

A DAVID RAFFIN
SAMPLER

a feast of
appetizers



DAVID
RAFFIN

David Raffin

A David Raffin Sampler
(a feast of appetizers)

by
David Raffin

Vision? Nary!

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This is a work of faction. It contains a heady mixture of fiction with facts mixed in. The fictive parts are factual. The factual parts are fictive. Public figures are used for effect. No public figures were harmed in the manufacture of this book.

People and events are purely coincidental.

Published by VN publications

Olympia, WA

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This is forward

This is a sampler. It is free. Feel free to give it to your friends. You may also give it to your enemies. People forget that you can give gifts to your enemies. Probably because they don't want to spend money on them. As this book is free, I have solved that problem for you. You're welcome.

Of course, this book is also an advertisement for the books that these samples are culled from; and the website, <http://davidraffin.com>. But enough about that until the end.

The best thing about *Buy Nothing Day* is the reasonable cost.

Thank you.

David Raffin, 2012

<http://davidraffin.com>

Selections from *Perils of Free Thought*

Government should fund the Opera habit so people don't have to score Opera on the streets. On the back of napkins & envelopes. Sad.

I do not wish to be addressed as "sir." I have never been knighted.
I wear the armor simply because it suits me.

I punched a six-year-old once. He deserved it.
Wait, that sounds bad if I don't mention I was also six.

If you lose an appointment you are then disappointed. Is it better to be ordained or preordained? If preordained, no need to show up.

If you procrastinate while writing a book about procrastination you are doing research; thus, not procrastinating. Your research is faulty.

It's all fun and games until the villagers burn down your house and chase you with pitchforks. But it's worth it, for science.

There are no bird's eyes in Bird's Eye brand frozen vegetables.
The important thing is it tastes like there are. That's brand identity.

There is a downward spiral. Is there an upward spiral? It sounds bad too.
I want nothing to do with that unpleasant, wrongheadedly idealistic, vortex.

Went to a store, helped up an old man who fell down. Isn't it always so?
You tend to pick up more than you came for at the store.

When a hedonist says "Don't do anything I wouldn't do" are they just saying that for the pleasure of saying it? I think they are.

I eat a burrito, then it rains. Cum hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy, yes. The other way around I can make true. It rains. I eat a burrito.

I eat the whole apple, including the core but excluding the stem. (Wait, if I exclude the stem does that count as whole? If not, is an apple without a stem less than a whole apple?)

I fear zero gravity ants. They think they're better than me.

I filled out a form detailing any conditions people should be aware of in case of emergency. I wrote that I was "emotionally damaged."

I have all the necessary ingredients to make Gingerbread Men.
And the requisite man cutter.
I suppose any knife qualifies as a "man cutter."

I have to get off this continent. It's drifting in a direction I don't want to go. Let's not even get into the slow speed of travel. Glacial.

I rarely cry. However, once I dropped a hat and as a result of that action I cried like a little girl. Sadly, to this day, there are some who point at me and say, "He cries at the drop of a hat."

I regret evolution screwed us on (the lack of) wings. I have no plumage. Aggravating.

I spend a lot of time making sure the earth doesn't tilt; and, if it does, compensating in real time. Usually by leaning the other direction.

If men had wings they would require larger seating on airplanes. Irony.

Ladder from estate sale-- used but once by a little old lady. She only used it to go up.

Last time I was in a hospital the pillowcase said: "Do not steal pillowcase." Now that's a souvenir. A talking pillowcase.

Local time used to mean noon in your town = when the sun was directly overhead. The railroad changed this. Now we're on someone else's time.

Losing, then finding is better than just losing; yet not as good as just finding. The worst combination is, of course, finding, then losing.

Magic. I can pull a coin from your ear. Do you need a coin pulled from your ear? How long has it been stuck there?

Fish tears are what make the sea salty. Fish can't bear sorrow. Their hearts have but one atrium.

Gingerbread Villages always end in tragedy. Giants descend on them and eat them.

Regarding Hansel & Gretel: Who builds a house made of flour and sugar in the forest? Then complains when it attracts pests? What a half-baked idea.

Gotta Have Heart

This is my little black heart. ♥. If lost, please return.

It has a chain on it. You could drop it in a mailbox.

It's hard to tell from this picture but it's made of lead and is therefore hard.

I think I left it in San Francisco.

It was once on fire.

The fire is what blackened it.

Greatest fear: someone will shout "Duck" whilst I'm looking at a duck and I am then hit by a random flying object. Probably a duck statuette.

I accidentally sounded the doomsday vuvuzela. Please accept my apologies. It won't happen again. Case in point, it can't.

Most ants toil to gather sugar for others. They are just like people.

Short history of war: There is passion & sorrow. Money changes hands. Some imaginary lines move. Some books are written.

Tear gas always makes me sad.

The anti-joke is antidote to the joke. It contains a trace of a joke. Just enough to inoculate against deleterious effects. Delightful.

The cheetah, the lion, unfortunately named; poor maligned kitty cats! No one wants to do business with them.

Think of how frightening I would be wearing a snuggly lion hat! Fearsome!

A sign at the occupy encampment advertises: "Free Hugs." It is a protest over the commercialization of hugs.

I calculate the odds at 8.9%. I am the margin of error.

In a world where love comes in buckets anything is possible.

Sometimes I think love buckets are used to bail out love. You know, in an emergency on a boat. When there is too much love.

Schrödinger's love bucket may or may not contain viable love.

That is, the love in Schrödinger's love bucket may have gone off. There are no expiration dates on love buckets. Troubling.

Love buckets are hard to get rid of. No one wants someone else's discarded love. Who knows where it's been? Dirty old love.

Honestly? I prefer Leibniz over Newton. Stop looking at me like that.

One millionaire buys a painting for 5.2 million dollars, from another millionaire. The artist starved to death. It is a still life.

How many millionaires does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Millionaires don't screw in lightbulbs. They like to pounce out from the dark.

Two millionaires walk into a bar. Then they complained the bar was set too low. Millionaires never watch where they are going.

One millionaire. Two millionaires. Three millionaires. A gated community. Job creation.

I kid the millionaires, sitting there, eating that terrible millionaire food, wondering how they got themselves in such an odd predicament.

Millionaire food is the worst. Purina makes it, it tastes awful. But it's very expensive. That is what makes it so desirable.

They call it class warfare because it's classy. It shows good breeding.

When the aliens land I have prepared the following explanation: "We have found evil to be an extremely profitable philosophy. We hope you are kinder than we have been."

The bucket of sorrow mostly complains that it is only half-full.

Keep your eye out for good deals on prosthetic eyes.

I love raccoons. They are lukewarm on me. Same old story.

The building of a snow fort is, in itself, a serious act of war.

The Amish do not build snow forts. But they do get together and erect snow barns.

The Amish are famous for their group erections.

The Amish bend over backwards to help each other with their erections. That's the Amish way.

When water falls, no one asks if it is OK.

They just say: "Look at that water fall."

That is the cruel beauty of water.

These cups run over. Or runneth over, be they olden-timey cups.

There is an old saying: "When in Canada, do as the Canadians do." It's a Canadian saying.

The word "value" is a buzzword that means people are looking to swindle you. Especially should you be offered a "super-value" or an "extra-value." Run.

I will write an alternate history novel where JFK ate something else for breakfast the morning he was shot. Oatmeal? Probably.

As it stands he ate bacon. Bacon will kill you every time, butterfly.

Dentists number your teeth. This is to help keep them from getting lost in your mouth. Watch out, your teeth are out of order.

I always feel the same, more or less.

It is springtime. I am sometimes convinced that the world is a porn film and I am simply not in the cast. But I'm going to get an old-style bullhorn and start directing, so that it will be more artful. So if you see me out there, shouting into the cone, that is why.

