

**Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus – Frances Pharcellus Church – New York Sun  
– 9/21/1897**

"DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old.  
"Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.  
"Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.'  
"Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?"

"VIRGINIA O'HANLON.  
"115 WEST NINETY-FIFTH STREET."

VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! He lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

**Gamalielese – H.L. Mencken – Baltimore Sun – 3/7/21**

On the question of the logical content of Dr. Harding's harangue of last Friday I do not presume to have views. The matter has been debated at great length by the editorial writers of the Republic, all of them experts in logic; moreover, I confess to being prejudiced. When a man arises publicly to argue that the United States entered the late war because of a "concern for preserved civilization," I can only snicker in a superior way and wonder why he isn't holding down the chair of history in some American university. When he says that the United States has "never sought territorial aggrandizement through force," the snicker arises to the virulence of a chuckle, and I turn to the first volume of General Grant's memoirs. And when, gaining momentum, he gravely informs the boobery that "ours is a constitutional freedom where the popular will is supreme, and minorities are sacredly protected," then I abandon myself to a mirth that transcends, perhaps, the seemly, and send picture postcards of A. Mitchell Palmer and the Atlanta Penitentiary to all of my enemies who happen to be Socialists.

But when it comes to the style of a great man's discourse, I can speak with a great deal less prejudice, and maybe with somewhat more competence, for I have earned most of my livelihood for twenty years past by translating the bad English of a multitude of authors into measurably better English. Thus qualified professionally, I rise to pay my small tribute to Dr. Harding. Setting aside a college professor or two and half a dozen dipsomaniacal newspaper reporters, he takes the first place in my Valhalla of literati. That is to say, he writes the worst English I have even encountered. It reminds me of a string of wet sponges; it reminds me of tattered washing on the line; it reminds me of stale bean-soup, of college yells, of dogs barking idiotically through endless nights. It is so bad that a sort of grandeur creeps into it. It drags itself out of the dark abysm (I was about to write abscess!) of pish, and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of posh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash.

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But I grow lyrical. More scientifically, what is the matter with it? Why does it seem so flabby, so banal, so confused and childish, so stupidly at war with sense? If you first read the inaugural address and then heard it intoned, as I did (at least in part), then you will perhaps arrive at an answer. That answer is very simple. When Dr. Harding prepares a speech he does not think of it in terms of an educated reader locked up in jail, but in terms of a great horde of stoneheads gathered around a stand. That is to say, the thing is always a stump speech; it is conceived as a stump speech and written as a stump speech. More, it is a stump speech addressed to the sort of audience that the speaker has been used to all of his life, to wit, an audience of small town yokels, of low political serfs, or morons scarcely able to understand a word of more than two syllables, and wholly able to pursue a logical idea for more than two centimeters.

Such imbeciles do not want ideas—that is, new ideas, ideas that are unfamiliar, ideas that challenge their attention. What they want is simply a gaudy series of platitudes, of sonorous nonsense driven home with gestures. As I say, they can't understand many

words of more than two syllables, but that is not saying that they do not esteem such words. On the contrary, they like them and demand them. The roll of incomprehensible polysyllables enchants them. They like phrases which thunder like salvos of artillery. Let that thunder sound, and they take all the rest on trust. If a sentence begins furiously and then peters out into fatuity, they are still satisfied. If a phrase has a punch in it, they do not ask that it also have a meaning. If a word slips off the tongue like a ship going down the ways, they are content and applaud it and wait for the next.

Brought up amid such hinds, trained by long practice to engage and delight them, Dr. Harding carries his stump manner into everything he writes. He is, perhaps, too old to learn a better way. He is, more likely, too discreet to experiment. The stump speech, put into cold type, maketh the judicious to grieve. But roared from an actual stump, with arms flying and eyes flashing and the old flag overhead, it is certainly and brilliantly effective. Read the inaugural address, and it will gag you. But hear it recited through a sound-magnifier, with grand gestures to ram home its periods, and you will begin to understand it.

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Let us turn to a specific example. I exhume a sentence from the latter half of the eminent orator's discourse:

I would like government to do all it can to mitigate, then, in understanding, in mutuality of interest, in concern for the common good, our tasks will be solved.

I assume that you have read it. I also assume that you set it down as idiotic—a series of words without sense. You are quite right; it is. But now imagine it intoned as it were designed to be intoned. Imagine the slow tempo of a public speech. Imagine the stately unrolling of the first clause, the delicate pause upon the word “then”—and then the loud discharge of the phrase “in understanding,” “in mutuality of interest,” “in concern for the common good,” each with its attendant glare and roll of the eyes, each with a sublime heave, each with its gesture of a blacksmith bringing down his sledge upon an egg—imagine all this, and then ask yourself where you have got. You have got, in brief, to a point where you don't know what it is all about. You hear and applaud the phrases, but their connection has already escaped you. And so, when in violation of all sequence and logic, the final phrase, “our tasks will be solved,” assaults you, you do not notice its disharmony—all you notice is that, if this or that, already forgotten, is done, “our tasks will be solved.” Whereupon, glad of the assurance and thrilled by the vast gestures that drive it home, you give a cheer.

That is, if you are the sort of man who goes to political meetings, which is to say, if you are the sort of man that Dr. Harding is used to talking to, which is to say, if you are a jackass.

The whole inaugural address reeked with just such nonsense. The thing started off with an error in English in its very first sentence—the confusion of pronouns is the *one-he* combination, so beloved of bad newspaper reporters. It bristled with words misused:

*Civic for civil, luring for alluring, womanhood for women, referendum for reference, even task for problem. "The task is to be solved"—what could be worse? Yet I find it twice. "The expressed views of world opinion"—what irritating tautology! "The expressed conscience of progress"—what on earth does it mean? "This is not selfishness, it is sanctity"—what intelligible idea do you get out of that? "I know that Congress and the administration will favor every wise government policy to aid the resumption and encourage continued progress"—the resumption of what? "Service is the supreme commitment of life"—ach, du heiliger!*

But is such bosh out of place in stump speech? Obviously not. It is precisely and thoroughly in place of stump speech. A tight fabric of ideas would weary and exasperate the audience; what it wants is a simple loud burble of words, a procession of phrases that roar, a series of whoops. This is what it got in the inaugural address of the Hon. Warren Gamaliel Harding. And this is what it will get for four long years—unless God sends a miracle and the corruptible puts on incorruption... Almost I long for the sweeter song, the rubber-stamps of more familiar design, the gentler and more seemly bosh of the late Woodrow.

### **The Death of Frankie Jerome—Westbrook Pegler—News Syndicate— 1/18/24**

A yellow-haired kid with a mashed nose and scalloped lips dipped his fingers in the holy water fount of St. Jerome's Church, crossed himself with the fist that killed Frankie Jerome and went to his knees on the cold marble to pray when all that was left of the little fellow was wheeled up the aisle to the alter yesterday for the funeral mass that preceded the journey to the grave.

Bud Taylor of Terra Haute, Ind., had been very happy for a moment last Friday night when he realized that he had been the first one to knock out the "Bronx Spider." As he bent his tousled head in a shadowy corner of the big church he wished to God he hadn't been to one to do it.

The church was full of people, most of them prizefighters, managers, bottle-holders and ring-siders, and a lot of them had not been to church in so long a time that all they recollected of the procedure was that a fellow is supposed to take off his hat and kneel down.

John Doherty and Mrs. Doherty, the father and mother of Frankie, were in a front pew with the little widow and her baby girl. Outside the church, the police reserves were handling a crowd of Frankie's friends.

