



Out Watering Horses

A story of a man and the horses that helped him face his fears.

By Peter Hagerty

Porter, Maine

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Table of Contents

The Prologue	Page 9
The Irish Riviera	Page 13
Peter and Lady	Page 16
Frank	Page 20
Jamaica Biggs	Page 21
Mary Francis	Page 28
Mary and Herb and Grandpa John	Page 34
Uncle John	Page 42
Dad and the Russians	Page 47
Dr. Martin Luther	Page 53
Ensign Hagerty	Page 65
The North Atlantic 1969	Page 67
The USS Lloyd Thomas DD 764	Page 75
The Call	Page 89

Family Fun Day	Page 94
Thunder in the Morning	Page 100
Vietnam and Hong Kong	Page 111
Jane	Page 116
Common Sense and Marty	Page 130
Veterans	Page 135
Making Butter	Page 139
Maine 1974	Page 147
Barney and Nicker	Page 150
Bub Dow	Page 168
Mary had a little lamb	Page 182
Outed by Herbie	Page 198
The Beginning of the End	Page 207
Water for Horses	Page 210
Santa in the Beech Grove	Page 222

Russia 2010	Page 226
Moscow 1985	Page 227
Arketektora Vlassova 1985	Page 234
Embargo 1985-1986	Page 241
Chaban	Page 249
Afganski	Page 264
Goodbye Pavel	Page 273
Flies in the sun	Page 283
Cat and Mouse	Page 290
King	Page 299
Potato Cakes	Page 307
Jesus	Page 317
Gary	Page 322
Reunion	Page 326

Romania	Page 332
Gardner	Page 338
The Great Sadness	Page 348
Nizhny Novgorod	Page 352
Good Behavior	Page 357
The Holy Land	Page 373
Shearing for the PLO	Page 383
A Dip in the Sea	Page 391
On the Rez	Page 397
Shearing at the Blue Gap	Page 406
Death in the Morning	Page 412
On the road to Tuba City	Page 420
The Horse that wouldn't give up	Page 423
On the Rez again	Page 431
A Christmas Gift	Page 436

Cheating at Shuffleboard

Page 441

A Poem for July

Page 444



This book is dedicated to my brother John (on right) with whom I spent my early years



and to my wife Marty with whom I spent the last.

Josephine



Prologue

This book is about a young boy who grows up thinking that the world is fair and that conflict can always be resolved by compassionate reflection. I am ultimately rescued by an 1800 pound horse who offers to help me make amends for my mistakes and to join me in the search for my life's purpose. When I can still my mind and find my center, Willie, my Suffolk Punch draft, will join me there, lay his head on my shoulder and help me consider my options.

I never meant to write down the stories in this book. I have always felt an allegiance to the Seanacháí, the teller of the tales from my Irish Catholic heritage, huddled by the peat fire with his or her rapt listeners. My characters come to life at a child's bedside during a lightning storm or with a stranger on a long train ride.

But friends and family kept after me and one day I began writing. And as I wrote, tears unexpectedly came pouring out. As my words became sentences, then paragraphs, a huge weight slowly lifted off my chest and a healing began.

My stories will take you to the forests of Maine, the rivers of Vietnam, the shores of the Irish Riviera and the mountains of Siberia. I wrote these chapters on trains and planes, tears falling on my laptop. Some form of healing was taking place that made these public emotions seem okay to share with my fellow travelers. The people sitting next to me on these trips were unbelievably kind. Only when their bladders threatened to burst did they gently catch my eye and mouth, "bathroom". I would close the laptop

cover and rise into the aisle and let them out. On their return they would slip past, settle in and often ask, “How’s it going?”

The conversations that followed were always special. My tears apparently allowed us to jump right past “What do you do?” and right into “What are you feeling?”

I have a memory as a small boy of sitting with my white haired Irish Catholic grandmother Josephine on our front lawn high above the ocean. It is a beautiful summer day and she has just finished telling me a story, a rather fantastic one. I have followed her face closely as she talked. When her mouth stops moving I asked her “Nana, is that true?”

Her face explodes into a smile and her laughter carries out over the summer waves. “You want the truth?” she asks as if she is talking not to a young boy but rather to someone who has stopped and challenged her at a border crossing. “I am sorry,” she said “but the truth has not always done me well.”

My grandmother came from a time when eating grass to survive the potato famine was only one generation old. As a Boston policeman’s daughter, she was the first Irish woman to graduate from Radcliffe College. Yet “Irish need not apply” was what greeted her as she went looking for a job. Maybe this is what framed her relationship with the “truth”.

Nana was gone by the time my childhood was ending. In private school I threw up my breakfast every morning. At college I slept through most of my classes. I was Catholic and afraid that I would accidentally impregnate every girl I touched. And when I was in the Navy and headed for war, I

was afraid that I would soon be killing an ‘enemy’ someone else wanted dead.

My relationship with the ‘truth’ shifted noticeably when I came back from overseas. I was often not able to tell my family and friends what I had seen. Even though I had been in relatively little danger, something happened to me there that shook me to the roots. I could not talk truthfully about Vietnam because I had survived and some of my crewmembers did not. They died doing the job I would not do.

I have begun to contact old friends from these dark days. Most have been hard to find and some are reluctant to revisit the past. I wanted them to help me separate what I imagined from what actually happened. But in the end they seemed to warn that dead dogs are best left lying by the road.

Some of my stories are embellished and will stretch your imagination; others will be more ‘straight up’. Writing them down has brought back old ghosts that occasionally rob me of the truth. But maybe these demons can be like co-authors, like business associates that you don’t completely trust but still value their point of view. I have told these stories so often that they now have a life of their own. As they unfold I will try and stay out of their way.



“As I get older, the tendency to dwell in the past becomes more enticing. With less to occupy our days and less of a future to anticipate, we fill our minds with recollections and nostalgia, pouring back over the years, sometimes tenderly, at other times with regret, anger, longing, or sadness, coloring our present lives with baggage and memories. Although this is understandable, it is important that we become aware of when reminiscence becomes an obstacle, or a burden, and of the degree to which we identify with who we’ve been in previous time. It is impossible to be present if you’re trapped in personal history. And what, after all, is the difference between the past and a dream?”-*Ram Dass, “Still Here”*

“Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your special offering. There’s a crack in everything. That’s where the light gets in.” *Leonard Cohen*

“Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions.” —*Hafiz*

“Put your head in the mouth of the demon, and the demon disappears.” -
Margaret Wheatley

“When you find yourself in the thick of Pete’s book and you lose the thread of the story, don’t panic, don’t give up. Sit back, take a deep breath and plunge in again. And you will find you will be back in the thick of it before you know it.” *Mark Albee, Pete’s farrier.*



The Irish Riviera

I was born on what is fondly called “the Irish Riviera”, a stretch of rocky coastline south of Boston. My father worked first as a boat builder, then as a furniture maker. My mother’s job in life was to craft me into the first Irish Catholic American president. I was 15 when John F. Kennedy beat me to that job but his victory only reaffirmed for her the road on which her oldest son was meant to travel. Before you could say “fish on Friday” I was sent off to the proper boarding school, then on to Harvard and finally stuffed into a naval officer’s uniform and pointed to a war in Southeast Asia. If all the PT boats were not in mothballs I am sure she would have found me one to captain.



Joe Kennedy with kids on Sandy Beach with my ancestral home in background
Circa 1928



It's not that I was all in favor of my parents' program. Sometimes things just happen, especially when you are young, confused and a child of loving parents who have strong ideas for their children's future. I was a pretty good kid, wanted to be liked and had little experience in making waves. It was really quite impressive how far mom's program progressed before it finally came apart.

I am writing these first words on a paper towel that I scavenged from the bathroom of a Russian train heading south towards Moscow. My wife is asleep in the adjoining seat and my normal writing materials are in a

knapsack wedged under her legs. I have put off writing this story for too long now.

I am at a stage in my life where due to my youthful but mistaken belief that I am invincible, I am starting to come undone mentally and physically. With my own mortality staring me in the face I wonder if it's time to consider leaving something behind for my extended family to read.

I have always been a storyteller, mostly of the spoken word variety. But today with a pen made in Turkey and a paper towel from the Baltic Republics I will use written words to tell you one last tale. I would be honored if you would join me on this train heading down from the north so I might introduce you to my friends, both two and four legged and the ghosts and spirits that have accompanied me through the years.

My delivery was a long one and the minute I popped out my mother began to worry that I would die. She bought me a puppy when I was three and gave me a baby brother the following year. For some reason she did not seem to worry about me when I was with Lady.

We got a TV when I was five and I would watch it with Lady. Every morning when I returned home from kindergarten Lady would join me for secret meetings in my bedroom closet with two imaginary friends, Helley and Hickey. Lady and I were convinced that if we planned carefully we could have a successful chicken farm near my Grandmother Connolly's house in Newton.

When I had my first bike Lady would always be by my side in the driveway as I learned to ride. Although she was always by my side I never hurt her when I fell. I shared with her my dreams of living on a farm that for some reason I could not to share with my parents.



Peter and Lady

My mother drove me to school for the first year. And she stayed and helped the teacher most days. She always said that I was scared to get on the bus. Lady would be waiting for me in the afternoon and we would head down to the beach to see what had washed in. Mom would sit by the porch window, ready to run down if I should get too close to the waves. I have this picture of her on Sandy Beach in her funny looking 50's bathing suit holding my hand. I am maybe eight years old and my friends are out playing in the waves. And she is holding my hand with her hand, yet hers is like a vice, the only thing stopping me from drowning in the incoming surf.

My dad's passion was sailing. When he graduated from MIT he purchased a small boat building company in Cohasset and made rowing shells for the Ivy League. But his love was driven by the wind and in his spare time he would build racing sail boats that would fly over the water and turn on a dime.

To my mother's horror he gave me my first boat when I was seven. It was eight feet long, had one sail and a rudder and its name was Charles W. Morgan, named after the very last whaling ship built in 1841. He took me down to the back beach, strapped on my life jacket and gently pushed me out to sea.

"But dad," I said "I don't know how to sail."

"You will soon," he replied.

Over the next ten years I won almost every sailing event I entered in Massachusetts Bay. But the best memories I had are those sailing alone on bright afternoon breezes and the stories I would share with my dad upon returning safely home. These were his rewards for having to calm his nervous wife.

The Atlantic can be an unforgiving place that my father gave me the chance to see firsthand. Hurricane Carol came calling in August of 1954 when I was just six days away from my ninth birthday. For a while it looked like Cohasset would be spared, passing south of Cape Cod. Then Dad awoke me in the middle of the night.

"Pete, the wind is rising and I think that we need to move the boat to the harbor." Dad had one of his sailboats moored off the house and to this day it has been a mystery to me why he waited so long to act. It was 2:00 AM

and pitch-black outside. The wind was coming off the ocean and the tide was high.

We rowed out through the surf in our small dingy and raised the sails on the Minots Light, a racing 24 footer. With only setting the main sail we were soon moving at a very fast clip and able to cut inside Brush Island, avoiding the worst of the shoals. My legs straddled the bow and my hands grasped a heavy beacon to light Dad's way but with the breaking waves it was impossible to see the difference between white caps and rocks.

As we finally neared the harbor entrance my light found the channel marker. I then turned its beam on dad. He had told me not to do this as it would erase his night vision but I had to see his face. His teeth were clenched like a boxer's in the twelfth round. But his smile showed me that we were winning. He was wet and aglow with wonder. This was his element. Carol had come calling and dad greeted her with open arms.

All at once a rowboat appeared off the starboard bow. Someone was rowing out to sea to greet the storm. It was my best friend Doug Martin. He was just a few years older, maybe thirteen. My dad saw a kindred spirit in Doug that night and cheered him on his voyage.

The storm waited till daylight to unleash its awesome strength. Somehow we found an empty mooring at the yacht club and made our way home on foot in the pouring rain, trees crashing around us. Power lines sparked like demon snakes along Sandy Beach. As we walked Dad told me stories of being under sail off of Bermuda and watching a tidal wave just miss them, of a tramp steamer on auto pilot almost running them down when they were becalmed.

Carol was at her worst when her winds turned offshore. Dad and Mom and John and I sat in the lee of our house that morning and watched everything that was not tied down in our neighborhood blow out to sea. I pointed to the sky with mixed emotions as our mean rooster shot by overhead. Someone placed an ad in our local paper four days later saying they had found a red chicken walking on Nantasket Beach five miles to the north. Dad and I reluctantly went to claim him.

Frank

Along with sailing I spent the summers growing up playing tennis or exploring the ocean depths. Often I would dive for lobster off our house, knowing that mom would be inside, watching and praying. When I had a full sack I would wave and she would turn on the water in the stove. I never owned a lobster license because my mother believed that if they were in the pot there was no way to trace from whence they came.

With the end of summer many of my sailing friends moved back to the city or went local private schools. As I moved on through grade school I had less and less to share with my school chums, most of whom worked summer jobs. My dad owned a factory where some of their parents worked. When I joined Cub Scouts and the Little League I found myself either the object of a bully or getting beat up trying to pull two friends off of one another.

One day I found myself alone on the playground with Frank. He punched me on the back of the neck and kicked me to the ground. Ironically it was the same day we had our monthly air raid drill where our teacher would mount her desk and we, crouching under ours, would giggle as she made sounds with her voice of the atomic bomb dropping on our school.

Now for the second time in one day I was on the ground, but now I was choking and spitting blood. “Just because my dad collects your garbage doesn’t mean your dad is any better,” Frank shouted.

And in my foggy memory I see Frank over the summer in the driveway of our seaside mansion working for his dad collecting our garbage.

Jamaica Biggs

It was a sweltering hot day in August. I was home alone in Cohasset, about to turn fourteen in a few weeks and had just finished breakfast in our big white house overlooking Sandy Beach when I heard a knock on the front screen door. There standing in the shade of the porch was a tall black man sweating profusely. He wore tan pants held up by a bright green rope and a big brass buckle, short sleeved red shirt and sneakers.

“Hello,” he said in a sing-song accent. “could you tell me the way to the harba?”

“I am sorry,” I replied. “Where are you going?”

“To the harba, where the boats are,” he smiled.

“Oh, the harbor, yes. You just go back out the driveway, turn left, go by the beach parking lot, over the bridge at the Run, stay left at the flower fountain and in a mile or so you will see the harbor.”

“Oh, much obliged sir,” he said and turned to leave. I then realized that he was on foot.

“Excuse me,” I said. “Would you like a glass of water before you leave?”

He stopped and thought a moment. “Oh, that would be most lovely, most generous,” he said.

“Even better, my mom made some lemonade. Why don’t you come and sit in the cool of the kitchen?”

A flash of anxiety crossed his face for just a moment, then his smile returned. “Well, I think that it would be better if I just sat down here on the

stoop. But I would love some lemonade. Thank you very much. That is very kind of you.”

I returned shortly with two glasses and we sat together listening to the laughter of the bathers float up from the beach.

“My name is Biggs,” he offered “and I come from the island of Jamaica.” His voice had a formality as if he were talking to someone very important, not a sunburnt 14 year old kid. “I have come to pick apples in Beachwood but until they are ready, I have taken a job on Minot’s Light”.

“I have sailed by Minot’s many times,” I replied. “My dad said that the light would be shut off for several weeks. What will your job be?”

“Back home in Kingston I am a cook. So I will be cooking for the Coast Guard repair crew.”

“Well, maybe I can come out in my boat and see you.”

“Yes, that would be very nice,” he replied. “So people call me Jamaica Biggs.”

“My name is Peter Hagerty, Mr. Biggs. I look forward to seeing you again soon.”

So we shook hands and Mr. Biggs headed down the road never to be seen again. I went off on my bicycle with my dog Lady and quickly forgot about our visit. That is until several weeks later when Dad announced over supper,

“A sad thing has happened out on the light. I was working in the office when I saw a police boat pull into the harbor. I went down to see what was up and one of the boys said that a man went missing on Minot’s.

Apparently they had a colored man doing the cooking and this morning he was gone. No boats came or went during the night so they are expecting foul play from one of the Coast Guard repair crew.”



Now for the first time I told them about my meeting with Jamaica Biggs. My mother was very upset. “You mean you let a complete stranger into our house,” she shrieked. I remembered back to Mr. Biggs expression when I asked him to come into the kitchen where it was cool.

“We sat on the front steps,” I reminded her. “He was a very kind man.”

“Well maybe he is a very kind man who has gotten himself into a bit of trouble,” she replied.

I couldn’t really blame my mom. She had no contact with people of color. I remember when I brought my college roommate home years later and she asked him over a somewhat awkward lunch, “Well, Conway, how long have you been black?”

The fall after Mr. Biggs went missing I started my first year at Milton Academy. I was a day student and commuted 50 minutes each way to school. The first three weeks were pretty rough but on a Friday late in September we were free to go home after lunch. I arrived to an empty house and a strong offshore breeze. Down in the cove in front of our house

sat my dad's latest sailing design, a hydrofoil type craft called the Plataplane. Painted dark blue, its vast sail lay coiled on its deck. No harm could come from a quick sail and I would be back well before dark.

Before you could say 'Jack Robinson' I had stripped off my school clothes, pulled on some shorts and dragged the boat down to the water's edge. I stepped the mast, raised the sail, dropped in the centerboard, grabbed the tiller and pushed out to sea.

At first I was in the lee of the house where there was scarcely any breeze but once I cleared the point and the wind filled the sails I was off like a rocket. There were straps under which I placed my ankles which allowed me to hike far out to windward to keep the boat from tipping over. Dad had designed it so that when running before the wind the bow would ever so slightly lift up off the water and plane. So as I headed with the direction of the offshore wind the bow began to lift and we began to fly. Before I knew it I was far from shore.

As I pulled in the sail and began to turn around and head home, an enormous crack sounded and the mast broke in two pieces. The boat quickly rocked back to the way I was leaning, throwing me into the water and dragging me along by my ankles. I climbed on board and shivering from the cold water, I immediately began to assess my situation.

I had been this far off shore many times but never so late in the day. Normally lobster boats would be prowling these ledges pulling traps and providing a safety net for sailors in trouble. But as I quickly scanned the horizon there was no one in sight. It was too late in the summer for skippers to take an evening sail. It was also hurricane season and most leisure boats had been hauled and tucked in for the winter. I was alone out here. I wrapped the wet sail around me for warmth and tried not to panic.

Back on shore I could see the sun dip over the western horizon and the first lights of the night come on. I tried to imagine what my folks were doing. Mom would come home to start supper, see my school clothes strewn on the upstairs floor and know that I was around. Dad would see that the boat was missing and call the Coast Guard. It would be just a matter of time before someone would be out here. But how would they see me. There were already white caps on the waves and I blended in with the dark sea. Soon I would be past Minot's Light and on my way to Portugal and I didn't even speak Portuguese. "Come on Pete," I said out loud, "you can do this!"

I reached over the side, grabbed a passing lobster buoy and tied its rope to a cleat on the boat's deck. A long rope went down to the bottom of the sea where it attached to a lobster pot about the size of a large suitcase. It was now high tide and as I held the rope I could feel the pot at the other end skip and roll along the ocean floor. Hopefully it would catch on a rock and hold me like an anchor. As I looked over my shoulder, I could just make out the tall, dark tower of Minot's Light slowly drift into view. Still under repair, there was a beacon shining but no sign of life. Just in case I yelled out into the night.

For years sailors approaching Boston Harbor would sigh relief as they saw the 1-4-3 signal "I love you" blinking out into the night from Minots. In 1863 Irish immigrants danced on the deck of the Brig St. John when they saw the tip of Cape Cod in the distance. But then a howling northeaster caught them and drove them onto Minots Ledge. A light house was later built to commemorate this disaster with its beacon paying tribute to the 143 immigrants that were lost.

The wind kept up and the night grew darker and I feared that I would miss the light entirely so I lay spread eagle on the bow and with both arms in the water, paddled frantically toward the base of the light. I could see the waves breaking against its granite sides and the sharp, white barnacles glistened in the spray. As I grew closer I could just make out the rusty ladder about six feet above sea level, too high for me to reach. But then I caught sight of a short rope hanging down from the bottom rung and after a final paddle, I jumped up and grabbed it. The side of the Plattaplane ground against the barnacle covered side of the light and for the moment stopped my journey. Quickly I tied the rope to the bow of my boat and turned to hear a motor approaching. Sure enough, there was a light searching the waves. Its beacon fell on me and I waved.

Manuel Figuertero came from the Canary Islands off of Portugal when he was my age. Not speaking a word of English, he first settled in New Bedford, and then moved with his new wife to Cohasset where he took up fishing. Now in his fifties, he was someone “you did not screw with” as my friends would say. He was a man of few words who did not treat fools lightly and was deeply respected by my father. His lobster boat was sleek and fast and now came into view.

“Push off and drift away from the light,” he yelled in his heavy accent. Soon I had tossed him the short rope I had found tied to the ladder and with strong arms he lifted me aboard the ‘Mrs. Fig’. I was shaking from the cold and the excitement and he tossed me a set of oilskins and told me to put them on. Then he tied the Plattaplane to his stern and headed toward Cohasset Harbor.

“Your Fran Hagerty’s boy,” he asked loudly over the motor. “Yes sir,” I replied, bracing for his indictment. But instead he slowed his engines and

drifted quietly below the light. A moon had started to rise and we could now begin to pick out the features of the light, the doorway half way up, the lantern and its large glass dome.

“You really have to see it at night. It’s my favorite time,” he said. And we both stood there on the rolling deck, silently looking up at the tower rising 125 feet above the sea and the rock ledges. Then his hand dropped to the throttle and we surged off towards home.

It was a warm fall and the Plataplane went back to dad’s shop for repairs. But a few days before Christmas he asked me for help in putting it away until next season. After we had stuffed the sails and stored the gear Dad said, “Here is the rope that you found on Minot’s ladder.”

He handed me a green piece of rope with a brass buckle on it. The last time I had seen it in the light of day it was holding up Jamaica Biggs’ pants. Four years later I received a card postmarked Kingston, Jamaica. On it was written in bold letters “Sorry I missed the sail. See you someday. Your friend, Jamaica Biggs”.

Mary Francis



My father loved designing and sailing boats that moved quickly over the water. Our home was next to the ocean and that was as close as my mother ever wanted to be to a boat. So it was a memorable occasion the day my dad coaxed her out for a picnic lunch on a sailing craft which he had designed and built. It was a hot summer morning and a brisk wind took us

to the Boston Lightship five miles out from shore. But by noon, every breath of wind had vanished and the sea became as still as a mill pond.

“Well Frannie, now what?” Mom asked. “No problem,” replied my dad. “By the time we finish our picnic the afternoon wind will come to take us home”.

I looked overboard and imagined myself with my mask and flippers on, floating on the surface and looking down toward darkness and the bottom 200 feet below. No matter how deep I would dive here I would never see the ocean floor, only sunlight disappearing into a void where all the monsters of the deep lived.

I spent most of my summers under the water. Most days I would throw on an old swim suit and head out to the rocks in front of my house where I would either dive for lobsters which we would eat for lunch or spear flounder which mom would clean for supper. The water was mostly shallow, barely over my head and mom could keep an eye on me from the house as she did her chores. I devoured books by the French diver Jacques Cousteau and one summer my dad and I made a rubber diving suit to keep me warm against the cold currents. Off my house I was always able to see the bottom and felt safe from the larger fish that I imagined swam out in the deeper ocean.

The lightship was very close now and I waved at a Coast Guard sailor walking on deck. As mom was taking the lunch out of the picnic basket my brother John tapped me on the shoulder. Off the port bow of our sailboat appeared the fin of a fish that we both immediately recognized as belonging to a shark. We both looked at each other with concern. This was the last thing mom needed before lunch. She was dressed in her funny

bathing suit and huge sun hat happily eating a tomato sandwich and looking in the opposite direction.



Mary and Fran sailing off Minots Light

Just as I was about to covertly signal my dad, another fin appeared off the port stern and all at once I realized that it belonged to the same fish, that it was in fact not a fin but part of a tail. This meant that the shark was as long as the boat, 18 feet overall. We were having lunch with a monster from the deep, a hammerhead shark. I tried to think of some clever way to introduce our predicament to my mom who was well known for her ability to overreact.

“Hey guys, look who has dropped by to say hello,” I announced. Mom nonchalantly looked over her left shoulder at the front fin, then over her right shoulder at the tail fin and then said with uncharacteristic bravado, “Oh darn, just when I was thinking of taking a dip.”

Today forty five years later my mother was no longer alive and this morning I was to orchestrate her burial. I sat in the upper most room of my

childhood friend Michael's home. No one lived up here now. Once it had been the secret domain of his children. Built like the top floor of a lighthouse with windows facing the sea, one could see the distant beach and the breaking waves. But this morning I was not looking out the windows. My eyes were shut and I was as still as a post as my mind worked overtime feeding me the raw footage of a small child playing by the ocean, a doting mother by his side trying to hide her fear that her son might be swallowed up at any moment by the cold sea.

I had awoken in Michael's home before dawn to prepare for the eulogy the oldest son must give. I went over my notes but my words fought with my conscience. Since she arrived in Cohasset as the young bride of my father almost 70 years ago, my mother had been the pinnacle of our community. For days now, many people whom I had not seen in over 50 years had been writing, calling, or stopping me in the street of my old home town. Their eyes and their voices filled with tears as they shared with me stories of my mother's kindness, courage and strength.

And I would leave these exchanges asking myself if they were talking about my mother or someone else. As I now sat rigidly in the tower room, the movie house of my mind played and replayed in vivid color the stories of my mother that I held to be true. My relationship with my mother was, to say the least, complicated.

The more I thought, the more I dislodged memories. There were the series of telephone calls to my college dorm room starting on Wednesday evenings. My father would be first, asking how things were going and did I have any plans for the weekend. I would tell him that school was fine, that

I might make the second string soccer squad and that I had plans to visit friends on the Cape after Saturday's game.

Mom's call would follow Thursday night, saying that she had just bought a roast at the Central Market and why don't I bring my friends home for the weekend after the game. I would tell her patiently that I had plans and wish her well. Dad would end the week on Friday with a pleading tone in his voice saying, in a few words, that I was needed. And I always went home.

Beset by guilt that somehow I owed my parents something, I would arrive seething with the self-anger that comes from not having the courage to follow through with one's own plans. And my mother and I would always end the weekend with a fight. And I would pull my car over every Sunday evening at the same stretch of deserted road two miles from home and wrench my guts out in the ditch.

One weekend while at Harvard I asked a new woman friend from Radcliffe to join me at my home for Sunday lunch. I sat at the right hand of my mother who doted over me and showed no interest in my guest. On the ride back to Cambridge Allison was uncharacteristically quiet. I asked her what was up.

"Peter, I have to tell you how uncomfortable I felt in your home today. It was like your mother was reaching out to keep you from me, like I was some kind of personal threat. It was very strange, like you were her lover or something. And you seemed to go along with it".

As my face paled, I confessed to Allison how it was normal for me to vomit after leaving Sunday lunches in Cohasset. Then it struck for the first time full force how my mother was taking inappropriate advantage of me,

asking me to provide a level of intimacy she could not enjoy with her own husband.



Mary and Herb and Grandpa John

My mom grew up in the Boston suburb of Newton in the roaring 20's. She was the oldest of five and the apple of her father Herb's eye. She never recovered completely from his sudden death, leaving her when she was only 17 years old. She became a kindergarten teacher and fell in love with my father the spring day he arrived at her classroom with two Easter lambs. My dad's mom Josephine invited them shortly after their marriage to join her on the rocky shores of Cohasset and purchased for them a huge Spanish stucco home overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Complete with red tile roof and porches reaching out over the sea, parakeets escaping from a nearby amusement park would routinely mistake our house for the coast of Mexico and make their home for the summer.

My dad was born in the Dorchester section of Boston where thousands of Irish families had settled since the mass immigration of the mid 1800's, victims of genocide at the hands of the British. His father John was a liquor

salesman, a sports guide in the North Woods and could barely write his name. My dad never talked much about his youth. His father died when Frannie was 7, leaving Josephine to raise him and his two brothers, John Jr. and Robert. In spite of his refusal to talk of the past I did learn a few things.

One day Marty and I attended a wedding in Vermont on a beautiful hillside under a green tent. Back in the corner sitting all by himself was a rugged gentleman who looked like someone's grandpa. I myself didn't know anyone at the wedding so I sat down beside him.

"I once knew a John Hagerty," Norm said. "He was from Boston."

"Oh, that must be my brother," I replied.

"This John Hagerty has been dead for a long time," he said. I quickly realized that he might be talking about my grandfather.

"He was quite a character. He used to take 'sports' hunting in the North Woods and one Fall he took my dad and me to Quebec to hunt moose. Two things I remember were that he always wore just a flannel shirt, rarely a jacket, no matter how cold it got. And he could throw a knife."

"One day we were camped about 200 miles north of Montreal. We were dropped off by the train and had enough grub for one week. John had an Indian for a guide and we made camp on a lake. Well, sure enough there we meet another bunch of sports who were fishing and they also had an Indian guide from the same tribe."

"Well, we sort of camped together, had two separate fires. And pretty soon

this guy from Colorado comes over and says to John ‘I hear you’re pretty good with a knife.’ John doesn’t say much. ‘My guide says that you can throw a knife through a pack of Lucky Strikes at 50 paces.’ John grunts something and the guy throws down \$20 that says he can’t.”

As if on cue, John’s Indian takes out a pack of Lucky Strikes, walks out 50 paces and lays the cigarettes on a tree branch. John then gets up slowly, reaches in his pocket and covers the Colorado guys bet, and without so much as a “how do you do”, whips his long knife out of his leather sheath and through the air and splits the pack in two. Later John gave both Indians a \$5 bill on the sly.”



Grandpa John

Norm's story reminded me of a day when Dad and I were looking for an antique car. We were driving down Melville Avenue in Dorchester when he casually pointed out the house where he was born. I forced him to stop the car and I jumped out and ran up the driveway and knocked on the front door. Dad was so embarrassed when the owner and his wife invited us in. But they took us down cellar and showed me the beam filled with knife marks. My grandpa had died here from a massive coronary at the young age of thirty seven.

Though Josephine would mourn his death for the remainder of her life, a bright light of intellectuality and financial acumen accompanied her wherever she went. From her own business dealings she amassed enough money to send both Robert and John to Harvard and my dad to MIT.

Through her son John she made the acquaintance of the German architects Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer and the Dutch designer Meis Van Der Rook. These three architects had fled the Bauhaus School of Design as the Nazis took over Germany. Together they agreed to design for Josephine their first residential home in America, complete with Bauhaus furniture. We called the place "the modern house".



The Modern House

Every summer of my childhood I would run down the back stairs of my Spanish “hacienda” and join Josephine in her Bauhaus garden of sunflowers to eat black Cuban honey from the Romelia and the Wild Chamomile flowers with large wooden spoons.

My grandmother outweighed my mother by 100 lbs. but they quickly became fast friends. They cut quite a path as they made their way down Cohasset’s Main Street towards the Central Market to go shopping, Mary in her summer dress with me riding inside her belly waiting to pop out and huge Josephine in a widow’s black frock, defying the July heat wave that summer. Men would tip their hats and women would smile as they passed, perhaps slightly intimidated by the confidence Josephine exuded as she made her way through town.



My ancestral home in Cohasset

Our neighbors were almost all of old Yankee stock and when my father applied to join the Cohasset Yacht Club he wondered out loud if he had a chance. But by then he was already a talented and respected boat builder and some of the yacht club members had rowed in his sleek racing shells at Harvard so he and my mom were admitted.

The first Irish to arrive in Cohasset came in the fall of 1849. The Brig St. John from Galway, Ireland, overloaded with immigrants fleeing the starvation at home, wrecked on the Grampus Ledge just a few miles off my house and their bodies washed ashore for days. The local farmers, eager to gather the storm's seaweed from the beach for their fields and gardens, complained that the dead Irish bodies got in the way of their work.



Josephine, Nana Connolly and Aunt Ditto

“You know Mary,” Josephine said one day “when I graduated from Radcliffe in 1907, I was the first Irish girl ever to do so. But I could not find a job. My name was Curry and everyone knew I was Irish. The newspapers routinely ran ads for help adding ‘Irish need not apply’. But we survived and so will you. These people will learn to love you, you mark my words.” *Nb. The Kennedys left Cohasset for Hyannis when they were refused membership in the Cohasset Golf Club because they were Irish Catholic.*

The first and only time I saw my mother and father cry was the morning we found Josephine dead in the modern house. Only a few days before I

had run next door after school and found her working with Gropius and Van Der Rough, discussing a rusted window frame. There was an artist there that day named Alfonso Ossorio painting with pastels on the stairwell walls. He believed he was the reincarnation of St. Francis of Assisi. Dressed in monk's habit, he chewed peyote nuts he carried in the deep pockets of his robes and recited prayers in Pilipino Spanish.

It was 4:30 in the afternoon when Cardinal Cushing came on the radio to say the rosary. Everyone knew the drill. Jew, Lutheran, stoned out monk or child, we all stopped our work and either knelt or sat. And under the watchful gaze of our hostess we respectfully submitted to the drone of the Cardinal's nasal voice. "Glory be to the faatha, son and holy ghost....." When Josephine died the following day, my mother lost a strong ally and friend. She wondered aloud if she could survive without Josephine by her side. Now my mother was gone and it was my task to write her epitaph.

Uncle John

One summer my Uncle John, my father's brother and Josephine's oldest child, headed off to Greece to buy antiques. It was 1964 and I was about to start my freshman year at Harvard. While he was overseas, a revolution broke out in Athens and John was caught up in the upheaval. A lifelong alcoholic with high blood pressure, he apparently had a coughing fit on the steps of the Parthenon, ruptured a vein in his throat and drowned in his own blood. A Greek friend with limited funds made the arrangements and he was flown home in a simple pine box. Dad called me at college and asked if I would meet him at Logan Airport to pick up the casket.

Fourteen years before when Josephine died there was a dispute about her estate and Dad and John stopped speaking. I have only a few memories about John myself. While he lived with us for a few years, John would bring home exotic friends from around the world. There was a Russian countess who could spread her front toes widely apart and walk up the side of a pine tree in our front lawn like an ape. Then there were the tall, tanned and well-muscled young men who came to our town every year for the summer theater. After Josephine's death, John left our home and moved to Beacon Hill in Boston and we lost touch. Now my dad reached down and slid his hand over the smooth pine box that held his brother.

The funeral was held in a small Catholic Church near Beacon Hill. Since the falling out, John's name was rarely mentioned in our home. As we sat as a family in the pew of the church, we looked around and realized that we knew almost no one. My father's other brother Robert and his wife Mary had flown up from South Carolina but most everyone else were strangers.

After the Mass a nice man approached our family and introduced himself as Uncle John's lifelong partner. Without embarrassment he invited us back to a small luncheon at the apartment they had shared. As I walked through their front door, I immediately saw a photograph of my brother John and me that had appeared in a Life Magazine story about antique cars. It was framed and hung in the center of the room. Our host Bill then took me into another room where he handed me a photo album. Inside were many newspaper articles about my brother John's and my high school athletic accomplishments, including hockey and soccer games and track meets covering the last seven years.

"He was so proud of both of you," Bill said. "Every Sunday he would head out to buy the Boston Globe. He would return home and open up the sports section. He would then search for your names and when they appeared, he would show all his friends the article. And we all thought it was so interesting because as you know, John was not much of an athlete."

As we were about to close the book, I saw several photos in the back. They were in color and they were apparently taken with a telephoto lens from the ocean in front of our house in Cohasset. One was of me rowing a boat out to sea and another was of my brother John painting a chair on the rocks by our beach. As I looked closely I realized that these photos were less than a year old.

Before I could ask, Bill began. "Your Uncle John would hire a boat from Boston to take him down to Cohasset. We would moor off your house and he would sit there with binoculars and study the shore. It was very sad for me to see this. I know how deeply he missed not being a part of Cohasset, not being able to see you boys as you grew up. Last summer he used my camera to take these photos. He loved you both very much."

Prep Hockey

Hagerty, Taylor Lift Milton Academy, 2-1

Pete Hagerty's goal at 9:36 of the final period gave Milton Academy a 2 to 1 win over St. Mark's Wednesday in a Private School League game at Milton.

Hagerty's score came 25 seconds after Ben Taylor had tied the game for Milton and spoiled a fine job by St. Mark's net minder Will McCormick, who made 34 saves.

In the other league game, Kent Parrott scored three goals and assisted on two others to lead Belmont Hill to an 8 to 3 win over Middlesex.

Pete Franchot scored with 2:25 gone in the final period to give Andover Academy a 4 to 3 win over the Northeastern Freshmen.

Bob Waldinger scored three goals and assisted on another as Noble & Greenough trounced Thayer Academy, 12 to 0.

Browne & Nichols rallied for three third-period goals to defeat St. Sebastian's, 4 to 3. Ned Griefen, Charlie Marshall and

ANDOVER 4, N.U. FRESHMAN 3

At Andover
ANDOVER—Sempie, g; Gurry, rd; Freeman, ld; Garrity, c; Brandt, rd; Warren, lw.

N.U. FR.—G. Thornton; rd, Jeanneault; ld, Christie; c, Leu; rw, Legger; lw, O'Connell.

Andover Spares—Cooper, Evans, Samson, Bemis, Cliff, Comsock, D. Franchot, P. Franchot.

Northeastern Fr. Spares—Webb, Shannon, Fraser, Brandley, Milles, Bruno, Dowling, Weller.

Andover	1	1	2-4
Northeastern Fr.	0	2	1-3

Goals—Warren 2, Garrity, P. Franchot, Webb, Bruno, Leu. Assists—Garrity 2, Bryant, Warren, Gurry, Cliff, Keller, O'Connell.

BELMONT HILL 8, MIDDLESEX 3

At Middlesex
BELMONT HILL—Elwell, g; Fenollosa, rd; Koslowski, ld; Martin, c; Willard, rw; Mueller, lw.

MIDDLESEX—G. Pavan; rd, M. Mathers; ld, Burnes; c, Naylor; rw, Bates; lw, Crafts.

Belmont Spares—Page, Lintner, Scott, McNamara, Parrot, Chase, Byrnes, Stiles, Weeks.

Middlesex Spares—J. Walker, Terry, Dye, J. Mathers, Drunker, Taylor, Rich, Brewster, Wilbor, Wheeler.

Belmont Hill	2	4	2-8
Middlesex	2	1	0-3

Goals—Koslowski, Taylor, Parrott. Assists—Martin 2, Mueller 2, Parrott, Martin, Burnes, J. Mathers, Weeks, 2, Crafts, Dye.

MILTON ACAD. 2, ST. MARK'S 1

At Milton
MILTON ACADEMY—G. Carter; rd, T. Cutter; ld, Bard; c, Ford; rw, E. Cutter; lw, Flynn.

ST. MARK'S—G. McCormick; rd, Gray; ld, Chatfield; c, K. Rosenberger; rw, Agnew; lw, Coye.

Milton Academy Spares—Taylor, Holmes, Hobbs, Bigelow, Woodard, Perry, Pope, MacAusland, Hagerty.

My mind wandered back to the paunchy man with short grey hair who would sit with me at night on our front porch and watch the lights of the ships as they made their way towards Boston Harbor. Had my parents known then that he was a homosexual? Were they afraid he would hurt us? I had gone to boarding school not 15 miles from John's apartment. I would come to Boston to see friends and stay overnight not three blocks from Uncle John and Bill's apartment. It would have been so easy for me to just

drop by. But this was Boston in the early 60's and gay men living on Beacon Hill were enemies of the Catholic Church and doomed to die young and go directly to hell. I might as well have been living on the other side of the planet from my uncle.

Years later I visited a teacher of mine from Harvard who was a leading force in the gay community of San Francisco. The first night I was there he invited me to a gathering of friends in the Bay Area to celebrate the lives all those gay men and women who had died in the war of sexual prejudice. As we arrived at the door of a handsome mansion our host, assuming I was gay, gave me a hug and a kiss on the lips. Surprisingly I felt completely comfortable with this display of affection. Sometime before supper we each offered a memory of a loved one or friend and I found myself tearfully recounting the story of my Uncle John.

I am sure my parents had the best intentions when they took me out of the local school in the fifth grade to begin making me into the first Irish Catholic president. Recently the boarding school they chose for me held our 50th class reunion and only a handful of our 130 students had signed up. With several classmates I wrote the school and requested that they supply us with a meeting space where we could privately meet and catch up. The school agreed.

Close to sixty of us gathered at the science center and we agreed that it would be best if each of us had two minutes to share our thoughts. It is truly amazing what can be transmitted in two minutes. During our school time together we had experienced racism, homophobia, antisemitism, physical abuse, divorcing parents, a president shot and killed, the Cuban Missile Crisis, to say nothing of our classmates who vanished into mental institutions.

As moderator my offering was unexpectedly emotional, partly because I had not let one memory surface for many years. I recalled the upper classmen who would gather on the front steps of the school every morning, calling across the street to the girl's school and jostling underclassmen as they passed through and into the school.

I recounted to the group the memory of a Jewish doctor or his wife who would drive their long black sedan up and deposit their day student son in front of the mob. As I stood there many day watching, the crowd would start rubbing their noses chanting "Sheeny, Sheeny, Sheeny, Kike, Kike Kike". Now in front of my class I confessed my shame that I had done nothing to stop this behavior.

Dad and the Russians 1956

I was born in the late summer of 1945. The war was just over in the Pacific and my father's brother Robert, a Marine Corps doctor, had not been heard of since the assault on Iwo Jima late in March. My parents had just bought a house by the ocean in Cohasset and while it was getting fixed up, we went to live with my grandmother Josephine on Beacon Hill in Boston. I was nicknamed 'Spider' and from the moment we moved into our new South Shore home, I would not be still. One of my first memories from my childhood was when I was six years old and my Uncle John and I were sitting on our Cohasset front porch on a summer's night looking out at the dark ocean and the lights of the passing ships.

"The Russians are out there," he would whisper. "Somewhere tonight a submarine is surfacing, men are scrambling down the side into rubber boats and while you sleep, they will row quietly into our beach, hide their rafts and dress in normal American clothing. Why tomorrow you might be at the Central Market and one might be right next to you, buying an orange."

I knew he was trying to scare me but the result was quite the opposite. I had no idea what a Russian looked like but I loved rafts and ships that could go beneath the waves. I would welcome these visitors and offer them my jackknife to peel their oranges. We would become friends.

The second grade classroom at the Ripley Road School was the sunniest in the building and our teacher Mrs. Kennedy was a gift from God. Her reading and writing lessons made the day fly by but what put her in the Best Teacher Hall of Fame category was what she did every fourth Friday of the month. At exactly 12:00 noon a siren would sound from our nearby police station and she would begin the drill we all looked forward to. As

she climbed on her desk in her high heel shoes, we would all scramble under ours. Then for two solid minutes she would make sounds with her mouth of atomic bombs being dropped by Russian airplanes that would burst apart our playground and surrounding forest. Then the all clear would sound followed by the lunch bell and we would all scramble off to our dinners.

I am not sure why I developed such a fascination with Russia. My Cub Scout leader told me a few years ago that I was always the one in her troupe trying to get boys to stop fighting. As I grew older I began to make up a very Slavic sounding language that my brother and I would use in public places to impress people. Our favorite expletive was “doctor nobi po-gee-tov!” People would stop and stare at these two very Irish looking guys in the throes of a heated debate in a language no one could decipher.

One Sunday when I was 12 we returned from church and saw out on the ocean in front of our house a three-masted schooner under full sail making for Boston Harbor. My father was a naval architect, a boat builder and a passionate lover of wooden ships and he knew that he was looking at something he had only ever seen before in pictures or drawings. He drove the car up into our driveway, jumped out and ran over to the rocks and stared.



“We must go and meet her,” he said. Mother packed a picnic breakfast and we followed the ship up the coast. There was a strong breeze from the southwest pushing her sails along and with our binoculars we could see the waves breaking against the bow and the men aloft adjusting sail.

My dad was born in South Boston and knew just where she would make port. But when we got to the pier, there was a police car blocking the public entrance. Being Sunday, there was no one else on the long wharf. My dad pulled up next to the officer.

“Good morning,” Dad said. “What are you doing out here on such a beautiful day”?

“Well, sir, I am awaiting the arrival of a sailing ship,” the officer replied.

“I know,” said my dad. “We saw her off Minot’s Light earlier under full sail and I was hoping that my family and I might visit her once she is settled.”

“I am sorry,” said the officer, “but I don’t think that will be possible. You see, that ship’s from the Soviet Union and she is just here overnight to take on water and a few supplies. No one can go ashore and no one can go on board.”

My father was crestfallen but he was not one to give up easily. The ship was still an hour away so we sat with Officer Reardon and shared our picnic breakfast with him. It turned out that my dad and Officer Reardon’s brother rowed in the same Irish racing boats called ‘currachs’ across Boston Harbor when they were kids. The policeman agreed after a cup of my mom’s tea that there could be little harm in us going out on the dock to see the ship land. So our small group would be the official welcoming party that greeted the Russian training ship ‘Nadezhda’ as she made her only stop in New England.

As this giant ship approached the pier, the orders to drop sail were given and as silently as a gliding gull she floated slowly towards us. Then as small ropes were tossed to us my dad took over, ordering us to pull in quickly the larger ropes that followed which we threw over the giant cleats that were cemented into the pier. First came the bow ropes, then the ropes from the stern.

“Stand back,” my father shouted as the heavy nylon ropes the size of my arms started groaning under the strain of the ship’s forward motion. If my dad not been on the pier I do not know how the ship would have landed for someone like him needed to be there to direct the securing of the on-shore lines. I watched his boat builder eyes twinkle with satisfaction as this huge sailing ship, propelled only by the wind, gently nestled up to the pier.

Our policeman stood in awe of the event and it slowly began to dawn on him that he was the only city official to welcome this majestic vessel, its captain and crew. His bewilderment turned to panic as the gangplank was extended over the side. Just then one of the young crew members, a boy a few years older than I waved and of course I waved back and yelled “doctor nobi po-gee-tov”! And of course he yelled back something in Russian like “what did you say?”

Officer Reardon turned to my father, “Does your son speak Russian?” and my father looked down at his feet and said “well, just a little.” And before you could say ‘borscht’ we were on board and making our way below deck. Our first introduction was to the ship’s doctor who was the only English speaker on board.

My father had a long history of dropping everything he was doing to greet random strangers. He was often calling my mom to say that he had met the most interesting young couple at the shop and could he bring them home

for supper. Well, today was no exception. Thanks to some salted fish, Russian black bread and vodka in our tea, Sergeant Reardon was graciously agreeing to everything Dad was suggesting. Arrangements were made from his CB radio for our Catholic Youth Organization back home to send up two school buses for the forty sailors, their captain, first mate and ship's doctor. Three hours later we arrived in Cohasset to find a group of teen-age girls from our church standing in our driveway and by late afternoon our local dance band was playing 'bee-bop' music on our front porch to a bunch of dancing kids that shared no common language.

What I remember most about that day was the ship's doctor. He was curious about my 'few Russian words' and because it was low tide I directed him down to the tide pools where I kept my crabs.

"I walk out at low tide and catch all the crabs I can find," I told him. "I put them in these pools and when the sea rises they all swim out."

We talked a little about his home in a place called Kaliningrad that he said was also on the ocean. There he had a family that he missed very much. The doctor seemed very happy to stay with me by the pools as the tide came in. We listened to the music from the house and the laughter. I liked him very much but was a little disappointed that the first Russian I was to meet did not arrive on a rubber raft from a submarine.

"Doctor," I asked. "What does your ship's name 'Nadezhda' mean?"

"It mean's 'hope' in Russian," he smiled. "It means 'hope'."

I am breaking the first rule of the Irish storyteller in noting that the Nadeshda was in fact either the Christian Radich or the Statsraad

Lehmkuhl, both Norwegian training ships. I can blame Uncle John and his submarines for my deviation but I thank my brother John, the other last living witness, for the correction. As Josephine would say, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story."

Dr. Martin Luther

I was tired, scared and sweating profusely in my brand new Navy uniform. It was my first time in the South and although it was late in the night, Charleston, South Carolina's airport was alive with soldiers. I was sitting on a bench, confused and afraid to move. Standing would mean that I would have contact with other soldiers, men in uniform who would either salute me or expect a salute. It was early summer of 1967 and Vietnam War protests were a daily event at Harvard. It was the rare occurrence that we ROTC Naval Officer Candidates appeared in public in uniform. Therefore I had almost no experience with either offering or receiving a salute. My strategy on this my Junior Year midshipman cruise was to salute every person in uniform, regardless of rank of service. That seemed to work well until my last trip to the men's room where an irate Marine twice my age wanted to know why the hell an officer candidate was saluting a sergeant.

I finally fled outside to the parking lot and found a retired Navy sailor, now cab driver, named Jules who said he knew the Naval Base like the back of his hand. He drove me to the Main Gate and asked the sentry for the whereabouts of the USS Fidelity.

"Sorry, sir," the sailor said after consulting his manifest list "but we have no record of that ship being berthed here".

"Can I see a copy of your orders," Jules asked me and I passed them forward. "This place is some busy. No one knows what's going on. Come on, we'll find her".

The base on the Cooper River was a principle staging area for all US naval operations in the Mediterranean. We drove by large cranes working round the clock loading and unloading cargo. Ships bound for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) and the Tonkin Gulf often dropped in for last-minute fixes to their guns or boilers. Jules rolled from pier to pier, asking sailors for the whereabouts of the Fidelity. It was 2 am when we finally found her rafted outboard of four other ships. I gratefully paid Jules my fare with a generous tip and said “good by” to my first friend in the South.

The USS Fidelity was a minesweeper, a 195 foot long boat made entirely of wood. All the nails that held her together were stainless steel, no iron to trigger off the mines for which she was built to search and destroy. As I crossed her gangplank I was greeted by a young sailor on the midnight to four watch.

“Good evening, Mr. Hagerty. There is no one here to sign you in and I have no idea where you’re to bunk. May I suggest that you go back to the dock, take a left and walk down the pier to the Bachelor’s Officers Quarters? That’s the two story building with the neon lights outside. There you can find a nice bed and a hot shower. You can get breakfast and be back here at 8: AM for morning quarters.”

I was exhausted but I left my luggage in the ward room and with a tooth brush and a bar of soap in hand I made my way down to the BOQ, found a bed and was soon fast asleep.

I had family in Charleston, close relatives I barely knew. Back when I was seven years old and Josephine died, my father and his two brothers had a fight and for years they never talked to each other. My Uncle Robert moved to Charleston where he became a well-respected plastic surgeon. He lived with his wife Maggie and five kids in the Battery section of the city.

They had sent their four boys North to boarding school and college and my dad reached out to them as soon as they arrived, eager to mend the old hurt. Duke, John, Thomas and Henry would each come to Cohasset for weekends where we would play football and lacrosse on the front lawn. I had not seen Robert or his wife since a brief encounter at my Uncle John's funeral three years ago. When I had told dad of my summer orders, he made a rare call to his brother letting him know of my imminent arrival and Uncle Bob seemed eager to welcome me.

The next morning I met Lt. Ryan, captain of the Fidelity, at morning quarters. He was very relaxed and cordial and invited me to his cabin for some coffee. He put me at ease right away, sharing with me memories of his first midshipman's cruise. I told him that I had family living in town and he encouraged me to make contact.

"You only need to be on-board every third night to stand watch. Other than that, we start at eight and knock off at four. Every other day we go to sea for drills but we are always back by late afternoon. You can set your clock by the thunder storms here."

He showed me to my small cabin and later introduced me to the crew. I slept aboard the first night and the next day we went to sea, dropped and dragged a long cable hunting for test mines the Fidelity had set out the day before. That afternoon after we had returned to port I called Uncle Robert's home from the ship's phone. Aunt Maggie answered.

"Why Peter, you come over here right now. We will wait for supper 'til you arrive. You will have a room here for as long as you want. We are very excited."

Jules had left me the number of his cab company, was free when I called, and came right over. He wanted to know all about the ship and gave me a big smile when I showed him Uncle Robert's address.

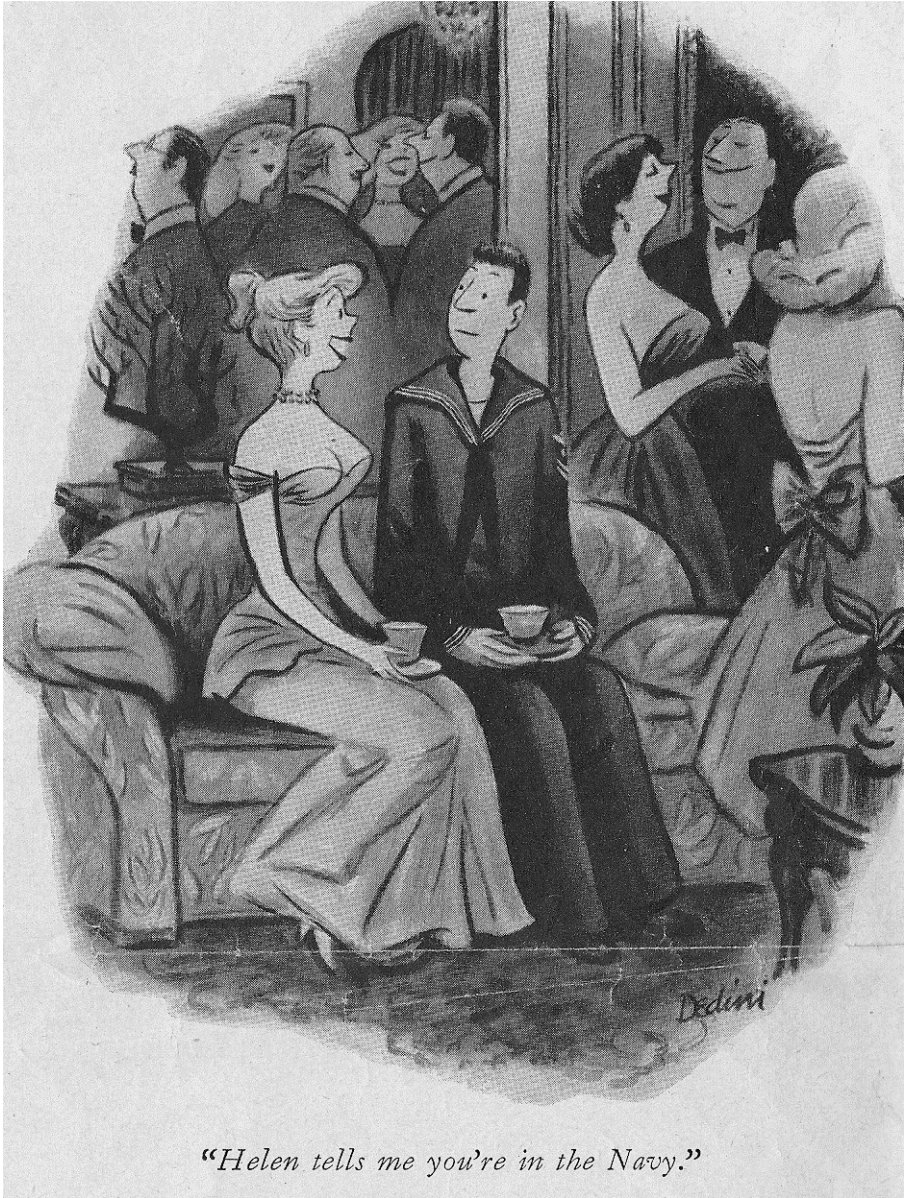
“This is the very old section of Charleston. I know this address, 10 ½ Le Guere. It was the slaves' quarters for the big house out on the street. Your uncle has some fine parties at his home. He has also done some good work on folks from my neighborhood who were careless with their cheap space heaters during the cold months. My cousin was burned pretty bad on the face but Dr. Robert made her as good as new. Her name was Belle Pride. Maybe he will remember her.”

We pulled into a very narrow alleyway under a brick arch covered with ivy and waved to a black woman who came out the door to greet me. “I'll be back around 6 in the morning to pick you up” he smiled and slowly drove away.

“Now, Mr. Peter, don't you believe a word that comes out of Jules' mouth”, laughed Ferdina as she took my small night bag and welcomed me into the kitchen as if I was merely returning from a short trip and we'd been friends forever.

“Dr. Robert said to put you in the downstairs room next to the library. You have your own door that leads out to the garden but you need to check your shoes every morning before you put them on.” I had no idea why this was necessary but assumed that with time all would become clear.

I settled in, put my clothes away in the dresser and walked back through the main hall for a promised glass of lemonade. As I looked at the



"Helen tells me you're in the Navy."

paintings on the wall I felt that I could have easily been drifting through a room in my own home in Cohasset. Portraits of waves crashing over Minot's Light, full rigged schooners under sail and a black and white photograph of Josephine's 'modern house' were all prominently displayed. The hall was cool and dark and a sofa covered with oriental cloth beckoned me to sit and enjoy the peace and tranquility of this home. Then the screen door of the kitchen slammed shut as a giant of a man still wearing his operating scrubs dropped his briefcase and came walking into the room.

"Well, Peter, welcome to Charleston!" Uncle Robert was larger than life and you could see that he and my dad were clearly brothers. He was well over six feet, had bright blue eyes and a tight smile and the crushing handshake of a college fullback. His hair cut was buzz and already starting to grey. But where my dad was an artist at putting people immediately at ease, Bob's warmth seemed to leak out around a formal and rigid persona.

As a Marine Corp doctor he had been on the first wave at Okinawa, Ryukyu and Pelau. He had received the Silver Star and been recommended for the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration for valor that can be awarded a soldier. But if there were medals they were in a drawer someplace, out of sight. When the war ended in the Pacific in the late summer of 1945, most soldiers from Boston were home by fall. But by the time the leaves were changing color on the Boston Common, Josephine still had no word from her son.

I was born that September and my parents and I joined Josephine on Beacon Hill until our new house in Cohasset was ready. As the story goes Mrs. Toomey was getting ready to announce Thanksgiving dinner when she went to answer the front door. Her screams resonated up into the house and out onto West Cedar Street. There in his uniform, duffle bag by his

side stood Uncle Robert, smiling and wondering if he were too late for lunch.

Now as he stood before me, I felt a mixture of fear and fascination. I looked forward to getting to know my blood-relatives in the coming months as they opened up their home and their lives to me. This was my first time south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Would this man, my father's brother, tolerate my northern values and my ignorance of "low country" southern culture? Now as I think back I never recall him ever challenging my liberal positions on war and civil rights. We seemed to quickly arrive at an unspoken agreement that there need not be any further discord in our family, especially on topics that involved politics. But would I ever really get to know this giant of a man whose success as a surgeon and courage in battle seemed to put him out of reach?

Maggie came home shortly before supper and all my cousins seemed to appear like clockwork as Ferdina put the fish and vegetables before us. Uncle Robert was "Sir" and Maggie was "Mam" to everyone at the table. Her real name was Mary so I called her "aunt Mary". She had just returned from a trip to Italy where she visited all the great museums and churches, sketching faces, primarily noses, which Uncle Robert would use in his reconstructive plastic surgery. After supper they would both go over his upcoming operations and choose appropriate sketches to fit the patient's disfigured face. Bob and Maggie seemed on the surface to be a great team, she the architect, he the builder.

Every weekday night when I was free I would join them for supper followed by a quick game of touch football in the front yard. On weekends we would go out to their retreat house Aunt Mary had built on Sullivan's Island, swim in the ocean and sleep in an antique train caboose. Aunt

Mary proved good on her initial invitation and as weeks passed I became a member of the family.

Lt. Ryan owned an Austin Healey 2000 sports car which he rarely drove and insisted I used it to commute back and forth to La Guere Street. One morning I found a huge black spider asleep in my shoe which Ferdina laughingly carried outside and let it go behind a bush.

One day after returning home to an empty kitchen, I saw a new addition leaning by the screen door, a M1 carbine rifle. I mentioned it to Ferdina later as she was preparing supper and she chuckled.

“Well now, you know, Dr. King is due in Charleston tomorrow and some folks are taking notice.”

“Do you mean Dr. Martin Luther King?” I asked.

“Yes, that Dr. King! He is coming to support the hospital workers who are on strike.”

I still didn’t get it.

“Your uncle is one of the directors of the hospital so Dr. King has got Dr. Robert’s full attention”.

“You mean,” I stumbled. “You mean that this family is afraid of some kind of violence happening here in the Battery?”

“Oh, don’t worry, that gun’s not loaded and it will be back in the closet in a few days.”

That night Aunt Mary was late for supper and when she finally sat down, she was full of news.

“Peter, tomorrow do you have the day off?” In fact tomorrow was Sunday and I did have it off. “Well then, you can join Henry and me ‘cause we are going to see Dr. King.” I looked at 11 year old Henry’s face turn pale with the news. “I can’t mom, I’ve got practice.”

“Henry, you can miss one day of practice and come with your cousin Peter to see Dr. King.

“Anyway,” she ended with an afterthought, “I have a few questions to ask him.”

The next day the three of us piled into the family station wagon and made our way out to a large auditorium in the primarily black community of North Charleston. We parked the car and entered by a side door, following Aunt Mary to a row of chairs directly in front of the speaker’s podium. I would hear later on the evening news that there were over 3000 people seated behind us. The only other whites present were a handful of journalists.