Someone just asked me what kind of women I like and I told him "bookish, super*-intelligent ones." He shook his head. Imagine here a tall black man shaking his head at my nonsense.

*The prefix "super" always indicates the possibility of a cape.

No one writes like me. Except my clone. And he's more a photocopy than a digital copy. There's degradation. It's degrading, being a clone.

A Word About My Alma Mater

from Rhyme or Treason

I am a graduate of the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. My fellow alumnus, who graduated a geological age before me, Matt Groening once said Evergreen is a breeding ground for artists and revolutionaries. This statement may be categorized as simple hyperbole.

There are only two degrees one can earn by attending Evergreen: hunting & gathering or theoretical physics. Sometimes people work doubletime in order to earn both, but this is very rare. No, I find one is generally either a hunter & gatherer or a theoretical physicist and the differences between these two alumni groups are a bridge rarely crossed.

Like many colleges, Evergreen is not well respected by a segment of the local population who hold students, both undergraduate and graduate, responsible for any number of ills besetting the local region; such as the disappearance of livestock and the plundering of fields – as well as the high cost of whiteboards, erasers, and dry erase markers. There is also a spate of unexplained spontaneous internal combustion which plagues the area in late spring every year.

I am not saying the staff and students at Evergreen are not at least partially culpable for the ill will between a segment of the community and themselves. What I am saying is that it's all just a little overblown. For instance, it is both a right of passage and a requirement for diploma for students to demonstrate knowledge of how to make a human head explode with the power of thought. However, students only do this one time in order to graduate and most never use this skill again. In this way it is very similar to the common foreign language requirement at any school. While certainly hundreds of students graduate every year the individual culpability in these deaths is negligible. Scarcely more than a statistical blip. No, heart disease is still the big killer even in Olympia, Washington. The cure is more diet and exercise—not finger-pointing.

Upon graduation it is advisable to buy an alumnus T-shirt. Because Latin has fallen out a favor, these shirts are usually incorrectly worded as “alumni” which is plural – even though they designate an individual wearing a T-shirt who is more accurately described as an alumnus, singular. But who's to quibble? The shirt is not to prove your firm grasp of Latin. The shirt is to help you pick up women. Or men.

Once wearing the shirt people will approach you.

They'll say things like, “I hear you can make heads explode.”

To which one can only reply, “Yes, but only during finals week.”

Excerpts from the Bush Memoir

a look inside the mind of the chief executive

from Rhyme or Treason

Soon after I took office we were faced with challenges peculiar to the office of President. Here we were, right off the bat, on day one, having to face difficult issues. Thankfully I had brought with me to the Oval Office our nations best and brightest. My advisers were even more knowledgeable than myself and were able to provide to me, the president, their expertise on whatever issue was on the table.

Our first issue which we dealt with was one that had plagued the campaign trail and this nation as well. I'm speaking, of course, about the homosexual problem. Here this nation needed decisive leadership and I gathered my advisors to help provide it.

Our first topic of discussion was a man named Osama bin Laden. It seems a letter regarding Mr. Laden had been left by the outgoing administration. I inquired to my right-hand man, Karl, whether Mr. Laden was a homosexual. I was informed he was not. I asked whether, regarding Mr. Laden's orientation, he was an appropriate subject for presidential scrutiny. I was informed he was not.

Hindsight is a difficult challenge. I wish we knew then what we know today. Osama Bin Laden's sexual orientation is, in fact, questionable. We simply do not know. We could have acted more decisively and formed an exploration committee.

September 11, 2001 was a terrible day for the presidency. I still remember the moment the urgency sunk in. I was on Air Force One. I was at a loss.

I asked Karl, "How... how could the homosexuals have done this to us?"

He replied, "We do not know. We just do not know. One thing is for sure — they didn't do it alone."

"Who else could have been involved?" I asked. "The ACLU?"

"Perhaps," said Karl, "I'm afraid it's just too early to speculate. Maybe them. Maybe the feminists. Hell, maybe all three. It's just too soon to say — we have to be careful, remember what happened with Richard Jewell."

"Was he a homosexual?" I asked.

"We don't know," was the reply. "It was never properly investigated. All we know is that he wasn't involved in the Olympic bombing. That's all we know."

It was a terrible time to be the president. Matters of urgency were constantly arising yet still I was burdened with a legacy of poor fundamental research left to me by the previous administration.

As our poll numbers fell we tried to focus on the positive. We took decisive action. Karl suggested that we hire a plant, a man we could count on, to sit in with the press corps during presidential briefings. He would ask leading questions about our administration's decisiveness and triumph over difficult conditions.

I asked where we would find such a man. I was told there were places where you could hire a man to do just about anything that was required. A sort of Jack of all trades. I was told these men were called "escorts."

"I thought escort was a fancy name for prostitute," I said.

"It is," said Karl, "but that doesn't mean you have to hire them for sex. Oftentimes you can just hire a man to listen. It stands to reason you can also hire a man to ask questions; the kind of questions that you want asked. If you have questions that you want asked you are better off to pay a man to ask them. That way you know what you're getting."

"Well," I said, "it sounds good, but aren't these men homosexuals?"

"Not necessarily," said Karl, "sometimes they're simply gay for pay."

"I've never heard of that," I said.

"In essence," said Karl, "it's simply the offering of goods and/or services in exchange for money."

"But that's capitalism!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly," said Karl, "the very basis of our economic system and way of life."

"Could we hire one to be the head of FEMA?" I asked.

"I really think we should hire someone with slightly better qualifications," said Karl.

I still cannot believe I won reelection. It is a triumph of the Spirit. A victory over the three-pronged forces of the axis of evil: the homosexuals, the feminists, and the ACLU. Americans have spoken, clearly. Four more years. Four more years, a mandate, and a big chocolate cake sent to me by every large oil company; they all chipped in. All in all, while I like chocolate cake, I thought it was a chintzy gift.

When news broke of trouble on the Gulf Coast I was as surprised as anyone. After it had been going on for a while, and it appeared this hurricane thing was not going to just blow over, I even cut my vacation short to address the seriousness of the issue.

When I got back to Washington I found Karl had taken decisive command of the situation. He was sometimes answering two phones at once, a feat which impressed me as much as anything I have ever seen him do. He was taking copious notes and had drawn graphs and diagrams directly onto the walls of the Oval Office. He had the kind of take charge attitude that I look for in a subordinate. Knowledgeable. Full of fire. A man to be reckoned with.

When I walked in I could hear him on the phone asking, "How many homosexuals were involved? With the planning, I mean."

I then knew that things were even worse than I had suspected. When he was off the phone I asked him, "How many homosexuals were involved?"

"We just don't know," he said. "Maybe all of them. Maybe this is it. Our worst-case scenario."

"All of them?" I asked. I was astounded. "Six thousand homosexuals acting together against us?"

"I wouldn't put it past them," Karl said.

"What about Brownie?" I asked.

"I'm sure he's doing the best he can," Karl said.

This I was sure of. Brownie has always done a heck of a job. A real heckuva job.

I only had one question. "How did they make it rain?" I asked.

"How do they do anything?" Karl said. "It's an abomination."

The prince of Saudi Arabia visited the White House. I spent a lot of time with him. My advisers had informed me that their ways differ from ours. They have a completely different language. They view the world differently too. I asked if they behave differently because of the different way they view the world. Condoleezza said it was a "puzzler." I never did get an answer. I guess no one knows.

While the prince was here I was told I should observe some of their ways. To this end, I often held his hand in public and frequently kissed him on the cheek. Three times. One, two, three. I also prayed toward Mecca five times a day. Karl said it was okay if I prayed to Jesus. I figure he is also in Mecca.

