

SPECIAL ISSUE

ISSUE 221

# ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING ■ PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

APRIL 2021



## HERE & THERE

A 68-PAGE **LITERARY ROAD TRIP** WITH

Joe Allen

Joe Bageant

Denis Beckett

Linh Dinh

Tom Engelhardt

Dell Franklin

Chellis Glendinning

Trevor Hoyle

Tim Knight

Nate Robert

Tony Sutton

Stacey Warde

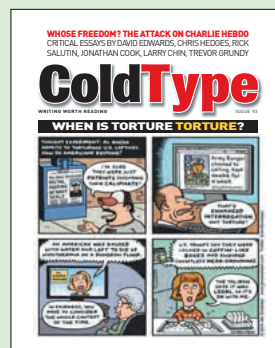
# The articles featured in this special issue have been taken from these issues of ColdType



ColdType Reader Issue 23  
February 2008



ColdType Issue 75  
June-July 2013



ColdType Issue 93  
February 2015



ColdType Issue 208  
Mid-June 2020



ColdType Issue 97  
May 2015



ColdType Issue 100  
July 2015



ColdType Issue 204  
Mid-April 2020



ColdType Issue 186  
Mid-June 2019



ColdType Issue 76  
August 2013



ColdType Issue 38  
August 2009



ColdType Issue 107  
Mid-November 2015



ColdType Issue 1  
October 2005

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# INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO OUR THIRD SPECIAL Looking Back issue of *ColdType* (the others were issues 111 and 143 – see right to download and read). The aim of *ColdType*, as I wrote in our initial tabloid issue way back in 1996, has always been to highlight stories that are not only relevant this month or next, but will be as readable in 10 or 20 years.

Looking at the range of stories republished in this 68-page special – loosely dedicated to travel – I think we’ve managed to live up to that promise.

Our stories include *ColdType*’s first magazine-format cover story, Tom Engelhardt’s *The Spies Who came In From The Hot Tub* (Page 65) from October 2005, Joe Bageant’s *A Yard Sale in Chernobyl* (Page 8) from 2009, and Denis Beckett’s 2008 essay, *Sam and Me: Famous Cousin Blues* (Page 4), through to more recent material, including *You Can’t Get there From Here*, Tim Knight’s 2015 warning to journalists

travelling into African war zones (Page 16), and Joe Allen’s essay, *A Knoxville Redneck Heads for the Hills* (Page 42), written after his escape from the clutches of Covid in 2020. Plus seven more delightful rambles.

I hope you enjoy these and the other stories in this latest collection. Let me know what you think.

Tony Sutton, editor@coldtype.net



READ OUR PREVIOUS 'LOOKING BACK' ISSUES HERE

- ISSUE 111 – FEBRUARY 2016  
Click here to read/download
- ISSUE 143 – JULY 2017  
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# SAM AND ME: FAMOUS COUSIN BLUES

Denis Beckett tramps the streets of Paris with Samuel, and takes a strange car ride with a gang of French diplomats



From  
The ColdType Reader  
Issue 23  
February 2008

SONS OF FAMOUS FATHERS are never “Joe is a panel beater” or “Joe collects bottle tops”. They are “son of Jack”. If they follow their father’s career and reach the top, the whisper-mill says, “His Dad pulled strings”. If they halt at a normal part-way level it’s “He’s a failure”. Take up a different field and the pop psychologists go orgasmic: “running away from his father!”

Even if you laugh off the volunteer analysts you spend fortunes on paid analysts, working out why you fit under a stone after family lunches. Then your father dies and thereafter you fit under a stone all the time. You get to wish he’d been a personnel manager.

This information comes to you courtesy of two guys I know, who’ve been there. My own personnel manager father loved me regardless, gliding so lightly even over my also-ran showing on the sportsfield, where he’d been captain of everything, that I didn’t know this was a classic font of paternal neurosis until I learned it from a movie at the age of 38.

But I have known lesser strains of the same genus. Long before mid-life crisis, I had famous cars, magnificent impractical Jaguar XKs and E-types which had rear visibility like a blindfold, burst their water-pipes on dates, and donated generous

oil-puddles to unwilling driveways. I loved them. But I saw the syndrome. Friends didn’t say, “Hullo, Denis, how are you”. They said, “Hullo, Denis, how are your cars”. You get to feel like an incidental accessory to an inanimate object.

Then there was the other matter, Famous Second Cousin.

Or maybe it’s Famous Uncle-Once-Removed. All these years and I still need help. What, to you, is your father’s cousin? Technically I think it’s second cousin, but that feels wrong. You wouldn’t have a first cousin 40 years older. Uncle sounds better, but officially an uncle is a parent’s brother. And officially, I think, once-removed means an affinity relative as opposed to a consanguine relative, i.e. marriage rather than so-called blood.

Anyway, that’s what Sam was.

Samuel Beckett was a dimmish name in my childhood. He wrote these plays and things that nobody understood, nobody in my world, anyway. But somewhere else, London and places like that, where they read books without pictures on the cover, minds doubtless greater than our own developed the idea that these plays and especially one of them, *Waiting for Godot*, unsealed the human predicament.

As the idea developed, so did Sam’s name, and reflected glory. At first only an occasional English Hons type would ask if I was

Art: Tony Jenkins

related, and plumb me for insights as if these were transmitted through a network of genetic cyberspace. They seldom asked twice, concluding they had stumbled upon the family retard, but the circle of first-go enquirers expanded.

During a spell of sentry duty in my call-up year I armed myself. I read *Godot*. Plus *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. It was Greek but, begorrah, impressive Greek. Was I proud of my ... er, relative. I asked my Dad for his address.

At boarding school, whither my dad was despatched at the age of six, Sam, eight years older, was for a brief while a big feature in a small boy's life. He was father-figure (my dad's dad died young), elder brother (no incumbent) and ersatz mother (the official title-holder was truant.) I don't think they ever saw each other after school-days. But, the one having settled in France, because the Irish were too gregarious, and the other in South Africa, which had given him a wife, they corresponded.

They didn't correspond out of nostalgia, let alone literary mind-meeting. They corresponded about money. In their boyhoods a lady named Toshie had, unaided by ties whether consanguine or affinite, become an honorary aunt to both. Subsequently her cupboard had bared a bit, and Sam and my dad rallied round.

Later an aged uncle struck a cash-flow crisis, and then an aunt, and Sam and my dad were getting into quite a habit, along with other cousins. Which was incidentally a strange and lovely thing. The family had once been rich and riven, and now here had



scarcity wrought unity. It was also a surprising thing. The family were (mainly) Protestant, supposedly the more anally-retentive brand of Irish who kept the spare tyre pumped and the coal-pile stocked, but the blood-line evidently balked at premiums and prudence.

Sam lived at Boulevard St Jacques, Paris 14. I wrote, "Dear Uncle Samuel...", after consuming half a pad on Second-Cousin, Mr Beckett, Sir, and clever-clever alternatives which I am too embarrassed to publicly remember. Sam replied in tiny black ink on very white, very stiff paper the size of a cigarette packet. He said Uncle Samuel sounded like a folk tale. He corrected my recap of the lineage. He ignored my earnest freshman references to his books (several wasted pads). He said to come and visit some time.

Six years later, I did – memorably, but not necessarily for the right reasons.

I was 24, and as fit as the next man. Sam was 64. We walked. Did we walk! We walked everywhere, and Sam walked way better than I walked. I puffed forward with blisters on my feet and mind while Sam strode like a Derby winner. The times my burning blisters or aching muscles forced a softening of his pace, I heard distant chimes of that Famous Father tune – hey boy, match up.

It was worse when we talked.

In the fashion of 1970s humanities graduates, I was sure that South Africa's political system was the sorest boil on the face of the planet. Our lives were built on opposing it, and I devised a plot, a secret weapon. Sam would write a play on apartheid.

Plays on apartheid weren't new. South Africans wrote them all the time. People like me barely knew there were plays on anything else. But they hadn't so far gal-

I was 24, and as fit as the next man. Sam was 64. We walked. Did we walk! We walked everywhere, and Sam walked way better than I walked. I puffed forward with blisters on my feet and mind while Sam strode like a Derby winner

Sam was sick of *Godot*, and everything he'd written. He cared only for what he was still to write, and for cricket. He knew South Africans were cricket-mad, in the corner left over from rugby-madness

vanised the world. That needed Sam's heft. I'd give Sam the lowdown, how the pale lot made all the rules and the other guys were cut out, even from catching our buses. He'd be aghast, having previously heard the enormities only through media filters. He'd write his play, which I wouldn't understand but would set the Great Minds alight. Galvanisation ahoy.

Heh. Sam's interest in Africa and all its works was nought. That he wasn't a man for politics and parties, I had divined. But our issue was supposed to be on a higher plane, a test case for humanity. He didn't seem to grasp that civilised people from pole to pole ought to agonise daily over how to help The Struggle. He said in effect: pfft. From such a prince of intellect! This was shattering. And a consanguine at that!

I had also swotted my *Godot* and other Beckettiana, so that in time off from plotting the plot I'd be tuned to receive the ultimate insider's insight. Another pfft. Sam was sick of *Godot*, and everything he'd written. He cared only for what he was still to write, and for cricket. He knew South Africans were cricket-mad, in the corner left over from rugby-madness. But my cranium was too stuffed with the Cause to leave any corner for either. Sam would ask if so-and-so was on form. I'd say, "Um, does he bat or bowl?", and shrink a little.

One place we walked was to Sam's restaurant in Montmartre, which was about equidistant with Moscow. So my blisters told me. He had a permanent table, with vast red vinyl seats.

On the way we passed a grand mansion. Sam said, "This is the Men of Lesser Society".

I thought, that's a strangely coy way of putting it. I said, "I see, like an asylum".

Sam gave me a sharp glance. "I said, this is the Men of Letters Society".

I got the impression I wasn't giving the correct impression. Still, I slept on a couch in his small poky apartment ("Boulevard St Jacques" had given the impression of a

gorgeous French 'otel) and while the Jame-son's sank we did establish a commonality. He wrote later, with "appreciation of your dogged dedication, even if I cannot share it" and invited me to come again.

By 1989, Sam was to France what Princess Di was to Britain, except for legs, and I was still on the same old mission. By now my dedication was given over to a theory, on which I had written two books and enough articles to wreck my magazine, *Frontline*.

*Frontline*, of which I was owner and editor, and frequently sales-rep and bottle-washer, was reasonably light in the Righteousness Dept, at least by the norms of the anti-apartheid industry, and an allegedly lively journal until the theory sabotaged it. But the theory was my way of getting past apartheid, as opposed to shrieking at the ruling Afrikaners as per chorus. Having found the theory I had to go at it, like Don Quixote and windmills.

Editors tend to take up weaponry when I advance the theory, so I desist, nearly – merely noting that starkly split countries have a dud record of overcoming their splits. The more minority rights you provide the more you short-change majority rule. Both lots gripe, heads get broken, economies wither, and paper constitutions frazzle trying to squelch natural pressures. You need something better, viz a structure which does not purport to dictate the fields of battle but firmly locks the methods of battle to a web of interacting power-sites.

Alright, it may not ring bells in a sentence, but note this: One day, when Earth's Democracy Version 1 has graduated to about 4.0, vexed societies will routinely tie the wildmen to the anchor of ordinary people's votes. Everyone will be in a majority in some foci of power and a minority in others, and much age-old strife will dry up.

In '89 my life-calling was to get a Version 4 prototype on the map. My own government had wax in its ears but on the diplomatic circuit there were flickers. On the day of Tiananmen Square I was in a

classy Paris restaurant with France's Under-Secretary for Africa and three of his henchmen, urging France to pressurise the apartheid regime into supercharging a richer democracy than had been heard of here in the hub of the universe. The Under-Sec listened approximately politely until the third refill. Then he waxed lyrical (and admittedly amusing) about utopia and dreams, and we regressed to standard politics like whether X's alliance with Y was intact and did Z have a bottle problem.

In the course of goodbyes the Under-Sec asked jokingly if I was related to Sam. I said I was forthwith proceeding to the Metro to call on him.

I ceased to be a nutcase from nowhere and became Royalty. Metro!? No way. Foreign Affairs had cars, special luxury cars for VIPs like me. A special luxury car was summoned. It took a while coming, during which I (a) learned that my theory was the greatest discovery since  $E=mc^2$ , and (b) checked my watch. Sam expected me at 5. It was after 4. I'd should be on the Metro. But I was a prisoner of vicarious fame, and delighted by my hosts' delayed dawning, and not averse to being driven through Paris in a special luxury car with flags flying. Would they have outriders?

We waited on the pavement. I scoured for a long sleek car with an immaculate driver. I was re-explaining why, no, enriched democracy does not mean neighbouring villages legislating to drive on different sides of the road, when there was a noisy shouting from a hot cross T-shirted person leaning from a scruffy 10-year-old Renault.

It turned out I had to be escorted as well as chauffeured. The two smaller henchmen squashed impossibly in the front. The Under-Sec and I shared special luxury at the back with henchman three, whose stomach flopped on my lap. Sweat occurred. So did rush-hour.

Denfert-Rochereau is in deep southern Paris, aka slightly north of Orleans. By 8-ish, when we pulled up at an old-age home,

I was sick of being heavyweight by proxy, dismissed for what you are and respected for what somebody else is. I was sick of the car, sick of the flopping stomach, sick of the Gauloise air. My escorts expected to escort me right into Sam's room. I drew the line.

Sam's legs locomoted but you could have stood a bottle on his back, if the weight didn't crumple him. He looked like one of his own characters. He was nowhere near the world of Under-Secretaries, theories, or the magical effect of his name. He poured whisky and he toasted bread. We ate it dry. He asked after my father ("fine, thanks") and my trip ("fine, thanks") and told me he would be dead before the year was out. I blurted the obligatory guff – years to go, medical science... He cut me off with "bullshit". We sat in silence but for toast crunching. Then he said, "thank you for having visited me".

The trip back took half an hour on the Metro. Sam died on December 28.

Each year has more press about Sam as genius and giant. Each year my surname elicits more queries. A steadily lower proportion go, "As in Thomas a' Becket?" A steadily higher proportion go, "As in Samuel Beckett?" Whereupon follows Frequently Asked Question Number 1. Did he mean it or was he having us on, especially with some of the later stuff like the one where you pay good legal tender to watch the stage lighting change?

The answer is, Don't ask me. I had one real conversation with the guy, with double-tots on the way. When I crashed on his couch that night in '71 I understood the universe, but in the morning it had sneaked off. I believe an urgent message on the meaning of life is in there somewhere, but where, when and whether it might be supplemented by a secret guffaw at the gullibility of the believers, I have less idea than any of millions of Lit III students around the world.

What I know is, he did it his way. That's a good enough model for a second cousin. Or sort-of nephew.

Sam's legs locomoted but you could have stood a bottle on his back, if the weight didn't crumple him. He looked like one of his own characters

*Denis Beckett is a South African author. This article originally appeared in the magazine NineOnTen and was reprinted in Redeeming Features, Beckett's collection of essays, published by Penguin Books.*

CT

# A YARD SALE IN CHERNOBYL

Joe Bageant returns to the United States from Central America to find a nation bamboozled by propaganda and obsessed by shopping



From  
ColdType  
Issue 38  
August 2009

IT'S ONLY A SYSTEM," SHE SAID, as we floated through the sprawling supermarket's gleaming commodity-lined indoor streets. "THE HELL IT IS! It's a goddamned air conditioned zombie hell of waste and gluttony", I thought to myself, before the usual vertigo completely enveloped me. Just back from Central America's simple, comprehensible mercados, bodegas and street cart vendors, the effect of this most common American shopping ven-

ue was, as always, one of vertigo. Head splitting light beats down on pyramids of plastic eggs, as if to incubate their hatching of the ladies stockings within, dozens of kinds of toothpaste, well scrubbed dead chickens, lurid baskets of too-perfect flowers, plastic wraps, tissue for faces, asses and wrapping gifts, row upon row of polished vegetables and fruits standing like soldiers waiting for the annihilation of salads or the ovens of casseroledom.

And all those hushed and not so hushed shopper cellphone conversations, this one consoling someone at the home base pod: "Oh, I am so sorry, baby, but I think they've quit making the Ranch flavoured Pringles. Yes I know you don't like the jalapeno Pringles. I am so sorry. Really I am". Both parties seemed genuinely distraught.

And I imagine Allen Ginsberg in this

supermarket, as he once imagined Walt Whitman in a supermarket in California and wonder, as Allen wondered, "What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed open their skulls and ate their brains and imaginations?"

The meat department workers in blood-stained white smocks recite their corporate programmed litany: "Welcome to Food Lion. How can I best serve you today?" I cannot help but politicise such moments, so I say, "Humiliating, isn't it, to say that a thousand times a day to people who just want to be left alone to shop". Once in a while I get a knowing glance back, but usually they do not respond, because cameras cover every inch of the place.

Only the Mongoloid bag-faced boy seems happy. His smile is a deep mysterious void. What it must be like to be so unfazed, to be in another country of the mind? What sphinx rules his Republic of One? Does it have the same unknowable corporate face as governs our obedience to this one?

It was to the spectral triumph of corporatism Allen Ginsberg referred in the epic poem, *Howl*: Moloch, whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!





Pentagon city shopping mall, Washington, USA, in 2003.

The world at that time, 1956, understood what Ginsberg was saying. Around the planet, *Howl* remains the most well-known American poem of the 20th-century. Here in the Republic of Amnesia though, *Howl* is all but lost amid the crackling digital noise of the immediate moment. Allen’s hairy-assed existential yalp for humanity just doesn’t go well with the body waxed décor of our current American aesthetic.

President Obama understands the featureless not-so-new American aesthetic. So well that he had the world’s most politically correct, authority sanctioned, but possibly worst poet, Elizabeth Alexander, read at his inauguration. (“We encounter each other in words, words spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed, words to consider, reconsider”).

Like the soothing, ambiguous language of the Super Corporate State, it sounds as if it means something. Which is close enough for government work. More importantly, she has been vetted by proper authorities and is credentialed and licensed by Yale University to practise poetry. The marketing theme of the event was Obama’s alleged blackness. Alexander is sorta black too, but not black enough to scare away business. Welcome to the domination of the business aesthetic. Literate people all over the world found Alexander’s reading to be like one of those eyewatering farts you just wait through until it blows away. Still, millions of Americans listened and cried, in accordance with the marketing theme, “happy to be born in America, where a black man

Allen Ginberg’s hairy assed existential yalp for humanity just doesn’t go well with the body waxed décor of our current American aesthetic

“It’s only a system”, I told myself during the 24/7 blanket coverage of Michael Jackson’s corpse, deeply suspicious that that so many millions of Americans were really distraught over the loss of this weirdly mutated media flesh puppet

can be elected president”. Personally, I was sorry as hell I’d sworn off bourbon for the month.

If you ask, you will find that most of our citizenry are indeed “happy to be born in America” – Fat City, the beacon of bacon. The great 24/7 all-you-can-eat buffet republic, where you can walk in without a cent in your pocket and buy a car, or, until the credit meltdown, even a house. People immigrate here for just that: to possess more commodities and goods than previously available (as in none, zilch); or to accumulate money to ensure such goods in the future. Or to escape political machinery that deprives them of goods, and sometimes kills them if they object. “Your basic lack of democracy”, as we’re constantly reminded. I’ve met a few genuinely starving people in my day, and to be truthful, democracy was the last thing on their minds.

However, they usually believed the American free market sell job about a profoundly bountiful place with plentiful opportunities, or at the very least, plenty of edible commodities. And from their experience and perspective, there surely is truth to the claim. For the most part, these immigrants are utterly unconcerned about the resource depletion or ecocide inherent in a superheated capitalist system designed to burn up as much of the planet as possible as fast as possible, in order to generate as many commodities as possible for the quickest buck possible. Show ’em the money and the meat! If I were an average citizen in Haiti or Somalia, I’d feel the same way.

But even more fortunate people among them believe the hype. My Central American friend Rodrigo, who is in no danger of starving because he owns a couple of tamale and panade street carts, says, “A new car, that’s what I want to go to America for. A car and an apartment with one of those things that go up and down inside the buildings”.

“An elevator?”

“Si! An elevator. A glass one!”

When I get back down there, I’ll be sorry

to tell Rodrigo that we went bust before he got his glass elevator ride. But if he needs an eight-bottle Pier 1 wine rack or a particle board book shelf that leans decidedly to the right, we can fix him right up. America is one big yard sale now, as we close out the books on industrial capitalism, only to discover that all our neighbours were as broke as we were. That it was all “on the plastic”, the furniture, the wines, the digital toys, the camping gear that never got used. There is something eerily sad in these tens of thousands of suburban Saturday morning sales. There are seldom any buyers, not even many “free box” takers – only sellers. An uncharacteristic silence hangs in the air, and there is the feeling of some unspoken recent disaster of immense proportion, some Chernoybl like thing that left everything standing.

“It’s only a system”, I told myself during the 24/7 blanket coverage of Michael Jackson’s corpse, deeply suspicious that that so many millions of Americans were really distraught over the loss of this weirdly mutated media flesh puppet. Morbidly curious maybe, but not distraught. There were the high ceremonial tributary rituals, the carefully written and rehearsed incantations as to how Jackson pushed the global cause of racial equality to new heights. Even Nelson Mandela said so. Why am I not sharing in this great and tragic stirring of the masses? This news event apparently of massive import?

A politician dips his pecker in the wrong honeypot, and it plays for days, dies down, then returns months later when the honeypot sues him for support, his wife sues him for divorce. A congressman offers a black dude a blowjob in a public restroom because, “I was afraid of him and wanted to accommodate the situation”. Cheap spectacle and the distractive buffoonery of folly, along with the latest reasons we should be afraid, these are primary grist for the media entertainment divisions called “news”.