On the night that Frankie dropped Jack Kid Wolfe seven times in one round at the Velodrome, equaling a record that Jack Dempsey achieved at the expense of Jess Willard, these friends had raised a roar that drowned the rattle of the L and the croupy whooping of the tug whistles in the Harlem River nearby. Now they were as silent as they had been noisy and the stillness was a tribute to the "Spider," just as the racket had been on the

long-ago summer night.

Nine big open automobiles wheeled into file, burgeoning with flowers as the bearers came down the step with Frankie on their shoulders. It took a long time to get the procession under way because there were sixty-five carriages in the line. It seemed that all the Bronx was going to the end of the journey with the "Spider," the boy who fought in the Great War before he was 21 and fought till his body was worn out in the ring.

Father Ryan got out of his vestments and into his clerical black in time to get aboard the last hack in the procession and lurch over the humpy roads of the Bronx to the cemetery, where he dribbled a handful of loam over the brink of the unfathomable abyss. He thumped on the box that contained the spindling kid.

Father Ryan didn't blame himself at all. He was the one who had first taught Frankie Doherty to turn his thumbs out and his knuckles up and to hit straight with all the drive of his body and character behind every blow. Frankie had been "one of the kids who fooled around the basement of St. Jerome's" about eight years ago, and Father Ryan had tied the first laces about the bony wrists of the bellicose acolyte for a slam-bang bout in the cellar of the church where the alter boys still maul one another for the joy of fighting.

Being a bit of a handy man in a fight himself, Father Ryan taught Frankie how to roll with a punch, how to upset a right swing with a left stab to his shoulder, and how to swing in with a right cross to the nubbins of the chin while his man was off keel. He taught Frankie the rudiments of the business of Billy Gibson when he took hold of the boy as a professional, had Benny Leonard to teach him the rest.

"The boy is dead," Father Ryan said when the carriages had rumbled back over the bridge. "He led a good life. He married a good wife and he was as good as his marriage vows. I wish all men were as good as Frankie Jerome was. They'd be no need of preachers, then. Green be his memory. A square shooter was Frankie Doherty."

### **Amelia Earhart – Walter Lippmann – Herald Tribune - 7/8/37**

I cannot quite remember whether Miss Earhart undertook her flight with some practical purpose in mind, say, to demonstrate something or other about aviation which will make it a little easier for commercial passengers to move more quickly around the world. There are those who seem to think that an enterprise like hers must have some such justification, that without it there was no good reason for taking such grave risks.

But in truth Miss Earhart needs no such justification. The world is a better place to live in because it contains human beings who will give up ease and security and stake their own lives in order to do what they themselves think worth doing. They help to offset the much larger number who are ready to sacrifice the ease and the security and the very lives of

others in order to do what they want done. No end of synthetic heroes strut the stage, great bold men in bulletproof vests surrounded by squads of armed guards, demonstrating their courage by terrorizing the weak and the defenseless. It is somehow reassuring to think that there are also men and women who take the risks themselves, who pit themselves not against their fellow beings but against the immensity and the violence of the natural world, who are brave without cruelty to others and impassioned with an idea that dignifies all who contemplate it.

The best things of mankind are as useless as Amelia Earhart's adventure. They are the things that are undertaken not for some definite, measurable result, but because someone, not counting the costs or calculating the consequences, is moved by curiosity, the love of excellence, a point of honor, the compulsion to invent or to make or to understand. In such persons mankind overcomes the inertia which would keep it earthbound forever in its habitual ways. They have in them the free and useless energy with which alone men surpass themselves.

Such energy cannot be planned and managed and made purposeful, or weighed by the standards of utility or judged by its social consequences. It is wild and it is free. But all the heroes, the saints and the seers, the explorers and the creators partake of it. They do not know what they discover. They do not know where their impulse is taking them. They can give no account in advance of where they are going or explain completely where they have been. They have been possessed for a time with an extraordinary passion which is unintelligible in ordinary terms.

No preconceived theory fits them. No material purpose actuates them. They do the useless, brave, noble, the divinely foolish and the very wisest things that are done by man. And what they prove to themselves and to others is that man is no mere creature of his habits, no mere automaton in his routine, no mere cog in the collective machine, but that in the dust of which he is made there is also fire, lighted now and then by great winds from the sky.

### **The Death of Captain Waskow- Ernie Pyle - Scripps Howard – 1/10/44**

AT THE FRONT LINES IN ITALY, January 10, 1944 - In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow of Belton, Texas. Capt. Waskow was a company commander in the 36th Division. He had led his company since long before it left the States. He was very young, only in his middle twenties, but he carried in him a sincerity and gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my own father, he came next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never knowed him to do anything unfair," another one said.

I was at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Capt. Waskow's body down. The moon was nearly full at the time, and you could see far up the trail, and even part way across the valley below. Soldiers made shadows in the moonlight as they walked.

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly-down across the wooden pack-saddles, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other side, bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

The Italian mule-skinners were afraid to walk beside dead men, so Americans had to lead the mules down that night. Even the Americans were reluctant to unlash and lift off the bodies at the bottom, so an officer had to do it himself, and ask others to help. The first one came early in the morning. They slid him down from the mule and stood him on his feet for a moment, while they got a new grip. In the half light he might have been merely a sick man standing there, leaning on the others. Then they laid him on the ground in the shadow of the low stone wall alongside the road.

I don't know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of dead men, and ashamed at being alive, and you don't ask silly questions. We left him there beside the road, that first one, and we all went back into the cowshed and sat on water cans or lay on the straw, waiting for the next batch of mules.

Somebody said the dead soldier had been dead for four days, and then nobody said anything more about it. We talked soldier talk for an hour or more. The dead man lay all alone outside in the shadow of the low stone wall.

Then a soldier came into the cowshed and said there were some more bodies outside. We went out into the road. Four mules stood there, in the moonlight, in the road where the trail came down off the mountain. The soldiers who led them stood there waiting. "This one is Captain Waskow," one of them said quietly.

Two men unlash his body from the mule and lifted it off and laid it in the shadow beside the low stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off. Finally there were five lying end to end in a long row, alongside the road. You don't cover up dead men in the combat zone. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody else comes after them.

The unburdened mules moved off to their olive orchard. The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave. They stood around, and gradually one by one I could sense them moving close to Capt. Waskow's body. Not so much to look, I think, as to say something in finality to him, and to themselves. I stood close by and I could hear. One soldier came and looked down, and he said out loud, "God damn it." That's all he said, and then he walked away. Another one came. He said, "God damn it to hell anyway." He looked down for a few last moments, and then he turned and left.

Another man came; I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the half light, for all were bearded and grimy dirty. The man looked down into the dead captain's face, and then he spoke directly to him, as though he were alive. He said: "I'm sorry, old man."

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer, and bent over, and he too spoke to his dead captain, not in a whisper but awfully tenderly, and he said:

"I sure am sorry, sir."

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the dead hand, and he sat there for a full five minutes, holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face, and he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

And finally he put the hand down, and then reached up and gently straightened the points of the captain's shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of his uniform around the wound. And then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.

After that the rest of us went back into the cowshed, leaving the five dead men lying in a line, end to end, in the shadow of the low stone wall. We lay down on the straw in the cowshed, and pretty soon we were all asleep.

### **Miracle of Coogan's Bluff - Red Smith - New York Herald Tribune – 10/4/54**

Now it is done. Now the story ends. And there is no way to tell it. The art of fiction is dead. Reality has strangled invention. Only the utterly impossible, the inexpressibly fantastic, can ever be plausible again.

Down on the green and white and earth-brown geometry of the playing field, a drunk tries to break through the ranks of ushers marshalled along the foul lines to keep profane feet off the diamond. The ushers thrust him back and he lunges at them, struggling in the clutch of two or three men. He breaks free and four or five tackle him. He shakes them off, bursts through the line, runs head on into a special park cop who brings him down with a flying tackle.