Karl has not stopped laughing at me since.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited the United States. While he was here he spoke at Columbia University and received a lot of press. While it has always been our position in the executive office that the Iranians are wild eyed extremists, I must admit he made a number of good points. He, as I, is a firm believer in capital punishment. He also is aware, acutely, of the homosexual problem. However, he lost me when he claimed Iran had no homosexuals.

“How can this be?” I asked Karl. “Does he know something that we don’t?”

“I think he’s playing some sort of a definitional game,” said Karl.

“Still, you’ve got to look into it,” I said.

“We will,” said Karl. “It’s now at the very top of our priority list.”

“As it should be,” I said.

I cannot believe we lost this election. I guess it makes a difference who is running. I guess people won’t just vote for any Republican. I guess the name Bush still has staying power. We’ve done a lot and we’ve also had accomplishments. My place in history is, at last, assured.

Questions About Cake

from Rhyme or Treason

Why are there no funeral cakes anymore? Why is this event not commoditized by the baker's guild?

Cake is a standard at every other event. Did bakers find it was unwelcome to price gouge on the cake served at a funeral? When funeral cake was discontinued did the price of wedding cake rise?

I understand the Amish still serve funeral cake. They are set in their ways. They still mix it by hand. They make it themselves, bypassing the commercial bakeries altogether.

Was the cake discontinued for lack of choice? Did the mourned get to choose the color, shape, and flavor—stipulating such in a will or codicil, or were these choices thrust upon the mourned by a powerful subset of the mourners? Did someone finally wise up and say, “Who died and made you God?”

Did funeral cake enter disfavor when it was linked, intrinsically, with culinary fascism? Did Mussolini have a funeral cake? Was there enough for everybody? Is that what sullied its reputation the world over?

When Marie Antoinette famously said, “Let them eat cake!” was she talking about her funeral?

My research indicates that funeral cakes may have been somewhat akin to giant cookies. Presumably because it was disrespectful to let the flour rise.

What about funeral pie?

Are cream pies somber enough? Fruit? Pecan?

What about a funeral pudding?

Funeral cotton candy? Made at the funeral in a funeral cotton candy machine?

What about fondue? Which is more appropriate? Cheese, chocolate, coconut, honey, caramel, or marshmallow? Again, who will choose?

Milton Snavely Hershey's body was dipped in chocolate, then caramel, then rolled in coconut. However, there was no dessert served at the reception. He forgot to leave his dessert instructions.

This is not the sort of thing people like to think about. That's why people die without wills. That's why people die with wills but failing to stipulate their final dessert wishes.

Today if you attend a funeral and you want cake you are best advised to keep it to yourself. If you stand and say, "Hey, where's the cake!" people will think less of you.

Do not even think of sidestepping the problem by bringing a cake to the funeral. People may cry.

You don't want to be known as the one who ruined the funeral.

More Than One Day in the Life of Igor Igoravitch

from Rhyme or Treason

Igor loved his country. That's why he worked for the KGB. Unfortunately, he also loved having extra money to spend on the black market, and that's why he often sold secrets to the CIA.

Igor cursed the duality of man.

He worked out of a small office in a building very near the Kremlin, in the basement. It was a prestigious location, and given the general geography he conducted his work in, and the fact that he was KGB, people assumed he was something of a big deal. It helped in some measure that he was a large and imposing man, standing over six feet tall, with powerful chiseled features always seen in Soviet art but rarely seen in real life. He walked quietly, often walking past people without ever garnering their attention. Ordinarily this skill, stealth, would have been valued by the agency and Igor would have been an agent in demand, holding important posts—perhaps even foreign.

Alas, it was this very stealth which held him back. In fact, hardly anyone knew who he was, or what he was doing; which was an odd thing for a person, KGB or not, who lived and worked right at the Kremlin's doorstep. At least, he often had thought, this had kept him out of trouble during the purges; and really, who could ask for more?

In reality, Igor's job was as drab as that of a clerk. Because that's what he was — an investigatory clerk in KGB supply. He had gotten the job because he was the only one in his class who could sew on a button so that it would stay, which was sometimes—but not often—one of his job duties.

Not that anyone cared.

Igor led the quiet life. He had his work, which consisted mostly of filing paperwork which no one read—indeed, often it never left his office filing system. He had his home life. He lived at home with his aged mother, in a fairly nice apartment near his work.

His small home was filled with items he had acquired on the black market. A rich variety of foods, fine furnishings, art works, and a collection of literature, much of it frowned upon by the Politburo. No one asked any questions, because he was KGB.

One of his long-standing duties was to find out who was stealing boots from KGB supply. He had put in the order himself and kept meticulous files on the fact that there were missing boots and he was looking into the matter. No one read

these files, and no one knew the boots were missing, other than Igor, his mother, and the KGB officers who occasionally had to wait for new boots, some of whom came in to see if they could make a deal to get some faster (they could).

Shoe shortages were rare in the USSR. After the revolution many people had no shoes. Lenin decreed all would have them. Thereafter shoes were mass produced. For years there was a glut. Warehouses were filled with shoes and factories were busy turning out more. Boots, on the other hand, were in shorter supply.

Igor knew he would never find the man responsible for “mishandling” the boots; but he did know his files would show, without question, he had gone all out to find the culprit.

He would, of course, never find the man because he was the man. And it turned him a nice safe profit.

Every day his mother would serve him up her borscht, telling him, “Eat, eat, it will make you strong, like Stalin.”

One day, Igor challenged her, saying, “You always say that. But Stalin was not strong. He had been a sickly boy, he was short and one arm was shorter than the other. I know, mamma, I’m with the KGB. Khrushchev, on the other hand, can lift a barrel over his head and spin it, I have seen him do this myself at a Kremlin mixer.”

The confusion was caused by the fact that Stalin literally meant “man of steel,” a name the Soviet leader had assumed when he was a revolutionary.

Igor would meet the man from the CIA at the Kremlin wall, near where American journalist John Reed was buried. He would sell him secrets right there and no one noticed, a tribute to his nondescript nature.

Now the thing was, Igor was not in a position to actually know any real state secrets. He was a glorified clerk, KGB or not.

He made up for this deficit by large scale fabrication.

Eventually, Igor was the best man on either side at making up secrets, both by his believable manner and the close proximity to actual events.

One day, in 1959, he sold them a little secret. He told them France was developing an atom bomb. It was typical of his information up to that point. It was of questionable value, but sounded very important. Around the time of the French A-Bomb test of 1960, Igor became a source of great value.

Everyone on the American side who was in the know was abuzz about the new man on the inside.

“We know so little about him,” they would say.

“But he must be a reliable source, most reliable, he works so near the Kremlin.”

Igor’s value, as well as his price, had risen upward.

Still, the fact that the French had an atom bomb?

Regardless of the fact that this was due to the French getting tired of being dependent on the US and also being dictated to on foreign policy matters, this was of questionable use to the US, more of interest to the USSR.

Igor’s guilt was great. He resolved that every time he gave the US some imaginary tidbit, he would give the USSR the same info, but state that he had a source on the other side and that this or that was happening and everyone was concerned.

In this way, from that point on, whatever Igor made up would in some way come to pass.

In the Kremlin, everyone in the know was abuzz about the man in the KGB who had forged an important relationship with a turncoat American agent.

“We know so little about him,” they would say.

“But he must be a reliable source, most reliable, he works so near the Kremlin.”

Igor’s value, as well as his place, had risen upward.

Igor got a new office, in the Kremlin, albeit in the subbasement, and still people left him alone.

Igor foretold the Bay of Pigs, or something damn close, and his information actually ended up saving the Cuban revolution.

His apotheosis¹, on both sides, was complete with the onset and conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis. No one of any importance on either side wanted to make a move without consulting him.

Igor’s value, as well as his price, and place, had risen upward.

Both sides would come to him, by the grave of John Reed, and say, “I hear you have information.”

Igor would deny he had information.

They would say, “Surely you have something?”