Henry was seated to Maggie’s right and me to her left. He had not spoken since getting in the car and now he stared at the floor with his hands in a prayer mode. All at once the room exploded with applause, people rose to their feet and before you could say “I have a dream” Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King was standing not ten feet in front and above us, larger than life.

Later Henry told me that he was praying we’d get out alive. He recounted stories of his mother growing up in rural Georgia, driving a school bus as a young girl, going to nursing school, falling in love and marrying a young doctor from the North. She had her pilot’s license before most of her friends had their driver’s license and she carried a side arm holstered at her

hip when working alongside of a crew of black men building her family's summer island retreat off of Charleston Harbor.

But now as everyone in the hall took their seats, Aunt Mary remained standing, her face lowered in respect and her hands folded on her stomach. As Doctor King began his speech I could see words began to form on her lips.

Her mantra started as a whisper but slowly began to grow in volume. "They sold themselves into slavery," she repeated, her voice slowly getting louder. "The African chiefs would sell their prisoners of war to the white man's slave ships."

Henry turned to face me. He then pointed to the door as we gently rose. We were now the only folks other than Dr. King standing, one middle-aged white blond woman with two young men holding each of her arms. Even though most in the room could not make out what Aunt Mary was saying, she managed to gain Dr. King's attention and he stopped talking and looked down at us. Mercifully Mary took this to mean that he agreed with her historical perspective and this softened her long enough to let us move her out of the hall and into her car.

The next morning I rose early to drive to the ship. As I made my way out through the main hall I found Mary asleep in a ball-room style gown on the linen covered couch. She looked totally spent, her normally young skin pale and tight. Ferdina was in the kitchen getting the family breakfast ready and I asked her if everything was alright.

"Oh, Miss Mary often sleeps on the couch when she comes home late from a party. She does not want to wake Dr. Robert at night, especially when he has to operate in the morning."

For some reason this made me feel very sad. Years later I read Pat Conroy's *Prince of Tides* and was struck by how the shrimp boat captain's wife seemed so familiar to me. Pat's equally popular book, *The Great Santini* profiled a stoic and decorated Marine Corp fighter pilot and his relation to his wife and children. So it was no surprise when I learned years later of Pat's long term friendship with both Mary and Bob.

In the years that followed that summer my Charleston cousins all grew up, married and had their own children. Most of them stayed within a short drive of La Guere Street. My own brother John and his family bought a condo in the adjoining town of Mt Pleasant and I visit every few years for weddings and a few funerals. We cousins promised each other that we would never let an argument split our family apart again.

When my own dad died unexpectedly I suddenly realized how much I missed the father I had taken for granted. So I began to cherish my time with Uncle Robert. I saw my dad's smile on his face, smelled my dad's breath on his breath and as he grew older, I felt the need to spend more time with this man.

One spring evening I sat next to Uncle Robert at his son Duke's dining room table to celebrate Bob's eighty-seventh birthday. Although he was struggling with a heart condition he was bright and sharp as a tack. The day before my arrival a story had appeared on the front page of the Wall Street Journal about a speech I had made at my Harvard 25th reunion. It was about the night my father had told the military police on the phone that if they were coming to his home to arrest his son that they needed to bring two sets of handcuffs. The Journal article had come as a complete surprise to me and I prayed that no one in my southern family had seen it. But

sometime between the main meal and dessert Bob leaned over and put his right hand gently over my left.

“I don’t think I would have the courage to do what you did,” he said.

My heart stopped beating. I was confused. What had I done? Was he talking about the story in the Journal? If so, how could he compare my small act of protest during Vietnam with his doctoring of dying men during a suicidal assault on a beach in the Pacific? I had been terrified doing what I did. Courage had nothing to do with my battle.

I looked around the table hoping that no one had overheard. But he went on, speaking only to me. “When you are in a war, everything changes. You do what you need to do to survive. A doctor administers to others and effectively shuts out the danger. You are trained to save lives. That is all that matters.

“You, on the other hand, had so many chances to change your mind. But you didn’t. I am not sure I could have done that.” Mercifully the cake arrived and our conversation ended. Once again his power overwhelmed me. Those were the last words we shared that evening and this was to be the last time I would see Uncle Bob alive.

His funeral six months later was a magical event. We were all asked to bring our favorite musical instrument and after the church service we all marched, hundreds of us, through the streets of Charleston singing and playing “Oh when the Saints go marching in”. As we gathered at La Guerre Street to celebrate his life with stories and more song, I had this strong feeling that on such a sunny Southern day Bob had not time for such ceremony but had been quick to sneak off and corral Dr. King for a quick game of touch football.

Ensign Hagerty

The USS Lloyd Thomas (DD 764) was a destroyer built in 1944 for one purpose, to cross the Pacific and support the massive ground assault that was to end the war with Japan. The atom bomb made her mission redundant and she sat around for 30 years waiting for her moment in the sun. I joined her crew as a Navy Ensign shortly after graduation from Harvard in 1968 and worked hard with the men in Deck Division to keep this rusting bucket of bolts from sinking. We chased Russian subs off of Nova Scotia and shot our guns at targets pulled by airplanes in a desperate hope of joining the war in Vietnam before it was over.

In the spring of 1969 we were stationed in Newport, Rhode Island with a large contingent of naval vessels preparing to deploy to the Pacific. I was asked by our captain to do a check of the ship's five inch guns to see if they were combat ready. Our weapons were to be used to support our troops on the shore of the Tonkin Gulf. My battle station was on top of the forward gun mount and my job was to make sure the barrels were pointed in the right direction when being fired. Never having examined a barrel of a 5" gun much less having ever shot one, I went to the manual for advice. "Look for hairline cracks" the manual advised, so in I went searching with a flashlight and mirror. Much to my surprise the interior surface of the barrel had more cracks than a Bedouin's shepherd's forehead. I dutifully reported to our captain that our guns were compromised and not ready for combat.

"Do you know how long it would take to replace those barrels?" he asked as I faced him in his cabin. He took the inspection notice from my hand,

put his own signature on it, and that was that. The whole exchange took less than 30 seconds but he set in motion a chain of events that changed my life forever.



Ensign Hagerty at Commissioning

The North Atlantic 1969



The night is bitter cold. We are fighting a nor'easter and the seas are building to 20 feet. Both port and starboard watches on the Lloyd Thomas are strapped to the hull with safety lines and the ship is rolling and pitching.

“Change heading to 045 degrees and reduce speed to 15 knots” says Lt. Jack, the officer of the deck for the midnight to 4 o'clock watch. I am the junior officer.

“Aye aye, sir. Change heading to 045 degrees and reduce speed to 15 knots,” the helmsman replies and the quartermaster notes the change in the ship's log.

“Mr. Hagerty,” says Lt. Jack, “Send down some of your crew to assess ice on the main deck. We don't want to freeze up and roll over. Make sure they are all wearing safety harnesses.”

I head below to wake some of my men and when I return to the bridge, Jack says, “I am sure glad the Captain is out cold. I hope he stays that way.”

We are somewhere off the Grand Banks and we are getting a dose of typical November weather. We passed the New Bedford fishing fleet around 2300 hours and their crews were all out on deck, sliding around with no safety harnesses. We could not fathom how those guys could keep from falling overboard. Their ships were maybe 150 feet in length and ours was over 400.

All at once the sonar man comes on the line.

“Sir, we have contact with a submarine, bearing 094 degrees with a subsurface speed of 22 knots.”

“Quartermaster,” replied Lt. Jack, “give me the coordinates of our present position.”

“Sir, estimated coordinates are 42.5 degrees north, 61.5 degrees West”

“Does that put us in International Waters?” asks Lt. Jack.

“Yes sir, we are approximately 300 miles off the US coast and 240 miles off the Canadian coastline”.

“Thank God,” Jack whispers under his breath. “The old man is no fan of subs, no matter where they are from.”

“Sonar to bridge, we have confirmed contact with a submarine, probable nationality Soviet, probable Class Akula, 10,000 tons with a top speed of 52 knots submerged.”

The Lloyd Thomas had begun anti-submarine drills with the Brunswick, Maine Naval Air Station four days before. No Russian submarine had been detected in the Gulf of Maine in the last 60 days. We were now ready to go home and the last thing anyone wanted was a full blown drill, especially in the face of this northeast storm.

“Sonar, get me the heading and speed of this bogey and ask the Communications Officer to come to the bridge”.

Before you could say World War Three, Lt. Tom is standing next to us.

“Tom, do we know who this is?” asks Lt. Jack.

“We’re pretty sure it’s the Rostov. Captain’s name is Melnikov, 42 years of age. Left Murmansk 22 day ago. And by the way, the Rostov is nuclear!”

“You mean you don’t know Melnikov’s wife’s name or his shirt size?” Jack replied.

“We are working on it. Give us 10 minutes.” Tom laughs and disappears below deck to the communications center.

“Shit,” exclaimed Lt. Jack. “Standing orders are to wake the old man if we find a Ruskie out here. Pete, will you go down and wake the Captain?”

“Mr. Hagerty leaves the bridge to wake the Captain,” the quartermaster repeats out loud, then writes it verbatim in the log.

“Quartermaster”.

“Aye Lt.”

“Quartermaster, from now on, I want you to record every command given tonight here on the bridge.”

“Aye aye, sir. That is what I am doing.”

“I know that. This is not a reflection of your work. I have just got to make sure you can handle this. It could get very busy here in a few minutes.”

“Thank you sir, I will get some support”.

Just then the old man appears, barely awake and in pajamas, wrapped in a Naval Academy blanket.

“What’s up Lt.?” he asks.

“Sir, we have a Russian boomer, heading east north east at an approximate speed of 22 knots. We made contact nine minutes ago and just confirmed its name and relevant specs.”

“Lt.,” orders the captain, “change course to 094 degrees. Increase speed to 22 knots. Let’s see what this son of a bitch is up to.”

This new course sets us directly into the path of the oncoming waves. The effect is immediate. As the ship plows thru the sea, we crest through one

wave and crash down into the valley of the next. Spray towers over the hull and begins to immediately freeze to everything. I suddenly remember my men working to chip ice off the deck. I make my way down three floors to the main deck and ordered them all inside. As we stand soaked and shivering in the passageway I begin to feel the full effects of the ocean on the ship. Everything that is not tied down falls to the floor. The Engineering Officer comes thru the bulkhead door and tells me that they have burst one high- pressure steam hose on the starboard engine.

I make my way back to the bridge and report to Jack on the conditions below deck. I watch the quartermaster writing furiously everything that I am saying verbatim. Jack is still in command of the ship until the Captain orders differently.

“Lt., what is the state of the HEDGEHOG anti-submarine rockets?” asks the captain. I know that we have these weapons mounted on the forward section of the ship, but they are closely guarded and rarely talked about.

“Sir, HEDGEHOG is at stage 3, covered and locked.” Lt. Jack’s first job on the ship was is the Weapons Officer so he is quick to respond.

“Lt., take the HEDGEHOG to Stage 2.”

“Sir, with all due respect, Stage 2 is called for only if we are provoked. This sub is in international waters and moving away from us.”

“Bull shit,” shouts the captain. “This Russian captain is no fool. Look what he is doing to us. He knows who we are and why we are out here and he knows the sea conditions and our top speed. He is trying to sink us by

dragging us through this storm till our engines fall apart or we roll over. I know his game.”

“Sir, we are in international waters. He has as much right as we do to be here.”

“Lt., I am going below to get dressed. When I come back I want to see HEDGEHOG at Level 2. If we are still getting beat to shit, then I am prepared to go to Level 1 and a possible launch. Am I clear?”

“Yes sir.”

“Captain has left the bridge,” chimes the quartermaster. “Lt. Jack still Officer of the Deck.”

Jack’s face looks pale in the red light of the ship’s night controls but he is composed. “Peter,” Jack whispers as he takes me out aside. “I want you to go find the Chief Bishop. He is the Sergeant at Arms for the ship. He has a side arm and handcuffs. I want you to tell him to come immediately to the bridge. If the Captain insists on going to Level One, I am going to arrest him and relieve him of his command. I will make this clear to the Chief when he gets here. Just tell him to hurry.”

Jack is a graduate of the Naval Academy. He has wanted to be the captain of his own ship since he was a small boy. He and his wife opened up their family to me and are willing to respect my position on Vietnam. I have the highest admiration for him both as a leader of men and as a husband and friend. I am now seeing the beginning of the end of his Naval Career. To relieve a Captain of his command is a career ender, no matter if the intervention is warranted or not.

“The Captain has returned to the bridge,” announces the quartermaster.

“Sir, do you want the con?” asks Jack.

“I will let you know if and when I will take control,” replies the Captain.

“Engine room reports damage to # 2 superheated steam lines,” announces the engine room radio.

“Lt., what is our present position relative to the bogie?” asks the Captain.

“Sir, we are approximately 3000 yards and slowly closing.”

“Let me know when we are within 2000 yards and take HEDGEHOG to Stage 1 immediately,” replies the captain.

I can see it now like it just happened. Everything slows to a crawl in my memory. Lt. Jack motions to the Chief who has just arrived on the bridge. They begin a conversation over on the port side out of the Captain’s hearing range. I see the Chief look at Jack like he has misunderstood what the Lt. has told him. I see the Chief unclip his handcuffs, I see Jack make his way across the bridge and then I hear Lt. Tom’s voice on the squawk box.

“Communications Center to bridge, bogie has increased speed to 48 knots. We have lost contact with the Rostov. I repeat, no contact.”

The Chief takes a step backwards, steadies himself on the hand railing

while Lt. Jack gives new orders to the helmsman steering the ship.
“Change heading to 240 degrees, change speed to 12 knots”. The captain stands there silent, alone in his thoughts. His knuckles are tight in a fist. He then turns and without a sound, leaves the bridge.

“Captain has left the bridge. Come to new heading and speed. Lt. Jack has the con.



Lloyd Thomas refueling at sea

The USS Lloyd Thomas DD 764



When I first joined the USS Lloyd Thomas in the summer of 1968 she was birthed at the Charlestown Naval Shipyard in Boston undergoing structural repairs. Being Deck Officer meant that I was in charge of a rough and tumble group of men, some a good deal older than I, who were responsible for scraping the rust off her hull, repainting her, then washing her decks, welding her cracks, then scraping and painting some more. When I was not on board I was sharing an apartment in Cambridge, working with my friends to protest the war and explaining to their friends why my hair was so short.

Within weeks of my arrival on board the ship, the Executive Officer, second in command to the captain, asked me into his office for a friendly chat. He suggested I put a little more effort into my public demeanor, i.e. trim my curls, polish my shoes, and press my uniform. I tried to tell him that being in the Navy was not really my idea. He told me that I had better shape up because we had just received orders to proceed to Newport, R.I. where we would join a convoy and head to the Tonkin Gulf and the war in Vietnam.

“Folks over in Nam won’t cut you much slack so get your act together!” he

smiled.

Several weeks later we left Boston to join the larger squadron. It was in Newport that my captain signed, over my objection, the 'combat ready' report for the five inch gun barrels. I had a college friend who was on the sister ship to the Lloyd Thomas birthed just down the pier so I took a stroll over to see him. It was on a Friday and as it happened Ed was in his stateroom getting ready for a short weekend leave to see his folks.

"Ed, do you know what would happen if our 5 inch barrels cracked while we were doing fire support?" Ed had been at Harvard with me, we had done a summer intensive Naval ROTC training together and both our parents were 100% Boston Irish.

"What are you up to now?" he asked, looking at me over his glasses that were perched at the end of his nose.

I explained what had happened on the Lloyd Thomas.

"What do you plan to do about it?" he followed up.

"That depends on the answer to my first question", I replied. It turns out the Weapon's Officer of Ed's ship was still on board. Ed asked Lt. Jim to join us and when he arrived presented him with my question straight up, no explanation.

"Well," said Lt. Jim "first you have to understand that what you are shooting from the 5" barrel is not your standard bullet that comes out of a rifle barrel. These projectiles are filled with explosives that are timed to

explode when they are about 8 feet above the desired target, sending out shrapnel in all directions to tear body parts off the enemy.

“Just imagine if the projectile accidentally explodes prematurely in the ship’s gun barrel itself. A new barrel is designed to direct the shrapnel forward to harmlessly fall into the ocean or on the deck. An old barrel with cracks might technically be unable to accommodate such a failure. The explosion could be directed backwards into the gun mount where a firestorm could result with heavy casualties.

“Now remember, I said ‘technically’. Lt. Jim added. “Thank God I have never seen that happen”.

I thanked Lt. Jim for his thoughts and he smiled and departed.

“So now what?” asked Ed. “You know, Pete, probably nothing is going to happen over there. If you make this a big deal, you are going to find yourself eating a ‘ration of shit’. This is not Social Relations 101. Your captain is keen to get over there so he can have the Vietnam Commendation Medal pinned on his chest. He is not going to take very kindly to your concern for detail”.

Actually Social Relations 101 had been one of my favorite classes in college. I took it during the fall of my junior year when I was just about flunking out. For the first time I found students and professors who were willing to put aside the pretenses of an Ivy League education and wrestle with the emotional and sometimes spiritual issues that faced all of us. That year I had been spending more time protesting the war than studying and my grades reflected this. I scrambled to try to climb out of the bottom

quarter of my class from where my draft board would send me to the Army. I already knew a classmate of mine who had died in Vietnam. Joining Navy ROTC at Harvard ensured that I could stay in school. Graduation was still two years away. I would worry about the war then.

The day after my talk with Ed and his roommate, I found myself ringing the doorbell of a well-kept brick home in the nearby town of Portsmouth, Rhode Island. It was on a ridge, one side sloping east to a view of Buzzards Bay and Cape Cod and to the west over rolling fields filled with sheep. I remembered that when I was a young child I had come to a nearby monastery with my father to visit a Franciscan monk who had a border collie that worked these very sheep. As I stood wondering if the monk and his dog were still alive a pretty middle aged woman in a tartan skirt opened the door.

“Hello”, I said with as much courage as I could muster. “My name is Peter Hagerty and I am an officer on a ship here in Newport that is part of your husband’s squadron. I was wondering if I might have a word with him.”

I was warmly welcomed in by the wife of the Squadron Commander as if I were a college friend of one of her children. She invited me to sit in a sunny room with copies of Turner and Constable paintings hanging on the wall. I knew these artists because my Uncle John had been an art collector. She offered me a cup of tea and assured me that her husband would be down shortly. This was not going to be as bad as I had thought. I smelled a roast of beef cooking in the kitchen.

All at once the Commander was standing in the doorway.

“Good afternoon Mr. Hagerty. How do you like Portsmouth?”

Well that was the cue for me to talk about how I had played soccer against a school just down the road. And I brought him up to speed on my visit to the Portsmouth Priory and of course I told him how much I appreciated the romantic influence of Turner and Constable. He joined me for tea and I soon felt that we were becoming the best of chums. Then all at once I heard the sound of my own voice and slowed to a stop.

“So how can I help you on this Saturday afternoon?” he asked kindly. My host was dressed not in military attire but in summer weight wool pants and a light blazer. He could have easily been the Commodore of the local Yacht Club.

“Well sir, I am the Deck Officer on the Lloyd Thomas, a ship in your squadron and as you know part of my duty is to make sure that all my crew and the equipment we operate are in safe condition.

“I was asked by my captain to certify that our 5 inch guns are combat ready. During an inspection, I detected problems with the barrels of the forward gun mount. When I reported this, he refused to address this concern and signed the combat readiness sheet over my objections.”

My host then reached into his coat pocket and took out a pipe, lit it and filled our corner of our bright little room with smoke.

“In addition, I recently learned of the dire consequences that would result should these barrels be compromised during firing.” The volume of smoke increased.

“How long have you been on the Lloyd Thomas?” he asked.

“Just under a year, sir.”

“Very well. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I will discuss it with my squadron staff and I will let you know of the outcome as soon as possible.”

The meeting was over. I made my way to the door and we shook hands good-by. No invitation to stay for lunch but in any case I hoped that I might see him again. I truly enjoyed meeting him and his wife.

Monday morning came along and my country jaunt to Portsmouth had already taken a back seat to the pressing issues being discussed at the ship’s 8:00 a.m. staff meeting. I was standing at ease and listening to the Executive Officer’s work orders for that day when one of my enlisted men unexpectedly appeared. He politely interrupted the meeting.

“Excuse me sir,” he announced to the Exec. “There are some men here to see Mr. Hagerty”

“What men” queried the Exec, slightly amazed that anyone would want to see me.

“Sir, they say they are from the Squadron Commander’s office”.

I was excused and as I made my way to the upper deck I was pleased to

think that my new friend the Commodore of Portsmouth was so fast acting. I was surely on the way to meet his staff and give my report first hand.

Standing at the gangway of our ship were two burley military policemen with very serious and somewhat nervous expressions on their faces.

“Mr. Hagerty?”, they asked.

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Sir, we are under orders to escort you off the ship now. Please come with us.”

Something in their tone just did not sound like they were escorting a valued member of the Naval Service to the Commander’s staff meeting.

“Let me just get my briefcase. I have some notes I would like to bring with me.”

“I am sorry sir, but we are under orders to escort you off the ship. We must leave now.” Out of instinct, the older of the two found his hand going to his handcuffs. He stopped, however, and slowly tried to regain his composure. Something started to smell like a ‘ration of shit’. Before I was to leave with these men I needed to let my fellow officers on board know that something was up.

I turned to the quartermaster who was standing nearby on the gangway, checking everyone who came and left the ship. He happened to be in my division and a very smart young man.

“Pomerantz,” I beckoned. “I am being escorted by these two men off the Lloyd Thomas. Would you kindly take down their names, ranks, and serial numbers and report that to the Captain?”

“Yes, sir,” said Pomerantz smartly. Then I turned to our two guests.

“Gentlemen, am I under arrest?”

“No sir, not at this moment.” Now these guys were really getting nervous. They had probably never had to “escort” an officer before and even as I tried to control my own rising fear, I felt sorry for them. Pomerantz was also quickly realizing the implications of what was going on.

After my escorts had given the quartermaster their ID particulars we headed up the gangplank and down Pier #7. Someone once had told me this pier was six football fields long. In spite of all the comings and goings of trucks, jeeps, and men getting ready for war, I felt that everyone was watching our little parade.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked.

“It’s just a little further, sir”. Sweat was running down my back as we reached the end of the pier. I realized that my poorly polished shoes and my curls were not about to work in my favor no matter what lay ahead. I was suddenly overcome by an image of my disappearing and no one ever finding me. At that very moment a sign on the building that we were walking past came into focus.

Office of the Judge Advocate General (JAG)

I had been to a workshop here months before about the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), a set of rules that lays out the legal process in all branches of the US Armed Forces. At the time I felt it was pretty boring stuff but as I veered off to the left and up the stairs, I saw this office as a refuge.

“Gentlemen,” I said, reaching the top of the stairs and facing my alarmed escorts. “With all due respect (and I meant it) if you are going to charge me with an offense under the UCMJ, then charge me and arrest me now. Otherwise I am going in here to consult with my attorney. You may either wait out here or come inside. I suggest you do the latter as it probably cooler inside and I am sure there are some refreshments here as well.”

The tables quickly turned. My respect for their awkward situation coupled with my authentic concern for their comfort caused them to acquiesce. I was now the officer and they were the enlisted and I was making a reasonable suggestion. They chose to remain outside.

Twenty cubicles comprised the layout of the first floor of JAG headquarters and in each cubicle sat a Navy lieutenant with a law degree. The vast majority had joined the service as combat desk jockeys. This would be the closest they would come to shrapnel and gunfire. Their days were filled with representing naval personnel involved in automobile accidents, drunken brawls and divorce. I chose the seventh cubicle on the left and introduced myself to Lt. Lowell Noteboom.

“Excuse me sir, I am in some kind of trouble and I could use some help.”

We talked for a full hour, or rather I talked and Lowell listened. I told him everything that had gone on over the last year from my gun barrel incident to getting sprayed in the face by a skunk in the garbage pail out back of my Newport apartment. When I had exhausted my historical repertoire, Lt. Noteboom stood up and walked toward the window.

“I have been waiting for a client like you ever since the first day I arrived here in Newport,” he said enthusiastically. “Don’t you worry; we will set this all straight.” I knew then I had an ally and a new friend and things for just a moment looked brighter than they had in a while.

He went outside and sent the guards packing with an order that they return with formal charges. But they never returned. He gave me his office and his home phone number, told me to return to my ship and to call him every four hours to “check in”.

Back on the Lloyd Thomas life was busy. Chipping paint, checking anchor lines and covering the ever-present rust, my deck crew continued to get the ship ready for the first leg of the voyage to Vietnam. Then several days later the captain announced that we would go to sea to test our engines. After lunch in the wardroom he asked to see me in his cabin. I had not been in his stateroom since that fateful morning months ago.

“Mr. Hagerty, we have a guest on board for this sea trial. I would like to berth him in your room. You have a spare bunk I believe.”

“Yes sir, I will make sure he is comfortable”. That was it. Dismissed, I made my way below. No mention of my unorthodox visit to his senior

commander. I called Lowell.

“Look Pete, it may be nothing. I regret that we will be out of touch while you are at sea but I can’t imagine anything sinister happening. You have some good friends on board, just stay close to them.”

It was now approaching early Fall. The weather had been unusually warm and I prayed that no storm systems came our way. We got under way on a Friday morning and I was on the stern watching the Jamestown Bridge pass overhead when a friendly voice announced, “Well, I guess I am your new roommate”. I turned to find a Lieutenant standing to my right.

“Jack Braiden,” he smiled and stuck out his hand.

“Pleased to meet you sir,” I replied.

“Let’s forget the ‘sir’ if it’s alright with you. I live in up-state New York and am in the Naval Reserve and I am doing my two weeks active duty so I am barely a ‘sir’.”

I liked Lt. Braiden right away but I remembered Lowell’s cautionary advice so I kept calling him ‘sir’ in any case. My morning watch ended as we passed Martha’s Vineyard and we went down to the wardroom for lunch. Because Jack had no apparent assigned duties, he ended up hanging out with me, helping where he could. He thought nothing of running an errand for me and I found myself relaxing and looking forward to his presence.

The weather was holding and the early fall nights at sea were spectacular.

We ran into the New Bedford fishing fleet off the Grande Banks and their lights lit up the dark ocean like a remote city on the prairie. I was on the bridge on Saturday standing my midnight to 4 am watch and was surprised to have Lt. Braiden join me.

“Can’t sleep on nights like this,” he said. “Never was much good at sleeping at sea. What got you into the Navy?”

He had an easy way of getting me to talk. The ocean was calm and we just had one radar contact we were following that was 12 miles off the port bow. I told him about growing up, then about Harvard and how I went there because it was the only place I got in. He thought that was hysterical.

“This guy from Harvard,” I explained, “he came to interview the students at my boarding school. It turns out that he was an alumna and wanted to see what the campus looked like after 20 years of being away. Because I was one of the few in my class who hadn’t applied to Harvard, I was chosen to take him around. We went to his old dorm room, the hockey rink, and the chapel. He told me stories of his time there, just typical stuff but not building himself up at all. In fact he was pretty modest. It turned out that we had similar interests and so we got along real well.

“Then he tells me that he sees a lot of him in me and says that I could go to Harvard if I wanted. Of course I was flattered that he said this but didn’t think much more of it and we finished the tour and went to supper.”

“Then three weeks later a letter arrived at my school and it was signed by this same guy. His name was Humphrey Doermann and he turns out to be the Dean of Admissions. He writes in the letter that I have been selected to

go to Harvard the following year if I want. Of course my parents were overjoyed because their ultimate dreams have been met.”

“I mean, I hadn’t even applied. So I ended up going by default when my other college applications were rejected.” Jack hunched over with laughter.

The night slipped on. I was happy to pass the 12-4 watch talking with my new friend. Over the next three days we talked a lot. At first I had suspicions that the lieutenant was up to something but as the days drifted along I came to look forward to these “casual conversations” around the ship. On some level I was more eager to find someone with whom I could share my fears and frustrations than worry if he were a spy.

Then on the last morning we were at sea we talked about the war. We were back by the stern of the ship and I was supervising my men getting ready for the ship to enter port. I finally decided to tell him some of what had happened with the 5 inch guns and what I might do if push came to shove. I told him how I had secretly and illegally traveled overseas to England and France several months prior while on two weeks leave to see if I could handle the idea of deserting. I saw him draw back into himself. Maybe I had misread him. Perhaps I had crossed a line and for a moment had lost his respect.

“Look Peter,” he said. “Thank you for sharing your stories with me. I have truly enjoyed our conversations over the last few days very much. It is clear to me that you are sincere in your beliefs and your concern for the safety of your men. But in the end it doesn’t matter what I think. You have chosen to enter a very dangerous situation and you have to be very careful from now on, especially choosing what you say and to whom you say

it. Be very careful!” He shook my hand rather formally and was gone.

I was busy with my crew for the remainder of the morning as we entered port and secured our ship to the pier. I was also watching out of the corner of my eye for anyone on shore that might be looking for me. When I finally got to my bunk, my roommate was gone. When I called Lowell and gave him an update, he did a search of Naval Reserve officer personnel and no Lt. Braiden surfaced. He told me that we were now to resume our daily check in's and not to leave the base for any reason. Fear once again became my daily companion.

The Call

Newport, Summer 1969

Mornings on the Lloyd Thomas were the worst. I would open my eyes, remember what was going on and put the pillow on my head, refusing to rise. The smell of fresh paint to cover the rust was everywhere. The ship looked ready for combat as long as no one looked in the wrong places.

Several times Lowell would call early just to make sure I was awake enough to attend the morning staff meeting. “We can get through this,” he would say in his boyish, mid-west optimism. “The Navy is just not willing to have one of its Ivy League officers splattered all over the cover of the Boston Globe for whistle blowing.” Lowell was Lutheran and he had faith.

One Saturday in late summer he called and in a soft voice asked, “Can you get down here? I think that I have found something.” When I arrived we were the only folks at the JAG office but even so Lowell closed the door behind me after I entered.

“I hired a local civilian lawyer friend of mine to do some calling. Sometimes they can open drawers we can’t. Well, my friend tells me that there is a Marine Corps colonel in the Secretary of the Navy’s office here in Newport who has it in for you. This is too bad because John Chafee, who is the Secretary, is a pretty decent guy and might side with us on this. But this Marine has put your file in a very dark place where it will not see the light of day. Our colonel is banking on you cracking, doing something drastic like going over the hill, maybe even leaving the country.”

I smiled at the memory of my last overseas trip. The previous Easter I’d been slipping in the self-confidence department and took two week leave that I had coming. It was completely illegal for an active duty military

person to depart the continental US without permission but instead of spring skiing with friends in Vermont I boarded a flight to London and moved into a friend's flat in Cadogan Square. I had been an exchange student there in the early 60's and wanted to see if I could live the life of an exile in my old stomping grounds.

I visited pubs and coffeehouses where American vets who were now deserters enjoyed celebrity status from the Beatles' generation. Men with pony tails and women with breasts visible through their blouses would buy these American GI's pints of lager beer, praising them for their courage and expecting graphic depictions of the blood, carnage and rape in return. Where these Brits saw courage, I saw fear and deep depression. I had planned to sit and talk with these soldiers but in the end I could not.

On Good Friday I went to Westminster Cathedral and sat in the front row, the very seat I had occupied just seven years before when I was at a school down the road. For the first time I began to appreciate the sacrifice that Jesus made. He believed in something and was willing to die for it. In my mind, Easter Sunday paled in comparison. As I made my way through the streets of London that night, I realized with certainty that my battle would be fought at home, not in some far off British pub or Parisian coffeehouse.

Lowell now politely admonished me when I told him of my trip. "Pete, from now on you need to live a squeaky clean life. Stay close to the base. No speeding tickets, no bar fights. Don't provide them with an excuse. We need to find a way to get your file back out in the open. We need some time."

I was living with another officer from our ship in a small apartment in Newport. It was the summer of Woodstock, of Joan Baez marrying David Harris and revolution was in the air. One night I felt this overwhelming

need to see my parents. They lived two hours away and were having some problems of their own and I needed to check in.

Cohasset's postmaster, Gerard Keating, had lost his son Brian in Vietnam. Word had finally reached home of my provocative actions in the Navy and people were avoiding my parents in public. Gerard and my father had worked side- by- side posting my families' business mail every day for over 20 years and now Gerard could not look at dad in the face. My mother was in the Central Market when a longtime friend refused to talk to her. I learned all this from my brother John. They were not about to burden me with their own issues.

So failing to heed Lowell's advice, I headed off the base, changed at the apartment into civilian clothes, and watched in the rear view mirror for an escort as I traveled the back roads into Massachusetts. It was a gorgeous late summer sunset that greeted my arrival home and after saying hello to my surprised folks I went for a swim. Mom cooked up some fish and we sat on the porch, catching up with our respective news. It had been months since I had seen them. Dad said that he had watched the Lloyd Thomas sail by Minot's Light on its way south to Newport. We were staying away from all the difficult stuff when the phone rang and dad went to answer it.

"Hello, is this the Hagerty residence?"

"Yes," replied my father.

"Mr. Hagerty, my name is Hines, John Hines, and I am a Military Police officer stationed at the Naval Base here in Boston. If you are Francis, then perhaps I was a neighbor of yours growing up on Melville Avenue in Dorchester."

"Yes, I remember your older sister Joan," replies my father.

“Mr. Hagerty, we have reason to believe that your son is visiting you there this evening. Is that true?”

“Yes, we are just finishing supper”.

“Well, I am afraid to report that there are two MP’s coming down there to arrest your son.”

“Why?”

“The charge is that he is Absent Without Leave from his base in Newport.”

“But my son is off tonight and chose to come here to have supper with my wife and me and will return to the base by morning. Officer Hines, why are you calling and telling me all this?”

“I recognized the name and as a courtesy I am giving you a heads up.”

“Well, John, my son has done nothing wrong. And if your associates are coming here to arrest him, you tell them to be sure to bring two sets of handcuffs!” My father then hung up the phone and stood looking at the floor.

Both my parents were Democrats. My father used to joke that if they were Republicans then the fire department might not come if his factory caught on fire. I had never seen my parents stand up against authority. Tonight my dad said that he was going to jail with me.

My mother began chattering, then screaming, then moaning. She walked the hallways of our house cursing me. My dad excused himself, went up and lay down on his bed and began having mild chest pains.

Mom took some Valium and I went to sit on my dad's bed. I wanted to tell him how proud I was of what he had done. He had come to my rescue like I had always hoped he might. Instead I told him a story.

As a child, every night Dad would treat me to the adventures of Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest. So this night, as we awaited our jailers, I transported him back to a forest clearing where Friar Tuck was battling the Sheriff of Nottingham with a large pole while Robin Hood once again escaped to be with Maid Marion. As my words rolled out his breathing eased and when the story ended, he fell into a deep sleep.

Sitting by his side I felt totally responsible for my parent's trauma. When would I be able to make decisions in my life and not feel the weight of responsibility for others? Where did their life end and mine begin?

I waited until 2 am but no one ever came. I never knew if it were a bluff or whether the Navy was not prepared for the arrest of a 42-year-old father of two. I have always preferred the latter. Years later at my Harvard 25th reunion I told this story of my father's courage to 800 of my returning classmates and it brought the house down. It seems that many in the room had desperately wanted this kind of support from their own parents but it was not to be. That summer night I had seen my father face fear head on and not turn and run. For this reason alone I would love him forever.

Family Fun Day

Newport, Fall 1969

“Family Fun Day” the poster read. “Come meet Secretary of the Navy John Chafee. Games for the children, free food.” It was fall, the trees were turning in Rhode Island and someone nearby was burning leaves. The Lloyd Thomas had set sail two weeks before for Vietnam. Lowell had me transferred to a destroyer tender, a huge floating repair vessel. I was ironically assigned to assist the ship’s Chaplain with the spiritual issues of his crew.

To this day I cannot remember saying good-bye to any of my shipmates as they sailed out of Newport for the last time. Another officer on board, Lt. Henry, had taken over command of Deck Division. None of my men were watching as their unconventional leader walked off the ship for the last time. All I can remember was deciding not to throw my hat in the water as I left.

Lowell and I had discussed the risk of informing my men of the dangers they faced going to war on an unfit ship. If any of them went ‘over the hill’ before the ship sailed, I would be open to charges of encouraging desertion in the face of combat. This would undoubtedly complicate Lowell’s defense efforts if the Navy court-martialed me.

Yet for me to leave saying nothing seemed cowardly and irresponsible. So one evening before my final departure, I was standing watch with my 3rd class petty officer, Pomerantz. An affable young man from Boston, he could easily have been a friend in civilian life. Over the year I had spent with my men, I found that they were very uncomfortable with any

conversation that strayed from the clearly defined role of officer and enlisted man.

But Pomerantz was different. He had been on deck the day the MP's came for me. He appreciated the nuances of surviving military life in the late 1960's. So one night I chose to tell him what was up with the forward gun mount. His combat station was in the powder room that supplied the gun with shells. He would be directly in harm's way should an accident occur. He listened intently, saying nothing. I learned later that six men on the Lloyd Thomas went missing when the ship sailed from San Diego for the South China Sea. And as the Lloyd Thomas headed across the Pacific, things started coming apart on board. Lt. Jay and two other division officers decided to leave the Navy and all three handed in their commissions in protest on the same day.

But today it was Family Fun Day and I would have a chance to see John Chafee, the Secretary of the Navy in person, up close. The event was held in a large aircraft hangar on the Newport, Rhode Island base. Tables of food lined the sides and proud sailors dressed in their finest uniforms paraded their families about till they found a seat. First some marching bands warmed up the crowd. Like church, no one chose the front row so I made my way there and sat down. Before anyone noticed, a tall, distinguished man with grey hair and dressed in civilian clothing came ambling out a side door and started greeting the sailors, their wives and their children. People began flocking to him like a trout to a fly. He hunkered down to chat with four year olds, taking up to several minutes listening to these kids. I remembered that he had once been a popular Rhode Island Senator and had been considered a political moderate. Finally he made his way to the microphone and began to speak.

Short of an opening welcome, I remember nothing of the specifics of his talk. It was not long, maybe ten minutes. What I will never forget is how his talk ended.

“I have come here today to hear from you about your concerns,” Chafee began. “We live in the same state and we have all chosen to serve our country in its time of need. So we are literally one family here today. I have asked that microphones be placed throughout the hall. Please raise your hand and someone from my staff will accompany you to a podium from which we may speak to one another”.

I was stunned. Here was the man who needed to hear my story and today he had unknowingly made that conversation possible. All I had to do was raise my hand.

It took a while for the room to quiet down. Someone had said there were 4000 people there yet no hands were raised. The room grew silent. Rather than start talking again, John Chafee smiled and remained quiet. He would wait because he knew that this part of his family was not used to standing up and saying what was on their minds.

Finally one sailor raised his hand. His question was followed by one from a Navy wife. I watched my right hand lie on my leg, frozen, unable to move. My mind listed all the reasons why I should not take action. Here was our leader, a compassionate man trying to make the lives of these families a bit lighter if for only a moment. Many of these men were on their way to war. Some had just come back. This was the real world. What right did I have to interject my own personal drama into these proceedings?

I watched as a drum and bugle corps assembled off stage preparing to say good-bye to the Secretary. Chafee was reaching for his closing notes.

Before I could stop myself, I was on my feet. “Sir”, I cried, too loudly. “Do you have time for one last question?”

Chafee put his papers aside, adjusted his spectacles and looked down at the first row. What he saw was a young officer in summer whites, white shoes, white socks, white pants, and white shirt holding a white hat in his trembling hands.

“Please,” replied Chafee, pointing me to a nearby microphone. I can only imagine a Marine Corps colonel somewhere in the room stop chewing his overcooked hamburger and slowly turning his face towards the front of the hall. “Take your time. This is your day,” Chaffee said

“Mr. Secretary,” I began, “thank you for coming to Newport today and offering us an opportunity to speak to the difficult issues that face us as members of the United States Armed Forces. Thank you in advance for addressing my question.

“If a member of your Navy finds something wrong that could result in the injury or death of a fellow crew member and he reports this finding to his superior officer and this superior not only fails to acknowledge the problem but in fact punishes this sailor, what would you do, if anything, in response?”

Time now stood still. For better or worse I had said my piece. Where others had sat down after delivering their question, I remained standing. Chafee looked at me and understood that what hung between us now was not a question but a statement. A statement given with respect but one with implications that reached far beyond the walls of this hanger.

“Thank you for your thoughtful question Mr....”

“Hagerty, Ensign Hagerty; U.S. Naval Reserve 0105-289-70524”.

“Thank you Mr. Hagerty, I will have my staff look into the specifics of your question immediately after this meeting. But in practice the Navy will not tolerate information being withheld for whatever reason if it endangers the life or well-being of its members”.

“Thank you, sir,” I said and without thinking I turned, left the microphone and walked out of the hanger. There was already a crowd in the parking lot heading home so I jogged for my car and left the scene as quickly as possible. Three days later Lowell called with the news. I had been honorably discharged from the US Navy, effective immediately.

Of course I was relieved. It was over, we had won. I have no clear memories of my last day. The Lloyd Thomas had left for the Pacific months before, my deck crew standing in the bow. I gave them a wave. Then they were gone.

I was a civilian as I drove out of Newport for the last time. But now as I remember back,, I wonder how I reconciled that these men, my men, would soon be heading into battle with a weapon that could kill them. And if it did, what responsibility did I hold for that loss.



Beards and Peace Signs on the way to war

Thunder in the Morning,

1970



Ed Filming near the DMZ

It was September and night came early on the Mekong River. The monks finished their evening prayers and began replacing the Christmas tree lights that routinely burned out on the towers high above the pagoda. “It is necessary to have all the lights working so the bombers can see we are here,” a monk told me as he passed by. The evening breeze ruffled his brown robes as he efficiently moved up and down the tall ladder. I pointed out to him the heavy cloud cover that was promising rain but he shrugged and said that God would protect them.

These monks were Cao Dai Buddhists and their spiritual leader was a small, elf like

man named the Dau Uhr or the Coconut Monk. The French had built him this monastery on the south end of a banana shaped island in the Mekong when they ruled Vietnam, then threw him in jail when he supported independence. The Communists in the north and the Americans in the south also invited him to taste their prison food. He said he was proud that he managed to be so honored by every occupying power.

Fall of 1970 found me in South Vietnam. After being “honorably discharged” from the Navy, I had moved back to Cambridge and became embroiled in the GI anti-war movement. Cafes in London, Paris and Toronto were full of American soldiers and civilian draftees who had chosen to “love it and leave it”. Talking with these men was very depressing because they believed that although they were safe from Vietnam they felt that they would never be able to return home again. Some ex-military friends and I decided to open a GI coffee house at a military base near Boston and offer free legal counseling. A friend of mine, Ann Singer, heiress of the Singer Sewing Machine fortune, funded this project.

Ann had been living in the Philippines during the early years of the Vietnam War and was then married to an Air Force colonel flying illegal sorties over Cambodia and Laos, something that the State department fervently denied. She was outraged by what she saw and heard from her husband and wanted to fight back. One day she came to me with the idea of opening a law office in Saigon where we would offer to defend soldiers, free of charge, who were facing court martial for acts they had committed in the war. She asked me if I would help. We would use the courtroom as a bully pulpit to expose through the media the true human price we as a country were paying to continue this war. Ann was now married to Martin Peretz, a Harvard professor and editor of Ramparts Magazine, a radical journal firmly opposed to Washington’s policies. She was friendly with many in the Washington legal community and was able to interest former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark to

head up an impressive Board of Directors. We formed a non-profit corporation called The Lawyers Military Defense Committee and began searching law school grads for young and energetic attorneys ready and willing to move to a war zone. While Ann looked for staff, I headed to Vietnam to find office space and begin interviewing defendants.

I arrived at Tan San Ut Air Force Base early in the summer of 1970 accompanied by William Homans, a senior partner in a distinguished Boston law firm and from an even more distinguished old Boston family. In 1968 Bill managed to “undistinguish” himself by joining the Chicago Eight defense team.



Anti-War Poster for the Chicago 8

A 1997 N.Y. Times obituary described Bill as “a Boston civil rights lawyer who championed the downtrodden, the oppressed and the out-and-out villainous with such verve that he became a legend in Massachusetts legal circles.”

Bill was of my father's generation and a bear of a man physically. Over six feet four at a stoop, his hand would grasp yours and bring tears to the eyes with its enthusiastic grip. Our first defendant was waiting for us 20 miles south in Long Binh Jail, the US Army's largest prison in Vietnam and affectionately known to its inmates as "LBJ".

On the day of my discharge from the Navy in Newport one year earlier, I had returned home to a joyful reception. My parents were glad I was not heading to jail or to war. One can only imagine their emotions when they learned that I had decided to head into the fray voluntarily. When they asked for an explanation, they exploded in frustration and anger before I could come up with an answer. Who did I think I was that I could play with the feelings of loved ones? Maybe being out of the limelight did not suit my ego needs? Did I understand how much they had suffered?

The truth was that I had no reasonable answer as to why I was heading to Vietnam other than the fact that there were people suffering there and perhaps I could help. And I did have recent experience with military law.

My parents had always told me growing up that there was nothing I could not do with my life if I put my mind to it. They had imbued me with the courage to act on my convictions. They had sent me to the "best" schools where I learned to articulate my beliefs with confidence. Yet now I was paralyzed with guilt as I faced their criticism. They joined me at Logan Airport in Boston to say good-bye but as they hugged me their eyes said "how can you do this to us?"

The flight from Guam to Saigon was on a commercial United 727 and most of the passengers were wearing civilian clothes. Walking down the stairs to the airbase runway I heard thunder in the distance rumbling in a

cloudless tropical sky. My fellow travelers started running for the terminal but seeing no rain I slowed my pace. Then a stewardess jogged by and shot me a hard stare. “Get a move on pal” she said. “That’s not thunder. We’re being mortared.”

And for just a moment I faltered, realizing for the first time that I was totally unprepared for a war zone. I had sat on rocks off the shore of Cohasset on cold November mornings with a shotgun in my hand but ducks flying south for the winter had never been safer. Unlike most of my traveling companions in Vietnam, I would be unarmed as I made my way ‘in country’. I forced this realization into the pit of my stomach and broke into a run.

Tyrone was black, from Alabama, lied about his 17 years of age to get into the Army and was up on charges of first degree murder of his First Lieutenant. He was sitting in a cell by himself as I made my way the 17 miles south of Saigon for an interview. I had been in Vietnam two days and I would spend the next two months with men like Tyrone, mostly black and Hispanic, hearing what heinous crimes they had committed, often against their own troops, in order just to stay alive.

“You’ve got a couple of ways you can get down there,” an Army sergeant told us at Saigon hotel. “If you go by land, convoys leave twice a day from No Ba Trahn which is a cab ride from here. If you don’t get attacked you might make it in a few hours.”

“You can also take the air shuttle from the airport. That’s a 30 minute

chopper ride.” We flipped a coin, Bill got the convoy, I got the chopper. We would compare notes later.

Bill and I quickly learned how chaotic this war had become. Word on the street was it was safer to be out “in the bush” than on a base. Drugs and booze were everywhere. Soldiers were “fragging” their own officers, coating a grenade with wax, then pulling the pin and dropping it into the gas tank of their Captain’s jeep. The jeep moves, “boom”!

Arriving at Than Son Nhut Airbase I lined up with a motley crew waiting for a ride down to “LBJ” where Tyrone was waiting. Helicopters would appear like mid-west crop dusters, flying just above ground level at speeds of eighty to 100 miles an hour. They pulled up just short of the terminal building and hovered a few feet above the ground. A short line of soldiers stretched out onto the tarmac waiting to board. I was wearing a civilian shirt and army pants (they had more pockets for my pens, note pads and small camera) and my hair was definitely not regulation.

Standing in line in front of me was a character right out of Woodstock. Big Abbie Hoffman curls, blue jeans and Nixon printed on the back of his shirt. But he had replaced the “x” with a Nazi swastika. Before I got a closer look he picked up his gear and slowly began moving towards a recently arrived helicopter gunship.

A soldier at the door of the chopper wearing dark shades and a dirty green t-shirt held up three fingers. Abbie and I began running and an overweight colonel complete with jowls and a golf bag took up the rear. Abbie rammed his collection of cameras and lenses under his left arm, hopped up on the struts and was pulled aboard by “shades”. I was next and with two

free arms climbed through the cabin door. I suddenly felt the chopper lift off the ground and looked back to see “shades” give the sweating colonel with the clubs the finger and slam shut the access door.

Abbie strapped himself into a passenger seat directly behind the pilot. I was just about to join him when the starboard gunner offered me his seat. No sooner had I straddled his 50 mm machine gun than his sweaty hands adjusted a set of headphones over my ears. All went silent except for a high pitched, barely audible whine of the rotors.

We rose up into the air and we were off like a rocket, flying parallel to the ground. No sooner would a grove of tall trees appear than we would gently lift up and over, barely touching the top-most leaves. Then as if on cue my ears filled with the music of a most familiar song:

“You, who are on the road,

Must have a code that you can live by.

And so, become yourself,

Because the past is just a good-bye.

And you of tender years

Can't know the fears

That your elders grew by.

And so please help

Them with your youth

They seek the truth

Before they can die”

David Crosby and Neil Young had joined me for my ride in the starboard gunner’s bubble. Soon the sweet smell of weed drifted down to my outpost and the gunner’s hand appeared bearing a gift. I respectfully declined and spent the next 14 minutes of the flight wondering what would happen if I just leaned back and pulled the trigger of the gun that rested calmly between my legs.

Abbie’s real name was Ed and he worked with Dispatch News, a Bay Area wire service that supplied the liberal press with an alternative version of what was happening in Southeast Asia. He had worked as a CBS cameraman during the early days of the war until he was injured. After a year of rehab at a clinic in New Haven, he returned to Vietnam wearing a different shirt, totally politicized by the anti-war movement he had discovered at Yale. After we arrived in Long Bin and I had interviewed Tyrone, Ed and I had a meal together and became friends. Several weeks later he invited me on a trip up the Mekong River. He was on assignment for French Television to make a film about the Coconut Monk and asked me to come along.

The B-52's began their run after evening prayers. The bombs shattered the jungle on the distant shore and soon made their way out into the river, marching towards the monastery's lighted towers like giant underwater monsters. I watched the monks do some end of day chores and prepare for bed. I myself sat in a lotus position hoping to fool the gods that there were no Western skeptics on the island tonight. A bomb exploded in the mud not a football field away and I felt the floor under me shake. Then all was quiet. After what seemed a lifetime, the explosions skipped the island and continued marching across the river towards the opposite shore.

The night air was heavy and smelled of mud and rotting leaves. Telephone pole sized pilings held the monastery and the huts of the adjoining village over the Mekong as it flowed by underneath. Earlier in the day Ed and I had explored the small banana shaped island attached to the north end where the villagers used all available land to grow vegetables and fruits. "This is what Vietnam was like before the war," said Ed.

I lay awake for hours on my straw mat, choosing to sleep under the stars and hoping to catch a stray breeze as it made its way down river. I was deeply shaken by the bombing raid and marveled that the island had been spared. I wondered if the pilots would return. A few monks attended to the prayer candles on the monastery's altar whose centerpiece was a triptych icon depicting Buddha, Jesus and the Virgin all smiling at one another. Fish was cooking over a wood fire somewhere in the village and I felt a pang of hunger.

Sometime after midnight I heard a small engine pushing a dugout canoe approach the island. I looked down to see four men in black pajamas stack

their AK-47's on the island's dock and make their way up the path towards me.

"Bon soir" I said as they approached my mat. I knew no Vietnamese and hoped that these guys might have picked up some French from their grandparents. "Bon soir" they replied. "Ou habitez vous?"

"Dans une petite ville pres de Boston," I replied. "Ah, Boston!" they shouted with glee. "Red Socks, Red Socks. We listen to the games on your armed forces radio". Then they argued amongst themselves about who was going to win the World Series this year. When they quieted down I asked them where they were from.

"From a small town maybe 100 clicks north of Hue," one of the older guys replied. The left side of my brain was rejoicing that we could share a common language and an interest in baseball when the right side of my brain started screaming that these four young men were North Vietnamese soldiers who I had been trained to kill with my bayonet at close range. But before I could reach for the pen knife in my pocket one of the guys asked me if I had a family back home and did I have any photos. The best I could come up with was the picture of an old car my dad and I had restored. Well, they were ecstatic. They had never seen such a beautiful machine. I might as well have been standing in Tibet and showing a photo of the Dali Lama.

We talked all night and by dawn my new friends were gone. They were on a two-week leave from their platoon on the Cambodian border and had chosen to venture into Vietnam to visit their spiritual leader, our host the Coconut Monk. When I told them that I had been raised Catholic, they chuckled and confessed that they too had Catholic parents. But there had

been a Cao Dai monk who lived in their village. This monk seemed to be happy every day, no matter what was happening, no matter what degree of suffering he underwent. He had told them about the Coconut Monk and suggested that one day they make a pilgrimage to his pagoda. Though I would never see these men again, our meeting that night set in motion a lifelong passion to know more about the lives of my enemies.



Pete in the Mekong

Vietnam and Hong Kong

1970

I remember the day I departed Saigon for home. A journalist named Tom came by my hotel the evening before and warned me that I needed to leave Vietnam the following day. He enjoyed a great reputation among many of my friends and was married to a Vietnamese woman yet Tom had always kept his distance from me. He thought I was a loose cannon and never wanted to get too close. But that night I trusted him and without asking ‘why’ agreed to leave on the first morning plane.

He showed up at 5:00 am the next morning on his motorbike to give me a ride to the airport. I had given my portable typewriter to a young student whose parents owned my hotel. Everything else was jammed in a small suitcase that rode on my lap. When we got to the terminal I raced in to buy a United Airlines ticket to Hong Kong while Tom waited outside. When I returned, I asked him why I had to leave.

“Do you have a small notebook, someplace where you keep names of people you have met in Vietnam?” I reached into my back pocket and took out a wallet sized address book and handed it to him.

“This is why,” he said as he began thumbing through its pages in the early morning light.

- Vu Van Huyen, ex attorney general of Vietnam and personal friend of Ho Chi Minh,
- Tom Marlow, Dispatch News Service,
- Francis Fitzgerald, New York Times,

- Lt. Phil Lehman and Lt. Jim Crawford, anti war activists,
- Ed Razen, Liberation News Service,
- Don Luce, The Catholic Worker

All were written out with addresses and phone numbers.

“Have a good flight,” he smiled and like an airline clerk at a ticket counter handed me back my notebook. Then he sped off into traffic back to Saigon.

The plane was full and I had been lucky to get a seat. Everyone was in civilian clothes and looked like they could use a good night’s sleep. Once the plane was airborne we got up and started visiting. Cocktails were served before breakfast and pretty soon the mood turned lighter. Like me, most of my fellow passengers had made an unexpected dash for the flight.

I took out my black book again and wondered who would have been damaged the most. I recalled a meeting in the Cho Lon section of Saigon. I had been dining with my lawyer partner Bill the previous evening at the Continental Hotel when a well-dressed Vietnamese approached our table.

“Good evening,” he said with great formality. “I sincerely regret disturbing your meal but I have a request from Mr. Vu Van Huyen. He invites one of you to his office at this address tomorrow and apologizes for this last minute invitation.” The man then quickly departed.

The name did not ring a bell. Bill had a court date but I was free so I made my way the following morning through the narrow streets in Cho Lon. I passed a bar that was popular with US servicemen. Its front wall lay on the

sidewalk, the result of a recent suicide bombing. Vu Van Huyen's office was on the fourth floor of an unpretentious brick building.

"Mr. Hagerty," he said. "I appreciate your coming. Would you prefer that we speak in French or English?"

This put me immediately off, the fact that he knew who I was and that I was not Bill. And how did he know that I spoke French? His small office was piled high with papers, files and folders. I chose English.

"I have asked you here today because I have a problem I hope that your organization might help me solve. I am an attorney. I am sure that it is no secret to you and your associates that there are many Vietnamese civilians today employed by US government secret organizations. The most famous of these is the Phoenix Brigade. But there are others less well known. Many of these men and women are my clients."

"These folks are paid well by our standards for the work they do for your government but if they are injured or killed during a military action, your people deny that they ever existed. Now I do not want to argue the right and wrong of this but hundreds of my countrymen have come to me in the past several years asking for relief, compensation for injury or death from your government."

"I am a Vietnamese citizen and have no standing in your civil or military courts. I am asking if your lawyers would help us in this matter."

"My God," I said, in shock. "Mr. Van Hugen, our organization has never discussed such an involvement. We are here as guests of the Vietnamese people to practice law in military courts because it is allowed. We would be challenging the very existence of these covert groups like Phoenix Brigade. Our government's policy is that they do not exist."

“Yes! Exactly! That would be central to our claims. And this office is piled high with their charges, specific information, dates, and photographs.”

“I am not in a position to make such a decision, I replied. “I would need to consult our board.”

“Of course, I completely understand. But I must emphasize that if you choose not to help us then the Vietnamese people would be hard pressed to allow you to stay.”

This was the second time I had been threatened in one week. Three nights before a friend of a friend of mine who had gone to Yale had invited me out to supper with a small group of his co-workers not four blocks from where we were now sitting. Lots of rice wine, delicious fish, all paid by my friend’s friend. We talk about old times and summers on Martha’s Vineyard and then he offered to escort me back to my hotel.

“Peter, it’s great to visit with you. But I have to let you know that there are people here with whom I work who do not understand what you and your group are doing. You might by now begin to imagine what my work might entail. This evening I will return with material for them that may help straighten things out. But I must confess that I am worried for your safety. I am the low man on the ladder and am often asked to do things that others above me will not do. I like you but I am worried about your future. I would regret very much having any harm come to you.”

“Excuse me, but it sounds like you are threatening me.”

“Look, I think that you are a nice guy and that you are sincere about the work you are doing. But I have a job to do and in the end I will do it. Please understand that it is not personal.” He then gave me a shake of the hand and a pat on the back and left me standing alone in the night.

As we safely flew out over the Gulf of Tonkin that morning the secret police back in South Vietnam were breaking into foreigners' apartments and hotel rooms, demanding to go through all their personal belongings. They were most interested in journals, contact lists, address books like the one in my back pocket. Few arrests were made that day but in the weeks that followed Vietnamese dissidents and human rights workers began to disappear. News sources dried up. Indiscretions had been committed that had cost many brave people their freedom and, in some cases, their lives. A journalist I barely knew had politely asked me to leave Vietnam because I was naïve and could not be trusted. I had also been threatened by some covert ops guy and coerced by a Vietnamese attorney. I had roamed through the jungle, often scared and always unarmed. I spoke no Vietnamese and was kept at arm's length by most of the 'ex-pat' community in Saigon. I had been in-country less than two months and I was ready to go home. But unlike 99.9% of all the Americans fighting this war, I could go home, just like that.

Jane Hong Kong, Home

1970

The plane from Saigon arrived in Hong Kong by mid-morning. The relief of leaving the war zone was palpable. As I made my way down the gangway and my feet touched Chinese soil, I noticed another United Airlines flight nearby. The passenger door was open and there were Chinese police with weapons looking up the gangway at a bare chested black man staring down at them. I was intrigued so I walked over, hoping to appear as if Act Two could not begin without me. I approached one of the officers and asked if I could be of assistance.

“The plane is filled with US soldiers that have been on leave here in Hong Kong,” he politely told be. “They are refusing to return to Vietnam.”

“I have just come from Vietnam,” I reported respectfully, handing him my business card. “I work for the Lawyers Military Defense Committee in Saigon. Perhaps if I spoke with these soldiers I might be able to help resolve this impasse.”

The policeman consulted his partner and together they considered my request. Hong Kong was still a British Colony. These men might understand the Western concepts of due process and the right to representation. But they were only policemen.

“This has been going on since early morning. These men will be arrested and confined. There is a bus coming. You have about three minutes if you want to talk to them.”

I climbed up the gangway and entered the passenger cabin. The man who I had seen earlier confronted me immediately. “What the fuck do you want,” he said angrily. I looked behind him down the rows of seats. It was unbearably hot and almost every passenger was black and stripped to the waist. I handed him my business card and told him I thought he and his buddies might want an attorney.

“These bastards shut off the air conditioning. We have no water, no food.”

“Ok,” I said. “You guys need a lawyer to represent you. Hong Kong is a British Colony and as long as you are here at this airport, the US military has no jurisdiction. I need some names and I need them quickly. Four should be enough. And I need your military ID numbers.”

What did I know about British law? I had once gone to a British boarding school. I looked outside the window and saw the bus arrive.

“Why should I trust you?” my overheated GI asked.

“Because I am all you’ve got,” I replied with all the bravado I could muster. He turned down the aisle and returned shortly with a piece of sweaty paper on which was written four names with rank and serial number.

I jogged down the ladder and met a British officer standing at the bottom. I introduced myself and handed him my card.

“Yes,” he smiled, “I saw the article in Time Magazine about your group. Good story. But you have no jurisdiction here. We are a British colony.”