But seldom to never do we get news and information as to the global scale of the genuine emergency facing humankind. Bad news is bad for business, therefore said to be bad for you and me. We all accept that consumer confidence is the foundation of the whole shebang, the confidence game that is capitalism. Thus confidence and cheery optimism is mandatory among the citizen consumer-producer marks. Willingly we self-police our behaviour, shunning, criticising or mocking what we perceive as “negative people”. We drive past the empty parking lots, abandoned housing developments, through networks of cameras and cops with radar guns, stun guns and real guns every few blocks, numb to it all, listening to government commercial propaganda officialised by Katie Couric and Ben Bernanke. Just like us, they have internalised the system as a matter of education and “professionalism”. But unlike us, they’ve done it to such an effective degree as to warrant seven figure remuneration.

—————  
Somewhere waaay down the ladder of the propaganda machinery, we find the anonymous guy or gal who writes the crap that keeps the front page of our web browsers so slow. The top story on my browser yesterday was: “Is Facebook hurting American productivity?” (begging the question as to whether there is any production to hurt). On one level you gotta wonder who the hell put that story there and for what reason. On the other hand, the story carried a link to Facebook. Was that a small act of personal rebellion at AOL? A corporate state message? Or a Facebook plant to direct traffic in its direction? In all likelihood though, it was

just another piece of meaningless shit, generated by some kid news editor at AOL, a guy who has one of those rare things in America these days, a job, because he’s already internalised the system far too well. In any case, my attention was momentarily diverted, sucked into AOL World, snared away from what other world I do not know, but certainly one fraught with paranoia, or at least hyper suspicion, if a browser screen can arouse so much speculation as to its motives.

Speaking of motives, there are those who worry about an American authoritarian police state one day rounding folks up, shuffling them off to geographically remote camps, such as the Department of Homeland Security’s scattered FEMA Camps. But physical geography isn’t the only geography. There is geography of the mind too, where another kind of hellish internment may be conducted. One without razor wire or sirens but surely as confining and in its own way, as soul chilling as any concentration camp. One with plenty to eat and filled with distractions and diversions enough to drown out the alarms and sirens that go off inside free men at the scent of tyranny. If a round up of Americans is real, then it began years ago. And as far as I can tell, everyone went peacefully, each one alone, like children, whose greatest concern on that day when the gates were closed, was the absence of Ranch flavoured Pringles. **CT**

*Joe Bageant is the author of the best selling **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America’s class war** (Random House, 2007). He was a regular contributor to ColdType until his death in 2011. You can read our collection of his essays at [www.coldtype.net/joe.html](http://www.coldtype.net/joe.html)*

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# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A LEGEND

Samuel Johnson, the famed 18th-century writer, claimed that London was the centre of all that was good about life. Cold, wet, and jetlagged, **Tony Sutton** disagrees

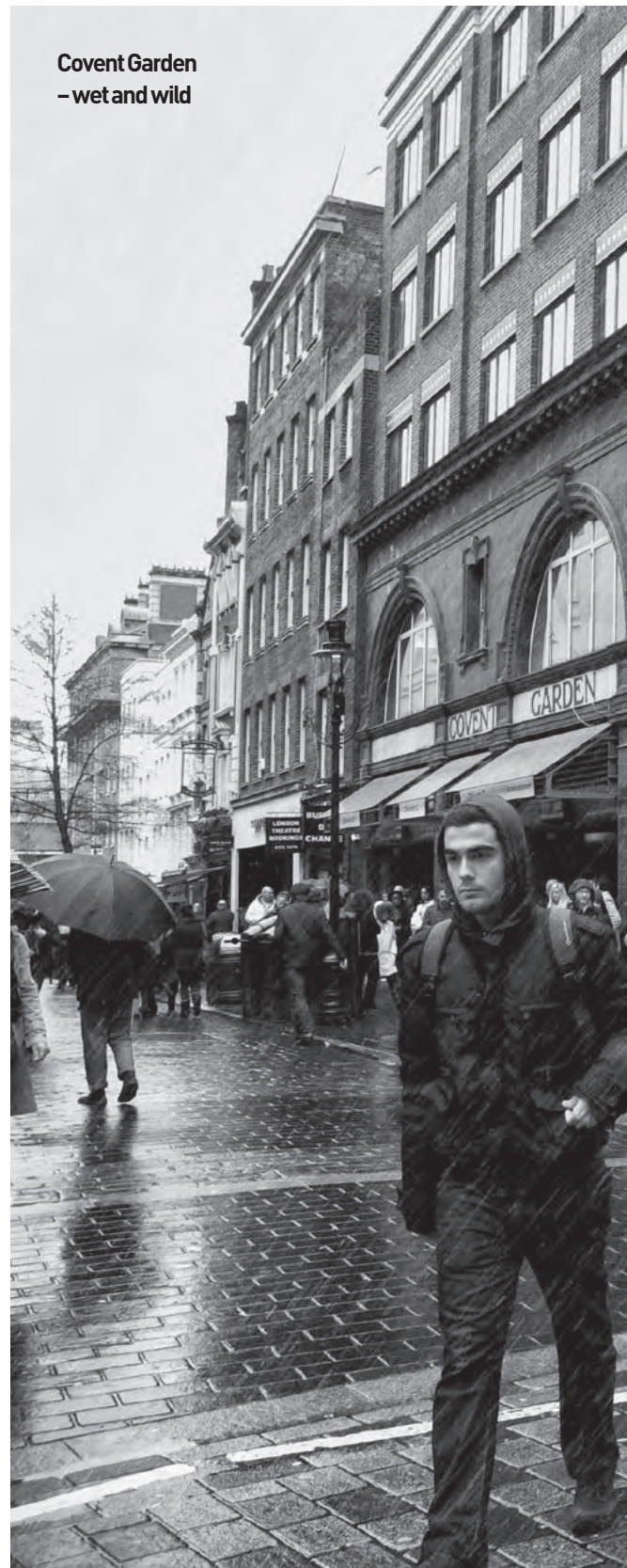


From  
**ColdType**  
Issue 75  
June–July 2013

FABLED 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH writer Samuel Johnson told his faithful diarist James Boswell way back in 1777, “*Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford*”.

Hah! Johnson wasn’t suffering from lack of sleep, hunger, and sore feet after staggering round the city in pouring rain, weighed down with a backpack stuffed with computers and books, when he uttered those words of wisdom. But I was. And my Johnson-inspired enthusiasm for a stroll around London during a 10-hour break between flights from Toronto to Johannesburg had soured moments after stepping through the customs hall into a subway carriage at Heathrow airport.

“Welcome to the 150th anniversary of London Underground”, shrilled a gleefully disembodied female voice as I hopped aboard, hoping for a speedy ride to Central London where I calculated I would be just in time for breakfast at my favourite West End breakfast haunt. I should have known better. After 150 years of trying, London Underground still can’t get its damn trains to



Covent Garden  
– wet and wild



Photo: Tony Sutton



**Travelling on the Tube is fine, so long as you're not weighed down by heavy bags – or kids.**

Where else could you walk along an eerie underground pathway knowing that the merest flicker of a ceiling lamp will conjure deliciously demented visions in which Jack the Ripper lurks around every corner

run on time when I'm on them. "Apologies", said the lady on the intercom moments later, repeating her gloomy message every five minutes of the almost two-hour journey, "due to work on the tracks, this train goes no further than Hyde Park Corner. Change at blah, blah, blah". Bugger, bugger, bugger. Goodbye breakfast; I should have eaten the bilge on the plane.

Ah, the Tube. Parts of it are wonderful: the Victorian tiling in the older stations is stunning. Other parts are hell: the stairways and vertigo-inducing escalators are fiendish obstacles for anyone with a suitcase. And that misery is compounded ten-fold

if you're trying to manoeuvre a suitcase, stroller, *and* two howling kids in the path of a claustrophobic rush-hour mob.

But where else could you walk along an eerie underground corridor knowing that the merest flicker of a ceiling lamp will conjure deliciously demented visions in which Jack the Ripper lurks around every corner wielding a blade dripping with gore?

Two transfers later, I emerge from my nightmare at Oxford Circus and begin a brisk walk to Soho. Whoosh, the sky darkens, and rain lashes down. "Just a small shower. Won't last. Be over in a few minutes, Luv", says an over-cheerful woman as

we huddle in a shop doorway. She's right. Sort of. The sun peeps through the gloom. So I walk on. Then, a minute later, there's another downpour. So it continues until I arrive at my breakfast place. It's closed. Of course. No breakfast. Obviously.

I wander along the streets. Soaked, cold, eyes half-closed, backpack heavier with each stride. Starving. Check my watch. It's almost eleven. I wonder how long before the fish 'n' chip shop at Berwick Street Market will open. Nip into Starbucks for a bitter-tasting and overpriced coffee. Then a newsagent's, where I buy a daily paper and a novel to read on the plane. A nostalgic shudder as I pass Raymond's Revue Bar, the first – and only – strip club I visited during a previous existence in London.

11:45. I'm the first customer of the day, so I choose a table close to the window in the just-opened fish shop. Cod, chips and a pot of tea, please. It's perfect. Outside, the sun blazes, London's gleaming. Half an hour later, I rise to leave. It's hosing down. Again . . .

Dodging showers in Soho, Chinatown and Covent Garden, I browse the ever-dwindling bookstores of Charing Cross Road. Try to buy a book. But it's too big for my backpack, so I'll buy it later – from Amazon . . .

What now? I shuffle around for half an hour, Then I surrender: wet, tired, demoralised, and defeated, I board the westbound Tube to the airport at Leicester Square. The thought of staring blankly at fellow passenger-zombies while drinking expensively tasteless coffees for five more long hours at Heathrow suddenly seems more fun than traipsing streets in sodden misery.

Yes, I know. The country and its capital are renowned for crap weather, but it seems to get worse every time I pass through. Is it climate change? Or the tired tears of disillusioned travellers seeking a city that no longer exists, except in idealistic imagination and long-faded memory? I don't know



Leicester Square – hardy tourists enjoy coffee in the rain.

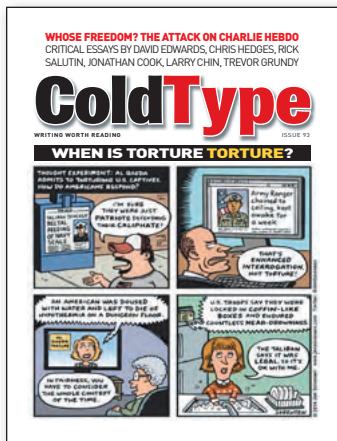
the answer, but I can offer some curmudgeonly advice to other travellers who may be inclined to follow in the footsteps of Samuel Johnson. If you're planning to relieve jetlag and hours of airport tedium with a stroll round London on your next trip, do what I'm going to do in future – check the weather first! If the forecast says rain, buy an extra book, then find a comfortable seat next to the airport coffee shop. Relax. You won't miss a thing, except sore feet and, perhaps, a lifetime's aversion to old Sam's favourite city. **CT**

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# YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

Tim Knight undergoes a life-changing experience while covering a strange war in Southern Africa



From  
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SEPTEMBER 26, 2014. A MILITARY coup beckons like distant thunder from the other side of South Africa's border with Lesotho. Soldiers shoot some police ... police shoot some soldiers ... the general commanding Lesotho's army defies the King's command to lay down his sword ... rebel soldiers train in the mountains ... Lesotho prime minister and allies flee across border to South Africa ... South African police are sent the other way to guard Lesotho VIPs ... corrupt politicians blame each other ...

Sylvia Vollenhoven, radical journalist, author and playwright, has started a new website in South Africa, *The Journalist*. She assigns me to travel to Lesotho, find out what's happening, become *The Journalist*'s first-ever war correspondent. She writes me an impressive letter of accreditation.

More than 40 years ago, I covered South Africa's fight against apartheid. After that independence struggles in Zimbabwe and Zambia. And three years and two wars in the Congo. And America's civil rights protests and riots against racism. Now it's an attempted coup in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. How could an intrepid war correspondent resist?

Actually, there's a second reason for me to go to Lesotho. Friday, September 26,

2014, is the last day of my 90-day South African Visitor's Visa. Time to renew. So a good day to fly out of Cape Town where I'm a guest in my sister Jane's house, spend a few days in Lesotho covering the coup, then fly back to Cape Town with a renewed 90-day visa safely stamped on my Canadian passport.

And while I'm away, it's quite possible that my application for South African citizenship – “under consideration” for the past 10 months – will be approved. So I won't need any more Visitor's Visas to live and work here.

At the last moment, I change my travel plans. I'm a writer, filmmaker and journalist. I know all about airline people and airports. Now I need to be with real people, touch real land. Be part of the proletariat. So I decide against flying to the Lesotho border and instead take the overnight bus from Cape Town.

My plan is to stay in Lesotho for four days, hire a freelance cameraperson, interview the mutinous general (think Castro in the Sierra Maestra mountains), the King, the Prime Minister. South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa (who's there trying to solve Lesotho's problems) and anyone else who might know what's going on. I'll apply for a renewed 90-day visa, go back to the South African border, head back to Cape Town.



Photo: Kaizer Matsumunyane

There, I'll write a roundup on Lesotho and its attempted-coup, sit in the sun, and wait for my South African citizenship papers to emerge from the national mail strike.

As it turns out, there's a tiny flaw in my perfect plan.

## Day 1

Four South African Home Affairs officials sit in a row behind thick glass windows at the international border with Lesotho. Three of them wear neat khaki or blue uniforms decorated with Home Affairs badges. They treat people who want to cross their border into a foreign country with brisk, bored, bureaucratic courtesy.

The fourth official wears cheap, rumpled civilian clothes and is so fat he overflows his stool. He sits like a gross Buddha, waves away travellers who push anxious papers through the slot under his thick glass window, and makes jokes about foolish people who want to leave South Africa.

The fat man doesn't seem to do any actual work, so I guess he must be from the Crime Intelligence Unit (CPU) which replaced apartheid's notorious Special Branch, BOSS. Of course, it's also possible he's just a deputy minister's cousin who's being kept as far away from Pretoria as possible until some fuss dies down.

Anyway, when I present my Canadian passport at one of the thick glass windows this fine September 27 morning, a polite uniformed official tells me I've just overstayed my 90-day South African Visitor's Visa. By ten hours.



**Trapped in Lesotho: Tim Knight awaits the letter that will take him to freedom.**

Being a writer, not an accountant, I haven't figured out that my visa expires at midnight Friday, September 26, while I'm fast asleep on the overnight bus rumbling through the Karoo toward the Lesotho border. The official sympathises, tries to help me find a way around my unexpected and very unwelcome undesirability. The fat man thinks it's all very funny. He chortles. I don't think I've ever heard anyone actually chortle before.

*"The big, important Canadian journalist is in great trouble. He broke the law. He must pay the price"*.

This hugely delights him. Because, as he keeps reminding everyone in the office, I'm now an *"undesirable alien"*.

Eventually, a new stamp on my passport (Sec 30 (1) H ... Regulation 27 (B) 9.) legally prohibits me from stepping foot in South Africa for the next year. I have a strong feeling that had the fat man not intervened, justice and mercy might have triumphed in this clash between entirely unequal forces.

Once over the South African border, Lesotho gives me a 30-day Visitor's Visa. No problem.

My Lesotho contact is Kaizer Matsumunyane. He drives me to my hotel, the Maseru Sun, in Lesotho's capital. Kaizer is a dreadlocked filmmaker I meet back in Toronto. He looks like a Rastafarian high priest, knows everyone in Maseru, teaches filmmaking at the local Limkokwing University, and is trying to start his own brewery.

The fat man doesn't seem to do any actual work, so I guess he must be from the Crime Intelligence Unit (CPU) which replaced apartheid's notorious Special Branch, BOSS. Of course, it's also possible he's just a deputy minister's cousin who's being kept as far away from Pretoria as possible until some fuss dies down

A ridiculously draconian law has trapped me in a Kafkaesque limbo. I literally can't get to any other country from here

With Kaizer's gentle help, slowly, slowly, the shock of it all hits me. I'm trapped. Lesotho is landlocked, entirely surrounded by South Africa. I can't walk, swim or drive out of Lesotho without stepping on South African soil where I'll certainly be arrested for overstaying my visa. I can't fly out because all planes from Lesotho land in Johannesburg. And the nearest Canadian High Commission is also on South African soil. In faraway Pretoria, where I'm now an undesirable alien.

A ridiculously draconian law has trapped me in a Kafkaesque limbo. I literally can't get to any other country from here. And Lesotho is unlikely to let me stay longer than the 30 days stamped on my passport.

To make life even more unpleasant, I've only brought four days' supply of the pills my doctor claims cure – or at least alleviate – the ailments I accumulate over a long lifetime. Then there's the problem that I have no Canada to return to. I give away my books and most of my clothes before I leave Toronto for Cape Town. My children and friends take their pick of the rest. The leftovers I donate to Habitat For Humanity and get a \$680 tax receipt in return.

Kaizer and I mull over the problem. We decide there's no immediate solution so we head for the hotel bar. The next day I fire up my iPad, and start the long, laborious process of appealing the South African ban. I've got three weeks.

## Day 2

Lesotho's communications system has problems, particularly during a military coup or whatever this is. So phoning and e-mailing the South African Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria to appeal the decision is a nightmare. It's a week before they send me a 12-page appeal form to fill in, insisting all twelve pages be sent separately to [overstayappeals@dha.gov.za](mailto:overstayappeals@dha.gov.za).

And I start trying to find contacts and friends in Lesotho, South Africa and Canada who can maybe, just maybe, help rescue

me. It's delicate political stuff, so not wise to mention their names.

## Day 3

According to my original plan, this is the day before I head back to the South African border, with another 90-day Visitor's Visa stamped on my passport, and catch the overnight bus back to Cape Town. Instead, I sit in my hotel room and spend the day writing a chronological account of my exile to date so I don't sound like a complete idiot when trying to explain it to people I contact. Even when I write it as simply as I can, it all sounds ridiculous when I try to explain to people at the other end of the phone or email. It all reminds me of *Scoop*, Evelyn Waugh's great satirical novel about war correspondents.

That evening, Kaizer and I supper at the hotel's Ying Tao restaurant. I'm an amateur Chinese cook, particularly fond of Szechuan. My theory is that because there are thousands of Chinese people sent by their government to work in Lesotho, it follows that Ying Tao must be fairly authentic. It is. Expensive, but good hot and sour soup. Excellent mapo tofu. I feel better.

Even so, I'd much rather be on the bus heading back to Cape Town tomorrow.

## Day 4

Maseru is full of rumours of political, military and police skullduggery.

The attempted coup started when Members of Parliament tried to call a vote of no confidence in the government. The Prime Minister's response was swift and decisive. He closed down Parliament.

Basotho King Letsie III, Grand Master of the Most Dignified Order of Moshoeshoe etc. etc. has fired the general commanding the Lesotho army. The general refused to hand over his sword, heads for the mountains outside Maseru with some of his best soldiers, along with anti-aircraft guns and mortars.

It all has something to do with the fact

that in Lesotho the police traditionally support the Prime Minister and the military traditionally support the Deputy Prime Minister. So, naturally, when this sort of thing happens, cops and soldiers become irritable and shoot at each other.

The traditional unreliable sources are certain that one, two or three police/soldiers have been killed in clashes between cops and soldiers. The Prime Minister and some of his supporters decide the soldiers plan to kill them too. So, in a most undignified exodus, flee across the border into South Africa, where they ask for asylum.

After a few days they return, guarded by South African police with submachine guns. Eventually, other police from neighbouring countries join them. Lesotho is, in effect, now occupied by foreign guns.

In Maseru's taxis, bars and restaurants everybody knows everything and nobody knows anything.

Evelyn Waugh (*Scoop, Black Mischief*) – thou should'st be living at this hour..

## Day 5

I write my first Our Man In Lesotho report for *The Journalist*:

*“The Americans have issued a travel alert warning their nationals to stay away from the dangers of Lesotho.”*

Then I get to the matter of the hundred or so police sent by neighbouring countries under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) flag. Their job is to protect important Lesotho politicians from their own almost-coup.

*“My hotel is full of very large men with shaved heads who refuse to speak in the lift. Not even ‘good morning’. Many carry assault rifles and wear badges that say ‘Police’ but don’t disclose where in Southern Africa they come from.*

*“The man in the room next to me is different. He wears a small South African flag on his shoulder and the word ‘EXPLOSIVES’ very large on the back of his military jacket.*

*“As soon as the police move in, the hotel puts notices on all the elevators warning, one assumes, against entertaining traitors or ladies of the night:*

*SOME GUESTS ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEY HAVE TO MAKE PROVISION FOR THEIR OVER NIGHT GUESTS AT THE RECEPTION, KINDLY BE ADVISED THAT ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE REGISTRATION CARDS WILL ONLY BE ALLOWED ACCESS INTO THE HOTEL ESPECIALLY ROOMS FROM 6PM ONWARDS”.*

Time for negotiations. The SADC, with its traditional diplomatic finesse, has trusted presidents Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Zuma of South Africa to sort out Lesotho's problems.

My *Journalist* column rather rudely questions the choice of the two presidents on the grounds that they're *“the two most untrustworthy politicians in our part of the world”*. Predictably, Mugabe and Zuma fail. So the SADC sends South African Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, instead.

I mention the 2012 massacre of 34 miners at Marikana under Zuma, and Ramaphosa's rather suspicious billions, I describe Ramaphosa as: *“... the politician who has gone from the most trusted presidential candidate in the next South African election, all the way to the winner of the ‘Just Like All The Rest Of Them’ award”*.