¹ I will make the effort to explain all difficult words. This word means “with raisins.”

Then Igor would pause, for dramatic effect, and say, “Maybe I could find a little something, somewhere.” He would then put them off for a few days.

An important lesson he had learned was that, in order to get men to believe you, timing was of the essence. If you led them on that it took a few days to get “facts,” they would then believe them as the God’s honest truth, even the atheists.

Igor was working on the “everything” secret, the reintegration of everything into a whole. Some people might call this a “grand unification” theory. It would be his crowning glory, would bring the US and the USSR together; after which he would retire, a hero to the people, collectively.

He was unfamiliar with Entropy, the principle in physics which states that on the largest scale, over time, order tends to disintegrate into disorder; a principle discovered earlier by the Buddha, who said, “Decay is inherent in all compound things.”

It should be noted here that lack of knowledge in these areas never has kept anyone from doing anything they had set their mind on. In this way, all science and religion is rendered irrelevant.

In the US, doubt was taking seed, or at least some people were realizing that good fact checking had never hurt anyone, only that the reverse was true.

Bob Jones was a CIA man who had been dispatched to the head office of the FBI to get some information. While it may seem odd that the international spying arm of the USA would go to the domestic spying arm to find information on a foreign matter, it was in fact routine. The files of J. Edgar Hoover were considered authoritative on the issue of communism, both foreign and domestic.

When Jones was shown into the office, Hoover was sitting behind his huge oak desk, a menacing figure who seemed ill lit, even in the brightly lit room. Beside him sat his right hand man, attorney Roy Cohn, sitting in a less grand chair, his thin body appearing spindly and bent, a note pad at the ready.

“I understand you need information...” said Hoover, who then looked at Cohn who looked to his pad and said, “Jones, Bob Jones, CIA, non-Communist as of last check, eight months back.”

“There is a man in Moscow, Igor Igoravich, an important source of intelligence since 1960. We were wondering if you could tell us anything about his contacts. Is he really as good a source as we believe?”

Hoover looked to Cohn. Cohn looked to his pad. Cohn looked up and said, to Hoover, “No known association with Charlie Chaplin, non-communist.”

“Excuse me,” said Jones, “Charlie...”

“Chaplin,” replied Cohn, after checking his notes again.

“The old silent movie comedian?” asked Jones.

Hoover leaned forward and said, forcefully, yet in a hushed tone, “I discovered, long ago, that where there were communist actions brewing there was Charlie Chaplin.” Every time Hoover said the name his face twitched involuntarily. “Every time there was a union rally there was Charlie Chaplin. Every time there was premature-anti-fascism there was Charlie Chaplin. Or someone who was close to Charlie Chaplin. Or someone who was close to someone who was close to Charlie Chaplin.”

“It was then that I discovered the Charlie Chaplin theorem.”

“The Charlie Chaplin theorem?” quizzed Jones.

Cohn stated, “The idea that where you find communism you find Chaplin, or someone no more than seven persons distant to Chaplin.”

Hoover continued, “I call it ‘Seven Degrees of Separation from Charlie Chaplin.’ It proves conclusively that Chaplin is the prime mover of the modern communist conspiracy. He is the lynchpin. Without Chaplin, communism would wither and die.”

“Our Chaplin file is housed in an entire wing of this building,” said Cohn. “We’ve had to destroy many volumes of the private writings and letters of Thomas Jefferson to make room for them. The only consolation is that it has saved the American people some money in this cold winter, having reduced our heating costs.”

“Money that can better be spent fighting international and domestic communism,” added Hoover.

“Now when we determine who is and is not a communist, we no longer need look at all their activities. We just need to show whether or not this person has been in contact with Chaplin or in contact with someone who has been in contact with Chaplin. Only in this way can we determine who is a real American.”

Hoover stood and pulled down a chart behind his desk.

“In 1949 we knew for certain that three percent of the American people were communist tinged. Now, In 1962, that percentage has risen to fifty-six. We project that if something is not done soon to quell this red insurgency, one-hundred percent of America will be communist, and we will have lost the cold war.”

“Chaplin?” asked Jones.

“In Switzerland,” replied Cohn, after checking his pad.

“We can’t get at the bastard,” growled Hoover, his fists clenched, his face glowing bright red.

“Look,” said Jones, “Surely you’re having me on. You must know how silly this is. This is happenstance, coincidence.”

“You,” intoned Hoover, “are a fool.”

“Just like Truman,” added Cohn.

With this, Jones left the office.

Hoover turned to Cohn and said, “Have that man followed. Full surveillance. Tap his phone. If he’s not a red he’s a pink. Put our best man on him.”

“Matt Cvetic?” asked Cohn.

“He’s not entirely trustworthy,” said Hoover. “Put him on it, but have a man tail him also.”

“In fact, if this ‘Jones’ character is indicative of the kind of man employed by the CIA, I want a man with the FBI on each CIA agent, whether at home or abroad. In fact, I want two men on every man. And I want pictures. And I want new Chaplin checks done on every FBI agent every thirty days.”

“Now you better go see about clearing out some more of the Jefferson and Paine papers, we need the room for new files.”

Cohn dutifully went about his government business.

Jones went next to a diner a half-mile away. There he met agent Phillips, also of the CIA.

“How was the meeting with Hoover?” Phillips asked.

“Hoover and Cohn have both gone completely mad. Nothing of any import can ever come from that office,” replied Jones.

Their waitress took careful note; as did Cvetic, seated at the counter. They filed conflicting reports, and a third agent was assigned to keep tabs on them both.

In Moscow, near the grave of John Reed, Igor met with his CIA contact and was not made nervous by the presence of a third man who kept looking at the CIA agent but disregarded Igor as an insignificant occurrence and made no note of him.

Igor told his American contact that President John Kennedy was a communist, getting his orders straight from Moscow.

“Fascinating,” said the CIA man. “Johnson, we had suspected, but Kennedy? This will send shock-waves through the agency.”

Two days later, Igor had a special meeting with Khrushchev.

He rode the elevator from his office to the top floor of the Kremlin.

Khrushchev was at his peak—robust in health, alert, attentive.

When he saw Igor approach he spread his arms wide and joyously shouted, “Tovarich!²”

He threw himself at the KGB clerk, administering a massive bear hug.

“Tovarich!” he repeated, “you have brought important news?”

“Indeed I have, Tovarich, Indeed I have,” replied Igor.

“It’s about the American President, John F. Kennedy.”

“War is imminent?” Khrushchev quizzed, wide-eyed.

“Nyet,” replied Igor. “The American president is a closet Trotskyite³. The counterrevolutionary forces have taken America in a bloodless coup. They wish regroupment with the Soviet homeland. They are open to friendship, cooperation.”

Khrushchev brightened. “Then we will call a summit meeting. This is good news, we must celebrate.”

“Have you ever seen me do this?” asked Khrushchev, as he lifted a barrel above his head and began spinning it.

“Da,” replied Igor.

Khrushchev tossed the barrel aside. “Have you ever seen me imitate an airplane?” Khrushchev ran around the room arms outspread, making a buzzing noise with his mouth.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” applauded Igor, humoring the man.

“If only Stalin could be alive to see this day. He did not believe in me,” said Khrushchev, “If only he could see this day!”

“I was in the hall when you exposed Stalin’s crimes against the Soviet people,” said Igor.

“Da, many crimes. Stalin hurt and killed many people. But you must also remember that he loved the people. That’s why he killed them. His love was so strong. He had no choice! You always hurt the ones you love.”

With this, he went back to running around the room, imitating an airplane.

² This word also means “with raisins.”

³ As does this one.

A summit was called and there was a jubilant mood everywhere but in the head office of the FBI as well as the head office of the KGB.

A sullen mood had taken over a handful of men in both countries, men who were sworn to protect the American and Soviet way of life, respectively.