“We have a British partner here in Hong Kong,” I lied, “who is a solicitor and will represent these men in a British court.” While he was considering

my request, I asked him if I could accompany these men to the holding area. The mere fact that I happened to be on the runway at the right time seemed to automatically grant me some legitimacy, some legal standing so he agreed for me to come along.

Once in the bus, I reached for my little address book, the very object that had forced me to leave Vietnam earlier that day. A friend from Boston had given me the name of a lawyer friend who lived in Hong Kong. Her name was Jane and she was from Scotland. I found her number and called her from the lieutenant's office.

Yes, she remembered my friend, yes she could help, yes, she would be right down. It turned out that Jane was not a lawyer but knew an associate who was and she would bring him along within an hour. This gave me time to talk with the soldiers who recounted for me the litany of war stories involving drugs, racism, and random killing that I had become so used to hearing.

Jane and her friend Simon arrived and after some discussion the GI's agreed to have him represent them in court. A US Army police officer was then allowed to enter the room and arrest the plane load of men.

"The system of law here is modeled on the British Commonwealth and it is so much more civilized," Jane told me. "Those men will have a chance to tell their story. So now you can stop worrying. Let's have some lunch?"

I booked a flight for the following evening to Tokyo before we left the airport. Then off we went to dine on a giant floating restaurant on Kowloon Harbor. After a garden salad and a little wine I could feel the tension fall away from my neck, back and shoulder muscles and I began talking in a way I had not been able to for months. I felt safe.

I talked for hours. In fact I could not stop talking. Jane asked an occasional question and once left the table to call some friends who soon joined us. But I never stopped talking. And all of Jane's friends sat and listened.

After a few hours I began to tire. I found myself feeling very exposed, selfish and stupid. I knew nothing about these folks. How could these people be interested in someone who had just been asked to leave Vietnam because he was putting others in danger? Jane sensed my discomfort.

“Peter, this is what we do, all day long and sometimes into the night. We listen without judgment, just listen. Some of us listen to radio broadcasts from mainland China, others of us meet with American soldiers who are here on R&R and a few of us talk with folks like you who have a very special take on the war. We are called China Watchers and our trade is to offer the world a more nuanced perspective of the role China is playing today in this part of Asia, especially Vietnam. Your observations are very helpful.”

For the first time I took in the faces around our table. Some Asian, a few Europeans and one American. We stayed on that floating restaurant for the remainder of that afternoon and evening, eating, talking and finally laughing. Waiters would arrive with small wicker baskets of fish or rice or steamed vegetables. I would choose only one small basket and when I was finished they would return with another offering. It was without doubt one of the best food events of my life. When I started falling asleep Jane took me to a small hotel nearby.

“If you are free tomorrow, I would love to show you Hong Kong. But we need to start at 5:00 am. Would you like that?”

“Oh, you bet. I am an early riser. My flight to Tokyo does not leave till late in the evening.” She assured me that we would be back in plenty of time. I closed my hotel door and sank down into my bed. As I fell into a deep sleep, I marveled at how I seem to have been passed from the safe hands of a Vietnam activist into those of a China watcher, all within one day.

The narrow gauge steam train hugged the coastline as we headed north the following morning. Jane had collected me before dawn and we dashed to the railroad station in the darkness. We had shared few words as we watched the dawn break. The morning air was cool. Thick vegetation grew on both sides of the tracks but you could smell the nearby ocean. We were skirting perilously close to the mainland China border when the train slowed and pulled into a small fishing port.

“Come on,” she smiled as the train came to a stop. “We have to make a dash for the ferry” and she pointed to a dock about a quarter of a mile away. The crew laughed when we came into view and made as if they were going to pull in the gangplank. They applauded when we ran across it just in time. The ship’s whistle tooted and we headed out into the bay. As we made our way to the bow and sat in the warm sun, I wondered who this Scottish woman with bright red hair really was. She now knew a lot about me but I knew almost nothing about her.

The crew finished their work and as the ferry chugged along they settled near us to play the ancient Chinese board game of mahjong. Jane watched intently until one of the players made a seemingly insignificant move on the board. All at once Jane muttered something in Chinese like “ming-taoi”. Everyone stopped playing and looked at Jane. Then they looked back at the board. “Ming-taoi” the players repeated to each other.

Jane had seen the winning move before any of them had. The men began talking with Jane, first in reserved tones but soon in machine gun dialogue. Jane laughed with pleasure at their astonishment of a western woman speaking Mandarin. There were certainly Europeans that spoke Cantonese, the language of South China but those that spoke the language of the north, the language of this crew, those Westerners were few and far between.

The ferry made its way along a waterway with the coast of China on the port side and a series of small islands to starboard. We entered a small harbor on one of these islands where deep green-blue water gently touched the bending limbs of tropical palms and ferns. The captain slowed the ferry to a stop and a large dugout canoe struck out from the shore.

“There is no dock here so we need to take a launch to the island,” Jane said. “And look at all the flowers they are bringing on deck. It must be for a wedding.” Sure enough, gorgeous potted plants were lowered down and skillfully placed so the canoe stayed balanced. Finally the paddler signaled us to descend the ladder and we found ourselves surrounded by the colors and smells of paradise.

Once ashore I followed Jane up a dirt path through the jungle. It was very humid and the temperature must have been in the nineties. We were climbing up the side of a small mountain and occasionally we caught a glimpse of the ocean between the thick vegetation. I realized how tired I was from my travels and I longed to curl up under one of these palms and drift off to sleep.

We came to a small village of maybe 10 homes, each made of clay brick. Pigs seemed to be the farm animal of choice. We stopped at a small shop to buy some bottled water and Jane switched to Cantonese as she talked of

the weather and the coming rains with the shop owner. Barefooted and healthy looking children ran about trying to catch a very large rooster.

We soon reached the top of the mountain and here we could look around and see Hong Kong Island in the distance and the China Sea to the south. We descended into a pine forest on the eastern side of the island. Here the soil was sandy and the air was very dry. I began to hear breaking waves in the distance and as the path widened we arrived at the edge of a white sandy beach with giant breakers crashing on the shore. Jane found a place by the water's edge in the shade of a giant rock and here we ate a delicious picnic lunch that she had brought. A gentle breeze blew in off the ocean and after my last bite my head hit the beach and I fell into a deep sleep. I felt safe with this extraordinary woman.

Joe walked into the bar, ashen faced. At 6'3" and 240 pounds he played linebacker for Harvard and did not suffer fools lightly. It was the summer of 1966 and a large bunch of Ivy League officer candidates were being eaten alive by a small bunch of Marine Corp drill sergeants freshly back from Vietnam. They made us run all morning in the Indiana heat, study weapons and warfare into the afternoon and evening but they allowed us to retire to the Sportsman's Grill on the weekends to drown our sorrows in whiskey and beer.

We all knew Joe had a date with a local Purdue girl but it was barely nine in the evening when someone suggested that a farm boy might have stolen Joe's girl.

"Hell Joe, she's out there right now riding his tractor," laughed my friend Morris.

Joe swung in his seat, his fist raised and ready to pop Mo. Then his elbows dropped to the bar and he held his head in his hands.

“I couldn’t get it up,” Joe mumbled under his breath. “It’s never happened before. Maybe I’m sick, maybe I picked up something out here.”

“They are feeding us saltpeter,” chuckled Scott, a redhead from Princeton. “I talked with my dad the other night. He’s a doc and he said it was standard practice back in his day that all the recruits got it in their food. I am sure that we would never have been allowed on this campus, especially Joe. Imagine a couple of years from now, a whole bunch of little Joes showing up at kindergarten.”

But Joe was not listening. His spirit was momentarily broken and his head hung down like a man condemned to death. Then from outside the bar the thump, thump, thump of helicopter rotors were heard in the distance. The sound grew louder and people ran to the windows as two Bell “Hueys” raced down Main Street, side by side scattering late evening shoppers. Several women slipped and fell as they ran. All at once the front window crashed inward sending shards of glass toward the bar. I fell to the floor and covered my face.

I woke up lying on the beach covered with sand and sweat. I saw Jane down by the water’s edge waving at a British helicopter that was following the coastline. I wondered if I had yelled out in my dreaming. I thought about Joe and the saltpeter. Here I was on a gorgeous beach on the South China Sea with an attractive woman who had brought me here and I was reeling from my regular nightmares and feeling no sexual desire.

Jane made her way up from the waves and sat down in the shade. For a long time we were silent. We shared some bottled water and saw a giant shark outlined in a tall wave.

“Peter,” she finally began.” I know it’s none of my business so stop me if you want. But yesterday when we met at the airport I felt there was something wrong. I mean something wrong with you. I barely know you yet somehow it felt like I was seeing only a ghost of you, not the real you.”

I had gone to a British boarding school for a short time, had grown close to a few Scottish girls but none of them had ever talked about personal things like this.

“I spend my days listening to people in China spouting propaganda to their own people. Most of it is worthless garbage. But my director reminds us that these speakers are real people with real families, hope and dreams. He tells me to try and imagine what these people look like. And he asks me to listen to the subtle tone changes from day to day to try and glean information they do not intend for us to hear.”

“Yesterday I watched you as you spoke to our group. Everyone was enthralled yet I had the sense that you were not telling the entire story. I don’t mean that you were lying, just that for some reason you felt the need to edit your story for us. Just in the short time that I have gotten to know you, I feel that you are an honest person. So it makes me worry that you might be for some reason two people. In my short life experience I believe a person living two separate lives can be in grave danger. You might crack apart and never come back together.”

I was stunned. I could not look at her. I wanted to get up and run. But then tears began to well up and trickle down my face and I began to shake. I

wanted to throw up. I became a small boy with a boxer dog running from his old schoolmates. I was the Catholic sneaking down the road to Sunday mass at my Protestant boarding school. I was the Deck Officer who stood on the pier as his men sailed off to war. I could not speak to Jane about these things. They were way down inside and they would stay there. Jane stood up, wiped the sand from her legs and began walking up the path back over the mountain to the cove. After a few minutes I followed.

Two days later in Shinjuku Railroad station waiting for a train to Tokyo Airport, I looked across the platform and noticed a young man dressed just like me, rumpled panama suit, sandals, a small suitcase and a knapsack over his shoulder. As his train approached, he turned to lift his suitcase, then stumbled and fell to the floor. As he lay there, a dark urine stain covered his pants. Then I felt someone loosen my tie, put my knapsack under my head as a pillow and quickly move aside to allow the paramedics to test my vitals. Then all went black.

San Francisco Airport was filled with men in uniform, some leaving for Vietnam and some returning home. The headline of the local papers told of police breaking up a large anti-war demonstration just a few miles away in Golden Gate Park. Out in the lobby soldiers mingled with flower children. Welcome home.

I called my folks in Cohasset. 1-617-383-1328. Some things you never forget. Our very first home phone number was Cohasset 4-0377. In those early days I would get a real operator, someone I knew from church. Now I got a long ring, no one home. It was late September. Dad was most likely at the office and mom was out shopping. I had missed one hurricane and my birthday. I waited three hours and called again.

My mom answered and her voice was on the verge of tears. “For weeks everyone has been trying to contact you. We called the office in Saigon, we sent telegrams, we wrote letters, no response. Where have you been?”

It was very hard for people ‘back in the world’ to understand how primitive communication was in Vietnam. Prior to my recent ‘evacuation’ I had been up north in Hue with Ed Razen helping him photograph ancient pagodas along the Perfume River. I had done an interview there at Phu Bai airbase with a GI from Houlton, Maine, a kid from a potato farm who was now strung out on drugs after witnessing the assassination of his own platoon leader by a fellow soldier during a firefight. The whole war zone seemed to be coming undone with drugs and alcohol. Somehow I had forgotten to write home when I returned back to our Saigon office. Then my dad came on the line.

“A few days after Bill Homans came back to Boston he called us to let us know you were alright. He said that Charlie Nesson called a meeting of the LMDC Board at the Locke-Obers Restaurant in Boston where Bill gave an overview of your work in Vietnam. I guess all was going well until Bill mentioned a meeting in your room at the Continental Hotel with a bunch of your old ROTC friends. Apparently Frances Fitzgerald of the New York Times was there too. Is it true that they organized an anti-war march in downtown Saigon the following day wearing their uniforms? Made the front page on the Times the following day? Is that true?”

I stood there silently in the phone booth. Since the collapse in the Tokyo train station I had trouble remembering certain events that evidently just occurred.

Some Navy friends I had known in college had come to Saigon from Cam Ran Bay to have lunch with Bill and me at the Continental so we could

brief them on the work we were doing. We adjourned to our room where we were joined by other folks, one apparently who was a New York Times reporter and Pulitzer Prize winner. The vast majority of the meeting was developing a strategy for telling soldiers in Vietnam how they could contact us for representation.

The list of LMDC Board facing Bill that night at Locke-Obers read like a who's who of American legal and financial prowess. Burke Marshall, Dean of Yale Law School, Ramsey Clarke, future Attorney General during the Carter administration, Charlie Nesson, Dean of Harvard Law School, Ann Singer Peretz, heiress of the Singer Sewing Machine fortune, and other distinguished legal activists. I had personally hired Charlie Nesson to chair the board. One condition on which they all insisted before joining us was that we only do legal defense work in Vietnam, never political organizing.

Apparently that night as Bill gave his report, Professor Nesson felt that I had crossed the line when my friends used our room at the Continental to organize the first active duty, in uniform, in country protest rally, and a Pulitzer Prize winner got the scoop. So the messages flew out from corporate headquarters in Harvard Square to have Hagerty recalled immediately. But their messages went unanswered for weeks as I ran about the jungle looking for soldiers in trouble.

“Bill felt terrible that he had mentioned this meeting,” Dad went on. “He tried to explain that there was no connection between your work and the protest march. But his words fell on deaf ears. Pete, you need to come home right now and straighten this out.”

Suddenly I felt like a small child, admonished by his father. I was drained of energy, suffering from jet lag and apparently about to face my own trial. There was a plane boarding for Vancouver, Canada just off to my right.

Maybe I had enough cash to buy a ticket there and hang out in the redwood forests till things cooled down. But fall was coming and that was my favorite season back home. I could get through this.

I arrived at my brother John's Harvard dorm room late the following day. I had just been to the Cambridge Trust to get some cash, only to find that I had withdrawn all my funds before leaving for Vietnam. I couldn't ask my parents for help until I sorted out the mess I was in.

"You can stay with me," my brother kindly offered but with three other roommates sharing the same living space the couch option did not fit with my sleep cycles. Then for some reason I remembered a girl to whom John had introduced me months ago. She was in art school, had a chipped front tooth and was a great dancer.

"She and I are working together teaching art at Framingham Woman's Prison," he said. "She lives up on Agassiz Street in a big coop house. She gets home from school about 5:00 pm. I bet she would love to see you".

I had a meeting with Charlie Nesson at 3:00 that afternoon which went as badly as I had imagined it might. Just six months before I had been the one shaking his hand as he agreed to chair the board. Now he quickly gave me my walking papers. He wasn't interested in details and I had no fight left. Feeling very sorry for myself, tired, alone and broke, I sat down on the front porch of a very large house in North Cambridge in the shade of a tall blue spruce, leaned back on my worn back pack and dozed off to sleep.

Apparently it was a deep sleep for when I awoke the sun had long fallen away and a group of people had gathered in the nearby kitchen making supper. Someone noticed I was awake and asked if I would like to come in. So I entered the happy kitchen and began chopping some onions. My eyes

began to water just when Marty arrived home. With all the cooking activity she did not take me in right away but when our eyes met I knew in my heart that I was looking at the woman with whom I would spend the rest of my life.

Common Sense and Marty

Winter 1970

The train continued its run down from the north towards Moscow. Seasoned travelers who had been on board since Archangel began folding up their mattresses and putting their possessions in order.

“Do you remember the day you first met me after Vietnam?” I whispered.

“Why?” she asked sleepily.

“I’m just writing a few things down and I have come to Agassiz Street.”

“You came to my house the first day you were back. I remember it was at the Cambridge house. You lectured me about how I should be angrier than I was, especially since I was a woman.” She then sank back down in her train seat and went back to sleep.

Anger, yes I remember the anger. I had plenty of anger then to spread around. This was the fall of 1970. The anti-war movement was building on the shooting deaths of young students at Kent State and was looking for articulate spokespeople who had been in Vietnam to expose the hypocrisy of US foreign policy. And I blamed Harvard for graduating a student like me totally unprepared to face how horrible human nature could be.

Righteous indignation pulsed through my veins as I spoke to a crowd of demonstrators on Boston Common the weekend following my return from Vietnam. I suddenly realized that I was perfectly positioned to take on a leadership role. My “curriculum vitae” was spot on. Irish Catholic, Harvard grad, refuses combat orders, faces court martial, goes to war zone anyway to fight for GI human rights, risks his life in the jungle in search of

the truth, comes home to be done in by the legal elite that gave life to this war policy in the first place.

The only thing that didn't fit was this art student I had just met and for whom I was falling head over heels. She cared less about my politics or my anger. We spent our first weekend together in Vermont and all I did was talk; talk about myself, my anger, my righteous indignation. She just sat there and listened. Later she said that she could see past the pain, the ego and the hurt to a person she wanted to get to know. I did not make that job easy for her.

Ann Singer Peretz contacted me sometime after Halloween. She said she was sorry for what had happened but had been powerless to stop my departure. She had a new project, a GI coffeehouse at an Army base near Boston. Would I set it up and run it? I agreed on the spot, having no idea what I was getting into but keen to get back into the game.

Ft. Devens was the home to Military Intelligence (MI), an oxymoron to most of my friends. By the fall of 1970 every self-respecting military installation from Ft. Hood in Texas to Ft. Dix in New Jersey had their own coffeehouse near the base with talent like Joan Baez and Cat Stevens vying for top billing most weekends. MI's job was to infiltrate and minimize the effectiveness of these watering holes.

When I arrived in Ayer, the town closest to the base entrance, I had enough of Ann's money to purchase a single family home just a mile from the base entrance. We hung up the sign Common Sense Bookstore on the front porch, hired a young married couple just returning from overseas and opened for business. We offered counseling four nights a week, two nights legal and two nights psychological. On the weekend we had local poets and folksingers. No drugs or booze allowed, ever.

Many years later at a Maine ski area I shared a chairlift with a retired Army staff sergeant from Ft. Devens whose job it had been to oversee the activities at the Common Sense Bookstore. We figured out what we had in common on the short ride to the top because in those days I had my name stenciled on my skis.

“You guys were like a wet dream for us,” laughed Alan Boudreau. “We’d been running covert ops for all these other GI coffee houses around the country and we never had one of our own. Then you guys came along. You remember the night when one of your customers OD’d on drugs and ran out onto the street to be hit by that pickup? That was us. He was late and he ran into the wrong truck. Cracked his hip.” I joined in the memory and found a way to laugh. But there was nothing funny about what had happened that night.

This GI came in, clearly high on something. We had a drill in place. Escort any possible user out the door and down the road. But this guy would not leave. Said he was looking for a particular book he was sure we had. I called the local police and asked for assistance. They were none too happy to assist as their paycheck was underwritten by the presence of Uncle Sam down the road. But when the cruiser approached the store, this guy freaks and runs out into traffic and gets hit by a pickup. It was winter, cold, dark and the roads were slippery. Before I could call an ambulance the MI folks were there in full force, demanding we let them in to do a full-blown search for drugs.

“We forgot to get a search warrant signed by a judge,” laughed Boudreau as we reached the top of the lift. “You called us out on that. You stood there with the cops in the road and the ambulance hauling our man off to the hospital and I remember you saying to the Army Lieutenant, ‘with all

due respect Lieutenant, this is civilian property and if you want to search, you will need a warrant signed by a judge'. Well that Lieutenant was an asshole and he was wearing a mike and we were all back at base listening and you got a round of applause that night." Then Boudreau or whoever he was disappeared over the hill in a puff of snow.

That very night back in Ayer I called Marty at Agassiz Street after the police left. I told her that I was all done in, that this project was way over my head. She encouraged me to leave and I did. One week later the Common Sense Bookstore closed after four months of being open and I moved to a poultry farm in Maine. I worked days packing chicken and at nights wrote stories of Vietnam for The Maine Times. I lived in a barn heated with an old wood cook stove and I put my food in an unplugged refrigerator with a light bulb on to keep it from freezing.

My only really warm time of the day was when I went to the Bowdoinham post office. I would stand there reading in the mail room for as long as I could. One day late in March a letter arrived from my mother. Inside it was a newspaper clipping from the Luddington Daily News, Luddington, Michigan dated Saturday September 12, 1970. It was an Associated Press story from Saigon.

"An explosion ripped through the US destroyer Lloyd Thomas on Friday while she was firing from off South Vietnam in support of Australian ground troops 45 miles southeast of Saigon, the Navy announced. Three crewmen were killed and ten injured, the Navy said.

"A spokesman said that the explosion occurred in the forward gun mount of the 3500 ton destroyer and did not result from enemy fire."

September 12, 1970, that was just seven months ago. I had been there, in Saigon, not seventy miles away as the crow flies. Those were my men. I had been so close. I headed out of the post office into the night alone and begged forgiveness from the Almighty.

Veterans



The cold, June sky was a cobalt blue and steam shot from the horses' nostrils as they moved across the chest high field of hay. It was our first summer in Maine and Barney and Nicker were pulling a #9 McCormick Dearing High gear horse drawn mowing machine that my neighbor Bob and I had found and fixed up. Other than the early morning birds the only sound was the cutter bar as it neatly clipped the tall timothy and orchard grass and laid it in long neat rows behind the mower. Our friend Wayne whose farm we were haying walked along nearby giving us pointers.

Coming to Maine in the early 70's Marty and I were part of a "back to the land" movement where suburban young adults, tired of the lives their parents were living and weary of the Vietnam War, voted with their feet and left their college diplomas for the organic gardens and simpler lifestyle of rural America. The small farm Marty and I found was built somewhere around 1840 and had provided six generations of families with a subsistence existence. These folks would plant a garden in the spring, cut

hay in the summer, harvest crops and spread manure in the fall, log in the winter and start all over again in the spring. When we moved in, our farm had a stall for two big horses and tie up for three cows, one for milk and two for meat. Sometime in the 40's our barn had been converted to accommodate large numbers of chickens on the second floor.

Down the road from our house is a small graveyard where Marty and I plan to be buried. The headstones tell the stories of our deceased neighbors. Men lived only till their 50's, women died earlier, often in childbirth and large families provided the labor force. Each Memorial Day small flags fly from those neighbors who served in combat, some in the Civil War but most in far off places. For many of them, it was their only chance to see the world.

In the summer I walk past this graveyard several times a day on the way to our pastures. Occasionally I will pass by and see my friend Gary digging a grave. On learning that the deceased served in the Armed Forces, I will return later in dress up clothes and quietly stand behind the family. And tears will run down my face as I remember, as I relive all the reasons why I left behind my prior life and came to this small valley at the foot of the Burnt Meadow Mountains. I will look at my horses grazing in the field across from the graveyard, dried sweat from the day's haying still on their backs. I will squeeze my hands together and wonder why I am still alive when so many died, and a brew of guilt and gratitude will course through my veins.

After our children Silas and Cora Josephine were born, I had hoped that my memories of the Vietnam era would slowly disappear, but the low flying fighter jets still came on Saturdays, reminding me that living on a dirt road and eating organic home grown foods would not protect my

family from the human folly I had seen overseas. One day I met a therapist who worked in a neighboring town who agreed to see me and explore the darker regions and let some light in. So for several years she listened to the stories I am now telling you and helped me to begin the healing.

“Peter,” Ines asked one morning. “Have you visited the Vietnam War Memorial? What if you wrote a letter to Lt. Henry, the man who took your place on the forward gun mount and read it to him in Washington on the Mall? It might loosen up some good emotions that need to surface.”

So I booked a trip south and wrote the following letter.

Dear Lt. Henry,

It seems a bit strange to be writing you after so many years. I would not be surprised if you don't remember me but I remember you. You replaced me on the Lloyd Thomas several weeks before it left for WESTPAC and the Tonkin Gulf. Things happened so quickly during those last few days and we never really talked with each other so I expect that much of what I have to say will come as somewhat of a surprise.

For many reasons I was opposed to going to Vietnam on the ship, not the least of which was a fear of dying. The Captain asked me to give him the OK on the forward gun-mount but I knew it was defective and could blow up at any moment. I told him that but he told me to take a walk. He wanted that Vietnam Commendation medal on his chest pretty badly. I heard that they took him off in a strait jacket later on. In any case I knew the ship was in bad shape, could kill a bunch of guys and I let a few of my men in the division know. Some went over the hill but most stayed on board to serve under you.

During the whole time I was pretty scared and didn't talk much to anyone except my Navy lawyer. I told the guys in the wardroom some of what was going on but their attitude was to just stick it out, cover my ass and I would make it through all right. Well I guess I did make it out, yet in another sense I didn't. When I got the news about one year later that the gun mount had in fact blown up and a bunch of guys had died, I assumed that you were one of the victims just as I would have been because you would have been sitting where I would have been, up on top of the mount. My mom sent me a news clipping and I can remember like yesterday the day I received it. I felt very guilty about not being there.

Because I came from a comfortable background where I had the confidence to stand up to authority, that privileged position was the reason I didn't take the hit. And I was in Saigon that day helping soldiers like me when the Lloyd Thomas exploded. Since then I have been trying to prove something to myself that has yet to take hold, that it wasn't my fault that all you guys died. There is a voice in me still today that asks "What if you hadn't just walked off the ship that day and out of the Navy? Instead you refused to leave and instead, made noise from the inside. Then you all might be alive today.

I never knew you that well and don't have a lot more to say. This letter to you was important for me to write, to put things straight. I hope that you understand better what was going on for me during those terrible days. I understand better now as well. All the best, Peter Hagerty, Ensign, US

Making Butter

Nineteen seventy three was the wettest summer on record and we were technically living in a tree house we had built from lumber scrounged from the local dump. Mart's parent's camp was just through the woods but we had built a structure, complete with screens and a ladder, to give life to the fiction that we had our own place. We were unmarried and Mart was under age so the tree house was a way for her parents to feel less responsibility for whatever might happen. During the week we lived in the camp and headed for the tree house if Pep and Eleanor called to say they were planning a visit.

It was not that I didn't get along with Mart's folks. I thought they were great and they seemed to warm to me. But the sixties had just ended, turning a lot of things on their head. Mart and I had been together less than a year. I knew that we were right for each other. She was not quite so sure.

Tip Ridge was a perfect name for the camp. Perched on a hilltop overlooking a crystal clear lake to New Hampshire's White Mountains, it had been a summer home to the Tracy clan for three generations. Mart's grandmother had built it in the 20's and in those early days she would take the train from Boston, dropping she and her family just a short walk from the camp. We, however, commuted whenever we could get away from Boston in a small V-4 Saab with just enough room for us and our two dogs, Beaujamois and Galadriel. Now we were enjoying a cloudy, wet vacation from our city jobs and wondered why we would ever go south again.

It rained all June and most of July. At first we sat by the fire place and read, taking afternoon forays into the forest to check on the tree house or

go for a hike. One day Marty had the idea that each of us do something that we had never tried before. I chose making butter from the cream that settled on the top of a jug of raw milk. I assumed that because we were in the heart of the North Country that raw milk was just around the corner. I found two empty one gallon pickle jars in the woodshed and headed out.

“Nobody milks cows around here,” Mr. Weston, the local storekeeper, informed me. “I’ve got some pasteurized milk in the cooler that tastes real good.” I made the mistake of saying why I wanted raw milk and got a lecture on why you can’t go back to the good old days. And those times weren’t apparently always that good for Mr. Weston.

Then I met one doctor who lived by the lake who told me that “those who choose raw milk often find themselves sick in a hospital for several weeks fighting for their lives.”

“Why don’t you try across the border in Maine?” the local librarian told me. “They are a little more flexible over there.” So I got out a map and found that we were in fact living just a few miles from another state.

On the first rain-free morning I took my direction from the rising sun and headed east. After crossing two ranges of hills I crested the third and found myself looking down into the most beautiful vista I had seen in a while. Blueberry fields to my right, verdant pasture in the valley dead ahead, and steep mountains rising to my left. I put the car into low gear and began my slow, steep descent.

Crossing the Maine border at the foot of the hill, I slowly drove by a field of grazing milk cows, their udders swinging below their full bellies. The farm on the opposite side of the road was painted white and faced two red barns filled with haying equipment. It would have been your quintessential

New England farm if the American flag were flying from the porch. Instead, in all its defiant glory the flag that flew was that of the Republic of North Vietnam.

Mart and I had wondered aloud if we chose to move north would we find neighbors who might not share our values. But as my Saab slowed to a stop, two young girls with dark hair came running round the front porch followed by their equally dark haired mother. I stopped the Saab and climbed out.

“Hi, I’m Pete and I am looking for milk,” I announced reaching into the back seat for a jug.

“We’ve got milk, don’t we, mom?” shouted the oldest girl. “Pops has got tons of cows.”

Becca and Sarah came right up to me with their mom close behind. “Hi Pete, I’m Kathy and Pops is my dad and he has some milk down at the next farm.”

So we all piled in the car. By the time we got to the milk room I had learned that Kathy had been born here in Porter and she and her husband Hank and the girls had just moved back from New York City, where they had worked in the anti-war movement. Thus the flag.

“Some folks call this section of town the ‘Peoples Republic of Porter’, smiled Kathy. But they say it in good fun. People are pretty tolerant around here.”

Kathy found my butter-making project most interesting and was certainly sympathetic to my plans for leaving the city. “You need to just continue down this road another half mile and you will meet Jim and Nancy. They

were living in Chicago not too long ago.” So much for wondering about kindred spirits.

Porter, Maine. Pop 1426, bordering on the Ossipee River and part of Oxford County.

I got a USGS map from the town office and over the next three months drove down every road and visited with every piece of property that had any farm land. I try and imagine now what I must have looked like to them. Broken front tooth (cap fell off), mottled beard, long hair, driving a foreign car with Massachusetts plates and looking for a place to raise a few sheep with my life partner. If I were a local back then and someone looking like that drove into my farm yard, I am not sure I would leave the safety of my house.

But the people of Porter were a gracious lot and the longer my search took me, the more determined I became to live there. When summer ended and we returned reluctantly to the city I kept coming back on the weekends and mid-October found me exploring the last road in Porter.

“Hi, my name is Peter Hagerty and my wife (slight editing) and I are looking for a small farm here in Porter to raise sheep.” It was a sunny Saturday morning in the Norton neighborhood on the Porterfield Road.

“I’ve been driving every road in this town since July and have met a lot of wonderful people but have yet to find a place to farm.”

My audience was a young man 10 years my senior. Lester was just getting out of his pickup and standing in his driveway when I arrived. His wife Irene was raking some leaves onto her flowers to protect them from the coming winter. He took off his ball cap and scratched his head. “

“I don’t know any place around here. Do you Renee?” he asked tipping his head her way. “Nope,” was her reply.

“Well, thanks so much. . . .” And just then I was interrupted by a mooing in the barn. “You’ve got cows?” I asked with the enthusiasm of someone who had been forcibly deprived of a cow’s presence for years.

“Why, yes,” he smiled. “I’ve got a few I’m milking here in the barn. Want to see them?” For the next hour I managed to engage him in the small talk I had heard on other farms. How many pounds a year does this Holstein milk? When do you breed your first calf heifers? Do you have a bull or do you use AI (artificial insemination)?

And then when I had exhausted all my questions Lester smiled and said, “I’ve got a bunch more up on the hill. You want to see ‘em?”

We climbed into the pickup and headed up Norton Hill, passing an abandoned apple orchard with views of snowcapped mountains in the distance. We drove higher and further until we arrived at the original family farm, a three story classic farmhouse with a 100 foot long barn. Mount Washington smiled back at us to the north.

As I climbed down from the truck I felt overwhelmed by all the beauty that surrounded us, the open fields bordered by rock maples turning red and gold with the frost and the dark green pasture covered with black and white cows, each one with a calf nearby. Lester was watching my reaction.

“You know, it was rough growing up here. Walking three miles to the paved road to get the school bus. Snowed in for weeks in the winter. No electricity, milking by hand, and us boys sleeping on the third floor with no stoves and only a warm rock under our blankets to keep us from freezing.

And how that wind would howl as it came down from the North. No sir, I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

I helped Lester with his few chores and we headed back down. As I shook his hand goodbye in the dooryard he said, "You know, I do know where there's a farm for sale." My heart skipped a beat. "Right next door. Irene's parents want to sell their place."

Now, forty two years later, I am sitting in Lester and Irene's living room, a TV western blaring in front of us, as Lester tells me his latest heart attack story.

"I was up on the farm cutting firewood. Reenie was helping me as I dropped a hitch of logs in the field near the four corners. I climbed down off the skidder and felt this awful pain in my left side move up to my chest. I mentioned this to Irene. I was not too worried. As you know I have that angina all the time. But this time it's worse."

The last time we talked about his heart it was in the hospital as he recovered from open heart surgery. After that operation he was back on the farm cutting wood and putting up fence in just a few weeks.

Not six months later Lester slipped on the ice and had swelling on the back of his brain. They drained a quart of fluid from his skull and told him to lie still for four weeks. For this most recent heart attack Renee had moved his bed downstairs. All the chairs were taken in the living room, so after I took my shoes off, I climbed under the covers with him. Everyone thought that was pretty funny.

Lester and I could not be more different if we worked at it. But our love for farming, animals and the forest always allow us to talk long and loud about almost anything. How fast the cars are going on the road, how dry it is,

how wet it is, these are the subjects for our own script. The barn or the woodlot is our stage and the cows, sheep and horses are our audience. We are like actors in an obscure reality TV series. And for most of our shows we are the only ones directing the dialog. Now it seemed as if a third dark and uninvited force was helping write the copy. I suppose we always knew it was out there in the wings, just never sure of when it would arrive.

“So how bad was the heart damage,” I ask. This gets Lester to sit up in the bed, look around at room, check to see if Renee is still in the kitchen, listening and ready.

“Look, Peter. They said it’s like this. My heart is like a hydraulic pump on a tractor. You can change the fluid, put new seals in but someday the pump is just going to fail.”

“Yesterday they said I have damage, no question about it. It’s just a matter of time before mine let’s go.” He listens for the carrots being washed in the sink. “Ain’t that what they said, Reenie?”

“Yep,” is the reply over the flowing water.

His face now seems unexpectedly younger than I have ever seen it in years. His rough hands, his bare feet sticking out from under the bottom of the sheets, all had good color.

For the first time I hear Lester refer to the end, to death, to no more theater. And I feel a pang go through my heart. He has always bounced back. His barn light is the first on in the morning and you can set your clock to afternoon chores.

“I was down in the barn yesterday fussing with that calf. And look what happened to that finger. Joe had to take a bunch of fluid off that yesterday.

Boy didn't that hurt! I could barely hold the chainsaw when I went down to the landing to buck up logs for the boys."

On my God, this script is no longer funny!

"Wait a minute," I break in. "I am a little confused. You were in the hospital just a few days ago recovering from this heart attack you just had out logging in the woods. Then you come home and the same day you're down in the barn wrestling cows, then off to the doctor to drain blood from your crushed finger, but you've got a few hours left before dark so why not go down to the woodlot and run your chainsaw. Is that right?"

Lester's impish grin rolled out over his face. This script is stupid, dangerous. This is not fun, this is too close to home.

Later in the day I am up back on the hill cutting down a huge red maple that shades Marty's garden. As I am cutting off the top a giant branch rolls toward me and throws me off my feet and through the air. I gather myself together, pick up the saw and continue working.

Maine 1974

Marty and I moved to our farm next door to Lester in December of 1973. We got married that first spring and Marty quickly set up her own pottery business complete with a small studio and wood fired kiln. Ever since I was a child I had dreamed of being a farmer but now that the time had come, I found I knew nothing about growing our food much less cutting wood for our heat. And the demand for a psychology major was somewhat thin up in Porter, Maine so it took me months to find any work at all. Finally a logging contractor named Larry Walker with a sense of humor as big as his tummy hired my neighbor Bob and me to cut pine logs with his woods crew.

The first day on Larry's logging job Bob and I chose to work in the forest as far from everyone else as possible. We did this to hide the fact that we had no idea what we were doing. We would notch the tree with a chain saw, make the back cut, then pull out the saw and run like hell, unsure of which way the tree would fall. A man named Wilbur soon showed up with a sled pulled by a team of big horses to examine the mess we made. It turns out that he was born in Bob's farm house so he quickly took pity on us and for the coming months guided us in the technique of felling trees. When the job ended in late summer, I had fallen in love with horse logging. Marty and I have had draft horses on our farm ever since.

Years later I helped start a logging school with a group of like-minded friends. I was convinced that learning to work with horses in the woods did not need to be a near death experience. Today horse logging is an art that is struggling to survive in the face of tractor-like "skidders" and large mechanized equipment. But there are still a few folks doing it the "old fashioned" way and it is not unusual to have some of

them visit when I'm working with my team, sit down on a log and relive those days when life was slower and somehow better.

It was during one of these workshops at our school that I was approached by a man and his wife who both looked to be in their seventies. Mrs. Abbott introduced herself to me and then turned to her husband.

"George, tell Peter here what's going on".

"Well", he began somewhat reluctantly, "I've had draft horses since I was a kid and my father and grandfather had horses before me. Last year I bought this mare and I can't do a god-damn thing with her. She won't step up when I want her to move, she won't stand still when I want her to stand. I don't know what got into me to choose to buy this horse."

I could tell that the last place George wanted to be at this very moment was standing in front of a person half his age and asking for advice. I then said either one of the wisest things I have even said or one of the stupidest.

"Well sir, maybe you didn't choose that horse, maybe that horse chose you."

George looked at me the same way he might have looked at a blown tire on his pickup on a dark night ten miles from home. I hadn't meant to be disrespectful. Clearly this man had much more experience with big horses than I. The words just came out of my mouth. But before I could begin my apology his wife broke in.

"I told you so, George, didn't I?" she exclaimed. "I told you there was a reason why Bonnie came to our farm. We just got to figure out what she is trying to tell us."

I never saw George Abbott or his wife again. I hoped they worked out their issues with Bonnie. But that little voice of mine had told me a powerful truth, one that would take years for me to fully understand. For I was slow to learn that we have little or no control over the animals or people that come into our lives and that most of them arrive for a reason.

Barney and Nicker

1974

When Larry's logging job ended that summer of 1974 Bob and I bought our first team of horses and for the next six years we cut timber with them all over Southwestern Maine. "The trick is to go light and often," Larry advised us. "You can break a good horse's spirit before dinner and then where are you?" Barney and Nigger (changed to Nicker) were "long in the tooth" when we bought them but we had some good years before they retired.

I remember the day my Dad and Mom met these horses for the first time. Marty and I had decided to get married shortly after moving to Porter. So we invited my folks up in May for a small family wedding. The weather was still cold when they pulled into the driveway of our farm for the very first time in their Buick station wagon.

I had been up early brushing and combing Barney and Nicker's tails and manes. We had bought the team real cheap because they had been starved the previous winter and rescued by the SPCA. They had scabs on their haunches and their ribs showed but I was as proud as punch as my dad walked over and patted Barney's dusty rump.

"Looks like real potential" he smiled trying his hardest not to have a heart attack on the spot. The sky was grey, our house was grey and my hair was turning grey. As we stood there trying to make the best of the situation, I heard the unmistakable growl of a "beater" car coming down our road.



Peter with Nicker and Barney

There is a tradition here in Maine of buying the cheapest and roughest car you can find to get you through winter. When spring comes, you drive it out on a back road, roll it into the woods, unscrew the plates and walk home. You could always tell the arrival of winter because folks would ask each other, “got your ‘beata’ yet?”

The first arrival to our wedding this cold May morning drove his smoke belching, muffler-dragging “beata” past our driveway, then backed up, had his female passenger roll down her window and then peered across the front seat at us. Beer cans fell to the road as he opened his car door and made his way falteringly towards my mother and father.

“Jesus Christ,” he said to my father with the most authentic down east accent you can imagine. “Where did you get them gawd damn horses?”

He made his way over to us, his tobacco stained wool shirt standing in

sharp contrast to my father's Brooks Brothers overcoat. I knew what my father was thinking. 'Here was a real Mainer about to give us his impression of this logging team.' He was enthralled.

"This one over here," our new friend observed holding Barney's mouth open for my parents to look in, "he's still breathing but that black one, I don't know if he will make it past noon." Laughing out loud, he wiped his chin with his sleeve and with the elegant stroll of a man who has piled more than his share of pulpwood in a lifetime, made his way back to his 'beater' and was off down the road, never to be seen again.



Dad sawing pine boards at Dick White's mill

My dad loved working with wood, whether making boats or furniture. He contracted spinal meningitis while at MIT and left after his sophomore

year, apprenticed with an aging Norwegian immigrant boat builder named John Eltman and, in 1938 at twenty one years of age, became John's business partner on the harbor of Cohasset.

One of Dad's first friends in Cohasset was a reclusive sculptor named Richardson 'Dick' White. Dick came from a prestigious Boston family whose 200 acre estate/farm was a place where our family could walk on Sundays, exploring the hay fields and pine groves. Dick also harvested pine logs from his woodlot and sawed them into wide boards for my father's many projects..

At ten years of age I was a boy who spent his every waking hour on, around or under the ocean. So when my father announced one spring that we would be spending the next seven months living on Dick White's farm while carpenters worked on our home, I was incredulous. I had by now outgrown my adolescent dreams of starting a farm, exchanging them for a boat with a sail. How could I now live without the sea by my bedroom window?

Our rented farm house was one of the oldest buildings in Cohasset. Set way back from the paved road, it was surrounded on one side by a forest and on the other side by a giant sea of tall grass. When we first moved in school was not quite over and some days no one would be home when I got off the bus. One day after grabbing a snack in the kitchen I saw a boy maybe five years older than me riding on a tall green tractor cutting the hay in our field. Back and forth he went as I sat watching on a warm rock. I waved and he waved back, shut the motor off and walked over. His name was Frank and he was Dick White's son. He was home from boarding school and had heard we were living in the "yellow house". We soon became friends.

Frank's dad had a small herd of horses, three Arabian crosses and two drafts. He participated in fox hunting, steeple chasing and flat racing, which gave him an opportunity to observe the animals in many activities. Dick would spend some time every morning studying the anatomy of these beautiful animals and then retire to his studio off his red barn to first draw and ultimately sculpt them. During those afternoons the horses would be released to graze in the yellow house field where they would regularly receive apples from me. Frank showed me how to get up on the grey draft horse named Bud. He would then jump up on one of the Arabians and we would ride to the Ice Pond where the horses would drink while we went swimming. Then we would ride out to the field and in the warm sun lay back on our horses' spines and watch the early summer clouds drift across the blue sky. It seemed like the ocean and my small boat were from another world. I now found myself dreaming of a life working with horses.

Frank went back to boarding school at summer's end but our family chose to stay on into the fall. One day I found my dad working with Dick White sawing pine logs at his mill and soon my fingers were sticky with pine pitch as I helped stack the lumber. The following weekend Dad and I were back again helping split oak firewood. My dad was very active in sports and in great shape but I had never seen him enjoy this physical farm work. After moving back to our ocean home I found myself often heading to Dick White's farm on the weekend, especially Sundays. On this day after checking in with Bud, Dick's wife Neelie would sit with me in front of their granite fireplace in the "big house" and tell me stories of what it was like to grow up in Boston society and then one day find herself living on a farm. I began to detect a loneliness alongside a strong love for "farmer White". Now as I look back realize how important these afternoons had become for me.

After our small Maine wedding, Marty and I headed for a one- night honeymoon in Portland and the following week Bob and I started looking for logging work with our horses. Because we did not yet have a truck or a trailer, our job had to be within walking distance of our farm. As luck would have it our neighbor Lee Hamlin had cut some beech, rock maple and birch on his woodlot just a short trot over the hill. Lee asked us if we could haul this wood out of the forest to the truck road with Nicker and Barney.

The first time Marty and I met Lee it was a cold wintry afternoon the very day we moved into our farm. We had just purchased our property from Irene's parents who had let Lee use our barn to house some of his ponies. It was on a Saturday and we had some friends come up from Boston to help us move in. We were just lifting our bathtub through the front door when Paula came screaming out of the barn. At first I thought she had been attacked by a woodchuck or something because she just could not stop crying hysterically and pointing through the barn doors to the yard out back. "They're killing your horses," she sobbed.

We did not yet own any animals but as I entered the yard out back of the barn I saw someone that had not been there yesterday, a man naked from the waist up and covered with blood, working a large knife around the carcass of a dead and decapitated horse hanging from the limb of a maple tree. The severed head lay on the ground, its eyes open and looking up at me. The large man with a generous stomach stopped his work and greeted me with a guilty smile.

"Hi," he said, "my name's Lee" extending his blood covered hand, then drawing it back when he realized that it was not at the moment an object

that one might want to shake. “I am sorry if I gave that young girl a scare. I suppose she doesn’t see something like this every day.”

I smiled understandingly as if this were standard fare for me. He went on to say that this pony’s meat was for his hunting dogs and he appreciated my temporarily housing his meals on hooves and assured me that they would be gone in a few days. As Lee headed for home that afternoon, he knocked on the kitchen door and offered a piece of the pony’s loin roast to round out our supper menu.

Lee was one of the last folks in my neck of the woods who made a living for his large family by hunting, trapping and cutting a little wood. And he would be the first landowner to hire us to work our horses in his forest.

Marty and I had chosen this corner of Southwestern Maine to be around people like Lee. The Hamlin family had an uncanny way of knowing what you needed before you did. Lee’s father Dana would drive slowly past our driveway, wave and then be back in a few minutes brandishing a $\frac{3}{4}$ ” drive socket wrench to loosen that rusty bolt on my truck.

Dana and his wife lived way up the valley in a small mobile trailer. He loved to hunt coyotes but also had a passionate respect for these predators. Once when he could still get around he took me up back behind his home and showed me a den where a young female was raising her three pups. On the day Dana was buried, Marty and I were heading to his funeral when a huge male coyote walked onto the road in front of our car and stood there staring at us. Over the years our town would prove to be an ideal place for us to raise a family, nurture a marriage and develop long lasting friendships with people like Lee and Dana.



Cutting 8 foot pulp with Jake for Scott Paper

One day the following summer we were working on Lee's lot, hand loading 200 lb. sticks of hardwood onto a woods sled. The bugs were pretty thick and the day was working up to be a warm one. A friend from college named Ellen had stayed over the night before because she wanted to see the horses working but after about 30 minutes of biting insects she was ready to leave. Having said good-bye to Bob and me and the horses, she headed back up over the hill to our farm. Bob asked Barney and Nick to start the load forward but they refused to move. He asked them to move again but no luck. Then Nicker bent his head toward the trail that Ellen had taken and let out a long whinny. For some reason I took this to mean that all was not well.

“Hold on Bob,” I said. “Let me check to see if Ellen is all right” and I headed up the path at a trot. Not 50 yards away I found her convulsing on the ground in the throes of a full blown seizure. I yelled for Bob and he was soon by my side.

“I think that she may have swallowed her tongue,” I said as her face turned a light shade of blue. I began to panic and I grabbed her jaw to try and pry it open.

“Don’t do that,” replied Bob. “Keep your fingers away from her teeth. She can lock down on them and bite them to the bone. Here, take this stick and pry her teeth open with it.”

I began to slowly pry her teeth apart while Bob inserted another stick to free her tongue. Blood stained saliva bubbled out of her mouth and we rolled her head to the side as she began to breathe again. Finally she dropped into a deep sleep.

Bob went to tend to the horses and by the time he returned Ellen had begun to come around. She remembered nothing of what had happened and her hands began to shake when we described how we had found her. Back then there were no rescue units or 911 so we piled her on a mattress in the back of her station wagon and headed for the hospital in Portland. Bob followed in my car. On the way into town she searched for explanations as she lay on her back.

“I have never had seizures before,” she told me. “My parents were both schizophrenics. My mother was a concert pianist and my father was a composer. I was born ‘placenta previa’ which means that I did not have the protection of the placenta during delivery. The muscles of my mother’s uterus pounded me into life.

“My therapist feels that this birth event may have had a profound effect on my psyche and we were just on the edge of exploring this when I came here to visit. I think that I may have just re-lived my birth out there in the woods. I always feared that I might not survive such a memory. But maybe now I have.” Then her teeth began chattering uncontrollably and she had to stop talking.

Maine Medical did extensive research on Ellen, looking for a lesion on the brain or some medical explanation for what had happened. None was ever found. It was not till later in the day when Bob and I returned to the woodlot to bring the horses home that I remembered Nick’s whinny and the warning he gave us. He showed me that day his ability to communicate with humans if only we would listen.

Barney and Nick worked with us for eight years before they retired. We kept on buying these older horses because they fit our budget and because they were gentle and experienced and tended to know more than we ever would about logging. But after about 20 years of these “long in the tooth” drafts my wife and I began to wonder what it would be like if we started from scratch and bought some young colts. It couldn’t be that hard. After all, we had been kicked, stepped on, dragged around and bitten at least as many times as our neighbors. Some of that must translate into wisdom.

So we bought two chocolate brown colts about nine months old named Nick and Willie, half- brothers from the same stallion. They weighed about 400 lbs. each and were easy enough to lead around. But at 16 months they passed the 1000 pound mark and were in and out of trouble every day, just like two half-ton kids.

Willie ended up that summer in the vet hospital dehydrated, heat stroked and with a fever of 104. Two months later I found him wrapped up in some fence wire. As we slowly introduced them to farm work I could not fail but be impressed by the fear that especially surrounded Willie. We'd be walking through a pasture and a squirrel would pop out of a hole in a stone wall and Willie would jump like a jack in the box and bolt ahead, nearly trampling me to the ground.

We sought advice from a host of characters. Some told us that Willie just needed a harder workout to settle him down. Others suggested a more aggressive and painful bit in his mouth. But no matter what kind of bit we used or how tired he was, he always seemed ready to bolt at the drop of a hat. This behavior continued on unabated for eight years.

That eighth winter Willie, Nick and I were working up back on the hill behind the farm cutting pine logs for lumber. One afternoon Marty came up to join us. I had the horses teamed up and was backing them to hook onto some logs. I asked Marty to hold the reins while I made the hitch. Somehow Willie's left rear leg stepped over a part of his harness and as I leaned over to fix it, this same leg shot backwards, knocking my hard hat off my head and sending it flying into the woods.

I scratched my forehead, turned and went to fetch my helmet while Marty stared speechless.

"It's Ok," I said "he only got the hard hat."

I watched as her concern turned to incredulity, then to anger.

“How long has this been going on,” she asked. I tried to shrug it off but she would have none of it. “That kick could have killed you.”

“Yah, but it didn’t,” I replied, knowing already that I had lost. She dropped the reins and headed down the hill clearly frustrated and angry with my attitude.

The following winter I was cutting wood on another of our woodlots with my friends Tim and Jeff. They had a logging tractor called a skidder taking out some of our bigger logs that the horses couldn’t pull and Willie and Nick and I were handling the smaller wood. It was a big deal for me to be working with these guys because back at the farm most everyone on our Peace Fleece office crew was female.

So it was doubly frustrating on the second day when around mid-morning Willie and Nick refused to go back into the woods, even when I threatened them with a switch. I checked to make sure they weren’t going lame or getting sore in the harness. Just then Marty showed up to see how things were progressing.

I had smartened up over the year and started appreciating how well she could read the horses. So I asked her what she thought was going on. She had me turn them again and head up the woods path and into the forest.

“Well, what do you think,” I asked after a few minutes of her watching the horses not move.

“I think I know what’s going on,” she said. “They are not having any fun.”

“What does fun have to do with this?” I replied with a frustrated, mocking voice.

“If you have to ask me that, then I am afraid that I can’t be much more help,” and with that she turned and headed home.

Now I was stuck. I felt like a fool in my own wife’s eyes and I clearly wasn’t holding up my side of the log production with Tim and Jeff. Willie was clearly getting worse as he grew older. Maybe I should just give up on them both, sell them to some Amish farmers and go and find a nice broke team. Why did I have to get stuck with a 2000 lb. brown eyed, terribly stubborn and complicated horse? As we turned down the logging road towards home Willie took the lead and it was all I could do to hold him back from a run.

My self-pity subsided the next day and I got up my courage to ask Marty for more help. After all, we had been together for a long time now, over 30 years. Sure enough, when I asked she jumped right in.

“I think that you need to start over again, right from scratch,” she said.

“How long will that take?” I queried. “Can we get things straightened out in few days?”

“No,” she said, rolling her eyes. “This is going to take more like a few months,” and headed to the house.

I just about jumped up in the air in protest. I needed to get back to support Jeff and Tim. Marty just didn't understand how vital I was to the success of that harvest. Fortunately at that moment a neighbor arrived in the driveway and I had a chance to cool my jets for a few minutes while Marty and she talked. I looked out in the pasture where Willie was chewing on some hay. He certainly was a beautiful four-legged animal. I knew deep down in my heart that if I could just get my pride under control that this whole thing might work out.

“OK,” Marty said as she returned. “Here is what I recommend that we do, starting tomorrow. “

So the next day, following Marty's instructions, I walked up the hill behind the farm where the pasture meets the woods. It was now early January and we had enjoyed a few good snowfalls. The horses liked to come up here and eat their morning hay and get far away from me and the work I had lined up for them. Every one of our four horses was watching my advance and ready to move off at a trot when I got too close.

This time, however, I brushed the snow off a tree stump, sat down and did nothing. I was quiet, eyes shut, motionless. After 20 minutes I got up and, without looking at the horses, walked down the hill and out of the pasture. The whole thing seemed like a total waste of time but a man can handle some pretty stupid feelings when he's at the end of his rope.

I returned the next day and the day after. Marty kept telling me to have no expectations, just keep it simple, sit down, show no interest in any of the horses, then leave. Some days, especially the warm and sunny ones, I was totally with the program. But other days were hard, especially the ones

when I kept reminding myself that it was I who had been working with logging horses for the better part of my adult life. Marty, God bless her, she rode at Camp Teelawocket when she was 12 and that was that. Those days I began to backslide. But for some reason I kept my mouth shut and my ego at bay and did as she suggested.

Then one day during the third week something special happened. I had been sitting, more like dozing, on my stump for the allotted time and was just about to get up and walk away when I felt a warm breath on my left ear. I turned slowly to face Willie's nose. I raised my right hand and stroked his chin. All at once an unexpected rush of emotion coursed through my body. Tears came to my eyes. I slowly rose up, sighed a deep breath and made my way down the hill towards home.

The next day the same thing happened. Willie showed up at my side, laid his huge head on my shoulder and this swelling of emotion again rose up in my body. But this time, as I stood up and stepped down the path, Willie stayed hooked on to me like a magnet, following my every step.

We crossed the brook, turned at the barn and headed for his stall. I instinctively walked toward the harness area to find his halter. Just then Marty came out of the house and peered at me from the woodshed.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am about to put on his halter." I replied.

"Please don't do that. Just pat him on the head and reward him for following you."

So I did just that. I scratched behind his ears and walked away.

The next day I went up back, sat on my stump and after a few minutes, I felt the warm breath again on my neck as Willie came over to say hello. Again he followed me up to the barn and this time I gave him a good brushing.

One week later after visiting the field several times with a halter in my hand, Willie let me slide the smooth ropes up over his ears and around his chin and with a slack halter rope drooping from his chin he followed me to the barn. I would stop, he would stop. I would walk again, he would follow. We passed the wire fence he had wrapped himself up in when he was four. We passed through the field where he and his brother had run away with a mowing machine. And now he was walking by my side, his head low and relaxed, connected only by a slack halter rope. But as we crossed the bridge over the brook, everything changed.

All at once his nose shot up, his head turned to look into the far distance and as a chipmunk skirted up an oak tree 50 yards away, a bolt of fear vibrated through Willie's body and all 2000 lbs. of him jumped into the air and came to rest inches from my feet. His body trembled and he prepared to run. My instinct kicked in and I grabbed the halter rope and yanked his head towards me.

"Go ahead," I screamed in a panicked voice. "Run over me, you son of a bitch". But Willie didn't move, just looked beyond me into the forest.

Then slowly, deep down inside of me, a rumbling began. My eyes filled with tears and I began to sob like an old motor that had not run in a long

time. It came first in fits and starts but soon I was forced to bend over while my inner soul retched out some powerful anguish. For several seconds I was barely aware of Willie's presence. But then I felt the rope in my hands. Like following a lifeline in a blizzard I made my way towards him and putting my arms around his neck and hugging him as tightly as I could, I embarked on some serious grieving.

In my mind I saw a small boy on a beach with his mother. The weather was sunny but the mother was ever vigilant, nervously pacing back and forth by the water's edge while her young son played in the waves. Then I saw this same woman, standing by her kitchen window as she watched the rescue workers carrying her dead husband out of her life forever.

I had never come to terms with the extent to which fear controlled my mother's life. Unwilling to travel, afraid of new restaurants, constantly on guard for new diseases that might invade our house, she managed to see her life and her loved ones through a prism of fear. I had spent my life unwilling to forgive her for this fear, the demon that had robbed her from me. I had never been able to appreciate what it must feel like to live with this emotion 24-7. But here on this bridge on a winter afternoon Willie had opened a new door for me, had given me a very short but powerful preview of his life that was also ruled by fear. For the first time in my life I cried for my mother.

I don't know how long we stood there. But when I finally let my arms go from around his neck, Willie breathed in deeply, dropped his head to face me, and let out a long sigh. "I am starting to get it," I said to his huge brown eyes. "Don't give up on me and I won't give up on you".



Willie and Nick as colts

Bub Dow

Marty and I were at a gathering of friends not so long ago when somehow the conversation drifted to near death experiences working in the woods. I was about to back out of this risky topic when someone asked “Hey Pete, didn’t you and Bob once roll the International 1600 with the horses in back?”

I made the mistake of stopping for a moment to reflect when Marty looked at me with incredulous eyes. A simple “no” would have saved the day but I’ve never been much of a liar and am a pathological storyteller to boot.

“Well, not quite rolled.” Once I began I could not stop.

“Mart, you remember when we were cutting firewood with the horses on the Mason lot the spring Cora was born. The snow plows had busted up a metal culvert running under the dirt road. Bob was driving and we were loaded for home. He thought we could safely straddle the knife edged pipe by driving out onto the shoulder but when he did the shoulder gave way. The truck tilted to the left, the horses leaned with it and their weight tipped the balance. Over we went.

“Bob always felt bad about it but I would have done the same had I been driving. We crawled vertically up through the passenger door window and ran to the back to peer in. The truck was tilted slightly down-hill with the horses, one on top of the other in full harness, lying quietly and facing backwards towards us. We quickly decided that best choice was to cut the roof off the truck and somehow roll them over and out. Fortunately the roof was made of wood. Unfortunately our saws were behind the horses and to retrieve them one of us would have to climb over our now sweating and progressively nervous team. I volunteered.”

“The obvious route to take would be to crawl over their legs but as I made my way in I noted the sharply calked winter shoes nailed to Barney and Nick’s feet. I could be chewed to bits if they started thrashing. My mind dismissed the safer option of shooting them both and dragging them out dead and I began my crawl.

“All went well and I made it to the saws. Checking that I had enough gas and oil, I turned to make my way back when I saw a small stream of horse blood running down the sideboard. And this blood made me realize for the first time how serious a crisis we were facing.

“I climbed out, started the saw, and with chips flying everywhere, we managed to cut off and drag away an eight by 12 foot section of roof. I climbed back over the horses and with Bob grabbing the front feet and me the rear, we rolled them out, first Nicker, then Barney. They stood up, shook like wet dogs and bolted back down the dirt road in the very direction from which we had just come. I went to call a wrecker and Bob headed on foot after the horses. As I leaned over to pick up my farm hat I saw the six inch long spike sticking from the truck’s sideboard covered with blood.

“Delbert arrived about thirty minutes later, just as Bob was coming down the road leading the team. Blood was still oozing from Nick’s wound as Del hooked his boom cable to the International and ever so slowly righted it. Miraculously, other than a few dents and scratches, it looked fine.

“Just give it twenty minutes for the oil to drain down back into the crankcase and it should run fine”. He then drove off, refusing any compensation, shaking his head and smiling about something in his own youth.

“Bob walked the team up the tailgate as if nothing had happened and we drove home. I called our vet who told us to give Barney a 100 cc shot of penicillin for four days and pray. That we did and he came out of it just fine, going on to live and work another ten years.

“I can’t believe this,” Marty exclaimed. “Why was I never told?”

“Marty, if you were not home that day, it might just not have come up. We never put a new roof on the truck and the way it sat in the yard you might not have noticed. The horses seemed fine and we were back at work the next day. And Cora was born a week later.”

I knew what Marty was thinking. I just had a different attitude towards animals. Our horses were merely a means to an end back then and our sheep were ‘units of production’. I had farm animals to generate income or at least to give that impression. The ‘quid pro quo’ was ‘I feed you, you work for us’. And every day was throwing new stuff at us. I just didn’t know just how many close calls we had left in the lesson plan.