Here comes a whole platoon of ushers. They lift the man and haul him, twisting and kicking, back across the first-base line. Again he shakes loose and crashes the line. He is away, weaving out toward center field where cheering thousands are jammed beneath the windows of the Giants' clubhouse.

At heart, our man is a Giant, too. He never gave up.

From center field comes burst upon burst of cheering. Pennants are waving, uplifted fists are brandished, hats are flying. Again and again, the dark clubhouse windows blaze with



the light of photographers' flash bulbs. Here comes that same drunk out of the mob, back across the green turf to the infield. Coat tails flying, he runs the bases, slides into third. Nobody bothers him now.

And the story remains to be told, the story of how the Giants won the 1951 pennant in the National League. The tale of their barreling run through August and September and into October ... On the final day of the season when they won the championship and started home with it from Boston, to hear on the train how the dead, defeated Dodgers had risen from the ashes in the Philadelphia twilight ... Of the three-game playoff in which they won, and lost and were losing again with one out in the ninth inning yesterday when— Oh, why bother?

Maybe this is the way to tell it: Bobby Thomson, a young Scot from Staten Island, delivered a timely hit yesterday in the ninth inning of an enjoyable game of baseball before 34,320 witnesses in the Polo Grounds... Or perhaps this is better:

"Well," said Whitey Lockman, standing on second base in the second inning of yesterday's playoff game between the Giants and Dodgers.

"Ah, there," said Bobby Thomson, pulling into the same station after hitting a ball to left field. "How've you been?"

"Fancy," Lockman said, "meeting you here!"  
"Oops!" Thomson said. "Sorry."

And the Giants' first chance for a big inning against Don Newcombe disappeared as they tagged him out. Up in the press section, the voices of Willie Goodrich came over the amplifiers announcing a macabre statistic: "Thomson has now hit safely in fifteen consecutive games." Just then the floodlights were turned on, enabling the Giants to see and count their runners on each base.

It wasn't funny, though, because it seemed for so long that the Giants weren't going to get another chance like the one Thomson squandered by trying to take second base with a playmate already there. They couldn't hit Newcombe and the Dodgers couldn't do anything wrong. Sal Maglie's most splendid pitching would avail nothing unless New York could match the run Brooklyn had scored in the first inning.

The story was winding up, and it wasn't the happy ending which such a tale demands. Poetic justice was a phrase without meaning.

Now it was the seventh inning and Thomson was up with runners on first and third, none out. Pitching a shutout in Philadelphia last Saturday night, pitching again in Philadelphia on Sunday, holding the Giants scoreless this far, Newcombe had now gone twenty-one innings without allowing a run.

He threw four strikes to Thomson. Two were fouled off out of play. Then he threw a fifth. Thomson's fly scored Monte Irvin. The score was tied. It was a new ball game.

Wait a moment, though. Here's Pee Wee Reese hitting safely in the eighth. Here's Duke Snider singling Reese to third. Here's Maglie, wild —pitching a run home. Here's Andy Pafko slashing a hit through Thomson for another score. Here's Billy Cox batting still another home. Where does his hit go? Where else? Through Thomson at third.

So it was the Dodgers ball game, 4 to 1, and the Dodgers' pennant. So all right. Better get started and beat the crowd home. That stuff in the ninth inning? That didn't mean anything.

A single by Al Dark. A single by Don Mueller. Irvin's pop-up. Lockerman's one-run double. Now the corniest possible sort of Hollywood schmaltz — stretcher bearers plodding away with an injured Mueller between them, symbolic of the Giants themselves.

There went Newcombe and here came Ralph Branca. Who's at bat? Thomson again? He beat Branca with a home run the other day. Would Charlie Dressen order him walked, putting the winning run on base, to pitch to the dead-end kids at the bottom of the batting order? No, Branca's first pitch was called a strike.

The second pitch — well, when Thomson reached first base he turned and looked toward the left-field stands. Then he started jumping straight up in the air, again and again. Then he trotted around the bases, taking his time.

Ralph Branca turned and started for the clubhouse. The number on his uniform looked huge. Thirteen.

### **He Went All the Way – Murray Kempton– 9/22/1958**

MOSE Wright, making a formation no white man in his county really believed he would dare to make, stood on his tiptoes to the full limit of his sixty-four years and his five feet three inches yesterday, pointed his black, workworn finger straight at the huge and stormy head of J. W. Milam and swore that this was the man who dragged fourteen-year-old Emmett Louis Till out of his cottonfield cabin the night the boy was murdered.

“There he is,” said Mose Wright. He was a black pigmy standing up to a white ox. J. W. Milam leaned forward, crooking a cigaret in a hand that seemed as large as Mose Wright's whole chest, and his eyes were coals of hatred.

Mose Wright took all their blast straight in his face, and then, for good measure, turned and pointed that still unshaking finger at Roy Bryant, the man he says joined Milam on the night-ride to seize young Till for the crime of whistling suggestively at Bryant's wife in a store three miles away and three nights before.

“And there’s Mr. Bryant,” said Mose Wright and sat down hard against the chair-back with a lurch which told better than anything else the cost in strength to him of the thing he had done. He was a field Negro who had dared try to send two white men to the gas chamber for murdering a Negro.

He sat in a court where District Attorney Gerald Chatham, who is on his side, steadily addressed him as Uncle Mose and conversed with him in a kind of pidgin cotton-picker’s dialect, saying “axed” for “asked” as Mose Wright did and talking about the “undertaker man.”

Once Chatham called him “Old Man Mose,” but this was the kindly, contemptuous tolerance of the genteel; after twenty-one minutes of this, Mose Wright was turned over to Defense Counsel Sidney Canton and now the manner was that of an overseer with a field hand.

Sidney Carlton roared at Mose Wright as though he were the defendant, and every time Carlton raised his voice like the lash of a whip, J. W. Milam would permit himself a cold smile.

And then Mose Wright did the bravest thing a Delta Negro can do; he stopped saying “sir.” Every time Carlton came back to the attack, Mose Wright pushed himself back against his chair and said “That’s right” and the absence of the “sir” was almost like a spit in the eye.

When he had come to the end of the hardest half hour in the hardest life possible for a human being in these United States, Mose Wright’s story was shaken; yet he still clutched its foundations. Against Carlton’s voice and Milam’s eyes and the incredulity of an all-white jury, he sat alone and refused to bow.

If it had not been for him, we would not have had this trial. It will be a miracle if he wins his case; yet it is a kind of miracle that, all on account of Mose Wright, the State of Mississippi is earnestly striving here in this courtroom to convict two white men for murdering a Negro boy so obscure that they do not appear to have even known his name.

He testified yesterday that, as Milam left his house with Emmett Till on the night of August 28, he asked Mose Wright whether he knew anyone in the raiding party. “No, sir, I said I don’t know nobody.”

Then Milam asked him how old he was, and Mose Wright said sixty-four and Milam said, “If you knew any of us, you won’t live to be sixty-five.”

And, after the darkened car drove off, with his great-nephew, Mose Wright drove his hysterical wife over to Sumner and put her on the train to Chicago, from which she has written him every day since to cut and run and get out of town. The next day, all by himself, Mose Wright drove into nearby Greenwood and told his story in the sheriff’s office.

It was a pathetic errand; it seems a sort of marvel that anything was done at all. Sheriff George Smith drove out to Money around 2 P.M. that afternoon and found Roy Bryant sleeping behind his store. They were good friends and they talked as friends about this little boy whose name Smith himself had not bothered to find out.

Smith reported that Roy had said that he had gone down the road and taken the little boy out of "Preacher's" cabin, and brought him back to the store and, when his wife said it wasn't the right boy, told him to go home.