Then I decide it might be a very good idea for me to refrain from being nasty about South Africa's high command until I sort out my citizenship papers. Good advice. I refrain. First time in my professional life I've held back a story because writing it could be dangerous to my health.

## Day 6

I visit the South African High Commission in Maseru looking for help, get turned away within fifteen seconds.

*“Nothing we can do”,* says the clerk in the booth behind the thick, doubtless bulletproof, glass window. *“Next please”*.

Your intrepid war correspondent isn't

The Prime Minister and some of his supporters decide the soldiers plan to kill them too. So, in a most undignified exodus, flee across the border into South Africa, where they ask for asylum

It's possible he occasionally wakes screaming in the dark hours before dawn because of his prison's reputation for violence, corruption, rape and general human rights nastiness

deterred. I e-mail the South African High Commissioner in Maseru, Rev. Harris Majeke, describe my problem, ask for an audience.

Very spicy Szechuan duck on the menu at Ying Tao. Delicious.

### Day 7

I don't get to see His Excellency, of course. Instead, I'm passed on to his First Secretary Immigration, Madiba Mahlatholle, who interrogates me from a booth behind his own thick glass, doubtless bulletproof, window. I show Mahlatholle my letter to the Department of Home Affairs appealing my undesirability, asking for another 90-day Visitor's Visa. It lists my six appeals against the department's ruling:

1. My transgression was entirely accidental, unpremeditated and innocent. Yes, I sinned, but only by 10 hours.

2. I'm currently being considered for South African citizenship. (South African grandparents, parents, schooling, reporter for the *Natal Mercury*, *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express*, Johannesburg etc.). Already, Home Affairs has applied for an identification number on my behalf. If I get that number I become South African.

3. Lesotho is currently in the midst of civil unrest, becoming more dangerous every day.

4. I'm 76 years old and prone to the normal (listed) disabilities of men my age.

5. Lesotho is entirely surrounded by South Africa so I'm trapped. No way out.

6. My Lesotho Visitor's Permit is valid for only 30 days.

First Secretary Mahlatholle ignores five of my six points of appeal. And doesn't even refer to my request for another 90-day Visitor's Visa. To him it's a matter of getting me off his hands and out of the country. So he promptly turns my problem over to one George Masanabo at the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria.

From: "Madiba, MJ Mr: Maseru,

First Secretary, DHA"

Date: October 6, 2014 at 5:14:33 PM GMT+2

Subject: FW: TIM KNIGHT APPEAL.pdf

Dear Mr Masanabo

*"Please receive self explanatory attachment for your assistance and guidance on behalf of Mr Tim Knight, a Canadian journalist who came to Lesotho to cover the current situation, he visited South Africa but then he overstayed and declared undesirable. His Lesotho permit is about to expire, at the same time he has to leave to Canada via ORT airport, now that he is undesirable in the country, which is the only transit country, how do we assist in that regard.*

*Regard*

*Madiba Mahlatholle"*

One of the professional habits I've developed as a journalist over the years is to research every name that turns up in a story. Every one. Just in case. So, now I have the George Masanabo name I check him on the Internet. Turns out the man who will decide my fate isn't any ordinary official at the Department of Home Affairs. No sir. George Masanabo is Deputy Director at South Africa's notorious Lindela Holding Facility.

Now, George Masanabo may well be a fine and splendid fellow, a bureaucrat dedicated to serving his people with every ounce of his energy. He could, for all I know, be trying to reform Lindela and deplores the institution's gross violations of human rights as much as the rest of us. It's possible he occasionally wakes screaming in the dark hours before dawn because of his prison's reputation for murder, violence, corruption, rape and general human rights nastiness. I know I do.

But I'm not at all sure I want the Deputy Director of one of South Africa's most notorious prisons judging my case. For one thing, he may well be tempted to take revenge against all those other journalists

who've investigated Lindela in the past, called it a corrupt, vicious hell-hole. Prisoners have a habit of dying there.

So locking up this white, international, Canadian journalist will be a real coup. Wonderful revenge. An example to the world. I can see Masanabo explaining to my colleagues as he locks me away for four months (theoretically the maximum allowed by law) in Lindela: "This shows no-one is above the law. See how we treat everyone – powerful and powerless, white as well as black – just the same".

I'm scared. I go back to phoning and emailing people who might help. For a long, long week I wait for something, anything, to change. To save money, I move from the swanky, Maseru Sun Hotel (biggest hotel pool I've ever seen) to the half-price Mohokare Guest House (no pool, but excellent spicy chicken wings). No more Ying Tao restaurant.

The days drift by. I write and watch a lot of TV. You think South Africa has it bad with all the out-of-date, third-rate, bland programming that television broadcasters buy cheap from the Americans and British. Then repeat and repeat until you know them by heart. At least South Africa has something like 150 channels. But as far as I can tell from my hotel, Lesotho has only five channels. One for SABC. Another for CNN International. A third shows European football games which all look and sound exactly the same. A fourth channel sometimes shows Al Jazeera and sometimes doesn't.

Lesotho TV itself repeats Basotho singing and dancing performances in an apparently endless loop until occasionally replaced by equally endless quasi-interviews with very serious and important people who never smile or say anything of import.

Then there's Lesotho TV news. My speciality is storytelling – how to structure stories, write, perform and interview. I've trained thousands of working broadcast journalists in hundreds of workshops in a

dozen countries. But it's a long time since I've seen such an unabashed, unashamed, unadulterated mess of programming as Lesotho TV.

A never-ending river of pompous politicians shake hands, cut ribbons and make interminable speeches about their own magnificence and the malevolence of the other guys. When the politicians aren't around, interchangeable groups of very respectable, formally-dressed, middle-aged to elderly people sit in serried ranks behind tables topped with white tablecloths and make speeches at each other about, no doubt, exceedingly important matters.

I don't think I ever see a single ordinary Basotho on LTV – except in the interminable singing and dancing programmes – during all my time in the country. Then there's the fact that, uniquely in all Africa – probably the world – the Prime Minister never gets on his own country's state television. Seems Communications is run by one of his political enemies. Go figure.

## Day 16

I'm a guest at a meeting of the Media Institute of Southern Africa. I'm impressed with the oratory. The speakers talk easily and confidently without notes, without stumbling. The audience listens respectfully. My only problem is that all the speeches are in Sesotho. However, the beer is suitably cold and the sausages splendidly spicy. And it beats lying on my hotel bed watching TV.

Just in case you're wondering — no, I never get to find and interview the renegade general up there in the mountains with his mutinous soldiers. I don't even ask the King or the Prime Minister or Cyril Ramaphosa for an interview.

That's because – intrepid war correspondent though I was when I left South Africa – I have absolutely no intention of drawing attention to myself during Lesotho's almost-coup by roaring around the corridors of power trying to interview powerful people when I have no diplomatic representa-

I never get to find and interview the renegade general up there in the mountains with his mutinous soldiers. I don't even ask the King or the Prime Minister or Cyril Ramaphosa for an interview

It's a huge relief to get out of Maseru politics and my hotel and into the valleys, hills and endless magnificent mountains surrounding the capital

tion to fall back on if and when I get into trouble.

Already while I'm here, two journalists have been arrested for trying to do their jobs. I have enough problems with South Africa without Lesotho turning against me, too. Also, there's something about being a nowhere person, trapped in this ridiculous bureaucratic limbo (you can't get there from here), that seriously interferes with my urge to report on almost-coups.

Also, I decide I'm getting too old for this shit.

### **Day 17**

Kaizer Matsumunyane invites me to lecture to students and faculty at the Limkokwing University's Communication, Media and Broadcasting school. My focus is storytelling and journalistic integrity. Great to be doing something more positive than writing endless notes to people protesting that I'm actually an innocent good guy and not an international terrorist.

Afterwards, Kaizer drives me to the traditional Thaba-Bosiu village outside Maseru. This is where the great Basotho chief Mosheshshoe unites his people, defies the might of both Shaka Zulu and the Bors, negotiates protection as an equal with the Great White Queen Across the Water, and lies buried on the hill top.

It's a huge relief to get out of Maseru politics and my hotel and into the valleys, hills and endless magnificent mountains surrounding the capital. The air is clean here. People still live in thatched, mud-and-stone-walled rondavels and wear the traditional blankets and conical grass hats of their ancestors. And many still ride the famously hardy Basuto ponies.

### **Day 18**

The big story on SABC TV is the Oscar Pistorious trial. He's the South African playboy who gets more than 13 years in prison for murdering his girlfriend. It doesn't help my mental health to hear defence witness

after witness describe corruption, gangs, rape and murder in South Africa's jails. I picture myself in George Masanobo's Lindela. I try not to picture myself in George Masanobo's Lindela.

Until now, I've worked on the theory that since I'm applying for South African citizenship, the Canadian High Commission in Pretoria isn't likely to be particularly sympathetic or helpful. I swallow my pride and doubts and email the High Commissioner in Pretoria. What the hell! I have nothing to lose. I'll take help wherever I can find it.

I wait for rescue. And wait. And wait.

### **Day 19**

I'm fascinated by the Pistorious murder trial. I watch the boss of South Africa's prisons give evidence. He admits that gangs rule some of his prisons and yes, gangs are violent. Even so, he tries hard to make his prisons sound like Club Meds for unruly teenagers. I've covered prison stories in four countries. He doesn't fool me for a moment. I turn off the TV.

The phone rings. It's Cathie Bruno, Consular Program Officer at the Canadian High Commission in Pretoria. She says she'll try to contact George Masanobo at Lindela. Maybe it can all be sorted out. At worst, she promises to try to get me a 10-day transit pass so I can go back to Cape Town and pick up my belongings before being deported back to Canada. It's the first positive response I've had from anybody in authority in a long time. I think I love her.

### **Day 20**

A colleague back in Canada asks me for what she calls "some telling details about Lesotho". I don't have much else to do, so I write back.

*"Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy. King Letsie III (universities of Cambridge, Bristol and London) is one of the richest monarchs in the world, a constitutional symbol reigning – but not ruling – over one of the poorest nations in the world. He has*

*absolutely nothing to tell his subjects when an attempted coup threatens Lesotho's democracy. I'm told, though, that he does play an excellent game of tennis.*

*The Lesotho army which may or may not have started the fighting costs around U\$60,000,000 a year. Its sole reason for existence seems to be to look smart when on parade for the King's birthday. Certainly, it could neither repel attacks from neighbours, nor successfully invade any other country (with the possible exceptions of Swaziland).*

*Two out of every five Basotho live below the international poverty line of U\$1.25 a day. The country has one of the highest literacy rates in all Africa. But it also has one of the highest percentages of citizens with HIV/AIDS. Lesotho politicians and bureaucrats are even more corrupt and venal than South African politicians and bureaucrats. In fact, according to all reports, they take corruption and venality to a whole new level of international splendour. It's as if warring Mafias own the place.*

*The Basotho people I meet here are dignified, courteous, hospitable, kind and generous. They deserve a lot better."*

## Day 21

My iPad signals. Email from the South African Department of Home Affairs, Sub-Directorate: Deportations.

*"The request of the waiving of your undesirable status has been considered and was successful. The Department has therefore decided to remove the restrictions placed upon your name, with immediate effect.*

*"Yours faithfully,*

*"H. Dlamini*

*"pp Director-General"*

I'm free. I'm desirable again. I don't know who or what persuades Home Affairs to free me. I suspect, though, that it's a critical

mass of people extolling my manifold and manifest virtues in many, many places, all at the same time. Of course, it's also possible that some smart person warned Home Affairs that unless it relented it could expect such bruising international headlines as: INTERNATIONAL JOURNALIST LEAVES SA 10 HOURS LATE, BANNED FOR 365 DAYS

I suspect Home Affairs decides it has enough bad publicity without the Lesotho limbo making headlines.

My advice for any colleague trapped in a similar problem is get hold of as many people as you think can help and ask them to intervene on your behalf. From as many angles as possible. That's because no politician or official ever wants it known that a single intervener was responsible for an overturned official decision. Much safer for the official to be able to shrug helplessly and explain "... *all those people pressuring us ... maybe we should rethink our decision ...*"

It should never look as if one powerful player – particularly a politician – saves your ass. I reply to the e-mail from Department of Home Affairs, Sub-Directorate: Deportations, thank H. Dlamini profusely and ask for details about my new status. Can I now go back to the South African border and get a new 90-day Visitor's Visa? If not, should I get a letter from the High Commission in Maseru? What's my legal status in South Africa? What do I do next? No reply.

## Day 22

Kaizer and Tiisetso Moremoholo (faculty manager at Limkokwing University) drive me to the South African border at Maseru Bridge. I really, really hope the fat man will be on duty at Customs and Immigration so I can push my redemption letter through the slot under his window and watch his face as he reads it. No fat man. So no revenge. Pity. Considerable excitement, though, when officials see the Undesirable Alien stamp on

My advice for any colleague trapped in a similar problem is get hold of as many people as you think can help and ask them to intervene on your behalf. From as many angles as possible

There's no way I can get another 90-day Visitor's Visa during those five days. Anyway, the law says I have to apply from outside South Africa. Also, I'm broke

page six of my passport.

I produce the letter. "... *it says my appeal was successful and there are no restrictions on me ... with immediate effect. So I'm just asking for another 90-day visitor's visa*". Much confusion. Seems nobody has seen a successful undesirable alien appeal before. Officials huddle, make phone calls to Pretoria. More calls. I wait.

A hour later, an official comes out from behind the thick glass windows. "*We can only give you seven days. No longer. Sorry, Mr. Knight.*" She shrugs, smiles sympathetically. "*Try for another 90-day visa when you get to Cape Town*".

Tiisetso kindly arranges for her uncle to drive me the two hours from the Lesotho border to Bloemfontein Airport. By evening, I'm safely back in Cape Town.

## Day 23

I have a massive dilemma. I've only got five of the seven working days left until I'm an undesirable alien again. And have to leave the country again. Saturday, October 25, will be my last day. There's no way I can get another 90-day Visitor's Visa during those five days. Anyway, the law says I have to apply for the visa from outside South Africa. Also, I'm broke. My original flight from Toronto to Cape Town, added to the twenty-three days in Maseru hotels and flight from Bloemfontein, cost serious money.

I have three options. I can give up. I'll find the money to fly back to Canada, start again there, and forget about living and writing in Africa. It's already eight months since I first applied for citizenship and surrendered my fingerprints back in Toronto. How long can it possibly take some bureaucrat at Home Affairs to figure out that I'm eligible again?

My second option is to go underground and hide out in Cape Town until that bureaucrat decides my status. Or the postal strike ends and my citizenship papers miraculously appear. Or don't. I could become

legend as the White Pimpnel (Nelson Mandela was dubbed the Black Pimpnel while on the run).

My third option is to start the whole vicious circle again. Leave the country before the deadline, fly to some country where there's no fat man behind a thick glass window, and try for another 90-day Visitor's Visa. Of course there's no guarantee this will solve any of my problems. Sure, I hold the letter from the Department of Home Affairs, Sub-Directorate: Deportations, saying all is forgiven. But I hold that same letter when I cross the border from Lesotho last Saturday. And all the South African border officials there will give me is a seven-day Visitor's Visa.

In fact, even with the letter, I have no idea whether I'll be allowed back into South Africa. And if I am, will they give me a visa that lasts any longer than seven days?

It's exactly 24 hours before I have to leave South Africa or become an undesirable alien again. I've charged a South African Airways ticket to Namibia to my Visa card. That's more money I don't have. Later today I'll pack my bags and tomorrow my sister Jane will drive me to Cape Town airport. From there I'll fly to Namibia and apply for another 90-day visa. And hope.

## Day 29

It's a glorious Cape Town day. I'm having breakfast in the sun room. My iPhone rings.

"*Mr. Knight? This is Nelson Ngoepe at the Department of Home Affairs.*"

I freeze. This could be bad. Really bad.

"*Your South African Identification Number is approved. Please write it down.*"

I write it down. I'm cool. "*Thank you, sir ... does this mean I don't have to leave the country tomorrow?*"

"*Yes sir. Congratulations, Mr. Knight.*"

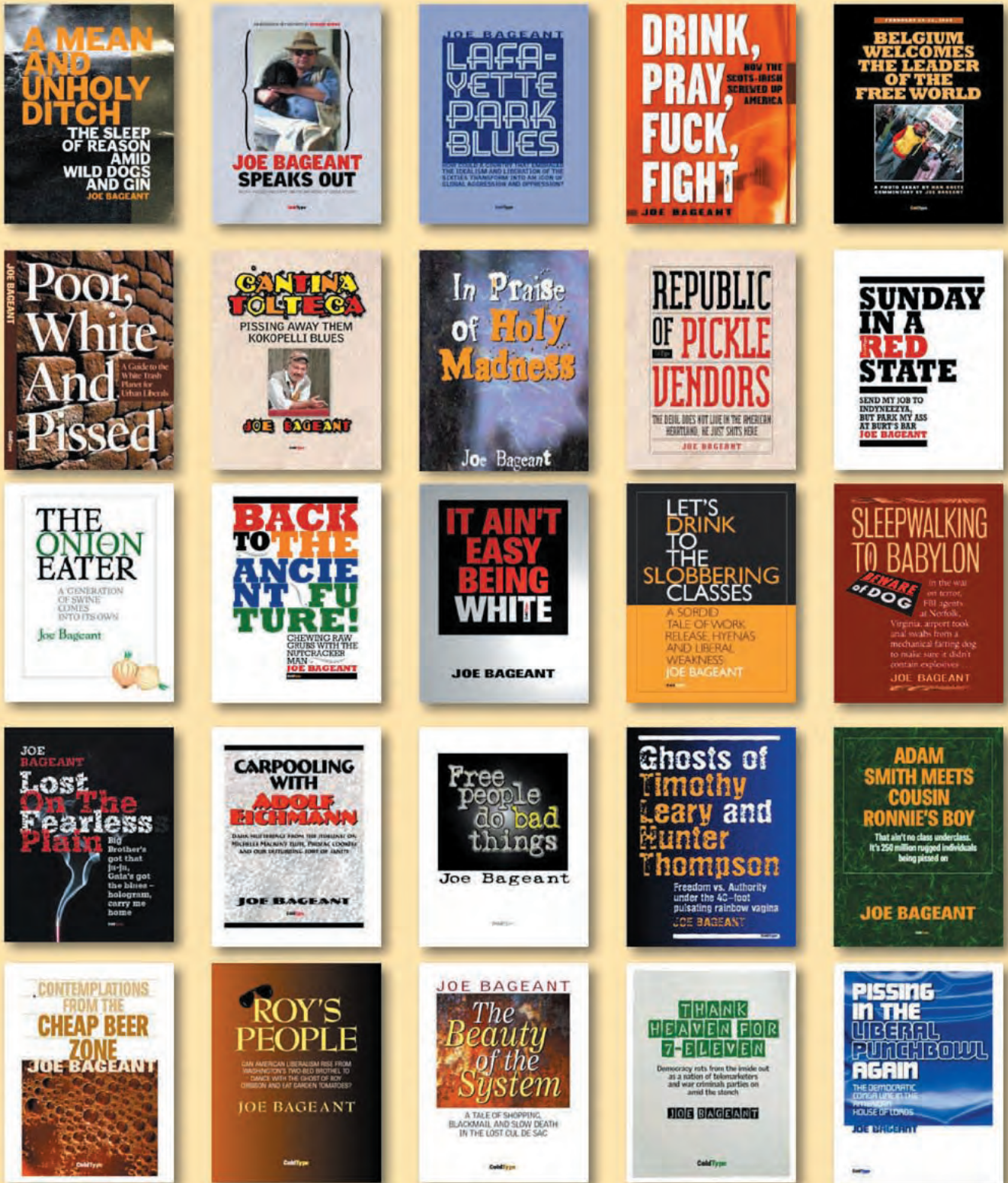
"*And I'm South African? I can get a passport? I can stay?*"

"*Yes, Mr. Knight.*"

CT

**Tim Knight** is an Emmy and Sigma Delta Chi winning international journalist and filmmaker. His book, *Storytelling and the Anima Factor* is now in its second edition. He lives and writes at Surfer's Corner outside Cape Town.





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# REVERSING ORWELL'S MOST FAMOUS ROUTE

George Orwell went North looking for Wigan and inequality; my trip would take me in the opposite direction – from Wigan to Bognor Regis, writes **Trevor Hoyle**



From  
**ColdType**  
Issue 208  
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BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU THROW away. Clearing out some old files, dumping them into a waste bin, I noticed a label that read, The Road to Bognor Regis. The title stirred a long-lost memory. I retrieved the battered folder, made a cup of coffee, and sat down to revisit what my idealistic younger self had been up to thirty-odd years ago.

The top sheet – a letter to my publisher, John Calder – brought it all back. It was the god-awful 1980s. The UK was being throttled and Thatcherised to death, what with the miners' strikes, the poll tax, the headlines shrieking about the North-South Divide.

Two of my novels: *The Man Who Travelled on Motorways* (might have been a prescient title for Dominic Cummings' autobiography) and the dystopian *Vail*, the latter being my state-of-the-nation screech from the heart, had been published by Calder's.

This is the letter I wrote to him in November 1986.

Dear John,

## THE ROAD TO BOGNOR REGIS

In January 1936 George Orwell set off on a seven-week tour of the industrial areas of the

north of England. As an intellectual upper-middle class observer his purpose was to investigate and report on the conditions of the working class, and to bring to the attention of the disinterested, relatively affluent south the plight of millions of working people in the "forgotten" half of the country in the depths of the Depression. Orwell was, amazingly, only thirty-three when he wrote *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which was published by Gollancz in 1937.

