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WALKING THE VAST GREEN lawns of a city in upstate New York, I saw the trash bits that are such a part of our earth now, and thought to pick some up. For ten steps I resisted, then bent down and grabbed some papers and cans. Arms full, I walked to a bin, thinking my job done. But the thunk of the trash in the empty steel bin rang in my ears, and I wanted to gather more. It was a crisp autumn day, nearing dusk, quiet and still, no one else in sight. The hills ablaze with red and gold around the flat green lawn embraced my solitude and simple aim. I never decided to clear the whole field, just get a few more bits, but the bottles and bags and soggy boxes invited me on, like friends calling me to a joy. Why did this plain task give my soul such solace, each new scrap a burst of vigor? Load after load went in the bins until the broad acres turned pure green. Unready to stop, I dove in the underbrush, clogged with old junk wind-swept from the lawn. My hands able to hold but a little, the trash itself gave help: cast-off garbage bags held a lot. I grew bolder, ambitious, plunging deeper into the brush, tearing plastic sheets and chunks of automobile from the earth and tangled tree limbs. It was easy work, a release from self and scheme, a purpose all its own: like playing music, no gain or loss to figure. Toting two hefty bags, I met a shy middle-aged couple clipping purple-berry branches; we nodded hello, eyeing each other's harvest. Shadows growing long and black, air cold, I left by a narrow woods path, picking litter each step. Deep in the trees I stopped to behold the sun's last light. The brilliant foliage, which I hadn't seen for two decades, haunted me anew with the old wonder: why did nature invent such colors? And then I saw the moon. Just rising, a huge blue-white lamp amid the orange leaves, it possessed me; and there I stood, in place, at home on the earth, shivering, hopeful, gripping bags of trash.



Words for His Joy

Urban decay and ruin are gaining favor for film and TV settings. A recent ad script urging young women to get pre-natal care called for graffiti-scribbled rubble (not just any rubble) for its location. The producer used one of the few apartment buildings burned down in this year's Los Angeles riots, with gleaming corporate skyscrapers in view. *Like monkeys they seized upon the gold. They thirsted mightily for it, they stuffed themselves with it, they hungered and lusted for the gold like pigs. Clams like mud.*

"Yesterday a praying mantis perched motionless on a mint plant by the kitchen door," Pamela Worthington writes. "When I took my daughter out to show her, it was holding a bee in its arms, munching daintily." *The power of a national leader consists mainly in focusing the mind of the people upon a single enemy. Unable to find words for his joy Ed stammers, "Why this is — unexpected."*

Faster All the Time

At the end of a late-night flight out of New York City, our small aircraft landed through such rough air, and hit the ground so hard, that the two dozen passengers, already edgy with fatigue, remained silent, still gripped by the harrowing descent, as the plane crossed the dark runway, multi-colored guide lights sprinkling the blackness like flowers of a weird unearthly garden, no words or movement breaking the tense hush, till a beefy young man braved out, "Well! Guess our pilot used to be a New York cab driver!" and we all laughed, relief gushing, strangers bubbling convivial cheer. Exiting, I praised the flight attendant for her speed-talking technique; she'd read the flight rules with dazzling rapid diction, which only intense practice and a comedian's flair could have made. "Thanks!" she beamed, "I'm getting faster all the time." *Brahms and Bach were out in a boat; Bach fell out; who was left? Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore; send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door! One loves to be sidetracked.*

Second-Floor Bag

The next-door neighbors left a leather bag hanging up on their second-floor back porch for a year. We asked what it was doing there. "Oh," Cindy said, "my mother gave us the bag, and it's a good one, except it stinks of some foul tanning chemical I couldn't wash out no matter how hard I tried. So I thought airing might help. It didn't. It'll always stink. So we can't use it. But it looks nice up there, don't you think?" *Two young boys, one pushing his bicycle, the other idly kicking a stone along, mosey up a residential street, beneath tall leafy trees, in the scorching summer afternoon heat. One murmurs dreamily, "Well — whaddya wanna do?" After a long pause his pal replies, "Oh — I dunno." They continue moseying on up the street. Bop squiggle-dee, squiggle-dee, bop bop.*

How to read Rollmag: bits and pieces, slowly absorbing. Give it time to sink in.

“She’s building confidence like a machinist builds a jet plane.”