Sheriff Smith didn't even take Bryant's statement down. When he testified to it yesterday, the defense interposed the straight-faced objection that this was after all the conversation of two friends and that the state shouldn't embarrass the sheriff by making him repeat it in court. Yet, just the same, Sheriff Smith arrested Roy Bryant for kidnaping that night.

When the body supposed to be Emmett Till's was found in the river, a deputy sheriff drove Mose Wright up to identify it. There was no inquest. Night before last, the prosecution fished up a picture of the body which had been in the Greenwood police files since the night it was brought in, but there was no sign the sheriff knew anything about it, and its discovery was announced as a coup for the state. But, with that apathy and incompetence, Mose Wright almost alone has brought the kidnapers of his nephew to trial.

The country in which he toiled and which he is now resigned to leaving will never be the same for what he has done. Today the state will put on the stand three other field Negroes to tell how they saw Milam and Bryant near the murder scene. They came in scared; one disappeared while the sheriff's deputies were looking for him. They, like Mose Wright, are reluctant heroes; unlike him, they have to be dragged to the test.

They will be belted and flayed as he was yesterday, but they will walk out with the memory of having been human beings for just a little while. Whatever the result, there is a kind of majesty in the spectacle of the State of Mississippi honestly trying to convict two white men on the word of four Negroes.

And we owe that sight to Mose Wright, who was condemned to bow all his life, and had enough left to raise his head and look the enemy in those terrible eyes when he was sixty-four.

### **It's an Honor - Jimmy Breslin -New York Herald Tribune - November 1963**

Clifton Pollard was pretty sure he was going to be working on Sunday, so when he woke up at 9 a.m., in his three-room apartment on Corcoran Street, he put on khaki overalls before going into the kitchen for breakfast. His wife, Hettie, made bacon and eggs for him. Pollard was in the middle of eating them when he received the phone call he had been expecting. It was from Mazo Kawalchik, who is the foreman of the gravediggers at

Arlington National Cemetery, which is where Pollard works for a living. "Polly, could you please be here by eleven o'clock this morning?" Kawalchik asked. "I guess you know what it's for." Pollard did. He hung up the phone, finished breakfast, and left his apartment so he could spend Sunday digging a grave for John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

When Pollard got to the row of yellow wooden garages where the cemetery equipment is stored, Kawalchik and John Metzler, the cemetery superintendent, were waiting for him.

"Sorry to pull you out like this on a Sunday," Metzler said. "Oh, don't say that," Pollard said. "Why, it's an honor for me to be here." Pollard got behind the wheel of a machine called a reverse hoe. Gravedigging is not done with men and shovels at Arlington. The reverse hoe is a green machine with a yellow bucket that scoops the earth toward the operator, not away from it as a crane does. At the bottom of the hill in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Pollard started the digging.

Leaves covered the grass. When the yellow teeth of the reverse hoe first bit into the ground, the leaves made a threshing sound which could be heard above the motor of the machine. When the bucket came up with its first scoop of dirt, Metzler, the cemetery superintendent, walked over and looked at it. "That's nice soil," Metzler said. "I'd like to save a little of it," Pollard said. "The machine made some tracks in the grass over here and I'd like to sort of fill them in and get some good grass growing there, I'd like to have everything, you know, nice."

James Winners, another gravedigger, nodded. He said he would fill a couple of carts with this extra-good soil and take it back to the garage and grow good turf on it. "He was a good man," Pollard said. "Yes, he was," Metzler said. "Now they're going to come and put him right here in this grave I'm making up," Pollard said. "You know, it's an honor just for me to do this."

Pollard is 42. He is a slim man with a mustache who was born in Pittsburgh and served as a private in the 352nd Engineers battalion in Burma in World War II. He is an equipment operator, grade 10, which means he gets \$3.01 an hour. One of the last to serve John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was the thirty-fifth President of this country, was a working man who earns \$3.01 an hour and said it was an honor to dig the grave.

Yesterday morning, at 11:15, Jacqueline Kennedy started toward the grave. She came out from under the north portico of the White House and slowly followed the body of her husband, which was in a flag-covered coffin that was strapped with two black leather belts to a black caisson that had polished brass axles. She walked straight and her head was high. She walked down the bluestone and blacktop driveway and through shadows thrown by the branches of seven leafless oak trees. She walked slowly past the sailors who held up flags of the states of this country. She walked past silent people who strained to see her and then, seeing her, dropped their heads and put their hands over their eyes. She walked out the northwest gate and into the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue. She walked with tight steps and her head was high and she followed the body of her murdered husband through the streets of Washington.

Everybody watched her while she walked. She is the mother of two fatherless children and she was walking into the history of this country because she was showing everybody who felt old and helpless and without hope that she had this terrible strength that everybody needed so badly. Even though they had killed her husband and his blood ran onto her lap while he died, she could walk through the streets and to his grave and help us all while she walked.

There was mass, and then the procession to Arlington. When she came up to the grave at the cemetery, the casket already was in place. It was set between brass railings and it was ready to be lowered into the ground. This must be the worst time of all, when a woman sees the coffin with her husband inside and it is in place to be buried under the earth. Now she knows that it is forever. Now there is nothing. There is no casket to kiss or hold with your hands. Nothing material to cling to. But she walked up to the burial area and stood in front of a row of six green-covered chairs and she started to sit down, but then she got up quickly and stood straight because she was not going to sit down until the man directing the funeral told her what seat he wanted her to take.

The ceremonies began, with jet planes roaring overhead and leaves falling from the sky. On this hill behind the coffin, people prayed aloud. They were cameramen and writers and soldiers and Secret Service men and they were saying prayers out loud and choking. In front of the grave, Lyndon Johnson kept his head turned to his right. He is president and he had to remain composed. It was better that he did not look at the casket and grave of John Fitzgerald Kennedy too often. Then it was over and black limousines rushed under the cemetery trees and out onto the boulevard toward the White House. "What time is it?" a man standing on the hill was asked. He looked at his watch. "Twenty minutes past three," he said.

Clifton Pollard wasn't at the funeral. He was over behind the hill, digging graves for \$3.01 an hour in another section of the cemetery. He didn't know who the graves were for. He was just digging them and then covering them with boards. "They'll be used," he said. "We just don't know when. I tried to go over to see the grave," he said. "But it was so crowded a soldier told me I couldn't get through. So I just stayed here and worked, sir. But I'll get over there later a little bit. Just sort of look around and see how it is, you know. Like I told you, it's an honor."

### **Daley Embodied Chicago – Mike Royko – Chicago Sun Times – 12/21/76**

If a man ever reflected a city, it was Richard J. Daley of Chicago.

In some ways, he was this town at its best—strong, hard-driving, working feverishly, pushing, building, driven by ambitions so big they seemed Texas-boastful.

In other ways, he was this city at its worst—arrogant, crude, conniving, ruthless, suspicious, intolerant.

He wasn't graceful, suave, witty, or smooth. But, then, this is not Paris or San Francisco.

He was raucous, sentimental, hot-tempered, practical, simply, devious, big, and powerful. This is, after all, Chicago.

Sometimes the very same Daley performance would be seen as both outrageous and heroic. It depended on whom you asked for an opinion.

For example, when he stood on the Democratic National Convention floor in 1968 and mouthed furious crudities at smooth Abe Ribicoff, tens of millions of TV viewers were shocked.

But it didn't offend most Chicagoans. That's part of the Chicago style—belly to belly, scowl to scowl, and may the toughest or loudest man win.

Daley was not an articulate man, most English teachers would agree. People from other parts of the country sometimes marveled that a politician who fractured the language so thoroughly could be taken so seriously.

Well, Chicago is not an articulate town, Saul Bellow notwithstanding. Maybe it's because so many of us aren't that far removed from parents and grandparents who knew only bits and pieces of the language.