In 1986 millions of people are suffering the social consequences of economic change; and once again there is in the north a mood of bitterness, apathy and despair – a feeling that central government and The South, while perhaps better informed than before, are really just as disinterested and uncaring as they were fifty years ago. As someone who was born in Lancashire (where Orwell did much of his research) and who still lives here, these changes are for me an everyday living reality, affecting people I know, and not just the distant, abstract result of economic policies. The North-Side Divide might be a handy cliché for broadcasters and newspaper editors; for those of us on the "wrong" side of the line it's more than just a glib sound-bite on the six o'clock news.

An opposing and (as far as I know) original approach to the task Orwell set himself would be, quite simply, to reverse the process. Instead of following in Orwell's footsteps and reiterating the tired familiar tale of gloom



**ON THE ROAD:** Hoyle planned to counter Orwell's famous trip to Wigan with a literary journey from Wigan to Bognor Regis.

and bleak despair in our northern towns and cities, perhaps it would be more useful and illuminating if a northerner set off on a tour of the south, and by inference rather than direct comparison, obliquely demonstrated the differences and inequalities which divide the two halves of the nation.

In just the same way that Orwell sought to convey a highly subjective, impressionistic vision of the north, its conditions and its people, my idea is not to produce a colourful travelogue, or a catalogue of facts and figures, but to feel free to rearrange times and places and events to suit the narrative structure; and, again like Orwell, to employ the novelist's technique of combining several individuals into a composite character. So my aim is not to come up with an "objective" or "balanced" report, even supposing such a mythical beast exists.

Bognor Regis epitomises to the northerner the cosy and complacent slumbering south. Also I like the sound of it, both as a place and as a title. With Bognor as my focal point, I also plan to visit Herne Bay, Tunbridge Wells, Eastbourne, Brighton, Worthing, Dorchester, Weymouth, Lyme Regis, Bridgewater, Wells and Swindon. My intention is to produce a book of 70,000-75,000 words by May 1st, for publication in Autumn 1987.

As a postscript, Orwell included a political analysis in which he prophesied either the coming of an "effective Socialist party" or "a slimy Anglicised form of Fascism, with cultured policemen instead of Nazi gorillas and the lion and the unicorn instead of the swastika". He also looked forward to the time when "the class-difficulty may solve itself more rapidly than now seems thinkable" – with hindsight a vain and rather naive hope. I am not a "politi-

Orwell included a political analysis in which he prophesied either the coming of an "effective Socialist party" or "a slimy Anglicised form of Fascism, with cultured policemen instead of Nazi gorillas and the lion and the unicorn instead of the swastika"

He threw the bucket of steaming soapy water, made a few swipes with his mop, and then stood, feet apart, cigarette jutting from the corner of his mouth, contemplating with leisurely satisfaction the quiet promenade at this early hour of a Saturday morning

cal writer” in the sense that Orwell was, and therefore the postscript I have in mind is a look at the Wigan of today, how it has changed since Orwell’s visit and what are the realistic expectations of its people in the latter part of the 1980s.

The proposed book could be seen as the documentary mirror-image of *VAIL*, and perhaps would capture the imagination of readers by being regarded as non-fiction (and therefore “true”), not least in owing its inspiration to Orwell’s famous book, aptly on the 50th anniversary of its publication.

Yours etc, Trevor

My fictional take on the North-South Divide had been *Vail*, and 1984 its publication year being an auspicious omen in my mind if no one else’s. The novel had picked up some good, prestigious reviews (“... a comedy which is even blacker than the diesel and grime with which the eponymous hero covers his head for his appearance on television, fronting a programme called *Bootstraps*.” – *Times Literary Supplement*) and in consequence sold in its dozens.

To give an idea of the comparison between Orwell’s 1936 odyssey and my attempt, you need a flavour of the original:

### THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

by George Orwell  
Chapter 1

THE FIRST SOUND IN THE MORNINGS was the clumping of the mill-girls’ clogs down the cobbled street. Earlier than that, I suppose, there were factory whistles which I was never awake to hear.

There were generally four of us in the bedroom, and a beastly place it was, with that defiled impermanent look of rooms that are not serving their rightful purpose. Years earlier the house had been an ordinary dwelling-house, and when the Brookers had taken it and fitted it out as a tripe-shop and lodging-house, they had inherited some of the more useless pieces

of furniture and had never had the energy to remove them. We were therefore sleeping in what was recognizably a drawing-room.

That was Orwell’s beginning. This is the abridged opening chapter of the book I was planning and intending to write:

### THE ROAD TO BOGNOR REGIS

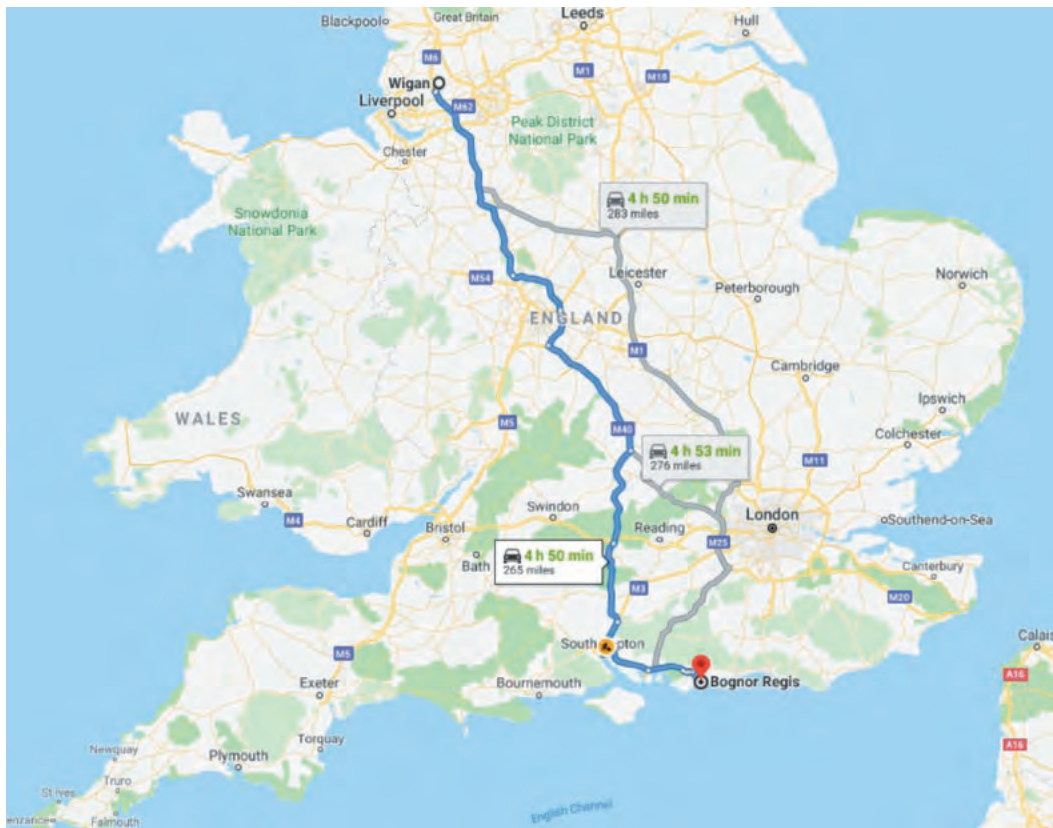
by Trevor Hoyle  
Chapter 1

THE FIRST SOUND YOU HEAR IS THE gentle thud and lisp of the waves on the shingle.

From the big bay window of my hotel room I looked down on the black shiny Brylcreemed head of the porter swabbing the front steps. The foreshortened angle emphasised the ponderous swell of his paunch, supported by a straining brown leather belt. He threw the bucket of steaming soapy water, made a few swipes with his mop, and then stood, feet apart, cigarette jutting from the corner of his mouth, contemplating with leisurely satisfaction the quiet promenade at this early hour of a Saturday morning.

It must have been about nine o’clock. There were a few walkers with their dogs on this mild morning. An elderly woman with her head wrapped in a purple chiffon scarf and wearing sun-glasses tottered along, as if leaning into the wind, if there had been any. It was late November and the resort was empty of tourists. An Irish folk group called The Fureys was the forthcoming attraction at the Pier Pavilion, making their Only Sussex Appearance! *Top Gun*, *Critters* and *Psycho III* were showing in the area.

The man on the steps had a thin black moustache, like the greasy tar strip Akim Tamiroff wore in the Orson Welles’ film *Touch of Evil*. There was something seedy and slightly disreputable about him. I imagine seaside resorts down here to be



**HEADING SOUTH:** Looking for an idyllic town that didn't exist.

swarming with such people – helpers, servers, swabbers, clearers-up – getting their bed and board and a pittance in exchange for portering, odd-jobbing, moving furniture, etc. Elsewhere they would be on the dole, but here they manage to survive because of the excess fat that cushions a town where unemployment is round about the 7 percent mark.

In the dining-room the cereal bowls were lined up on a side table, already filled with cornflakes, and a single jug of watered orange juice. Two elderly people, a man and a woman, bearing the marks of genteel subsistence, were discussing a local cafe where the prices were reasonable and the helpings generous. The woman was doing most of the talking, and eventually became apologetic that she was so tardy – “I’m always the last, aren’t I?” – in polishing off the last scrap of toast.

Of the few other occupants were two young girls, and a child of two or three who was clamped to the table in a kind of plastic vice. The older of the two girls, who was very fat, with pale inflated arms stretching the sleeves of her dress, I took to be the child’s minder or sister, but she turned out to be the mother, capably hoisting it up over her shoulder where it goggled at me with a mouth smeared with toast crumbs and jam, head cushioned on the rolling folds of the girl’s neck. On the way out the mother stopped to have a word with a man sitting alone, in his forties, I guessed. The most noticeable thing about him was his hair, starting low and square on his forehead and rising at thirty-three degrees in symmetrical waves to a sheer, hacked-off drop at the back. He wore a striped shirt and non-matching striped tie with a Windsor knot, heavy tweed jacket, and in his

The man on the steps had a thin black moustache, like the greasy tar strip Akim Tamiroff wore in the Orson Welles’ film *Touch of Evil*. There was something seedy and slightly disreputable about him

They are a form of southern bag-people, living in shabby gentility, who instead of dragging themselves along the gutters looking for scraps or lying sprawled and bleary-eyed amongst empty bottles of cheap sherry keep up some kind of respectable front

breast pocket a glimpse of handkerchief, with three or four assorted ballpens. When they had gone he carried on shovelling in bacon and egg and mopping his plate, just as a hungry child would, then wiped his mouth and pulled out a worn tobacco pouch and rolled a cigarette. When he got up to leave, I saw he was wearing fluffy red carpet slippers.

I don't suppose this type of harmless eccentric can only be found in second-rate hotels on the south coast. But he did strike me as typical of those I had seen aimlessly wandering the streets, most of them elderly, a bit lost and out of touch with mainstream life. They are a form of southern bag-people, living in shabby gentility, who instead of dragging themselves along the gutters looking for scraps or lying sprawled and bleary-eyed amongst empty bottles of cheap sherry, keep up some kind of respectable front while actually leading marginal, hand-to-mouth lives only a step or two removed from real penury.

The main shopping streets of Worthing were jingling merrily into Christmas, with the help of Paul McCartney assuring us from a stereo speaker outside an electrical store that everyone was "simply having a wonderful Christmas-time". Nearby there was a shop with an artificial leg in the window. It was surrounded by bed-pans, walking-frames, items of thermal underwear, and ingenious contraptions of incontinence equipment. I wondered if this was the famous Body Shop I had heard about. According to the local paper, Princess Di was to open a new Body Shop factory extension in a few days' time. But no, further along the street I came upon the real thing, faked up with green paint and gold-leaf to resemble a 1930s village store, with dainty plaited baskets in the window and a heavenly smell wafting onto the cold pavement.

The local paper had in fact led its front-page story with the Princess coming to look round a residential centre for the

handicapped, run by the Sussex Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, and almost as an aside had mentioned the new extension at Littlehampton. But who was fooling who, I wondered? The "noblesse oblige" angle was respectable cover for the real business of bestowing Royal favour on a thrusting entrepreneurial success story.

"I have always been a fan of Princess Diana," the deputy matron told a reporter. "I'm so excited I haven't been able to think what to say to her. She has said she does not want any fuss but she will be getting two bouquets."

The charity collectors were out in force that day; I've forgotten what good cause they were collecting for – cancer perhaps, or stroke victims. There is certainly enough surplus cash sloshing around down here to provide resources and equipment that the NHS and the social services can't. Two full pages in the local paper were given over to a hospital scanner appeal, which has raised £60,000 towards a target of half-a-million spondulicks. A sailing club raised £350 at a snooker and raffle evening; a youth football club collected £26.66; the Soroptimists Club held a Glitter and Glow evening; twenty hefty beer drinkers were planning to tow a double-decker bus along the prom.

This is all tremendous heart-warming stuff. You can't help but feel a glitter and glow at the efforts of these selfless folk, helping others worse off than themselves.

I began to wonder whether I was uniquely alone as a mean-spirited Scrooge in detecting an unhealthy, almost rancid odour in this plethora of blatant begging and wholesome Christian charity. Because what it does (and is intended to do) is divert our attention and nullify any pangs of conscience we might otherwise feel about a society that has abdicated its responsibility in caring for the sick, disabled and elderly. Indeed, we feel righteous and

absolved when we drop thirty pence into a collector's box for a worthwhile cause. It allows us to go blithely on our way, averting our gaze and closing our minds to the real, fundamental question, which is (obviously) why do we need to collect money in the first place?

On the radio the other day an ex-cabinet minister was asked his views on Childline, a charity recently set up to help children and young people suffering physical and sexual abuse. Ten thousand calls had come in during the first week, and the service was existing on a shoestring and the goodwill of volunteers. The ex-cabinet minister said that Childline was providing an essential service and that with Christmas approaching we ought to seriously consider making a donation. No suggestion, you will note, that the government should get involved by contributing some taxpayers' dosh to the fund. Had this radical notion been put to him I expect his response would have been a wagging finger and an admonition that you don't solve problems by "throwing money at them". And yet, curiously, this glib slogan is without fail applied to social reforms or the improvement of public services – never to buying missiles or tanks or spending £300-million on advertising campaigns to sell state assets to the people who already own them. "Throwing money" at something works in some cases, apparently, not in others.

Driving west along the coast road, I passed through late-Victorian and Edwardian villa civilisation, the route taking me inland a few miles and curving down to Bognor Regis. As we all do with places we've never been to, I had formed a hazy mental picture of what to expect. Let me try to conjure up how I, a northerner, might envision it.

First it would be small; a cosy, clean, genteel town tucked away into a gently folded green landscape. No factory chimneys of course, no signs of any industry

whatsoever. The streets would be narrow and curved, set at interesting angles to one another, gradually converging from the higher slopes to a square or a quietly bustling main street ...

The people would be well-fed and well-dressed, in understated English good taste. There would be bookshops with trays of remainders on the pavement under faded green awnings, antiques shops, cafes with check tablecloths, fishmongers with their cold slabs open to the street, a small public library in mock-Gothic and stained glass, pubs with saloon bars but without juke boxes, a bandstand in a neat formal park, and perhaps a small civic theatre presenting the local amateur society's latest musical production. To object that this is hopelessly old-fashioned and naively romantic is to miss the point. I knew the vision I carried in my head bore little connection to the reality I expected to find. Just as, to the southerner, the North is one vast smoking slag heap, a dark labyrinth of mills, terraced houses and cobbled streets – despite the knowledge that much of it (but not all) has been swept away – so my view of this small West Sussex town was idyllic and mythologised.

Disappointingly, the town was flat. Not a gently folding hill to be seen. And instead of an elegant promenade, the road along the sea-front was like a somnolent suburban avenue: a few strollers dotted about, the odd stray dog, an old lady in a wheelchair with her head swathed in a tartan scarf and a hat jammed down over her ears. Facing the sea were the usual "courts", which seems to be the fancy name given in these parts to nondescript jerry-built blocks of flats

This being a Saturday, the main shopping street was busy. People collecting for charity (as usual) outside the central Post Office. Had I been dumped on this street from outer Mongolia and opened my eyes to see the plastic and neon signs above the shop-fronts – Curry's, Marks & Spencer,

Instead of an elegant promenade, the road along the sea-front was like a somnolent suburban avenue: a few strollers dotted about, the odd stray dog, an old lady in a wheelchair with her head swathed in a tartan scarf and a hat jammed down over her ears

We might pretend that we're different from that lot "down there" or superior to that lot "up there", and perhaps superficial differences do still exist, but we're more homogenous now than we've ever been. More the same, definitely, than different

Fosters Menswear, Boots, DER, WH Smith, McDonald's, Dixon's, Paperchase – I could have been in any town or city in Britain and not known the difference ... because there was no difference. North vs. South has been obliterated. We have all been flattened and rolled out to lie neatly and uniformly on the endless conveyor belt of mass advertising, mass marketing, mass consumerism. The same tastes, the same needs, the same shops, the same goods, the same cut-out people. Everywhere and everything determined by the marketing experts' graph.

And this daft quest I had embarked upon, this folly – setting out to look for the "other" England, the soft underbelly of the nation, the mythical South of my prejudices and imagination – was exposed for what it was: a mission without purpose for a goal that didn't exist. Because there was nothing to find except more of the same.

We might pretend that we're different from that lot "down there" or superior to that lot "up there", and perhaps superficial differences do still exist, but we're more homogenous now than we've ever been. More the same, definitely, than different. For all the talk of education helping us to nurture our inner selves and develop our unique talents, for all the fashionable theories of achieving personal goals through freedom of expression and equality of opportunity – for all the political cant and mass media bullshit – quite the reverse has happened. What has happened is that a gigantic invisible steamroller has trundled across the land – the metal nameplate

on its side reads "Consumerism" – and stamped us all flat, as indistinguishable one from the other as so many pancakes.

*End of Chapter One.*

*(End of book as it turned out.)*

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As this opening chapter testifies I did undertake and complete part of the itinerary I had outlined in my letter to John Calder. Stopping briefly at Tunbridge Wells, I'd gone on to Brighton, Worthing and Bognor, staying a day or so at each place.

But what stymied the project was the stroll I took down the main street in Bognor. The brutal gaping differences Orwell had witnessed in the 1930s were no longer there – on the surface at least. Everything was superficially the same as where I'd just come from, and it left me wondering what the hell there was to write about.

Of course there was plenty to write about. Reading the letter and chapter again after all these years, I think it was a worthwhile idea and I wish I'd persevered and stuck with it. The book might have turned into a fictionalised social survey that dismantled the thesis I'd set out to prove. So the wrong assumptions (on my part) might have been the point of writing it in the first place. **CT**

*Trevor Hoyle is a writer and novelist based in Lancashire, England. His most recent novel is the environmental thriller *The Last Gasp*, published by Jo Fletcher Books (Quercus). His website is [www.trevorhoyle.com](http://www.trevorhoyle.com).*

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# SISTERS FROM SOUTH CENTRAL

Taxi driver **Dell Franklin** takes a group of women on a trip to a California prison

AT 8:30 ON A SATURDAY MORNING THE red-eye bus from LA pulled into the Greyhound station and disgorged three black women oozing a hard sexual beauty. Dressed in their finest, moving their fine asses, not trying to hide their ghetto scowls. They came to my door and announced they were going to the prison on the outskirts of San Luis Obispo and for me to wait while they went to the head for some last minute pimping. They were bossy, like some of the tough black girls I went to school with at integrated Compton High down south on the fringe of South Central LA, girls I got on well with and who referred to me humorously as “Norman,” which meant I was harmless.

They piled into the back seat, filling the cab with harsh perfume. I wondered if they were visiting pimps, drug dealers, addicts, robbers, gang-bangers, or all of the above. I studied their smoky eyes in the rearview mirror.

“What you lookin’ at, white-boy?”

Boy? I was old enough to be their father or grandfather. “Nothin’, hon”.

“How come y’all wearin’ them funky shades with a pin holdin’ ’em up? Who

dress y’all?”

“My mother dressed me until I was 12, and it’s been downhill ever since”. When there was no response, I said: “So how you doing this morning, girls?”

“How we doin’?” said the one who disapproved of my shades. “Sheee’it. Mothafuckin’ bus stop ev’ry town ’long the way. Ain’t nowhere t’ eat. Ain’t nevah takin’ that nasty-ass bus up here again see MY man. He gon wait til he git his black ass out”

“Y’all be back”, grumbled one of the sisters.

“You got that right,” added another.

“A-men!”

They gazed at the countryside as we pulled out of town, up Highway 1. They could not get over how much land there was, and how green it was when they came up in winter.

“Girl, I movin’ up here soon as I get me some cash.”

“Hey boy, how much it cost rent a house up here?”

“Plenty. And you won’t like it, either.”

“How y’all know that?”

“It’s too white. Only black folks up here are Cal Poly jocks and brothers they let out of prison from the honour farm to clean the

“Sheee’it. Mothafuckin’ bus stop ev’ry town ’long the way. Ain’t nowhere t’ eat. Ain’t nevah takin’ that nasty-ass bus up here again see MY man. He gon wait til he git his black ass out”



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May 2015

Before getting out, the lady who so disapproved of my shades told me to come back for them at 3:30 to take them to a shabby motel off the freeway that catered to those visiting the prison

roadsides. Oh, there's a black lady lives up here with her three kids. I take her to the market once a week. Her husband drives a garbage truck down in LA all week and drives up here weekends, so she and the kids can live in this nice safe white town. Peaceful. No gangs. Very little crime. But she says there's nobody to talk to, nobody speaks her language. Her phone bills are huge. She misses the old neighbourhood". "Sheee'it".