In the head office of the KGB, one man said to another, “Do you know why we had a revolution in the first place?”

“It was because of the Russian orthodox church. The church was totally self-denying, live only for next world; standing only, no sitting. No luxury. Guilt. No Joy. Not even music.”

“And the Czar?”

“Also gave nothing to the people. We will not go back to those days.”

Hoover and Cohn were apoplectic.

They sat in an office with Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson, hatching all manner of plans; many of them insane, some of them ingenious in their insanity, none of them that all four men could agree on.

To break the tension they played dominos.

Johnson believed they should escalate the small police action in Vietnam into a full-scale war: “but,” he was adamant, “we should not ever actually call it a war.” This, he believed, would aid in keeping the status quo.

Cohn thought that they should prop up a young FBI agent who could play guitar and sing, albeit off-key, name of Zimmerman. He felt that by foisting a music on the public through the government’s grip on the media that seemed deep and rebellious but said little, it could divert public attention. The rebelliousness they fostered would be harmless. This, he felt, would keep the young quiet.

Nixon was a believer in a new drug called LSD, or “acid.” He thought they should forbid its use, thereby creating an immediate demand for product. Also that they should release as much marijuana into the general population as possible. This, he believed, would keep the young docile— as well as create generational strife to divert public attention.

Hoover believed they should just kill the president, and then round up everyone ever tainted by Chaplin and send them to re-education camps. He stated that he was a believer in simplicity.

Cohn wanted to call these camps “spas,” as he believed many people would check themselves in, and they could make a few bucks on it as well.

Johnson called Hoover and Cohn “Fascists.”

Nixon called Johnson a “pre-mature-anti-fascist.”

Hoover, Cohn, and Nixon immediately wrote off Johnson as a communist sympathizer.

This action was broken only by the occurrence of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and “high tea,” the observance of which, Johnson said, proved Cohn was really a “pinko son-of-a-bitch.”

The KGB men, having not nearly as advanced a notion of public relations as a means of public control, just thought they should kill Kennedy and possibly remove Khrushchev, in order to keep the status quo.

This took them only five minutes to agree on, exchanging intricacy for expediency, and letting them knock off early.

This, they felt, proved the superiority of the Soviet model.

Igor was not a part of either group, but was needed to implement the plans of both sides.

Igor’s mother served him another bowl of borscht, saying, “Eat, eat, it will make you strong like Stalin.”

“Stalin is dead, Mamma.”

“Because he never finished his second bowl of borscht,” she said.

Igor’s bags were packed and he was ready.

He was to travel to Odessa and catch a boat, under the guise that he was a fisherman. He was to make his way to Italy, where he would change identity and catch a plane to France. There he would change identity again and make his way to Britain. From there to Mexico. From there to the US, crossing the border on foot at night.

Igor traveled as an illegal, on a false passport, no diplomatic immunity. Igor, unlike most other Soviet illegals, had US government backing, and thus, protection.

He got into Dallas early that Friday morning. He bought a daily paper and read the full page ad claiming Kennedy was a communist sympathizer, signed by a man named Weisman. Across town, Jack Ruby read the same ad and called the paper to tell them he was outraged.

Just after noon, Igor made himself comfortable in the grassy knoll. He looked up at one of the windows of the Texas Book Repository. He had been briefed that Oswald was actually a lousy shot, despite what the records had been doctored to say. But he knew that Oswald and the ensuing panic would make it easy for him to just walk away, getting lost in the crowd. This was Oswald’s purpose.

At 12:26, The presidential motorcade was nearing target.

Kennedy was seated between Texas Governor John B. Connally, Jr., and Senator Ralph Yarborough. Suddenly, Kennedy stood up, spread his arms, and asked, "Have you ever seen me imitate Air Force One?" He made a buzzing noise with his mouth.

"Sit down and wave," sniped Jackie. "Really! Try to act more presidential."

Kennedy complied.

A few minutes later, Igor squeezed the trigger.

At this moment his conscience was finally at peace; as he was securely working for both sides, in their common interest.

Even though this was not according to his plan, he was still, at heart, a patriot.

Johnson took the oath of office at 2:38 PM. He promised a new era of peace and tranquility.

Ruby killed Oswald two days later.

Ruby knew nothing, that was pure happenstance.

Igor flew from Mexico to West Germany, where he crossed into East Germany, and then caught a flight to Moscow.

When he arrived, he was met by senior KGB officers and arrested.

Two days later he found out that it was due to the boots.

He signed a confession that implicated Khrushchev.

Moscow was abuzz with "Nikita's boot scandal," and he was forced into retirement, the only Soviet leader at that point who failed to die in office.

This, he never lived down.

Brezhnev never, ever, imitated an airplane in the Kremlin.

Thereafter, all world leaders considered such an act best left to each man's private bedroom.

Wonderful places I have been

from Drugs, Sex, & Bicycling

I went to the Nez Perce reservation to deliver a car and some computers. I drove the car that was being delivered. So I followed the guide car that would take me back. This took us to Stonehenge, or rather, we stopped at Stonehenge. From across the river the Maryhill Stonehenge replica looks great, emerging from the banks on the Washington side of the Columbia that I thought looked like Egypt. I have never been to Egypt, so I can imagine it however I like. Up close it looks cheesy. While I have never been to Stonehenge, I know that the texture is not right. And it is all standing upright, in an attempt to replicate the original before it lay in ruin. At the entrance there is a marker which explains the replica is a monument to the WWI dead from the town of Maryhill and surrounding county. It is a comment on the futility of war. The marker also explains that the replica is incorrectly oriented toward the sun, as Mr. Hill thought Stonehenge was a place of human sacrifice.

He also built the first paved roads in the Pacific Northwest, and the Maryhill museum of art.

Walking to the back of the replica you can read the graffiti on the faux stone pillars. The Class of 1932 was here before you. The graffiti suddenly ends sometime in the 1950s, coinciding with the town of Maryhill drying up and blowing away.

Down the hill a little is the grave of Mr. Hill. It is a giant grave marker after all, just like the pyramids.

Back to the road.

There is a small town and in that town there is a town hall and courthouse the size of a house, a restaurant that looks sort of like a Denny's but is not, a burger shack, and a few homes and trailers. We stopped at the restaurant and ate. As we left I picked up a free book by the door from a large stack.

We passed through the dead zone. An area filled with little pup-tents on each side of the road. The tents are filled with canisters of poison gas manufactured and stored by the military. The canisters lie in the tents to protect them from the heat. The canisters slowly decay. There is a sign on the road warning you that you are passing through the dead zone. From this sign, to the sign on the other side of the encampment, and vice versa, should there be a leak, you will die. A perfectly reasonable way to store your poison gas and lay your main roads. Nearby towns have sirens installed.

We cross the Columbia again. The houses start to look like plantation houses in the deep south. I have also never been to the deep south. I am simply filled with false memories of false fronts. We enter the radio station dead zone. There is nothing on the radio but three stations, all religious.

We drive and drive and drive.

We enter Idaho and then, in minutes, are on the reservation. We deliver the goods. We eat something. We look at giant soft-bodied cockroaches. Our host points out that they are soft-bodied. I do not know why. There are many kids playing basketball. The reservation is the only normal place we visit this day.

We do the beginning in reverse. We enter and exit Idaho. The plantations. The poison pup-tents. The tiny town.

We get pulled over and get a ticket, literally for not being locals.

The rest of the way I read aloud from the free book I picked up in tiny town. It turns out to be about global government, THE JEWS, and all the sneaky things THE JEWS are up to.

We pass by the grave of Mister Hill who built his Stonehenge as a plea for world peace.

We return twice. To contest the ticket. The first time they send us away because their weekly (or was it every other week?) visit from the traveling judge had been called off due to illness. Tiny town does not have its own judge. The second time we win in court. The traveling judge suggests, mildly, that tiny town simply tickets non-locals to bring in cash. Because few visitors go to the restaurant twice.