So when Daley slid sideways into a sentence, or didn't exit from the same paragraph he entered, it amused us. But it didn't sound that different from the way most of us talk.

Besides, he got his point across, one way or another, and usually in Chicago style. When he thought critics should mind their own business about the way he handed out insurance business to his sons, he tried to think of a way to say that they should kiss his bottom. He found a way. He said it. We understood it. What more can one ask of the language.

Daley was a product of the neighborhoods and he reflected it in many good ways—loyalty to the family, neighbors, old buddies, the corner grocer. You do something for someone, they do something for you. If somebody is sick, you offer the family help. If someone dies, you go to the wake and try to lend comfort. The young don't lip off to the old, and everybody cuts his grass, and takes care of his property. And don't play your TV too loud.

That's the way he liked to live, and that's what he thought most people wanted, and he was right.

But there are other sides to Chicago neighborhoods—suspicious of outsiders, intolerance toward the unconventional, bigotry and bullying.

That was Daley, too. As he proved over and over again, he didn't trust outsiders, whether they were long-hairs against war, black preachers against segregation, reformers against the Machine, or community groups against his policies. This was his neighborhood-ward-city-county, and nobody could come in and make noise. He'd call the cops. Which he did.

There are those who believed Daley could have risen beyond politics to statesmanship had he embraced the idealistic causes of the 1960s rather than obstructing them. Had he used his unique power to lead us toward brotherhood and understanding, they say, he could have achieved greatness.

Sure he would have. But he expected that response from Daley was as realistic as asking Cragin, Bridgeport, Marquette Park, or any other white Chicago neighborhood to celebrate Brotherhood Week by having black gang leader Jeff Fort to dinner. If Daley was reactionary and stubborn, he was in perfect harmony with his town.

Daley was a pious man—faithful to his church, a believer in the Fourth of July, apple pie, motherhood, baseball, the Boy Scouts, the flag, and sitting down to dinner with the family, and deeply offended by public displays of immorality.

And, for all the swinging new lifestyles, that is still basically Chicago. Maybe New York will let porn and massage houses spread like fast-food franchises, and maybe San Francisco will welcome gay cops. But Chicago is still a square town. So City Hall made sure our carnal vices were kept to a public minimum. If old laws didn't work, they got new laws that did.

On the other hand, there were financial vices.

And if somebody in City Hall saw a chance to make a fast bundle or two, Daley wasn't given to preaching. His advice amounted to: Don't get caught.

But that's Chicago, too. The question has never been how you made it, but if you made it. The town was built by great men who demanded the drunkards and harlots be arrested, while charging them rent until the cops arrived.

If Daley sometimes abused his power, it didn't offend most Chicagoans. The people who came here in Daley's lifetime were accustomed to someone wielding power like a club, be it a czar, emperor, king, or rural sheriff. The niceties of the democratic process weren't part of the immigrant experience. So if the machine muscle offended some, it seemed like old times to many more.

Eventually Daley made the remarkable transition from political boss to father figure.

Maybe he couldn't have been a father figure in Berkeley, California; Princeton, New Jersey; or even Skokie, Illinois. But in Chicago there was nothing unusual about a father



who worked long hours, meant shut up when he said shut up, and backed it up with a jolt to the head. Daley was as believable a father figure as anyone's old man.

Now he's gone and people are writing that the era of Richard J. Daley is over. Just like that.

But it's not. Daley has left a legacy that is pure Chicago.

I'm not talking about his obvious legacy of expressways, high-rises, and other public works projects that size-conscious Chicagoans enjoy.

Daley, like this town, relished a political brawl. When arms were waving and tempers boiling and voices cracking, he'd sit in the middle of it all and look as happy as a kid at a birthday party.

Well, he's left behind the ingredients for the best political donnybrook we've had in fifty years.

They'll be kicking and gouging, grabbing and tripping, elbowing and kneeing to grab all, or a thin sliver of the power he left behind.

It will be a classic Chicago debate.

He knew it would turn out that way, and the thought probably delighted him.

I hope that wherever he is, he'll have a good seat for the entire show. And when they are tangled in political half-Nelsons, toeholds, and headlocks, I wouldn't be surprised if we hear a faint but familiar giggle drifting down from somewhere.

### **A Short Story about the Vietnam War Memorial – Molly Ivins – Dallas Times Herald – 11/30/82**

SHE had known, ever since she first read about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, that she would go there someday. Sometime she would be in Washington and would go and see his name and leave again.

So silly, all that fuss about the memorial. Whatever else Vietnam was, it was not the kind of war that calls for some "Raising the Flag at Iwo Jima" kind of statue. She was not prepared, though, for the impact of the memorial. To walk down into it in the pale winter sunshine was like the war itself, like going into a dark valley and damned if there was ever any light at the end of the tunnel. Just death. When you get closer to the two walls, the number of names start to stun you. It is terrible there in the peace and the pale sunshine.

The names are listed by date of death. There has never been a time, day or night, drunk or sober, for 13 years she could not have told you the date. He was killed on Aug, 13, 1969. It is near the middle of the left wall. She went toward it as though she had known beforehand where it would be. His name is near the bottom. She had to kneel to find it. Stupid clichés. His name leaped out at her. It was like being hit.

She stared at it and then reached out and gently ran her fingers over the letters in the cold black marble. The memory of him came back so strong, almost as if he were there on the other side of the stone, she could see his hand reaching out to touch her fingers. It had not hurt for years and suddenly, just for a moment, it hurt again so horribly that it twisted her face and made her gasp and left her with tears running down her face. Then it stopped hurting but she could not stop the tears. Could not stop them running and running down her face.

There had been a time, although she had been an otherwise sensible young woman, when she had believed she would never recover from the pain. She did, of course. But she is still determined never to sentimentalize him. He would have hated that. She had thought it was like an amputation, the severing of his life from hers, that you could live on afterwards but it would be like having only one leg and one arm. But it was only a wound. It healed. If there is a scar it is only faintly visible now at odd intervals.

He was a biologist, a t.a. at the university getting his Ph.D. They lived together for two years. He left the university to finish his thesis and before he could line up a public school job – teachers were safe in those years – the draft board got him. They had friends who had left the country, they had friends who had gone to prison, they had friends who had gone to Nam. There were no good choices in those years. She thinks now he unconsciously wanted to go even though he often said, said in one of his last letters, that it was a stupid f---in' war. He felt some form of guilt about a friend of theirs who was killed during the Tet offensive. Hubert Humphrey called Tet a great victory. His compromise was to refuse officer's training school and go as an enlisted man. She had thought then it was a dumb gesture and they had a half-hearted quarrel about it.

He had been in Nam less than two months when he was killed, without heroics during a firefight at night, by a single bullet in the brain. No one saw it happen. There are some amazing statistics about money and tonnage from that war. Did you know that there were more tons of bombs dropped on Hanoi during the Christmas bombing of 1971 than in all of World War II? Did you know that the war in Vietnam cost the United States \$123.3 billion? She has always wanted to know how much that one bullet cost. Sixty-three cents? \$1.20? Someone must know.

The other bad part was the brain. Even at this late date, it seems to her that was quite a remarkable mind. Long before she read C.P. Snow, the ferociously honest young man who wanted to be a great biologist taught her a great deal about the difference between the way scientists think and the way humanists think. Only once has she been glad he was not with her. It was at one of those bizarre hearings about teaching "creation

science.” He would have gotten furious and been horribly rude. He had no patience with people who did not understand and respect the process of science.

She used to attribute his fierce honesty to the fact that he was Yankee. She is still prone to tell “white” lies to make people feel better, to smooth things over, to prevent hard feelings. Surely there have been dumber things for lovers to quarrel over than the social utility of hypocrisy. But not many.