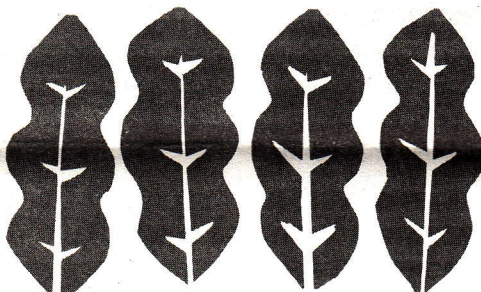
“On our farm,” writes Charles Farrow in Connecticut, “I clear a bit of land each day. I use hand tools, sneaking up on the land with gentleness. This region is dying because of the addiction to oil, wrecking the economy and poisoning the air. I’m setting up self-perpetuating devices: wind generators to heat the ground so we can grow food year-round, wind and photo-voltaic generators for cars and houses. It’s all possible. We just have to see problems from new viewpoints.” *Rain splattered the windshield as Edna freshened her make-up.*

Should we aim our telescopes in a different direction?

Fact University genetic scientists have created a new species of tree that grows hundred-dollar bills for leaves. TheMoneyTree™ will retail for \$99.95, and US Treasury officials are ecstatic. One confided, “We can forget about deficits, plant closings, Japanese trade tactics, Arab oil — all that stuff. This tree gives the USA real economic clout. We’re on top again!” *Mutt and Jeff were out in a boat.*

A Sustaining Grace

Are we more like birds or trees? We fly over continents, drive hundreds of miles weekly, commute to work, travel to vacation, change homes repeatedly; most things we do begin with getting in a machine hurling us through space. We say this mobility is our nature. Is it? I feel more like a tree than a bird: rooted in place, thriving on ever-deeper intimacy with the land I’m part of. Cars are handy, but what do they do to our souls? Each time I ride in one, the acceleration and speed rip the fabric of place, tear the fibers of being. I love to walk, and not just for exercise; it’s how I get around, weaving my life into the world. I sold my car ten years ago. At first daily habits were inconvenient, then reshaped themselves on new rhythms, tuned to bus schedules, weather, friends’ habits, and the capacity of my canvas bag: rhythms which cars’ instant overpowered lurching had mangled. We think, understandably, that doing without cars will paralyze us. True, it takes getting used to, but it’s hardly a deprivation, more a sustaining grace full of encounters and people unseen from the zooming steel boxes. I find staying in place fosters a deep trust in the order of things, a reassuring orientation, curing an edginess we all know. *Nostalgia* now means a silly longing, but the term was coined for a medical illness, like *neurosis*, first provoked by the early 19th century advent of rail travel: *homesickness*, the *pain of needing to return*. All the adults I know who stay out of cars agree: life on foot *makes sense* in ways unimaginable with vehicular mobility. It lets the deep roots grow strong.



Bop, squiggle bop-bop, moo, honk-honk. When I told Dick Winslow my models for Rollmag were E. B. White and I. F. Stone he said, “Just remember, every man pays his debt to life his own way. A *Charlotte’s Web* by I. F. Stone would have been a mess.” **Damaged lawn furniture?**

Holding the Mess Together

A friend in Hartford writes, “The sections of my life fit together imperfectly, with thick seams and jagged edges, pop rivets and bungee cords holding the mess together. Big Car Overhaul, Keeping Body in Shape, Job Writing, Searching for Sex Partner, Keeping Household Functioning Smoothly, Reading Rollmag, Family Relations — where they overlap there’s comfort, but I often can’t even get them close. I think my memory is substandard, or else I’m just careless. Today a housemate mentioned a music professor’s abusing her a few years ago. ‘Did I tell you that story?’ she asked. ‘I’m sure I did.’ And I made her tell it all again because, if she told me, I forgot it. So here’s this Major Trauma in a friend’s life, and she shares it with Sensitive Me, and I blow it off like the plot of last week’s sit-com. Man, why do I do stuff like that? But she took it OK. She’s really something. She’s putting her life together, building confidence like a machinist builds a jet plane. Plays alto sax in a jazz band, washes dishes for a job. She has this incredible strength; fights to hold her head up. It’s enough to make you think entropy is just plain wrong.” *Talking is like eating, without the food.*

Big Buttons

Figuring my taxes at the library, I tried to multiply two four-digit numbers, and failed. I asked Renée, at the desk, if the library had a calculator for patrons’ use. No, she said. “Oh, wait!” She pulled her own calculator from her bag, and gave it to me: a good one, with big buttons and a clear screen. My work habits, writing these lines, are very slow. Most passages get dozens of edits. When I mused on the wisdom of laboring so long for such modest results, a friend said, “That’s how the love goes in.” The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and as imagination bodies forth the form of things unknown, the poet’s pen turns them to shape, giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. *Yeah.*

The Blood Told Her

Joseph Woodard Zummo, 3, reports, “We mowed the lawn and gardened, got this tool box, got in my bed, I got my office stool to eat, too. We have something in here like a train. We got Sweetie from the cat store. We got all these trains. We got a new bed. We got a new house. A girl came from her house to my house. We die. Boing.”