Before moving to Maine I had been a part of a very radical men’s group. One commitment our members made to one another was that those of us with children would spend half of our waking day caring for that child. This would grant freedom for the woman and raise the consciousness of the man. But the day our first born Cora arrived, I knew of absolutely no one working in the woods who would return half way through their work day to take care of a child.

Marty’s delivery was long and hard and after a Cesarean section and a first breast feeding the nurse handed me my small daughter and left us to bond in a rocking chair. The imprinting that occurred that moment was powerful and totally unexpected. I looked into her little eyes and saw Josephine, her

great grandmother staring back. As I sat rocking Cora I recalled how our ewes would attack our dog Rudder if he even looked twice towards their new born lambs. I hugged my sleeping daughter and promised her the world.

But this promise was not an easy one to deliver. Bob's and my typical work day began with feeding and harnessing the team at dawn. That summer we cut pine pulp by the Saco River about forty five minutes from our house. While we were starting our day in the woods, Marty would be rising and feeding Cora. After breakfast she would then feed the chickens and the sheep, often with Cora strapped to her back. Bob and I would return by 12:30 so that the horses could be put away and fed by 1:00. I would then begin my child shift, tired and hungry.

My MO with my daughter was the same every afternoon. Make a quick sandwich followed by putting her into her car seat, load the dirty laundry in the back of the truck and head down the Porterfield Road towards town. That first year I found a sunny place near Stanley Pond where I would pull over and eat my sandwich. By then Cora would have fallen asleep. After finishing my lunch I would join her for a good nap.

Upon awaking we would continue to the laundry where, still dressed in dirty pants and logging boots but now with a child on my back, I might be greeted by a neighbor who would offer 'hey Pete, not working today' to which I might reply, 'what does this look like?' After a trip to the saw shop or the dump, we would return home. As Cora sat in her swing I would begin planning supper. If I didn't fall asleep over my meal I would do the evening chores and be in bed by eight.

I tried to hold onto the commitment I had made first to my men's group and then to Marty. But what kept me on task was a strong desire to give

her pottery business she had started on our farm time to succeed. Folks were coming from far and wide to fight over cups and bowels she had fired in her wood burning kiln down by the stream. The bottom line was that she was really the only family member generating any money.

Bob was amenable to our short work day but most of the money we made went to feeding the horses and keeping the truck and the saws running. Neither of us had any experience running a business, much less a logging one. What kept us going were the love of the horses and the physicality of the work. Our finances began looking better when we met Harold ‘Bub’ Dow.

One fall day returning from the woods Bob and I found a pickup truck parked in my front yard with a Diamond International sign on the side door. As we unloaded the horses a white haired man with a Santa Claus smile jumped out.

“My name is Bub Dow and I work for the Diamond”, he announced. We soon learned this to be the Diamond Match Company of Old Town, Maine. ‘I heard you boys were logging with a team and I had to come down.’ We invited Bub in for a cup of tea, I checked on Cora who was napping and I cooked up some lunch for all of us while Bub filled us in on his story.

“I was born in the town of Allagash, the last settlement on Rt. 1 in Northern Maine. Back then we had school in the spring, summer and fall. In the winter we went to work in the woods. My job at age sixteen was to walk the eighty miles of riverbank along the Allagash and St. John every two weeks, visiting timber camps and recording their log tallies for their Bangor offices. Those companies would then advance money to the families back home so they could pay bills until their men returned in the spring.

“We were told never to walk on the river ice between camps but of course everyone did because it was the easiest going. We carried long poles so if the ice broke we could pull ourselves up and out of the water. We carried matches and birch bark in a small glass jar to start a warming fire if needed. I would try and make it to each camp by dark and would always feel relieved when I smelt the smoke from the cooking stoves. I was a welcomed guest because I brought news from the other outfits. Most camps had a special bed next to the cook stove for me. And there were plenty of big horses back in those days. After supper I would visit them in their cozy hovels, blanketed and chewing hay in the dark.”

Bob and I had met a few men who had logged in the north woods in the old days who would drop by when they saw the horses working. Harold’s enthusiasm was mesmerizing for us both and I started to have a new perspective onto the tradition we were keeping alive

“Look boys, the company has a woodlot up in Fryeburg about fourteen miles from here. I have about forty acres of spruce/fir I’d like to work with horses. You’d get a check each week and I’d come by every day to check in.”

So we agreed to give it a try and the following week Harold showed us where to clear a wood yard on the Fryeburg Lot where the four foot pulp would be piled for the truck. Bub was clearly a pro but he was careful to only make occasional observations and not to tell us what to do. Bob started at the back of the lot felling fir trees and I cut a twitch trail to the yard with an ax for the horses to walk.

Now for those of you that have not spent time around balsam fir, they are the quintessential New England Christmas tree, about thirty to forty feet tall and covered with branches which needed to be cleaned off once the

tree is felled. We only had one saw and one axe between us so our production was slow. Bob would cut the tree down and limb it out and then I would arrive with Barney or Nicker to pull the trees out to the yard where I would pile them full length. When things got crowded, Bob would come out for a cup of hot tea and I would buck the trees into four foot lengths with our one saw. When Bob returned to the woods I would pile the pulp wood in a long row. Monday of the following week Bub came by to check in our progress.

“You know Pete,” he offered after break, “those horses can go back and forth between you and Bob by themselves.” And he walked up to Barney, took the reins and pointed him up the twitch trail. “Get up there Barney!!!” he ordered, giving him a slight tap on the rump. Sure enough, Barney responded to this new voice of confidence and experience and headed up the path alone looking for Bob.

“And I’ve got this brand new company saw I’ve been hauling around in the pickup,” he added. “Why don’t I just leave it here with you? And if Bob just leaves the tops on those fir trees as they come out, you can chop them off, haul them home and sell them for Christmas.” In just a few minutes Harold upped our production and gave us a welcome new source of income.

We cut four foot wood all that winter on that Diamond lot. The heater in the International was broken so we had to stop for coffee in town just to thaw out. Bub came by each day and had a driver come with a pulp truck every Friday to haul our wood to the railroad siding in Fryeburg. From there the train would take it to Old Town over 200 miles to the northeast over old and weakened tracks. One could walk along the rail beds toward

Portland and see our wood spilled out along the siding. Locals would quickly gather it up for their winter wood.

“Boys,” he announced one Friday payday. “Here’s the deal. I am measuring the wood you cut on the pulp truck when it leaves the wood yard. The company is paying you on what arrives in Old Town. By my calculations about seven percent of your wood never makes it to our mill. And that don’t seem quite fair to me. So you’ll see on your check two amounts, one for the wood and one for the work you’ve done building bridges here on the woodlot.” He smiled as he handed us our checks. And we had no idea what a woodlot bridge even looked like.

At this time most large tracks of Maine forest land were owned by multi-nationals like Diamond with out of state corporate headquarters. Salaried company foresters like Bub hired and fired a work force that was paid not by the hour but by the number of cords of wood they cut. The more you cut the more you were paid. There were boom years when folks logged seven days a week and slow years when they stayed home for months. Often Wall Street determined if a Maine logging family went hungry or not.

Corporate profits drove the health of the Maine woods and during years of poor forest practices both trees and workers suffered. The day of big timber was a thing of the past and Maine loggers had to work longer hours at a faster pace to make the same wages their parents had earned. The spruce budworm thrived in the poorly managed forest and disease was rampant.

Bub was not the only company forester for whom Bob and I had worked but he was the most caring. He had been a logger as a young man and only went to forestry school when he contracted colon cancer. Just a few years before I had been living in the very progressive urban Cambridge

community so it didn't take much for me to see our pulp wood by the side of the tracks as a sign of an injustice that needed to be corrected.

Bub still had family up in Maine's northern counties and as winter turned into spring word of some serious discontent drifted south. We finished the Fryeburg lot that May and Bub asked me if I would go up north with him. It would be a fishing trip for him and I could use his car to visit his family and friends. After a nine hour drive, we crossed the border at Madawaska and spent that night at Bub's camp in Canada.

The following day I headed back into Maine to meet the Pelletiers of St. Francis and the McBreairtys of Fort Kent, Franco-Americans and Scotch Irish who had lived and worked together for generations. Now French Canadian loggers were crossing the border as guests of the paper companies and were allegedly paid more to cut the same wood as locals. At the same time they were offered better wood to cut. They lived in wood camps during the week and returned to Quebec and their families on the weekends.

I also met with Pine Tree labor lawyers in Presque Isle who were investigating unusually high number of logging accidents as Maine loggers pushed their own production to the breaking point. Then there was the recent incident at Camp 106 in the Allagash where Maine loggers allegedly entered a Canadian camp at night, set fires and left a hard hat impaled with an axe as a message. Local loggers would openly talk about these unfair labor practices and yet point to the pickups rolling across the Madawaska Bridge early Monday mornings from Canada, naming many of the loggers as their cousins and in-laws.

On the way back down state Bub dropped me off in Patten where a meeting of the Maine Woodsman's Association was taking place. I walked

into Wayne Birmingham's kitchen and before I could sit down, was asked if I would organize the southern district or about a quarter of the State. My job would be to stop loggers and truckers from cutting and delivering four foot pulp wood to paper mills in Rumford, Mexico, Jay, Lisbon Falls, and Westbrook, with owners like International, Scott, Boise Cascade, and US Gypsum. Looking back I can't believe that I agreed to take on this job. I had little labor organizing experience and less legitimacy as a logger. I supposed my ego was stroked but the fact was that they had no one else to do the job. Not knowing where to begin, I started in my own back yard.

Neither Bub nor Bob had a problem when I told them about my new job offer. Bub made it clear that once I began my MWA work we would be "persona non grata" with The Diamond as well as any other pulp mill in Maine. During that winter Bub had mentored us in many ways, sharing his knowledge of the forest and how the economy of logging actually worked. The last day on the Diamond Lot we had made enough money to buy a second saw and put some meat on our bones. For the first time I felt we had a confidence to handle whatever lay ahead. We had wonderful neighbors in Porter and the surrounding communities who owned pine forests that needed thinning by horses. And there were locally owned and operated small sawmills who would buy these logs. Bob and I were pretty sure we could make it without cutting pulp on paper company land. The only wild card would be my future with the MWA.

It was clear to me early on that the mills were pitting the French speaking Canadian loggers against their Maine counterparts to distract and mislead both groups as to the cause of their low pay and high accident rates. So when I printed the leaflets for our first MWA meeting at Eastman's Garage and Saw Shop in Porter, the information was written in both French and

English. My reasoning was that no meeting could be productive unless both groups felt welcomed. Our trucker Michael Beaulieu was one of the first that said he would come.

It was a warm June evening when the pickups began arriving. Herb Eastman had rented a bunch of chairs telling me when I arrived that “the issue seemed to be a hot one”. He also offered that some of the boys were greased up pretty good and a few were armed. A state wide work stoppage way under way up north and every night the MWA seemed to be in the news.

I asked for folks to be seated and introduced myself. I was interrupted right away by a question.

“How long have you been cutting wood and how long have you lived here?”

“Two and a half years,” I said to a burst of laughter. I went on.

“It hasn’t taken me long to see that fellows are not getting much for their wood and lots of folks are getting hurt. And the companies are enjoying record profits.”

My neighbor Don jumped in. “You are asking us not to ship wood to Scott Paper in Westbrook. How the hell are we going to pay our bills? Just answer me that! I don’t got no college education like you, just my two hands. And you’re asking me to stay home!”

And the comments went down-hill from there. I looked over at Herbie who was worried. After all, it was his garage and he was the one who rented the chairs. I felt way over my head and drowning. Just when all seemed lost a small man, maybe seventy years old if a day, stood up in the back of the

room and slowly made his way to the front. He stood directly in front of me as the crowd quieted down.

“You all know who I am? Who does not know who I am?” No hands went up.

“Yes, I am Leandre Morin from Biddeford”, he announced with a heavy Quebecois accent. “Je suis Leandre Morin et j’habite en Biddeford.

“I have worked in woods all my life. I knew many of your parents because we all sold wood to Scott Paper. Tonight your parents would be ashamed of you.”

“This man here, he don’t know a lot of the woods life but he has figured out that something is wrong. Il dit la verite. I still cut wood for S.D Warren but will not tomorrow. And even though my son has a full load on he will not start his truck tomorrow and my grandson will stay home as well. C’est tout.” Then Leandre Morin went back to his seat and the meeting was over.

Leandre Morin saved the evening and perhaps my hide because he could read the leaflet I had posted in French. This gave me the idea of going to Quebec and meeting with the loggers and their families there to see if they would stay home in support of our work stoppage. I made some calls and was invited to speak at a movie theater in Ville Degilis about one hour north of the Madawaska Bridge. I arrived late afternoon on a Saturday and enjoyed an early church supper. My hostess smiled when I began speaking in French. “Tu parle comme un coq poo”. “You speak with a mouth like the rear end of a chicken”, she laughed.

“You know we read a great deal when our husbands are away,” she went on. “We believe in your strike. In fact we have begun to convince our men that it is our strike as well.” And that evening the men arrived at the

theater wearing their logging helmets with a new logo stuck to the front. “C’est a nous de decider” it read. “It is up to us to decide”.

Shortly after returning from Quebec my dad called, asking me if I would like to travel back up to Ashland, Maine in Aroostook County to visit his friend Tom Pinkham whose pine sawmill sold dad thousands of board feet of beautiful lumber for his furniture business. I told Dad about the strike and my role in it and worried that my presence might compromise his business plans. He laughed and said he would like to see Tom’s face when we met. I joined him on a plane at the Portland Airport and we continued on to Presque Isle by air.

There was no work stoppage at the Tom Pinkham’s mill as they produced saw logs and not pulp for paper. But I noticed a story of my Quebec trip on the front page of the Star Herald on Tom’s desk as he gave my dad and me a warm welcome. “And this is my son Peter”, Dad said proudly and Tom turned to take me all in.

“Well, welcome to town Peter. You don’t have any intentions of organizing this mill do you?” he smiled. “No sir, not today”, I smiled back.

The strike was over just about as fast as it began. It was a flash in the pan where mercifully no one was injured or died. Many State Police had family members on strike and some of these officers refused the Maine Governor’s orders to break blockades. When an all-black contingent of loggers appeared at the Scott Mill in Winslow to picket and were asked by reporters for whom they worked, they smilingly replied “Scott Paper, Eastabuchie, Mississippi”. Then word came down from the north that the Quebec workers were not appearing for work in the company camps. Maine’s newspapers were now choosing MWA stories for their daily front page.

The crowning moment came the morning we learned that the Independent Union of Chemical Workers was honoring our strike. Scott had only three chemists to oversee the recipe for making pulp into paper. When this small but powerful union voted for a work stoppage, all production of paper across the state came to a halt.

People today still on occasion debate what was gained by the strike. What is not debatable is the work Ralph Nader and Pine Tree Legal did to expose unsafe and exploitative working conditions in the Maine woods. That was more than forty years ago. The forest land of the northeast is still a place where debate rages about environmentally sound logging practices and workers safety. Twenty years ago some friends and I started the Low Impact Forestry Project where over 900 graduates have learned how to safely work in the fragile forest. A recent class featured some Aroostook County MWA folks I hadn't seen since the strike and it was so rewarding to know they were still out there working for change.

It will take these people and others like Bub Dow to guide us to some middle ground. I can see Bub now by the frozen shore handing us all poles to save us when we fall through the ice.

Mary had a little lamb

Sheep have always been a part of my life. We had five sheep in the barn our first spring in Maine. When I was seven the wooly creatures played a role in my imaginary farm in Newton. Maybe it had to do with everyone seeming to love them. “Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace,” mumbled the priest at my first communion.

Clothing from their wool keeps everyone warm in the coldest of times and all people, be they Muslim, Jew or Christian, welcome their meat at their table. As I grew older and began to question what I would do with my life, sheep were somehow always in the background. I am not sure when the desire to actually raise them came about but I do remember the moment when I made the commitment to learn every aspect involved in being a shepherd.

Marty and I were flying to California in 1977 with our eleven month daughter Cora Josephine to visit Marty’s sister in Newport Beach. We had been living on our farm in Porter for two years and it was our first trip away since Cora’s birth.

It was a long flight and sitting next to me was a man who was sketching what looked to be some kind of Arabian tent with a fine ink pen. We started talking and I asked him about his drawing. He told me that he was an architect and was working for a firm in Chicago, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, designing the architecture of Saudi Arabia’s new international airport. He opened his briefcase and took out elaborate drawings of what appeared to be a series of Bedouin tents.

“I am just returning from Riyadh, the capital. It is so exciting, designing on this scale. As you can see a large section of the complex, called the "Terminal Support Area", is a flexible, open area, designed like a village. It will have its own souk (market) and mosque. The series of Teflon coated fiberglass tents will act to keep out the fierce sun while the breezes drift underneath, keeping travelers cool as they embark and depart.”

This man was totally engrossed in his work and was so excited. He appeared to be only twenty years my senior but his confidence and wisdom made him seem much older. He then asked me what my interests were.

“Well,” I began cautiously, a bit intimidated by his energy and confidence, “my wife and I have started a new life and family on an old farm in Maine. We have big horses that work in the woods in winter and a flock of sheep and chickens. In fact as soon as the snow melts I have to redesign a new coop.”

“What do you want the coop to look like?” he asked. He handed me his sketch pad on which he had been drawing.

“Oh my God,” I thought. “This is a bit much.” But I took the pen he offered and drew a rough outline of the house and connected barn.

“Which way is south?” he asked and I showed him.

“How does the barn peak run?” and I drew that in.

“And where is the present coop?” and I drew that in.

“And what are the challenges that site presents?” and I explained my concerns.

He sat there for about two minutes and as his drawings turned into plans I smiled at how much this would cost me if I were a Mid-East crown prince.

“Well, here’s what I would do. I am not a chicken expert and you can modify this design when you get home. I would put the coop off the end of the barn like it is now. But face the shed roof to the south to maximize winter sun. If the coop itself ran off the south side of the barn it, then the snow would come crashing down off the barn roof onto the coop, maybe damaging the structure and killing any birds that might be out enjoying the mid-winter sun. ”

“I’d make the roof rafters out of 2 by 6’s, 16” on center so as to handle snow loads. Make the sills out of 4X4’s and..”

His hands danced over the page as he sketched out the framing, the windows and the doors. Then with a satisfied smile on his face he tore the sheet from his binder and signed it. “Here is the phone number of my office in Los Angeles. Call me if you have any questions. And please let me know how it turns out.”

As we flew across our country I knew I was coming to a crossroads in my personal life. I was on a path to farm with absolutely no training. The last person in my family to own livestock was my grand uncle back in the 20’s. As I sat in my seat looking down at his and my drawing, I knew that I needed to find one thing in my life that I could say in confidence that I understood inside and out. At that moment at thirty two thousand feet somewhere over Kansas, I chose sheep.

For the next twenty years I enrolled in every course, every workshop and every project that involved sheep. I attended an intensive shearing workshop with instructors from the New Zealand Wool Board. I enrolled

in the New England Sheep Development Project and became one of 20 farms supported by a grant from Control Data Corporation (CDC) whose mission was to assist its participants with financial choices in their sheep operation. And I studied a veterinarian curriculum developed by a sheep coop in Minnesota.

Over a five year period we expanded our flock to upwards of 80 ewes. We ran their lambs in confinement on a slatted floor so all their manure and urine fell out of reach, organically controlling parasites. Our chickens would run about below the sheep, eagerly scratching up fly maggots.

It was a heady period. We milked our sheep to study individual output. We fed them waste food products like split dry beans, cull potatoes and apple pumice, the waste from cider. We had an intensive OBGYN unit set up during lambing, complete with oxygen and an array of injectable drugs. We had epinephrine to inject into a non-beating heart and Pitocin to aid in delivery. Lambs fighting to die didn't stand a chance in our E.R. And we kept coyotes and wild dogs at bay with newly invented portable electric fencing.

Every six months a staff person from CDC would visit our farm and go over our books. We could not make any substantial purchases or financial decisions without their approval. And this was our saving grace. In spite of having a healthy flock with decent lambing percentages, over a six year period it became obvious that we were not making much of a profit. The cost of putting up winter hay for the ewes and grain and supplements for the feeder lambs was a killer. And we never counted our own labor into the equation.

In addition to the financial challenges were the emotional ones that came with the arrival of the stock trailers that would take our lambs to market.

Because they had been raised in close quarters where we would see them every day, they were docile, friendly even, trusting us without question. As they walked up the trailer ramp to their slaughter they would turn to say good-bye. They had become our friends and their departure would break our hearts.

One Easter Sunday Marty and I were walking on a beach south of Portland, Maine and looking out at a 600 acre island about a mile off shore.

Richmond Island was the first home for European settlers arriving in Maine. They came there to fish and the island insured a safe distance from the natives living on shore.

Back home on the farm it had been a long, cold winter, there was still snow on some of the fields and we were out of hay. But here by the warmer ocean, less than 40 miles from Porter, snow had been gone for a long time. As I studied the island's giant fields I recalled how I had read somewhere that the present owner had once grown potatoes on the island. But now the fields were covered with tall brown grass. As we walked south along the beach we could see more of the fields that faced the mainland. All at once my heart skipped a beat.

"Marty, is that green grass growing out there." She agreed that it did look like some new spring grass might in fact be sprouting here and there. A breakwater connected the island with the shore and as luck would have it, the tide was low so we scrambled across. Running up the island beach, we arrived at what looked like a clump of dead, brown grass but when carefully parting the stalks with my hands we could see broad leaves of new forage, sweet to the taste and ready to be grazed.

Within two weeks we had met with the island's owner who agreed to our flock taking up residence on Richmond Island where they would live for

the next five years. Our sheep were a mixed breed of meat type animals. Their lambs had been raised with readily available shelter, fresh water and plenty of food. We watched closely over that summer to see if they would survive this island environment. Fortunately mothers and lambs seemed to thrive in their new home. We visited the island every few weeks, restored an old dory to transport supplies back and forth and our apprentice Molly took up island residency in a canvas tent on a platform with an outside wood stove for cooking.

We discovered that Maine had a long history of raising sheep surrounded by ocean. Free from two and four legged predators, the Gulf of Maine warmed the sheep in winter and cooled them in summer. Sheep had thrived on islands like Green, Metinic, Mosquito and Allen further Downeast.

The following fall the weather stayed warm and just before Thanksgiving we moved all the castrated ram lambs to home across the breakwater on a super-low tide. We then introduced breeding rams born and raised on Metinic Island in hopes of strengthening the flock's genetic makeup. We timed the breeding so new lambs would be born in late April when the grass would be green and mother's milk would be plentiful. Snow came to the island before Christmas, Molly moved back to Porter and the days when the weather permitted island visits became few and far between.

Over the next five years the flock grew in size, our bottom line seemed more viable and the CDC project grew interested in our operation. Ian Coop, a New Zealand sheep scientist who created the Coopworth breed, came to visit our flock one summer as did a professor from the Rowatt Institute in Scotland. It all seemed very heady. As the numbers approached 700 lambs and ewes we all wondered aloud what the maximum carrying

rate was. Only Bruce, the CDC staff person who crunched the numbers worried aloud if all this was sustainable.

One thing that was becoming more sustainable for me was my feeling for our sheep. Where most of my peers were raising sheep on well fenced pastures with plenty of high quality food and just the right balance of trace minerals, my rams and ewes were surviving fairly well on air and a view. Their fence was the ocean, their shelter was the spruce forest and their minerals came from the seaweed they ate on the beach.

These were the same sheep that only several years before were living in confinement. Back then we referred to them as “units of production” as each would be identified by the plastic tag in their ear. Now on the islands, days, even weeks, would pass without the sound or trace of human intervention. Mothers lambd by themselves and natural selection replaced human intervention.

Sometimes in the winter we would find some of the older sheep growing thin. Most often their ear tags would have fallen out and they would now have names like “Dear Dear” or “Spot” or “Knees”. Teeth seemed to break earlier on the islands and old age and death was guaranteed to be private and natural. But as the years passed the flock grew stronger.

What concerned Bruce most was the number of hours that we were inefficiently putting into the operation. During spring shearing we would be gone for a week. Gathering meat lambs in the fall took up large chunks of time as well. All of our meals and crew supplies need to be ferried across a half mile of water. Boats had to be rolled up and down the sand beach, pens and ramps needed to be set up on shore to load the market lambs onto the trucks.

Occasionally heavy snows would fall on the island and we need to visit as soon as the storm passed. Often when we arrived we would find the ocean too rough to cross and all we could do was watch the sheep in the distance walking the island beaches, looking for food, then return to the forest to bed down at night. Should we get a freezing rain after the snow, followed by a cold snap, a crust would form over their trails. They would then become trapped and their access to food on the beach would be shut off.

To solve this problem we introduced a few large and long legged castrated rams into the flock from an island further down east. These wethers knew how to break through the icy snow and lead the flock to the shore. But sometimes the frozen snow was too hard and it took humans to break these trails and free them to feed.

It was after one of these winter storms that I arrived late in the day with a group of college age folks studying sheep to find an angry ocean greeting us. Against my better judgment I chose to cross at dusk and after a few scary moments made it to the island in the dory. But our normal safe spot to beach the boat overnight was open to the weather so I chose to head by myself to a cove down island where I knew there was a safe anchorage. The rest of the crew headed to the cabin to build a fire and cook dinner.

When I first moved to Maine in the winter of 1970 I worked on a chicken farm and I left the ocean behind. The coast of Maine became for me a place where the tourists played in the summer. When Marty and I moved to Porter and married in 1974, June, July and August were spent under the hot sun making hay, shearing sheep and cutting firewood for the cold winter ahead. The first time I returned to the ocean was when my father called from Friendship, Maine asking if I would join him for a day of sailing on

his sloop. Fortunately I agreed for just three months later he would be dead.

Now some ten years later I thought of him as I headed towards the cove in the coming darkness. Alone and surrounded by an unforgiving sea, I began to see myself in a very foolish light. My father would never have found himself alone in a dory on a winter's eve. The tide was high, covering the rocks that protected the inlet. I figured that if I could catch a wave just right I could ride in over the ledges and slip into the calm waters of the inner cove. So I waited for what I took to be the biggest in a series of incoming swells and began rowing with all my might as it passed. But just as I thought I had made it, the wave dropped the stern onto a rock, tipping the dory sharply. The oars fell from my hands and as I went to grab them I lost my balance and fell into and then down under the icy water.

I had no life jacket on, just heavy rubber boots and wool pants and sweater. I struggled to the surface and swam towards the dory as it drifted now safely into the cove. Its high sides made it almost impossible for me to climb in. I wanted to kick off my rubber boots but they were a recent and substantial purchase and I smiled for a moment as I heard my dad say "just kick them off and get into the god damn boat." Suddenly my feet hit bottom and I was able to push myself and the boat into shore. "Start running" the same voice shouted and I did. And that is no mean feat when you are shivering and your boots are full of water. Arriving at the cabin my voice was so shaken by hypothermia that I could not tell the tale until I had stripped down to my birthday suit and hugged the slowly warming wood stove.

As the island flock numbers grew so did our fledging Peace Fleece yarn business, buying wool globally from historic enemies and blending it to

make a knitting yarn.. When we bought Abu and Fatma's wool from Israel and Palestine , we blended it with the island fleece. Journalists came to write or film our story and we often would take them to the island when they wanted to see our sheep. But just as we thought we had found the best of all worlds to raise sheep, a new and unexpected challenge arose.

Cape Elizabeth, the Maine town which claims Richmond Island on its tax rolls, does not allow deer hunting with a rifle, just a bow and arrow. There is also no leash law. Consequently there was then and is today a largely unmanaged deer herd that is often hounded by domestic dogs. One day when we arrived on the mainland beach we found about fifty deer driven to the water's edge by six dogs, fiercely barking and trying to bite the deer. All at once the herd jumped out into the waves and began swimming for their lives towards the island. By the end of that summer there were over 100 of them living peacefully with the sheep. But then our lambs began to mysteriously die.

The first ones Molly found near the east end of the island. Their heads were thrown back but there were no signs of violence. We sent off a carcass to be autopsied at the Cornell University sheep station and Gordon Campbell, a Scotsman with a heavy brogue called to say that the deer had introduced a parasite to the island grass that when ingested by the lambs would migrate to the brain and result in death. There was no preventative or cure other than removing the deer. And that was not an option. So in the face of a growing international yarn business and a hostile island environment we downsized the flock, said good-bye to Richmond Island and the CDC sheep project and moved a portion of our flock to three islands further down the coast and further out to sea.

The Post family of Metinic Island brought their first sheep over from England shortly after the end of the American Civil War. Frank and Woodbury and their extended family now lobster in the waters off Metinic and have island homes where they stay during the summer. Neither of them have any love for their Cheviot sheep but their presence is essential in keeping down the grass that would grow wild without them. Once a fire took hold in the dry grass the Posts would be helpless to put it out and their island homes would go up in flames.

We had purchased some of their rams to improve the Richmond genetics and when they learned that we were looking for new islands, they offered not only their island but their sheep as well. During the Richmond Island years we had developed a loyal following of volunteers who loved nothing more than to chase, gather, turn over and shear a pile of “woolies” with nothing more than lobster and some fine wine to end the day. People would come back year after year, bringing new friends with them.

We had the use of a small cabin at the far end of the island which slept four to six at most. We would cook supper on a small gas stove and dine outside as the sun set in the west. A camp fire would then be lit and the most outrageous story telling would begin, carrying on a yearly tradition where old timers were expected to jump in to elaborate and exaggerate the already unbelievable tales from previous years.

One story that I often started, which was always embellished by veterans of the camp fire, was the ongoing saga of my grandmother Josephine and her Australian husband Lennard.

John from D.C. would start. “So Peter, what’s the news from your grandmother?”

I would follow with “well, John, I do have some news but let me give our new guests some background.”

And I would begin a back story that would appear emotionally difficult to tell.

“I never knew my father’s father, Josephine’s first husband. John died when my father was only seven. She struggled to put her three sons through college and then began to travel. She went to Rome and met the Pope, went to Russia where she met Shostakovich, then continued on to Australia where she met and married her second husband, Lennord. He had made a small fortune ‘down under’ developing a breed of dog called the ‘Barkless Beagle’.

“Lennard had been in the Australian Navy and reached the rank of Vice Admiral at an early age. Through some dark and nefarious ways he became the owner of a nuclear submarine due to be decommissioned. With this submarine he and Josephine now travel the world ostensibly delivering Barkless Beagles to the far corners.

“Well, every year around this time of island shearing they arrive at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard to have the sub’s reactors checked and recharged. How a private citizen, not even an American, mind you, can access this service, this is beyond me. But last year when I was having lunch with Josephine during re-fueling, I made the mistake of mentioning that we were all heading to Metinic to shear. One week later to my horror, they surface right off that south point.”

Gary breaks in on cue. “ But Pete, certainly they have a right to be in these waters. Why were you so upset?”

John takes on the story. “Because Gary, when they coasted into Metinic Harbor what wafted up to the noses of the Post family and all of us was the undeniable scent of ganja.”

Gary look shocked. I continue.

“We were ending the second day of shearing. Everyone was tired and dirty. As we looked down over the harbor we could see everything perfectly. On the deck of the sub at parade rest was the crew made up entirely of stoned Jamaicans, decked out in dreds, full blown dreds, wearing leather sandals, reggae playing from some boom box on the deck. And to top it off, they maneuver this full blown three hundred foot sub through the channel to stand off the beach without going aground. A major nautical feat I am sure not lost to this lobster community.”

John continues. “And before you can say Jack Robinson they dropped a boat into the water.”

I interrupt. “No, it was a rubber life raft.”

“Whatever,” replies John. “The point is that they are coming ashore.”

I now look around the fire to see how many of the audience I have lost to the ridiculous and the sublime. Looks good, everyone still hooked.

Pete: “Yes, they are coming ashore and I am horrified. I have been trying to gain some legitimacy with this hard working lobster family and an eccentric relative is about to blow it all sky high.”

I stop for several moments. Paul, his first year at shearing, follows my eyes as they drop to the ground, showing the pain that’s still there a year later.

Paul: “Well what did you do?”

Janice, also a new comer, now adds sympathetically, “Easy Paul. Let him tell the story at his own pace.”

I confessed as shamefully as possibly, “I just stood there, unable to move. I watched as Frank and Woody come down to the beach and help my grandmother from the boat. She unloaded a dog on the stones which then took a long pee. Frank and Woody got into the boat and rowed back out to the sub with Lennord, then climbed aboard and disappear down the hole.”

John: “I remember, you were frozen in place, could not move. I had met Josephine before so I went down to greet her and invited her and her pup up for tea.”

Peter: “The crew apparently was not allowed to smoke below so they tossed their cigar sized joints over the side as one by one they disappeared through the hatch. As we heated up water in the camp we watched as the sub dropped its mooring and headed out to sea.”

“They were gone for several hours. I thought I saw them resurface over by Green’s Island but I couldn’t be sure. I knew that Josephine sensed my discomfort but we made the best of it, she telling me all the places she had been over the past year and my showing her some photos of my kids, her great grandchildren, which I had in my wallet. Apparently she had taken the ‘to be president’ George Walker Bush for a sub ride down in the Caribbean and talked with Barbara about knitting and told her about Peace Fleece.

“The tide had gone out by the time they returned so Leonard sent the Post boys back to the beach in the raft and retrieved Josephine who gave us all a warm hug goodbye. As the sub slipped below the surface, the Post brothers

retreated to their respective homes not to be seen for the rest of the afternoon.

“The next day was taken up by the castration of 100 ram lambs. We castrated the traditional way. One person would hold a ram up by his front legs, exposing his scrotum to me as I sat on a stool. I would take a razor sharp knife, slit the scrotum, and place it in my mouth. With my tongue I would direct the testis between my front teeth, close lower and upper jaw, and gently pull backwards. Ninety nine percent of the time the gubernaculum muscle would break and I would spit the testicles into a bucket between my feet. I would then rinse my mouth out with some single malt as a disinfectant. I would swallow the liquid rather than wasting it and after about 50 or so lambs I would be replaced by someone with a working mouth. There was always talk of stirring these ‘prairie oysters’ up with garlic and onions but somehow the dogs got to them first.

Needless to say I hit the hay early that night so it was not till the following afternoon that I caught Frank returning to the dock with his morning catch.

“I screwed up my courage and asked, ‘well, what did you think?’”

“About what?” replied Frank.

“Well, you know, the sub!”

“What sub?”.

And the story would end there. Each year there were new volunteers and each year the story would get a little more outrageous. Sometimes arguments would break out among us veterans about what really happened. And of course, like any good story, the more you disagreed, the more real

it became. Josephine once asked me, “The truth, why do you want to know the truth? For me it often gets in the way of happiness and forgiveness.”



Rams arrive on the islands for the winter

Outed by Herbie- 1978



One morning I was heading off to work in the woods. The weather was terrible, sleet and cold. I had to stop by the local saw shop where I had left some equipment to be repaired. Herbie the owner greeted me with a friendly smile.

“Peter,” he said as he settled his elbows on the countertop and the wind rattled his windows. “Is it true that you went to Harvard?”

I felt like I had been punched in the stomach and I almost bent over forward to catch my breath.

“Yah,” I replied cautiously, “why do you ask?”

“Well, what I can’t figure out is why a guy that has a degree from Harvard is going out to work on a crappy day like today. Nobody else is working, why you?”

The answer I tried to offer Herbie fell apart even before it left my mouth. I stood there frozen, my eyes glazed over and a feeling of panic sweeping through my body. Somehow I paid my bill, stumbled out into my truck and made it as far as the laundromat downtown where I pulled in and slowly watched the windshield cover with wet snow. Soon I would be invisible.

When I was a kid growing up in Cohasset, my summer mornings would be spent swimming in the ocean out front of our house. In the afternoons I would either go to sailing lessons or play tennis with friends. Many of my

classmates mowed lawns or worked for their parents by the time they were ten. I never had a real job till I was 14 when I worked in the factory that my father owned.

Class lines were clearly drawn in my town. You were either a townie and your dad was a cop or a fisherman or you were a rich kid and your Dad worked in Boston. But because my Dad owned a small furniture factory in town and employed some of my friends' parents I was cut some slack. Until the 5th grade I had friends on both sides of the tracks. But now as I sat in my truck and replayed the scene in Herbie's saw shop, I remembered as if it were yesterday that Saturday morning just a few days before the end of summer vacation when my parents told me that I would leave public school and begin attending a small private school in a neighboring town.

I rode my bike down to the Common that day where I met up with Bobbie and the old school gang and told them about this abrupt change of plans. They said something like "wow, that sucks," but I could see that it came as no surprise. One of the kids there named Frankie Williams gave me kind of a scary look. His dad was the man who collected our garbage and I had already been on the losing end of a playground fight with him in the second grade.

That next week I started the fifth grade at my new school. It wasn't so bad. There was a Mr. Russell who smoked a pipe and taught a shop class where we all made a wooden box. Plus I knew a lot of my classmates from sailing and tennis. But I couldn't wait till the following Saturday when I jumped on my bike and headed down town to see how my old school chums had fared during their first week back at school. As I approached the common, I saw Frankie and some of the old gang. But instead of heading over to them, I stopped. Frankie turned and saw me.

“There he is,” he shouted and everyone jumped on their bikes.

And at that moment I felt like I was under attack, that Frankie was out for revenge and that he had turned the gang against me. I then made a decision I have always regretted. I climbed on my bike and fled.

From that day forward, whether in summer, fall or spring, I was afraid to bike down town. Whenever I did have to bike past the Common, I would get up a head of steam and go flying by. And of course if the old gang were there, no matter what they were doing, they would drop everything and join in the chase.

As I replay that decision in my mind, I wonder if things might have been different if I had just stood my ground. My old friends never did catch me but in a sense I never got away.

Many years later, I was driving with my wife and kids by Cohasset Common on Christmas morning when I saw a plume of black smoke rising from the chimney of one of its stately homes. I knew immediately it was a chimney fire and probably started by wrapping paper burned in the fireplace. Back in Maine we had an old cape that we heated with wood and we were always on guard for such a fire.

I jumped from the car, ran to the door and knocked loudly, When nobody came I opened the door and entered the front hall. There to my right sitting on the living room floor was a happy family of four enjoying Christmas.

“Excuse me,” I said to my surprised hosts. “I am pretty sure you have a chimney fire and you need to call the fire department now.”

The husband slowly rose to his feet and put on his slippers.

“Look,” I said. “This is a very old house and you could lose it in a few minutes.” I suggested that we take a precautionary visit to the attic.

“We need to feel all the chimney bricks that come in contact with wood,” I said. “You start up at the roof peak and I’ll work my way down to the floor”. Sure enough, the bricks up at the height of the attic were getting hot.

By the time I made it down stairs again, the family was all out of the house on the lawn watching the smoke. The husband came over to me as the fire department arrived.

“Hey, thanks for stopping. No telling where this could have gone. My name is Frank Williams.” He grasped my hand with both of his and shook it warmly. I told him I was glad I could help.

As I left Frank and his family and drove back to my childhood home, I felt I had crossed a small bridge of healing. I had moved to a farm in Maine to leave Cohasset, Milton Academy, Harvard and my privileged background far behind. Working in the woods as a logger was about as far as I thought I could get from being the next Irish Catholic president of the United States. But Herbie had ‘outed’ me that second winter in Maine. He stirred up the old ghosts. How long had I thought I could run from my past? And what was so wrong with my past that I needed to so carefully cover my tracks?

As the snow continued to fall in front of the laundromat, I revisited in my mind the Cohasset Commons and I rewrote history. I see a fall day, the leaves are turning, and I am biking to town to see my friends and tell them about my new school. As I approach them, they turn and one of them

scowls. They all jump on their bikes and head towards me. But now I stand my ground. They ride up to me, crowd in real close.

“We’d thought we’d never see you again,” Bobbie says.

“What’s it like to be around a bunch of rich kids all day long?” Frankie Williams taunts.

Now it’s time for me to speak.

“I really miss you guys. The new school is ok. There is a nice teacher who smokes a pipe and we all make wooden boxes together.”

My friend Eddie moves in close. “Do you know that your dad kicked me and my dad off your rocks this summer when we were fishing? My dad told me he used to fish there when he was a kid. Shit, who do you think you are?”

Eddie had never mentioned this to me before. I remember that night. We were all sitting there in the dining room having supper when this kid and his dad walk over the rocks in front of our house and start casting for stripers. My dad gets up and starts for the door. They are quite far off and I can’t see who they are.

“Dad,” I said. “Why can’t they fish?”

“I am sorry,” he replied “but our agent says he will cancel our insurance policy if I let them fish. He says that if they get hurt on the slippery rocks, they could sue us.”

I was just a small boy and I felt so helpless.

“You must think you’re pretty cool,” says Frankie. “You living in that big house and my dad comes to collect the garbage. But my dad is just as good as yours.”

The boys push in a little closer. “I am sorry,” is all I can say.

Then I add, “I am just a kid. I don’t have a lot to say in what goes on or where I go to school. All I can say right now is I don’t want to lose you guys as friends. “

We all look at the ground, scuff our toes, then somebody says something about either all going down to the station to watch the train come through. Or maybe someone knocks me down and steals my bike. But whatever happens, in this version I stand my ground, I do not run. I do not give fear time to take root and flourish. I do not become the Indian scout that is dragging his blanket over the high mesas covering his tracks. I am just a 10- year old kid who is trying to do the right thing.

I fell asleep by the Laundromat and when I awoke it was near lunchtime. I drove home slowly as the snow piled up on the roads. I never did go to work that day. I stayed up late that night and when I finally climbed in bed next to Marty I took forever to fall asleep. I kept going back to my childhood, following myself as I moved from classroom atomic bomb drills to bicycle riding to gathering crabs.

I moved to Maine to get as far away from my background as I could get. I put my nice shirts, pants and sport coats way back in the closet and hid out in the woods in my wool caps and hob nailed boots. Some days I would get up early, like my neighbors, at 4:00 am, turn on the downstairs lights, then go back to bed. I don’t know who I was fooling.

The summer after my Harvard graduation the Navy posted me briefly at an all-black college in Texas that was starting an ROTC program. I had driven to Houston to pick up some text books and on my way back decided to take some back roads.

It was summer and it was hot and humid in South Texas so I had my eye out for a place to get a cool drink. Somewhere on a dusty stretch I spied an all American drug store on the outskirts of a very small town, the kind of place with the swinging doors and the wooden porch. As I parked I noticed a well worn pickup towing a trailer with a sweaty and saddled quarter horse in back.

As I swung open the door and my eyes adjusted to the room, I saw just one cowboy sitting at the counter sipping on what looked like an ice cream soda. I sat down next to him. A young soda jerk ambled over and drawled out a ‘waddle ya hav’.

“I’ll have what he’s having,” I answered as casual as possible.

“Hot day,” I announced to the cowboy.

“Yep,” he replied. “The vanilla soda will set you square,” he added.

“Where you from?” he asked, getting right to the point.

“Up North,” I replied, starting to regret where this might go. My new friend had graying hair and a face as wrinkled and tanned as a chestnut shell.

“How far up North?”

“Well, sir, as far as Boston.”

“What the hell you doing down here in this dusty hole?”

“Well, I just graduated from college and I am teaching at an ROTC unit at Prairie View A&M just up the road.”

My drink arrived and as I stuck the straw in my mouth I noticed how my new friend’s ring finger was missing from the knuckle up. Then came the dreaded question.

“Where did you go to college, if you don’t mind my asking.”

“I went to Harvard.”

“Harvard,” he said loud enough for his horse to hear. “You went to Harvard?”

“Yes sir.” I replied and stared down into my soda.

“Well, tell me something son, is Fred Glimp still working up there?”

“You mean Fred Glimp, Dean of Admissions?”

“He’s the one.”

“Well, yes, as a matter of fact he is very much there. Do you mind my asking how you know him?”

“Hell yes, Fred and I were roommates for four years up there in Cambridge.”

I have often thought of this cowboy. I loved his horse and saddle, his easy way of talking and smiling but most of all I loved his cover. What I would have given to have such a cover.

On a cold winter’s day years later, while feeding the horses their lunch, Willie joined me in the field as I was putting hay down. As he munched

away, I could barely remember what he looked like as a small colt. His massive neck and jaws now worked in harmony to eat the green forage lying on the snowy ground.

Steve Estes was working an excavator across the street and when it lifted its bucket and pounded the ground to break through the frost, my 2000 lb. bundle of muscle spun around, kicked his two rear heels high in the air and set off running down the hill and across the brook away from the fearful sound. Willie's predecessors would not have survived if they refused to honor this fear, this instinct to survive.

I ran from my old gang not because they had ever caused me harm. I ran because somewhere in my young mind I felt that I was part of an injustice. On some level I knew that it was unfair that Eddie and his dad could not fish off our rocks. But I did nothing to stop my father. I loved my dad. He was not a bad man, he was just afraid to lose his insurance policy. Willie was showing me how fear was a part of both his and my genetic makeup. I was more like Willie than I ever imagined.

The Beginning of the End

1977

It was a bitterly cold November morning and Dad waved to Mom as he passed the kitchen on his morning run. When he didn't return an hour later my mother began calling friends. By noon she called the police. They searched his jogging route but did not find his body till mid-afternoon, lying at the foot of our back stairs, not 20 feet from where my mom had last seen him. Apparently the wave was a welcome home and not a good by. His best friend Dr. Sceery pronounced heart failure as the cause of death and the whole town went into shock. Only 63, jogged every day, ate well, great life, what's the point? But then again his father died at 37. I received the call at the farm after noontime chores from Aunt Cathy, mom's sister.

The funeral was held a few days later and people from all walks of life came to say good-by. When neighbors and friends were leaving the church, the wind off the water began to blow. Mary refused to leave the house that night and would stay on for many years. She took on boarders to fight her loneliness but she was lost. Once again her God had forsaken her, taking away her man. I now saw a sixteen year old girl in Bonwit Teller clothes trying to take charge of a life she had no experience running by herself.

Hers and my relationship became more contentious with Dad no longer the buffer for her demands. As my children grew up we would spend weekends at her house. But when I arrived I was often handed a "honey do" list and I felt like the hired hand. One evening as we were all helping her prepare dinner in her kitchen, she said something in the presence of Silas and Cora that pushed me over the edge. I wanted to punch her but instead I slammed my fist through the broom closet door. She grabbed the

phone and called the police. Fortunately Marty took back the phone and calmed her down. Two days later during a visit to Silas' second grade class by Officer Friendly my son reported that his dad had smashed the kitchen door and his grandmother called the cops!

Every one said that the perfect storm was a monument to Frannie on the fifteenth anniversary of his death. As the tide rose and the wind increased to gale force, the Boston area prepared for the worst winter storm of the century and Mom refused to leave her Spanish villa on the rocks. Only when a giant wave crashed through the living room window, sucking out the furniture on its ebb, did she allow the fire department to carry her to safety.

I came down from Maine as soon as I could. It was difficult to reach Atlantic Ave. as telephone poles and power lines covered the rock strewn roads. I finally reached our house on foot. Sheets of plywood covered the ocean windows. Much of the front porch where we had played music and danced the nights away had been washed out to sea. Also missing was a giant wooden eagle that dad was sculpting when he died.

The damage from the Perfect Storm that finally drove Mary from our home was impressive. It was a classic nor'easter with the worst wind coming off the water, driving the waves higher and with more destructive force. The ocean would not give up until it poured itself through our front hall and living room. Mom moved in with friends until her house was repaired and when she returned she promised to never again leave. When her mind began to fail, she reluctantly sold her home of memories and moved to a retirement community a few miles inshore.

One day we went for a walk around her cull de sac. It was a warm spring morning and most of her neighbors were still in Florida. I was working

hard to try and forgive her and myself for our lousy relationship. All I wanted was to spend a few months with her before she died when we didn't fight or blame.

Since the Perfect Storm had driven her from her ocean home, small mini-strokes worked to hide some of her strongest fears and most negative memories. But as we walked past the home of one of her least favorite neighbors, I instinctively braced myself for a caustic judgment. I felt her bony hand tighten on my arm and then slacken. She paused as she looked at the front door, then back at the road and said "Aren't people wonderful?" She then stepped forward and with a smile on her face, resumed our walk.

Water for Horses

1982

My neighbor Bob and I never did make much money logging. On good weeks we might each take home \$100. But Bob was an excellent carpenter and after 7 years of working together, he decided to take a job on a building crew. So with a handshake and a good laugh we parted ways. Barney died one cold night of old age and Nicker found a new home with a 70 year old friend that still cut his own firewood. Horseless for the first time, I found that I could not stay out of the woods. So I went in search of a younger horse and called Bill Hall.

In 1947 Maine had several forest fires that swept across the state. It started up in Washington Country 400 miles from Porter and within 10 days was cresting the Burnt Meadow Mountains just north of our farm. The National Guard evacuated our neighborhood but the Lewis brothers, Wilbur and Carroll, hid in the woods. Then with fire pumps on their backs they met the fire at Ten Mile Brook and stopped it from moving south just long enough for the wind to shift. If it weren't for those boys, our house and those of our neighborhood would all have gone up in smoke.

Back then Wilbur drove a team of horses for a logging contractor named Bill Hall. With thousands of acres of forest land charred by the fire, it was up to men like Bill and his crew to salvage the timber. So in October of 1947 Bill moved his portable sawmill into the field just north of our house and for the next sixteen months kept our whole neighborhood employed. He and his wife Rose lived on our farm and Wilbur and his family lived next door.

Over the years many families worked for Bill. He was known as a tough but fair boss. His portable camps consisted of small houses that could be lifted onto flatbed trucks and set up in the woods near the next timber to be cut. Horse hovels were built nearby with room to store hay and then the saw mill would soon follow. Overnight a small community of ten or so families would appear on a previously deserted woods road. Kids were enrolled in local schools, a well would be dug for fresh water and smoke from cook stoves curling up into the evening sky would greet the men as they returned home from the nearby forest.

Several friends of mine spent their entire childhood living in these logging camps. Each year would find them in a new school where they would often be targeted as “camp kids”.

“Our kid’s clothes were never quite as clean or new as their classmates,” remembers Wilbur. “But they hung together and most often had to fight to gain respect. When the bus dropped them off at the end of the dirt road to the camp, they had important chores to do. Firewood was split, potatoes were peeled and some of the older boys would go straight into the woods to drive team with their dads.”



Wilbur Lewis with his team

“Bill’s wife Rose was the camp nurse. She stitched up axe wounds so men could go right back to work. One day while working in our neighborhood a horse named Blackie was coming down a steep slope with a load of logs

and slipped on the mud. Her right flank sank down and onto a sharp stub of wood, slicing her open. Rose was working in the garden when Wilbur brought Blackie in.

“Rose saw the blood flowing” Wilbur told me, “and without missing a beat she went into the house and put a small can of pine pitch on the woodstove. She then got out a sail maker’s sewing kit, a stout needle that you could push through the tough horse skin with a small device that sat in the palm of your hand. We put the horse in her stall and snubbed her tight so she couldn’t move. But with Rose’s soothing voice, she was all stitched up in a few minutes. Rose coated the wound with pine pitch and we went right back to work. See this axe scar on my shin. Rose did that and all I had to dull the pain were a couple of swigs of booze. She was gentle as Bill was tough.”

By the time I arrived in Maine, Bill had wound down his horse logging operations. He had two horses left, Doc and Dan. We had never met when he called me one day during my first summer in Maine and wanted to know if I would help him with his haying. I agreed and we headed in his old truck to a big field and loaded bales all afternoon. When we finally had the hay put away in his barn late that afternoon, he bid me goodnight and that was that. No offer to pay me. So I felt pretty comfortable calling him seven years later to help me find a new horse.

Bill said that we needed to go down to Ray Smart’s sale barn in Southern New Hampshire. Ray had sold us Barney and Nicker so I was pretty comfortable with this choice. I don’t remember one word he said to me on the way down as I don’t think that he said much. Bill and I didn’t have much in common other than our time with horses.

When we arrived, Ray had about 40 big draft horses standing in tie stalls. Bill walked around the whole barn once and then picked two for Ray to show us.

“Gee, Bill,” Ray admired. “Those are the two best horses I’ve got”.

Well as you might imagine, I wanted to please Bill. He was generally recognized as “The Man” when it came to big horses. But when I looked at these two geldings standing in front of me, my heart sank. They were old, they had scars on their legs, one had a big cartilage bunch on his right front knee that clearly came from a severe injury and the other had a blind right eye.

“I don’t know Bill, these guys aren’t really what I was looking for,” I stammered. I don’t think that this came as any surprise to Bill and he gave Ray a knowing smile.

“Well,” Bill replied. “These guys may not be pretty but they know their business.”

On the way back home things were even more quite in the car. But I managed to interject that Ralph Sturgis had a seven year old for sale in Standish and maybe we could stop by. Ralph and his wife were finishing lunch when we arrived and he and Bill launched into some serious “catching up”. After a while I suggested that we retire to the barn where I discovered an absolutely gorgeous horse, a silver grey Percheron, tall and distinguished. When Bill arrived in the barn and saw Jake a wave of contempt crossed his face and he offered that “this horse never worked an honest day in his life”.

“Ralph, you got a sled we can hook him to” and just like that Bill and this horse were out the door and into the back field. Around and around they

went, Bill just ‘kissing’ the horse along and the horse glancing back every once and a while over his shoulder to see what this bald headed voice of experience looked like. Finally they returned to the front of the barn.

Bill stepped down from the sled, went up and gave Jake an affectionate pat on his sweaty neck. Then he turned towards me.

“Peter, this is just the horse for you. He don’t know a goddamn thing!”

Two days later we took Bill’s trailer and picked Jake up at Ralph’s and brought him home. He walked out into the field, took a drink from the water tank and after looking around the place he laid down on top of the manure pile and immediately fell asleep. It was the first time I had seen a new horse on our farm so quickly assess his environment. In just a few minutes he had determined that all was safe and assumed the most vulnerable posture possible, lying defenselessly on the ground.

It was a warm spring day and the sun must have felt good to Jake as it slowly began to melt the earth. I went into the kitchen to clean up and said hello to my four year old daughter Cora and her friend Sanno who were playing in the front yard. When I came back outside, I looked over towards Jake and my heart stopped. Cora and Sanno, both in light cotton dresses and barefoot, had crawled under the fence and were climbing up onto Jake’s sleeping body. Both girls were sitting up on his rump, looking down towards his feet that were shod with bright, sharp winter steel shoes.

I had seen horses before lying on the ground that, when frightened, jumped to their feet in one singular motion, crushing anything that was in their way. As I stood there panic stricken, Jake raised his head from the ground, looked back at what was going on, let out a giant sigh and lay back down to sleep.



Pete,

Jake and Cora

Jake and I worked together for twelve years. He and I would travel the countryside, one week helping Jim and Nancy get in their winter firewood, another month or two working with Lawrence and Marty twitching pine logs out of the forest for their new home. Jake was a young horse that weighed in close to a ton and alone could do the work of Barney and Nick. But every year or two he would get sick to his stomach and have a ‘go around’ with colic.

Three quarters of a horse’s weight is intestine. Food that enters from the mouth travels miles before it is deposited out the back. This highway of nutrient absorption is lubricated by the water they drink. Without water, colic is right around the corner. So I was always happy to see Jake drinking lots of water.

Stop the water and the whole system shuts down. First comes stomach gas, then pain and finally the patient lies down on the ground and rolls. The major danger from colic is that a section of intestine can easily become entangled and twisted as the horse rolls, trying to pass gas. At this blocked

point his flow of food comes to a stop and an impaction can quickly form. The gut will become irritated, then infected. Without surgery the horse will die from peritonitis or blood poisoning.

On those days when Jake went off his feed, I knew right away what to do. First I would take a stethoscope and listen to his gut. Deep rolling sounds were good, no sounds at all were bad. I'd snap a finger on his stomach and listen. A high pitched ping meant that things were shut down and I had to act fast. Then I would call Matt, our vet. I would give him Jake's heart rate and temperature. When he arrived Matt would feed some mineral oil by tube down through Jake's nostril and down into his stomach to try and get things moving. A light sedative would follow to ease the gas pain. I would then walk him for hours, sometimes days, hoping that he had not secretly rolled and twisted his gut. Previously with Jake, something had always shifted relatively soon in his gut and he had passed his manure and recovered.

When the horses worked hard hauling logs or cutting hay in the summer, they would drink buckets of water. But in the winter when the water came from the brook, sometimes ice would cover their hole and they might not drink for days. That is how Barney died. We now have a heater in the water tank near their stalls. The older horses with worn, sensitive teeth are now especially happy to drink their fill.

One cold Thursday night in early February Jake went off his feed. I called Dr. Matt and the following morning he showed up and did the drill.

"I don't like the looks of it, Pete. He may have twisted a gut last night while rolling in his stall. His skin color is off and his heart rate is up. Keep me posted and let's hope he has a bowel movement soon."

I walked him all that Friday and most of Friday night. By Saturday morning I was exhausted. When I would lead him back to the barn, he would want to lower his body to the ground and roll. I could not let that happen.

Noontime Saturday Jake tried to lie down in the middle of the road just as my neighbor Squiggie came around the corner in his logging truck. By supertime I was a wreck. I hadn't slept in almost two days, was exhausted by the winter cold and had given up hope that Jake would make it. That night the mercury dropped below zero. I tied Jake in his stall, set a small mattress down on the barn floor and prepared to go to sleep. Just then a set of headlights drove into the barnyard.

Jeff had grown up in the town next to Cohasset. His dad worked for the water company in Hingham and we had almost nothing in common. Jeff was working class, blue collar, I was upper-middle class from the Irish Riviera. He and I moved to Porter about the same time and we both owned big horses. That's where the similarity ended. But we did meet once briefly in that prior life.

One summer when I was 16 I was trying to get the attention of a girl named Robin Earle from Hingham. I was at a dance at her local VFW hall and I asked her to dance. It happened to be a slow song and I was a bit over enthusiastic. As we grew closer together I failed to notice a small knot of boys discussing strategy over in the corner. When the song ended, the crowd on the dance floor parted. I don't remember much of what followed except that out of nowhere a guy who I had never met before was shoving me into the backseat of his dad's car and racing out of the parking lot towards the Cohasset border. Mercifully no one followed and I never saw Robin again.

Now, some twenty years later, here he was in my barn to put in his two cents. “Jesus Christ, this horse has got colic. Why aren’t you out there walking him? All he needs is a good walk and he will come out of it. I bet he wasn’t getting enough water. I knew you weren’t cut out for this shit.” Then he gets in his truck and drives off.

I looked at my watch. It was 11:30. Marty has been asleep for 2 hours. As I dusted myself off, cursed Jeff and walked Jake out of the barn again I started choking up. This really was my entire fault. I didn’t belong up here in Maine. Jeff was right. I didn’t have the right stuff. I belonged back in Cohasset, commuting to Boston and a cubicle.

I dragged Jake down the pitch black road in front of our farm for the umpteenth time. What if he went down out here in the dark, died right in the middle of the Porterfield Road? I’d have to put a chain around his legs and drag him back, his naked dead skin peeling off on the hard top. I remembered back to the first day he arrived, how he lay down and let the kids play on his back.

We got about a mile from home and turned around and headed back. I now had a stick and was hitting him on the back to keep him moving. Tears were freezing to my cheeks. He was the gentlest horse I had never known. He did not deserve this.

Somehow we made it back home and I put him in his stall, climbed into my sleeping bag directly under his body and clutched the stick with my right hand. Exhausted I drifted off to sleep.

After a few moments I felt the floor shake and I looked up to see Jake’s body slowly lowering towards mine as he started to lie down and roll. I slapped him with my stick and he bolted upwards. This routine went on for

a while until I fell into a deep sleep. I was awakened by drops of rain falling on my face.

I jumped to my feet. Jake's whole body was convulsing and sweat was falling in rivers down on the floor. This was it. I had never seen a horse die before. Then all at once he trembled like a dog shaking off snow and a huge amount of horse dung and mineral oil spilled out from under his tail. He gave a great sigh and leaning over, began chewing on some hay that had been my pillow moments before.

I had never experienced anything so black and white, so clear. One moment he was dying and the next moment he was eating hay, drinking water, enjoying a new lease on life. We had won, Jake and I and Jeff and Matt.

I wanted to celebrate but everyone was asleep. I looked over towards the grain bin and saw a pink portable tape player my daughter Cora had given me earlier in the evening so I could listen to music as I walked Jake. I put the headphones on and headed out into the night. The Pointer Sisters were singing "I'm so excited, I just can't hide it. I'm about to lose control and I think I like it."

Years later on a warm August morning I found Jake lying in the Pierce pasture down the road. He had scraped up the ground all around him trying unsuccessfully to stand. I looked for a strong tree limb and tried to remember where I had left the block and tackle when I caught the look from his eyes.

"This is it," they told me. So I left him lying there exhausted and headed towards Lester's where I found him finishing his morning cup of coffee.

“Can I borrow a rifle?” I asked. Lester knew I wasn’t much of a hunter and deer season was a ways off. “You need any help?” he asked as he handed me his 30/06.

“No, I need to do this.” As I walked the half mile back I realized that this was part of the deal. You feed, water, brush, harness and work these animals every day and slowly they become a part of you. You depend on them and they depend on you. Now Jake needed me to stop his suffering and his life. I prayed that I had the strength not to let him down. But as I entered the field I saw his body lying still in the pasture. In his true fashion this thoughtful horse had died alone and spared me the trauma of ending his life.