I dropped them off at the medium security prison where the harder core inmates resided. The ladies paid, minus tip, and strode toward the office to wait at the end of a long line on a very warm morning, waiting to be checked in and inspected before spending a few precious hours with men who had years to serve, men in blue pants and blue work shirts with scowls and tattoos and weight-lifting torsos. Before getting out, the lady who so disapproved of my shades told me to come back for them at 3:30 to take them to a shabby motel off the freeway that catered to those visiting the prison. I promised to do so.

---

I was called immediately back to Greyhound, where another woman waited for me – Reese, a heavyset black lady who ran a government office in downtown LA and had two children and was waiting for her husband to finish an 8-year armed robbery sentence and go straight – a man who had a year to go and had become a born-again Christian. Reese usually came alone, but this time brought her teenage son and daughter and wanted to stop at the supermarket to pick up groceries for a conjugal visit with her husband in one of the trailers on prison grounds, where couples spent 48 hours together every few months.

Reese had to wait because I had to tear to the airport and drive a pilot and crew to a downtown motel, and at the motel pick up another crew and drive them to the airport – a contractual priority – before I got to Greyhound, where Reese was in a lather,

having already lost an hour of visiting time with her anxiously waiting husband.

Like the other ladies, she'd taken the red-eye. She was in a terrible huff, and having trouble with her moody, scowling children, who whined about the discomfort and already stifling heat, both kids decked out in stiff new Wal-Mart duds. Reese was in what appeared her finest attire. Sweat rolled down her burnished chocolate face and smeared her mascara and make-up, and this large earth mother showed signs of cracking, perhaps crying, perhaps screaming in a primal way at the misery of it all.

"Where you been, baby?" She asked.

"Sorry, Reese. We're backed up, running late. Two cabs are down. I'm all alone. It's just been a mess".

She gazed at me. I was sweating profusely in the non A/C cab. "Well you cool down now. We'll make it".

Somehow she always cheered me up, and I cheered her up. She sat shotgun, window down, staring out while I swerved around town, the kids shifting and grimacing in back. I halted in front of the supermarket where Reese needed to stock up for the feast to be cooked for the family.

"You be back in fifteen minutes now, baby. You be here?"

"I'll try my hardest, Reese". It took me precious minutes to unload the three large suitcases from the trunk and stack them in front of the market where the boy was to guard them while white folks shuffled in and out, sneaking furtive glances at his sullen presence, his hair moist and glistening, new clothes blotched with sweat at the armpits, the boy growling and hating this strange environment. Just as I pulled away he began sassing Reese, who tore into him, humbling the boy who skulked off to sit by himself on a bench in the shade near an elderly lady who moved away, uneasy, close to panic.

It took me forty minutes to get back to them. Reese was with the kids at the bench, beside the stack of luggage and a

shopping cart and enough food to feed half a battalion. Again I lifted the luggage and stacked it in the trunk. Then we started loading bags of meat and poultry and fish and gallons of juices and milk and soft drinks and produce and spuds and rice and eggs and bacon and sausage tubes and coffee and cookies and ice cream and chips and condiments...

There wasn't nearly enough room in the trunk. Reese had another spat with the boy and threatened to whack him and strand him there, and this was when I stepped in and took charge like a true cab pilot. I told Reese to calm down and instructed the two kids to sit in the back.

Then Reese and I began to carefully stack the bags on the children, until their heads peeped above the massive jumble of bags. Most outrageous, the disgruntled boy had a watermelon atop his heap. Then I sat Reese and stacked the last bags on her lap, and she flashed me a weary smile and chuckled, then threw her head back and unleashed a hearty laugh, and I began to laugh, too, as I sat beside her, telling her it was almost over, we were almost home free.

As I drove out of town, Reese remarked on the beautiful wide open countryside and what a nice day it was, and she turned around and told her morose kids that soon they'd be with their daddy; everything was going to be okay.

She reapplied her make-up and primed her hair in a hand mirror as we climbed the last mile up the hill. We parked at the medium security prison and an inmate wheeled up a sled for her supplies. It took a while to fill it up. Afterwards Reese paid and tipped me a buck, patting my hand with warm appreciation that left me feeling truly humbled, and blessed. She was the only prison-visiting woman of all those I picked up at Greyhound, white or black, who ever tipped me.

At the front of the slow-going line at the office, the three women I'd previously

picked up spotted me and reminded me to be back at 3:30. When I returned at that hour after a hectic, non-stop afternoon, sweaty, stressed, drained, they were nowhere to be seen. As I pulled out, I saw them sitting in a sedan driven by another black woman. As usual they used me for insurance while soliciting a free ride to their motel. Those were the breaks.

Later that evening, toward the end of my 12 hour shift, I saw them on one of the main drags and beeped my horn. They waved and demandingly flagged me down. They complained of the rude stares they'd been getting, the honks and ugly comments from college boys at Cal Poly ("How come you ain't at KFC?") and other wise guys and the police, who stopped them and asked where they were from and what they were doing in San Luis Obispo.

"Like we ho's," fumed the one who'd found fault with my tilted shades.

"We ain't no ho's", exclaimed another. "We come here t' see our men!"

They were heading back to their room to have pizza and watch TV, and they wanted me to pick them up next morning and take them to the prison early so they didn't have to wait in the long line and lose time with their men. I told them I'd try, and I did, showing up early at their motel, but they were gone, again using me for insurance after probably driving to the prison with fellow sisters. I would not be there for them in the afternoon

As for Reese? Well, I'd be there for her in 24 hours. She always requested me as her personal cabby, and it always made me feel special and privileged to be there for her.

CT

*Dell Franklin, who was the founding publisher of California literary journal the Rogue Voice, wrote a Cabbie's Corner Column for ColdType for several years. His memoir, "Life On The Mississippi, 1969", is now available at amazon.com*

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# PEEKING INSIDE IRAN'S DEN OF SPIES

**Nate Robert** visits Tehran, Iran, where he takes a private tour around the former US embassy, site of a 'sophisticated, cutting-edge, state-of-the-art spy base'



From  
**ColdType**  
Issue 100  
July 2015

THE FORMER US EMBASSY in Tehran, Iran – aka the Den of Espionage – has an uncanny architectural resemblance to a Californian high school. At least, the high schools you see on TV and in the movies. Brandon and the gang from 90210 would be at home here in Iran, bouncing down the steps, a flurry of chambray, leg-warmers and giant cell phones, jumping into Kelly's totally rad cherry-red drop-top BMW, and cruising down to the Peach Pit for an after-school root-beer float.

But, I reminded myself, I was in Iran, not Beverly Hills, and I marvelled at my inane ability to be so totally and utterly distracted by cheesy '80's American TV, even at probably the most infamous site anywhere in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

I pulled myself together, firmly wiped my dirty Jordans on the "Down With USA" doormat, and stepped into a private tour of the American "espionage den" in Tehran. Sometimes, when you're in Iran, it's handy to have a friend, who has a friend, whose Uncle knows a guy.

Before our gang of trippers entered the building, it all seemed so normal. We strolled a lovely pathway through the rarely-seen

grounds of the former US embassy, avoided sprinklers that were watering lush lawns lined with roses, and waited at the entrance for our "guide".

It didn't take long for things to move into a world even more surreal than a Hollywood high school. Outside the front entrance of the embassy, a bronze Statue of Liberty stands proud, stomach removed and replaced with a cage containing a white dove. Our first translation came, and it was a pearl, "The statue represents the American government, who have taken freedom and liberty away, from even their own citizens". Wow. I fanned my face and walked up the steps, entering where even Ben Affleck had not dared to tread.

The thing is, being toured through a regular "embassy" would be fairly boring. "Over there is the desk where John sat, there's a filing cabinet, umm, in here's the coffee machine, and well, on Fridays we sometimes wear Hawaiian shirts. So, ah, ummm, go ahead and take a pic of the photocopier if you like".

However, it would soon become clear, this was not a regular embassy, but an extensive, sophisticated, cutting-edge, state-of-the-art spy base, constructed in secret by a rogue state on foreign soil. Rogue state = USA. Foreign soil = Tehran, Iran. Chances of me ever entering the US again, rapidly declining.

Recent revelations from whistle-blowers



Entrance to the former US embassy in Tehran, Iran.



Just a standard office door from the 1970's. All office doors had inbuilt retina scanners back then



US beware! Sign near entrance of the former US Embassy in Tehran.

Photo: Nate Robert



I'm sure this is just the "Scrap-booking and Christmas card making table".

The Iranians who stormed and took over the US Embassy in Tehran more than three decades ago, would not be surprised in the slightest, to see the level of monitoring that the US government is capable of today

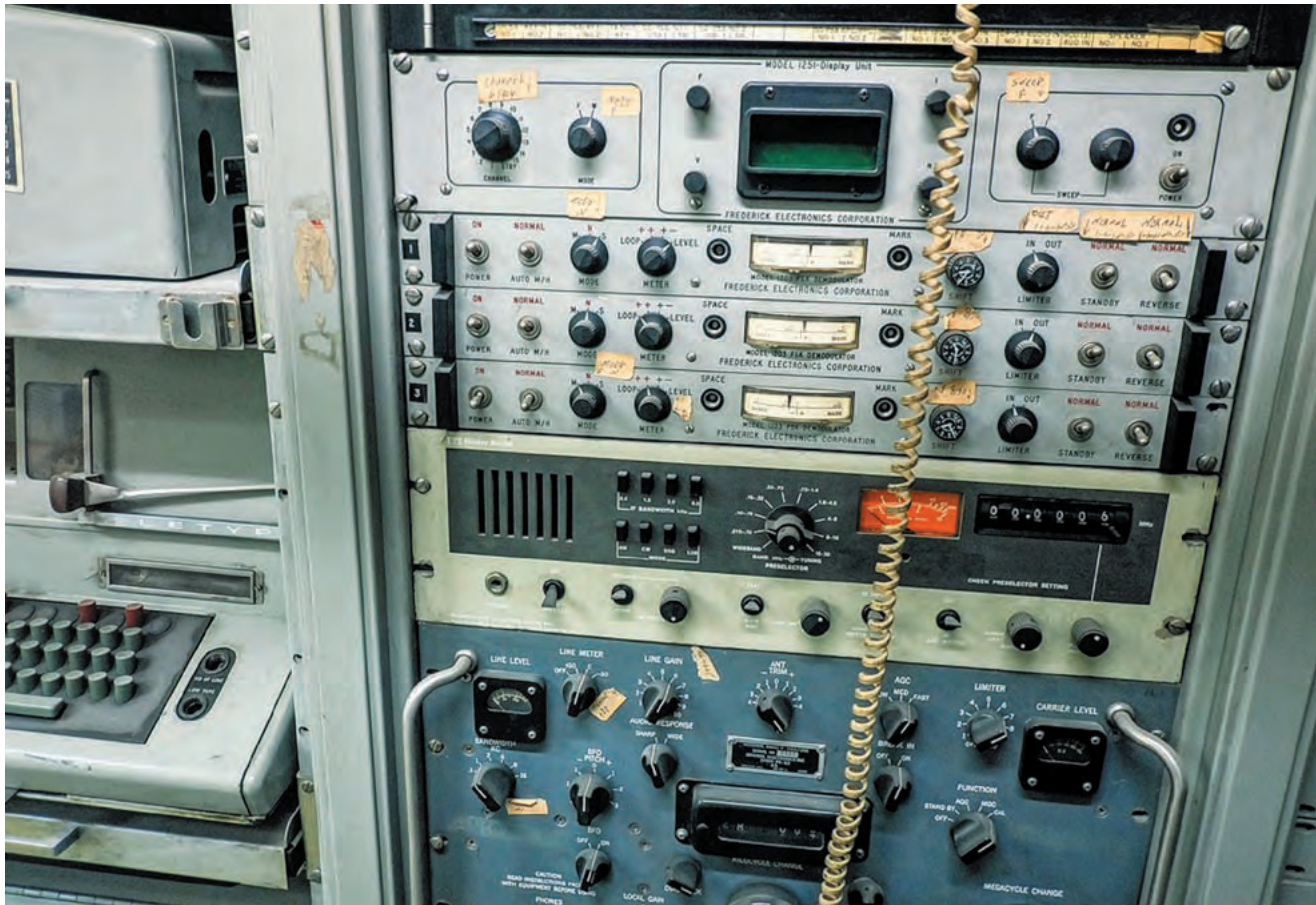
such as Edward Snowden have shown how the US government is spying on billions of emails, phone calls, and as much internet traffic as their systems can handle. The Iranians who stormed and took over the US Embassy in Tehran more than three decades ago would not be surprised in the slightest, to see the level of monitoring that the US government is capable of today. And, that was the implied narrative of our private tour – we were not inside an embassy, this was a “Den of Espionage”, a concerted effort by the US to spy on Iran, from the comfort of downtown Tehran.

The commentary and narrative was optional. We had a choice – wander around freely, or listen to a local custodian explain and opine about the building, its contents, and the events that took place here. After passing

underneath the “we will make america (sic) face a severe defeat” sign, we spread out on the stairs up to the second level, and began to listen to the first of many commentaries, with translation into English by an Iranian friend. The stairwell was adorned with graffiti-like aerosol art, and the first mural depicted the World Trade Centers being destroyed.

“So, look, he’s just sayin’, that’s all”. The translation from our guide was that many engineers and experts in the USA agreed that fire alone could not bring down the twin towers. No alternative explanation was offered, just that perhaps we don’t yet know the full story. I looked around. People were smiling. This was rapidly becoming a full-immersion experience, and we had only been in Iran 24 hours.

Personally, I wanted more info before we moved on. I wanted to ask his opinion on the



Think of this as just a telephone that can listen to many more calls than a standard telephone.

events of the September 11, 2001, like how a few men armed only with box-cutters directed by an old man on dialysis sitting in a cave fortress halfway around the world had used a satellite phone and a chunky laptop to direct a sophisticated penetration of the most heavily defended airspace in the world, where some guy hijacked a commercial aircraft and flew wildly off-course for over an hour, wasn't intercepted by a single jet-fighter, before the hijacker – who couldn't handle a single-engine Cessna – expertly flew a Boeing 757 in an 8,000-foot 270-degree-corkscrew-turn, descended to come exactly level with the ground, hit the Pentagon, and yet no footage of the plane hitting the Pentagon has ever been seen? So many questions. But, I thought that, perhaps, the rest of my tour group might think I was a tinfoil-hat wearing, batshit-crazy, conspiracy theorist, so I

didn't ask.

Along the tour, there were a few remarks about the equipment, the events that went down here, a couple of versions of “make your own mind up, but hey, the US government really is pretty “shifty”. and a mention of the number of African Americans being killed by police over in the USA, as well as the obsession Americans have with pornography and being controlled by the mass media. There may also have been some questionable statements about human organ harvesting and Israel, but one thing was for sure – this was an American spy base. A veritable slithering nest of spies.

There was an abundance of physical evidence: we entered the embassy “office” by walking through a bank-vault-door, while other doors had retina-scanning locks. The

There may also have been some questionable statements about human organ harvesting and Israel, but one thing was for sure – this was an American spy base

Photo: Nate Robert



The most disappointing part of this sound-proof bug-proof room? Realising after we left the building that I could have got in, removed a dummy, sat on the chair and had my photo taken.

Maybe the array of blades, paints, glue, photos, inks, pens, and official looking replica-documents were just there to make really elaborate Mother's Day cards?

world's most advanced computer and communications systems (in the 1970's) were still inside, and we were shown a book containing painstakingly-restored shredded documents – outlining the CIA takeover of Iran that never came to pass. To this day, many of those documents remain classified by the United States government. Our guide smiled and laughed as he showed us the book. Copies were promised.

We entered an office with forgery equipment, without our guide, and examined the equipment. Maybe the array of blades, paints, glue, photos, inks, pens, and official looking replica documents were just there to make really elaborate Mother's Day cards? In any case, it was around this time that I was convinced – anyone who explored this building, walked around, and kept an open

mind, would conclude they were standing in a sophisticated espionage centre.

Back outside, I asked another Iranian friend to translate one of the many murals adorning the front perimeter wall of the Den of Espionage. She looked back at me with an expression that clearly says, "This is so embarrassing that foreigners have to see this shit". The message was some kind of generic, "We will crush the USA under our feet" propaganda. It's right near the mural of the Statue of Liberty with a skull-face. Yes, it's a little corny. Her look told me what I already I knew – if I wrote an article about this place, it would annoy so many people – Iranians, and Americans.

The messages that come from here don't represent the thoughts or opinions of most Irani-





The paper shredder. Unfortunately for the US government, classified documents were reconstructed from shredded paper, and published in book form.

ans. Many Americans are concerned with the extreme invasion of privacy that their government is responsible for. There are citizens of both nations who don't agree with the actions their leaders have taken over the last few decades. This isn't a place for the moderates or the I-don't-carers. The Den of Espionage attracts the stories of the hardliners from both sides. It's impossible to write about this place, even with tongue firmly in cheek, and not piss somebody off.

My last intention is not to display the Den of Espionage as being representative of mainstream Iran, because it's not. And focusing on this one building to represent the relationship between the USA and Iran only serves to turn a complex series of events over more than fifty years into a histrionic pantomime of good vs evil. Ben Affleck, I'm looking at you.

The truth is, I absolutely loved it. It's a fascinating, historical and unique place that is rarely visited by foreigners. And hearing points of view that I don't normally hear, such as the explanation of what would happen should Iran ever be attacked by Israel, is informative, if chilling, "If Iran is attacked by Israel, we will make every city in the entire land of Israel, the same level as the sand."

It was a rough translation. After saying the words out loud, my Iranian friend smiled, moved his right hand onto his chest, pointed at the embassy guide and added "Oh... I wish you could understand Persian, this man is making it sound so much more beautiful than my translation, like, you know, he's saying how all the cities in Israel would be flattened like sand..."

Yeah, I pretty much understood what he was saying the first time. **CT**

**Nate Robert** specialises in travel photography. Since July 2012, he has been travelling the world full time, travelling through 54 countries. His web site is [www.yomadic.com](http://www.yomadic.com)

# A KNOXVILLE REDNECK HEADS FOR THE HILLS

Joe Allen gets the uneasy feeling that when the Global Lockdown is finally lifted, we'll all come out of our cells to find that the furniture has been rearranged – and we won't be allowed to put it back



From  
ColdType  
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Mid-April 2020

LAST MONTH I WAS GEARING up for a world tour. The job was as a rigger for a pop punk band. Yes, I'm a dirty fucking roadie.

The tour would start in Asia, bounce back to Europe, do the US circuit, then hop over to Oceania. There would be long flights and free drinks. Tour buses and sweet hotels. Blistering hard work at breakneck pace with zero sleep. Wild parties in pathogen-rich environments. It wouldn't be my first, but it was sure to be my best.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent Global Lockdown. My job depends on thousands of people gathering together. In an instant, our entire industry was obliterated.

The warnings started in January. A good friend from back home – we'll call him K-Bob – was freaking out about some "Chinese virus". This demonic spectre, I gathered, was a ravenous chemical complex with a taste for the human lung, a microscopic enigma skirting the fine line between organism and self-replicating molecule, an anime succubus that wore a silk dress and flew on bat wings. Being an anti-commie maniac, K-Bob used more descriptive terms, but I'll leave that to your imagination.

As I gathered myself for the band's re-

hearsals, concentrating on my professional future, K-Bob's relentless text messages hammered my brain:

01/21, 4:47 PM – *might want to invest in germ for crowds*

01/21, 5:32 PM – *germ mask*

01/21, 8:46 PM – *maybe coronavirus will be black swan*

01/21, 8:52 PM – *interesting thing is how 25% get pneumonia. simply having bunch people with that could crash already fragile medical system.*

At this point, the WHO had just stopped repeating China's claim that the virus couldn't spread person-to-person. Apparently, the germ could surf a sneeze straight into your nostrils. Rumour had it the peculiar COVID-19 originated in a bad batch of bat soup cooked up next door to a Level 4 bioweapons lab in Wuhan. The world community didn't care too much and I didn't either. But K-Bob would not be ignored:

01/24, 1:22 AM – *weird that millions quarantined in china but still flights to usa*

01/24, 8:24 PM – *viral chernoby5*

01/25, 7:15 PM – *forget porn. coronavirus phone videos far more addictive. i believe nothing officials say.*

01/26, 12:16 AM – *nobody remembers*



South Gay Street, Knoxville, Tennessee

*botched utah nerve gas test or accidental gorky biowar anthrax release*

*01/27, 7:45 PM – w.h.o. says oops, risk actually high, not moderate*

*01/30, 6:28 PM – get hand sanitizer and, if possible, mask for trip*

*01/30, 6:39 PM – always be the first to panic*

*01/31, 11:01 PM – saw prediction on twitter that 6 months after coronavirus kills last man, computer in fed basement trading with computer in wall street basement will drive dow to all-time highs*

*02/01, 12:07 AM – twitter, facebook now censoring coronavirus posts*

These increasingly frantic texts followed me to the band's rehearsals. I tried my best

to ignore them and let my dreams soar. Looking back, I'm reminded why it's best to keep one antenna tuned to the far left, the other to the far right.

*02/16, 7:00 PM – am astonished msm, public did not, and still do not, notice shit hitting fan*

By March, the tour had been cancelled and the entire world was hysterical. Seeing all the shelves cleared of toilet paper, I realised that America is literally a nation of asswipes. After a long stint of denial – maybe just long enough – the WHO and the CDC had finally sounded the alarm. Two months too late, Big Media suddenly

Seeing all the shelves cleared of toilet paper, I realised that America is literally a nation of asswipes

I get the uneasy feeling that when the present Global Lockdown is finally lifted, we'll all come out of our cells to find that the furniture has been rearranged – and we won't be allowed to put it back

echoed the dissident feeds that K-Bob follows. Privy investors sold their stock. The Dow Jones tanked. It was time for a cosmic freak out.