The Worst Magician in the World

or, Xmas with the science deniers

from Drugs, Sex, & Bicycling

The building resembles nothing more than a large, well-equipped, television studio. There is a stage. A large stage. There is going to be a show. There are cameras. The room is built for acoustics. In many churches the rooms are built with great ornamentation. This room is not built for visual aesthetics. It is bare of art. There are no windows. It is a television studio. There are two cameramen at the back of the room. They sit on specially designed chairs and operate large cameras. If you have seen a television studio you'll understand. No expense was spared in constructing this church in the guise of a television studio. Why? Because television is a modern God. Television is an anchor point to modernity. Also, television is an effective tool used to hawk products.

To many people, things that are on television are believable. Are trustworthy. Are beyond questioning. Too many people.

It's a packed house. On the way in everyone was issued small white candles. They are awkward to hold; what with the standing and the sitting. The standing and the sitting reminded me of Catholic Church, but without the kneeling. Stand. Sit. Stand. Sit. Repeat. Try to figure out where to put your candle. Especially with the clapping. There are no applause signs; there don't need to be. When you don't clap, the believer next to you will turn to you and remind you to clap.

A band plays. If you have ever, momentarily, seen something like the PTL club on the ubiquitous local Christian television station you will understand. A mediocre band plays mediocre music. Except the drummer is really good. I do have to note that it's really hard to find a truly good drummer. As the music was insipid, I spent time watching the drummer. He had it all: style, skill, charisma. I wish he were in a good band.

The music was, I suppose, exactly what you would expect. It was Christmas Eve in a hard-core evangelical Christian church. They changed the lyrics to Beethoven's Ode to Joy. I was probably the only one who noticed. I assume I was the only one in the room with a passing familiarity with the original. Recently, Garrison Keillor sparked controversy by complaining that Unitarian Universalists would take songs and rewrite them, removing Jesus. This irks Garrison Keillor (That, and the fact that Jews write Christmas songs that don't include Jesus). Those in the room familiar with that recent controversy are probably in agreement. I only note this to point out the hypocrisy. They change lyrics to put Jesus in. This is at least equally dishonest. I don't care. I just don't like hypocrisy. Should it

mean anything, Jesus is quoted condemning hypocrites a dozen or so times in the Sermon on the Mount.

Back to the cameras. The cameras broadcast to a large screen, in real time, at the front of the house. This means that you can choose to watch the action on the stage, or you can choose to watch the action on the stage occurring on a giant screen directly behind the stage. Whichever vision you consider more believable. It is also projected on a smaller large screen at the back of the house; presumably so those on the stage can watch themselves. I don't know if these images are broadcast anywhere else. I was left wondering why so much money was spent on this extravagance. Why not take that money and use it to feed, clothe, and shelter the poor? What Would Jesus Do?

Perhaps he would rather watch himself on a big screen while he talked. We'll never know.

After a long musical set the preacher came forward and began speaking. He wore a wireless headset. The band packed up behind him and shuffled off. The drummer, both my hope and light of the evening, exited.

The pastor insisted that everyone stand and shake hands. He suggested that you say hello and ask your neighbor if he or she would give you \$100. "You never know, maybe you'll get it!" he said.

I know this was meant as a joke. However, as a joke teller, I can tell you that jokes frequently mean something. This joke meant that it was going to be a materialistic Christmas. These were materialistic people. Moneychangers in a temple. Good Americans.

The sermon was, understandably, Christmas centric.

He spoke about how long it took the Magi to show up at the manger. He spoke of biblical scholars arguing about how long this journey took. The length of the journey, and he favored the longer length, was meant to prove the importance of the occasion. I found this reasoning fallacious. I found the math, what there was of it, specious. I also must say, in the end, I don't really care how far a camel can travel on a given day in the desert. I never did much care for story math problems.

I knew it was Christmas because a dozen people on the way into the building all made a point of loudly wishing me a "Merry Christmas." Several of them seemed particularly offended when I didn't reply. Some of them even made snotty comments. This brings into question the sentiment. Are you wishing me a Merry Christmas? Or, are you demanding that I reciprocally wish you one?

What if my jaw hurts? What if I'm deaf? What if I'm not having a "Merry Christmas"?

The meme of the night was the sinful nature of the average person's thoughts. "Tonight I'm going to show what each and every one of you thought this past year," the pastor said. "Back here on this big screen, every idea and every thought you had. Can I get a volunteer to be first? Anybody want to go? Oh you wouldn't like that! To have all your thoughts seen by everybody!"

The audience chuckled.

This was the beginning of my viewing the pastor as the world's worst magician. He was a magician, on a stage, who kept promising to pull a rabbit from a hat; while never pulling a rabbit from a hat. It was an hour of misdirection.

I didn't care if my thoughts were broadcast on the screen. Other than the fact that these people would probably kill me. Even then, I would have to be impressed that he could actually do this.

This meme about your thoughts on the large screen kept coming back up throughout the night. It was a mild winner with the crowd. Why? Because they saw truth in it. They didn't want their thoughts broadcast. Why? Clearly, I was surrounded by evil people. People I should not trust. People who didn't even trust themselves. I didn't laugh. I didn't think it was that funny.

The pastor turned his attention to those who may not believe in God. "Now who put that thought in their heads?" he asked. The crowd started to become agitated. A few people said some variation of, "the devil!" (The devil is very popular with the holy rollers. If you have a devil you don't have to own your own failings or urges.)

The pastor suggested, in a surprise move, that it was God who sowed the seed of doubt in the doubter. That this, doubt itself, was proof of the existence of God.

He went on to talk at length about how you would spend most of your existence in the afterlife and therefore if you did not prepare for the afterlife, you were essentially a fool; like someone who lives in a floodplain and does not prepare for a flood.

The crowd was very excited by this. If you are an educated person you may recognize this as a version of Pascal's Wager. Unfortunately, Pascal's Wager is idiotic. Pascal suggested that if you didn't believe in God, and God existed, you would lose. However, if you did believe in God, and God didn't exist, you had nothing to lose.

It's ridiculous. You have your life to lose dedicating it to... what? Who's God? What God? What flavor? There's no way of knowing other than "faith." The faith breaks down to the faithful, the true believers, as "believe what you're told" "take our word for it – or else!"

The problem is fundamentalists are not even tolerant of each other. The world is full of “one true religions.” They gladly tell you that all the other believers will be damned. The only thing they dislike more than other flavors of religion are those who are nonbelievers. This, they all agree on.

The pastor alluded to people who “may have been drug here.” I simply don’t think there were that many in the room. This is a classic example of “preaching to the converted.”

I think he really wanted to “save” a heathen atheist on stage. I was kind of expecting a plant in the crowd to stand up and “see the light.”

I have some respect for him that he did not do this.

He went on to declare that Jesus had always known you. “From the time you were nothing, being created. Jesus knows the time of your death, the cause of your death, and everything that you do in between.”

This is predestination. A classical teaching of Calvinism. The idea that God knows everything. The flip side of predestination is that there is no free will. If God knows everything that I’m going to do then I must be held blameless for anything I do. I have no choice. This is the logical conclusion drawn from that argument.

This is interesting. In the biblical story of Judas, Judas has no choice but to turn in Jesus. Jesus announces that he knows one of them will turn him in. If there is predestination, Judas had no choice. When fundamentalist Christians hate Judas they hate him for no reason. They hate him for what God ordained him to do. Ordered him. Offered him no choice. Used him, in fact, like a puppet. Because under this doctrine we are all puppets.

Believers in predestination don’t draw the logical conclusion from their argument.

The pastor next demanded that disbelievers “make a choice and accept Christ,” which they can’t do. Because they have no free will. He just told them that they had no free will, then demanded that they make a choice.