Santa in the Beech Grove

The winter of 1985 saw an early hard freeze with a following snow. The trail Bob and I had made to the back of my woodlot was now well trodden and gave me courage to tackle some disease ridden beech trees on our own land. This grove was a long way from the farm and I would be working alone with the team in the most distant corner of our woodlot but we needed the firewood and beech was renowned for its heating quality.

Some days Marty would walk back and join me for lunch. There was a small hill in the stand where three pines had taken root years ago and now towered above us as we ate. Every morning I would toss a few items on the scoot that I thought might add to the comfort of what was becoming a small woods camp. First some boards nailed between the pines to hang wet clothes. Then some tin roofing to keep the fire pit clean of snow followed by an old woodstove and some piping. By Thanksgiving four walls, one window and an old chair made the place downright homey.

My daily routine would be to walk the horses the thirty minutes to the beech grove, reward them with some hay from the woods sled, then fire up the old stove and add water to the pan on its top. I would start up the saw, drop and limb out a few infected trees, work up a sweat and retreat to the warmth of the hut for a cup of tea. As I sat on the single chair I reveled at the quiet of the forest and reminded myself of the vulnerability of my situation. No one would miss me till supper if I were pinned under a dead fall or bleeding from a chain saw kick back.

Jake and John worked well back here. They would pull the beech up the small hill to the yard near the hut and stand as I cut the logs into chunks that fit on the sled. When we had a load, I would hitch them to the scoot and we would head towards home. The loaded trip would be slower but we

were now in a rhythm and I had no need to rush them. When we arrived at a place where a pickup could reach in the summer, we would unload and head back to camp.

It was Christmas Eve day and I was planning to start home early but we had some last minute problems and it was dusk before they were sorted out. I had added a kerosene lantern to the camp's accessories and its glow lent a golden hue to the window as we came up from the beech stand with our last hitch of wood. I glanced at the camp and imagined a bearded man inside rocking in my chair and enjoying a warm tea, his reindeer grazing the fir trees nearby. I left the lantern on and headed home.

I entered the farm yard and hitched the horses to the outside post and headed off to find my family. Marty was cooking a roast for supper and the kids were wrapping presents and decorating the tree.

"I was over working in the beech stand," I mentioned to Marty loud enough for the kids to hear. "On coming home I spied a lantern burning off in the woods. The horses were tired so I decided to check on it tomorrow."

"But there's no one living back there," Marty noted, "and tomorrow is Christmas!"

"Someone may be in trouble," said Silas. "Maybe we had better go see."

The oven was turned off, boots and snow suits were pulled on and much to Nicker and Barney's dismay we all headed back up the long hill in the pitch dark, over the mountain and down to the beech stand.

The horses were clearly challenged by the shadows and the night breeze. This full darkness was new for them. But the sled path was well worn and they settled down when they found their hoof tracks in the snow.

At first the kids chattered and threw snow balls but as we crested the hill they grew quiet and slipped under their quilts. I wondered if I had left enough oil in the lamp but as we approached camp the same golden light spilled out onto the log landing. Nicker and Barney slowed on seeing the light and stopped.

Two heads popped up and looked around. They had to climb off the sled to see beyond the horses. But when they did they stopped short just like the team.

“Where are we?” asked Cora.

“We are by the beech grove,” I answered.

Neither of my kids had ventured this far back in the woodlot. Cora was six and Silas just four. The snow was up to their waist as they cautiously made their way past the team and towards the camp.

“What do you see?” Marty asked.

“It’s too high, the window,” replied Silas. But Cora was already rolling a short piece of rotten beech stump across the yard. Somehow they both managed to stand on it as they looked in.

“There’s water steaming on the stove and a red knit hat on a nail,” announced Cora.

“And a rocking chair that someone has just been sitting in,” said Silas.

“How do you know someone was sitting in it?” I asked.

“Because it is still rocking a little,” he said.

“It’s Santa’s house,” he quickly added.

“It can’t be,” replied Cora. “Santa is too big. And there is no bed. Can we go inside?”

“No way,” said Silas. “He’s probably out there in the woods checking on his reindeer. We just need to wait. He will come back.”

So we all stood there, waiting, smelling the smoke, looking up at the stars through the winter hardwoods.

After some time Marty pulled a small package of cookies from her pocket that she had grabbed from the kitchen. “Maybe he wouldn’t mind if you put these on the table. He has a long night ahead and will be hungry.”

So Cora made her way back to the sled and taking the small gift in her woolen mittens rejoined her brother who opened the old door and entered the camp.

“Oh, it’s nice and warm in here,” she said. “Can I put more wood in the fire?” And before I could reply she opened the stove door and Silas slipped in a piece of birch. I then realized that I had never seen my children take an interest in our home stoves, much less pick up a piece of wood. But this was Santa, this was different.

We waited a bit longer and they sat down in the camp as I turned the team. Then they carefully closed the camp door, climbed aboard and we all headed home for supper.

Russia 2010



My wife stirred next to me as the Moscow train slowed for the town of Sergeiv Posad. I had taught here at the agricultural college and it was one of the loneliest periods of my life. I leaned forward to look out the window to see if I could pick out the cold and remote dormitory where I lived during those weeks. It really wasn't that long ago, maybe 15 years. No one in the college spoke English. I spoke some Russian, had one friend with whom I could chatter on in French but when it came to the end of the school day, I would find myself walking many miles over vast fields of grain and dark forests just trying to get tired enough to fall asleep at night.

People I would pass on my walks could see I was a stranger from far off. It seemed they were all on their guard for when we grew close their eyes would drop to the path. So I would smile and say in a strong and loving voice, "do-bre dein" and watch them momentarily falter, then see a thin smile cross their face. I would then wonder as they walked past what a kid from Boston was doing half way around the world in a place like this, greeting a stranger as if you'd been patiently waiting hours for him to come by. Maybe it is why Americans are often the first ones asked to help broker truces with warring parties.

Moscow 1985



There were roughly forty women with scarves on their heads and brooms in their hands slowly moving across Red Square in a long, single line. The warm August morning brought with it a slight breeze that ruffled their skirts as these women swept waste paper, cigarette butts and candy wrappings into an ever-growing wind row. I stood there in front of my hotel eager to head out across Moscow and I marveled at these ladies' energy. As I stepped out into the light of day I thought back over the journey that had brought me half way around the world to the capitol of the USSR.

My eight year old daughter Cora had come home from school one afternoon in the fall of 1983 and asked me what I was doing that evening. Her teacher told her class that if they wanted to watch an ABC special that evening they should ask a parent to join them. Well, I was intrigued and told her that I was at her disposal.

“The Day After” began with a graphic depiction of nuclear war as seen through the eyes of farmers, soldiers and students in and around the University of Kansas at Lawrence. This docudrama starring Jason Robarts drew the second largest audience in U.S. television history. I wondered aloud to my wife if this were appropriate viewing for an eight year old. But

we watched the show together and I was deeply shaken by the graphic imagery and powerful script.

Shortly after falling asleep that night, I suddenly awoke and saw through the bedroom skylight an airplane with blinking lights flying high up in the cold night sky over our farm. The stars shone and there was no moon. All at once a bright light detached itself from the back of the plane and began tumbling towards earth. I shook Marty awake and we both agreed that it looked like it might be heading directly towards our farm. We ran to our children's bedrooms but were blown backwards by an explosion that threw us both to the floor. I ran to Cora's door and when I opened it, I saw her bedroom wall crumbled below in the driveway. Both of our children lay in the rubble, consumed by a raging fire. I then awoke, drenched with sweat.

All that winter I questioned what I was doing with my life. Logging with horses, nursing chilled lambs by the wood stove, shearing sheep in the spring, cutting hay in the summer, an ideal life by some standards. But what did it all matter if a nuclear bomb could end it all with some soldier's mere push of a button? A dark cloud became my new partner over morning coffee and some days I could barely get out of bed.

In late January of that winter, fighter jets from Pease Air Force Base began making low altitude, supersonic flights down our valley and over our farm every Saturday morning. The planes were on top of us before we could hear them and the horses and sheep would scatter across the field in panic at the sound of their afterburners. I found myself slipping deeper into a sense of helplessness. I would visit Lester and he would offer evidence to support his own hopelessness.

“Now what can one person do? What are you or I supposed to do? It’s just too big.” He would stand there with a pitch fork in his hand and dare me to differ.

I remembered Lester’s booming voice as I made my way across Red Square. I took his challenge that day on his farm and put it in my pocket and carried it home. Over supper Marty reminded me of my visit to the Mekong years ago and the four young Viet Cong soldiers, men I had been trained to kill, with whom I had spent an extraordinary night.

“What if there is somebody in the Soviet Union right now that is just as depressed as you. Maybe that person is a shepherd who spends his days on the hill with his sheep, shears their wool and cuts their hay. If you find this person, perhaps we could do something together.” By late spring I decided I would go to Russia and in mid-August I joined a group of Iowa farmers that were headed to Moscow to negotiate their grain contracts.

Brad and his wife Emma were in their late sixties and were corn and soybean farmers from north central Iowa. They explained to me when we first met at JFK Airport why they were on this trip. Both spoke with the desperation of Iowa farm folks that were at the end of their rope.

“The Soviet Union has over the years grown dependent on supplies of American wheat, corn and soy beans to supplement their own poor harvests. And we, likewise, have become dependent on them for a market. But last year the US government instituted an embargo, ordering us to stop shipping grain to the USSR. And this came at a time when American farmers like us were facing an historic economic crisis.

“On top of this, farmers like us could not make payments on our loans

because the market for our crops crashed through the floor as huge surpluses piled up at the grain silos. Our neighbor, Wes Easterman, shot himself three weeks ago after he lost his fourth generation family farm to a bank auction.

“We have two choices; give up our way of life or sell our crops illegally across the border into Canada where they will be re-loaded on ships headed to Russia. I feel like a criminal but our government has left us no choice.”

I doubt if there was a Democrat in the group. And here they were, proposing to end run a US State Department embargo to a communist country. The plane had not even left the runway and already this trip was worthwhile.

The day before our farm group was to depart New York, my childhood friend Michael who trades natural gas with the Soviets told me of a small American company that had an office in Moscow. Simon Chilewich and Sons had been in Russia for years, bartering soybeans for race horses and precious gems. “Go visit them in New York before you leave,” Michael insisted. “Maybe they can help you find your shepherd.”

So I walked into their Wall Street office with no scheduled appointment the very afternoon of my Moscow flight and Gary Gailes, their overseas director, met me with a smile and a handshake.

“Absolutely,” Gary exclaimed. “Use our office from day one. We have a good reputation over there. We never left when things got bad. We just took our losses and rode it out. It is a tough but very rewarding place.

There are wonderful people there.” He gave me their address in Moscow and wished me well.

On the flight over I sat next to a middle-aged British woman married to a Russian. She had lived for years in Moscow. She asked me what I was up to and I told her my plan.

“Since we moved to our small farm in Maine my wife and I have been raising sheep. We sell the wool and eat the meat. We once thought that if we left the city and moved to the end of a country road we would feel safe. It turns out that is not the case.”

She fingered the ice in her drink as I continued.

“So we came up with the idea of my going to the USSR, meeting a sheep farmer there, buying his or her wool, blending it with our wool and making a yarn that could show that our two countries can co-exist, that there is an alternative to nuclear war”.

My companion digested my words and ordered another drink from the stewardess. I reflected on what I had just said and as her silence continued, I began to seriously doubt what I was up to. Back in Maine it sounded like a great idea. My friends there admired my courage. Nobody challenged my expectations.

“Look,” she finally said turning to me. “You seem like a nice guy. Well educated, you’ve been around a bit. But Russia is different. I was a young girl in London during the war. My favorite uncle was killed, my school was destroyed. I saw dead people on the street. But it was nothing

compared to what Russians went through. They are a very tough people. Yes, they are friendly. Complete strangers will cook you soup in their kitchen. But you must be tough when you are talking business with a Russian. Negotiate from strength, not from weakness. I know. I have been married to one for over 40 years.”

Now I stood in front of the Rossiya Hotel on my first morning in Moscow watching the women with their brooms made of birch branches sweep Red Square clean. A machine could have clearly done this job more quickly but I was getting my first taste of what the USSR called “full employment”. The sun had been up for hours but most of Moscow’s citizens were now in the country enjoying their traditional August vacation. I had originally been told that the tour would put us in Moscow for three days, plenty of time to make an official contact. But only recently had I learned that the three days consisted of Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

As I crossed Red Square and headed onto Karl Marx Square, I noticed that all the store and street signs were written in Cyrillic and I regretted that I had not taken my language lessons more seriously. I wondered what my Russian counterpart was doing on this warm summer morning. Was he tending his sheep on a high mountain pasture or maybe fishing by a rushing stream with his children?

Somehow I found my way to the Hotel National where Chilewich Corp rented office space. Its roof top sign turned out to be the only one in all of Moscow written in English. Because I was a foreigner in Western attire, albeit it somewhat shabby, the doorman welcomed me cordially. As I entered the lobby my instinct told me to keep moving, to look as if I’m late for an important meeting.

What would my grandmother Josephine say to me if we were walking side by side right now? It helped to imagine her next to me, a formidable ally by my side with her large form and white hair impressing the front desk. I felt her arm steer me towards the stairway where we quickly climbed to the second floor and took a right down the hallway. “Look at the room numbers on the doors as you pass” her confident voice told me. My cowboy boots made a singing sound as they touched the hotel carpet.

Higher and higher the numbers rose until she whispered, “There, on the door over there, English writing.”

Under Room 420 was written in polished brass letters: ‘Simon Chilewich and Sons, 120 Wall Street, New York, New York.’

“We made it,” I cheered as I squeezed her arm but when I turned to face her, an empty hallway was all I found. I knocked.



The door was heavy and made of thick, polished birch. I heard a voice on the other side say “da” so I slowly built up my courage and entered. There behind a desk was an attractive woman, maybe ten years younger than me, smiling. I used the only sentence I knew in Russian. “Vwi gavaritye pa angliski?”

“Yes, I do speak English. And you’re Peter...Peter Hagerty.... from Milton Academy.”

How could this be, the first Russian secretary I meet and she is talking about my boarding school? I smiled and nod ‘yes’.

“I danced with you once many years ago. You were dating a friend of mine from Concord Academy.”

Jessica Nielsen and her husband Steven had moved from Boston to join the Moscow office staff of Chilewich Trading Company, bartering farm products, vegetable oils, precious gems and thoroughbred racehorses. I stood before her elated.

“So Peter, what are you doing here?” asked Jessica over a steaming cup of morning tea. I had no memory of our past dance together but I quickly

explained my idea of meeting a Russian shepherd, buying Soviet wool, blending it with our own wool and making a knitting yarn.

“Is someone expecting to meet with you here?” she asked. “Do you have an appointment?”

“No,” I replied, starting to feel foolish.

“Oh this might be interesting,” Jessica explained, sensing my faltering spirit. “First it is Friday and it is late August. Most businessmen take this day off and join their families at the dacha for a long weekend.” For some reason I suddenly became aware of my dress, old cowboy boots, a pair of stained pants and a non-matching coat and no tie. What was I doing here?

“Second, it is very unusual for a foreign businessman like you to arrive with no appointment. They often make visitors wait days, sometime weeks before they agree to meet them. This generates foreign currency for the hotels. But look, this is a slow day for us. We have good contacts. Let me give it a try.”

So for the next hour Jessica worked the phones like a pro. With perfect Russian pronunciation she called friends and associates to find the official I needed to meet. All at once she looked up from the phone with a smile. We had a name. Nikolai Borisovitch Emelianov, Firm Runo, 33 Architect Vlassova. Jesse called his office and just like that we had a 1 pm appointment that very day. As I rejoiced over a second cup of tea, an impeccably dressed young man entered Jesse’s office.

“Stephen, this is Peter Hagerty. He just arrived this morning from the

States and he has an appointment with Nikolai Emelianov today. Strangely, Emelianov seemed not surprised at my call, like he was expecting Peter.” Stephen, Jessica’s husband and co-worker, extended me his hand in congratulations.

“Look,” he said. “Today I only have a few things to do. I have some reports to file but I have a car and driver downstairs and Vlassova is a hard place to reach by metro. First we will have lunch and then I would be happy to accompany you to the meeting if that is ok. It would be appropriate since our office made the contact.”

In just one hour everything had come together. I was about to meet my Russian counterpart, had renewed an old acquaintance and was now on my way to Stephen’s club for lunch. I once again felt the warmth of Josephine's hand on my arm.

As we waited later in a conference room for our meeting with Mr. Emelianov, the chief director of all fiber flowing in and out of the USSR, a moment of self- doubt again seized me. I shared this with Stephen.

“Just be yourself,” Stephen assured me. "Don’t try and be anyone other than who you are and you will be fine.”

“Mr. Hagerty, it is such a pleasure to meet you.” Mr. Emelianov swept into the conference room speaking perfect English. Dressed in a pin stripe tropical wool suit, Gucci shoes and Italian silk tie, Nikolai’s extended a hand in greeting. His attire stood in stark contrast to the bare, birch paneled walls and the portrait of Lenin by the window. He was not exactly the Russian shepherd standing on the hill with his flock but he was impressive all the same.

“Why do I enjoy the honor of your presence today? How can I be of use?”

“Well, sir,” I began haltingly, “I am a sheep farmer from Maine. I am interested in purchasing a small amount of Soviet wool, perhaps one bale, import it into the US and blend it with the wool of our own sheep and market a knitting yarn called Peace Fleece.”

If a smile and a frown can simultaneously coexist, it did so momentarily on Emelianov’s face.

“With all due respect, Mr. Hagerty,” Mr. Emelianov replied, “this idea of yours will be very difficult. We use all the wool we grow to meet the needs of the Soviet people. We have never exported wool to America. Why should I sell wool to you?”

“Because your President Andropov and our President Reagan agree that there should be more trade between our countries...”

He politely interrupted.

"I know what our presidents say. Look, you seem like a nice guy. Are you telling me you flew all the way here for just one bale of wool? Maybe I could sell you a container load. But only one bale for your project, the paperwork would kill us. Please tell me, why are you really here?"

I suddenly realized that this conversation was going nowhere. I remembered the woman I sat next to on the plane. “Don’t show your emotion. Be strong.” But fear was welling up inside as I realized how unprepared I was for all of this. Back home I sheared sheep and cut wood, I

was not an international businessman. I didn't even have a decent business card much less a clean suit. And I just assumed that when I met my Russian counterpart he would embrace the idea.

Emelianov seemed to sense my self-doubt. "Please, talk frankly; I am sincerely interested in your motives."

I detected sincerity in his words so I took a deep breath and struggled to gather my thoughts. I began by telling him some of my story, my history of the war in Vietnam and my wife and children in Maine.

"I have a daughter who is nine years old and a son who is five," I began. "I believe that if you or I cannot do something today, even in a small way, to bring our countries closer, then the chances that my children will survive this Cold War are lessened. My daughter may never know what it feels like to fall in love, my son may never see the birth of his own child. If you or I can do something in business to better understand who we are, even if just in a small way, I will feel more hopeful."

Emelianov stood up and walked down to the window by Lenin and looked out at the playground, his hands stuffed down into the pockets of his suit pants. Some of the children were playing summer hockey, others kicking a soccer ball into a goal. He stood there for a long time.

"You know, you sound just like my wife," he finally said with his back to me. "And sometimes these women..." His voice trailed off as he returned to the desk, picked up his phone and ordered an international call. We three waited in an awkward silence for several minutes before his phone rang.

“Hello John, this is Nick. Yes, great. Hot summer here too. I thought it always rains in London. Look I have an American named Peter Hagerty in my office who wants to buy some of our Type 22 that is up in Bradford. Could you break off one bale of that lot and send it to...?”

“Boston,” I mouthed.

“Boston. He can come to London next week to sign all the paperwork.” Nikolai nodded to me. I gave him thumbs up. And it was done. Peace Fleece was born.

This was the first of many trips I would make to Nikolai’s office. We became as close to friends as we could during those times. I helped to find his daughter a summer job in the States; he found me more Russian wool when I needed it. I never visited his home and he never visited mine. There was a formality that seemed always necessary.

Then one summer I got a call from him. He was doing some wool business with a contact I had given him in Texas and was stopping in Boston on the way home. Could we meet and have a meal?

I left Maine early on a beautiful summer afternoon and was soon shaking Nikolai’s hand in the lobby of the Harborside Hotel on Boston’s waterfront. I regretted that I had not brought Marty or one of the kids to meet this man who had done so much for us. Nikolai invited me up to his room.

It was 1991 and things were very bad in Moscow. There was little food in the shops and it was dangerous to be on the streets, even in the daytime. He

asked me if I would not tell anyone that he was staying in this luxurious hotel. He said that the Texans had paid for the trip and had insisted on making all the arrangements. Still, he felt badly, enjoying this luxury when things were as bad as they were at home.

Since our first meeting in 1985 we had never been in a relaxed setting where we could just talk. So it was awkward getting this conversation going but over dinner we began to loosen up and I remember giving him a big hug when we said good-by. This would be the last time I would see him alive.

I was never sure what happened. Six months later when in Moscow I called his office and asked for him. I was passed from person to person until I reached Igor, his personal assistant. Igor spoke only Russian and after a pause, said sadly, “Peter, Nick oo-mer”. I was alone in Luba’s apartment at the time. I remembered the word as a dark one and thanked Igor in a sober tone for the news. Luba’s Russian-English dictionary said ‘dead’.

The Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho believes that if one is on the right path, there will be people that will appear out of nowhere to make your journey through life a success. There have been countless numbers of people since the birth of Peace Fleece that have appeared from nowhere to sweep away the rubble and make clear the way. Nikolai was the first person to do so and he will never be far from my thoughts.

Embargo 1985-1986



John Collier's office was in the East End in an old industrial building not far from the Thames River. Modiano Wools, Ltd. was then the largest wool company in the world. Based in Australia, John oversaw their European business dealings.

"I have already taken the liberty of moving your Russian wool down to Southampton." I had arrived the night before from Amsterdam and we were dining at John's club. "But it may be a bit before I can get it on a ship to Boston."

"How should I get you the payment for trans-shipping the wool?" I asked.

"Oh dear, don't worry about that now," he replied. "I will send you the bill and you can wire me back the amount to our London bank."

He handed me the invoice on Modiano stationary and for the first time I actually saw the price I was paying for Nikolai's wool, US \$1.21/ lb. clean, FOB Southampton. I was so relieved by Nikolai's support for the project that I had forgotten to check the price of the wool. Even today, thirty years later I have almost no connection to money, never knowing if I have any in my wallet. Thank God for Marty!

The bill arrived two weeks after my return to Maine. I went to our local

bank in Kezar Falls and sent a money transfer for the amount. It was not till I returned home that I realized that there was a charge for the wool but not for the freight. I quickly sent John a Telex requesting a bill for shipping. John's reply followed the next day.

“Dear Peter, Wool on its way soon. Know you plan subsequent shipments of Type 22. Will handle shipping costs at a later date. My best, John.”

I thought this a bit odd as it made the final pricing of the wool a bit difficult. But we took a guess at the cost and began waiting for the arrival of our one bale. Thanksgiving arrived, then Christmas. Finally word came from Modiano.

“Wool booked on S.S. Wainwright, ETA Boston, 1 February, 1986. Please send contact information of brokering agent. Best, John”.

“Brokering agent?”

I called my Uncle Paul who was a lawyer in Boston and he gave me a list of a dozen international freight-forwarding companies. I started working the list. As I did, I thought how wonderful it would have been if I could have made this call to my father instead. He had died suddenly nine years before. He would have enjoyed the irony of his “back to the land” son now looking for the phone number of a commercial broker to handle an overseas shipment from Russia.

I remembered the day we were walking through Dad's furniture factory and came across a stack of birch veneer plywood. He fingered the flawless wood and handed me a sheet. “I use it to finish the insides of the chest of

drawers.” As I admired it I turned it over and saw words written in Russian Cyrillic.”

“Dad, where does this come from?”

“Oh, I get it from Morton Waldfogel in East Boston.”

“No, I mean what is the country of origin?”

“It is called Baltic Birch so it must come from the Baltic republics.”

My dad was not much of a traveler. Except for a family trip to Bermuda I can never remember him ever leaving New England. So I called my brother John who had taken over running the family furniture business after my dad’s death, asked him for his Baltic Birch connection and by that very afternoon I was chatting away with Morton.

“Peter, this is very interesting and exciting what you are doing. I never could get your dad to fully appreciate the Soviet connection. He was too absorbed with the great quality of the product to ever wonder about its origin. Baltic Birch comes from the Baltic Republics, probably Latvia or Estonia. I have done very well working with the Soviets. I believe you will too”.

He suggested I contact a Bob Kenny to handle this deal. “Now most brokers today won’t touch stuff from behind the Iron Curtain. But Bob’s been around the Boston wool trade for years and is a good guy to have on your team.”

“How much did you pay for the wool?” was Mr. Kenny’s first question when I called him the following day.”

“Christ, that’s a hell of a good price,” he shouted back enthusiastically.
”Sure I can broker this wool. I’ll visit customs when the Wainwright arrives and give you a call.”

Ten days later the call came. “Sons of bitches, you won’t believe what’s happened!” I thought Mr. Kenny was referring to the Russians.

“No! It’s the U. S. Customs. They want to charge you a tax because the USSR does not enjoy our most favored nation status. That’s outrageous and it pushes up the price of the wool as well. Do you know how much US grain they buy from us every year? Hell, our farmers would be done for if the Russians treated us that way.”

I was about to tell him that yes, I had some first-hand information on this subject but instead I asked “Well, what do you think we should do?”

“Well, we sure as hell aren't going to pay the bastards.” I had checked out Bob Kenny before I had made my first call. He was a well-respected member of the Boston Wool Trade, went to my Uncle Fred’s church and was known to be a cautious and conservative financial agent. I tried to match this person to the “over enthusiastic” wool broker I had on the phone.

Bob negotiated with customs unsuccessfully for two days before we agreed to pay the import duty. Then the second shoe hit the floor.

“Hey, this is Bob. The longshoremen are refusing to offload the wool. They saw the Russian writing on the bale and they won’t touch it. Ever since the KAL shoot-down people here treat Russians like the plague.”

Months before a Soviet MIG fighter shot down an unarmed Korean Airline's passenger jet that had strayed over Soviet airspace killing everyone on board.

I remembered Marlin Brando in "On the Waterfront" and how he faced off a longshoreman's union. What could I steal from his script to get things moving?

I called some friends who ran a small PR firm in Boston's North End and we came up with a plan. They would put out a release to all the wire services and local media announcing a press conference in two days. We would fight the union and their politics. We chose the Old Post Office Square building in the heart of Boston's financial district.

On the day of the event I put together three large bags of wool from our Maine farm and hauled them to the conference site. With a coat and tie and jeans and work boots I stood with my wool bags in front of television and still cameras and asked if trade with the Soviets might not be a way to warm up the cold war. Did the longshoremen want to stand in the way of a small farmer from Maine who wants to set aside, just for the moment, the many past political mistakes by Washington and Moscow? Because if the politics of fear and reprisal continue to rule the day this farmer and his wife's small children may never know what it feels like to grow up, fall in love and have children of their own.

The only thing missing that day was Nickolai Emelianov in his Italian suit. But he must have been there in spirit because United Press International and the Associated Press sent their stories out across America and not only caused the longshoremen to relent and release the wool the following day

but led to subsequent articles in the American media. Peace Fleece was born.

The Wall Street Journal, Dunn and Bradstreet Weekly, People Magazine and many small and large city newspapers across the country covered the story. We scrambled to make our first colors of knitting yarn, naming them Samantha Katya Pink, Antarctica White and Volgasippi Blue, names that commemorated Joint Soviet-American accomplishments and similarities.

Later that year I received a telephone call. “Good morning Peter. My name is Jane Palance and I am Mike Jensen’s administrative assistance here at The Today Show. Mike is our Financial Correspondent and would like Marty and you to be our guests here in New York next Thursday morning and tell our audience about Peace Fleece”.

I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I told Jane how delighted I was and I would be back in touch.

“I can’t do it,” Marty said. “My girl scout troop has an awards ceremony that Wednesday evening.” I could not believe my ears but no matter what I said she would not budge. “If they want us they will find another time.”

Surprisingly, Jane completely understood. I think she might have been a Girl Scout herself in her youth. And yes, ten months later The Today Show did come to our farm and spent two days filming an in-depth piece. It broadcasted on Dec 12 of 1987 at 8:45 am and for the next 10 days the phone would not stop ringing. I mean, you put it down and it would ring immediately. NBC said that it had the highest telephone response for a human interest show to date.

I realized then that this outpouring of public support did not come primarily from what Peace Fleece was saying but from what the American people wanted to hear. They were tired of the Cold War rhetoric, of mutually assured destruction. They wanted a new day, a ‘novi deen’ in Russian. Peace Fleece gave American knitters a taste of what a moment without fear might look like. Our motto became ‘Warm Wool from a Cold War’.

Bob Kenney called me several days later after the wool cleared and admitted to me that he had never met a Russian much less handled a product from a communist country before. And he had woken up the day after the press conference wondering if what he had done was really for the greater good.

We were coming into some kind of holiday that would close down commerce for a long weekend. I suggested that he send Emelianov a Telex saying that the wool had cleared and to thank him for all his help. That afternoon Bob called back and said that he had sent such a message and would stay late in the office in case a Telex came back. This was before the days of e-mail.

I looked at my watch and told him that with an eight-hour difference I thought there was little chance of a reply today. But that very night I was awakened by an elated voice. It was midnight in Boston but 8 A.M. in Moscow. “He just wrote back,” Bob shouted excitedly over the phone. “Listen!” ‘Dear Mr. Kenny, Thank you for all your good work in making this importation a success. My company is happy to join you as part of the Peace Fleece venture. We look forward to hosting your arrival in Moscow someday soon. My best wishes to you and your family. Sincerely, Nikolai Emelianov.’

Three years later John Collier once again found me in his office. It was my turn to take him out to lunch. It was the third shipment of Russian wool and still no shipping bill from Modiano. “With all due respect,” I began. “I know where Bradford is. It is up in Yorkshire, just about as far from Southampton as you can get and still be in England. You have trucked this wool to the dock and shipped it across the sea three times. You have done more than enough. We are a for profit company. We can pay you for your efforts.”

We were sipping a chicken broth at an East End restaurant. John took the napkin from his lap and lightly dried his lips.

“Look Peter,” he said kindly in his New South Wales accent. “I sit in my office all day long, moving millions of dollars’ worth of wool around the world. And I go home at night to watch the same depressing news on the tellie. And I ask myself, what can I do? And I go to sleep feeling quite helpless.”

“So you come along and you bring Nickolai with you and you ask me for help, help in an area I know something about. So now when I go to bed at night, I feel part of something that is doing something. I feel better, I sleep better. Let me do this small bit please.”

We are never alone in this world. If you are on the right path around every corner there is a friend ready to help you meet your goal.

Chaban 1988



Novosibirsk, Russia, 1988

It was snowing when we boarded the giant Tupolev jetliner in Moscow for the five-hour flight to Siberia. The trip was uneventful until the pilot announced during our chicken salad that the temperature in Novosibirsk was -40 degrees. I turned to the passenger next to me and asked her whether that was in Fahrenheit or Centigrade. She smiled and replied, “When it is that cold, they are the same.” A warm bus was waiting at the airport to take us to our hotel across from the central railroad station but as we helped the driver unload our bags, I felt the full force of the cold and it was numbing.

By 1988 there were several companies and individuals in the New England area who wanted to try their hand doing business with the Soviets. So I put together a rag tag group of twelve folks, some old friends, some new, and

accepted an invitation to spend the Russian New Year with a group of families living in a suburb of Novosibirsk, the capitol of Siberia.

This town, Academ Gorodik, was the brainchild of the Soviet scientific community in the 1960's. Their idea was to take the best and the brightest minds and build them a city where they would live, breed and prosper. Their genetics offspring would provide cutting edge research and guarantee Soviet supremacy in the arts and sciences for years to come. My friends who lived there were the second generation to enjoy unlimited access to new ideas and freedoms of expression. Their children were now in primary school and eager to meet with Westerners, practice their English and perform their plays and musical productions.

Awaiting us as we entered the hotel lobby was a large group of parents and children from Academ Gorodok. In a display of uncharacteristic Russian emotions, the adults rushed to greet us while their children broke into song. Men in neatly trimmed beards and women in stylish furs and Western styles haircuts took our bags, enthusiastically shook our hands and in perfect English announced that each of our group had been assigned one family who would wine and dine them for the duration. We technically needed to stay at the hotel but with only four days and so much to learn from each other, where was there time for sleep?

Bags were taken up to rooms, keys were handed out and before you could say "I am freezing" we were off on a walking tour of the city. We numbered over 40 if you included all the young children. But it became apparent in the first few blocks that we were totally unprepared for the weather. It was now already turning dark so we rushed back to the hotel for tea and more singing.

As we reached the hotel, I noticed a policeman directing traffic in front of the Railroad Station. He had been there since we arrived in our bus and as far as I could see had not left his post. He was enthusiastically blowing his whistle to keep traffic flowing. I left my friends and walked across the square to meet him. High above his head a digital temperature sign at the railroad station was permanently stuck at -40. He saw me coming in my very impractical Western winter attire and beckoned me to hurry across the busy square.

“How can you stand here in this cold and not freeze?” I smiled.

“Valienki,” he smiled back. “Valienki is necessary.”

This word was not listed in my “Speak Russian in 30 days” so I asked him where I could buy some.

“GUM” he said and pointed to a giant 7- story brick complex just off the square.

I thanked him and made a bee-line to the store. I was now thinking that ‘valienki’ came in a bottle that one would sip every 15 minutes or so. The lady in the lobby mopping up the melting snow from our boots directed me to the fourth floor. But when I arrived all I saw was clothing. I sidled up to an old man looking at sweat pants and asked him, “what is ‘valienki’?” He stepped back and looked at me?

“Ot kyda? “ he asked. “America”, I answered in my halting Russian.

A huge smile broke across his face, revealing a set of tobacco colored broken teeth. He slipped his arm into mine, as much to give him strength to move as to make sure he would not lose me. We made our way across the giant room to a table piled with knee high felted woolen boots.

“Valienki” he proudly smiled as if he had made every last one. “Ochen ti-op-la” he said, blowing his warm breath through his fingers and rubbing his hands together. I remembered now that the policeman had been wearing these very boots.

“Daragoi?” I asked. “Niet”, he replied and pointed to the small sign attached to a set of boots at the top of the pile, 10 rubles or about two US dollars per pair.

I handed the cashier a 100 ruble note and said I would take 10 pairs. The old man laughed out loud as we filled a giant plastic “somki” with a variety of sizes and like Santa Claus I swung the sack over my shoulder.

“Kak vash zavoot?”, I asked as we made our way together down the long stairway, his arm still stuck to mine. “Maxim,” he replied. As we entered the cold, I asked him to come to the hotel for tea. He declined shyly and said good-by and, swinging a bum leg, made his way down the empty street. I hoped that Maxim had a doting wife or granddaughter waiting for his return.

Back at the hotel a Tolstoy play by the children was in full and spontaneous swing on the stage of the dining room. I passed out the felted boots to our group and they all seemed to miraculously fit. My own pair was already having the desired effect and I could again feel my toes.

This was my sixth trip to Russia in four years but as I sat in my chair and looked around the room, I sensed that there was something going on here that I had never seen in Russia before. I watched the hotel staff and other Russian guests react to the energy of this Academ Gorodok crowd. It was clear that they were not totally comfortable with this atypical Russian behavior but they seemed to be resigned as well as tolerant.

As our four days unfolded, I was offered a view of an unexpected consequence of this Soviet cultural experiment. It appeared to me that along with the freedom with the arts and sciences came a desire to test the limits of expression that the Soviet system imposed on its people. These young students reminded me of the children back in Maine who were being educated in an alternative, unconventional home school setting where they stood out in a crowd. These Maine students seemed to exude a certain sense of self-confidence, one that was soon challenged by their own peers as they integrated back into the public school system for their high school years. I wondered how these young Russian students performing a Russian play in English would fare as they integrated into Soviet society. As it turned out, in the coming years many of them would play central roles in the overthrow of the Soviet Union.

We spent New Year's Eve ('Cnovum Goadum') moving through the apartment complexes of Academ Gorodok as our host families introduced us to their many friends. I myself went to over eight homes where fish, soups, breads, salads and glasses of sweet wine and vodka were offered. I had warned my American friends to only eat a little bit at each stop. For most of the hosts this was the first visit of a guest from the West so it was not until the early hours of the morning that we all finally made it back to the hotel. I slept warmly for the first time that night, fully dressed and covered with blankets, my valienkis still on my feet.

New Year's Day I woke up with an odd feeling. At breakfast I ate alone, preoccupied with the notion that I needed to leave our group and head off by myself. For some reason I needed to go to Alma Ata, the capitol city of Kazakhstan, 1373 kilometers to the southwest of Novosibirsk. Why Alma Ata was calling to me I had no idea. I just knew I had to leave.

Our Intourist guide Marina Klimova from Moscow was a good friend and we had worked together several times before. In 1988, she and I had taken a group of American farmers to Alma Ata and at our hotel one night she had rebuffed a KGB agent who wanted her to inform on our group. Now when I told her my travel plans she was understandably worried. But the more we talked, the more she was willing to take over the group and give me the freedom to leave. We agreed to meet in St. Petersburg in six days.

The hotel booked me a one-way flight that afternoon and in the fourth floor dining room over lunch I said good-bye to my old and new friends.

Lawrence, my roommate who would go on to work for the Peace Corp in Russia, took charge of my extra baggage and Peg, who would import pre-fabricated homes into the Russian Far East, gave me a bear hug. Dressed in a full length sheepskin coat, Peace Fleece hat, valienki and a small backpack I boarded the elevator alone.

“What am I doing?” I asked out loud as I looked at myself in the elevator mirror. “These people here are so full of life and great energy, why on earth am I leaving?” I had no answer. I was no longer in control.

On the third floor, two very short and stocky men with jet black, slicked back hair walked in. The door closed. One stared at me.

“Ot kyda?” I was asked for the second time in three days.

“America,” I smiled.

“Kak vash rabotat?” (what do you do for work) he asked a little too aggressively.

“Chaban,” (shepherd) I smiled.

He thought for a moment, took in my outfit from hat to toe, scowled and punched his index finger into my solar plexus so hard that it took my breath away.

“You ain’t no fuckin’ shepherd” he angrily retorted in Russian as the elevator stopped and the doors mercifully opened.

I stumbled into the lobby and made my way quickly out the front door. My new friends chose not to follow. I waited for the cab I had ordered but when it did not appear right away I went to the nearest bus stop around the corner from the hotel and jumped on the first one to come along. I asked the driver how to get to the airport and he kindly put me off as near as he could to the airport route but I still had to hurry across five blocks to catch the #15.

Even though it was still –40 degrees my shirt was now drenched with sweat from both the running and my fear. The airport bus windows were covered on the inside with a thick coating of ice and I wondered how I would know when to get off. I then had this very special memory sidle up to me and sit down on my lap.

It was summer and Marty and I were visiting Portland, the nearest big city to our farm, to do some shopping. It was in the mid-seventies and Portland was still primarily a fishing and shipping port town. The chic boutiques and cafes were still years away. We discovered a used furniture and clothing store. We saw nothing we needed but as we were preparing to leave I spotted a sheepskin lined Norwegian Navy coat hanging on a back wall. I wanted it. Marty said it was too heavy and I would never wear it. The coat seemed to be crying out to me. It rode home in the back seat and later hung for the next five years in our woodshed attic, untouched.

But today, on this bus, this very coat was my refuge from the cold. As I huddled inside its bulk, I let myself feel its protective powers. Now I needed time to think. In all my five years in the Soviet Union, I had never felt so vulnerable, so under attack as I had in that hotel elevator. Who were those men? They had not reeked of vodka. One had asked a normal question and my answer had angered, perhaps insulted him. All this happened within the first minute of my new and unexplained journey to Alma Aty.

“What do you do for work?” he had asked. Such a common question, a good opener for a casual conversation on a plane or train. I had said I was a ‘chaban’ which implied that I was a shepherd of the Russian steppe, one who lived a nomadic, perhaps lonely life with the sky his ceiling and the pasture his bed. In my haste to be amusing, perhaps I had crossed the line to arrogance.

The true answer to his question was complicated. I worked at being a good husband, father and neighbor. I sheared sheep in the spring, logged in the woods in the winter and cut hay in the summer. And I flew to the USSR twice a year. But this did not make me a ‘chaban’. My Harvard degree and upper middle class upbringing guaranteed that I would never feel the pit of hunger in my stomach or the cold of an approaching storm on my back that comes with the job of being a ‘chaban’. I had insulted these men. As I sat in my tent of a coat in the back of the bus, my sweat slowly dried and I felt very alone.

I have always loved foreign languages. The Slavic language my brother and I invented as youngsters was embellished all the way through college. I remember the day we sat at lunch in the Harvard Freshman Union totally engrossed in a heated debate in our made up language. People around us

had no idea what we were saying and neither did we. Still today, after over forty visits, I only have a very limited Russian vocabulary. Recently I had supper with the daughter of a Yaroslavl friend who was seven. At the end of the meal she thanked me for the nice time but said that she hardly understood anything I had said.

After my first trip in 1985 I enrolled in a Russian language course at a nearby university but gave up after six months. I hired a private tutor named Diane whose personal life was falling apart. Our classes consisted of repairing the appliances in her house while speaking only Russian. Consequently I have a rather esoteric vocabulary. I know the word for toilet bowl but could not name you most of the days of the week in Russian. When Diane developed a terminal disease, I would sit by her bedside and we would discuss, all in Russian, issues about death and dying. She was insistent that my pronunciation be perfect. "It rarely matters what you say in Russia, it's how you say it," she would say with great authority.

We had lots of fun together before she decided to move to Russia to die. When I questioned the wisdom of this decision she retorted, "I grew up in Salt Lake City. Would that be a better place to die?"

I sadly saw her off at the airport with her child prodigy and concert violinist 12 year-old daughter by her side, thinking it might be our last visit, our last class. Years later she called, told me that she had fallen in love and decided not to die. She now lives in Tallinn, Estonia and is in excellent health. And the one gift she gave me that constantly gets me into trouble is my excellent Russian pronunciation. Once it almost got me tossed off a Latvian train.

While working in Riga several years later, I boarded the Moscow train and took a seat in a six-person compartment. A short time later, another man, a Russian, joined me and as the train pulled out of Riga station, he unrolled a piece of newspaper and produced a daunting breakfast of hard boiled eggs, sausage, bread and vodka. My Riga friend Valodia had given me fresh tomatoes that morning to take to Moscow along with garlic and cucumbers. I added this to the pile along with a bottle of beer and before we reached the Russian border we were fast friends, in spite of the fact that we had only shared a few words.

At the border we were visited first by Latvian guards who checked to see if we were smuggling anything out of Latvia and then by a team of Russians to see what we were bringing in. Shortly after the train began moving again my dining partner began a long diatribe about Latvia, first about the Latvian women, then about the bosses at work, finally addressing the contempt he held for Latvians who had no appreciation for what Russia had done for them since the Second World War. Images of Latvians being thrown off trains during mass deportations came to mind but I held my tongue. I was also quiet because I only understood about a quarter of what he was saying.

Then came the moment I had been secretly dreading for years, that moment when a diatribe ends in a question that only you must answer while having no idea what has just been said. All was quiet in the thick air of the train compartment as the question hung in the air. The vodka was half gone as was most of the food. His dark eyes stared at me, demanding a response.

All at once Marina, the very friend I had just left in charge of all my American friends at the Novosibirsk hotel, came to mind. She, her husband and I were out walking their dog one afternoon. She kept telling her dog to

‘delai-it’, just do it. Go to the toilet so we can go back inside. I had taken the leash for a moment to give Marina a break and when I said ‘delai-it’, her dog immediately pooped. “It’s your accent,” Marina laughed. “It’s better than mine. She listened to you, not me!”

“Look, Peter,” she went on “your accent is very good but until your vocabulary catches up, you can get in trouble. There is one word that you need to know”.

“Someday you will be in a conversation and someone will ask you something that you will not understand. They will think that you have been following their passionate line of reasoning to a fault because you have a good accent. So to say you don’t understand will be a great mistake, maybe even dangerous. This word was created for this moment.”

She stopped walking to underscore the importance of this word.

“Toa-ch-na”, she said. “It means that what your friend has just said captures the very essence of your belief system and that you are in total agreement. Absolutely no hesitation, no doubt, just total agreement.”

So as the train gathered speed and my traveling companion’s question hung over the compartment, I reached down to salt the last egg, looked straight into his eyes and said “Toa-ch-na”.

He looked back at me. First his lips quivered and then his face tightened.

“Sch-toa?” (What?),” he said. “What did you say?”

“Toa-ch-na”, I said. It was this or nothing. “Toa-ch-na”. He seemed to come back from a dark place, as if he had been away. He repeated my

word under his breath. He began to smile. His clenched knuckles relaxed, his hands lowered onto the table.

“Toa-ch-na”, he muttered, “Toa-ch-na”. He slowly leaned back in his seat, exhausted by his diatribe but now no longer alone in its beliefs. He smiled, closed his eyes and within moments fell into a deep sleep.

Like a turtle emerging from its shell, my head popped up from the fleece collar of my coat as the bus rolled up to the airport. In those days foreigners could not associate with Soviet citizenry in public places. I sought out the Intourist desk, the travel agency for foreign travelers, complete with leather chairs and smiling staff and found out that apparently I was the only non-Soviet flying that day. After about an hour of waiting, an announcement in English requested my presence at the Aeroflot kiosk where I found an attractive young woman waiting for me with a very grave expression on her face.

“Mr. Hagerty, I am very sorry to say that I have some very bad news for you,” she said as she stared into her computer screen. She then went on to type for a bit on her keyboard. A car accident at home was my first thought followed by images of a fire consuming our barn. She continued to look at her screen and then said something to a colleague in Russian who also began typing on her keyboard. They conferred.

“Mr. Hagerty,” she continued. “I am terribly sorry to say that your flight to Alma Aty has been delayed for several hours.” She looked at me as if to say, ‘I apologize for the Soviet Union and my comrades here at Aeroflot Airlines. For this inconvenience we will be taken out at dawn tomorrow and shot.’

“My God,” I sighed. “I thought it was something serious.”

“Well,” she replied “we take this very seriously. My co-worker here will escort you to a hotel adjacent to the airport where at no cost you may rest in comfort. She will come to fetch you when your flight is prepared to depart.”

“That would be lovely,” I smiled. Co-worker and I hopped onto an airport bus and were soon walking into a mammoth six-story cement and brick edifice with peeling paint and water dropping from the ceiling into buckets.

Waiting at the front door for us was the hotel matron, dressed in the classic outfit of the Slavic woman who works at minimal wage but actually controls everything in sight. Worn felt slippers, frayed apron, mohair sweater as long and as loose fitting as a coat, a scarf covering her grey hair and a dusting rag in her right hand, she was dressed to move in the shadows of this building, constantly watchful, continually vigilant. Women like this Russian matron brought you hot tea on a train or found you an extra blanket for your hotel bed at night. They would keep their distance yet they could be fiercely protective and take a bullet for you if you became friends.

I followed my matron at a healthy clip up four flights of stairs and then turned down a long dark corridor flanked by doors painted a pale green. As we neared the end of the corridor, matron reached into the bottomless pocket of her sweater and extracted a ring that must have held fifty keys. I stood quietly by her side. You could smell the common toilet nearby and hear the perpetual run of its flushing water. Not another soul was in sight. As far as I could tell this giant hotel was completely deserted, save for matron and me.

A click of the lock and my door opened. I saw four beds, a sink and a wide, floor to ceiling window that looked out onto a pile of junk equipment and

broken farm trucks four floors below. She turned on the light, spoke “it is so” and gently closed the door as she left. My hand reached for the cord and turned off the overhead light. The sun was setting in the distance, turning the junkyard into a crimson graveyard. A shudder went up and down my spine as I realized for the first time that there was no heat in my room. I walked to the window.

Who knew I was here? There must be thousands of people in the world who are, at this very moment, alone and vulnerable. A college freshman far from home, a small child from an East African country, sobbing by the roadside unable to find his parents, a multiple offender slumped in solitary in Leavenworth Prison.

What I was feeling was no big deal. I could still return to Novosibirsk right now with my new and old friends, getting ready for the evening’s activity. Yet for some reason I had a calling to be alone in Alma Aty, Kazakhstan, far to the south. It would be years later before I discovered none of us are really ever alone. But for now I lay down on my bed, covered myself with my vast sheepskin coat and tried to sleep.

It seemed like only moments passed before I heard the knock on the door. My eyes opened and the room was in total darkness. How long had I slept?

“Da,” I said too loudly, “Kto eta?” No response, just silence. I repeated my question. Nothing. I opened the door.

There stood the short, stocky man I recognized from the hotel elevator. He did not look at my face but with his strong hands he grabbed my shirt and lifted me off the floor. Then he began walking forward in a very controlled and deliberate way, pushing me backward into the room. I tried to cry but nothing came out. I struggled but my feet could find no traction. Then with

a mighty surge he lifted me like a bag of grain and threw me up and through the window. Glass went flying everywhere and I fell back and down four stories onto the snow covered junkyard.

There was only silence. I was still breathing but I was in total darkness. Then came the knock. I reached down and lifted off my sheepskin coat. I was soaked through with sweat. But I could see the window at the end of the room, unbroken.

“Aftobus c chac tyt” I heard the matron’s voice say. I told her I was coming, gathered up my things and fled the room.

Afganski

Alma Aty is a large city, built at high altitudes and, like Denver, often polluted in winter with the inversion of mountain winds. The last time I was here, the time the KGB approached Marina, we stayed at the Modeo Hotel high up near the alpine glacier. But that was summer. Now the Modeo was cut off till spring by deep snows and high winds. Intourist had arranged a cab from the airport and because I was a foreigner traveling alone I was assigned to their hotel near their downtown park.

I had eaten here before and I had found it very friendly and accommodating. The front desk greeted me as if I were an old friend and gave me a very comfortable room on the second floor. They prepared for me a small supper even though the kitchen was closed at this late hour. I had had a long and emotional day to say the least and all I wanted was to lie down and sleep. I had just drifted off when my room telephone rang. I jolted awake and grabbed the receiver on the bed table.

“Hello Peter,” said a voice in perfect English. “My name is Zauria. My mother and I were wondering if you would like to come to supper.”

I looked at my watch and it said 11:45 P.M..

“I am sorry Zauria but do I know you?”

“No, she replied, “but hopefully you will. My father Alexi is on the way to your hotel. He is driving a green Lada with a roof rack?” I smiled to myself. I had never heard a Russian say the word “roof rack”. I began to relax.

“I am sorry Zauria, maybe tomorrow. I have had a long day and it is late.”

Just then there was a knock on the door. I excused myself from the phone and opened it, only to find a sweet looking Kazakh man holding a bottle of orange juice.

“Hello, Peter,” he smiled in Russian. “I am Alexi. I am honored to escort you. Here is some orange juice because you must be thirsty.”

OK, if this is Kazakhstan’s version of the KGB, then sign me up. I realized that I was punch drunk with fatigue but thought ‘why not.’

“What the hell,” I said to Alexi in English. “We’re on the way,” I laughed to Zauria on the phone and then headed out the door.

The apartment was gorgeous. Kazakh carpets hung on the wall joined by some pen and ink drawings. A grand piano took up much of the living room and laughter and delicious smells drifted in from the kitchen. Alexi took my coat and asked me to sit on the couch. As he stood there putting my sheepskin away, he seemed interestingly out of place. Alexi could be a ‘chaban’, his crinkled face staring into the wind and cracked hands gently scratching that special place between a ram’s horns.

“Good evening Peter and thank you for coming”. Zauria was maybe ten years my junior, an Oriental Kazakh but dressed like someone sitting down for tea at Oxford. “Please come into the kitchen to meet my mother. This is where we will eat as it is more comfortable than coming out here.”

First onion soup, then fresh salad, finally a leg of mutton boiled in milk. To be topped by a mild liquor. I was now feeling full and sleepy. Over the course of the meal Zauria told me the story of her life and that of her parents. She worked as a professional translator but her passion was archeology. She had studied at university and graduated fluent in English. Her professor had been British.

“This has been a lovely supper,” I told them, “but before I can sleep tonight I must know how you knew I was at the hotel.” Zauria’s mother laughed and for the first time in the evening took center stage.

“We have a friend in Seattle named Diana. She has visited our home here many times. Someone from your group in Siberia called her earlier today saying that they were worried about you coming here on your own, especially in the middle of winter. This friend of yours must have known that Diana knew me. So it was most convenient for us to immediately agree to ensure that you at least did not go to sleep hungry on your first night here.” With that, she clapped her hands together and laughed.

“Maybe you thought we were the KGB?”

At that moment I was filled with a variety of emotions. I was angry that someone thought I needed protection. I felt stupid because in fact I had wondered if these lovely people might have a covert agenda. I felt grateful for their kindness but also vulnerable because I still had more questions than answers. And I was exhausted and needed to say goodnight. Zauria came to the rescue.

“Alexi will now take you back to the hotel. Even here in our beautiful city you should not be on the streets after midnight. But I invite you back tomorrow because I want you to meet some of my friends that very much want to meet you. And I want to play the piano for you.”

Because I had no idea why I was in Alma Aty in the first place, I agreed to await her call in the morning and rode with Alexi back to the hotel.

I woke with the sun pouring into my hotel room. I showered and went down to the dining room for breakfast. Because I was in an Intourist hotel every staff knew how to handle foreigners eating preferences. The main

dining room was empty as the attentive waiter presented me with one glass of juice, two fried eggs with a slice of tomato, three pieces of thin, dark rye bread, a glass of kefir and a pot of tea. That is what everyone got, no choice and it tasted great.

At 9:00 A.M. I watched as a school bus, just like the American one that took me to school in the first grade, pull up in front of the hotel. Except this bus had the middle missing. Same front door that the bus driver swung open, same rear escape hatch. But there were seats for only a couple of dozen passengers. Zauria opened the door and beckoned me to enter. There sitting behind her were a group of young men, all in their 20's and 30's, smiling, waving to me as if we were old friends. Each wanted me to be in their row so I made my way towards the back as the bus jerkily started across the square and down the main boulevard of Alma Aty.

I sat down next to a smiling young man named Bolot who shook my hand excitedly and began talking rapidly in Russian but with such a strong local dialect that I could not understand a word. Someone next to him named Timur tried to assist but his accent was unintelligible as well. I looked to Zauria for help but she was busy giving the driver instructions. Finally the photos came out of the wallets. First the pretty girl, then mother and father, then the helicopter, then the desert with mountains in the distance, then some horses, then some bodies lying on the ground. Other men began taking out similar pictures, different wives or girls, different parents, but the same stark mountains and many bodies.

“This is what we did,” said a clear voice in Russian over my shoulder. “We are Afganskis, we are your Vietnam. Tell us about your Vietnam.”

All at once it became very hot, almost stifling in the bus. My mind was racing. Yes, I was in Vietnam but I never shot anyone. I spent most of my

time there looking for office space, arranging for phones to be installed. Yes, I listened to testimony of what crimes our clients allegedly committed but I was no combat veteran. How did they know I had been in Vietnam in the first place?

“What was it like?” the same clear voice asked. “Will you tell us?”

“Maybe,” I replied. “But later, not now”.

These young Kazakh men were Afganskis, veterans of their war with Afghanistan. The Soviet Union fought the insurgent Afghan rebel mujahedeen from 1979-1989. The Afghans were heavily armed with US supplied weapons and advisors which ultimately led to Soviet withdrawal after 10 years of brutal fighting. 14,000 Russian soldiers were killed and 53,000 injured. Countless Afghans went dead or missing. The Russian veterans of this war returned to a country that was falling apart. Many of them had severe psychological issues but they encountered a system that was totally unprepared to meet their needs.

When Chernobyl’s nuclear reactor melted down in the spring of 1986, hundreds of these veterans flocked to the disaster site and rushed into the radioactive zone unprotected as they tried to save others. Virtually all of them died shortly thereafter from radiation poisoning. Perhaps this was one way they could reconcile the horrors they had committed in Afghanistan.

We drove for about an hour north from the city, down from the Tien Shan Mountains and the snow and smog and out onto the steppe. Here it was noticeably warmer and some of the trees even had leaves. We arrived at a small village with hot springs. Several baskets of food were unloaded on a

table in a small park and I made my way to a bench and sat down. As we started our picnic lunch I asked Zauria what this trip was all about.

“Well,” she replied, “when Diana called I asked her about your interests and she told me you had been in Vietnam. I’m sorry if this is an imposition but no one in my country is interested in talking to these returning veterans. These men feel very lost. I thought you might be able to help.”

I remembered back to the last day on the Lloyd Thomas, my crew painting the after deck in preparation for departure for the war. I had walked off a free man that day. Why had I not done more to stop the ship? My men had died and I had not. How could I possibly be of help to these Afghan veterans?

I don’t remember much about the picnic that followed. Zauria translated into English the horrors of war that each man told in the Kazakh language. More photos appeared and were passed around. We built a small fire to keep us warm. We did not leave until every soldier shared his story. Some men trembled as they spoke, some cried, others talked in a whisper. My role seemed to be as a witness, the collector of the nightmares of strangers I would never see again. I asked a few questions but said almost nothing.

We made our way back to the city by dark. I was invited to supper at the communal apartments where these men and their families lived. Temir and his wife slept in a room with his mother in law and a 6 year old nephew. They shared a bathroom and kitchen with eight other people on the sixth floor of a run-down Khrushchev era apartment building. Laundry was washed in a bathtub, then hung in the hallway to dry. Meat and butter were kept on the roof in a wire box to keep out the ravens and other thieves. Families took turns cooking on the gas stove. The rooms were stifling hot and smelled of cheap cognac, wet clothes and frying potatoes. It appeared

that most of my new friends lived in these top two floors. In spite of crying babies and a barking dog their wives quickly prepared a lovely meal for everyone.

Bottles of vodka were passed around and toasts were made in several languages. Finally food appeared. Soup was followed by salad, then meat and potatoes and finally a rich store-bought cake. I sat at the place of honor in the overheated room stripped down to a T-shirt and, as I looked around the room, I realized how young all these people were. At their age I was in my second year of college sleeping through my classes.

I began to grow groggy but was revived by the arrival of a large TV that was placed in the middle of the room. Supper dishes were cleared, chairs and tables were hastily removed and as I sat leaning against a nearby wall I was told that a special movie had been acquired for my viewing. “My God,” I thought “not home movies of Afghan genocide.” The VCR slipped into the player and suddenly Tina Turner’s voice boomed out into the room singing “We Don’t Need Another Hero”. ‘Mad Max and the Thunderdome’ was underway.

Images of death and destruction filled the screen. Children were pursued across a vast wasteland by giant killing machines. The apocalypse had arrived and the only one standing in the way of total annihilation was a young Mel Gibson speaking dubbed Russian. I looked around the room. Everyone, young and old, was glued to the screen. I felt myself grow very tired as I slipped over the edge.

Cold wind and snow now blew down from the Tein Shan Mountains as we walked to the cab stand on Breshnev Plochet. It was well past midnight but all the Afghan vets and their families from the sixth floor apartment complex wanted to wish me farewell. It had taken a good 30 minutes to get

all the children dressed for the cold. I had spent this time bent over a foul smelling toilet throwing up the day's meals. With a head spinning out of control and a stomach tossing up dry heaves, I led a motley parade across the square. My new soldier friends negotiated fiercely with one of the few cabbies that were still out and pre-paid my fare to the hotel. I hugged all the men, shook hands with all the women and we promised to see each other again. "In sha-allah" we repeated to one another, "If God is willing."

I lay down on my bed in my small hotel room and tried to sleep but the stories and images of the last twenty four hours kept running through my head. I could not stop the heaves so every few minutes I made my way to the bathroom.

I looked at my watch. It was four am. I must have fallen asleep hugging my toilet. I crawled up off the floor and pulled on some clothes. The hotel lobby was empty as I made my way out through its front door and crossed the street to the park. Dense fog greeted me turning the snowflakes to ice crystals. Off in the distance the first city busses of the day were starting up their diesel motors.

I walked to an empty park bench, brushed off the snow with my hands, sat down and began to cry again. Slowly and quietly a middle-aged woman emerged from the darkness and took the bench across from me. I felt self-conscious as I continued to sob, coughing up phlegm into my handkerchief. I also felt very vulnerable. It was dark, I was clearly not a local and was easy prey for the 'bandits' about which my friends had warned me. It was very cold and I was unable to move.

My tears took me down inside myself and the deeper I went, the more vulnerable I became. I remembered my boarding school graduation at

Milton Academy. The key-note speaker was a renowned diplomat and humanitarian who ended his speech by saying:

“You all have received the best education that money can buy. You come from the privileged, now you must go to the underprivileged and change their lives. To do this you must change the way the world works. This is your task, your mandate from God. Make your family, this school and the greater community proud of what you do.” He failed to mention how I was to do this or when I might have done enough.