She stood up again, still staring at his name, stood for a long time. She said, “There it is,” and turned to go. A man to her left was staring at her. She glared at him resentfully. The man had done nothing but make the mistake of seeing her weeping. She said, as though daring him to disagree, “It was a stupid, f---in’ war,” and stalked past him.

She turned again at the top of the slope to make sure where his name is, so whenever she sees a picture of the memorial she can put her finger where his name is. He never said goodbye, literally. Whenever he left he would say, “Take care, love.” He could say it many different ways. He said it when he left for Vietnam. She stood at the top of the slope and found her hand half-raised in some silly gesture of farewell. She brought it down again. She considered thinking to him, “Hey, take care, love,” but it seemed remarkably inappropriate. She walked away and was quite entertaining for the rest of the day, because it was expected of her.

She thinks he would have liked the memorial O.K. He would have hated the editorials. He did not sacrifice his life for his country or for a just or noble cause. There just were no good choices in those years and he got killed.

### **Pithy into the Wind – Dave Barry – Miami Herald – 3/29/87**

The burgeoning Iran-contra scandal is truly an issue about which we, as a nation, need to concern ourselves, because

**(Secret Note To Readers:** Not really! The hell with the Iran-contra affair! Let it burgeon! I'm just trying to win a journalism prize, here. Don't tell anybody! I'll explain later. Shhhh.)

When we look at the Iran-contra scandal, and for that matter the mounting national health-care crisis, we can see that these are, in total, two issues, each requiring a number of paragraphs in which we will comment, in hopes that

( . . . we can win a journalism prize. Ideally a Pulitzer. That's the object, in journalism. At certain times each year, we journalists do almost nothing except apply for the Pulitzers and several dozen other major prizes. During these times you could walk right into most newsrooms and commit a multiple ax murder naked, and it wouldn't get reported in the paper, because the reporters and editors would all be too busy filling out

prize applications. "Hey!" they'd yell at you. "Watch it! You're getting blood on my application!")

we can possibly, through carefully analyzing these important issues -- the Iran-contra scandal, the mounting national health-care crisis, and (while we are at it), the federal budget deficit -- through analyzing these issues and mulling them over and fretting about them and chewing on them until we have reduced them to soft, spit-covered gobs of information that you, the readers, can

( . . . pretty much ignore. It's OK! Don't be ashamed! We here in journalism are fully aware that most of you skip right over stories that look like they might involve major issues, which you can identify because they always have incomprehensible headlines like "House Parley Panel Links Nato Tax Hike To Hondurans In Syrian Arms Deal." Sometimes we'll do a whole series with more total words than the Brothers Karamazov and headlines like: "The World Mulch Crisis: A Time To Act." You readers don't bother to wade through these stories, and you feel vaguely guilty about this. Which is stupid. You're not supposed to read them. We journalists don't read them. We use modern computers to generate them solely for the purpose of entering them for journalism prizes. We're thinking about putting the following helpful advisory over them: **"Caution! Journalism Prize Entry! Do Not Read!"**)

gain, through a better understanding of these very important issues -- the Iran-contra scandal; the health-care crisis (which as you may be aware is both national AND mounting); the federal budget deficit; and yes, let's come right out and say it, the Strategic Defense Initiative -- you readers can gain a better understanding of them, and thus we might come to an enhanced awareness of what they may or may not mean in terms of

( . . . whether or not I can win a Pulitzer Prize. That's the one I'm gunning for. You get \$1,000 cash, plus all the job offers the mailperson can carry. Unfortunately, the only category I'd be eligible for is called "Distinguished Social Commentary," which is a real problem, because of the kinds of issues I generally write about. "This isn't Distinguished Social Commentary!" the Pulitzer judges would say. "This is about goat boogers!" So today I'm trying to class up my act a little by writing about prize-winning issues. OK? Sorry.)

how we, as a nation, can, through a deeper realization of the significance of these four vital issues -- health care in Iran, the strategic federal deficit, mounting the contras, and one other one which slips my mind at the moment, although I think it's the one that's burgeoning -- how we can, as a nation, through Distinguished Social Commentary such as this, gain the kind of perspective and foresight required to understand

( . . . a guy like noted conservative columnist George Will. You see him, on all those TV shows where he is always commenting on world events in that snotty smartass way of his, with his lips pursed together like he just accidentally licked the plumbing in a bus-station restroom, and you quite naturally say to yourself, as millions have before you: "Why doesn't somebody just take this little dweeb and stick his bow tie up his nose?"

Huh?" And the answer is: Because a long time ago, for reasons nobody remembers anymore, George Will won a Pulitzer Prize. And now he gets to be famous and rich and respected for ever and ever. That's all I want! Is that so much to ask?!)

what we, and I am talking about we as a nation, need to have in order to deeply understand all the issues listed somewhere earlier in this column. And although I am only one person, one lone Distinguished Social Commentator crying in the wilderness, without so much as a bow tie, I am nevertheless committed to doing whatever I can to deepen and widen and broaden and lengthen the national understanding of these issues in any way that I can, and that includes sharing the \$1,000 with the judges.

### **We'll Go Forward From This Moment – Leonard Pitts Jr. – Miami Herald – 9/11/01**

It's my job to have something to say.

They pay me to provide words that help make sense of that which troubles the American soul. But in this moment of airless shock when hot tears sting disbelieving eyes, the only thing I can find to say, the only words that seem to fit, must be addressed to the unknown author of this suffering.

You monster. You beast. You unspeakable bastard.

What lesson did you hope to teach us by your coward's attack on our World Trade Center, our Pentagon, us? What was it you hoped we would learn? Whatever it was, please know that you failed.

Did you want us to respect your cause? You just damned your cause.

Did you want to make us fear? You just steeled our resolve.

Did you want to tear us apart? You just brought us together.

Let me tell you about my people. We are a vast and quarrelsome family, a family rent by racial, social, political and class division, but a family nonetheless. We're frivolous, yes, capable of expending tremendous emotional energy on pop cultural minutiae - a singer's revealing dress, a ball team's misfortune, a cartoon mouse.

We're wealthy, too, spoiled by the ready availability of trinkets and material goods, and maybe because of that, we walk through life with a certain sense of blithe entitlement.

We are fundamentally decent, though - peace-loving and compassionate. We struggle to know the right thing and to do it. And we are, the overwhelming majority of us, people of faith, believers in a just and loving God.

Some people - you, perhaps - think that any or all of this makes us weak. You're mistaken. We are not weak. Indeed, we are strong in ways that cannot be measured by arsenals.

Yes, we're in pain now. We are in mourning, and we are in shock. We're still grappling with the unreality of the awful thing you did, still working to make ourselves understand that this isn't a special effect from some Hollywood blockbuster, isn't the plot development from a Tom Clancy novel.

Both in terms of the awful scope of their ambition and the probable final death toll, your attacks are likely to go down as the worst acts of terrorism in the history of the United States and, probably, the history of the world. You've bloodied us as we have never been bloodied before.

But there's a gulf of difference between making us bloody and making us fall. This is the lesson Japan was taught to its bitter sorrow the last time anyone hit us this hard, the last time anyone brought us such abrupt and monumental pain. When roused, we are righteous in our outrage, terrible in our force. When provoked by this level of barbarism, we will bear any suffering, pay any cost, go to any length, in the pursuit of justice.

I tell you this without fear of contradiction. I know my people, as you, I think, do not.

What I know reassures me. It also causes me to tremble with dread of the future.

In the days to come, there will be recrimination and accusation, fingers pointing to determine whose failure allowed this to happen and what can be done to prevent it from happening again. There will be heightened security, misguided talk of revoking basic freedoms. We'll go forward from this moment sobered, chastened, sad. But determined, too. Unimaginably determined.