His argument has absolutely no internal consistency.

He is the worst magician in the world. (But he thinks he’s the best. I think you have to, in order to be the worst.)

The pastor suggested that if you are in distress you should “give up and accept Christ.” He suggested this would make your life better but he gave no example of how this could be. Predestination suggests that you were being beaten down on purpose, in order to make you choose to accept Christ, which you were

predestined to do, so it's not really a choice anyway; and if you don't, that was predestined, so who could blame you? Evidently God. Cruel trickster God.

This portion of the sermon seemed almost suggestive of a comparison to Buddhism. Except that Buddhism actually attempts to provide a system to alleviate suffering by giving up materialistic attachments. Fundamentalist Christianity asks you, instead, to give up and place everything in the hands of a man who 2000 years ago was tortured to death in your name. That is a blood sacrifice cult. I'm sorry, that's creepy.

Fundamentalist Christians don't focus so much on the message of Christ from the Bible, such as the Sermon on the Mount, Which even humanists such as Kurt Vonnegut appreciated, as they do in a slow, torturous, lingering death. They find meaning in death. Not life, death. It's a horrible message.

In the end the candles, given in the beginning, were lit, candle to candle, starting at the stage. Then the lights were dimmed, and the pastor declared, "Behold what was dark is now light!"

This was supposed to prove the existence of God. Somehow this was supposed to prove that this particular flavor of Christianity was also the one true religion. That atheists should embrace the light of Christ. That believers of other faiths should too. Even though they have no free will. Perhaps because they have no free will.

It's a poor payoff. But it's over.

No rabbit. No hat.

The author is a pragmatic agnostic who prefers reading Friedrich Nietzsche to the Bible, because Nietzsche has better jokes. He has been to a Lutheran church, a Catholic church, a Mormon church, and a synagogue (where he got to wear a yarmulke from the loaner yarmulke bin), but has never felt closer to hell than when surrounded by fundamentalist Christians.

Why I Will Always Remember Rachel Corrie

from Drugs, Sex, & Bicycling

Rachel Corrie died March 16, 2003 when an Israeli bulldozer ran her over. According to Wikipedia, “the details of the events surrounding Corrie’s death are disputed.” What is not disputed is that Rachel Corrie, of Olympia Washington, is dead. The cause of death was being run over by an Israeli bulldozer while she was protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip.

Afterwards, Billy Bragg wrote a song about her. A play, “My name is Rachel Corrie” was produced in London, New York, and even Israel. A book of the same name was published. None of these are the reason I remember Rachel Corrie.

In May of 2003 I was walking in downtown Olympia with Tim McBride, a local musician. We were distributing flyers for a show. Toward the end we walked by the park at Capitol Lake, directly underneath the state capital. There was a giant tent set up there in memorial. I hadn’t been downtown in months. I had also not been paying a lot of attention to the news, for various reasons. I knew someone from Olympia had died in the Gaza Strip. I didn’t recognize the name. I remember the loose hay strewn on the ground. We went in to give them flyers. Inside the tent were a few tables and some people. There were also some pictures of Rachel Corrie. I recognized her immediately.

When I was six or seven years old, we had a huge sandbox in front of my house. It wasn’t really a sandbox – it was a place where a cement slab was going to be poured, but hadn’t been poured, and wouldn’t for several years. Thus, it was a large sandbox. A friend of my mother’s brought over her daughter one day. She also brought a friend of her daughter. We were all about the same age. We spent the afternoon in the sandbox, which wasn’t really a sandbox, yet was. I never saw this other girl again. I know that, weeks later, she ran into traffic, was hit by a car, then died. No one told me this. I overheard my mother speaking to her friend on the phone. There is no other reason I would still remember this girl who I spent a few hours with when I was seven years old. Why would you remember it otherwise? It’s a completely random memory. Nothing happened. What did happen happened later. Therefore, it is not the memory of what happened that is memorable but the memory of the events surrounding the meeting. A memory of a retrospective loss. As the great American standup-tragedian Brother Theodore once proclaimed, “Only what we have lost forever do we ever truly possess.”

Roughly a year before Rachel Corrie died I went to a local political meeting. It was a group I had been involved with, at a time when I was involved heavily with such groups. It was the last meeting of that group I ever went to. I knew when I went there it would be the last time. I had no intention of coming back. I was just finishing up loose ends. The meeting was more of the same frustration lessened by the fact that I was no longer truly involved. Across the table from me and to my right was one person in the room who I had never seen before. She was the only person in the room who I didn't know. It was my last meeting and her first, though I don't know if she ever came back. I don't remember her saying all that much. I know that she did speak, I just have no recollection of what she said. I know it had nothing to do with the incessant infighting plaguing the group, a main reason I was leaving. This, if nothing else, endeared her to me. In fact, I concentrated more on her than any of the topics on hand. That is the only way I got through the meeting. When it was over I thought about talking to her, but I didn't want anything drawing me back into the circle. So I left. I left with a sense of relief, put it out of my mind, and never really thought about it again.

When I saw her picture I recognized her immediately. I once spent two hours sitting across from Rachel Corrie and now she's dead.

The thing is, I shouldn't remember her at all. The time I met Rachel Corrie was actually the time I failed to meet Rachel Corrie. I thought about talking to her but I didn't. Between the time I sat across from her and the time I saw her picture in her memorial tent I had not thought about her at all. Why would I? She was just a girl I didn't talk to. That is the reason I will always remember Rachel Corrie.

Saddle Up!

from Bouquet of Thorns

I'm going to get right back on that merry-go-round. Yes. Even the tragic merry-go-round accident will not thwart me. I am reckless.

I rode the merry-go-round again. I did buy a ticket. I am not a scofflaw. Though the economics of the ride, distance traveled divided by price, are well known to be poor.

I did not build the track or the mechanism. I live in the world as it is and I make the best of it, as must we all.

Critics of the merry-go-round decry the repetitious nature of the ride: travel being in the most round-about way, the sights redundant. I find this familiarity comforting. I do, however, admit to being disturbed, on some level, about the onlookers. Why do they stare? Why do they stand in place? Why are they resistant to ride themselves? Why do they point and wave? Do they not know I shall return?

Today I brought my own saddle. The attendants do not like this. Still, the customer is always right. I simply find the provided seating inadequate. I also brought a book. I have learned from hard experience.

I do not like the music at the merry-go-round. I have never been in sync with the popular taste. If I hear that song one more time I shall not be held accountable.

Often I take photos of my travels. When I leave my camera at home, invariably I see something good and kick myself. Once I asked a fellow traveler to snap my photo with my favorite horse and I was asked to leave.

The scarcity of good depot stations on the merry-go-round is troublesome. The attendant will not help you with your baggage. Generally there is one central station a passenger must enter and exit by. The route is thereafter fenced. If I wish to travel from point A to B, I am forced to travel from point A to point A and then walk half-way 'round. This is extremely inefficient. I have complained that this problem creates a resistance to the wide adoption of the go-round as a means of popular mass-transit.

Occasionally I exit as I please, jumping the barrier, though this is strictly against the rules.

Dictators and talk show hosts favorite recipe and personality sketch

from Bouquet of Thorns

Adolf Hitler.

Toaster strudel. Still current yardstick for being a Complete Dick.

Steve Allen.

Poundcake. Well regarded by his peers.

Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

Paella. Least known of World War II fascist dictators, Most famous for still being dead. Brutal.

Jack Parr.

Apple Brown Betty. His desire to get away from “old hat comedy” cost him the sponsorship of Lucky Strike cigarettes. Sometimes unpredictable.

Idi Amin.

The flesh of his enemies. A formidable rugby player and sportsman.

Chevy Chase.

String cheese sculptures. Mood depends upon back pain. Hypnotic powers of persuasion.

Muammar al-Gaddafi.