I now know that I was on the Afghan battlefield that night in Alma Aty, living the horror of that war and taking ownership of these men’s pain. The Afganski soldiers wanted someone to witness their stories, not change their lives. In Vietnam I had likewise taken on the pain of our clients, causing my emotional breakdown in Tokyo when the weight became too heavy to bear. And Jane had apparently seen this coming.

. “We all have our own pain and there is rarely any profit in taking on the pain of others,” writes horse trainer Linda Kahonov in Riding between the Worlds. One day my own horses would mirror for me my own pain and fear, those that I had hidden so deeply that I could no longer find their hiding place alone. But that day was still far in the future.

Slowly my stomach muscles began to relax, my dry heaves ceased and my tears fell more freely. My fingers brushed over my cheeks and dropped to my lap. I raised my head, looked up for the first time and smiled over at my neighbor. She smiled back, gave me a simple nod, rose to her feet and made her way down the snowy path and back into the darkness.

Goodbye Pavel



Pavel and Platon

My mother used to say that bad news travels faster than good. But it had taken two months for Galina's letter to reach me here in Maine telling me her husband and my old friend Pavel had died. The year was 2004. I had come to their small Russian village more than 12 years before to buy sheep. On my first visit I met their one-ton stallion named Platon who has just sired a beautiful colt named Valiet. I looked forward to working with that young horse every time I visited their farm. I remember the time Valiet

and I took off over the back pasture on our first ride, him full of beans and me holding on for dear life thinking what a mess I would be in if I fell off and broke my neck.

When Pavel became sick years later he asked me to take Valiet to the States, give him a good home and breed him to some New England draft mares. I was touched by his kindness but he just said he didn't want to worry about the horse after he was gone.

Many people still use horses in this part of Russia, mostly on wagons and sleighs. When Pavel and Galina moved to Sheplova in 1987, they used Platon to drag timbers from the nearby forest to make their hay barn and sheep and cattle sheds. Gorbachev was president, the Soviet Union was coming undone and Pavel and Galina, both in their late forties, had lost their Moscow jobs and moved to the country to grow their own food with animal power. The only food they would be eating was what they would grow in their garden.

Sheplova is about three hours north of Moscow and on the same latitude as Hudson Bay so it sometimes takes a while in the spring for the soil to warm up. On my first trip back since Pavel's death, Galina and I walked out over their 100 acres of hay fields in early June. We came upon old hay ricks she and Pavel had made on which they dried their grass and clover hay. Many of the tripods lay crumbled on their sides and we collected them like old bones and piled them up.



"I had to sell the sheep and the horses," she said sadly. "I have only one worker, Sasha, who is older than me. How can we live here in the winter alone? How can I ever survive now that Pavel is gone?" As we walked to the field furthest from the village, Galina's log home and barn disappeared behind the uncut hay.

"During the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917," Galina recalled "there was a young and very courageous soldier named Nickolai Antoniovitch Yarmilovitch who fought for the Tsar's White Army. By the time he was 30 he had been promoted to a general and his leadership qualities were renowned throughout Russia. When the communists won, he fled east and carried on resistance for many years. Just when people thought he had been killed, he would surface.

"Finally he stopped fighting, married, had three daughters and became a school teacher in Russia's Far East. But he was born here in the Moscow region and he and his family dreamed of returning to the west. But this would be a dangerous voyage for him as he was still considered by the authorities to be an enemy of the Soviet State.

“Somehow in the 1950’s he and his wife secretly came to Sheplova, our village which is miles from its neighbors at the end of a dirt road.

“Two hundred years ago the Tsar sent anyone who spoke out against his regime to this village. If anyone tried to escape, the front of their tongue would be cut off so they could not speak correctly. This is what ‘sheplova’ means in Russia, one who cannot form words. How ironic that Nikolai chose to live here.

“So this old general, Nikolai Antoniovitch, arrived and offered to teach in our small school. The people agreed, kept his secret from the police because you see they were all descended from people who disagreed. They gave him this log house where we now live in exchange for his teaching. The communist government still had a warrant out for his arrest even after all these years but he was never found. When he died 10 years ago at the age of 97, his younger brother in Canada inherited the house and he sold it to Pavel and me.”

The sun broke through the giant thunderheads and a quick rain shower fell from the sky. I myself had been coming to Russia for over twenty years, to work with farmers, buy their wool and sometimes give advice. But mostly I would listen. I knew that there was nothing I had to offer Galina in this moment of loss, only my friendship and my love. The ocean of uncut hay around us unfurled till it met the distant forest and murmured, "Who will cut us now that Pavel is gone?" When the winter winds raced across these snowy fields, I would be at home in my cozy farm in Maine. Where would Galina be?



Planting Potatoes with Valiet

"Pavel was Jewish, you knew that," Galina said. "And you know that there are not many Jewish farmers left in Russia. In the Russian Orthodox Church there is a tradition. Nine days after a friend dies, all his neighbors gather to remember him. We had such a gathering here on the farm in March. People called Pavel a pioneer, a dreamer, a teacher, a friend. They said that he gave so much that there was nothing left for himself."

When Pavel was a young man he shod horses in Moscow at the Troika Stadium just a few blocks from Luba's apartment. Later he trained riding horses but his love and his dream had always been to farm with the large Ruski Taji Lavorse breed which he later brought to Sheplova.



Valiet

Pavel's first mare Vietka was bred by Platon and then along came Valiet. He mowed hay with the mare and stallion and Valiet began planting potatoes when he was three. Ten acres of wheat and twelve acres of oats were cut by the horses as well. One spring during planting I came to Sheplova to do a workshop on sheep shearing. It had been raining for weeks and all the roads in and out of the village were deep in mud. But the farmers came anyway, on horseback and wagon.

Later that summer I returned to help with the haying. It was in July. When I left Maine on a Friday, our summer haying was in full swing and I had been raking hay that very morning with our horses on an International dump rake. That evening I jumped on a plane in Boston and the following

afternoon was walking down the dirt road to Sheplova. As I rounded the corner, I saw Pavel, also on a horse drawn dump rake identical to mine, making windrows of hay in this large field.

Because there were no phones in the village, no one knew I was coming. When Pavel finally spied me, he signaled for me to come over, gave me the reins and said he had a haying crew to get together. With no further ado, Valiet and I were back to work raking hay just like I had done the day before. For the first time I no longer felt like a guest but more like part of a team and that was a very special moment for me, one I will always cherish.



Raking Hay

As I write this final chapter of my time with Pavel, it is a June evening in Sheplova and I am in the same small bedroom in which I have slept my visits these last twelve years. The walls of my room are over 16" thick but

there is still enough light coming through the small ornate window so I don't have to turn on the light, even though it is approaching eleven pm.

I remember a very cold January morning several years before. Twenty American farmers and their families from Eastern Washington State had braved a Russian winter to visit Sheplova and meet Pavel and Galina. We had left Moscow in a light snow at 5:00 AM and arrived at Sheplova's access road by mid-morning. But when the bus driver saw only a single lane plowed road leading to Sheplova, he refused to drive any further.

Not to be outdone, the group put on their wool caps and heavy coats and headed down the 5 kilometer road to the village. The sun warmed the day, the wind began to blow and slowly the group began to stretch out into a long thin line. I began to wonder if we had bitten off too much when I spotted Misha, a neighbor of Pavel's coming towards us on his horse drawn sleigh. When he saw our mob stretched out on his normally deserted winter road, he froze in panic. He began to turn his sleigh and run.

"Misha", I yelled, but he refused to turn his head. "Misha, please it is I, Peter!" As I ran up to him, he turned and said,

"My God, what is going on? What are all these people doing here?" He was truly shaken.

I explained what we were up to and asked him if he would take his sleigh and go back down the road and pick up the stragglers. At first he was reluctant but as a few of our group began to arrive at his sled and shake hands, his reluctance faded and soon he was a man on a mission.

Racing down the row of trekkers, he spun his sleigh around and commanded the last in line to get in. Now apparently there is not a lot of

Russian spoken in Eastern Washington and Misha does tend to have an overbearing attitude that may have explained the confused look on the faces of his passengers as they shot past me and down the road towards the village. (*Galina came into my room as I was writing and when I shared this memory with her, she collapsed into the chair with uncontrolled laughter*).



Singing at Sheplova in the early days

Like a crusader, Misha returned a few minutes later to fetch his next victim. When I finally arrived on foot at the farm, everyone was packed into the living room enjoying a hearty lunch with Pavel, Galina and Misha in their glory. The Russians call the spirit of the small village "derevnaya". No matter where you are in the world, if you meet a Russian and he is a general or she is a doctor or well-armed body guard, all you have to do is ask them about the small village and they will immediately soften, take you into their confidence and share the precious memories of working with

their grandparents in the village garden of their youth. You might be driving with a friend through a deserted forest and all at once the car slows to a reverent crawl and your friend says "look, I think there was once a village there".

Perhaps it is because Pavel put so much of himself into his land, his animals and his village that for me he lives on. He has moved across that line of vision, harder to touch but not hard to feel. And I plan to return to Sheplova as often as I can to check in with my old friend, maybe set back up a hay rick or two and listen for the chatter of the rakes and the breath of the horses as they move across the fields as one more Russian village refuses to die.



Pavel and Galina with their flock

Flies in the sun

1974

It was a bright blue morning sky that greeted us my first day of mowing hay with horses. I was driving and Bob was walking ahead looking for rocks in the field. You could see the breath of the horses shoot out of their nostrils on this bright and cool July morning in 1974.

That was forty some odd years ago and since that time we have counted on our draft horses every year to fill our barn with hay. For the first 20 years we would put hay in the barn loose. The team would first cut it and when it was dry, rake it into long, straight windrows. Then they would pull a 16 foot long wagon which towed a loading device that would pick up these rows of hay and convey them up off the field and onto the wagon. One person would be up front driving the team while another worked with a pitchfork to spread the hay out uniformly onto the deck as it came aboard.

As this ancient equipment progressed up and down the field, the pile grew wider and taller and the two workers progressively grew higher and higher off the ground. This was a lot of fun but by age 45 my shoulders began to give in to all the pitchfork work and we purchased a baler, a miraculous device that presses the hay into cubes, wraps them in twine and spit them out onto the field where the folks on our haying crew stacks them on a wagon for transport to the barn.

When I was young and didn't know any better, I treated our horses like slaves. Not that I intentionally abused them. I just had no idea that they were thinking, feeling and caring beasts. While haying we would watch the clouds for rain, thank the gods for the sun and run like hell for the barn if it

began to storm. The hay came first and we took care of the horses only when the crop was safely under cover.

Every couple of weeks during the summer a cold front come through, bringing after it 4-5 days of sunny, dry weather. Now with global warming you are lucky to get 2-3 consecutive days of haying weather. As my neighbor Lester says, “If this were easy, everyone would be doing it.” But what this new weather pattern has done is put new pressure on a system powered by four legged animals that can only go so fast. One summer Willie and Nick helped us realize that we needed to revisit the way we not only put in hay but the way we manage ours and their lives.

It was mid-July and a warm front was slowly moving through New England. This weather was very hot and humid, filling the air with giant yellow flies that made our horses bleed when they bit. These bugs are at their worst with the high humidity that precedes the front. This day were waiting for the front to pass, bringing with it some thunder and heavy rain. Then a high pressure zone began to build in, promising us a few days of dry, haying weather.

“If you snooze you lose” so I was up early to greet the new high. After visiting with the 5:00 am TV weather forecaster, I was out the door to mow. We have a device called a mower-conditioner that cuts, crushes and places the mown grass in long windrows to dry. It might take three hours to mow two acres of hay, which is just about the right amount of hay for a team to handle. That summer we were down to two working draft horses and I had adapted the mower so a team could pull it. We harnessed while the dew was on the ground and patiently waited for the morning sun to burn it off. We then began mowing.

After a quick bite of hay for lunch, we headed out to flip this new mown hay with a tedder. This device which looks like a giant egg beater is pulled by a single axle cart upon which I sit and the horses pull. As we crossed and re-cross the field, the hay was tossed and flipped in the air so that the sun could work its magic. If we were blessed with a dry, clear night, we would be back at the field by nine AM and when the dew was gone we would flip it one more time.

By 2:00 that following afternoon we began raking the field into our final windrows. Then we hitched the horses to the baler which would pump out neatly wrapped packets of hay which the field crew would put in the barn

This scenario was always complex and filled with pitfalls. Over the years I always counted on the horses to be the one steady cog that would always turn, no matter if the baler broke or the rake came apart. Somehow with the horses I knew we would always get the hay in. But on this day the horses would teach me a lesson.

About six years ago Marty and I were in Yaroslavl, Russia working with our artisans there. We were joined for breakfast one morning by some friends from New Hampshire, Betsey and Sam who also worked in Yaroslavl at a local orphanage. They asked if we could come visit some of the older teenage children and talk to them about our farm. I happen to have two DVD's with me showing two well-known 'natural horsemanship' trainers working with young colts. These were very visual tools not requiring any language so I showed them at the orphanage that afternoon.

Very few of the teenagers present had any exposure to animals, much less horses. The first film showed a trainer from Texas working a young colt, gentling it and building trust over a three-day period. On the final day he slowly mounted the colt and rode it calmly around the ring. The second

film was about a trainer from Wyoming who, after a good deal of bucking and banging around, gentled and rode a colt in one day.

Both men, Buck Brannaman and Martin Black, were well known and respected leaders in this field and the students watching seemed mesmerized by the evolving relationship between the rider and the horse. These kids were between 16 and 18 and spent most of their childhood as urban orphans. Glances of understanding would shoot back and forth between students as a colt would respond cautiously to the trainers' advances.

After the films were over Sam and Betsey passed out snacks and I asked the students to comment on the different training styles. Valodia raised his hand.

"I liked the Texas cowboy. He knew when his colt was ready. He was willing to wait as long as was needed. I liked the Montana cowboy too but I don't understand why he didn't take longer with his horse. The colt was not ready. But I guess it all worked out in the end."

I was stunned by their observations. I happened to know that the Montana cowboy had a film crew for just one day. He had to bring it all together whether his horse was ready or not. Valodia then added, "It happens only once, this first time ride. Why rush it?"

Now back in Maine, the weatherman had promised three days of sun with only a 30% chance of rain the evening of Day 2. So we mowed about two acres of hay (200 bales). As I harnessed the horses in the barn on day three, I remembered I had not checked their feet in a while. Willie hates me poking around so I took him out to the round pen, the same training device the Wyoming and Texas cowboys used to gentle their colts. There I lifted

up his left front foot and with a hoof pick I began to clean out his feet of dirt and small stones. I felt him begin to resist, to shift his weight onto me as he prepared to pull back his foot. Quickly I dropped the foot, let out a “wooshing” sound with my mouth and drove him away from me and around the edge of the pen in circles. As he jogged along, he turned his head and begged to be allowed to return. Willie hates it when I send him away and is so grateful when I allow him to join me again. Usually it takes only one stern admonishment before he stands for me.

With both horses’ feet cleaned and trimmed I loaded them on the trailer and I noticed that we had fallen 45 minutes behind schedule. If Valodia were here he might laugh and say “whose schedule is this anyway?” Willie began to sense the shift in my mood. I explained to him that I needed to move along because every hour the sun gets hotter which may be good for the hay but rough on the horses. He did not seem to be very impressed.

I parked the horse trailer in a shaded portion of the hay field, unloaded the animals and hitched them to the tedder. I climbed up onto the fore cart, a Roman chariot looking device on rubber wheels, and looked down at my team. Out from my left hand ran a long leather reign, splitting over Willie’s back and clipped to the left side of the bit in both horses’ mouths. An identical one ran from my right hand, splitting and attaching to the team’s right bit ring. Pull on the left rein, team moves left, pull on the right, team moves right. Pull together and they both stop.

Gripping both reins in my left hand, I slowly reached with my right and turned the key to the 27 horsepower Deutsch Diesel engine that powers the egg beater tedder. The key clicked once, all the instruments on the display panel came to life and both horses’ ears prick up. I turned the key further and the engine rumbled to life.

Now I did a check on how I was doing. Did I believe that in the next two hours my two horses would, in a relaxed yet focused way, walk back and forth in the intense sunshine, not bothered by the flies and mosquitos? Or as the organic bug spray that costs more per ounce than a high end craft beer runs off their legs and chest with their sweat, would they balk at the end of a windrow and drag me into the shade of the nearby forest? I whispered a silent prayer and headed out across the field.

At first all went well. They walked up and down the field, the tedder flipping the hay in the air. I stood on the cart with the engine running next to me while the horses settled into their routine. Every once and a while the tedder's spinning tines hit a rock hidden under the hay and the loud scraping sound irritated the horses and they stepped up their pace into a slow trot. I calmly talked them back to a slow walk and found a shady spot every 10 minutes to rest. In about an hour we were over half done. But now the sun was at its hottest, the flies starting to attack even in the shady spots and the bug spray was long gone.

The horses began to tire. I could tell because at the end of the field when we turned, they wanted to go into a run and it took all my strength to stay in control. To them, running with a load seemed like the logical solution. "Let's get this over with," they told me as they fought the reins. The flies were everywhere now, under their bellies and on their necks. I should have quit, loaded them in the trailer, taken them home, cooled them off in the barn and finished this in the cool of the evening.

But like the Wyoming cowboy, I had a schedule to keep. You make hay when the sun shines, not after it goes down. So I pushed them and we finished the field. I turned off the motor, climbed down off the cart and headed them to the trailer in the shade. Suddenly they made a sharp swing

to the left, tipping the fore cart off the ground and threatening to turn it upside down, crushing the motor and the instrument panel. I started to panic and struggled to regain my balance. My voice was ready to scream. But I caught myself and used the reins, not my voice, to swing them back to safety.

When they were loaded and tied in the stock trailer I slumped down in the shade of an old apple tree. My hands were shaking. I took off my leather driving gloves and opened and closed my fingers. My arms and back were aching. I realized that I must have been tense for hours. For the sake of getting the job done I had repressed my fears and my common sense. But in the end I had fooled no one. I broke the rules that afternoon. I had lost my horses' trust.

Cat and Mouse 2000



Sunday in Moscow 1972

Photo by Valeri Krupsky

I have never been in a submarine and know almost nothing about them. But many years after leaving the Navy I received a telephone call from Peter Huchthausen, a new friend from an adjoining town here in Maine. He had heard I was on my way to Moscow and he asked me to do him a favor.

“Peter,” he began, “during the Cold War I became aware of an accident between a Soviet and an American submarine. Now that the incident has been de-classified I am writing a book about it. I was wondering if you mind taking the first draft over to a Russian friend of mine who will proof read it for accuracy.”

I readily agreed and Peter dropped off a small package a few days later. I was in a rush to get everything together for the trip and did not think much more about his book till I was going through my stuff in Moscow a few

days later. I called the phone number on the envelope and talked with a Mr. Ivan Borisavitch who gave me instructions to an apartment complex on the outskirts of the city.

I am normally unable to tell the difference between an upscale neighborhood and a sketchy one in Moscow but something told me that the building I was entering was different from its neighbors. There was not that worn out look from years of neglect. In fact there was a French feel to the architecture coupled with the smell of exotic cooking.

I rang Ivan's bell and a short stocky man with bright blue eyes greeted me with a happy "hello, welcome to Russia" in perfect English. His wife behind him pointed me to a table set for a delicious lunch.

"I am so happy and grateful that you have brought Peter's book to us. It will provide an important milestone in US-Soviet history. Have you heard the news about the Kursk?"

I had heard on the way over that a Russian submarine based in Murmansk had recently sunk in the White Sea and an international effort was underway to save the crew at the bottom of the ocean.

"Come and sit down and we can talk. But first we must eat some of Masha's wonderful cooking.

"Have you read Peter's book?" Ivan asked as we made our way to the dining room. I confessed that I had not.

"Well, it tells an amazing story. Peter worked for your government here in Moscow during the 'difficult times' and through his job he heard rumors of

an accident where one of your subs crashed with one of ours. But it was in the interest of both sides to keep this quiet for years. Then one of these days along comes perestroika and Gorbachev and things between our countries begin to improve.”

Masha placed a delicious soup on the table and motioned for us to eat as we talked.

“Well, Peter and his wife were at a resort in New Hampshire one winter and during supper they heard a conversation at a nearby table that would change Peter’s life. A man who had been an officer on an American submarine was describing to his dinner partner an accident with his sub and a Russian one.”

“Peter could not believe his ears. He was overhearing the whole story first hand, the names of both the American and Russian subs, even the date and location. He waited until this man had finished his meal, then he slowly approached him on the stairs to the rooms above. Well, you can imagine Peter’s excitement when the man agreed to extend his evening and tell him the whole story.

As Ivan lifted his soup spoon to his lips, a conspiratorial smile crossed his lips and he said “now I will tell you the story that the stranger told Peter.”

The Stranger *“I was the engineering officer on the nuclear powered submarine the USS Augusta in the summer of 1985. We were off the New England coast searching for Soviet subs when we located the K-219 in about 1000 feet of water. We could identify her exactly by the sound her propellers made in the water.”*

“At the time the US Navy had several submerged subs stationed off the

coast of Murmansk where the K-219 was based. We had Russians spying for us on shore who would see the name of a sub as it left the harbor and we would record the sub's name and their prop noises. Each sub had a unique fingerprint and soon we knew not only which sub was which but we knew the names of each of their captains and their specific history.

“So on this day we began to engage the K-219 with a special technique that prevented us from being detected. This meant that we knew she was there but she had no idea that we were there.

“These were games that everyone played, maybe crazy games and it was just a matter of time before someone got hurt. We were both off the coast of New Jersey in international waters so K-219 had as much right to be there as we did. But try and tell that to our captain. He wanted to see how close he could get, then scare the pants off his rival and send him back to Murmansk with his tail between his legs.

“As engineering officer, I had to slow down our atomic reactors as part of our disguise which meant we had little forward motion. We were basically coasting, two nuclear atomic reactor systems moving dangerously close to each other like two sharks circling for the kill. Except one was blind. All at once there was a crash and I went lurching forward. We had rammed the side of the K-219. Our damage control people reported that we had water coming into the forward part of the ship but there were no people in that compartment and we were in no danger of sinking. The captain broke silence, started up our engines and ordered that we surface immediately to render aid to the Russian sub if needed.

“To our knowledge there was no precedent for aiding the Russians at sea. We knew that we were not to break radio silence and that the higher ups

would decide how to politically handle this. But we also knew that these Russians were human beings and but for the grace of God we could be the ones in trouble. So the captain decided that we would render immediate assistance the minute they surfaced, if in fact they ever surfaced.

“Because I spoke Russian I was one of the few on deck to lower a life raft. It was as flat as a country pond that day. We had a man on the conning tower with a rifle looking for sharks. Several of our crew was fluent in Russian and they were on deck with me. It was very quiet, not a person spoke once everything was in place.

“As the ship’s engineer and also a graduate of atomic engineering school, a horrible scenario was slowly playing out in my mind. If the K-219, also a nuke, was so badly damaged that she should sink before her crew could shut down her nuclear power plant, when she hit the bottom her reactors would overheat and explode like a nuclear bomb under us. We would all die, our ship would add to the radioactive cloud and we would make atomic history.

“But no one spoke of leaving. And very soon the Soviet sub surfaced not three hundred yards away. Our raft was lowered into the water but before it made its way half the distance, a Russian flag signalman appeared on the deck and asked us to please call our rescue boat back. They told us that they had radioed a Russian freighter who was about 2 hours away to come to their rescue. Our captain replied that we had a doctor on board who spoke Russian but apparently there was no need for his services.

“As far as I was concerned that was our cue to depart the scene and head for New London to attend to our damages but the old man would hear nothing of leaving. We stayed there for 7 hours before the freighter came

along side. We could see that the subs pumps were working overtime to empty water from the seriously damaged hull. Then when we thought the last of the crew was safely on board, the freighter departed and suddenly the sub began to sink. Our captain immediately ordered everyone below and our ship to submerge, in spite of our injury. Because we had such a much faster submersed speed, he was willing to take the risk. We made it to our base at New London in nine hours, arrived intentionally after dark and were escorted to a special dock where we were examined for nuclear contamination and told to never speak of the accident.”

Ivan paused for a moment as his wife went to make coffee. Then he began to tell his part of the story.

Ivan *“When the man came to the end of his tale for the night, he turned and made his way up the stairs to bed. Peter worried if the speaker felt he had said too much and he could not sleep that night as he was sure that there was much more to this story. Luckily Peter met me several years later when a group of retired Russian and American submariners got together in Florida. You see I too was a sub captain and I knew the rest of the story. And now thanks to changes in both our countries I was at liberty to inform him of the truth. So I will continue the tale.*

“The Russian captain Nikolai Zateyev knew almost immediately that his ship was in dire straits. He had trouble cooling his reactors down. It was a choice of running the pumps to save his crew until the freighter arrived or cooling his reactors so as to avoid a meltdown. When the crew was safely aboard the freighter, he and the engineering officer knew they had run out of time. Knowing what lay ahead, the captain, the engineering officer and two other crew members volunteered to stay on board while the ship sank. This way they were able to control the speed at which the sub fell, slowly

so that the reactors had time to cool. But at some point, no one knows for sure when, the K-219 broke apart under the huge pressure of the deep ocean and all four men perished.

“The courage of these four men prevented a nuclear accident of epic proportions off your coast. They received the highest award that the Soviet Union can present posthumously. They were heroes but nobody will know this until Peter’s book is published and released here in Russia. The book will be quite controversial and timely considering that today we have once again submariners trapped at the bottom of the sea. I am very happy that the book is safely here.”

I love Russian cooking but I can honestly say that I did not taste a bit of Masha’s meal that day. My mind went to the crew of the Kursk who were now sitting at the bottom of the White Sea as Russian politicians were arguing over whether to accept America’s aid in the rescue. And there was also a rumor that an American sub was seen entering a Norwegian port with a damaged bow. How would Peter’s book taste to the higher ups on both side of the Atlantic?

Masha and Ivan and I finished our coffee and I rose to depart. As my host shook my hand he held it for one long moment.

“Peter, I need to ask you for one more favor. Peter’s father was a great hero to the Russian people during World War II. He was an American colonel and a tank commander. Facing overwhelming odds his division fought alongside Soviet soldiers against the advancing German army. But even though many died, at the end of the day the Germans retreated.”

Ivan then reached inside his pocket and handed me a small box.

“He was awarded the Soviet Union’s highest medal of honor but for a number of political reasons it was never given to him publically. Would you now take it to his son?”

I had now been to Russia many times and knew how difficult it was to take historic mementos out of the country. Ivan understood my reluctance.

“Look,” he said, “Peter and I understand the risks. Someday we may have an open society here. I think we are on the road. But I would like Peter to have his father’s medal before he too is gone.” So I took the small box and said I would do my best.

Ten days later at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport a customs official found the box hidden in a compartment in my carry-on luggage. He called me aside.

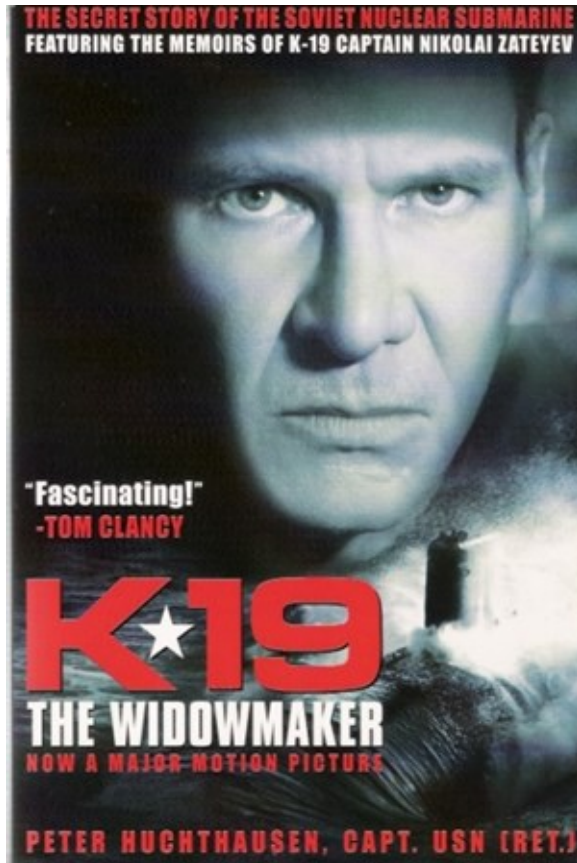
“It is illegal for anyone to take historic artifacts out of Russia”, he reminded me. I pleaded with him, asked him to read the inscription, to have a moment of compassion for a war hero. “What do I care? How do I benefit from this man’s heroism? Do you think for a moment that my life is better? Can I go over to that duty free shop and buy a quart of single malt whiskey? No, but you can.”

What was he suggesting, here in the middle of a crowded waiting room with other customs officials busily at work? I could not believe my ears.

“Don’t worry; I will watch your bags. And you have plenty of time. I will make sure the plane will wait,” he smiled pleasantly.

One hour later a Lufthansa jet lifted off from Russian soil carrying with it a medal for a hero while one petty customs official was heading home to

enjoy a bottle of Bushmill's Single Malt. In the end, everybody got what he wanted. But it was my first straight up bribe and I felt a bit dirty.



King 2010

I came out to the barn this morning and King was missing. Normally he is the first horse to greet me as I begin morning chores. His buddy Nick, Willie's brother, usually waits to hear me filling the grain cans before he comes into the stall next to King. Each horse has a distinctive way of saying 'hurry up, can't you see I'm starving?' Nick knickers, then leans over and bites Willie on the shoulder. Then Willie slams the swing door against the barn wall with his head. Duke paws the floor and starts sucking the wall of his stall with his teeth. Crazy Chief whinnies with his ears back and refuses to enter either barn. And Whiskey paces nervously, avoiding the other horses. But all King does every morning is sigh and roll his big, brown eyes.

Most of the six horses are tied in their stalls during meals so that they will not gobble down their food and then go steal from a slower eater. But King is never tied. When he finishes his grain, he patiently stands there and watches me as I leave the barn with a load of hay. When the other horses are finished eating their grain, they race off the minute I let them go as to be first to the hay pile out in the field. Everyone except King. He looks up at me and smiles. On those mornings when the sheep are up on the hill, the chickens still in their house and the other horses out in the field, King and I are the only ones in the big barn. Then and only then would I scratch his forehead, peel a thick book of precious dark green, second cut hay and give it to King. And he would blissfully lower his head and begin slowly munching his treat. It was our little secret. No one else ever caught on.



But today at 7:00 am there was no sign of King. We normally feed him and Nick in the main barn attached to our house and the others in a secondary barn. It was out past that second barn that I saw him, lying down on his side and struggling to get up. As I ran upstairs to get Marty, I knew that all the plans we had for today had just flown out the window.

King is an old horse, the oldest we have ever had on our farm, somewhere between 34 and 35. He was born in New Brunswick and was a stallion used for breeding until he was five. When he was gelded, he already had a huge neck and broad shoulders. Abused by his first owner, he was terrified of sticks or whips.

When we purchased Willie and Nick as 8 month old colts, it seemed like a good idea to find an older draft horse as a mentor so I called Paul, a man who had been farming with horses most of his adult life.

“Oh Pete,” he sighed, “I know the perfect horse. He was the best horse I’ve ever had but I did the stupidest thing. This woman showed up at my farm one day and said that she wanted to buy King. He was the last horse in the world I wanted to sell so I quoted her an outrageous figure. Then she took out her checkout book and broke my heart.”

He rang off saying that he would try and find a horse for me. Two days later he called me back. “You won’t believe what happened. This very woman, she calls me out of the blue and says that she wants to sell King.”

Marty and I jumped in the car and headed for Bangor and three hours later we were standing in filthy, manure filled stall looking at a very lonely horse. His feet were untrimmed and broken and he looked like he’d never been brushed or groomed. For \$400 King climbed up in the trailer and headed home with us.

From that very first day he was an absolute gentleman. It took two years before his feet were back to normal but he never fought me while I worked to rebuild them. He never kicked or bit anyone and neighborhood children would climb up on his tall back and feel absolutely safe.

The two colts, his young pupils, would always be getting into trouble in spite of King’s watchful eye. When Willie and Nick reached 2 years of age, we would hitch each of them separately to King and they would drag something light and unthreatening through the woodlot. I felt so smart that we had enlisted this perfect horse as a teacher that I failed to notice that somehow the colts began showing some bad habits. Both Willie and Nick began stepping forward when I had asked them to stand. At first it was only sometimes but slowly it began to be 50% of the time. This is a problem when you are in the early stages of training. If a young horse cannot stand still at your command, then when he is older and larger he can

start off unexpectedly, pulling equipment and hurting the teamster and himself as well.

What was I doing wrong? I asked Marty to watch and sure enough, old King would shift his weight forward before my command, triggering the colts. Maybe it was the early abuse he had experienced but for his whole time with us, King had a problem standing still and his young students picked right up on it.

But now, 13 years later, here was the mighty King lying on his side in the mud, his eyes pleading for me to pick him up. Months ago, King had slipped and fallen in the barn and lay there for eight hours while we tried unsuccessfully to get him on his feet. We had gone to bed exhausted and convinced that we would wake to find a dead horse. But Marty returned to King's side at 3 am and shook me awake at 4.

“Pete, let's give it one last try. I think that he might stand up again.”

I was sure that our efforts would be in vain but I was touched by her optimism so I pulled on my clothes and slipped out into the cold night. Somehow while we had been asleep King had pushed his 1800 lbs. backwards and out of his stall and was now lying on the packed snow. With Marty and I holding tightly to his halter rope, he made one last effort, first raising his neck off the snow, then jutting out his front legs, finally pushing upward with his back two feet. Marty and I pulled as hard as we could with the halter rope and with a giant shudder King rose to his feet. He stood there for a moment, not sure if he would fall back down again. Then he took one tentative step, then another. He could walk, he could stand and we had won.

I had never known a horse that had been down for 12 hours to get up again. It was phenomenal. It was medical history. King was not ready to die that night. Apparently he had a few more things left to do. But now as Marty and I ran up to him as he again struggled to rise, a voice inside of me said that this might be the end.

My daughter Josie can communicate with all sorts of souls, two and four legged. We called her in California and asked her to check in with King. “He is cold and afraid,” she said. “He needs to get up. He wants to be lying on a warm bed, not the cold ground. But he has had a very good life with you. He is grateful for the two of you.”

Early mornings can be cold and unpredictable in April and black clouds rolled in with thunder in the distance as we struggled to comfort King. I ran to get a tarp and made quite a cozy tent just as lightning struck and hail rained down on us. Marty sat by his side and scratched the area between his eyes and chunks of snow-white hair as soft as goose down drifted onto the muddy ground. We covered him with several horse blankets and waited out the storm. King kept trying to get up but his hooves just made pockets in the ground. When Matt our vet arrived, he agreed that the best thing to do was to put him to rest.

When my father died, I could not cry for months. One day I was having breakfast with a friend and he told me how much my dad had meant to him. I came undone on the spot, sobbing uncontrollably. Yet with King there was absolutely no reluctance. I was still crying three days later.....



King vs. President Bush

King was the horse I could always grab if I had to get something done right away. My tears reminded me that he never let me down. During the previous summers King had been part of a four-horse hitch that would pull our haying equipment through the fields. This was hot, exhausting work and because both King and Duke were over 30, we had to stop quite often for a break. When we were ready to start again I would ‘click’ the horses forward and King would always be the first one to lean into the load. “This is how it is done,” he would remind the other three with a patient and proud smile.



Mowing w. Nick, King, Willie and Duke

When the first president Bush declared war on Iraq and the bombs fell on Baghdad, King and I set out for town on a frigid morning in February. We pulled a home-made wagon with a home-made sign. We traveled over five miles of snowy roads to meet with a small group of friends who were protesting the President's decision. King was so big and so fuzzy in his winter coat that I knew he would protect me from the cold stares of those Yankee neighbors that might not share my sentiments. He plodded along tentatively and I wondered if he were up for the journey. We had never traveled this far before. He was already well into his twenties and some arthritis was showing on his legs. Every mile or so he would stop, turn and look at me and ask me if this was really a good idea.

When we arrived at the bridge that crosses over our large river, we could see friends in brightly colored coats with signs held high. A few cars would honk in support but most either sped up or revved their engines in protest.

There was not much room for King or the wagon on the bridge so we crossed and pulled into the nearby parking lot by the post office. Children

that were with their parents for Saturday shopping came running over to pat King, dragging their folks in tow. Some of them knew King from elementary school where he had given many of them rides. Soon we had a nice little crowd of 'supporters', some of whom were willing to talk about the war as long as the moderator was a 2000 lb. Belgian horse. When it was time to go home, he trotted across the bridge and continued to move at a lively pace till we were back with his four legged friends just before dark.

King was an example of compromise and concession while always retaining his role as the dominant horse in the herd. He was a teacher who waited patiently for me to understand the lesson. After he died I kept making his breakfast every morning out of habit and then sadly having to put it back. Yet no one has chosen to claim his stall for their first meal of the day. Maybe King is still here, waiting for his secret flake of second cut hay. Yesterday I set some down by his empty stall and by noon it was gone.

Potato Cakes

Moscow Region 2010



Luba and Sasha's Dacha

We were up at 4 am for potato cake and tea in Luba's kitchen. Our lost bags had been found at the airport and we were on the way to collect them. It has been a very complicated crossing to Moscow, maybe the most difficult ever.

Yesterday we missed airline connections to Russia due to in part to Iceland's volcanic ash which caused us to arrive in Moscow two days late.

When we finally arrived at Dom Dedevoa Airport, Luba was waiting for us and we made our way to Yaltinskaya Street for a lovely supper prepared by her daughter Anna who herself had just returned with her family from Ghana. Anna had done her hair up in waist long corn rows when she was in Africa and looked very striking. Over the years she had been very reluctant to use her English language skills but her mother- in- law in

Ghana knew no Russian so Anna was forced to swallow her shyness. After supper I went for a walk in the park with she and her children and we talked together comfortably in English for the first time in the 22 years I had known her.

I first met Anna when she was 10 years old. Her mom Luba began working for Peace Fleece in 1990 and she insisted that I use her family's small apartment in the southeast corner of Moscow as our base. Over the coming years Luba, her husband Sasha and her children Anna and Sergei would become very close friends. In the early years of Peace Fleece I came to Moscow 3 times a year. Every time I would arrive they would shift their furniture in their small 3 room apartment and give me one room to myself.

I remember waking up on cold winter mornings when it did not get light till nine. I would lie in bed feeling that the whole Peace Fleece idea was just too much to pull off. The USSR was falling apart, it was dangerous to be on the street day or night and I could barely understand the language.

The ravens outside my window would mock my fears with their ceaseless cawing. Then I would hear Anna getting her school lunch ready. Luba's voice would patiently remind the Sergei and Anna to stay together on the short walk to school. Their mother prepared them for the worst and would not relax until they were safely home every day. Anna would listen and survive. Sergei would not and would die.

Luba drove me all over the Moscow region. She was translator, negotiator, cook, and mechanic. Often she would mother me, insist on me taking her advice when I hadn't asked. But I knew nothing. I was fresh meat on the street. And somehow I knew she was right so I swallowed my pride.

Sasha her husband is from the southern Siberian region of Russia and has a very heavy accent. One winter several years ago I arrived to learn that he was in the hospital having his gall bladder out. So we drove out to bring him his supper. Sasha loves to fish and gather mushrooms. So that is what we brought him for food.

There were seven other male patients in his room when we arrived. Each was enjoying a meal from home and everyone was sharing. The nurses looked the other way as bottles squirreled under pillows emerged and were passed around. We were there for one hour, had a gay old time and I left realizing that I had never felt so relaxed and happy in any hospital in the West.

As we made our way to the car a light snow began to fall. There was a forest nearby through which a train passed. Then all was quiet.

“Peter, you know that Sasha feels that you are his best friend.”

I stopped in my tracks. “How can that be?” I asked. “We have barely spoken 200 words to each other.” His accent had always been very hard for me to understand and my Russian was difficult for him as well. We would spend our time walking in the woods looking for mushrooms or casting a line out into a pond. One time we cut firewood together. But the time I will always remember was when we held each other sobbing at the fresh grave of his only son.

I had not heard from Luba all that spring. I was busy in the office, busy on the farm. I had no plans to visit Moscow till the fall. So I felt a bit guilty when one day Marty asked me how Luba was doing. I ran out to the office and called her. No answer. I called Ivan, our Peace Fleece product manager in Russia, and asked if he had been in contact. “Unusually quiet,” he said.

Now I started to get concerned. By chance the very next day a friend of Luba's from Connecticut called with an order and I happened to be in the office.

"Yes, Peter, something is very wrong. One of her children, I think it is her son, he has died. I would have called but I assumed that you knew." I was in total shock and I was also hurt. I began to call in earnest and finally got thru 3 days later. It was a very difficult conversation.

Sergei, Luba and Sasha's only son, had a speech defect, a stutter. Years before he had been part of a Russian school group that had visited our Maine town as guests of Peace Fleece. These students stayed with local families and went to our high school. Sergei's American family immediately fell in love with him and because a common language did not exist, he had no problems with his stutter. He returned to Moscow, married his sweetheart Katya, moved to his own apartment and then Nikita was born. Katya had a prestigious job with the Russian Duma working for a newly elected Soviet official. Sergei took care of Nikita and held odd jobs. Each time I visited Moscow he would always come over with his young family to check in.

For a number of not so good reasons Sergei and a friend tried to hold up a neighborhood mob boss. The effort failed and he was arrested and put into pre-trial confinement. This was during the formative years of the Russian Parliament and the Russian legal system then resembled the early years of the American Wild West. The Russians were fighting a brutal war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya and draft dodgers were filling the jails in record numbers. Disease ran rampant in these pre-trial holding cells. Sergei's gym held 1100 men and while awaiting trial he contracted

hepatitis and died within three days. Luba was notified by mail and instructed to come and pick up his body in her small car.

She told me all this early one spring morning on the phone more than three months after his death. She told me that she could not bring herself to tell me because of her shame. She had been unable to protect her child, the ultimate failure of a Russian mother.

I headed over as soon as I could. I brought with me books about death and dying. I remember the first night in her kitchen, she and Sasha sitting across from me. I told her that the incidence of divorce in the United States after the death of a child was over 60%. Then without being asked, I opened Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's book "On Death and Dying". I knew I was crossing a line but I also knew in the fifteen years I had been working in Russia that they had no such tools to help them through this grief other than their faith and at that time neither Luba nor Sasha were able to avail themselves of that comfort.

We talked off and on all weekend. Kubler-Ross stresses the importance of expressing one's grief. Sometimes during meals or watching soccer on the TV I thought I saw a tear. Then on Sunday afternoon Sasha came into my room with his coat on. He wanted me to come with him to see Sergei's grave. As we drove towards the outskirts of Moscow, I tried to imagine Sergei's stiff, dead body stuffed in the back seat of this small Russian car. The graveyard was on the side of a hill. It was private and well taken care of by an attendant. We bought some flowers from a girl at the gate and we walked in.

The dirt was fresh and Sasha placed the flowers next to the small headstone. Then he began to sob. He grabbed me and as he hugged his sobbing turned into an almost primeval groan. I held on and soon began to

cry as well. I imagined my own son in the ground next to us. I felt Sasha and I move towards some barrier like a wall of fog. We both drifted through it and onto the other side.

Now walking through the grounds of the hospital Luba was saying that I was Sasha's best friend. Suddenly I felt under pressure to do something, to go back into the hospital and check to make sure he was really ok. After all, that's what best friends do.

"But we speak so little to each," I protested.

Luba took my hand. "Language is overrated" she smiled and we walked on through the snowy night.

One day years later in a walk in another park Luba's daughter Anna told me that she was looking for a black man to marry. She told me this in Russian because in those days she always refused to talk with me in English, even when she was visiting us here in Maine. I thought I had misunderstood what she said.

She did find a black man, a wonderful person, an African student at Moscow State University from Ghana. She brought him home to meet her parents and they welcomed him like he was their son. Soon they were married, moved in with Luba and Sasha and began having children. Two years ago Anna told me that she and her husband Adam were thinking of moving to Ghana. It had become quite a challenge living as a mixed race couple in Moscow. The skin head attacks were less of a worry these days but even as we pushed her chocolate colored children through the park in a stroller, I watched the occasional stare of an older Russian mother or grannie. Anna said that she and Adam only went to the park together if friends or Sasha or Luba went with them.

One time years ago on a long trip to one of our Russian farmer friends, Luba told me a wonderful story. Before her parents moved to Moscow they had lived in a remote village 10 hours south east toward the Ural Mountains. Every summer when Luba was a small girl, she and her brother Ivan would leave the city by train at 1:00 in the afternoon and arrive at the Lev Tolstoy Station at 3:30 the following morning. Her father would gently pick her and her brother up from the train seat and transport them to an awaiting horse drawn wagon loaded with hay where she would sleep until they arrived at their small village.

I had always wanted to make that journey with Luba but we never seemed to find the time. But now Marty and Luba and I were heading south in her car to meet the cousins and see the old home of her parents. After driving for five hours we suddenly arrived in a part of Russia I had never seen before, a place of giant rolling hills covered with bright green pasture and black and white cows.

We drove through a small town with a tumbling brook where men and boys were fishing for river trout, some with fly rods. The houses where these farm people lived were four story crumbling apartment buildings from the Khrushchev period. Built in the 60's these complexes replaced the log "izbas" of peasant times and were to become the trademark of Soviet agricultural life.

We arrived at our destination late that night and the next day woke around five to inspect the lovely Russian farm house where we were housed. It belonged to Luba's cousin Valentina, a 70 year old widow who lived alone on a hill overlooking a small valley where sheep and cattle grazed. After a breakfast of eggs, potatoes and a salad of fresh tomatoes and cucumber, we headed out on foot for the five kilometer walk to Luba's ancestral village.

The weather was gorgeous, about 60 degrees with a light breeze and bright sun. Valentina's house soon disappeared from site and before us lay enormous wheat fields maybe one or two thousand acres in size. I had never seen agriculture on this scale. Here and there wind breaks of poplar and birch had been planted and in the far distance we could just make out the small forest of Luba's youth.

"I have not walked this road in over 40 years", Luba smiled. "You see the grain towers in the far distance. That is where the train came in. My cousins could watch the smoke for miles. By the time we arrived asleep in the wagon all my cousins would be awake to greet us and we would eat breakfast under our apple tree. We would run around half naked all summer. It was a wonderful time".

Soon the village came into view. We first visited Luba's parent's home, now slowly coming apart from neglect. It lay vacant for several years after a cousin living there died and then it was sold to someone for next to nothing. Luba had tried to buy it back but to no avail. Trees had grown up in the front yard and brush had covered the vegetable garden but the old apple trees were still there.

For the next few days we visited with relatives who invited us to eat and drink till all we wanted to do was lie on the grass in the sun and fall asleep. Most everyone was over sixty, some closing in on 80. The women all wore scarves and many sported gold teeth. Most could shear sheep and split wood with the best of them. It was clear that Luba had great respect and affection for the last survivors of a fading generation.

Marty and I had a plan cooking in our mind ever since Luba's mom died last summer. Over the years our small Peace Fleece business had worked hard to develop a relationship with Russian sheep farmers. Once we even

purchased a small flock of ewes ourselves in partnership with a farmer Russian-German named Fydor Krut. We had worked with Pavel and Galina Potstrellov helping to improve their flock until Pavel died in 2003. We helped give birth to the Moscow Area Sheep Association (MASHA) from whose members we hoped to source wool for our Peace Fleece yarn. I had taught at an Agricultural College in Sergeiv Posad for several years in the hopes of interesting young Russian farmers in raising sheep. And we had purchased hand spun and hand knit socks from the Korneva Farm which we sold on our web site. But we had never been able to develop a long term relationship with a small rural community where we could share our knowledge of sheep and wool and form mutually beneficial projects.

And all the time we worked to get these various projects off the ground, Luba had been by our side, driving in her car over miles of bony roads. She translated for hours every day and shared with us her unrelenting affection for the Russian rural way of life, in spite of the fact that she had spent the great portion of her adult life living in Moscow. Sasha had recently left Moscow to join her at the dacha. With her parents gone she was free to consider a different kind of lifestyle.

Now they were full time country residents, spending summers with their three grandchildren, fishing the brooks and hunting for mushrooms and in the winter shoveling snow and splitting wood. As we walked the fields and woods of her childhood Marty and I wondered aloud if there might be a farming community here in her ancestral home that might want to work with Peace Fleece.

“You know,” Luba explained, “in the past women would gather at different people’s homes once a week to spin the wool from their sheep and knit socks, hats and mittens for their families. It was a time of sharing stories,

some old, some new. News was announced, laughter and tears sometimes followed. Now the women have no place to gather. There is maybe thirty to fifty percent unemployment here. Maybe our project could be a good way to bring these women, especially the young girls, together.”

So we floated the idea out to her relatives. Was there someone who could house, feed, cut hay for and shepherd a small flock of sheep? Was there available space somewhere for such a group to gather for summer youth projects or knitting groups? Was it realistic for Luba to spend two weeks every month coordinating efforts and developing programs? The more we talked the more Luba realized that her energy and her heart were at her dacha with Sasha and her grandchildren. Here it was too remote. Maybe that is why her parents left so many years ago.



Luba and Sasha with firewood for the banya

Jesus

Marty's family has a camp on a lake not far from our farm. Built by her grandmother back when the steam trains still ran from Boston, Tip Ridge is a magnet for three generations of Tracy family to gather during the summer months. When I can pry myself away from the haying I am sometimes there in the evening when it is time for the younger folks to go to bed. My nieces and nephews often ask me for a bedtime story and this is one of my favorites:

“When I was a little boy we lived by the ocean. I had a dog named Lady and we would spend all the time together. We had a flock of sheep that lived off the coast on Brush Island. Twice a day the tide would go out and Lady and I would check to make sure the sheep were ok, that they were not stuck in a cave or out of fresh water. They would stay there all winter and eat seaweed the storms would wash in.

“One winter on the day before Christmas it began to snow and I was worried that we would not be able to go to my grandparent's farm because the roads would be closed. But when Lady and I came back from checking the sheep I saw a team of big horses standing in the driveway hitched to a sleigh. They were from Dick White's farm down the road. Dad told me not to worry, that Bub and Jack would get us through the snow and to hurry up and get dressed 'cause we needed to leave'. Before you could say 'happy as a clam' we were off.

When we reached downtown it was dark and I was surprised that the streets were empty of cars on Christmas Eve. My brother John and I curled under a warm bear-skin blanket while my mother helped my father see the

way through the snow. Lady scratched herself and quickly fell asleep next to me. I knew when we reached Beechwood Hill because Bub and Jack slowed down to a steady pull.

“We arrived at my grandparent’s farm about seven. Dad held the horses while I ran in to get Grandpa. He jumped up when I came through the door and grabbed his wool coat with a smile. I saw all my cousins running through the house and I smelled good cooking coming from the kitchen. Grandpa pulled open the tall barn doors as Dad unhooked the sleigh and drove the team in. I helped them shut the doors and put wool blankets on the horses.

“As they unharnessed the team, brushed them down and gave them their supper I followed the warm smell of manure and sour milk and found the dairy herd munching their hay. Grandma had taught me how to milk by hand last summer and I would get up with her before sunrise, take my stool and milk bucket and sit down next to Mary, Kiley, Rita or Phyllis, lean forward, gently squeeze the teats of their udders and hear the stream of milk as it pinged off the steel bucket. Tomorrow we would milk even though it was Christmas morning.

“I heard someone yell my name so I said goodnight to the cows and the horses and made my way back to the bright lights of the farmhouse. We had a great supper, every child gave a blessing and when we finished eating we were allowed to open one present. I had an uncle named Herb who sold cars. Every year he would give us a pen with his name on it. He would also bring one present for every child so on Christmas morning the tree would be almost buried with gifts. Now it was time to go to bed. All of the children went up to the unheated attic and slept on mattresses under heavy quilts made by my Aunt Kathy.

“I woke up suddenly in the middle of the night and looked out the attic window towards the barn. I had heard something as I slept but I didn’t know what had woken me. The storm was over and the moon was shining. It must be nearly full because it was very bright outside. I started back for my bed when my eyes noticed something strange on the snow. Footprints were coming up the driveway from the main road going into the barn. Two sets of footprints.

“Now I could understand footprints coming from the house to the barn, maybe Dad checking the horses. But tracks coming from the road, it made no sense. So I put on my clothes and stole quietly outside. Lady joined me and after going pee in the snow she followed me to the barn.

There was a smaller side door which we entered and I took out a pocket flashlight which I always carried and turned it on and listened.”

“It must have been very late at night or early in the morning because the horses had finished eating their hay. Every once and a while you could hear the barn floor creak as they shifted their weight. Then out by the cow’s pen I heard a sound like a baby goat, a crying sound like a newborn lamb. I knew my Grandma didn’t have any sheep or goats any more. She said she was getting too old to chase them around the countryside. Then Lady began to growl.”

“Shush Lady!” I told her and I stroked her head. But her growl had gotten me to wonder what might be out there in the dark. I pointed my flashlight towards the cows and together we made our way deeper into the barn. In a few moments, I heard the crying again. Then all of a sudden I jumped up in the air and lady began barking. A tall man had risen from one of the cow stalls and was now facing us.”

“He raised his hands in the air, like he might if I had been pointing a gun. Then he began talking in a foreign language and pointing down at the floor of the stall. I pointed my flashlight and saw a woman holding a baby, a very young baby, maybe brand new. When Lady saw the baby she stopped barking and approached the man. He lowered his arms and Lady licked his hand. That made me feel better so I motioned the man to stay there, to not move. Lady sat down and I headed for the house and grandma.”

“When I knocked on her bedroom door Grandma quietly came out so as not to wake Grandpa and asked what was up. I told her that there was a man and a woman with a newborn baby in the barn. She completely believed me, never asked me one question, just like it happened every day. She grabbed a blanket as she left the house and made our way out the door.

“Go back to sleep,” she told me. “Everything will be OK and I will come get you if I need to.”

“Next morning I woke up late. The sun was shining and everyone was gone from the attic except me. I had missed the morning milking. Then I remembered the baby and the tall man and his wife on the stall floor and hurried downstairs. As I came into the kitchen I saw that a small bed had been set up next to the cook stove and sitting on it was a beautiful dark haired woman holding a sleeping baby. Grandma was stoking the fire and getting the morning coffee ready.”

“There you are”, she said. “I thought I had lost my milking partner. We’d better hurry.”

“But Grandma”, I asked as we crossed the snow, “what.... happened?”

“I’ll tell you while we milk” and she did. “These folks are Portuguese, from the Azores Islands. They just arrived in America last week. They are

living in New Bedford with relatives and planned to have their baby born at a hospital in Boston. It seems that the storm started the same time as the mother's labor and they lost their way in the snow. Their car is stuck at the bottom of the driveway and grandpa and your dad are getting it out right now with the horses. Doctors had told them there might be problems but the baby is fine."

"Grandma, how did you learn so much about them if they can't speak any English."

"Pete," she chuckled, "between women, language is rarely a problem."

"So we all opened our presents. Herb even had some presents for our new guests. And it turns out that Uncle Pete, after whom I was named, spoke some Spanish, which is close to Portuguese. So Peter asked Manuel the husband to say the breakfast grace and Peter translated. Then Peter asks Maria, the mother what will they name their new son.

"Jesus" she smiles. "Jesus."

Most of my audience at Tipridge had fallen asleep as the story ended. As I rose quietly to leave my nephew Christopher, then 6, quietly asked me, "Uncle Peter, is that story true?" Suddenly tears welled up in my eyes as I again remembered Josephine on that clear summer day by the ocean. Once again her spirit came to the rescue.

"Chris, Lady is gone as are Grandma and Grandpa but someday I will take you to Brush Island and Beechwood Hill and you can see for yourself." And with that he drifted off to sleep.

The train slowed as it entered Moscow Yaroslavl Railroad Station. A young girl that had been sitting across from me watching me write said hello. She handed me a card with a picture of a hockey player on it.

“This is my older brother. His name is Artem Krukov and his number is 82. He plays for Lokomotiv Yaroslavl. I am traveling to see him play in Moscow. I am so proud of him. It makes me so happy to see him skate. He loves to play hockey.”

I thanked her and wished her brother a safe game and I found myself wondering what made me happy. I loved playing hockey. But since moving to Maine I worked hard, cutting trees in the forest, shearing sheep and putting in hay so I rarely strapped on the skates.

Most nights my shoulders and back ached as I fell asleep and it was the pain in my body that assured me that I had done enough, done my share, earned my rest. I realize now that I was confusing this feeling of relief with happiness. Not until my body began to recently come undone did I admit that this pain might be a false friend.

Happiness was not a quality I considered when choosing my role models. Edward R. Murrow was a family friend who often visited our home in Cohasset. His son Casey was a close chum of mine at boarding school. As a WW II foreign correspondent for CBS, Ed had risked his life every night as he reported the Blitzskreig from the roof tops of London. His unwavering voice became the eyes and ears of the British masses huddled below in the bomb shelters and tube station. He became a hero to the people of that city. Ten years later he defied Senator McCarthy and the

House Un-American Activities Committee's anti-communist witch-hunt. He then went on to set a standard of network journalism that still remains the benchmark of excellence today.

As a role model for changing the world, he was in many ways perfect. But as he cracked open his third pack of unfiltered Camel cigarettes that he would smoke throughout the night in our guest room, I began to wonder what personal demons lived in his carry-on baggage as he traveled the world. I can only imagine that he would have considered happiness a luxury rather than an essential tool as he faced the expanding war in Vietnam and the race riots and assassinations back home.

Recently I have been struggling with a mild form of depression. I wake some mornings and am not able to rise from my bed. In March two logging crews moved onto our road and for weeks tractor trailers would shuttle past our farm loaded with wood chips and saw logs. I knew the forest they were cutting would take years to recover. I would listen to the whine of their shear machines as Nick, Willie and I made our way up the back hill to yard firewood.

For years I have been logging with horses to promote sustainable forestry practices in our area but now as I see the forest fall victim to a conspiracy of tough economics, job security and the hunger for cheap energy, I feel helpless to offer an alternative. How could a horse pulling a few sticks of wood compete with the show at the end of our road?

Two nights ago, my friend Gary arrived at our farm. He shares his time between his home in the States and a non-profit he started eight years ago in Afghanistan. He arrived late and needed to leave early and we had not seen each other in over three years. As Gary settled into his supper of fresh corn and chicken, I told him of my rough spring and asked him where he

went for strength when despair came knocking. He told me of his close Dutch friend Peter who was kidnapped, hooded and handcuffed to his Afghan driver for six weeks as they were shuttled from one Taliban gang to another until they were released.

“They never knew from one day to the next if they would be shot. One group would treat them with respect while another group would torture them. I saw Peter recently in London. He is still trying to put the whole experience in perspective. He does not know if he will return to the country. As one moves about there, you never know who is your friend or your enemy. I have always tried to live with hope for the day but it is difficult when fear and uncertainty surround you and the man that smiles at you on the street might be your captor tomorrow.”

Gary and I were enjoying an early morning coffee when a mother robin outside the kitchen door announced the arrival of a special moment. Several ancient tribes believed that there existed two times each day, just before nightfall and just before dawn, when it is neither day nor night, a time in between. At this moment a crack appears and profound truths may make themselves known.

“Last Christmas I lost several friends who I greatly admired,” Gary then began. “Tom and his family had been working in Afghanistan for over 20 years and were well known and highly respected. They were traveling with a group of aid workers in Waziristan Province on the Pakistani border when they were captured and all summarily executed. Their deaths rocked both the Afghan and European communities. Even the Taliban reluctantly discredited the action.”

Gary is sporting a beard these days and looks much like the Tolkien characters in the books he loves to read. He dabbed the butter from his chin

with his napkin and told me he was on his way to Idaho to take part in a survival training of what to do if he were kidnapped. As he sips his coffee, I find any melodrama and self-pity completely lacking in his words.

“I love my work. And I love the Afghan people. I experience real happiness when I am there among them. My spiritual and professional lives are now one and I am very happy. But my mortality is very real. I have started to get my life in order. I have rented a storage unit and have begun to sort through years of stuff. I don’t want my parents or friends to have to do this if I die.”

Reunion 2012



The Lloyd Thomas in Asia

The Cooper River of South Carolina twisted north in the bright morning sun and as the plane banked I looked to see if there was anything left of the Navy Yard and my mine sweeper. Not a sign. North-South traffic moved briskly as I drove my rental car along the thruway leading into Charleston and all at once, there I was, welcomed by my cousin Duke and his wife Barbara in their beautiful Battery home. La Guere Street had been sold, the retreat on Sullivan's Island was on the market, time was moving on.

Today I had traveled south to somehow come to terms with my time on the USS Lloyd Thomas, DD-764 which sailed to Vietnam without me and exploded there, maiming and killing young men from my Deck Division doing a job I myself had refused to do. I had never been able to shake the notion that I could have done more to stop the ship.