You see, the steel in us is not always readily apparent. That aspect of our character is seldom understood by people who don't know us well. On this day, the family's bickering is put on hold.

As Americans, we will weep; as Americans, we will mourn; and as Americans, we will rise in defense of all that we cherish.

So I ask again: What was it you hoped to teach us? It occurs to me that maybe you just wanted us to know the depths of your hatred. If that's the case, consider the message received. And take this message in exchange: You don't know my people. You don't know what we're capable of.

You don't know what you just started.

But you're about to learn.

## The Halloween of My Dreams – Marjorie Williams – Washington Post – 11/3/04

I was the one who insisted on the body glitter. Normally, you understand, I am a mother who pulls her daughter's shirt down and tucks it into her waistband every morning to keep her from showing her navel to the whole third grade. I make her scrub the supposedly water-soluble unicorn tattoos off her cheeks before she goes to school. I court her wrath by refusing to buy the kids' fashions that seem designed to clothe tiny hookers.

But after all, this was Halloween, the holiday that celebrates license. (A fifth KitKat bar after 9 p.m.? Why not?) Alice was determined to be a rock star, and I was happy to help her. Simple enough.

Yet my joy in conspiring with her felt so *big*. Usually I'm not much of a Halloween enthusiast, not since I was 13 or so. For a while, having children of my own brought me a new version of the old childhood thrill. One year Will came home from preschool and told me he'd learned about a new Halloween creature, one that lurches through the night swathed in flapping bandages.

"Oh," I said casually. "What's it called?"

"The MOMMIES!" he announced, with much more excitement than dismay.

But my delight lasted for only a few years before I returned to thinking of Halloween as just a silly, gaudy night that strains at symbolism -- the floozy among the family of big holidays. I thought, for a while, that I had simply buckled under the demands of Costume Hell. ("I want to be a computer, but also my feet will be, like, a robot, and you can make me a head with glowing red eyes and a voice like Darth Vader.") But that explanation has become less and less convincing: At 11 and almost-9, after all, the kids have more and more fun making their own costumes, with minimal help. Really, I think that I'm just not one of those people who easily climbs into fantasy and achieves flight.

Recently, after my dear cousin Sally spent a night guarding my sleep in the hospital, we talked about the one part of the experience I remembered as clearly as she. When I'd finally taken aboard enough pain medicine to dull the effects of the procedure I'd just been through, I'd said clearly, out of my cloud of Dilaudid, "I love all these random thoughts. All my life I've worked so hard to get words and sentences into line. They had to have a *point*. I love floating along on all these random thoughts."

It made me hugely sad to see that my escapes from the taskmistress of literalism are still so rare and hard-won. And in the days before this Halloween, it was especially hard for me to avoid interpreting its elements too bluntly. If you have cancer, if you've had it for a while, at some point you start really *seeing* all those skulls and skeletons and Styrofoam headstones, all those children in hooded capes, bearing scythes on their little shoulders.

So how could I explain the euphoria of the 45 minutes Alice and I spent in her bedroom, colluding over her hair, giggling at her faux-leather, deeply fringed bell-bottoms? The pleasure of watching her strap on those awful silver platform shoes, like something I wore in 1973?

Because Alice was getting picked up to join friends for trick-or-treating, I kept my eye on the clock, and shooed her into the bathroom just in time to add make-up: grown-up lipstick, a layer of shimmery lip gloss over that, and an overall, emphatic scribble, on her neck and face, with the body-glitter crayon. Every other day of the year, any mother knows that glitter is the work of Satan, but last Sunday it lit her skin with a dew of every color.

We could hear her friends pull up to the curb. As her momentum carried her to the top of the stairs, Alice looked back and tossed me a radiant smile. She had become my glimmering girl: She looked like a rock star. She looked like a teenager. She looked absolutely stunning. She thundered down the stairs in those shoes, and as the front door slammed behind her, it came to me -- what fantasy I had finally, easily entered this Halloween.

I'd just seen Alice leave for her prom, or her first real date. I'd cheated time, flipping the calendar five or six years into the future. The character I'd played was the 52-year-old mother I will probably never be.

It was effortless.

### **Open Letter to America – Chris Rose – The New Orleans Times Picayune – 2005**

DEAR America,

I suppose we should introduce ourselves: We're South Louisiana.

We have arrived on your doorstep on short notice and we apologize for that, but we never were much for waiting around for invitations. We're not much on formalities like that.

And we might be staying around your town for a while, enrolling in your schools and looking for jobs, so we wanted to tell you a few things about us. We know you didn't ask for this and neither did we, so we're just going to have to make the best of it.

First of all, we thank you. For your money, your water, your food, your prayers, your boats and buses and the men and women of your National Guards, fire departments, hospitals and everyone else who has come to our rescue.



We're a fiercely proud and independent people, and we don't cotton much to outside interference, but we're not ashamed to accept help when we need it. And right now, we need it.

Just don't get carried away. For instance, once we get around to fishing again, don't try to tell us what kind of lures work best in your waters.

We're not going to listen. We're stubborn that way.

You probably already know that we talk funny and listen to strange music and eat things you'd probably hire an exterminator to get out of your yard.

We dance even if there's no radio. We drink at funerals. We talk too much and laugh too loud and live too large and, frankly, we're suspicious of others who don't.

But we'll try not to judge you while we're in your town.

Everybody loves their home, we know that. But we love South Louisiana with a ferocity that borders on the pathological. Sometimes we bury our dead in LSU sweatshirts.

Often we don't make sense. You may wonder why, for instance – if we could only carry one small bag of belongings with us on our journey to your state – why in God's name did we bring a pair of shrimp boots?

We can't really explain that. It is what it is.

You've probably heard that many of us stayed behind. As bad as it is, many of us cannot fathom a life outside of our border, out in that place we call Elsewhere.

The only way you can understand that is if you have been there, and so many of you have. So you realize that when you strip away all the craziness and bars and parades and music and architecture and all that hoey, really, the best thing about where we come from is us.

We are what made this place a national treasure. We're good people. And don't be afraid to ask us how to pronounce our names. It happens all the time. When you meet us now and you look into our eyes, you will see the saddest story ever told. Our hearts are broken into a thousand pieces.

But don't pity us. We're gonna make it. We're resilient. After all, we've been rooting for the Saints for 35 years. That's got to count for something.

OK, maybe something else you should know is that we make jokes at inappropriate times.

But what the hell.

And one more thing: In our part of the country, we're used to having visitors. It's our way of life.

So when all this is over and we move back home, we will repay to you the hospitality and generosity of spirit you offer to us in this season of our despair.

That is our promise. That is our faith.

### **Man of the Streets, in Three Suites – Steve Lopez – Los Angeles Times – 12/4/05**

#### First Suite: The Apartment

He's a lucky man, Nathaniel Anthony Ayers. At least in some ways. Despite the imagined voices and daily flutter of scattered thoughts, he has a burning passion.

For him, the city is an orchestra, a labyrinth of musical references and inspiration. He sees a swaying palm and hears a violin. A bus roars by and gives him a bass line. He hears footsteps and imagines Bach and Brahms.

"I can't survive," Nathaniel once told me, "if I can't hear Los Angeles the way I like to hear it."

That's why he doesn't want to give up sleeping on the streets. I've told him that if he'd be willing to move into an apartment, he would have the freedom to devote even more time to music. As it is, he lugs his belongings around in a shopping cart, tugging an anchor through the city. If he locked up his things, he could travel lighter, with just his fiddle or cello.

But Nathaniel can't see the advantages. After years on the streets, his schizophrenia untreated, he's at home outdoors in a world of his own making.

He needed a nudge.