I decided to break camp and head north to Yankee Town. Sure, they talk funny up there, but there's a beautiful woman I know who tends a garden off the beaten path. Might be a good time to plant seeds and sing songs. Besides, maybe she needs a strong back and a .357 to keep her company.

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On March 15, I got my last proper pint at Blackhorse Pub & Brewery on Knoxville's Gay Street, an hour before they put the chairs up for good. It wasn't as satisfying as you'd think it'd be, so I ordered another. At the other end of the bar, a batty old lady with a roller walker yammered, "It's over. It's over. It's over." Her tone was more informative than alarmed. She'd probably been repeating that line since well before the pandemic began.

The streets of downtown Knoxville were empty except for one or two disaster tourists licking Cruze Farms ice cream cones. A handful of hobos watched them without interest. One was selling crocheted dog sweaters and I gave her a couple of bucks. If you don't support local business, who will? The Cruze Farms girls always wear checkered dresses as a trad uniform, but now they also wore checkered bandanas over their mouths, too. Big box stores could never replicate this flavour, but as it turns out, they don't have to. By the end of the month, the entire state would be locked down. Most businesses were ordered to close, except for Amazon and Whole Foods, or essentials like Tractor Supply and Wal-Mart.

If you've ever been imprisoned, you know that lockdown is a total drag. You go into your cell and do push-ups and listen to your cellmate tell that same story for the hundredth time. You look out the steel door's little window and watch the guards

move around freely. Maybe an ass-kiss inmate is out there cleaning up the blood, or dutifully rearranging the furniture.

I get the uneasy feeling that when the present Global Lockdown is finally lifted, we'll all come out of our cells to find that the furniture has been rearranged – and we won't be allowed to put it back.

My escape from Knoxville commenced after an argument with my new neighbours. I'd returned home from a job in Las Vegas to find a Mexican man sitting outside the apartment next door. Four pairs of muddy cowboy boots sat under him. One pair was embroidered with dyed leather stars-and-stripes. The man held his smartphone next to his mouth, speakerphone at top volume. The woman on the other end chattered in Spanish.

The next afternoon, as if to signal a new era, I returned home and heard a pop like a loud gunshot from just beyond the Sunsphere. Minutes later, a black plume rose up behind the golden globe. You could smell burning rubber in the air. I walked over to discover that a small transit van had exploded on the entrance ramp to Henley Street. The windows were blown out and the tires had melted into the pavement. In fact, everything was completely burned except the metal frame.

I joined a group of redneck gawkers watching the firemen hose down the blackened remains. Another 'neck showed up and said, "I ain't never seen nuthin' like 'at."

"Nor have I", I responded. The way they all looked at me, you'd think I'd just said "My teeth are from Mars" in fluent Greek. The 'neck snapped a picture on his smartphone and drove off. The best I could figure, a rolling meth lab must have gone Code Red like that Level 4 facility in Wuhan, but with less long-term damage.

Back at my apartment, the top-volume speakerphone conversations continued outside my door. This resulted in me

and mi amigo nuevo having top-volume arguments in broken Spanish. I tried to explain how our cultural orientations toward Big Tech are incompatible, but he didn't speak English.

Turns out that my landlords, who'd put me through a rigorous background check, were now renting a single unit to four undocumented workers. Their real estate company had apparently hired the immigrants at half price to help build more overpriced Legoland condos across the river. By my estimates, if my landlords were charging each of the four Mexicans half what they charged me, their total rent would be twice what I paid – plus cheap labour with zero accountability.

On my last night in ghost town Knoxville, I sat drinking on my back porch. The University of Tennessee's clock tower tolled each passing hour. Suddenly the spatter of urine sang up from the walkway below. One of the Mexicans was pissing off the porch next door, holding a chattering smartphone in his hand. I laughed, cracked a beer, and meditated on gentrification and its discontents.

My northbound path to Yankee Town took me over Skyline Drive, which winds like a snake over a rolling Virginian mountain range. A biologist on the radio reported that since the lockdown, the absence of pollution has altered the pollination patterns of the trees waking up below. I parked and climbed onto a rock face. The views over the Shenandoah Valley were gorgeous.

This is the soil that our Founding Fathers tilled, where English dreams of liberty were born on the backs of indentured servants and African slaves. These days, we're all online innovators and proto-cyborgs, libertines and bible-thumpers, the 1 percent and eager immigrants and the despairing unemployed. The sun cut through the clouds to set green fields and

breaking red buds aglow.

On Palm Sunday, my first of morning of true freedom, I woke up to a Shenandoah National Park ranger banging on my van door. She told me the wilderness was overcrowded with sightseers and their nasty microbiomes, so she'd decided to close up the park. If only for a moment, the deer and beaver would be free of human disruption. I drove on.

The next morning, *Democracy Now!* announced that Bill Withers had passed away at 81. The newscaster said his classic "Lean On Me" was now trending as a message of hope during this age of illness and isolation. "Goddamnit, Amy Goodman", I growled at my dashboard, "you can't lean on anyone and still practice social distancing. You're being a bad influence!"

In Upstate New York, the highways transitioned to pasted-over potholes. I couldn't help but notice all the exit ramp signs for local businesses. Up here, these generic white letters actually compete with professionally designed corporate logos. But for how long? As fear of the virus spreads, and the Global Lockdown squashes small shops from Maine to California, behemoths like Amazon and Wal-Mart have managed to capture the entire sanitised market. We'll see who rises from the ashes.

At my final destination, I found a lovely earthbound angel turning the soil. While I'd been drawing lines on maps, she'd been planting seeds in her garden. Each has the potential to sprout, she told me, but plenty will wither away. So it goes with the rest of us. This world produces far too many dreams for Nature to nurse them all.

CT

*Joe Allen writes about race, robots, and religion. Presently, he lives in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Read his weekly newsletter at [www.JOEBOT.xyz](http://www.JOEBOT.xyz)*

As fear of the virus spreads, and the Global Lockdown squashes small shops from Maine to California, behemoths like Amazon and Wal-Mart have managed to capture the entire sanitised market. We'll see who rises from the ashes

# ONE WOMAN AGAINST A NUCLEAR SUB

How a wet-suited protester jumped from a little rubber dinghy and halted a US nuclear submarine. An excerpt from *In The Company of Rebels*, by **Chellis Glendinning**



From  
**ColdType**  
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*“I ask myself: how did I come to find myself facing a machine gun pointed directly at me?” – Sunshine Appleby, letter to Chellis Glendinning, 2015*

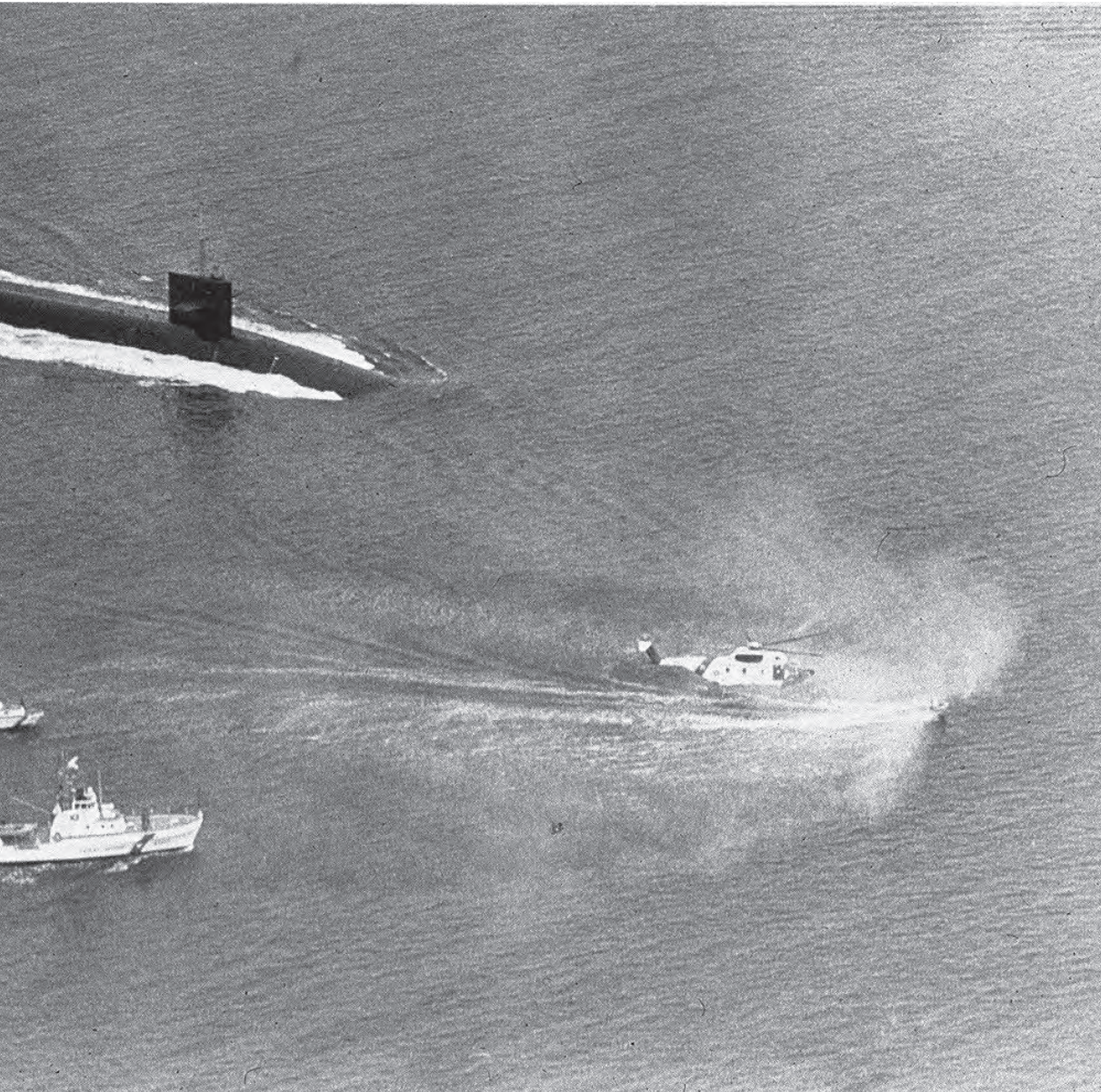
I AM SURE THAT MANY PEOPLE don’t know what to do with Susan Upton, by her own choice known as Sunshine Appleby. Her parents certainly didn’t; they locked her away in the loony bin for three years where – and I speak with certainty – she wowed the doctors with her intelligence, alertness, and imagination. And I hope that they all know now that their whacky patient became one of them: a registered nurse and certified massage therapist.

I myself can’t be sure how I met Sunshine; she seemed always to be there. Maybe through our elder feminist-dyke friend, Sarah Davis, who lived in a painted Victorian in the Haight? Marc Kasky knew her from the Ecology Center. And then, there she was in the whirlwind of the anti-nuclear movement.

She was everywhere, and everywhere



she stood out. Tall, peppery blonde-brown hair, slightly jutting front teeth – more concerned with doing the right thing than with caring about what people thought of her – she was usually dressed in a wrinkled shirt bought for twenty-five cents at Goodwill and tattered yoga pants. From her backpack arose little sacks of sunflower sprouts, hand-ground peanut butter slathered on thick slices of whole-wheat bread, and a glass jar of filtered water. I visited one of the slews of apartments she rented in San Francisco, a slightly below-ground affair,



Sunshine was a live-lightly freak with a predilection for raw foods. Her footprint, decades before the Ecological Footprint was even a glister in the eye of its inventor, resembled that of a tyre-sandaled Guatemalan peasant more than of a saddle-shoed white woman born into an East Coast upper middle class family

**Pursued by a helicopter and the US Coast Guard, Sunshine Appleby swims towards the US Ohio nuclear submarine during a protest in 1982. She is the swirl of little waves to the left of the protest boat.**

and learned that every single item that was brought into the kitchen met one of three fates: it was devoured; it was recycled into another use; or it was transmogrified into compost. The woman had a steel water filter and a Champion juicer, with nary a plastic bag in sight.

Yes, Sunshine was a live-lightly freak with a predilection for raw foods. Her footprint, decades before the Ecological

Footprint was even a glister in the eye of its inventor, resembled that of a tyre-sandaled Guatemalan peasant more than of a saddle-shoed white woman born into an East Coast upper middle class family.

But born into that family she was: the T. Graydon Uptons of Hartland Four Corners, Vermont and Washington, DC. Through the years her father, T. Graydon, worked at the US Treasury Department, the World

By a fluke of fate, she found herself in the middle of an anti-war protest; witnessed heavily armed police atop horses beating people with batons: was tear-gassed by helicopters and went totally blind for six weeks, during which time she lost her rental, her job, and her academic scholarship

Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Her mother, Vassar-educated Ann Nash Upton, was a homemaker with four children. Early on, Susan had health problems that included panic attacks, ulcerative colitis, and insomnia, causing unbearable pain that without warning would bedevil her in any situation from shopping to riding the bus and would always cause her mother not concern, but embarrassment. Susan was also legally blind and wore thick glasses. Despite such impediments to her parents' stereotypical expectations, the still ever-promising Susan was the apple of their eye – that is, until they discovered that this daughter of theirs was her own person.

1963 was Sunshine's breakaway year. A recent high-school graduate, she crafted her own free-form summer: she went west, jumped a freight train from California to Colorado, and chased circles around her dream to be a poet like the Beatnik women who had, by a few short years, predated her. But when the maples and oaks swathed the hills of the eastern seaboard in cloaks of dazzling red and yellow, she returned to perform her familial duty, entering the exclusive women's Bennington College.

All along she had thought of herself as a pacifist. But that first semester, after an incident in which she angrily pounded the roommate who had usurped her cot and pitched her clothes and books into the hallway, Sunshine locked herself in a bathroom stall for three days, "being unable to respond to anything but the question of how can I harbour two such radically different feelings at the same time: loving peace and having the ability to be a killer at the same time?" When the janitor unscrewed the hinges of the toilet door, Sunshine's mother checked her into a mental institution.

Although she rarely talks about her subsequent dedication to non-violent civil disobedience, she described what followed this enforced dark night of the soul in a personal letter to me as "a journey inward".

Upon release, she took classes at George Washington University in DC where, by a fluke of fate, she found herself in the middle of an anti-war protest; witnessed heavily armed police atop horses beating people with batons: was tear-gassed by helicopters and went totally blind for six weeks, during which time she lost her rental, her job, and her academic scholarship. Not to be daunted by disagreeable fortune, she took off for Mexico, where she witnessed the injustice of poverty, studied with Liberation Theology priests as well as with Ivan Illich, and was in Mexico City in 1968 when the historic massacre of protestors in Tlatelolco Square took place.

Out of curiosity she attended a community meeting for people interested in non-violent, faith-based activism; here she met pacifists Elizabeth McAllister and Philip Berrigan, two people who became life-catalysers. In 1980 she returned to the nation's capital, this time certain of her purpose in the world. She moved into Jonah House where McAllister, Berrigan, and a bevy of nonviolent peace activists and priests lived. Here she began reading such subversive material as Dorothy Day, Peace Pilgrim, and Mahatma Gandhi, as well as everything she could get her hands on regarding nuclear weapons and US participation in the arms race.

Years later, on the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki, August 9, 2015, she wrote me a letter about her dedication to civil disobedience, a lifelong practice in which she had, as of 2016, racked up a whopping ninety-two arrests:

"The main thing that enabled me to act as I did was the general field I was hanging out in and the enormous pressure of the times. . . . Civil rights. Hundreds of ordinary citizens protesting the Vietnam War. Kent State when the US government was shooting its own citizens. Millions marching in the streets protesting racial inequalities, the fervour of Martin Luther King. Living under martial law in DC, where tanks



rolled down the avenues, soldiers roamed the streets carrying machine guns, and no more than three people were allowed to gather publicly. . . . It was not one thing [that thrust me into activism], but rather the effect of the 100th snowflake when finally the branch bends”.

Also by the 1980s, Sunshine had finished her education as an on-call nurse, and thus she was able to dip into and out of paid work, but her “portable profession” – travelling from Washington State to California to New Hampshire in order to protest – was her true calling. Early on she learned that the government does not give a hoot for its citizens; rather we are merely, in military terms, “collateral damage”. And, without a monstrous income, she was able to live simply, cheaply, and communally wherever she was – sharing with her fellow activists both the emotional burden of existence under the constant threat of extinction and visions of creative strategies for a world at peace.

I visited Sunshine one afternoon in yet another basement apartment in San Francisco – as if in an underground air-raid shelter, she always seemed to be nesting below ground – and I noticed that a window opening to an air well could not be locked, leaving it blatantly ajar. The neighbourhood was a dangerous one.

“Aren’t you afraid?” I wondered. Her answer came like a sudden thunder crack on a sunny day.

“Listen. After you’ve been face-to-face with a nuclear submarine with nothing but a thin layer of rubber and a few feet of water between you and it”, she replied, “little things like a man entering your apartment tend to fade”.

Among her hundreds of acts of civil disobedience, most all of them directed at the US military, perhaps the most dramatic was the aforementioned. It took place in 1982 – in a wet suit. The adversary was a 560-foot-long (read: nearly the length of two football fields) Trident nuclear submarine that,

after manufacture in Groton, Connecticut, was to be housed at the Navy base at Bangor, Washington. The vessel carried up to twenty-four intercontinental ballistic missiles, each of which had as many as eight independently targeted warheads, in all holding an explosive force of 300 kilotons of TNT – some twenty times the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. In other words, according to climate-change activist Matt Dundas in his 2008 article *The Rise of Non-Violent Civil Disobedience: The Peace Blockade, Part 2*, the port was slated to be “the service station of the world’s deadliest weapons”.

The plan to oppose such had been hatched by theologian Jim Douglass while in jail from a different action, the idea being that small but fast-moving boats would deflect the ingress of this USS Ohio in a kind of water-based guerrilla resistance.

When the action was announced by the Ground Zero Center for Non-Violent Action, forty-six people signed on to participate, many admitting that they did so because they didn’t have a choice: they knew that they could die in this battle, but it was necessary.

Execution presented several hurdles. One was timing; no one knew exactly when the ship would arrive. This problem was miraculously solved by movement contacts at the Panama Canal who would report when the USS Ohio passed through, and from there the trip up the coast would take a few days. Another challenge had to do with skills. The action would require the kind of technical ability and discipline normally associated with an army. Very quickly, for the arrival seemed imminent, Greenpeace offered a three-day training in which basic water safety was taught, as well as how to lift and lower nine one-person rowboats out of two larger boats in less than three minutes.

A last challenge concerned support. Here the movement’s success at building relationships with other sectors of society

“Listen. After you’ve been face-to-face with a nuclear submarine with nothing but a thin layer of rubber and a few feet of water between you and it”, she replied, “little things like a man entering your apartment tend to fade”

The military men were yelling at me with sexual allegations – the C word – telling me what they were going to do to me if I didn't stop swimming toward the submarine. Meanwhile, I nearly blind and quite well-dressed in my wetsuit, red bathing cap, rubber booties, and rubber gloves – continued to dog-paddle towards the monstrous behemoth

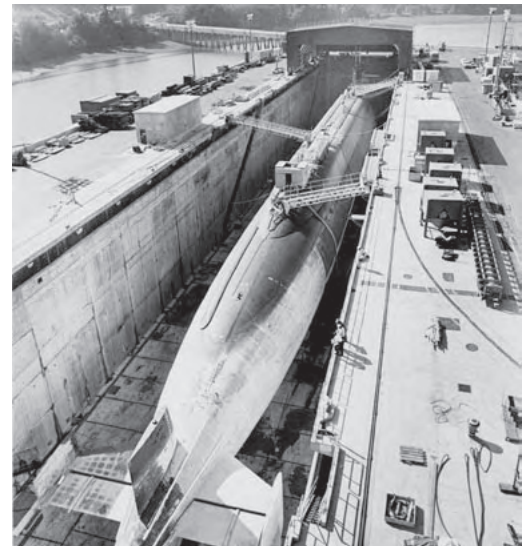
came to the fore. Simultaneous with the action, a 6,500-person rally protesting the stationing of the submarine took place on the S'Klallam Reservation, while twelve bishops and church executives from six denominations, along with their parishioners, held a prayer vigil on a boat in a nearby cove. Plus, the international press was standing by to film.

Between 2 and 3 a.m. on August 12, 1982, Ground Zero sentinels noted Coast Guard (CG) cutters moving about the bay like ants upset by a disturbance to their hill. The activists bolted awake, said their prayers, got into their wetsuits, and hurried down to the dock. Here the CG burst upon them brandishing M-16s, seizing boats, and hauling them away. In the scuffle a few boats got away and raced into the harbour.

Just then, like a monstrous water snake, the USS Ohio slithered into sight.

Dundas describes what happened next: "Video footage taken at the time shows protesters getting washed overboard by high-powered Coast Guard hoses", he writes. "The boats that got away from the initial Coast Guard onslaught tore toward the 'National Security Zone', a 1000-yard perimeter around the submarine, a boundary that once crossed meant risking [a] ten-year prison sentence and \$10,000 fine". Seventy-eight-year-old Ruth Youngdahl Nelson was riding in her son's tiny motorised rubber dinghy and a Coast Guard craft was hot and heavy in pursuit. Just as a Guardsman was about to hose the team into the sound, Dundas recalls, Ms. Nelson shouted, "Young man, not in my America!" Stunned, the Guardsman lowered his hose, and the resisters escaped for another run at the humongous submarine – only to be surrounded, captured, and arrested.