When I moved to Maine with Marty four years after returning from Vietnam I brought a substantial amount of this emotional war baggage

with me. Over time this slowed me down and tired me out. Sometimes when I would meet a person in uniform or saw a film about war, feelings would come flooding up and spill over into tears and sobbing. This would often happen in unexpected places and inappropriate times and I would have to stumble through some awkward explanation that never really seemed to work.

One day I met a therapist in a nearby town who diagnosed this as some form of traumatic disorder and she suggested I visit the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. When we got our first computer I googled the USS Lloyd Thomas and to my great surprise found that the ship's crew not only ran its own website, they had a reunion every year! I quickly shut down the computer and didn't look again for another 15 years.

Now as the October sun rose over the Charleston Convention Center, I made my way to a group of tour busses that were slowly filling with grey haired men and their wives and jumped on the last one. I had put off doing this for as long as I could and today was the last day of the reunion. Settling into a seat, I stared straight ahead. There had been a letter saying that some of the Vietnam era crew would be here. My eyes stayed glued forward.

"Welcome aboard," came a friendly voice from across the aisle. "My name's Mark" and a warm hand attached to a smiling face reached over and grabbed my hand. We shared pleasantries and he introduced me to his wife. I decided to jump right in and told him why I was on the bus and how I hoped to find someone that had been on the ship that fateful day.

"I was officer on the bridge the morning the gun mount blew up," he offered.

I was riveted. I had not expected this kind of access.

“We had been doing fire support for Australian troops on the beach. We were moored about one mile offshore. There had been reports of some problems in the powder room of the forward gun mount. Some type of leakage and there had been several misfiring. Then all at once, there was this giant explosion. I looked below me and saw the left barrel of the 5” gun had burst apart, become severed from the mount itself and gone spinning off the starboard bow and down into the water.”

“At first we thought we must have been hit by hostile fire. But soon we realized what had happened and we quickly moved to help the injured and dying.”

Mark stopped talking and so had everyone else on the bus. Then a rough voice directly behind me broke the silence.

“You had it all wrong what you wrote on your website,” it announced. . “It was the faulty shells, not the gun barrel!” I turned in my seat to face a heavy set man younger than me. This is more the kind of reception I had been expecting.

“You had written that it was the barrel cracks,” he said. “Well it was the gas leaking from the shells. That’s what exploded, that’s what killed them.”

Out of the corner of my eye I saw two men from the back of the bus slip into the aisle and make their way forward. “Here it comes,” I thought.

“You’re Peter Hagerty. We were on the Lloyd Thomas with you.” They both shook my hand eagerly and were smiling. “We were in the Combat

Information Center but we both remember you. It's great that you have come".

The first stop was a plantation on the Cooper River. Several crew members and I found a quiet spot to talk.

"It was Sept 11, 1970. We were anchored off Vung Tau about a mile out. I was lying in the sun on the after deck. Every once and a while a bullet from an 'unfriendly' on shore would ping off the superstructure. We called in some air support and a puff of sand on the beach put a stop to that. All at once I heard this huge explosion from the bow. I ran down the starboard side to see my best friend lying on the deck, blood everywhere. Alarms were going off and smoke was billowing up from below."



The forward gun mount

“I picked him up and carried him to the ward room where I laid him down on the table. I kept telling him everything would be alright. Then I saw that his stomach and chest had been ripped open. I could see his lungs breathing in and out. The medics arrived and I stayed with him till he died.

“Black smoke was rising from the gun mount. Blood and body parts and fire had found their way below and there was great fear that if the powder magazine exploded the ship would sink.

“Three of our friends died that day along with another friend a year later and 15 others were seriously injured. I saw one crew member lifting red hot sulfur rockets with his bare hands and throwing them over the side of the ship. A man named Cooper was sitting in your general quarter’s position on top of the gun mount. Both of his legs were shredded and he died the following year after unsuccessfully surgery. Al Boor and Doug Neeber also died that day.”



Sunrise in the Pacific

The bus made its way back to the convention center. As we returned to the reunion, my new friends guided me over to a round table in the corner. There sitting open for all to see was the photographic documentation of what had happened off Vung Tau that day. The scrapbooks started not with the violent explosion but with the quiet crossing of the Pacific. The crew grew beards, flashed peace signs, lingered over gorgeous sunrises, took on fuel and worked on their tans. The innocence of these moments on film reminded me of my own landing in Vietnam. How unprepared I was for everything that was to come.

The photos of the explosion were graphic. My gun mount was ripped open, the blood of my crew spewed over the deck. I asked and was granted permission to take these pictures to a nearby Staples store where they were scanned and put onto my computer. As the Lloyd Thomas reunion neared its end, it was clear to me that what happened on Sept 11, 1970 was the defining moment for all of its former crew members, whether they were on board that day or not. And the depth of their grief was no less than what the world would experience on the same date thirty one years later.

I shook hands with my shipmates, hugged my new friends and felt a weight lift off of me. I still cry on Memorial Day, often choke up when I see servicemen in uniform and wonder if my grandchildren will face the choices I did. These emotions now remind me how grateful I am to be alive.

Romania 2002



Konstantine Shearing at Lacu Surat

High in the Transylvanian Alps of Central Romania is the village of Copsa Mica. The first time I ever heard of this town was when I saw a picture in National Geographic Magazine (June 1991) of an older man leading a flock of sheep down its main street. The shepherd, the sheep and the houses were all coated with a thick film of black dust that was spewing from the smokestacks of an automobile tire factory. The article addressed

the environmental catastrophe that was unfolding as the Iron Curtain lifted on Eastern Europe. I knew almost nothing about Romania at the time and I moved on to other things. But I never forgot that picture, especially the filthy sheep and resolute expression on the shepherd's face. The photo hung in our outhouse for years.

Twelve years later I was in Russia having trouble sourcing wool for our Peace Fleece yarn. The textile mills there were finally getting into full swing after years of recovering from the fall of the Soviet Union and by 2002 it was impossible to find any Russian wool for export. That spring, empty handed and crestfallen after an unsuccessful Moscow buying trip, I arrived in Prague where I was welcomed by an energized young Australian who had a plan.

For several years Simon Neylon had been working with a very industrious group of sheep farmers near the Danube Delta in Romania. "The wool is beautiful, the farmers are learning how to sort and class the fleeces. I think we may have something for you".

Lacu Sarat Farm is a large agricultural operation in Romania that was modeled after the Soviet era collective farms. It has 630 milking cows and approximately 900 Merino ewes, rams and lambs. It grows all its own grains and forage on over 1000 acres of rich land about ten miles outside of Braila which is on the Danube River in northwestern Romania. It had been raining in this region for several weeks when Simon and I arrived and the shearing throughout the country was way behind schedule. Sorin Jitariu, a veterinarian and good friend of Simon's, had picked us up at Budapest Airport and driven his tiny car like a bullet thru the countryside to get us to the farm by early morning. Sorin and Simon for the past several years have been buying the best wool they could find in Romania and marketing

it to mills in Europe as well as abroad. Sorin was particularly keen on the wool from the Lacu Sarat sheep.



Sorin, Simon and Lacu Farm Manager Peter

The morning dew weighed heavy but the sun was struggling to make an appearance, which meant that shearing might start by ten. We found the farm not far from the rail line to Bucharest and we saw shepherds driving a large flock of ewes and lambs down the side of the road toward the shearing sheds.

“The shearers did not arrive last night. I am very sorry. Other than that, we are ready for you”, said Peter Viorel, the manager of the farm, who met us at the farm gate. He was very worried that his first American guest would not see any shearing but I was in a very carefree mood and tried to put him at ease.

Sorin had told me how difficult it has been for farms like Laku Sarat to recover from the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu. This absurd and brutal leader drained his country's resources during his twenty four year rule as head of Romania's communist party. One plan of his was to bulldoze thousands of Romanian villages and force their inhabitants into Soviet style high-rise apartments. To prop up his country's economy, he exported valuable food and drove his nation to near starvation. When he finally fell from power in 1989, he and his wife were arrested, tried for mass murder and shot by firing squads, leaving a country in disarray and in total environmental and economic devastation. It was important for me to hear this history if I were to fully appreciate the challenge that Lacu Sarat's director faced as he worked to rebuild his farm.

As Peter and I talked, there was a flurry of activity near the sheep pens and the smiles on everyone's faces announced the arrival of the shearers. Now the work could begin and everyone began taking his or her places. The ewes to be shorn were pressed closer to the shearing stands and the lambs were sorted out of harm's way. The six shearers ran in age from twenty one to sixty three. Before I had much time to grab my camera, the first hand pieces started up and the shearing began.

Konstantine Carmaeiu was at the far end of the shearing stands and at 63 the senior partner of the group. As fast as he cut the wool from the sheep's back, it was gathered up in a wicker basket and tossed onto the classing table. Here Mariata Biscaneanu quickly separated out any contaminated wool, determined the grade of wool, medium or fine, and passed the fleece along to the bagger. Mariata was trained as an animal technician specializing in sheep breeding. She has been working at Laku Saret for 25 years and says that she was born to work with animals.

At mid-day, lunch was announced and while the crew finished up their respective sheep, Simon and I were invited to the stand to do a bit of shearing. The Merinos had large folds of skin under their chins making the very challenging to shear. But somehow we managed and then joined the crew for a hearty meal of soup, bread and sausage.

“Shearing will last for about another month,” says Konstantine as he dipped his black bread into the steaming soup. “Then we will return home to our families to cut hay. Most all of us have one or more horses and some sheep, so we need to get the winter forage in. This should take about six weeks.



Mariata Bisceanu classing wool

“We cut hay with scythes and we all help each other until everyone’s hay is in. Then we go to work in the orchards, picking apples, plums and nuts. October is a time to begin splitting and storing the winter wood and garden crops. The snow comes in late November and we get set for the winter.”

Konstantine and his wife have three children and two grandchildren. His wife runs a small shop in their village as well. The crew will end up shearing 15,000 to 16,000 sheep this year.

After lunch Sorin and Simon met with the farm manager and began the intricate process of negotiating to buy this wool for Peace Fleece. The process took over two weeks of back and forth negotiations before a price was set. In the following three years Peace Fleece went on to purchase two more lots of Romanian Merino from the farm and the wool has been fantastic. Washed and combed in the mountains of the Czech Republic, it arrived in the U.S. as clean and fresh looking as pill bottle cotton.



Peter Hagerty shearing for his meal

It was a year and a half ago that I started writing this story on a train and now, once again Marty and I are traveling on the Yaroslavl Express, this time heading north. But today I am writing on a laptop, not on toilet paper. We have been in Russia for four days and have done nothing except eat, sleep and walk through the countryside near Luba's dacha. The sun comes up every morning at nine so we sleep in most days. Every evening Sasha fires up the steam bath after supper and we go to bed squeaky clean. It seems silly to both of us that we should travel half way around the world to sleep so much.

One night while sitting in Luba's steam bath my mind drifted back to a day just a month earlier when Willie and I had been up at the Common Ground Fair doing a demonstration called "Working with the Nervous Horse". It is a program we do every year and it examines how a horse often mirrors the behavior of their owner or the people around them.

We want to create conditions which might trigger telltale signs for the audience that these horses are uncomfortable, nervous and about to act out. I myself have been kicked, bitten, and generally beaten up by my animals because I did not know how to read their signs.

There is a degree of risk involved in doing this demo with a large audience in attendance. When I engage a four legged client and introduce him to a situation that might trigger a strong emotion, I will try to take the pressure off the horse before he explodes, let him move around the ring and give him a moment to think about what is happening. Any personal stuff I bring to a demo almost always triggers Willie.

There have been years when I have asked the audience to move to safety when Willie began banging the lower bars of the seven foot high stock panels. Some years I wondered if he might try and jump over, crushing spectators in the process. These thoughts make me nervous, my ego kicks in and my body language pushes Willie from a trot to a run. Before he does something drastic I turn on my microphone.

I talk to the crowd about how vulnerable I feel at that very moment, about my concern for their safety and that of Willie and his brother. And most recently I have begun to tell the crowd that I need their approval. I do not want to end up looking like a fool.

It is a bit emotional for me to make this confession. But I have begun to notice that as I offer these admissions to the crowd, I begin to focus on the here and now and calm down. Willie hears this change of tone in my voice and his panicked trot slows to a walk and he then comes over to comfort me.

Willie's nervousness comes out at the Fair each year when I separate him from his brother Nick. As I take him from their stall, walk him through crowds of fair goers, past water buffalo and lamas and smiling strangers who want to pat him, Willie is counting on me to keep him safe. "Is this ok?" he is asking me, the small man leading the giant horse through the crowd.

When I finally release him into a 50 foot diameter round pen surrounded by strangers, his normal reaction is to run around in a circle screaming out to his brother, exhibiting herd-boundness, a dangerous and unfortunately far too common condition.

Horses are herd animals and in the wild they depend on each other when they are ill at ease and sense danger. Back home at our farm we have a small herd of 5-6 horses. In the summer Willie and Nick live in the same pasture. In the winter they sleep in adjoining stalls. Not only are they brothers, they are a sub herd of two who eat and drink and sleep together. On the rare occasion when I need only one horse, I will bring both. They feel safer when they are together and afraid when apart.

As Willie feels this separation fear at the fair, I try and calm him but I too have my share of fear at that moment. And I am distracted as I hear brother Nick back at the Horse Barn pounding the walls with his hooves, screaming for his brother and unimpressed by my several friends who are keeping an eye on him.

You might now ask why anyone in their right mind would separate two large co-dependent brothers who are willing to tear down everything to run loose in a crowd of thousands, just to be with each other. Well, one reason is that many of the folks in the crowd are horse owners who have this same dangerous problem waiting for them at home. The other reason is that nothing draws a crowd like a one ton animal racing around in a circle.

But at this year's demonstration just a few weeks ago, Willie was perfectly calm as we made our way to the round pen. He seemed nonplussed by the strange animals and large crowds and, on arriving at the round pen, he ambled around the edge of the pen, sniffing and making new friends. I watched as his head nestled up to a brown haired woman with a child. As I stood by the gate, about to enter, I realized that I no longer had the nervous horse that I have counted on for the past five years.

As I contemplated what to do, someone from the fair staff called me aside and said that I had an emergency call from home. I took the mobile phone from her hand.

“Peter,” my wife Marty said. “Something terrible is happening. Police and FBI agents have surrounded Gardner’s house. There have been gunshots and he is not coming out. They will not tell us what is happening. Is there a chance you could call him on his cell? He might listen to you.”

Marty was standing about 300 yards uphill from Gardner’s house, trying to scope out a way around a police blockade. Gardner’s mom had asked that I try and call him on his cell phone, convince him to come outside.

“I will call you back when we know more,” Marty said and she was gone.

Gardner was like a son to me and such a call is every father’s nightmare. I did not have his cell phone number and if I had, what could I possibly say. I watched the people arrive and stand around the circular pen. Willie was calm and relaxed and continued to welcome folks to our program.

Gardner has been my son’s classmate and one of our family’s closest friends since kindergarten. As a child he would sit in the back seat of our car on the way to school and, on the coldest of winter days, would roll down the window and give a bemused smile as Marty or I would stop the car and roll it back up. As he grew older he continued to get into mischief but he was always a great pleasure to have around. After returning home from college he chose to buy his family’s farmhouse just down the road and settle into the daily life of our town. He had been to supper at our home several times over the summer.

Just then the same person returned with the phone. It was my own son calling.

“Dad, Gardner is dead.” The horse halter in my hand fell to the ground. I could not speak. “He shot himself this morning around 6:00 AM when the police arrived.” I was unable to speak. Silas understood and waited.

“I don’t think I can do this” I confessed to Si as I looked out at the awaiting crowd.

“I will call later,” Silas replied. “Have Willie take the lead.” Then he was gone.

I walked back into the arena. I would cancel the demo for today. Everyone would understand. I could barely talk.

As I made my way out into the center of the round pen and snapped the microphone onto my collar, everyone grew quiet with anticipation.

“Hello.” My throat began constricting. Tears squeezed down my cheek. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Willie raise his head from the far side of the pen and look at me. He then slowly turned and began walking over.

“I just received a call from my son and he told me that our best family friend Gardner shot himself to death this morning.” On speaking his name, the full force of the loss came spilling up from inside. Now tears flooded my eyes and I could not speak.

“How do you go about handling..... such a thing? We had supper at my home last week.....” I stopped talking. I could not go on.

Just then I felt Willie’s breath on my left ear. He had slowly placed his head down gently on my shoulder and let out a long, deep sigh. His breath was warm and smelled of oats. I wiped my eyes with a handkerchief and gently stroked his nose.

“Willie is reminding me now that maybe we could all take a deep breath and have a moment of silence for our friend Gardner.” Everyone in the crowd breathed in together and let out a long, deep sigh and I could feel them all with us. We would get through this.

“My name is Peter and I live in Porter, Maine just down the road from Gardner.” My voice was still shaking.

“This is my friend and co-worker Willie. He is a 1900 lb. Suffolk Punch draft horse and he has just now suggested that we all try and get through this workshop together.”

I reached over again and stroked his nose that remained resting on my left shoulder. Willie lifted his head, turned and made his way around the round pen, stopping to visit folks every 10 or 15 feet.

“Willie and his brother Nick came into my life when they were just 7 month old colts. My wife and I raised them to work in the fields in the summer and in the forest in the winter. Willie has taught us a great deal about fear, first about his own and more recently about mine.

“As he moves about the perimeter he might choose to visit with you. If he does, please be honest with him about any fears that might come up, for you or the child that you might be holding. You see, Willie or his brother can’t imagine why we as humans would ever try and cover up our fears. His forebears would never have survived in the wild if they refused to respond to their genetic radar.

“So please, if Willie gets uncomfortably close, just tell him you are afraid and take a step back. He will honor your feeling and the fact that you are aware and speaking what you need.

“What bothers Willie most is when we as humans choose to not live in the present. Willie and Nick believe that what happened yesterday can’t be changed and what happens tomorrow we have no power to control.”

As I talked my voice became less constricted. I slowly slipped into my routine. I watched Willie as he gently squeezed his head through the round pen bars and his nose hairs touched the head of an infant in his brown haired mother’s arms.

“I am 69 years old and I have seen a lot of good things in my life and some bad as well. What I keep thinking about is what was going through Gardner’s mind in the 30 seconds before he pulled the trigger. What kind of fear made him run to that place? And how could we as his close friends have all missed it?”

I watched Willie stay close to the woman with her child. Others around the pen were watching him as well, his head lowered with the infant stroking his face and tugging his mane.

“Horses mirror my feelings. If I am afraid but fail to acknowledge my fear, Willie acts out towards me, sometimes refusing to move, other times refusing to stand. In rare instances he becomes aggressive. I react from a place of fear and the cycle grows.

“Working with big horses like Willie and Nick, either farming or logging, is very dangerous work. Town records of the late 1800’s are full of deaths due to kicks from a horse, being dragged by a horse or crushed by a log being pulled by a team. I myself have been a guest at our local emergency room several times.

“Looking back, I now see that every occasion when I have been injured I was working with another human. Maybe I was focusing too much on this

person at the expense of my relationship with the horses. Was I distracted, worrying about my co-worker's safety, was he having fun, what did he think of me? In contrast I have never been seriously hurt working alone with just the horses."

Willie now turned and made his way towards me. His head was up in the air and he called out to his brother Nick back in Barn One. "Why would you hide feelings?" Willie asks the audience. "I need my brother here with me now. Hear my cry!"

"I am approaching the final quarter of my life," I go on, "and I am finally starting to get it. I studied psychology in college but I left that world for a simpler life, unknowingly dragging my baggage with me. I learned to meditate, stopped drinking alcohol, eat mostly organic food, love my wife, my children and my dog and cat. Yet I spend most of my day worrying about stuff I have no power to change. The irony is that all this time I had a barn full of four legged shrinks desperately trying to tell me something I just could not hear.

"We have a small international business in the barn above the horse stalls. In the winter I start harnessing them for work around 3 PM, trying to catch the last few hours of winter light. And I will unconsciously bring with me remnants of the day's unfinished business and run them over and over in my mind as I brush their manes. And for years it's been normal for Willie to refuse to take the bit in his mouth.

"I tried all manner of tricks to get him to drop his head. I had a ring screwed into the floor through which I pulled his halter rope. I even put molasses on his bit.

“Now I go into the kitchen first, make myself a cup of tea and sit down for 10 minutes. I delete the e-mails, save the files and shut down my mental hard drive for the remainder of the day. When I return to the barn Willie now opens his mouth and lowers his head. The good news is that he now takes the bit. The bad news is that I often forget my tea. Old habits are hard to break. But my horses are forgiving creatures and they reward me every time I do remember.”

I heard myself talking through the loud speaker and I needed a break. I turned down the mike and let the silence fill the space. I kept walking around the pen for several turns, lightly scratching Willie’s butt as I passed by.

“I believe that Willie and Nick are in my life to help me heal my soul, to guide me towards happiness and away from melancholy. Sometimes our fears and pain are so great that we just can’t talk about them with another human. But horses are so non-judgmental, so open to our pain if we can share it with them.”

I watched Willie now return to the brown headed woman holding the infant. Again he leaned into the panel so his face was once again face to face with her infant. Her child reached out and touched Willie’s lips. I was about to caution her when tears began streaming down her face. Willie sighed again and stayed with her till her crying ebbed."

Four weeks after Gardner’s death found me on another train pushing its way north out of Moscow and into the Russian countryside. We were berthed in a sleeper car and as darkness approached people around us set up their mattresses on their bunks and curled up to sleep. I went out to stand between the train cars and watched through an open window.

I like Russian trains because they go slowly enough, about 80 miles per hour, so you can take a brief look into stranger's lives and then be gone. During the Cold War period, I often took the night train from Moscow to Leningrad and every morning about 1 AM it would slow as we approached a road crossing in the middle of nowhere. The same man would leave his tiny station-master house and stand by the auto barrier as we passed. And every time I would lean out as far as I could from the train, wave and yell a greeting to him in English. I like to think that he somehow incorporated me into a story that he one day told to his grandchildren.

Now as we passed through a small Russian city the train slowed and I watched in the dusk a man in a sheepskin coat put his car away in his community auto garage. These small concrete cubicle rooms about fourteen by twenty feet are a product of Soviet times and are located at a convenient distance from the car owner's apartment buildings. Lined up in long rows with a roll down door, they are the chosen meeting place for some of my Moscow male friends.

On weekends these men go to their garage, close the door and spend the day chatting with their car buddies and working on their engines. Many of these spaces are fitted with small wood burning stoves and are quite cozy in winter. These are also places where you could go and turn on your engine, close your eyes and say good-by one last time to the cold grey skies, the cheap vodka, the meaningless work and the children that moved away and never wrote or called. I said a quick prayer for the man in the sheepskin coat as he closed his roll down garage door.

The Southwest jet came in low over Chicago and shuddered in the heat before it dipped over the lake and landed. It was the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend and I was looking for a place to hide. Before dawn I had started on a flight from Portland to Albuquerque, leaving behind everything that mattered to me, a loving family, a great community and a new puppy. I had said good-by to all this many times before and every time felt the same melodrama course through my veins, heard the string section of the same far off orchestra play the saddest and most beautiful symphony.

My record selection as a young adult was light on Chuck Berry and heavy on Debussy, Borodin, Mussorgsky, and Mendelsohn. On late afternoons when I was alone in our eight bedroom seaside mansion I would put these records on and wander alone through the halls and feel the emotion come crushing down on me. I watched the ocean churn and then darken before me. After lighting a fire in the living room, I would go out onto the porch that leaned out over the rocks and the ocean and imagine that I was the only one in the castle who made it home after the battle. My comrades had died valiantly and I had survived. This teen age absolution would always end with my parents driving up the driveway to start supper.

As a child, Memorial Day was a time for getting the boats painted and ready for the water. It was time for my dad and me to work together. His love for boats and the ocean was enormous. I was certain that he had been a sea captain of a giant sailing ship in a prior life but he never wanted to talk about his family history. Memorial Day was also a time of remembrance, of saying good-by to those who had made the ultimate sacrifice, dying in battle.

Last week I was visiting with my brother who now lives by the ocean in a sea captain's house. We had a great time, staying up late and then getting up early. Over breakfast he shared with me his retirement plans. He became passionate as he told me his dreams of playing jazz music, painting and studying history. Then he ran upstairs and came down with a book.

"You need to read this on the train home," he said as he handed me this very dull looking tome. "It's the story of what happened. It is the story of our people and when you read it you will understand."

I recognized the author Tom Hayden as a hero of the Vietnam anti-war movement. He and I had both spoken at the same demonstration years ago but I was too shy then to introduce myself. Now he was writing about our people's history, the Irish, and I was intrigued.

In the preface Tom tells a story. He was riding with his Canadian wife and her father through the Black Hills of South Dakota, headed for the Monument to Sitting Bull. Arriving at the park entrance, a native ranger welcomed them and asked if anyone in the car might be of the Lakota Nation. Tom and his wife said no. The ranger looked in the back seat at the father in law and said, "Sir, might you be native. We have free admission for native peoples. And to Tom and his wife's great surprise, her father said "Yes, I am from here."

"I left the reservation as a young man for work in the oil fields of Western Canada and never looked back," he then confessed to his daughter and son-in-law in the parking lot.

As I turned the pages of his book, Tom described how survivors of genocide, even those that were not yet alive at the time, often blame themselves because they were spared. I have since learned of Native

American children who are born with the genetic memory of Wounded Knee and Little Big Horn. They can draw the land and the dead bodies never having seen pictures or hearing stories, even though they were adopted as infants and lived thousands of miles from the killing fields.

Tom's book goes on to tell about a post-genocide sadness that descended upon the Irish people. This slaughter of their race became a part of their genetic memory and new-born children a century and a half after the famine may inherit this sadness and carry it throughout their lives. Then they pass it on to their own children, never knowing for certain its origin, even its existence.

Like the Native Americans, my Irish ancestors' racial profile came with alcohol on the breath, a tear on the cheek and a broken face from a drunken brawl. Reading this book I began to understand my love affair with melancholy. I recall now the warm summer day when my grandmother Josephine said "Truth, you want the truth. Why, it has never helped me much over the years."

Marty had always wanted Peace Fleece to work with the Navajo people, their sheep and their wool. Awhile back our son Silas co-produced a profoundly moving documentary film about Native Americans and through him and his South Dakota friends our whole family was introduced intimately to their trauma. Peace Fleece first began buying wool from the Cheyenne River Reservation, home to the Lakota Sioux in South Dakota, then from Native ranchers on the Navajo Reservation. On this Memorial day I was on my way visit these shepherds and their sheep.

As I left the Portland plane in Chicago and headed for the Albuquerque gate this deep familiar melancholy came over me and drove me to an isolated corner of the airport to be alone for a few moments with the words

from Tom Hayden's book. Maybe it was too much for an Irish American to be working with an Indian American. But I felt I was coming closer to something that had eluded me my entire life.

I recalled the day Marty and I were married, the moment our first child came into the world, the times when I worked with the horses, moments when I felt this happiness might be just around the corner. But the feeling was always elusive and would soon slip away.

Someone decided years ago to starve the Irish people off their land. Millions died of disease or were lost at sea. Why did the English do this? And were my Irish ancestors party to a new genocide as they immigrated westward to displace and destroy the 'savages' that roamed the fertile plains of America?

Nizhny Novgorod, the name just rolls off my tongue like warm butter. A Russian city on the way to the Ural Mountains five hours train ride east of Moscow and eleven hours by train south from Yaroslavl. Here artisans from Russia's third largest city make wooden buttons for Peace Fleece.

Last spring Oleg from our Yaroslavl office uncovered a wool washing factory near Nizhny which he thought might sell us Russian wool. I called their overseas phone number and spoke with Alexander Topnikov, the director of Borwool. He invited us to visit his mill and we set a tentative date for the fall. Hannah and Julia Stiles, sisters who work with us here in the office and on the farm, would be joining Marty and me when we headed to Russia where we would be hosted by our longtime friends Luba and Sasha. I bought airline tickets for mid-October and Luba organized our Russian train travel.

Then over the summer we got an e-mail from Ivan, our wood products coordinator in Yaroslavl. We had written him saying that we were going to Nizhny and search for the artisans that milled and painted our wooden buttons.

“Peter,” he wrote, “it is possible that some of the painting is done in prisons. I do not advise that you visit these people.”

Well, needless to say, this came as quite a surprise. Now more than ever we wanted to find out who were making the buttons. And as often happens, I heard from an old friend and fellow traveler about an American couple living in Nizhny Novgorod named Mike and Karen who worked with recovering drug addicts, alcoholics and newly released prisoners. When I

wrote them they enthusiastically agreed to meet us and help us find our painters.

Sometimes it is hard to stay light-hearted when visiting Russia. Often the sky is grey and cloudy over miles of endless forest and field as the plane makes its final approach to Domodedovo Airport. This year Luba crammed all five of us in her tiny Jiguli car, strapped two hundred and fifty lbs. of luggage on the roof rack and in the trunk and drove “hell bent” into Moscow traffic. Before our short trip was over we had whacked the side view mirror of a fellow motorist, been sideswiped by a panel truck and nearly slammed into the last car in a left turn lane.

After a hearty bowl of chicken soup at Luba’s Moscow apartment, we slipped out of the city under the cover of darkness and headed towards her dacha 90 miles to the west. For the next three days Luba’s husband Sasha filled our tummies, breakfast, lunch and supper, with wild mushrooms he had gathered from the nearby forest. He mixed them in soup, then pickled them with garlic and finally sautéed them with onions. Between these extraordinary meals we visited with neighbors, hiked the surrounding countryside and slept.

Taking a late morning train from Moscow, we arrived in Nizhny Novgorod on the midnight train and caught the last bus over the Volga River to Naberezhnaya Street and our small hotel. Guided by several friendly strangers who appeared out of the night, we found ourselves down by the river and the “red light” district, complete with pole dancing clubs. The police just shook their heads at our small group of out-of-towners asking for directions in such a sketchy neighborhood way too late at night.

When we finally reached the correct Air B&B addresses we pushed a buzzer, the door opened and we began dragging our oversized luggage up

five flights of stairs and entered not a hotel but a hostel! What a difference an 's' can make. Passing young, happy Russians with tooth brush and towel in hand heading for the common shower, we made our way to our simple but adequate bunk rooms. We dragged our suitcases into the corner and collapsed on the metal beds, lulled to sleep by the traffic and river flowing by four floors below.

BorWool was founded in 1952 in the small village of Nekludovo across the Volga River from Nizhny. Director Alexander had kindly arranged for a taxi to pick us up at our hostel and by 10:00 am we were all sitting in his conference room enjoying coffee and tea. His company buys Merino fine wool from southern Russia, the republics of Dagestan and Chechnya as well as from the central Siberian regions of Buryatya and Tuva close to the China border.



Weighing Wool during WW2

BorWool works as well with companies outside of Russia and its modern scouring train washes hundreds of thousands of pounds of wool each year.

As we walked through the plant I watched the relaxed way Alexander interacted with his employees. He often directed our questions to them, some of whom were twice his age and had worked in the mill their entire lives. The company is presently owned by a German firm and trucks leave for the West on a regular basis. We took home samples of wool we thought might work for our yarns.



Borwool Workers during War Years

Back in the city we met Mike and Karen for lunch at a small café in a modern shopping center where they described to us their work. Under the auspices of a Christian Church they help men and women recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. Their clients are placed in very rural village settings where they live for up to one year far away from old habits and acquaintances. It is clear that both Mike and Karen love their work and we were moved by their energy and commitment.

After lunch we went in search of a street bizarre where wooden buttons painters might be found. It turned out that the local prison was a ways out of town and we ended up not finding anyone who was selling anything similar to our Peace Fleece buttons. “You know, Pete,” Mike said, “it is quite common here for men to earn money while in prison. They learn a craft and at the same time make small amounts of cash which makes their lives a little easier while in jail.” We thanked them for their help and invited them back to our hostel’s common kitchen where we pooled a variety of dishes from a collection of plastic bags and celebrated the love we shared for the Russian people.



Now as I write on my computer Marty is up on the top bunk and will sleep most of the eleven hour train ride to Yaroslavl. Our train car is filled with new recruits to the Russian army heading for basic training in the north. Their freshly shaved heads and crisp new uniforms do little to bolster their mood as they leave behind their friends and loved ones. Hannah and Julia are reading together, surrounded by soldiers their own age. And I now thought of my own kids at home and how they had met their first Russians.



International Panorama and Dounaev

“There is a man on the phone who says he is from Russian Television,” announced my then eleven year old daughter Cora. It was 1987, and Peace Fleece was two years old.

“Please ask him what he would like,” I replied.

“Dad!” She rolled her eyes and handed me the phone.

“Hello Mr. Hagerty, my name is Vladimir Dounaev and I am the Bureau Chief for Soviet Television based here in Washington. I would like come to Maine with a camera man and do a story on Peace Fleece. Is this possible?”

My heart skipped a beat.

“That would be great,” I replied. “When are you thinking about coming?”

“Well, it is a little difficult. You see, you live in Oxford County, Maine. Your government forbids Russian journalists to enter all the counties that

surround yours, both in Maine and New Hampshire. But for some reason we are allowed to enter your county.”

“How do you proposed to get here then,” I asked.

“I am presently in Rhode Island doing a piece on Congresswoman Claudine Schneider. But tomorrow we are in hopes of flying, if there an airport near you in Oxford County?”

“Yes, in fact there is a small one in Fryeburg just north of our farm.”

And the following afternoon Cora and I were standing out on a deserted runway looking south. Soon a small speck appeared from behind a billowing white cloud and began its approach.

“Oh my gosh!” exclaimed Vladimir as he climbed down out of the cockpit. “Your daughter.” he exclaimed in a most sincere voice. “I am so honored. This is Sergei, my cameraman, and this is Mr. Brown our pilot.”

We all stood there shaking hands. As we loaded their baggage into the car, I noticed Providence Flying Lessons written on the door of the plane. Mr. Brown quietly asked me “Hey, do you know who these guys are?” I smiled and said, “Yes”.

Vladimir then said “It is true, yes Jack? I flew most of the way. My first flying lesson.”

“Look,” Vladimir continued, taking me aside. “I know this is all rather sudden. But Sergei and I would like to stay for maybe 4-5 days. We have rooms booked at the inn in Fryeburg. Is this possible? I need to tell Jack when to come back so we can resume our ‘flying lessons’.”

Four to five days, that was a long interview. In the past months we had hosted crews from the BBC, CBS Morning News, People magazine and the Today Show. Their visits had lasted two days at most. Vladimir noticed my hesitation.

“For years I have been directed by Moscow to show only the dark side of America, the racial tension, labor strife, the unstable stock market. Thanks to a new leader I now have new instructions.

“Russians are hungry to learn about the lives of average Americans. And I want to film this. I want to go to your children’s school, meet the teachers. I want to sit by the bridge that crosses your Ossipee River, to just sit and meet local people that come by. And ask them what they think about my country, about Gorbachev.

“I want to see you log with your horse in the woods and shear your sheep. My show, International Panorama, is the most popular news report in the entire USSR. Once a week I do a one-hour show from America. Peace Fleece will be fifteen minutes long and I want my viewers to understand why you do what you do.”

We agreed, not knowing how my town would react to a communist journalist co-mingling with their children, teachers and families. But that next day a letter to the homes of South Hiram Elementary School students produced not one objection.



Vladimir Dounaev was the Walter Cronkite of the USSR. For most Russians, the men and women they viewed on Vladimir's show were the only exposure they had to American people. Yet as I watched him at a teacher's meeting at our children's school two days later, he was extremely modest and soft spoken. After the staff had dealt with the problems of the day, the principal asked Vladimir to offer a few thoughts. He smiled and thoughtfully began.

"My wife has been a teacher her whole life. And what I have heard today is what I hear at night over supper, the same problems, the same hopes, the same passion. I do not think that one can truly teach without passion."

He was a big hit with most of the teachers. The exception was one of Cora's. When he saw her in school the next day he said "I hear you have two communists staying at your home."

"What does communist mean?" she asked me after getting off the bus that afternoon. "Mr. C made it sound bad, like maybe they should not be here."

I was surprised and saddened by this turn of events. I can't remember exactly what I said to her. But that evening over supper Vladimir announced that he would like to visit my children's' respective classrooms the next day. Silas was very excited but Cora just looked down at her plate.

They filmed at school the next morning and by afternoon Vladimir and Sergei were in the driveway of our farm with their camera as the school bus came down the road. Somehow the kids had gotten the word that the television crew was at our house so smiles and waving hands were sticking out the bus. Sergei was filming and Vladimir was leaning against the farm fence taking in the scene.

First Silas climbed down from the bus, then Cora. Both were somewhat embarrassed by all the attention but as Silas trotted into the house Cora dropped her saxophone case and book bag and headed out through the barn. Vladimir watched her and then slowly pushed himself up and followed. He found her out back across the bridge sitting on a tree stump. Cora remembered the conversation that ensued.

"I saw him coming up the hill.

"Hello," he said. "Something is the matter?"

"You did not come to my class today," I replied. "Yet you went to Silas. Why?"

"He sat down on a nearby rock and reminded me of a grandfather with his thinning hair and tummy.

"I asked you last night if I could come to your classroom but you said nothing," he replied.

“I know but I had a talk with my dad. My teacher called you a communist. I did not know what it meant. I thought about it all last night. I decided that I liked you and that you should come to my class.”

He looked off into the forest for a moment.

“Thank you Cora for sharing this with me. It means a lot to me that you changed your mind. But you see I could not come to your class without being sure that you wanted me there.”

“Well, can you come tomorrow?” I replied.

“No I am afraid that Sergei and I must return to Washington. But someday you will come with your family to Moscow and I can show you around. You can visit my wife’s classroom and meet all her students.”

It was not till the end of that summer that we saw the final broadcast version. Sergei had called from Washington to say that our edition of International Panorama had run the same evening that Ronald Reagan was heading home from Moscow after an historic rapprochement with Michael Gorbachev. As Reagan said good-by to his Russian counterpart, the Soviet Union watched as the president wrapped his arms around Michael Sergeivitch in a bear hug and announced that “you are no longer the evil empire”. Millions of Russians were watching that night.

Reagan’s plane took off and the show to follow the evening news was International Panorama, broadcast for the first time in a new format. No intro, just opening footage of a 2000 pound grey horse pulling a large pine log out of the woods. This was followed by clips of me shearing sheep, interviews with customers at the Peace Fleece showroom, and reflections from Silas’ classroom. But the most footage was devoted to Vladimir

reflecting on the conversation with Cora about the classroom and the communist.

Dounaev chose this dialogue to be the centerpiece of his show. And I heard in Vladimir's voice the authenticity not of a renowned journalist but rather of a proud grandfather. More than once I have been sitting in a Russian railway station or on a bus and a stranger might nod and smile or wave and I would say "Meshdoonarodnaya Panorama" and they would say "da" and ask me how my daughter was doing.

Vladimir had a bad heart. He knew before he came to Maine that there would be no hospitals nearby if he had an attack. I would like to think that local compassion would have trumped international politics. His Peace Fleece story was one of his last works and he died of heart failure in Washington the following October.



The staff of the Bear's Den, our Yaroslavl hotel, was still up and waiting for us when we arrived by train in the early hours of the morning from Nizhny. They smilingly reported that for reasons of "renovation" we would be sequestered in the "Deluxe" suites for the same price as the economy rooms that we normally occupied. I was then scolded when I failed to recognize the concierge and used the formal "you" in Russian when greeting her. We assume that we are part of only a handful of Westerners that stay there as no one in the hotel speaks English.

When visiting Russia we are always looking for sheep farmers with whom we might work. Since our last visit our friend Galina had discovered an Islamic farmer from the Caucasus region of Southern Russia who had moved to the northern reaches of Russia and settled with his family just south of Yaroslavl to practice veterinarian medicine and raise sheep.

So the following morning we joined a group of young teenagers from the Pytorka orphanage aboard a school bus and headed out to our new friends Omar and his Russian partner Ludmilla's sheep farm about thirty kilometers from the city. Here we toured the impressive construction of new sheep barns, saw a portion of the fall crop of over 1200 lambs, met three new Romanov rams imported from the Czech Republic and then sat down to a delicious Dagestani meal of mutton cooked in milk and garlic.

We met Omar's beautiful wife and son in law for the first time and shared with them the Ramadan greeting "As-salamu alaykum" "Peace be upon you" to which we replied "wa alaikumu el salaamu" which means "may peace be with you also". I was surprised how moved I was by this simple yet unexpected exchange. Somehow here in this remote region of Orthodox Russia it took on an especially powerful significance.

Our trips all seem to end too quickly and we find ourselves leaving with 'many emotions' as Luba says. She and I still joke about "how long we are going to do this?" But when Marty and I consider ending our yearly trips to Russia, we always come back to the fact that these friends so many miles away hold a special place in our hearts. It does not take much for us to get emotional as we recall their faces, of Sasha hunting for mushrooms in the forest, of Luba mothering us all the time, of Oleg and Ivan and the Yaroslavl crew organizing our business there. And the staff and students at

the orphanage carving pumpkins at Halloween or grooming horses at the riding stable.

One moment from this trip captures the essence of these friendships. It had been a long day for us, up early to the sheep farm, then back to the orphanage for lunch and a felting and drawing workshop taught by Julia and Hannah. Then finally a visit to the horse stables across the river where several of the Pytorka students proudly showed us the progress they had made riding and grooming their steeds. But before we would sleep that night, Marty and I needed to meet Ivan at the railroad station to buy tickets back to Moscow.

The weather was unseasonably warm so we decided to walk the five kilometers from the Bear's Den to the station. When we arrived at 11:30 pm there was Ivan holding the hand of his five year old daughter Anna. While waiting at the ticket window, I thanked Anna for accompanying her dad. Ivan then announced, "Every morning for the last month her first words were 'Daddy, is Peter coming today?'" My eyes welled up as this shy little girl smiled up at me.

At our going away party the next night at Anna's grandparent's apartment I looked around the living room at the smiling faces of her family. Her great grandmother Grannie Kuznetzova sits at the head of the table. This babushka lives by herself in her ancestral village for the summer months tending to her garden and sanding our Peace Fleece knitting needles in her free time. Her son Yuri and his wife Galina, Ivan's parents, sit to her right and have made Marty and I feel very special every time we come to Yaroslavl. Yuri speaks French with me and is our major needle maker. Galina works at a local bank and showers us with gifts and concert tickets.

To my left sits Masha, Ivan's wife and on her lap perches Anna's newest sister, Vasalisa. Only Ivan's sister is missing, on a business trip to Spain.

That night we toasted to 'mir ee druzhba', 'peace and friendship' and to the belief that our two nations can not only avoid mutual destruction but can in fact coexist and prosper. This gives me hope, in Russian "nadeshda". For years Grannie Kuznetzova feared American missiles pointed at her homeland. For years Uncle John feared the Soviet submarines that prowled his coastline. One can hope that Russians and Americans who have made such friendships over the past thirty years may well provide a much needed alternative to the winds of war now stirring in Ukraine.

I first came to Russia in August of 1985. On my first morning I walked out of my hotel onto Red Square and wondered aloud what an Irish Catholic kid from Boston was doing in a country where he spoke only a few words of the language and knew not a soul. Now almost thirty years later the answer is clear.

Russians and Americans are not the same people. We have extraordinarily different histories and no matter how much time we spend together, how many meals we share, we should not expect to embrace each other's values. Once at the supper table at Luba's dacha I threw up my hands at the television news of Russia's incursion into the Ukraine. Marty and I had been with her for a week and she had enough of my frustration.

"Peter, do what you can do. Forget the rest. Just do what you can do."

I had chosen not to view Dad's body at the funeral home. I just couldn't handle it. My brother John identified the remains, said his head and nose were smashed in pretty badly. It was a closed casket and that worked for me. My job was to welcome all the people who came from near and far and that seemed to take days. But by never seeing his dead body, Dad never really died for me. As my life moved along I was always on the lookout for his face in a crowd. From a moving train in Kazakhstan I thought I saw him getting into a car. Once I was sure it was him rowing a single shell on the Charles River.

The following year on the anniversary of his death Marty and I took a drive down Parker Ave to his factory that was now being run by my brother John. We sat in the car watching one of Dad's best friends Cliff Dixon hauling lobster boats out of the water for the winter. Cliff saw us and waved.

"I am really glad to see you," he began. "I wanted to talk at the funeral but you were stretched pretty thin. You know your dad was a very special friend. He was always looking out for me, especially this time of year. The night before he died he stayed up in his office long after everyone else went home. I had been noticing this all that week and I knew he was staying late so he could keep an eye on me until I was done. So that last night as I was leaving I honked my horn to let him know he could now go home.

"He knew how tricky it was working alone on the water in the cold and dark. So it was especially hard to be the first person to find him the next

day. I was on the rescue unit. He had been missing for 3 hours when we found him. He was wearing gloves and his fingers and toes were still warm so we tried to revive him. His face was crushed in. It was the fall down the cement stairs and the cold that killed him. We figured the heart attack story was to save your mom from knowing he was lying out there freezing to death. I thought you had a right to know.”

There stood Cliff, gently stroking the head of his old black lab and telling me my heart was not necessarily going to let me down at an early age.

It was a cold February night on the farm, ten years later. We were in full lambing mode and I was just returning to bed after the 2 AM check when I saw a bright light coming slowly over the Burnt Meadow Mountains. As it grew closer I made out a helicopter with two people inside. But the light was coming from inside the chopper and everything was made of glass. I could see all the moving parts, the engine turning the long drive shaft which turned the rotors. The copter hovered for a moment and then landed not 30 yards from our bedroom window in Lester’s field. The pilot remained seated but his passenger climbed out.

I threw on my barn coat and hat and when I opened the front door there stood my father in a foot of snow. It was well below zero but all he was wearing was his tattered Brooks Brothers shirt, his khaki pants and his summer sneakers with holes in the toes. Somehow his outfit triggered a very special memory of this man standing in the snow.

I was a sophomore at Harvard and was having no luck meeting any girls. Finally after a very thin winter and early spring I did meet a real beauty from Wellesley and I asked her down to Cohasset for Sunday lunch. It was a gorgeous day when we drove down Atlantic Ave. and as we approached our home I saw my father, dressed exactly as he was now in the snow,

standing on a short ladder, clipping back the hedge in front of our house. When he saw my car, he jumped down and as I pulled over he threw up his hands in the air in over-exaggerated expectation.

“Oh, Mr. Hagerty,” he began in a thick South Boston Irish accent. “It is a so good to see ya. How’ve you been? Everyone here has a missed you so. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Who it this beauty sitting next to you?”

He began moving behind the car and up towards my guest. I grabbed the chance to break away and headed up the drive. This was my father at his finest, one moment designing a fast sailing craft, the next fully engaged in Act 2 of his own Off Broadway script.

My guest turned to me and said “Oh if there’s one thing that I can’t stand its ‘uppity’ help”.

And now my Irish gardener was standing on my front steps in the dark looking straight at me with a sheepish grin.

“I got some time away on good behavior,” he smiled and stepped through the front door. I hugged him close, fighting back the tears. How I had missed this man. He had been my co-captain during some big storms. I could hand him the wheel and go below for some needed sleep knowing that all would be safe.

“I had a chance to meet Cora before I died but not Silas,” he said. So we both climbed the stairs and quietly opened my son’s door. The minute we entered Silas was awake and sat up.

“Hi Frannie,” he said.

“Hi Silas,” Frannie replied. “I am so very glad to meet you. Your sister was just seven months old when I suddenly left. I did have a chance to get to know her, but I missed shaking your hand.”

Silas grabbed his grandfathers extended hand and softly shook it. “I wonder if you would take me out and show me the sheep with their new lambs,” Dad asked.

I sat there in the darkness for maybe 20 minutes. Somehow this all made sense to me. I was calm, grateful and fully alive even in the presence of a dead man. Often when I was young my father would wake me in the middle of the night, asking if I would like to join him at church where he would sit for a few hours with a small group of his friends and quietly affirm his faith. I never accepted his offer and soon he stopped asking.

Then one cold December night he woke me up. “Peter, can you come to church? The Snow Maiden is sinking and everyone is gathering at St. Anthony’s.”

Frannie was always a great lover of old fishing schooners just like I am a lover of old ways to farm. Both these forms of work were well known for their high cost of human life. One spring a young newly-wed couple who went to our church purchased a worn out fishing schooner. Made in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia she had spent her life fishing cod off the Grand Banks but now she was a jumble of rotting lumber and tired sails. Fred White and his beautiful wife would often meet Dad after work at the town pier and for two summers worked into the evening refitting her planking and rewiring her stays.

“We all watched her leave the harbor that winter,” Dick Pratt told me years later at Dad’s funeral. “They were set on getting her to Plymouth and into a

dry dock before winter set in so they could work on her planking and frame. It was snowing hard and growing dark. Your dad pleaded with them to wait but they were set on leaving.”

Dad and I arrived at St. Anthony’s to see the stain glass windows ablaze with lights. Officer Dick Barrows was sitting in his squad car monitoring the Coast Guard ship to shore.

“They’ve no idea where it is. Coast Guard got a distress call, said they were taking on water. That was it.”

The basement of the church was alive with coffee making and donut broiling. The church itself was small but always crowded on Sunday and its stain glass windows had been paid for with nickels and dimes at collection time. Cohasset was a town where the rich, old moneyed Yankees commuted to Boston on the train, lived by the ocean and worshiped in the white colonial churches on the commons.

These Portuguese, Italian and Irish folks worked locally, fishing, clamming or as cops or firemen and said their prayers at a church they had built with their own hands. We had priests that drank too much and nuns that hit too hard but on this night they were all asleep. It was the folks who had been at sea in winter and knew what it was like to have a loved one in harm’s way who were running the show tonight.

After a quick cup of coffee and a donut we headed up stairs and found a place to kneel. We squeezed in next to Marge Freatus, Dad’s secretary and Jack Bishop, a very non-Catholic friend who had come to wait for news and say a few prayers. Someone had placed a single candle on the altar.

About twenty minutes into our kneeling Dad tapped me on the arm and signaled his desire to leave. As we made our way out into the cold he said, "I know where she is."

We made our way over to Dick's squad car. Dick's father Fred Barrows and his grandfather Tony had both worked in Dad's factory during and after the war so Dick did not hesitate to give Frannie the police radio.

"41.9583 Degrees N, by 70.6678 degrees W. Yes, that's correct, Lieutenant, 200 yards off of Sequish Point. Put your rescue helicopter down there and you will see the Snow Maiden. But she is breaking up. Fred and his wife, that's right. And four crew. Six in all."

And that night the Hull Coast Guard pulled the crew to safety. Fred stayed on board till the last minute and only left when she hit the sandbar and broke in half.

I heard the front door open and Silas came up the stairs. "Grandpa's outside and wants to say good-by".

There he was again, standing in the snow and looking toasty and warm. "You're doing a great job as a dad and a husband. I am always here if you need me." Again a hug beyond hugs and he turned, walked out into Lester's field and was gone.

The Holy Land 1991-1996

By 1990 things between the United States and the Soviet Union began to dramatically improve. Friends and customers began to joke that Peace Fleece had ended the Cold War and we needed to move into the Middle East and fix things there. I knew this to be a silly assessment yet I could not help being impressed by how our government seemed to seamlessly move from the communist threat to the terrorist threat. The night that US forces entered Iraq for the first time, Marty and I decided to make an exploratory trip to Israel and the Occupied Territories to see if there were Palestinian and Israeli shepherds willing to form a commercial partnership in wool.

My first trip was in the summer of 1991. I was hosted by the Center for Jewish and Arab Economic Development. It turned out that the projects they supported were exclusively in Israel and they had no formal contacts either in East Jerusalem or the West Bank. But even so they were a great help, introducing me to a Jewish shepherd, Taffi Nevo, who raised her flock on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa in the north and Israeli Arab Ali Mohammed Said whose family ran the largest shearing crew in Israel. They both agreed to help me purchase and export some Merino wool from Kibbutz Ramot Menashe once that flock's shearing was complete.

My final stop on this trip was to be Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salaam, an extraordinary community of Israeli Jews and Arabs who lived together, sharing the responsibility of the village business and their children's education. In the village school students learned Hebrew, Arabic, English and sometimes even an additional language. Fifty families, half Jewish and half Arab, all celebrated together their respective religious holidays as well

as mourned together when a member of their community died in the ongoing conflict.

They invited me to stay in their guesthouse for the night and the following morning I awoke to the sweet sound of sheep baaing. Opening the blinds I looked down to see a Bedouin family not 100 feet below milking their flock. I quickly showered and ran down the hill just as the shepherd disappeared with his flock over the hill to graze. When I caught up with him, he smiled and greeted me with “Salaam al Aikum.”



Abu with young admirer

“Wa ‘alayk al-salaam” I replied. When I then realized that I had reached the extent of my Arabic I said “America” and he held his hand several feet above the ground, about the height of a child. “San Diego” he said. I smiled. Then I began to take my right hand and, with a scissors finger motion, began to shear the hair off my left forearm. “Quaisse” he smiled. He then motioned with his sweeping arm to where the sun would be at

noon and then pointed towards his camp. We would meet there then and I would have a translator with me.



Heidi, Kara, Silas and Suliman washing sheep in the Wadi

So began the friendship with Abu Abed, his wife Fatima and his son Suliman. Their 200 Avassi milking sheep were their main livelihood. Fatima would make soft cheese over an open fire after morning milking and take it to the local market to sell. They would hand shear their sheep in the spring, a few every day, and sell their fleeces to weavers in a nearby village. One of Abu's sons had recently left with his family for San Diego and his absence caused a great hardship in his camp.



Abu and Ann Shearing

The Israeli government attempted to resettle these nomadic Bedouin people into cities but many resisted. Neve Shalom offered Abu Abed's flock and family a sanctuary on their land and his sheep freely grazed the community's pastures. As my first visit ended I promised him that I would return the following spring to help him shear. He consulted with his wife and they agreed. I think that they placed only a minimal stock in my promise but seven months later in April of 1992 I arrived at Abu's camp and helped his family with the shearing.

As my first Mid-East visit drew to a close I came to realize how much I missed not visiting the West Bank. In some respects I was relieved to pass up being mistaken for an Israeli settler as I hitch hiked through the Judean desert. But a village couple, Raik and Diana, assured me that I would be fine. Both fiercely proud of their Palestinian heritage, they encouraged me to spend a night in East Jerusalem and take one day at a time. I had two days left so I called an American friend Leah Green who regularly ran

workshops for American visitors to the West Bank and she also encouraged me to make the leap and recommended a hotel.

My room at the American Colony had a balcony which looked down into the narrow streets of East Jerusalem. As the sun slid towards the Mediterranean and West Jerusalem came to life with discos, coffee bars and night life, the community below me headed home for supper and the call to prayer. The Maghrib prayer begins when the sun sets and lasts till the red glow has left the sky in the west. From my balcony I watched as an armed Israeli three person patrol made its way on foot up the street, buying several pears from an Arab vendor as he closed his stall for the day. As the prayer ended I saw a glow of lights turn on in a stadium not far away and I quickly succumbed to the roar of the crowd. Hitting the streets I soon found myself screaming in the stands for the local soccer team.



Peter and Abu Abed

My original schedule called for me to leave the Middle East for Moscow in two days. I was carrying into Russia a large amount of American dollars sewn into the back of my tee shirt to pay our staff there. Back then we had no way to easily wire or transfer funds back and forth. I called home the first evening in my West Bank hotel room to check in.

“Peter, have you been listening to the news?” asked Marty. I hadn’t.

“There is fighting in Red Square. Yeltsin has a standoff in the Parliament Building. Tanks are rolling in to blow it up. The airport is closed. I don’t think that it is a good time to be flying there with a lot of cash.”

I agreed and booked a new flight for home, giving me several more days to explore the forbidden Occupied Territories.

The following days as I roamed the streets of East Jerusalem and Bethlehem I fell in love with the community I met there. Leah introduced me to Zoughbi Zoughbi who took me to a livestock auction. I met Hannah Ashrowi, a powerful Palestinian woman leader and Gene Sandretto, an American teaching at the Hope Flower School in Bethlehem. I was totally hooked and couldn’t wait to return with my family and friends.

In the spring of 1993 Marty and I, our two children Silas and Cora Josephine and a group of eight friends returned to Neve Shalom to oversee the first Peace Fleece Palestinian-Israeli Wool Festival, shear all of Abu Abed’s sheep and purchase and bring home all of his fleece for a new Peace Fleece Israeli-Palestinian weaving yarn. Our American friends taught knitting and felting to the children in the village school during the day and in the evenings these children brought their parents to our guest house to learn more about the crafts we were offering.

Unbeknownst to us our festival accidentally coincided with an historic meeting in Washington between Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his Palestinian counterpart Yasser Arafat in preparation for the Peace Accord they would sign later that summer. I learned of this early on the first morning of the festival in a phone call from a Jordanian news reporter asking me to comment on whether I was planning to cancel the wool festival.

"Why would I do that?" I queried.

"Because terrorist groups on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides are looking for a way to disrupt the Washington meeting. Here in Amman your event came up on our radar screen. You have no knowledge of this threat?"

"I think you have the wrong festival," I replied and thanked him for the head's up.

After checking with the Neve Shalom leadership we agreed to proceed with the event but sometime towards the middle of the day new festival arrivals complained of the traffic delay on the road leading up the hill to the village. I went down to investigate and found a road block with about 100 armed soldiers in battle gear preparing to sweep Neve Shalom. Nobody at the festival seemed alarmed as apparently this went on all the time in a country at war with itself.

On day two of the festival the school voted to cancel classes and all the children and teaching staff helped herd Abu Abed's flock down to the wadi (river) where we all gave the sheep a pre-shearing wash. On the following day many of the children visited Abu and Fatima's encampment to help shear and bag the wool. For some of them it was the first exposure to Arab nomads and their thousand year old lifestyle.

When I originally asked for volunteers to shear at Abu's camp I made no distinction between men and women. So when Anne Priest from New York signed on, I figured that we would sort out cultural differences when the time arrived. At first Abu was a bit taken aback by a western woman shearing in his camp but he and Ann worked through some awkward moments and by day three all the wool was shorn, hand washed and bagged.



Shearing crew returns

On the festival's last day, Jewish and Arab women from all over Israel arrived by bus and car carrying their knitting needles, bags of yarn and portable weaving looms which they quickly set up on the ground. Other folks assembled spinning wheels and quickly provided the knitters and weavers with hand spun yarn. Abu and I had earlier agreed on a mutually acceptable price for his wool and our shearing crew celebrated our financial transaction with one of Fatima's lunches at their tent.

After dessert I handed him a huge envelope stuffed with Israeli shekels. Dressed in clean white pants, shirt and keffiyeh, Abu Abed then climbed

on his donkey, waved farewell and headed to the Jerusalem bus and Friday prayers with my envelope tucked under his shirt. My friend John smiled and offered that perhaps he was “on the way to his stock broker”.

The following year when I returned, Howard, our translator, told me excitedly that with that wool money Abu and his wife had bought airline tickets for their pilgrimage to Mecca. Never before had they sold so much wool at one time, allowing them to fulfill a lifelong dream of doing the Haj.

Lufthansa Airlines had agreed in advance to allow us to check our wool on the home flight as personal baggage. “Anything we can do to foster better relations with Israel,” Lufthansa’s Boston manager had told me. Before leaving home I had also met with Logan Airport’s head of US Customs to alert him to our upcoming unorthodox importation. It turned out that he had a hunting camp in northern Maine with a woodlot needing some attention. I found him a forester to manage his timber harvest and the evening we returned from Israel with 28 bags of mid-East wool piled high on our baggage carts, he was there smiling as he opened a private door, bypassing inspection and taking us directly out into the warm Boston night.



Abu's Wool at Ben Gurion Airport

Shearing for the PLO 1995

“Raik, I need a ride to the village of Jybia”. It was a beautiful spring day in Neve Shalom. The orange trees were in full blossom and their fragrance was awe inspiring for someone from the Maine woods.

“I am not even sure I know where that is,” he smiled and scratched his chin. Raik always knew where everything was and I relished my temporary advantage.

“It is a small West Bank village up in the mountains north of Birzeit University.”

“Why in God’s name do you want to go there?”

“Because a farmer there wants to get some shearing lessons. I need a ride.”

Raik was always good natured and helped me out whenever he could. He was an Israeli Arab citizen and could therefore drive through check points with ease. And his car was somehow known in the West Bank and his keffiyeh casually thrown on the dashboard seemed to protect us from stone throwing youth looking for Israelis heading home to their settlements.

Peace Fleece had joined with the cheese and butter folks of Land O’ Lakes in 1995 to work with Palestinian and Israeli sheep milk producers to eradicate hoof and mouth, anthrax and brucellosis from flocks on both sides of the Green Line. We opened a joint office in Ramallah for West Bank farmers and I continued to exploit the hospitality of Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salaam to oversee the Israeli side. During the spring we also offered shearing and wool handling workshops.

The road north of Jerusalem to Birzeit was in really good shape but once we passed the university it rose up into the Samarian Mountains with rough bumps and gorgeous views.