Meanwhile communism snuck in everywhere. Even your baby sitter might be one!

"When my niece Sara was five," writes Teresa Gilman, "she told me she thought that when the earth turned round and round it made the wind blow. I asked how she'd figured that out, and she said she'd lain on her mother's bed with her head hanging upside down over the edge so the blood rushed to her head. She said the blood told her. And I knew what she meant, somehow." *If you can't be free, be a mystery.*

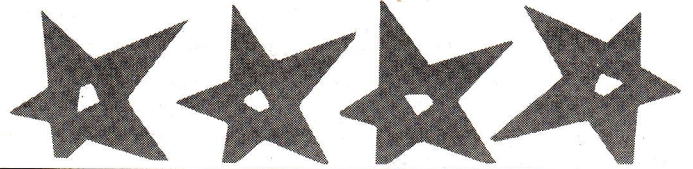
The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century began around 1900. It was a fight between good and communism. We won, of course. At first, people were happy. They had lace curtains, and nice hobbies like farming and church. Then Abraham Lincoln got stabbed in his bath by a madman causing World War I which was so bad, George Washington had to go win it for them. The '20s were fun. They had old cars, slapstick on TV, and gangsters. Alas President Hoover crashed the stock market and just sat around looking glum. Luckily President Franklin Roosevelt came along with his lovely wife Aretha Franklin who married Ray Charles in a Pepsi ad. Things got better. They had a TV show called New Deal where a guy said, "You're my friend." People liked that. Wouldn't you? Then Hitler attacked Pearl Harbor, until we attacked D-Day and won. We always win, thank heavens. Meanwhile communism snuck in everywhere. Even your baby sitter might be one! So they had a witch hunt. Then with no more Reds to worry about, the '50s were tops: Elvis, cars, bowling alleys, you name it. President Kennedy was brave and idealistic until he got shot. The '60s had the Beatles, but communism snuck back in with riots, and made the students attack the Pentagon, causing Vietnam to bomb Pearl Harbor again, so, another mess. Watergate was wild! It was on TV. That Nixon! What an idiot! He should've burned those tapes! The Arabs tried to steal our oil, but Reagan fixed everything up. Communism finally collapsed because, let's face it, they couldn't do anything right. Basically, capitalism is the best thing around. Now if we can just punch out those dictators in the poor nations, we'll have freedom everywhere.

**Like other roof-installation systems,
the fully-adhered method isn't perfect.**

"We are created from and with the world," writes Auden, "to suffer with and from it day by day. Whether we meet in a majestic world of solid measurements or a dream world of swans and gold, we are required to love all homeless objects that require a world." *Older brothers can be so persuasive.* The USA is a constitutional republic with three big branches: President, TV, prison. Ray Cook says, "I am what I am because I'm not suited to be anything else." Have you never fallen in love with an abstraction? *Tolstoi and Molière were out in a boat. Tolstoi fell out. Moo.*

Needing to spell the plural of "avocado," I couldn't find it in the dictionary. After much searching I realized I was looking in the phone book. No one named Avocadoes in there! Richard Ploetz writes from New York, "On a walk this morning, at 5:30, I passed a cricket chirping in a raised flower bed in front of a high-rise apartment building." One day we have beans and rice; next day, rice and beans. It's the variety that's so satisfying. "Dare to know!" says Kant.



Artist: Pamela Worthington. Other Sources: Ed Ericson, A. Haeuser, W. Shakespeare, Danny Nussbaum, Emma Lazarus.

A Farm Visit

FATHER PAUL KABAT, RETIRED PRIEST and veteran of US prisons for prayerful peace protest, met me at the St. Louis airport and drove us to the southern Illinois farm where his grandmother was born and he grew up. Along the way we saw the minor seminary (high school) he attended, now shut for lack of students; a large shrine he helped found 30 years ago; and the Nashville, Illinois, apartment of his 79-year-old mother, Anna Kabat (*CAB-et*).