"With almost every Ground Zero boat at a halt", Dundas continues, "there was only one which succeeded in advancing all the way to the Ohio. A speedboat carrying Renee Krisco, Ed Turtle, and Sunshine Appleby circled the colossal beast while out-



**The USS Ohio undergoes final checks in drydock before its first voyage. The ship was targeted by peace activists. Sunshine Appleby jumped from the protest vessel, swam towards the giant submarine and blocked its path.**

running multiple Coast Guard boats and a helicopter. Surrounded by law enforcement, the boat got right up next to the Ohio".

As Sunshine describes the encounter in a letter:

"We three, in a tiny rubber boat with a gas engine the size of a lawnmower, were able to block the path of the Trident, circle it, and jump into the water. I swam toward it; our driver Renee, a nun, guided the boat away from the Trident; while Turtle, a teacher, jumped out and swam away in an attempt to confuse the suddenly appearing-upon-the-scene helicopter and a large CG boat. The military men were yelling at me with sexual allegations – the C word – telling me what they were going to do to me if I didn't stop swimming toward the submarine. Meanwhile, I nearly blind and quite well-dressed in my wetsuit, red bathing cap, rubber booties, and rubber gloves – continued to dog-paddle towards the monstrous behemoth, black in colour and several football fields long. Inside my wetsuit I carried a loaf of bread to feed the soldiers bread, not bombs, and an arrest warrant

signed by the attorney general because, under international treaties, the Trident is illegal: its load of some 200 nuclear weapons would not distinguish between noncombatants (read: women and children) and the armed soldiers resisting an attack.

“I was on a mission. However, with the helicopter coming closer to the water creating heavy waves and the boat of shouting soldiers getting louder, I turned onto my back, closed my eyes, and said ‘God help me’. At that moment the Trident disappeared, the helicopter, the Coast Guard boat, the waves, the screaming voices: I entered a place/non-place of silence and peace that passed all understanding. I had the experience of being rocked in the arms of the Divine Mother. I felt a love really indescribable.

“About twenty minutes later I ‘awoke’ to the voices of my boat mates calling me to help them reconnect the gas line the CG had cut with a long boat hook. I looked around me and saw nothing but a vague outline of my boat mates in the mist. I noticed something was different but could not put my finger on it, a sense of peace. We held the gas line together manually and put-putted back to shore.

“What I realised is that when we feel from our gut that there is nothing left to lose, no matter the personal consequences, the danger of nuclear war overshadows all of one’s small concerns. I became free to act from my heart. As I was swimming towards the Trident, I felt only profound determination.

“I think the action was a wake-up call for the US military. The people on the CG boat came from the small town of Bangor, where the Trident was to be stationed. The protestors organising the blockade came from that same small town. The two groups knew each other; their children attended the same schools, they saw each other in the market, at church, at the movies. They knew we were unarmed and peaceful: thus the reluctance to fire upon us. A modest but for me life-changing benefit of the action: I

was healed of my irritable bowel syndrome and have never had an attack since”.

By 2010 Sunshine was aware of the inner tension presented by life within the superpower with the greatest cache of nuclear weapons and the most rationalisations for detonating them. Plus, now that computers connecting law enforcement agencies could reveal her ineffable arrest record wherever she went, she felt that further use of civil disobedience would be ill-advised. She decided to move to New Zealand, a place she regarded as saner, healthier, and more ecological. She also decided to leave behind her role as an employed health professional and “move from the stress of nursing to the joy of authentic healing work”. Although she did apply for and receive a New Zealand registered nurse licence, she opened a massage therapy practice instead and relaunched her campaign for low-footprint, ecological living and the medicinal value of raw foods.

New Zealand did not turn out to be the eco paradise Sunshine had imagined; as she puts it, it was more like a “US-in-training,” with its agricultural industry spraying tons of pesticides, genetic-engineering firms releasing altered organisms, coal mining and hydraulic fracking causing water pollution. Disappointed, she wrote to me, wondering if she should come to South America. At age seventy-one, though, after a life chock-full of jail cells and basement apartments, Sunshine decided to stop moving around; the nomadic protestor bought a small, sunlit house in Takaka/Golden Bay. There, amid straight-spine saguaro cacti and spreading silver fern, she continues with her massage work, promotion of healthy diet – plus legal protest against the use of pesticides. **CT**

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“With the helicopter coming closer to the water creating heavy waves and the boat of shouting soldiers getting louder, I turned onto my back, closed my eyes, and said ‘God help me’. At that moment the Trident disappeared, the helicopter, the Coast Guard boat, the waves, the screaming voices: I entered a place/non-place of silence and peace that passed all understanding”

# JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF CIVILISATION

Linh Dinh visits a forgotten American city that is struggling to survive



From  
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WITH 77,000 PEOPLE, CAMDEN, New Jersey, has one public library left and, in a city where Walt Whitman spent 19 years and is buried, there are exactly two bookstores, a Barnes and Noble serving Rutgers Camden students, and, not too far away, La Unique African American Books and Cultural Center, with *The Master Game*, *The New World Order*, *The Unseen Hand* and *Say It Like Obama* in its window. Camden has no hotel, and only one downtown bar, The Sixth Street Lounge. Hank's closed in 2010 after half a century in business. Now, if you can barely drink in the heart of any American city, no matter how tiny, you know it's seriously messed up.

Just off downtown, there's also Off Broadway, however. The first time I entered, four years ago, I noticed "NO PROFANITIES" on the wall, yet the very stern barkeep had this T-shirt on, "PRACTICE SAFE SEX. GO FUCK YOURSELF". You're finally home, I thought. On that occasion, I was able to make the acquaintance of Jamaal, a 65-year-old former math teacher. A jazz lover, he told me his favourite concert ever was Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers at NYC's Blue Note. We talked about Mickey Roker, who used to be the house drummer at Philly's Ortlieb's. I once had a cassette of Roker keeping time behind Dizzy and Ray

Brown, but it was erased by an embittered, life-hating middle-aged Korean art student I had lent the tape to. I should be awarded a peace prize, or some chintzy ribbon at least, for not strangling him. A bottle of Rolling Rock in Off Broadway was, and still is, only \$1.50. Jamaal informed me, "This place is all right. It has an older crowd. You can go home at the end of the night".

"What's the alternative?" I asked.

"Someone beats you up or shoots you".

"I'd rather just go home".

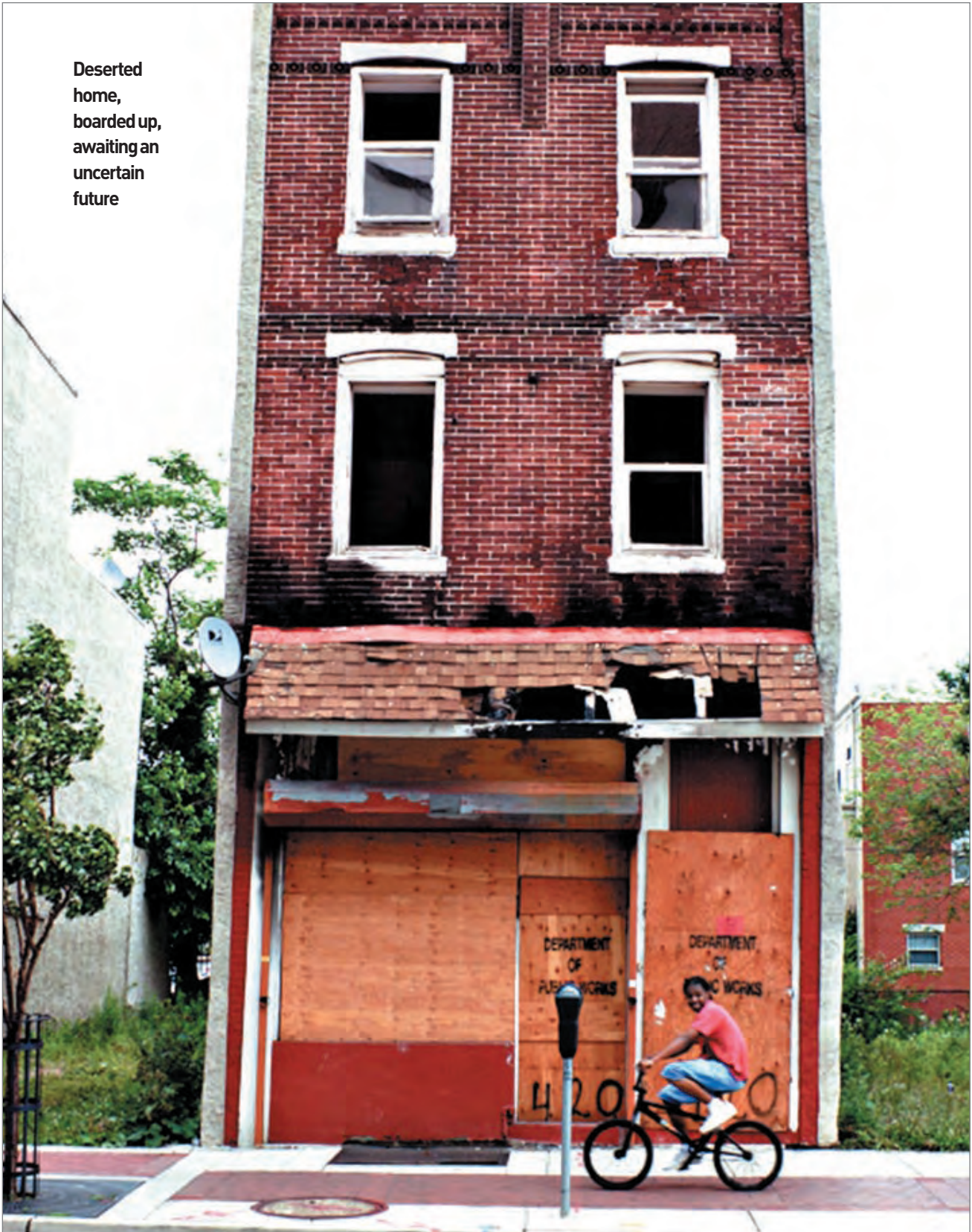
"Me too".

In Camden, I had seen Wynton Marsalis at a free concert by the river. Like Baltimore, Camden has a safe tourist section, with a much smaller, greyer fish version of the celebrated aquarium. People who come to this protected enclave don't need to see the real Camden, not that they want to. They can even arrive and leave via a ferry from Philly.

Lying outside Camden's tiny bullet-free zone, the Walt Whitman House, on Martin Luther King Blvd, gets almost no visitors, not that Americans are flocking to pay homage to their writers. Even during its days, this "coop" or "shanty", in Whitman's own words, was called "the worst house and the worst situated", and Camden was thriving back then, with its best decades still ahead. By the 1940's, Camden would become an in-

Deserted  
home,  
boarded up,  
awaiting an  
uncertain  
future

Photo: Linh Dinh



Some Camden folks will ask you for cash, but many will also offer you cigarettes, dope or sex. Here, illicit dealing is king

dustrial powerhouse, with many factories employing blacks and whites, and the largest shipyard in the world.

“Yo, Chris Rock, I’m at the Walt Whitman House”.

“Run!”

In 2011, Ken Rose wanted to interview me by phone on July 4, so I decided to do it in front of the Whitman House. On the day this country was born, I would not be in Philly, its birthplace, but Camden, its prototypical morgue. A habitually lawless government has no business celebrating the Constitution, and with this country being deliberately tortured and drowned by its rulers, accompanied by flag-waving acquiescence of deranged voters, each 4th of July has turned into a sick and sad spectacle. Across the street was the Camden County Jail, and on the next block, ABC Bails Bond. Before Ken called, some guy shuffled up and said he was the caretaker of the Whitman home, but as we chattered, I soon realised he didn’t even know who Walt Whitman was. He referred to Whitman in the present tense, as in, “He owns this entire row, including the parking lot right here”. Predictably, he wanted me to give him some change.

Yes, some Camden folks will ask you for cash, but many will also offer you cigarettes, dope or sex. Here, illicit dealing is king. Also in 2011, I met Abdul, who was selling body oils, perfumes, knit hats and boxer’s shorts from a table set up in front of a fried chicken joint. After peddling stuff for seven years, business was getting worse and worse, so Abdul was planning on moving to Senegal, where he had a wife. Years ago, he had been busted for drugs, a wrong conviction, he claimed, and locked up for three-and-a-half years. In prison, he converted to Islam. Released, he visited Senegal. As he walked into a Western Union, the lady behind the counter exclaimed, “You’re my husband! I saw you in a dream”.

His wife was 40-years old, and “doesn’t have a bad thought”, Abdul said. “She can’t be any better!” Since she didn’t want

to come to the States, he would go to her. He was having a house built over there for \$20,000. He sent her boxes of old clothes to sell. “American clothes are popular in Senegal”, he explained. “Even used clothes”.

“Where do you get old clothes? Where do you buy them?”

“I don’t buy them. I get them from my relatives!”

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In 2012, I met another Black Muslim man, 38-ish, who also sold on the sidewalk, in his case socks from a wheeled cart. Across the street was the ruins of the Carnegie Library, so I said, “That was a beautiful building once!”

“I hear they’re gonna fix it up”.

“Really?! But the city is broke. Camden is broke.”

“Camden is broke?”

“Yeah, man, Camden is broke. Philly is broke. The whole country is broke! Didn’t you hear about all the cops they laid off?”

“They got money”. He then read from the inscription on the building. “Nineteen-0-Four. Man, that building is old. How old is that? Thirty, forty years?”

“It was built in nineteen-0-four, so it’s over a hundred-years-old”.

“Really?”

He told me about a cop who had given him a ticket for selling on the street, “The judge will throw it out, though, because I was sitting in a restaurant when he busted me”.

“Yeah, but you’ll still have to waste your time in court. What an asshole! Doesn’t he have better things to do than to bust people trying to make a living? This city is so fucked up and he’s busting you, and you’re not hurting anybody”.

“There is a lot of complaints about this guy”.

“Is he an older guy?”

“No, a young cop, a young, white cop”.

Whoever this cop was, he’s gone, because Camden has laid off its entire police force. That’s right, all 270 cops who sur-



Frank's Deli, Camden

vived previous layoffs were let go in April of 2013, though 50 were immediately hired by the County Police that's now in charge of keeping Camden, um, safe. Announcing this restructuring, the mayor said, "We cannot sit back and allow our children and families to experience another 2012". Or another 2011, 2010 or 2009, etc, for year in, year out, this post-industrial city ranks as one of the deadliest in America. With its cops trimmed and shuffled, little has changed on Camden's streets, though there's a mobile observation tower across from the bus terminal. Inside that box is an anxious man with his head rotating nonstop, or a dozing schmuck, or no one at all, but you wouldn't know, would you? An instant panopticon, it is sprouting up everywhere, from theme park parking lots to your next mass protest. The Guardian Angels also made a cameo appearance in Camden, but have wisely disappeared. Unarmed, they'd stand an excellent chance of being peeled off the sidewalk,

then rolled, posthaste, into Cooper Hospital, Camden's one world class institution. Come to Camden, where you can be cut up or expire with distinction! World class hands will stitch you up!

"Work here. Play here. Live here", shout the LIVE CAMDEN billboards, but until recently Baltimore also declared itself, "The Greatest City in America", and Milpitas, whom most people have never heard of, drapes banners all over its blink-and-miss downtown, trumpeting, "MILPITAS A Great American City". Whatever. What is Juarez's slogan, I wonder? Or Kabul's? Speaking of Cooper, I must tell you about Paul Matthews Young, whom I met in 2012 at the Broadway train stop. On a plate glass window, this 50-ish man had taped his New Jersey ID, social security card and about eight sheets of paper showing his "Monetarial Earning Assessment". It wasn't clear what he was trying to convey, to whom, or if it was some kind of protest. When he

Come to Camden, where you can be cut up or expire with distinction! World class hands will stitch you up!

Already a coke head, she got hooked on heroin at 19, thanks to her junkie uncle. Unable to pay for her daily treat, she started to trick

told me had 18 children, I asked, “With how many women?”

“None”.

“What do you mean none?!”

“I had them by myself”.

He said his 18 kids were born microscopic from the tip of his penis. The doctors at Cooper had something to do with this, but I couldn’t get him to explain fully the procedure beyond the fact that Paul had to pleasure himself quite energetically.

See her, that’s Angela. She looks about 14, but she might be as old as 17. Walking unsteadily, her eyes are practically closed, but she can see enough to tell that you’re not serious. She’ll keep walking because she has no time to lose. Each day, she can easily go through five or six bags of dope, plus some powder for variety, plus she has to eat, too, and maybe down a few cans of Steel Reserve to flush that lousy Chinese food, bought from Yuk’s, yes, that’s really the name, at 827 S. Broadway. I’m not making anything up. Why would I? No one knows anything about Angela, not even her best friend. Thirty-three-year-old Michelle regularly gives Angela food and dope, but Angela still won’t say nothing about herself, and don’t you give me that shit about her being too drugged to remember, because on one level or another, none of us ever forgets anything.

I won’t forget walking with Michelle when she said, “That’s my baby’s daddy”, and she pointed to some guy across the street. Squinting, the dude was probably thinking, “What’s my side piece doing with that Chink (or fuckhead, or asshole)?” You know, anything but “gentleman” or “Asian American”, per the *New York Times* stylistic guidelines. To think is already to compose, and thus to dissimulate and cover up, and to write is to further distort, nearly always, what we pretend to think, but writing, paradoxically, can be used to hint at the rawness beneath all this culture,

this domestication, this farce, this composition. This half-assed expose almost never happens, however. Maybe it has never happened. Looking hazy, dude kept squinting as if he had a hard time recognizing his lay even.

“It’s Rashid’s birthday!” Michelle shouted.

“Huh? What?”

“Rashid! It’s Rashid’s birthday today!”

Showing no emotion, no smile, no grimace, dude gave Michelle one final squint, then kept walking.

“He doesn’t remember his son’s name?” I chuckled.

“No, he remembers. Lamon’s just a little out of it today”.

“How old is Rashid?”

“Eight! He’s eight-years-old!”

“And he stays with you?”

“No, with my mom”.

“So your mom is not so bad after all”.

“She might as well do something for him, since she didn’t do shit for me!”

Though Michelle is one-quarter Okinawan, it’s hard to see any Asianness on her white face. She was mostly raised by her Japanese grandma, but at 16, she moved to Camden. Already a cokehead, she got hooked on heroin at 19, thanks to her junkie uncle. Unable to pay for her daily treat, she started to trick, “I’ve been raped and beaten. Look”, she opened her mouth, “these are dentures. I don’t like to go with young black guys. They’re fucked up! There are, like, nine guys who go around beating up girls”.

“Just for the hell of it?”

“Yeah, just for the hell of it. This is Camden!”

“So what are you going to do? What’s your next move?”

“I’d like to get into rehab, maybe go to Florida”.

“What’s in Florida?”

“I dunno. There’s a good rehab place in Florida. My sister told me about it. I need to get out of Camden, that’s for sure”.

Her pale arms showed purple needle





Give peace a chance: Once Camden was a vibrant community; now it's a squalid eyesore

marks, and so did the tops of her hands. Her veins have collapsed. A blue headed pin pierced her upper lip, a large hoop dangled from one ear, and her hair had been dyed a burnt sienna or, more likely, was just a red wig. It was a very hot day, yet she was draped in a charcoal coloured hoodie, and her faded blue tank top had been rendered lumpy by a cheap, ill fitting bra. For someone living rough for so long, Michelle still appeared fresh, so I said, “You know, you don’t even look 33-years-old. You actually look younger!”

“You think so? I used to be beautiful”. She pulled two ID’s from her cloth sack, showed them to me.

Holding one up against her face, I pronounced, “No, I think you actually look better now, but you better get the fuck out of Camden soon”.

She smiled. Her dentures were newish, for they weren’t too yellow. Maybe she had just gotten punched? Michelle then volun-

teered that Lamon may be pissed because she had been seen with another guy.

“Some guy you like? Some guy you love?”

“It does get lonely out here... Hey, you want to hear something weird? Just last night, this one girl got so fucked up, she took her clothes off and ran down the street”.

The same night, 20-year-old De’quan Rodgers was shot dead, and another young man, 19-years-old, was found with multiple bullet wounds. About three hours before I chatted with Michelle, three more men were perforated. Shootings are nearly daily occurrences here, but a young naked woman running down the street is goofy enough to be remarked upon, if only for the next 24 hours or so.

All over town, there are RIP messages spray-painted onto walls, near where a loved one has died, whether targeted or hit by stray slugs. Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise,

About three hours before I chatted with Michelle, three more men were perforated

Watching a news story of five guys stealing 17 Rolexes after smashing its display case, the barflies whoop with astonishment and delight, but they are blasé about a school shooting simulation

sunset. You live and talk much shit until Jesus, Allah, Bruce Lee or Liberace texts you, “Kum home, loser”.

You strut about and blather beaucoup merde until Glock, SKS or Bersa Thunger taps you on the shoulder and whispers, “Hiya!” Even as you crawl on all fours, sightless and toothless, with your liver, spleen and entrails hanging out, it’s still too early to call it a night. Is it last call already? On a memorial for Izzy and Cunt, someone has scrawled, “Heaven is where we go but hell is where we live”. On shop windows and doors are flyers begging for information on Camden’s disappeared. Some have come to buy drugs, never to be seen again. Some were just strolling to the bodega or the Chinese joint’s bulletproof window. Yuk’s, it’s so yummy!