“What’s the name of this family we are going to visit?” asked good natured Raik, anxiously awaiting a blown tire or broken spring.

“I am not sure of the family name but the farmer is named Suleiman Al-Najab”.

“What did you say?” Raik asked as he screeched to a stop. “Oh my God, do you know who he is?” Words stumbled out of his mouth as the knuckles on his hands gripped the wheel and turned white.

“Someone who needs his sheep sheared?” I answered.

Raik was for several moments speechless. He just sat there looking out over the valley to the distant hills.

“It was on this very road that he walked home,” he began, stumbling over his words. “There was an Israeli human rights lawyer visiting her Arab client in a high security prison near Jerusalem who one day spotted Suleiman, walking down a corridor to his cell.

“We all thought he was dead. One night he had gone missing from his home, then nothing. For one whole year, the Israelis secretly kept him in this jail where he was brutally tortured. The lawyer went to the press and the government backed down and released him.

“I remember the night he was released,” Raik continued. “He looked so thin. Hundreds of people came to the jail to welcome him to freedom. There was a big black Jeep to drive him home to his village but he chose

not to get in. He just stood there staring up into the night sky. Then he told the crowd and the TV cameras that he was walking home.

“One week it took. Thousands joined. They walked on this very road. They ate and slept in these mountain towns. More and more people joined the march until they finally reached his farm.

“Suleiman Al-Najab is for me what Dr. King was for you.” exclaimed Raik. “He believes in non-violent means, is on the Palestine Liberation Organization’s Executive Committee, 19 years in exile in Russia and Cuba, then 4 years underground in the West Bank before he was arrested.”

Raik collected his thoughts and slowly edged the car back onto the road. We soon arrived at the small village of Jibya and had no trouble finding Suleiman’s farm. We made our way up the stairs of a modest stone house surrounded by tall pine trees to be greeted by a comfortably dressed man with a warm smile and a strong hand shake.

Entering a cool room with thick rugs we slipped off our sandals and were served a dark coffee by his lovely wife.

Other men sitting on the floor in a circle each greeted us in turn. Raik, usually the life of the party, was struck silent as these apparently auspicious men offered their names with their hand shake. Then they carried on their business for several minutes. Finally Suleiman excused himself and directed us out a side door to his barns.

“Peter, I am so glad you could come. My men are so excited. Any time we can learn a new technique, we jump for it. I will introduce you to my crew and return shortly. We are almost finished inside.”

The first thing a shearer does when arriving at a farm is to assess the condition of the wool. Is it wet, dirty, broken by disease? These factors will depend on how easily it will be shorn. After working my hands down the backs of Suleiman's sheep, I was relieved to find they were in great health and body condition. I asked each man to show me his shearing scissors and inspected them carefully for sharpness. I then requested that each one catch a sheep and begin shearing.

A year earlier I had been doing a shearing workshop in the remote Tian Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan. I asked the students present to watch me as I sheared with a style I had learned from the New Zealand Wool Board. So I sheared one sheep, rested and then asked them to try. All four shearers grabbed a sheep and sheared them exactly the way I just had. I stood there in shock. I never believed one could learn so quickly from just watching. They waited a few moments, then burst out laughing.

“We had a crew from Australia here last month trying to sell us their gear. They were great fun.” Now I always watch to see how my students shear first, considering that they may have a better technique and something to teach me. As I stood there admiring Suleiman's farm, the stunning view and the tall pine trees forest surrounding the buildings a voice from behind said,

“My father was a forester trained by the British. He planted all these trees and they are a blessing during the hot, dry summer.” Suleiman had returned after saying good-by to his political guests.

“Please, I want to shear a sheep but I never have done so.” I told him about my Kyrgyz experience and he laughed.

“I spent many years in Russia,” he began as I helped him comfort the sheep he held between his legs. I had suggested he change into some old clothes but he was afraid someone might arrive and interrupt this special moment. “Let’s start now,” he requested.

Somehow we got to speaking Russian together. I often find that non-native speakers enjoy talking with one another because we often make the same mistakes but laugh at these faux pas, empathize and keep rolling along.

Suleiman let his sheep go after several minutes so I could work with his staff but when he caught her again he commenced the dialog in Spanish. The only thing I knew in Spanish was the song Guantanamera which we sang together.

Guantanamera,
Guajira Guantanamera

Yo soy un hombre sincero
De donde crece la palma
Yo soy un hombre sincere.

De donde crece la palma
Y antes de morirme quiero
Echar mis versos del alma.

The version which my brother and I sang as youngsters had a different English translation and only now do I realize how appropriate that version was for that moment in Palestine.

I am just a man who is trying
To do some good before dying

So each man and his brother
Bear no ill toward each other.
Life will always be hollow
Unless you listen and follow

Guantanamo,
Guantanamo

As the afternoon drew to a close and the sheep were shorn we washed up in the house and he handed me his card. "Please stay in touch, I need to practice more." I carried his card in my wallet for many years.

The following spring the headlines of newspapers around the world announced "The Palestinian National Council has declared it no longer seeks the destruction of Israel through an armed struggle." Suliman was the man who made this announcement. After that I lost track of him.

Then in 2004, nine years after my visit to Jibia, Brian Whitaker wrote the following article in the British Guardian newspaper entitled These are the Worst Days of Our Lives.

"Two very different generations of the Palestinian resistance came together in Ramallah on Saturday for a double funeral.

As midday prayers ended at the Great Mosque of al-Bireh, the first body was carried out: a young man wrapped in a Palestinian flag, his face uncovered. They loaded him onto a truck draped with the green banners of Islam and his friends jumped in beside him.

"Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!" ["God is greatest"] they cried, sounding almost triumphant.

Nasser abu Zaidiya, barely in his 20s, had been assassinated by an Israeli hit squad that suspected him of killing a settler. As the funeral truck revved its engine, a man with a loud hailer led the chanting and youths with sharp haircuts did a war dance.

"Al-Aqsa's door is made of iron," they shouted defiantly, then roared off, escorting their martyr on his way to paradise.

Next came the body of 67-year-old Suleiman al-Najab in a large and imposing casket. A member of the PLO executive committee and a leader of what used to be called the Communist party but is now known as the Palestinian People's party, he had died in the United States, where he was being treated for cancer.

The procession set off at a snail's pace, to drums and the wail of bagpipes. It was the nearest thing to a state funeral that Ramallah can muster. Senior Palestinian officials followed the cortege, arms linked in lines that stretched the full width of the street.

They halted at the gates of the Palestinian Authority's compound, where Yasser Arafat took the salute. A band played the Last Post and two volleys of shots filled the air.

Arafat was visibly moved by the occasion, and one official confided later that the president had burst into tears on hearing of Suleiman's death. "It's the first time I've seen our president cry," he said."



Suleiman Al-Najab

A Dip in the Sea 1996

The following year, 1996, our cross borders projects came to an unexpected end. We had a large group of Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian veterinarians, academics and farmers scheduled to meet in May. It was the Palestinian's turn to host the event but Israeli settlers had shot and killed a flock of Bedouin sheep one week before the gathering and our Arab partners announced that they could no longer guarantee the safety of their Israeli guests visiting the West Bank. The meeting was relocated to East Jerusalem as a compromise but with dead sheep on the evening news emotions ran so high that we were unable to counter with a productive response. A new intifada had begun.

Peace Fleece continued supporting a small flock in the West Bank village of Beit Sira and Land O'Lakes continued its wellness program for Palestinian women boiling fluid sheep's milk to make cheese. But it was just not the same for me with the Israelis gone.

Gene Sandretto from the Flower School had been instrumental in creating a dialog with both sides but he now cautioned me that this work could bring the strongest to their knees. So reluctantly Peace Fleece decided to close up shop.

One memory of those last days that remains strong is the trip I took with one of our Palestinian staff named Raisa. She was a bright light in the Ramallah office and wanted to be a dress designer. On my last trip to the Middle East she asked me for a favor. I had previously mentioned that I knew a successful Israeli clothing designer named Adina who lived in a trendy beach community about 40 miles north of Tel Aviv. Could I arrange an introduction?

What Raisa was asking was very complicated given the political tension. We would need to get a one day visa for her to come into Israel. Our Palestinian office staff was restricted solely to animal medical exchanges. So I would have to arrange permission for Raisa to cross the border in East Jerusalem at 9:00 AM, then visit an Israeli sheep milking operation for an hour or so, then rush up the coast, meet the dress designer and get back to a border crossing near her home in the north by 7:00 PM. I asked Raik what he thought.

“It might be possible if everything goes as planned. But you have to realize that if you miss the 7:00 pm deadline you will be in serious trouble. You will be in violation of the Israeli Security Defense Act. Also, if you successfully make the crossing have you thought what happens to you after you drop her off at home? Are you going to drive down in the dark from Nablus to Jerusalem in your rental car with Israeli plates? Very dangerous.”

So I decided that I could not ask Raik to help me with this. It was all a bad idea. I was a poor liar anyway and would do a miserable job at the checkpoints, explaining, if challenged, why I was bringing a single Palestinian girl from Nablus, a hot bed of resistance, into Israel. Raisa would understand.

My designer friend Adina immediately complicated things by calling to say that she would love to meet a young, aspiring Palestinian designer. So when I met Raisa at the office the following day my resolve collapsed and we set a day for the trip one week later.

Armed with a temporary visa kindly arranged by Land O’ Lakes, I rented a car, met Raisa in our office in the West Bank and crossed into Israel. The visit to Kibbutz Nachshon went well. It turned out that Raisa had a good

deal of experience milking her family's sheep and she and Dan Neeman, the kibbutz shepherd, had a productive discussion. Back on the road I soon got lost in northern Tel Aviv and arrived 30 minutes late for the meeting.



Dan Neeman (ctr.) with West Bank Shepherds

Netanyana is Israel's answer to Santa Monica, its white sands and trendy shops welcoming the upscale Israeli with an alternative to border disputes and bus bombings. Waiting for Raisa's meeting to end, I went for a walk on the beach, watching the sun drop slowly in the West and the hands on my watch eat away our remaining time.

Raisa had brought some of her clothing designs and she and Adina apparently had an animated meeting. When I arrived to pick her up I thanked my friend and as we walked to the car, Raisa excitedly outlined

the high points of the visit and then asked me how I had spent my time. I told her I had gone to the beach just two blocks away.

“Oh no,” she cried. “Not the beach. You mean the sea is nearby? Is there a chance we could go there just for a moment?”

“I am sorry,” I said, starting to get frustrated. “We are almost out of time. We need to head toward the border.”

“Of course,” she said. “I am sorry!” I pulled out of my parking space and started down the road. All her excitement seemed to evaporate as we headed east.

“We can try for another day,” I offered thinking that this girl expected a lot from me.

She was quiet and just looked straight ahead. Then all at once a thought passed through my mind.

“Raisa, have you ever been to the beach?” I looked over to her and saw her fingers go up to her eyes. No answer. “You have never seen the Mediterranean Ocean, have you?”

She shook her head. I looked at my watch, calculated the traffic headed east and did a U turn. When we arrived she looked over and said, “just one moment” and ran down the sand and out into the waves fully clothed. This 26 year old college graduate woman speaking English, Hebrew and Arabic had never seen or swam in the enormous body of water not 22 miles from her country’s border at its narrowest point.

We arrived at the Saik Eta border crossing with 11 minutes to spare. A young smiling Israeli soldier waved us along with a nod and we were through.

“My parents will have prepared a meal for you. They are so grateful for what you have done.”

We arrived well after dark at a stunning home build up in the mountains. A gurgling stream ran through the house dividing the living room. Her father gave me a warm welcome and her English-speaking younger brother Abed sat by my side to translate as Raisa helped her mother bring in the food.

“My father wants to thank you for what you have done for us today.”

“You are welcome. I am grateful that all went very smoothly.”

“My father knows that what you did was not easy and might be misunderstood. That could have placed you in some danger. He hopes that you will stay with us tonight. Tomorrow I will accompany you back to Ramallah.”

I had nothing to eat since a hurried breakfast and the meal that night was one I would remember forever. We feasted on mutton, hummus and zaatar with freshly vegetables from the garden. Occasionally a fish would make its way either up or downstream, oblivious to the onlookers.

After supper Abed escorted me to the roof where he and I would spend the night. He laid down two thick futon-like blankets and as we sat down he asked me about America, about my family, my town and my own children. He hoped to study political science there one day in graduate school.

“You are one of very few Americans whom I have met. I think that because you are from the country, have animals and live close to nature that we may share common values. I am afraid that those values may be under attack here from western companies like McDonald’s and Pizza Hut.

“The supper we had tonight is what holds us together as a family. We do not have a television. We read the news from our papers and when we eat we share with each other the news of the day. Our sacred traditions are threatened by these Western fast food companies that want to open in the West Bank. How do you feel about this?”

Abed’s tone was sincere, not threatening. It also had a sense of desperation to it as well. I have no memory of what I might have added to the conversation that night. And other than a unique sleeping experience under the stars of the Nablus Mountains I would never have had occasion to remember our meeting at all. Yet several years later in a conversation with a friend visiting from the Mideast I enquired about our mutual friends in Nablus.

“I do not know what actually happened to Abed. I have heard many stories about young men like him from Nablus but now it is so hard to know what is true. I am sorry.”

Five years after our rooftop meeting came 9/11. Communism was dead and Terrorism was our new obsession. After the initial shock of the attack I tried to imagine what drove these men to fly an airplane into the twin towers. What faces were they seeing as they closed their eyes and all suddenly became very dark. What were they trying to destroy and what were they trying to preserve? Then as I watched over and over the planes crashing into the towers I saw Abed’s face on the roof that night and I prayed that his soul had found a safe place to rest.

On the Rez 2012

The D-6 Caterpillar arrived at Leonard and Estelle Cook's ranch just before sundown. We heard the growl of its motor pushing the heavy frozen snow before we saw its lights. Leonard went out to see if the crew wanted supper but they said they were going back out the 6-mile access road again to widen it before they quit. They would leave the dozer by the entrance for the night and they hoped it would start in the morning. If the weather held maybe we could get the shearing crew in by the weekend.

I had arrived that day on a snowmobile from their daughter Carol's ranch to the east by cutting across six and a half miles of open South Dakota cattle and sheep pasture with their son Lenny leading the way. It was foggy and cold and a rough trip. No one had driven a car into the Cook ranch for almost a month. Marty and I were last here in April during mud season. Then the ranch was preparing for spring.

The Cheyenne River Indian Reservation was now covered with a blanket of snow that had fallen in January, followed by a freezing rain that took down over 3000 electric poles throughout the region. Thousands of Natives on the reservation were without power and hundreds without heat and running water. Large groups of the elderly and infirmed had been relocated to other reservations throughout the state. Many people like Leonard and Estelle were unreachable for days. There was almost no cell phone service out there.

Our hope when we started Peace Fleece back in 1985 was that we would get to know farmers who grew our wool and tell the story of their lives. Although we were able to purchase Russian wool over the coming years, we never made substantial headway in developing these commercial relationships into friendships. We grew very close to several small Russian

farms but we never could find a way to use the wool from their sheep in our Peace Fleece yarn.

In 1993 with the help of Land O'Lakes we started MASHA (Moscow Area Sheep Association) in the hopes that we could source our wool from this coop. But the Russian economy was still very unstable and US-Russian relations remained tense, complicating shipments of wool out of Russia. The Russian wool that we did source came from international wool brokers who neither could nor would identify the source farms. This was a frustrating situation for us.

Russia's textile mills are today up and running and now importing large amounts of wool from outside their borders. With the value of the dollar so depressed overseas and the size of the carbon footprint from importing thousands of pounds of wool from Europe, we began focus on sourcing Peace Fleece from new sources here in the States. Years ago we had made trips to Montana and Texas to buy wool. Why not return?



Leonard and Estelle

I came to South Dakota and the Cook Ranch to learn more about the history of the Lakota and Dakota people who call this place home. Leonard and Estelle had lived on this ranch since the 1950's. They had a small piece of deeded ground that they owned outright and leased and additional 15,000 acres of reservation land. They had worked hard over the years, raising six children and tending to the needs of 400 Angus cross cows and their calves as well as a prize winning flock of Rambouillet sheep. They seemed happy to see me and insisted that I bunk in the main house.

Leonard's father was Scotch Irish and his mother Dakota French. His family had a smallholding in the nearby town of Timber Lake and raised 9 kids on this farm. Leonard was the middle child.

"When I was nine years old I went away to St. Joe's Mission School. We left in September and never saw our families till the following June. The priests forbid us to speak our language and some of the stricter ones cut our hair. They were afraid that we were talking about them behind their backs in Dakota. I was there for 8 years.



Cook

Rambuiollet on Winter Pasture

"My dad hated it when my mother talked Indian with her sisters and her friends. He just got so angry. I lost all my language but those two guys

snow plowing the road, they can talk real good Indian. Down in Thunder Butte just over the ridge the old folks there have kept the language alive."

Estelle takes over while Leonard goes out on the porch for a smoke.

"The Cheyenne River Reservation starts at the Missouri River to the east and goes to about 20 miles west of here. When Leonard and I got married back in the 50's we were living over at Timber Lake. I'm from a Swedish background but my father was so happy when he learned Leonard and I were getting married.

"Those two guys, dad and Leonard, turned out to be the best of friends. I remember the day we came out here to see the reservation land for the first time. Nothing was here. My dad and Leonard went for a walk up the creek and dad kept saying 'Leonard, this place is going to be great.'"

I slept soundly in their cozy guest room. The next morning dawned cold and foggy. I headed out before breakfast to see how the dozer crew was doing. Shearing was already weeks overdue. There was still a small chance that the road might be finished by today allowing the shearing crew to set up. Then I might be able to take some photos of the event.

My dad had shown me how to watch for ocean storms as we went sailing, to never assume anything, to have fun but always be watching over your shoulder. As I made my way up over the calving pasture, I reached the ridge and looked out onto a sea of white, free of trees or landmarks of any kind. The ranch house and barns had disappeared into a hollow. My only allies were the faint footsteps I had left on the hard packed snow. As a cold wind drove the wet fog down the neck of my parka, a primal fear stirred in me and I humbly retreated to the ranch for breakfast.

Son Lennie arrived from his home next door and when we were done eating we went down to the barn to fire up the tractor and head out to the pastures to feed the sheep and cattle. We loaded two 500 lb. round bales on the front bucket, hitched onto a hay trailer, then headed out to the feeding grounds. We passed a carcass of a young mule deer that had starved in the deep snow. A herd of about 200 cows grazed a nearby ridge. Lenny dropped the round bales on the ground and pushed them with the bucket the way a field hockey player might push a ball across a playing field. If done correctly the bale of hay unrolls like toilet paper. The green alfalfa gave color to the snow colored ground and the cows were soon busily at work munching their breakfast.



Thunder Butte with the Ranch barely seen down in the hollow.

When morning chores were done I felt it was time to return my borrowed snowmobile to Carol's ranch and head home to Maine. I would miss the shearing here this year. I put on my Russian felt boots and my thick down parka and headed out across the prairie once again. But this time I was alone.

I followed the old tracks Lenny and I had made as best I could, knowing that if I took a wrong turn I could end up miles from home with no gas. Like my boyhood sailing days, I began to look for signs on this white

ocean to keep me on course. I skirted small valleys with steep cliffs over which local tribes had once driven buffalo to their slaughter. The depressions in the prairie where my snowmobile could get stuck became the underwater reefs where my boat might strike a rock. Out beyond the frozen crystals of the prairie fog I imagined hearing warning bells of Minot's Light and looked back over my shoulder in case a rogue wave or thunderstorm were following my trail.

I once met a sheep rancher in Wyoming who had hired a Basque shepherd named Ernesto to herd his flock. The young man was new to the States and he had limited language skills. The rancher knew a little Basque and he tried to make it clear to his shepherd that he was never to leave his horse, no matter what. If a blizzard were to hit he should leave the sheep, no matter how far he was from camp, get on his horse, loosen the reins and give the horse his head.

Two weeks later a blizzard came in out of nowhere catching the sheep five miles from camp. Ernesto tried to gather the herd with his dog and head home but he was blinded by the blowing snow. He panicked in the whiteout and began to fear for his life, quickly forgetting the words of his boss. The horse started yanking the reins and finally Ernesto let it have its head. The horse turned away from the flock and headed directly into the eye of the storm.

Ernesto had never been so cold. He covered his legs with a horse blanket, wrapped his hands inside his coat, lowered his head and began to pray. One hour later, covered with a crust of ice and nearly frozen to death, he and his horse arrived at camp. He gently lowered himself to the ground and on all fours, made his way with his dog inside the camp, turned on the propane heater and began to melt.

As soon as he had regained his strength, he went outside, brushed off the snow from his horse's head and mane, covered him with a horse blanket and tied him on the lee side of the camp. He then wrapped his arms around the horse's neck and thanked God for giving him such a powerful four-legged friend.

The Cooks have horses that they use in the summer to move their cattle. I wished I was riding one instead of a snowmobile but on this day the spirits were watching out for me. To my left loomed Thunder Butte, a cone shaped, flat topped mountain long revered as a holy place by the Lakota.

"Just keep Thunder Butte to your left and you will find Carol's ranch," Estelle had said. So when I was passing the landmark I stopped the snowmobile, bowed in reverence and thanked the spirits of the Butte for guiding me to the Cook Ranch and the warm friendship and humor I found there.

Back in the car I headed south and west and stopped for the night in Newell, South Dakota, Wool Capitol of the World, a title that truly describes this community of 646. The center of town is very close to the way it was back in the early 1900's. As I signed into the Newell Hotel, (\$35.00/night including kitchen privileges) the ghosts of the Wild West greeted me from the dining room. I could almost see these ranchers and their wives who had come to town for the ram sale or the rodeo and were now taking their places around the supper tables. Later the men would excuse themselves and retire across the street to the Newell Bar for a few drinks and cigars. The buildings are all still there, the beautiful, historic hotel with its dining room, the bar across the street, the feed store and the grocery. And there are still real people in these places, buying a roll of barbed wire, a gallon of milk or a cold beer.

I arrived at the hotel late in the evening and met Darrell in the lobby. He was an oil roughneck and he and his wife were living upstairs with their three kids while he waited for work. When I hit the lobby early the next morning to check on the night's snowfall, Darrell announced that he had made a pot of coffee for me. I returned to my room for muffins, some nuts and taco chips I had bought the day before and pretty soon we had a hearty breakfast underway.

Outside on the street two stock trailers idled, filled with sheep for the Friday sale. I dropped into the bar later that afternoon and discussed the finer points of Olympic curling with a cowboy from Montana. Later I walked past the high school and almost went in to see the girls' varsity play. Half the people driving by would wave so I just ended up waving to everybody lest I offend someone.

This cow and sheep town was fighting for its economic life. Mutton prices were up to .65/ pound so people are selling good breeding ewes to pay the bills. Down the street from the hotel was a full service grocery store with fresh fruit and vegetables.

"People come for miles to shop here because it's their best and only option," said the friendly owner. "Rapid City is the next closest and that's sixty miles to the south."

I had trouble getting my mind around the distance people travel just for the basics. My friends think I live in the 'sticks' in Maine and my nearest neighbors are just a hundred yards away. Yesterday I drove for 70 miles in one direction without seeing a gas pump." "Isolation breeds cooperation," they say. Those who do not help their neighbor will not survive.

On my dresser in my hotel room the message below is displayed. For me it summed up the attitude of the people in South Dakota that I met during my stay.

Greetings Travelers

Because this hotel is a human institution to serve people, we hope that God will grant you peace and rest while you are under our roof. May your room at the hotel be your "second" home. May those that you love be near you in thoughts and dreams. Our goal is to know you as a friend and make you comfortable and happy throughout your stay. May the journey that brought you our way make you prosper. May every call you make, every message you receive and every friend you meet add to your memories and joy in this world. Before you leave say "good-by" and when you leave may your journey be safe. May all the days ahead be pleasant for you, profitable for society, helpful for those you meet, and a joy to those who know and love you best.

From the Newell Hotel Management and Staff

Shearing at the Blue Gap 2012



Navajo youth bringing in the sheep for shearing

"Ya'at'eeh!" said a smiling ageless woman in a bright blue sweatshirt and a purple skirt. Roberto asked permission in Navajo if we could enter her sheep camp and look at some of her fleeces. A shearing crew had been at work during the morning and was now at lunch break. The Navajo Nation is a matriarchal society and the mothers and their daughters own most all of the livestock and real estate. They make all management decisions while the men and boys tend to the chores and the daily grazing routine.

During the fall of 2011 a group of Navajos in Northeast Arizona invited me to visit native sheep ranchers with whom they work. The following spring we formed a partnership called the Black Mesa Wool Project. Our goal was to support these ranchers' traditional pastoral way of life by working with them to improve their soils and grazing patterns and to receive a better price for their wool.

Memorial Day of 2012 found me again entering the Navajo reservation near Gallup, New Mexico and heading northeast towards the Black Mesa in Arizona and the small community called Blue Gap. I picked up a young native hitch hiker traveling to his grandmother's cattle operation. She owned a large herd of Black Angus and his job on the weekends was to check on them on horseback. He was also a bull rider at the local rodeos but worked on a roofing crew in Albuquerque to support his young wife and two girls. There seemed to be ample folks of all ages by the side of the road looking for rides and it made the time fly to hear their stories.

I called Roberto when I crossed the Arizona line and he said he would drive down from Pinon and meet me at Blue Gap to check on the ranchers and their wool clip. Two months ago we had visited these Navajo ranchers during shearing season and we agreed then that if they were to clean all the thistle burrs from their wool that Peace Fleece would buy their wool. But today as we met at the Blue Gap and began visiting these ranchers, we were alarmed to hear that most of the folks had gone and sold their wool at the trading post in Gallup, getting only a fraction of the price we were offering. We had wool towers set up to bag fleeces, non-native volunteers coming to help and a 50 foot tractor trailer truck driving in from Ohio to haul this wool east. Now it looked as if we might not have any wool. Most

of this news arrived in the Navajo language and I knew something was wrong by the expression on Roberto's face.

"Let's not give up yet" he advised. "You never know what tomorrow will bring".

I checked into the Holiday Inn in Chinle, Az. about one hour to the east, heated up some tea and sat down on the porch and watched the sun set. All this work and coming all this way for no wool, I began feeling very sorry for myself. I sensed a pair of eyes watching and turned to see a small Terrier-type dog checking me out from the parking lot.

I stood up and walked out to meet her, scratched her hairy head and found it covered with burrs, the same species that contaminated much of the Blue Gap fleece. I gave her a soft rub and invited her back to my porch.

My new friend whom I named Thistle apparently knew the Holiday Inn dog rules, refusing my invitation and standing her ground. I began cooking dinner on a Bunsen burner and offered her some steamed summer squash with a light garnish of sausage and brown rice. When I brought her meal out to her in a small bowl, she waited patiently and politely until I had returned to my porch before devouring her supper.

The previous week during my annual physical back in Maine my doctor had told me about Navajo reservation dogs. He had done his internship at the Methodist clinic in Gallup and one morning while weekend camping in a park not one mile from my room he found a small dog sleeping outside his tent. After a week of hiking together he took her home, named her Chinle and she became the best dog he ever had.



As I sat there dining with Thistle, the extent of my impending wool buying disaster slowly came into focus. How could I have been so naive as to think that these people would trust their wool to a stranger from the very culture that had abused their race for so many years? As I rose to telephone my wife Marty and tell her the bad news I again found Thistle staring at me and it did not seem to be for want of more food. Her head was cocked to the side and her body was rigid. Even as an arriving car drove close by, she did not flinch. Then I heard a voice in my head, maybe her voice, and it said,

"Peter, there are no mistakes in life, just lessons. Today was Lesson One and tomorrow will be Lesson Two. No matter what happens tomorrow, it will be a waste only if you fail to learn from it." Then Thistle stood up and walked away.

Well, of course, the next day turned out to be one of the best in my life. Only a small portion of the wool had actually been sold and the rest turned up by early morning to be skirted and bagged. Our native volunteers and family members that day never stopped pulling thistle burrs and dried manure from out of their fleece, even when their fingertips were raw. And the following day everyone turned up again. Ranchers came back to help clean up their neighbors' wool and when all was said and done I was just 90 lbs. short of our initial goal.

I got very dirty and I felt that I was doing, in some ways for the very first time, the Peace Fleece work I had always wanted to do, the laborious job of examining and grading the fleece while toiling side by side with the growers. In the end, these ranchers were paid what their wool was worth, a price ten times greater than what the trading posts were paying.

Every morning Thistle was there to send me off and every night she ate steamed broccoli and carrots as I non-verbally processed with her the lessons of that day. I told her how Peace Fleece would take this wool back to Maine and spin Navajo yarn. And with every skein we would tell the story of the reverent and hardworking people of Blue Gap. And that if all went as planned I would knit her a wool blanket to warm her during the Arizona winter.

On our last evening meal I remembered my doctor's dog rescue and I made Thistle the following proposal.

"Thistle, what do you think of this?" She cocked her head.

"Tomorrow I could take you to Albuquerque," I continued. "We could go to a dog grooming place and remove all the burrs and get a nice bath, then you could jump into a dog crate and come back to Maine with me. We need a good farm dog and you would love all the animals."

She looked at me for a while, stood up on all fours and began walking away. My heart sank. I realized how I had begun to depend on our daily conversations. She then stopped and turned.

"Here is a very important lesson for you" the message read. "I belong here, this is my home and these are my people. You need me here, not at your farm. See you next year. Don't forget the blanket."



The Crew sitting on Blue Gap Wool

Death in the Morning



Kit Carson

August 14, 1863, Black Mesa, Arizona Territory

It was early morning somewhere in northern Arizona. The Civil War was in full swing in the East as US Army soldiers out west joined the European settlers to ‘protect’ them from the Indians as they carved out their homesteads.

Dolie went out to her sheep pen with her young dog. It was late spring and she wanted to check on the lambs that were born last night. Her summer camp was high on the Black Mesa and as she moved across the clearing the sun cast giant shadows on the sandstone cliffs. Puffs of dust rose under her feet. It had not rained much over the winter but somehow the grass found enough moisture to grow. Her sheep could smell the forage but she could not let them leave camp. Dolie’s clan was hiding and in this empty land

5,000 feet above sea level her family had become the hunted. No fires during the day and sheep grazing only at night.

Sunrise was her favorite time. Her husband who had been out all night with the sheep was now asleep with her children in their log hogan. She neared the spring where cool water bubbled from underground when her dog began to bark. Then she heard the hooves of the horses running across the ground towards her.

Men with blue uniforms covered with dust rode into the camp and sat their horses. Dolie's children and her husband ran and stood next to her. Their Captain, a man named Carson, a person greatly feared by her people, spoke to her in her language.

"Yi at tee, mother. Don't be afraid," he said. "Take your children, go into your hogan, and wait 'til we leave."

"No," Dolie replied. "We will stand here and watch. I want my children to see this. I want them to remember".

Carson shrugged. He then nodded his head and the men moved towards the sheep pen. It was all over in a few seconds. The sheep made no sounds as the shots rang out and they fell to the ground.

Thursday, May 23, 2013, Black Mesa

It was an equally beautiful spring morning high on the Black Mesa and dust puffed out from under the wheels of the giant tractor trailer as it made its way slowly around a narrow corner between a sandstone cliff and a dry river bed. In the driver's seat sat Dave, a large man who grew up on a farm

in Ohio who now drove for Mid-States Wool Buying Cooperative. Next to him was 21 year old Gjermanson, a Navajo who today would help Dave find a way for his truck to safely come down off the high desert.

They slowly traveled for miles without seeing another car or truck. But not far from the road they would often come upon sheep grazing the tall brush and tough grass that grew in its shade. Nearby would be their shepherd, often hunched in the shadow of a cedar tree. Gjermanson smiled as he took in the view. Like Dolie, he had seen some hard times. But like the sheep by the side of the road, he was a survivor.

We were into the third day of the Peace Fleece Wool Buy. Two years ago I had come to the Black Mesa to find wool for our yarn. I had read some of the history of the Navajo people, how Kit Carson had swept over their lands at the turn of the century, slaughtering every sheep he could find in hopes of breaking the spirit of the Navajo Nation and forcing them into concentration camps where thousands would die. But like Dolie, many just went higher and further out into the remote canyons where no horse could reach. When it was all over, a mere handful of sheep were left. But Navajo and sheep cannot live one without the other. Spider Woman taught them how to shear and weave the wool into carpets and blankets. Their wool would keep the families warm in the winter and their meat would provide the sustenance for their children to grow. We had come to the Black Mesa to learn from these survivors and help them to find new ways to market their wool and tell their story.

I had met Gjermanson on my first visit to the Navajo nation. As our Navajo partner, Roberto Nutlouis, took me around Northern Arizona, Gjermanson rode in the back seat. Roberto worked for the Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC), a group fighting for native rights on the

reservation. When we would arrive at a town of any size, Roberto and I would visit grazing officials and Gjermanson would disappear. When it was time to leave, Roberto would make a quick call on his phone and our back seat rider would re-appear.

It turned out that Gjermanson was a rapper, had a small band and been selling CD's of his music on the streets of these towns. He had left high school with plans to get his GED. Instead he had re-enrolled in another school and just this past April had graduated with a 'real diploma'. Today he had showed up early at the semi. "Hey Dave, do you know how to get off the mesa and to Tuba City without getting this big truck stuck?" he asked. Dave didn't.

I had arrived for this year's wool buy a day early and Roberto invited me out to see his fencing crew working to put the finishing touches on a barrier around an acre corn field. These young folks, six men and three women would be joining us on the wool buy, keeping records, bagging wool and loading the semi. They would translate for us as many of the shepherds we would meet in the coming days could or would not speak English.



Gjermankson in shades with the wool bagging crew

As Roberto discussed the day's work with his crew, I inspected the quality of the fence. The corners were braced and the fence wire was very tight and even. The sun would be beating down on these young folks all day and the nearest tree was 1000 feet up a ridge. Looking over the tilled ground I asked Roberto if there was anyone around who still plowed with horses.

When he mentioned the family's name I said I would like to meet them. He said sadly that both the father and his son who plowed had recently been shot and killed by a neighbor over a grazing dispute.

Our first buying site was Tsaille on the Arizona, New Mexico border. We set up in the agricultural area of Dine College, a public institution of higher education chartered by the Navajo Nation. Round us were garden plots of experimental varieties of vegetables, plants and grains as well as prize Rambuiollet breeding rams that were owned by the college. Students and staff were preparing for a cattle grazing workshop the next day but were eager to help us in any way they could. We set up tables on which to grade and weigh the fleeces but by the end of the day we only purchased a modest amount of wool.



Wednesday, May 22, 2013, Pinon, Az,

Day two of our wool buy was held at the parking lot of the Chapter House in Roberto's hometown of Pinon. Black Mesa Water Coalition's field office was also located here in a hogan, a traditional Navajo structure still popular today among Navajos living out on the range. This site was where we held last year's wool buy and we hoped for a large turnout. But again only a small amount of wool appeared and the truck was only quarter filled by the end of the day. Just after lunch I noticed an older Navajo woman standing by herself, watching the activity but uncertain of how to proceed.

"Yi at tee," I said. "Can I help you? Do you have some wool for sale?"

"No", she replied. "I just have goats. They are not Angora, they are meat animals. I have a herd of 300. But I am here today to get off the ranch. It is very dark there now?"

I remembered Roberto using the term "dark" when he talked about the killing in the Blue Gap. "Are you Mary?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "I am so sorry," I said. "Roberto told me what happened."

"You know we have been in a drought for a long time," she began. "Our neighbor who has cattle and many horses, his animals kept grazing the communal land which has been ours by permit for generations. Because there is no fencing, all the animals would come to graze on our goat pasture. My husband and son went out to try and stop them and this man, he shot them both dead. He is now in prison."

Some tribal officials say there are over 400,000 sheep and goats on the Navajo Nation which covers land in New Mexico, Utah and Arizona. If

this were true it would be the largest flock on a private piece of land in the United States. Combined with grazing pressure of cattle, large herds of unregistered horses and a seven year drought, it seems a miracle that there is any grass growing at all.

For folks like Mary and her neighbors, their livelihood depends solely on the carrying capacity of their grazing land. As the day moved on and more ranchers arrived with their wool, I noticed how relieved they seemed when their wool was finally sold and the check was in their hand. The meat of the sheep was almost always consumed within the family. The wool was for many the only cash income from their flock. Yet there was no outward sign of desperation and little dickering on price.



Family of Isk Willie, Pete and two truckloads of Rambouillet wool

On the road to Tuba City May 23, 2013,

We had heard that there were lots of sheep to the north of Tuba City running all the way up to the Utah border. Sure enough, thanks to Gjermanson's directions, when we arrived at the Tuba City Chapter House parking lot, there was a long line of farm trucks spreading off into the distance piled high with wool sacks. And as we pulled in, our semi became like a cat being dropped into a pack of sleeping dogs. As the tractor trailer lumbered across the parking lot, all pick-up trucks within sight turned on their engines and began maneuvering for a better place in line. Fortunately the Navajo police were there in the form of one jolly officer who with a big smile jokingly began to reprimand his elders, offering to write them tickets if they so much as moved.

It turned out that the white line running down Tuba City's main street is the dividing line between time zones. West of the line you are in Pacific Time, east of the line you are one hour later on Navajo Time. Because the Chapter House lay west, some of the folks had already been waiting an hour. We quickly set up as our crew went into action, filtering down the line of vehicles, handing out information and helping folks fill out forms. They also jumped on the tailgates and with box knives carefully opened the wool bag seams, pulled out samples and reported back to us as to what we could expect.

By eleven o'clock the line of trucks continued to grow and Stanley knew we did not have enough room for all the wool. He asked me to find a 26' box truck somewhere. I hopped on the internet and reserved one in Flagstaff, two hours to the south. I drove Dave down to pick it up and that

truck was filled by 4 pm. Dave headed to Phoenix 4 hours to the south, returning with a 40' trailer and that was filled by midnight.

I watched Stanley handle the pressure. He later told me that it was the largest one day wool buy he had ever managed in his life. But throughout the whole ordeal, everyone seemed to remain focused. As long as our handling crew was fed, they worked steadily, remaining cordial with folks, some who had been waiting the best part of the day. I was thankful that we could at least offer these ranchers a decent price for their effort. After hours of grading wool in this dusty parking lot Stanley still could be compassionate. I saw him late in the day dickering with a grandmother and her 80 cent/lb. cross bred wool. She wanted a dollar and Stanley soon gave it to her along with a warm handshake.

I headed to Albuquerque for an early morning flight the next day. I usually cherish the thought of finally returning home after a time away. But now I felt sad to leave everyone. Gjermanson and the wool crew, Stanley and Dave, Roberto our partner who had worked so hard to make this all happen, Teddy the mohair buyer from Chicago who had joined us with his wife and crew and most of all our new ranchers and shepherds whom I barely got to know. As I crossed the New Mexico line with the sun setting behind me, it would have only taken a phone call to turn me around and jump back into the fray.

Since the beginning of Peace Fleece almost 30 years ago, I had been looking for this opportunity to get down and dirty with the folks that grew our wool. But for whatever reason it never really happened. Yes we bought wool from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Israel, Palestine and Romania. And yes we worked with farmers there, helped shear Bedouin sheep, rode horses with shepherds in the Tien Shen Mountains. And yes we

formed amazing friendships which still flourish today. But for whatever reason, changing political landscapes or hostile environments, none of these partnerships flowered into long term farmer to farmer relationships. We will now see what happens with the Navajos.

Back in the time of Columbus there were 4 million native peoples living in what was to become the continental United States. By the beginning of the twentieth century there are less than 400,000 of these Native peoples left. These folks were victims of a genocide perpetrated by the invasion of people of my racial and cultural background. It will take time to heal from this atrocity. But I find something special in working with these native people and I now feel that I can enter the last quarter of my life envisioning a partnership that may finally be within reach.

The Horse that wouldn't give up - 2015

It had been a really tough year. We buried our 35 year old horse Duke in late summer and one of our favorite sheep, Dear Dear, died of old age when we were in Russia in the fall. Chad, her flock mate, followed in March. Finally our standard bred Crazy Chief, lay down and couldn't get up. Our neighbor Roger put a bullet in Chief's head before breakfast and Steve Estes sent over his backhoe to break the frost and buried him next to King.

When Chief died, Whiskey, our 35 year old Morgan-cross lost a buddy and felt very much alone. He would walk around the pasture calling out for his old friend. Record deep snows fell in February and March, and Arctic cold followed. Just when things began to warm up, Willie injured his lower leg requiring surgery. Death and old age seemed to be everywhere, making me feel all the more depressed with my tired knees and aching back. Some days I felt like I wanted to give it all up.

So when my friends called in early spring and told me of a Belgian mare named Molly and the help she apparently needed, both Marty and I were intrigued and surprised that we were open to a new challenge. Was this the new partner that Whiskey needed or was she just a diversion to offset the darkness of the past winter?

Molly was born on an Amish farm 24 years ago and had been owned by and worked with some of my best friends. But over the years she developed ailments that were complicated and expensive to diagnose and treat. The ample love that she received along the way apparently was not enough to offset her worsening physical condition. Her legs were giving

out, she tired easily and something was very wrong with her feet. Rich and Kate called asking if we might take her on. So Marty and I met Molly for the first time several days later and we embraced her with little hesitation.

Willie's surgery and recovery delayed us from returning to pick up Molly. During that time she lost ground. She was limping on her left rear leg as she finally struggled aboard the horse trailer and we wondered aloud if she would make it home. Just the day before we arrived she had been down on the ground, unable to get back up for three hours. Only when a passing storm pelted her body with hail did she finally struggle to her feet. The prospect of burying one more horse began to haunt me.

We made it home and separated her in the round pen from the other horses, letting them visit from a distance. But we shortened the visit when Nick and Willie began climbing up the walls of the pen trying to join her. Molly's brown eyes and long eyelashes spoke words of welcome but her body was not sure if right at that moment she could handle the new company.

Molly made it through her first night with standing on all fours but on the second day she began walking in circles, favoring her left hip. She was clearly in discomfort. Our own vet Matt had told us early on that what we were taking on with was very risky. But now it was too late. We were in love with Molly.

It was eight years of having horses on our farm before I saw one lie down. That was Jake on his first day with us. A neighbor came by that day and said "now that's a pretty site" as he pointed to our Percheron asleep in the field. "It means that he feels safe here, that he can lie down, close his eyes and go to sleep." I then realized that I had always seen our earlier horses standing. But a horse lying down to relieve pain is a different matter.

Molly finally collapsed the following night sometime around ten. Marty found her struggling to stand, her hooves desperately clawing at the upturned soil. With mud on her pants and tears in her eyes she came to bed saying that we must consider putting her out of her pain. That meant asking Roger to put a bullet into her beautiful head. We agreed to wait till sunrise.

At first light I arose from a restless sleep and started the water running for my morning bath. But before I climbed in I stood on the edge of the tub and looked out the dormer window. As I gazed down at Molly's pasture in the early morning light all I saw was a turned up patch of ground. Molly was gone.

It was like one of those moments when you thought you were dreaming. What I was seeing was just too good to be true. I dressed quickly and found her around the side of the barn, quietly watching the sun rise in the east.

The joy of her recovery lasted through breakfast. I had never known a horse to be down that long and then get back up. Molly hadn't given up. But as my morning coffee cooled the old fearful voices returned.

"How do we keep her from going down again, breaking our hearts? How do we keep some emotional distance, maintain some order? What is medically going on that is so painful, so life-threatening?" As Marty fed her some hay and brushed the dirt from her coat, I rushed inside to the phone.

Here in Maine we have an extraordinary group of horse support people that will come to your aid at the drop of a hat. What we needed was an equine summit, experts in the world of horse medicine who shared Marty's and my approach to horse health. For the next twenty four hours we kept Molly

standing while chiropractor vet Dave and his equine massage and acupuncture assistants cleared the deck and headed from the coast while farrier Mark and his horse shoeing wisdom made his way to our farm from the mountains. Then on a warm Wednesday afternoon we each examined, manipulated, rubbed, and prodded Molly's body, looking for a map of her medical history that might lead us to a course of treatment. While Dave adjusted her spine and Erin twisted her needles, slowly Molly's body began to assume a new shape, a new way of standing.

Mark then picked up her right front foot and with a hoof knife began uncovering a serious infection called White Line Disease. These bacteria live in the soft tissue between the sole and the hoof wall. Clearly this disease was compromising Molly's ability to put her full weight on that foot, shifting it to the other three, most critically the back left. Overworked for who knows how long, the left rear leg was the one that was under her when she had gone down and it had limited reserves left to push her to her feet again.

Dave then began readjusting her hips and found that the muscle that connects her left rear femur with her pelvis was very tight. Marty's and my assignment for the next month was to massage this twice a day for fifteen minutes. Mark started his forge and made a bar shoe for the infected foot which shifted the weight of the leg off of her hoof wall and onto her frog. In less than two hours we reintroduced Molly to a body that was more balanced and less painful.

During the entire time we were working, operating, manipulating and digging out dead and infected hoof tissue, Molly never shifted or resisted our prodding. Every once and a while she would take a deep breath, reminding all of us to do the same. And the five of us, each with our own

set of skills, cooperated at every turn. When we were done for the day, Dave reminded us that, in spite of the fact that we diagnosed and treated the symptoms, there was still no guarantee that the hind muscle would soften, that the white line disease could be stopped.

That night I called Molly's previous owners and related to them the day's drama. I asked them if they could remember a day when Molly might have slipped on some ice and strained her left rear muscle. Had they seen lameness due to the White Line? Had they ever heard of a horse getting up after struggling for so many hours? And each one of them said in one way or another that she was the most courageous, most loving, most considerate horse they had ever owned. She never gives up.

A year has now passed. Mark and I have had many additional sessions debriding her front feet. This entails us cutting the hoof wall upwards until there are no more necrotic, dead and infected bits of flesh underneath. Fortunately this has been painless for Molly. But it has been very challenging for me.

I am always looking at my horses' feet when we are working. If they become chipped then I file them smooth before any more breaks form. A horse is only as good as her hooves. So to nip away what looks to be a perfectly sound hoof wall to expose an infection in hiding was very hard for me.

For weeks I could not sleep through the night without going to check on Molly. My nightmare would find her again lying on her left leg, unable to stand. But after a while I stopped checking. Then the other night I went out looking for our cat at three in the morning. A fox was in the neighborhood and Masha was a night hunter as well. Finding her in the driveway, I cradled her in my arms and scanned the pasture with my flashlight and

when I saw Molly lying down on her left side my heart stopped. But before I could respond, like a young deer she popped up on all fours, powered by her left rear leg. Just like Ken and Mitch and Rich all said, she is the horse that never gives up.

On the Rez again 2016



“Where are we?” ask Peter, Felix and George

The car thermometer said that it was 119 degrees this morning when we started the Tuba City wool buy around 8:00 am. I was up at 4 for breakfast and as I put on my sweater it was hard to believe that this heat was around the corner. We were coming to the end of an eight day adventure buying wool that took us through New Mexico, Utah and Arizona, the high desert territory of the Navajo Nation.

We had a good turnout but no records were broken. This year I spent my time walking down the line of pickup trucks loaded with wool, directing traffic and spending some well needed time with the ranch families, trying to better understand what keeps them going. Every truck answered my ‘ee

ya'tee pine' with a broad smile and a hand shake. And this day at Tuba City was no exception. I was so touched by their openness that I passed up lunch and a rest in the shade and collapsed in the shower when we returned to the motel.



Loading wool in Tuba

I slept for an hour with the AC on high, then just laid there on my back staring at my cowboy hat on the shelf over the TV. Something kept bringing my mind back to my childhood summers. Maybe it was the heat.

I remembered the days I spent underwater in the Atlantic Ocean, my dad floating on top in one of his see thru bottom boats, making sure I surfaced occasionally. I remembered the cold of the deep water and then the heat of the sun on my back as I surfaced and kicked myself along, refilling my lungs with air. I remembered swimming down the rocky coast past the million dollar homes looking down at me. Soon I would swim into the beach of our own fourteen room home where water was boiling on our kitchen stove, ready to cook the lobsters I carried in my net.



Ocean of my childhood

Now as I lay on my back on my Dine Motel room bed in the Arizona desert, I wondered why these memories surfaced here, what was the connection.

The Navajo elders I have met this year are substantially older than my 70 years, most make the day to day decisions on their ranches, and all carry the poise and self-confidence of a Navajo elder. The women for the most part are the owners of the sheep, the livestock and the grazing permits. The wool checks were made out to them.

I thought back to the mother of my youth, boiling the water for the lobsters that I carried in my sack. My brother John and I discussed having mom live with Marty and me after dad died. But the farm in Maine was too much of a stretch for her so she moved to a retirement community near John's home. I compared her end of life to the one hundred year old couple

from Pinon that had just finished shearing by themselves their forty sheep for our wool buy. Speaking both English and Navajo, they introduced me to their four generations jammed in the GMC pickup cab. This couple was too busy to die, much less move to a nursing home.

I dressed and walked out into the parking lot. The rest of our crew was nestled into their own rooms. Strolling in this heat was not an option so I started the car and began driving out of town. I parked in a quiet spot looking down over Tuba City. I noticed that the temp has dropped to 93 degrees.

The homes below me were scattered, some broken, some neat and tidy. There were not many air conditioners in sight. Some have car wrecks out front, some new pickup trucks. Who owns these homes, are they the property of the Navajo Nation or privately owned?

The sand under my tires is brown, not like the beach sand of my youth. This stuff turns to mud with the quickest shower and will hold the footprint of a tire track for years. There is no grass growing here, only juniper bushes. A stray dog and a jackrabbit are my only visitors.

Maybe I am comparing my privileged childhood with the poverty that surrounds me here on the rez. What responsibility do I personally bear for their struggles? But as I try this on I am immediately brought short by the memories of this past week, of the hundreds of ranchers who welcomed me with a handshake and a smile, sharing their stories and their hopes for the future.

These people have reason to be angry, resentful. They are the walking victims of a long ago yet ongoing trauma. Just last week as the news

reported that the Orlando shooting was the largest mass murder in American history, one of our Navajo friends reminded Marty and me how Wounded Knee is easily forgotten. Back in 1890 over two hundred and fifty South Dakota Sioux, men, women and children, were gunned down when US soldiers went berserk. But why am I going there. This is not the energy that has surrounded me all week on the reservation.

It's Father's Day at Dilkon, Az. and the last day of our wool buy. Every time a truck arrives loaded with wool or mohair I stick my hand in front of the man in the cab with a 'Happy Father's Day' and mine is grabbed back and shaken with a laugh and a welcome as if he has known me and my family for a lifetime. For a moment we both share being fathers. And all week I have been treated as an elder. Children laugh to my Donald Duck voice, grandmothers smile at my Navajo words, everyone wants to know where I live and they roll their eyes when I say I am from Maine. I did not meet one person this year that had ever been to Maine. One had made it as far as Vermont.

There were many elders who braved the heat and the three hour lines. We were buying their wool but they negotiated their end of the transaction. Many were over eighty and some into their nineties. But there was beauty in the wrinkles of their cheeks and the jewelry and cotton dresses they wore did their colors justice.

Talking with the men and women of this, my generation, I began to not feel so old. Because of these elders I began to forget about my heart arrhythmia and my arthritis.

These folks are revered in their families. They live with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren until they die. And until they die,

they have important work to do. Some leave the ranch every morning before dawn with their flock of sheep and goats so they can graze when it is cool. Their pace is adjusted to the animals they are watching. They pick a few flowers and plant leaves to color the yarns for the weaver in the family. They listen for the songbirds that also are out in the cool of the day. And they are back by nine to be of use where they can, ready to return with their flock to the desert with the cool evening temps.

I am sure there are nursing homes somewhere but in the seven years on the rez I have never seen one. I have never met a Navajo rancher who mentioned that his mother or father was now in a retirement community.

This year our crew of native wool handlers did all the heavy lifting. Our Ohio truckers, some who arrived with their own families in the cabs, stayed two extra days just because they wanted to help. And the Peace Fleece volunteers did all the financials, writing checks and grading the wool. And for the first time on a wool buy, I began to limit my work to what I love most, that being spending 7-8 hours a day in the 100 degree heat walking back down the line shaking everyone's hand and celebrating what was happening there.

Singing at Pinon





Last Crew Photo

Wool Buy photography by Jennifer Bauman and Lisa Takata – Front row right-
both are dedicated volunteers at each and every Wool Buy.

A Christmas Gift 2015

My dog Modi and I sat on the couch this last weekend and watched footage of racially motivated killings going on in several America cities. Normally I would have shut off the television, exhausted by the divisiveness that is now plaguing our country. But that night I watched and spent most of the following days in tears.

One morning shortly before last Christmas I woke up early. It was still dark outside. It might well have been that magical time when it is neither morning nor night, when there is a crack through which things move. I lay there in bed next to my wife and my dog and as I listened to their soft breathing, I realized that it was already too late for me to accomplish all I needed to do that day. I felt helpless and overwhelmingly sad.

My daughter Cora Josephine had told me that I was not alone at times like this, that I had ‘guides’ that were there for me. In fact, they had been with me my entire life. All I had to do was ask for help. I initially dubbed these spirits as angels with wings, holdovers from my Catholic youth and categorically dismissed them as spirits with an agenda. But this morning I was coming to the end of my rope and asked them for help.

“Please give me more joy in my life,” I asked, not knowing if I would even recognize joy when it arrived. Within twelve hours I was admitted to Maine Medical’s Emergency Ward with an elevated and erratic heart rate. As I lay there in the admissions room, I watched my heart push and pull on the sonogram monitor. For seventy years I had taken this organ for granted. Now tears flooded onto my pillow.

I was assigned a small private alcove. I was impressed with the clean pillow case under my head absorbing the sweat seeping from my neck. I

was just drifting off for a short nap when a young doctor knocked on the alcove wall.

“Hello Mr. Hagerty and welcome to Maine Medical’s emergency ward. Before we review your charts could you tell me what you think is going on?”

“Well,” I replied, “I have these racing heart rates and a pounding on my chest. And please call me Peter.”

“OK, Peter, my name is Dan,” he replied and we shook hands. “I am a cardiologist here. But I would like to know what is going on at home or at work that might have triggered these events. Can you tell me a little about your present life, what strain or emotional issues that might have triggered your heart?”

“Wow,” I smiled. This felt different. When was the last time a doctor asked me about my feelings?

I told him about the request I made to my guides, thinking that a psychiatrist would be my next guest. Then I went on to describe the sadness I felt at the recent loss of contact with our Russian business partners, about the war in the Ukraine, the punitive sanctions imposed by Western countries, how my hopes that we might enjoy normal relation with the Russians within my lifetime had been crushed, all this I shared with Dan.

“Over the past thirty years our Russian partners became like family. Their children have been to our homes here in Maine and my family has spent time in their homes in Russia. We celebrated the birth of their children and grieved when one of theirs died. I thought that we had accomplished the

impossible, to befriend the enemy and to defy a history of fear and distrust. Now it seems to be all coming apart and my heart is breaking into pieces.”

As I related to Dan my sadness, I began to cry. Just then my son Silas and his wife Caroline appeared at the curtain. They shook hands with Dan, shared details like where they lived in Portland and Si acknowledged to Dan that one of my greatest attributes was my ability to cry.

I was starting to feel a bit self-conscious when Dan’s superior Mark joined us. Cramped for space, the first wave adjourned and Mark took Dan’s chair and asked “Well, what’s going on in your life today?”

Now six months later as I cry at the evening news I marvel at the choice “my guides” made to get my attention, changing the speed and rhythm of my heart. This organ had been beating without my paying much attention for over seventy years. Maybe now some joy will make its way to the surface along with the sadness.

Writing this book has helped me realize how much energy I have spent in my life being the center of attention (COA). One of my father’s favorite adjectives for describing me was “extraordinary”. As far as my dad’s friends were concerned I was the only person working with a horse in the Maine woods and the only Harvard graduate raising sheep. And my mom would ask me on my return from Russia for any personal news about Vladimir Putin’s family that she could pass on to her friends. I never had much luck reining them in and I am sure I gleaned some ego mileage from their exaggerations. But now thanks to my heart condition I am becoming aware of a down side to the COA phenomenon.

The job of the COA is to be ever vigilant, to always be positioned to take center stage. There is never time to relax, to enjoy the stories of others, to

just live in the present and enjoy the moment. The ego is on call 24/7 and there is no one else that can do a job as well as you.

The opportunities for the COA are endless. Chairing meetings, playing the guitar, marrying friends, acting in films, driving the horses in a parade, writing a book, all of these I have done. But my heart is now showing me of the cost of this job description.

‘Am I happy, am I joyful, do I fully appreciate the wonderful people in my life?’ It takes an aching heart to ask these questions and only now do I see for the first time that I come up short.

South Africa’s Mail Guardian wrote several years ago:

“In 2000, ten years after his release from prison, Nelson Mandela was a guest on the Oprah Winfrey show in Chicago. Mandela didn't even know the entire show was about him and just before he went on, he endearingly asked the producer, "So what is the subject of today's show?" to which she replied, "You".

“After the show, Oprah’s entire staff lined the long passage to see him out of the building and shake his hand. Oprah says that has never happened before or since and the photos they took with him that day now line the walls of what they call the Nelson Mandela Hallway.”

Clearly Nelson Mandela, one of the great leaders of our time, found a way to be the center of world attention yet maintain a powerful humility.

People sometimes ask me at what point I realized my life’s purpose. I say it was the summer I visited Red Square for the first time and read Paulo Coelho’s book ‘The Alchemist’. That summer I turned forty two. Red

Square affirmed my passion to meet and embrace an enemy I had been taught to fear and Paulo's book told me that if I followed my heart, the rest of the world would conspire to make my journey a success. Now some thirty years later my heart is taking me down a new road. Fears still challenge me in the early hours of the day but my tears are smoothing the way.

In the United States logging is the second most dangerous occupation next to deep shaft coal mining. As I work alone in remote sections of my woodlot, all it would take was one mistake to end my life. Over the years Willie and Nick have constantly impressed on me the importance of staying focused when I work with them. They have no time for yesterday's mistakes or tomorrow's worries. They demand my being in the present when I am with them. Often I fail to get this message and as I rush to grab the last few hours left in the day, Willie will spit out his bit in frustration, shake off his harness or push me around until I refocus on the here and now.

Mom started to lose her ability to speak several months before she died. Her doctor explained that a series of mini-strokes were allowing old memories of disappointments and fears to slip away and be replaced by a more calming and beautiful vacuum.

One spring day after a long absence I arrived at her new nursing home. My brother John and his wife Betsey were her primary care givers and had warned me not to be alarmed by what I saw or heard. As I entered mom's room the woman who lay on the bed held only a faint resemblance to my father's bride. But the smile on her face I had seen before. Spittle shot from her mouth as she struggled to speak.

Once again Willie appeared and reminded me that he and I did not share a common verbal language and he and I were still getting work done after eighteen years. So I sent Mom a mental note.

“What are you up to?”

“No good,” was her unspoken reply and we both laughed out loud. Much of her hair had fallen out, her teeth had turned yellow and all she could do was grunt and moan. Strangely I began to feel safe for the first time. No longer could she order me around and make inappropriate demands.

“You want to play shuffle board?” I asked. And before she could answer I was out in the hallway scrounging an empty wheelchair.

It was just after Easter and there was a bite in the breeze so I wrapped her in a blanket. In the distance we could see the ocean as we made our way across the front lawn to the shuffle board court. I went first and my wooden puck landed on the Number 7 box. Mom screamed with pleasure. Then it was her turn.

I placed the cue on her lap and with my right hand on hers we pushed together with all our might. Her puck shot down the court, slammed mine and knocked it off the course. Hers settled in the Number 10 box.

I jumped up in protest. “You were cheating”, I yelled. She started bobbing her head in agreement, her blue eyes alive and merry. Her darkening teeth and thinning hair took a back seat to her nearly hysterical grin. As I pushed her across the nearby lawn threatening to send her smashing into a giant oak tree, she opened her arms in anticipation, her laughter bouncing off the brick walls of the nursing home.

And then in my mind I see Willie at home, running happily back and forth in the pasture as Squiggie drives by in his logging truck, honking his air horn. And then a young mother appears before me, watching her happy son run out into the surf, crashing into the waves as the cold ocean closes around him.

And I thank Mom and thank Willie for this moment as the wheel chair flies down the steep path heading for the oak, my mother's screams daring us to go faster.



Sailing at Night with Mary and Fran

A Poem for July 12, 2016

Green tractors driving by,
Smiling faces home from the fair.
Dry fields and sweaty horses
Washed clean by the garden hose.
Thank God for the old dump rake
That came with the farm years ago,
It's tines snatch every bit of mown grass
Dry and savored by hungry horses.
Over the mountains the storm comes
Bringing rain to the parched land.
Willie and Nick, our big team,
Hearing the distant thunder
Know that not much will change,
The fast water running off bone dry soil.
But they smile between bites of grass
For they know what the rain means to me.



Cora Josephine, Marty, Silas and Pete

Written in nine point Bembo Font with origins in the fourteenth century Italian
Renaissance



Willie and Nick heading into the woods, 2017

Photo by John Williams, Camden, Maine