The staffers at Lamp, the skid row agency that has been working with Nathaniel most of the year, helped me devise a plan in late October. A downtown apartment, complete with all the supportive services Nathaniel needs, had become available. At the same time, a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic had graciously offered to give Nathaniel cello lessons. Now if we could just get Nathaniel to see that the apartment would be the perfect location.

Thanks, Nathaniel said, but he'd rather have the lessons in the 2nd Street tunnel.

With all due respect, I told him, a member of a world-class orchestra might balk at the idea, even if Nathaniel had studied at Juilliard. In the end, he gave in.

As a warmup, I went to the apartment with Nathaniel, trying to get him comfortable there. The building is on a quiet street that seems miles from skid row, with a courtyard where bougainvillea flows over an arbor.

Nathaniel sat on a bench in the garden, took bow in hand and played Beethoven, followed by Bach. Several residents stopped to listen on their way through the courtyard, stunned, as people often are, at the bedraggled source of such refinement.

Let's go check out the room, I said when he broke. Maybe the acoustics are good.

The apartment was small, plain, perfect. Nathaniel liked the light that fell through the window, filtered by an oleander that scratched lightly at the screen.

He took a seat on the bed and played Schubert, and in the embrace of the music, eyes closed, he was home.

### Second Suite: The Lesson

Nathaniel was nervous about the encounter, worried he wasn't good enough to burn the time of a professional. So too was Peter Snyder. The cellist, a 33-year member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, couldn't know what he was in for.

"It so moved me that I simply have to do something," he had written to me after meeting Nathaniel at Disney Hall. The orchestra had invited Nathaniel to a rehearsal, and Snyder had felt a connection with him during a brief chat.

One Monday last month, I picked up Snyder at Disney and we drove down off the hill, through downtown and across to skid row, a six-minute trip across the universe. Nathaniel was waiting in the courtyard with his shopping cart, two violins and a cello. We moved into the apartment and I asked Nathaniel when he last had a lesson.

Early 1970s, he said. Right before a concert in Aspen.

"Did you play in Aspen?" Snyder asked.

"Yes, but I got in trouble with the psychiatrists there," Nathaniel said without explanation. "Straitjacket."

He mentioned the names of several teachers and mentors; Snyder knew them all.

"I brought you something," Snyder said, showing Nathaniel the sheet music to Pablo Casals' "Song of the Birds." "It's something appropriate, because you're kind of a wandering bird."

Nathaniel responded by telling Snyder there was a battle in the tunnels between Don Quixote and Colonel Sanders.

"That's a nice story," Snyder said kindly.

Without an invitation, Nathaniel began playing, and Snyder was instantly impressed.

"You know," he said when Nathaniel paused, "you're a very natural player."

For several minutes they talked music, a conversation that was way over my head. Snyder would later write to me: "The way in which he compared the philosophies of different composers and their visions is extraordinary."

Snyder took his own cello and began to play.

"Do you know this?" he asked.

"Bouree," Nathaniel said, from the Bach suite in C major for unaccompanied cello.

As Snyder continued, Nathaniel was riveted. He leaned forward and stared at the fingering. Then a smile suddenly took shape.

Next it was Nathaniel's turn to impress. Snyder asked if he could play Bach, and Nathaniel showed his chops.

"I'm amazed," Snyder said. "I know many talented people who don't have as pretty a sound."

As Nathaniel continued, Snyder leaned in to me.

"He might be a musical genius," he said. "It's not unusual to find someone with his aptitude. What is unbelievable is to see someone without recent training play so well."

Snyder told Nathaniel he ought to seriously consider keeping the apartment as a

sanctuary — a safe place to connect spiritually with his music.

Thanks, Nathaniel responded quickly, but he preferred playing on the streets and in the tunnel.

"How about making this deal," Snyder said. "You come here as often as you can, so maybe we can have another lesson."

Nathaniel fidgeted like a teenager, then repeated his preference for the tunnel.

"Think of this as a clean, quiet tunnel," Snyder suggested.

Nathaniel was sitting by the window and his own shadow fell before him. The idea seemed to grow on him.

"I wouldn't have thought of it," he said. "Yeah. This is a brand new tunnel."

Third Suite: The Conversation

Nathaniel stayed away from the apartment for days after the lesson, then surprised everyone by asking to leave his cart there for several hours while he copied sheet music at the public library. But that was it. He didn't go back, and he said he had no interest in the apartment for anything but lessons from Peter Snyder.

"Will you give me violin lessons?" I asked Nathaniel the day after Thanksgiving.

Sure, he said.

"Great," I said. "I'd like to do it at the apartment."

He's a smart man — cagey, even — and good at sniffing out a ruse. I think Nathaniel was on to me, but he agreed.

I didn't envy the poor man. I took guitar lessons for several years, but didn't even know how to hold a violin. We sat in the courtyard last Wednesday and Nathaniel was patient and gentle, making me think teaching could one day give him new meaning and pay his bills. He had selected a simple piece of music for me to try but quickly gave up on it and asked me to just try and get something — anything — out of the violin.

What I got sounded like the torture of several small animals.

"There," Nathaniel said. "You get a sound and work with it. It's frustrating, but if you admire the violin, you'll weather the frustrations. Desire, discipline, diversity."

Nathaniel had a white shirt tied over his head. In one pocket of his blue cardigan was a tennis ball, in the other a dinner roll. He took out a copy of Beethoven's Ninth and began playing effortlessly.

By the time he switched to cello, he had drawn a crowd. One resident approached with a battery-operated drill and gunned it in rhythm with the music. Two other residents stopped and said they were musicians.

I suggested they start a band.

Nathaniel liked the idea, and he also liked it when another resident, wowed by his moves on cello, handed him a dollar.

"Dynamic," the resident said.

When everyone was gone but the two of us, I steered the conversation to Nathaniel's mother, who died several years ago.

You know, I said, she'd probably like to know you have a safe place to lay your head at night.

"I lost a god and I gained a god," he told me. His mother died in Cleveland, but he came to Los Angeles and found a statue of Beethoven in Pershing Square.

"It's rough out there," he said, "but as long as I can look at Beethoven, I'll be all right."

As I struggled with the violin, a man named James walked up, stood next to the "Smoking Prohibited" sign and lit a cigarette.

"Excuse me, sir," said Nathaniel, who hates smoke. "You can't smoke here."

"Who are you?" asked James. "You don't live here."

"I do too live here," Nathaniel snapped. "I have a place."

It was music to my ears. On some level, maybe Nathaniel had already begun thinking of the apartment as home, even if he hadn't spent a night in it.

"Where's your place?" James asked.

Nathaniel told him the room number.

"You're in violation of the city ordinance against smoking in that spot," Nathaniel persisted.

"Well, so what? I don't have a house on wheels."

"You see?" Nathaniel said, standing next to his cart. "I knew it was personal."

"You need soap and water," James said.

"You're killing yourself and everyone else," Nathaniel retorted.

"Get a doctor," James said. "Get some help."

If Nathaniel was hurt by that, it didn't show. I wondered how many times in 30-plus years he's been insulted that way.

"You know what?" James asked. "It's a shame you allowed yourself to give up."

"I didn't give up," Nathaniel said.

"You're a young man, strong, you could get a job. You're a musician and you should encourage someone else. You can't encourage no one looking like that.... Look at all that talent gone to waste."

Nathaniel shrugged as he got his cart ready to leave.

"You gave up," James went on, reciting what sounded like a speech he'd heard a few times. "You push a cart and say, 'I quit. I quit on life' .... I can't stand to see you like that. I don't even know you, but I love you as a human being."

Nathaniel was ready to go. He told James he hadn't quit anything. Then he thanked him for trying to help, and pointed once more to the room he hasn't yet slept in.

"That is my place," he said.

Maybe one day it will be.