Sorry, man, all you wanted was a beer and here I am dragging you down with talks of bullets, blood, gurneys, scalpels, needles and more blood, so much blood, blood geysers, showers of blood, so let’s head straight into Off Broadway, without further delay. As if to negate the chaos outside, this dump has so many rules, dude, as in:

NO T-SHIRTS OR VEST  
NO HATS TURNED AROUND  
BACKWARDS  
NO SCARVES  
NO HOODS OR SKI CAPS  
NO BAGGY PANTS

ALL TEE-SHIRTS OF ANY COLOR  
MUST HAVE LOGO’S THAT ARE  
VISIBLE  
MUST BE NAVEL HIGH  
LOGO MUST BE ON YOUR |CHEST  
OR BACK

PLEASE DO NOT YELL OR SHOUT  
ACROSS THE BAR  
THANK YOU

ATTENTION BAR PATRONS  
PLEASE DO NOT STAND

ON CHAIR RAIL

PLEASE PLEASE ANYONE CAUGHT  
TOUCHING  
TV WILL BAR YOURSELF  
PERMANENTLY  
ANYONE TOUCHING APPLIANCES  
BARRED  
YOURSELF NO EXCEPTIONS  
EMPLOYEES HAVE THE RIGHT TO  
CHECK BATHROOMS AT ALL TIME

And, of course:

BE AWARE  
THESE PREMISES ARE UNDER  
24 HOUR VIDEO  
SURVEILLANCE INSIDE & OUT

Well, I’m glad I have a dress shirt on, and no pantaloons, and I’ll do my best not to get touchy feely with that television. Watching a news story of five guys stealing 17 Rolexes after smashing its display case, the barflies whoop with astonishment and delight, but they are blasé about a school shooting simulation. As I eat a sad cheesesteak, with its dispirited meat, cheese and bread, bits of conversation drift to me.

“Yes, there was this girl born without a rectum, and she’s alive still. They haven’t fixed her yet, but they will”.

“You never had possum hash?”

“No, I’m a city boy. I don’t know nothing about that. My cousins in North Carolina might, though”.

“Possum is sweet. It’s an all right meat. And muskrat is OK too. You ought to know what’s edible, and what’s not, because it might come in handy one day”.

“No, ma’am, I’m happy with my chicken and my steak, thank you. I don’t need no squirrel, no rabbit, no raccoon, no possum. Why should I bother about any of that, when I can just go to the store?”

Surrounded by rules, we aren’t any safer, for a dickhead or two can just come in to make everyone lie on the ground, then

relieve us of wallets and purses. Most patrons are bunched up at the far end, however, so they'll have a better chance to see what's what should shit happens. (Sign on a Camden wall, "If you believe shit happens, park here".) Several of these lushes are probably packing.

Three Beyonce tunes in a row tells me it's time to get the fuck home. Soon I'll stagger into the dusk, into a half feral city of aimless men and women dwelling in rotting row houses, abandoned shells shrouded by vines and shrubs, or tents, like those clustering by the freeway, across from the long-shuttered Sears and beyond a billboard pitching \$5,000 Yurman watches to passing motorists. Living apart in a squalid tent down a dirt path blocked by plywood, branches and lumber, ex factory worker Beasto can choose between bacon, hot dog or pork chop, all stored unrefrigerated in

a sack of rice, and all reeking, of course. Fifty-seven, he's been away from Puerto Rico 43 years. Meanwhile, junkie Tina has left her tent, cleaned herself up and reconciled with her mom, so of course, of course, a cheerful respite, or recovery, if you will, is temporarily possible, within the larger framework of tempered hope, outright disappointment and, naturally, unmitigated horror. Staggering on, I will pass by Cooper, where wizardly doctors can give each of us a cleaner, fresher asshole, to pump up our always suspect vanity and confidence, or I might run into lovely Michelle or Angela, for they will still be out there. All night long, she'll sleepwalk from one john to another, just so she can score and score, until she finally disappears.

Junkie Tina has left her tent, cleaned herself up and reconciled with her mom, so of course, of course, a cheerful respite, or recovery, if you will, is temporarily possible

CT

*Linh Dinh's latest book is Postcards from the End of America. His photoblog is [www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com](http://www.linhdinhphotos.blogspot.com).*

HURWITT'S EYE

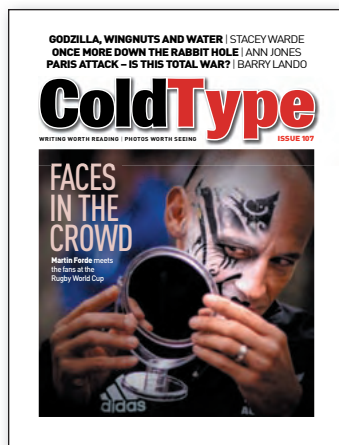
Mark Hurwitz



From The ColdType Reader Issue 56 May 2011

# GODZILLA, WINGNUTS AND WATER

Living like a hermit, **Stacey Warde** finds time to reflect on life's inanities



From  
ColdType  
Issue 107  
Mid-November 2015

WE GET LOTS OF EUROPEAN and Asian travellers this time of year, when summer morphs into fall and rain-starved Californians look expectantly to the season's first downpour.

The tourists cruise excruciatingly slowly along winding spectacular Highway 1, the coastal route through Big Sur; hordes of them park along viewpoints, at the cliff's edge, laughing, taking pictures, peering down into the vast sun-burnished Pacific, then hop into their rental cars and RVs to hog the road again. If you happen to be on the road at the same time, it's an agonising slog behind a train of tourists who have no clue about pulling over to let others pass, or how bad is our drought or the state of the union.

Invariably, they pass through Cayucos, our little hamlet by the sea. I meet a Japanese man at a coffee shop in town who stops for the sights. "What is, 'Wingnut'?" he asks, pointing at a "we have the right to refuse service" sign behind the counter. I spin my index finger around my ear, "Crazy". I show him how a wingnut works, spinning an imaginary one around my finger. "They're spun tight".

He laughs as though he gets my drift, and nods repeatedly, "Ok, ok, ok", he says, heading quickly for the exit, "Thank you!"

"I might have given him a few more examples", I say to the barista, thinking of a few politicians, gun kooks, mass shooters and deniers of climate change, "but I don't know if he would appreciate them".

I spend most of my days alone, working in the orchard, a quiet working retreat away from the flow of tourists and the brutish world of politics and wingnuts.

A lone hawk screeches in the grey distance overhead, obscured by the canopy of avocado trees under which I labour. A large dark avocado, a late ripener, drops heavily, clunking through the leaves and branches above until it plops to the ground with a thud. I'm glad it doesn't drop on my head. It's plump and weighty, and I know how much it hurts to get bonked by one.

The only sound besides the hawk, is the breeze sweeping dry leaves along the ground, and brushing back green leaves in the trees. I stop to listen. The harvest ended several weeks ago, only a few ripe stragglers remain, like the one that just fell, hidden from view from a flush of new growth.

The leaves tremble in succession from one tree to the next, as warm air whooshes through the orchard like a twirling, invisible dancer. More fruit falls in its path. Plop, plop, plop. The season has turned ghostly. It's fall in California, even though most days



bleak white blanket of a thick marine layer, harder still to imagine this place without water, the only way these trees will survive or produce more fruit.

This morning’s cloud cover, the first heavy bit of moisture we’ve had in weeks, will soon give way to blue sky and sun. Until recently, however, there’s been little to no marine layer, unusual for coastal weather, the hot dry easterlies pre-vail, blowing like a furnace down the mountain passes and through the valleys, raising temperatures to record levels.

“This feels really unnatural. When’s it going to finally rain?” I hear people ask.

“Soon, I hope”.

Sightings of coyotes and mountain lions have become more common as they come down from the hills to search for food and water. Dried up reservoirs give the best visual of how bad it is

it still feels hot, dry and summer-hardened.

An abundance of lime-green bulbs, about the shape and size of small pears, grows on the trees, the promise of a new crop, next season’s harvest, food for avocado lovers, provided all goes well, no frosts, wind storms, or pestilence, and a winter full of rain.

Another winter without rain, however, will turn this semi-arid region of extreme drought into a desert with devastating crop losses, catastrophic fires, and panic for almost 40 million residents competing with their straws for less and less of the less-than-half-full glass that remains of the state’s water.

Days like this, without the shortening and lengthening of shadows, time stands still; it’s hard to worry about shortages, difficult people, and lumbering RVs in the

Tourists – and some residents – seem to have no clue how dire things are.

Late October, and it’s still ungodly hot. Whether it’s unnatural I can’t say, but the ongoing heat and sun have sucked whatever moisture was left in this drought-stricken land a long time ago, leaving plant and animal parched for precious water. Sightings of coyotes and mountain lions have become more common as they come down from the hills to search for food and water. Dried up reservoirs give the best visual of how bad it is.

Signs posted along rural roads in Paso Robles wine country tell another story, “DRY WELL”.

In some places, we’re drawing water from the Pleistocene era. But we still must contend with billionaire water

We still must contend with billionaire water smugglers buying up properties in the north county so they can suck up, bottle and ship elsewhere what little of our water is left so they can get rich

smugglers buying up properties in the north county so they can suck up, bottle and ship elsewhere what little of our water is left so they can get rich. I take a long draught from the bottle of well water I carry with me in the field. Like all the other critters, I'm thirsty. I'm lucky to drink from a well that still runs. I refuse to buy FIJI Water.

The sun's intensity frightens rather than warms with its penetrating rays. I've already felt the knife to remove three melanomas, a skin cancer that will kill if left untreated. And these were borne from days of exposure when the sun felt – and probably was – much less intense.

Now, the sun itself cuts, its rays slashing through fibre and filament, making it unpleasant to bear more than a few minutes of exposure, as if the sun might actually make an incision and draw blood. I'm lucky to be working in the shadows of an avocado canopy that spreads out over several acres for which, thankfully, there's still enough water to irrigate, and cover enough to stay sheltered from the direct sun.

As we head into the rainy season, all the prognosticators point to a potentially record winter with wetter-than-normal rainfall, fuelled by what has been billed as a "Godzilla" El Niño. The above-normal temperatures of the Pacific Ocean will pack our winter storms with a powerful punch, driving a flow of moisture and rain like a machine, dumping buckets as they go, forecasters say. We need the water and the snowpack to lessen the dire state of its lack in the region's worst drought in 1,200 years, according to those who have studied the phenomenon. But even Noah's flood, apparently, won't fix the drought.

Farmers fret as water shortages threaten to destroy field crops and fruit-bearing trees, and land sinks from an overdraft of groundwater in the Central Valley, while rich celebrities sitting pretty in LA and the Bay Area pour tens of thousands of

gallons of water on their estate lawns and gardens. The rationale, presumably, is that they will pay the fines and rate hikes, no big deal, they've got plenty of money. But what happens when there's no more water? What good will their money do then? It's a mindset that never ceases to amaze me, the "la-de-fucking-da" attitude toward precious resources like water.

Before the West's major water projects, many driven by greed, land values in California, where there wasn't any water, were cheap, even beachfront property. But land grabbers like William Mulholland fixed that, securing millions for himself and his friends in one of the state's most ambitious and notoriously crooked water projects to develop the San Fernando Valley and LA basin. Water wars are nothing new here.

Only the promise and supply of water can keep us alive, let alone wealthy, and from cutting one another's throats.

-----  
For sure, as I might have informed my Japanese friend, we have our share of wingnuts in this country, and, like the rest of the world, they're either politicians or religious or angry young men intent on killing, or scientifically challenged, many with their own radio shows, unable to fathom the potential devastation – extremes in weather, for example – from climate change, and who for no other reason than lack of an educated and critical mind don't know the difference between civil law and religious superstition.

I wonder how so many seemingly intelligent people, Americans especially, because we presumably value a good education, can be so easily fooled by the crooked and the small-minded, giving precious time, energy and money to mean and vicious people and causes. The GOP, for example, is in disarray, hobbled by the mean and nasty, ultra-right wing rabble, mostly members of the so-called Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives, attempting to hijack the

government, threatening at every turn to shut it down. I don't understand or like this kind of thinking – if you can call it that – from hijackers and so-called “freedom” fighters. But I encounter them almost every day – not only in the news, but in the coffee shops, bars and workplaces here at home.

“How come you have to be such a fucking liberal?” a local farmer and freedom fighter once asked me during a political talk. Not long after that, he cut off my water supply to a field I was tending on his farm. I begged him for water as the heat of summer intensified and the plants began to wilt and fruit was forming but going bad. He refused, the ripening fruit fell off, and we lost our harvest and all of the income from our hard labour.

I'd rather be a liberal than someone who sabotages another's labour or livelihood on the basis of politics and grudges, unless of course I want to start a revolution, or recklessly meddle in other people's affairs, or become a hater and a fool, of whom we already have plenty. Only the wicked, as I understand, seek to destroy what another has built to provide for himself and his family. Only a fool will try to usurp what is not his to own or possess.

In many ways, I live and work like a hermit, mostly alone with plenty of – maybe too much – time to think. I like being physically active. It gets my mind off things, and that's a saving grace out here. Still, the mind will play tricks. Maybe the world isn't all quite as bad as I imagine, not as long as the sentient and wise prevail, who nonetheless appear to have been purged from the planet.

The only reliable witnesses to truth in this era are the modern court jesters – Steven Colbert, Jon Stewart, Matt and Trey and now Trevor Noah – the wise clowns and fools on network television, who aren't afraid to mock and laugh at the pretenses and posturing of those who wish to put on a show and wear the emperor's new clothes and get promoted by real fools.

Meanwhile, I'm feeling beat up from my labours, lower back complaints, hips, feet, neck and shoulders and try not to be too discouraged. But an even deeper hurt speaks to me: Where do I belong? Where's my home? What happened to my country?

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A lone plane passes overhead, and the wind brushes through the leaves again. Two hawks soar silently above the southeastern hills, taking updrafts, diving, circling back, climbing, climbing, and circling closer and closer until they clip wings as they swing past each other in the late afternoon breeze, an aerial dance all predicated on food and water.

Through the long rows of trees, in the tunnel of green they form, I try to follow a light path but seem to carry a heavy burden. Imagine living fully present, I think, fully engaged. How would that look? What worries then? What difference would it make? It's all I've got, really, to keep from falling into a pit of despair thinking of how far we've fallen as a “free” nation, where people will as quickly piss in their water as drink it.

I enjoy seeing my hometown through the eyes of tourists who pass through and look with wonder upon the beaches and ocean that surround us, who are curious and wonder, “What is, ‘Wingnut?’” They keep it fresh and real.

For the first time since late last winter, I hear the sound of a tree frog in the orchard. They've been so quiet in the dried up creek at home. Last winter they were so loud one had to raise a voice to be heard. If and when they return, the roads will be slick and wet and the road to Big Sur much less travelled, and Godzilla will be pouring down his fury upon us. **CT**

*Stacey Warde is a chicken farmer, freelance journalist, and semi-retired editor who lives on a ranch with his life partner on the central coast of California.*

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# THE SPIES WHO CAME IN FROM THE HOT TUB

In the cover story from *ColdType*'s first issue as a magazine, **Tom Engelhardt** tells how a 2003 CIA operation in Italy took US taxpayers for a very, very, expensive ride

LIKE SO MUCH ELSE IN OUR MOMENT, it contravened laws the US had once signed onto, pretzeled the English language, went directly to the darkside, was connected to various administration lies and manipulations that preceded the invasion of Iraq, and was based on taking the American taxpayer to the cleaners.

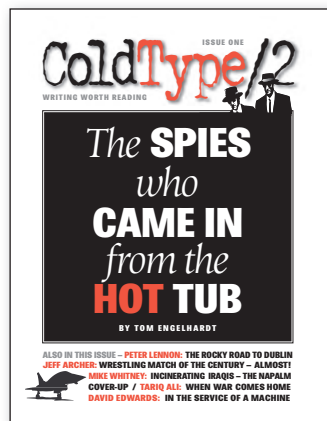
I'm talking about a now-notorious Bush administration "extraordinary rendition" in Italy, the secret kidnapping of a radical Muslim cleric off the streets of Milan in early 2003, his transport via US airbases in Italy and Germany to Egypt, and there, evidently with the CIA station chief for Italy riding shotgun, directly into the hands of Egyptian torturers. This was but one of an unknown number of extraordinary rendition operations – the estimate is more than 100 since September 11, 2001, but no one really knows – that have been conducted all over the world and have delivered terror suspects into the custody of Uzbeki, Syrian, Egyptian, and other hands notorious for their use of torture. It just so happens that this operation took place on the democratic soil of an ally that possessed an independent

judiciary, and that the team of 19 or more participants, some speaking fluent Italian, passed through that country not like the undercover agents of our imagination, but, as former CIA clandestine officer Melissa Boyle Mahle told Reuters, "like elephants stampeding through Milan. They left huge footprints".

So let me skip the normal discussions of kidnappings, torture, or whether we violated Italian sovereignty, and just concentrate on what those footprints revealed

Those gargantuan footprints – and some good detective work by the Italian police based on unsecured cell phones (evidently from a batch issued to the US diplomatic mission in Rome), hotel bills, credit card receipts, and the like – have given us a glimpse into the unexpectedly extravagant "shadow war" being conducted on our behalf by the Bush administration through the Central Intelligence Agency. So let me skip the normal discussions of kidnappings, torture, or whether we violated Italian sovereignty, and just concentrate on what those footprints revealed. If the President's Global War on Terror has been saddled with the inelegant acronym GWOT, the Italian rendition operation should perhaps be given the acronym LDVWOT or La Dolce Vita War on Terror.

Of course, if Vice President Dick Cheney



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Despite the well-reported use of taxpayer dollars to fund trysts, vacations, and the good life, nary a peep on the subject has come from Congress; nor has anyone yet called for the money to be returned to the American people

could say of administration tax cuts, “We won the [2002] midterms. This is our due”; if House Majority Leader Tom DeLay could charge his transatlantic airfare to Great Britain on an American Express card issued to lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and food and phone calls at a Scottish golf-course hotel on a credit card issued to Washington lobbyist, Edwin A. Buckham; if Halliburton could slip a reputed \$813-million extra in “costs” into a contract to provide logistical support for US troops (including “\$152,000 in ‘movie library costs’ [and] a \$1.5-million tailoring bill”); then why shouldn’t the Spartan warriors of the intelligence community capture a few taxpayer bucks while preparing a kidnapping in Italy?

Here’s what we know at present about this particular version of La Dolce Vita:

- The CIA agents took rooms in Milan’s 5-star hotels, including the Principe di Savoia (“one of the world’s most luxuriously appointed hotels”) where they rang up \$42,000 in expenses; the Westin Palace, the Milan Hilton, and the Star Hotel Rosa as well as similar places in the seaside resort of La Spezia and in Florence, running up cumulative hotel bills of \$144,984.

- They ate in the equivalent of 5-star restaurants in Milan and elsewhere, evidently fancying themselves gourmet undercover agents.

- As a mixed team – at least six women took part in the operation – men and women on at least two occasions took double rooms together in these hotels. (There is no indication that any of them were married – to each other at least.)

- After the successful kidnapping was done and the cleric dispatched to sunny Egypt, they evidently decided they deserved a respite from their

exertions; so several of them left for a vacation in Venice, while four others headed for the Mediterranean coast north of Tuscany, all on the taxpayer dole.

- They charged up to \$500 a day apiece, according to Craig Whitlock of the *Washington Post*, to “Diners Club accounts created to match their recently forged identities”, wielded Visa cards (assumedly similarly linked to their fake identities), and made sure they got or used frequent flier miles. (The Diner’s Club, when queried by *TomDispatch*, refused to comment on any aspect of the case.) Our master spies “rarely paid in cash”, adds Whitlock, “gave their frequent traveller account numbers to desk clerks and made dozens of calls from unsecure phones in their rooms”.

- To move their captive in comfort – for them – they summoned up not some grimy cargo plane but a Learjet to take him to Germany and a Gulfstream V to transport him to Egypt, the sorts of spiffy private jets normally used by CEOs and movie stars.

You would think that our representatives in Congress, reading about this in their local newspapers, might raise the odd question about the rich-and-famous life-styles of our secret agents. So far, however, despite the well-reported use of taxpayer dollars to fund trysts, vacations, and the good life, nary a peep on the subject has come from Congress; nor has anyone yet called for the money to be returned to the American people.

Now, because a Milan prosecutor had the temerity to issue arrest warrants for thirteen of our high-flying spies and to seek warrants for another six of them – the great majority are officially “on the run”



and assumedly have been pulled out of Europe by the Agency. The CIA station chief who headed the operation had even bought a retirement house near Turin. “That he thought he could live out his golden years in Italy”, reports Tracy Wilkinson of the *Los Angeles Times*, “is another indication of the impunity with which he and the others felt they were operating, Italian prosecutors say”.

A small tip for Interpol investigators: If any of these agents are still at large in Europe, I wouldn’t be checking out obscure safe-houses. The places to search are top-of-the-line hotels, Michelin-recommended restaurants, and elite vacation spots across the continent.

When evaluating the CIA’s actions in Italy, you might consider the Agency’s mission statement as laid out at its website: “Our success depends on our ability to act with total discretion... Our mission

requires complete personal integrity... We accomplish things others cannot, often at great risk... We stand by one another and behind one another.” Or you might simply adapt an ad line from one of the few credit cards the team in Milan seems not to have used: The nightly cost of a room in Milan’s Hotel Principe di Savoia, \$450; the cost of a Coke from a mini-bar in one of its rooms, \$10; the cost of leasing a GulfstreamV for a month, \$229,639; that feeling of taking the American taxpayer for a ride, priceless. **CT**

*Tom Engelhardt runs the website [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com), where this article was first published Engelhardt is a co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of a highly praised history of American triumphalism in the Cold War, *The End of Victory Culture*. A fellow of the Type Media Center, his sixth and latest book is *A Nation Unmade by War*.*

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