Hummus. Collects clown figurines. Frequently complements the beards of others.

Arsenio Hall.

Vegan lasagna. Congenial. His elimination of the desk in the hosting environment earned him the ire of the office furniture industry.

Saddam Hussein.

Pork brains in milk gravy. Once had a book written in his own blood. Liked kittens, puppies, and torture.

Oprah.

Sweet potato pie. Was once mean to Dead Kennedys front man Jello Biafra.

Kim Jong-Il.

Pizza. Delusional. Loves movies. Personality similar to common Hollywood producer.

Flights of Fancy

from Bouquet of Thorns

Because of our modern dependence on oil, transportation is a sticky subject. Everything becomes mired in it. It jams up the thoroughfares of rational discourse.

Bicycles are better.

The Wright brothers were bicycle mechanics. In this light it is only proper to describe airplanes as bicycles in the sky. That is why the first airplanes were biplanes.

Airplanes are actually my least favorite form of bicycle and biplanes are my favorite form of airplane. (I do not count the pedal-powered dirigible. It has a special, but separate, place in my heart.)

It is a travesty that they will not let you use a biplane in the Tour de France. They say you can't use an airplane in the bicycle race. Luddites.

I personally make extensive use of a bicycle when traveling between and betwixt points on a map. While I do this, I never wear any form of spandex shorts. I do not even own a pair of spandex shorts. I similarly do not spend any time thinking about Lance Armstrong. What he is thinking, feeling, wearing. He never crosses my mind. I'm too busy making calculations regarding wind resistance.

It turns out that the more you ride the faster you get. Wind resistance slows you down but can be overcome through hours and hours of practice. This is not, though most would argue, due to the fact that you become stronger through repeated wheel-assisted-wayfaring. No. It is due to the fact that all those hours spent on the road lead you inextricably to what every experienced bicyclist knows: the quickest way to travel from point A to point B is not to travel faster. It is not accomplished by building stronger muscles, by having lighter bicycles, by your choice in clothing. No. The quickest way to bicycle from point A to point B is by bending the two points in space/time so that they are closer together. Every experienced bicyclist comes to know this fact, given enough time on the road.⁴

Yet they don't allow you to bend space/time on the Tour de France. When asked they refer to this as "cheating." Luddites. They hate science!

⁴ The scientific basis behind this was first explained in a paper written in 1969 by radical physicist Benny Hill. Most famously the paper contained his theory that time slowed down while being chased by bikini-clad women; however, from the vantage point of the viewer, time spent up. In the footnotes of the paper there was grateful acknowledgment of the work of Charles Chaplin regarding sadness and laughter; specifically the space/time relationship bridging the gap between these two points.

The airplane was invented as an extension of the bicycle. Built from bicycle parts by bicycle mechanics in a bicycle shop.

However, it was primarily built because Orville was a good brother.

Orville and Wilbur Wright were brothers who were bicycle mechanics. Wilbur was suicidal. He suffered from a great sadness in addition to a love of the bicycle. His brother, Orville, was very supportive. Together they invented the airplane in order to give Wilbur the ability to jump from a great height⁵. The airplane was invented primarily for this purpose.

In fact, the first airplane was originally called “the suicide machine.” The name didn’t last because of marketing considerations. It is a very bad name for advertising purposes.

Wilbur’s primary concern was that he felt he needed to attain a great height. Something sure. Thus the need to build a very good bicycle. Even if it was only for one use.

So they set to work. There were failures. Mostly failures. But they kept working. They made refinements. They had some successes. Then, Kitty Hawk. Yet, it was still not right. More refinements were made. The sky bicycle was able to go farther and more importantly go higher. They worked ceaselessly. Even when the press became interested they did not publicize the true nature of the machine. Nor did they feel the need to impress upon the public that this was a new type of bicycle, which should have been self-evident.

At last the Wright brothers sky bicycle was ready and was going to be used for its inaugural flight. Then some ass invented the parachute. All that work for naught.

Wilbur eventually died of tuberculosis in 1912; but he was going to jump from an airplane.⁶

5 It is true he could have jumped from a hot air balloon. It is clear he would never do so as he was a bicyclist.

6 In 1976 an American woman named Jessica Rae went up in an airplane in order to jump from it recreationally. She exited the sky bicycle at an altitude of 102,800 feet. When she pulled the cord her chute failed to deploy. She fell freely. She landed. She bounced three times. She got up. Not a scratch. Not a bruise. No broken bones. This is the danger Wilbur feared even at great heights.

The arrogance this breeds in the average person is immense. The first thing Jessica Rae did upon meeting the crew who came to the site of her landing was dare some man to do it.

He was not so fortunate.

Lions! (Not Tigers) Oh, My!⁷

from Bouquet of Thorns

Until recently I was seeing a Christian girl. It all ended tragically as she was eaten by a lion. I tried to warn her.

This has always been a problem though it is now a seldom occurrence.

Even so, the cultural legacy of this fact has lead inextricably to a modern persecution complex. Christians tend to watch for lions everywhere, even where none exist.

That's why Christian commentators are concerned yearly about a supposed "War on Christmas" and the "Sanctity of Marriage." They are stricken with an instinctual fear.

What they are saying, translated, is: "Help us! We're being eaten by lions!"

Seen in this light the behavior is more understandable. Sympathetic, even. That's why their talk show hosts and commentators are so bitter. This is what evolution has done to them. It helps to understand.

Still, when was the last time you knew of a Christian being eaten by a lion? (Please refer to the opening line.)

Christians are driven to reproduce – some tend toward large families, some shun non-traditional relationships – because they must increase numbers to survive: ie, not be wiped out by lions.

When the fear of lions becomes the engine that drives all action it is hard to see, ultimately, the lions. It's the lion in the room. People stop talking about it and all that is left is the fear. The all-consuming fear.

You can't blame the lions. After all, lions have to eat. Lions also have a drive to survive and reproduce. It's not their fault they have an instinctual urge to eat Christians.

With the population of Christians increasing exponentially it is a wonder that there are not more lions in the world. However, as stated, a lion eating a Christian

⁷ I previously wrote on the subject of bears. That is beyond the purview of the current topic.

(Every time I make a footnote I remember that all footnotes are haunted by the ghost of David Foster Wallace, and that knowledge serves to depress me. Further, all footnotes were haunted by the ghost of David Foster Wallace before his death. I think this served to depress him.)

Also, as everyone knows, Tigers run around trees until they turn into ghee.

is a seldom occurrence. Sadly, this equates to the lion being listed as a “vulnerable” species. Their natural foodstuff is plentiful yet their numbers inversely decline. Nature is completely out of whack. As the predators disappear the prey multiply. What can be done?

Lions are placed in reserves and zoos and forced to eat alternative foodstuffs.

They survive, after a fashion.

Christians take their families to look at them, hardly registering that this is their greatest fear, the stuff of all nightmares. That fear is sublimated to other areas of life. Perceived threats multiply even as actual lions dwindle.

In Roman times, early lion conservation consisted of interest groups forming to feed Christians to the hungry animals. Historians consider this a band-aid solution. The Romans believed it would be effective; however, as lions continued to decline in numbers the proper nutrition of a Christian-centric diet was brought into question. It turns out that lions can’t survive on faith alone.

About the Author:

David Raffin is a metaphysicist, writer, and performer. He lives.



“His perversions are oddly analytical.” – Jodi Lamm, Author, *Titan Magic*

His work has appeared in the national newspaper *Funny Times*, *Rosebud magazine*, and others. He has been praised by *MaximumRock’n’Roll*.

Published by VN publications

Olympia, WA

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Forthcoming:

Perils of Time Travel (another book of no small danger)

Scenic Cesspools & other indignities (a tragi-comedy about work)

Drugs, Sex, & Bicycling

Bouquet of Thorns (tragic stories disguised as jokes)