Cheery and forthright, friend to many, she welcomed her guest, swapped garden vegetables with Paul, scolded her two granddaughters for noisy frolicking, and said, "I'm proud of what my boys done. Some folks call 'em criminals, well let 'em. They done the right thing." Father Carl Kabat, like Paul a Catholic priest, was in his seventh year in prison for peace protesting. Her living room brimmed with political writings; even in offhand remarks she showed a better grasp of how the world works than most US college graduates have.

A Fine and Decent Life

The white clapboard farmhouse, set on an acre of lawn amid 40-acre fields, is picture perfect. Out my window I saw front-porch columns, grass down to a cinder lane, corn fields, and trees afar. The corn was tall when I arrived, just starting to tassel. The earth is rolling flatland, cut by stream bottoms. Fields of corn, soybeans, and winter wheat are lined by rows of tall leafy trees. It is a peaceful, quiet, heavenly place.

Polish peasants came here 150 years ago, displacing the native people the USA drove out. Paul took me past so many farms of his relatives, it became a joke between us. A few old folks and parish priests still speak Polish, Paul's language till age four. This hard-working, religious people built a fine and decent life. One hears in everyday greetings deep reserves of goodwill, and the endless gifts of garden vegetables and homemade baked goods gracing every social contact speak of a strong community fabric rare in the modern world.

Carl said, "Look, God isn't up there. God is love. That's all. *Doing the right thing.*"

But these farmers' era is over. Just as they displaced the native people, global corporations are now displacing them. The life Paul grew up with has vanished. Family farms, with their diverse crops, gardens and orchards, canning and crafts, livestock for home eating and cash income, everyone helping out (Paul did a man's work at 11), no longer exist. Today's farms are speciality-crop operations run by "hobby farmers" working other jobs to support the farming they love.

They are the last generation of owner-farmers. Only big corporations can buy the land now; managers and laborers do the work. Paul's brother-in-law, Rich Radake (*RAD-a-kee*) and sister, Mary Ann, own the old Kabat place, and live on a second farm they own nearby. Rich does auto-body repair; Mary Ann runs a craft gallery. Paul lives in the house, tends his garden, and studies US society, corresponding with others who, like him, blaze with passion for social justice.

"In Love There Is No Fear"

He was retired a few years ago by the church hierarchy, which shuns activism. In his parishes he had lifted people's self-determination, only to be transferred by bishops. The old priestly "hatch, match, and dispatch" job means little to him. His "church of the future" is tolerant, inclusive, practical in its faith, fully committed to dignity and fairness for all. For now, he remains, like most radicals, an exile in his own land, awaiting a new advent of conscientious love.

In 1984 he joined Carl and two others in a peace action at a nuclear missile silo in Kansas City [*Rollmag* 25]. Expecting jail, they were shocked when the judge gave Carl 18 years, Paul 12. That night he tossed in his cell bunk, calming himself by repeating, "In love there is no fear." Near dawn, a voice said, "Peace beyond human understanding." Instantly he became serene, and fell sound asleep.

Legal efforts got him out in 28 months. Carl remains in prison. Paroled in early 1992, he returned on Good Friday to the silo they whacked in 1984 and, with a friend, whacked it again, praying as before. This got him six months in halfway house jail, with community service. On Saturday, Paul, Mrs. Kabat, and I drove six hours to Kansas City to visit him.

N-5 Is Auschwitz

Almost there, Paul pulled off the road and stopped at a chain link fence around what looked like a stray gear lot. A tiny sign said, "N-5, Government Property, Keep Out." No one there; no security. If you didn't know, you'd never guess it was a nuclear bomb launcher. Below the concrete slab lay a bomb 10 times bigger than the Hiroshima bomb, ready to destroy a city 30 minutes after launching. N-5 is one of 150 in Kansas City. This was the silo these priests had whacked.

Seeing N-5 made me sick. We all talk about The Bomb; we see pictures of mushroom clouds. But there it was: N-5, instant Auschwitz. What the Nazis took years to do, this one machine does in 30 minutes. And the killing isn't only if it's used. The wealth that pays for N-5 is food for people every day. Millions starve to death now. N-5 is Auschwitz.

Paul took out his video camera and I posed at the fence. "Wave!" he cried with a grin, and I waved at the priest who'd gone to prison for whacking this machine, while Anna Kabat, retired farm woman, former driver of four-horse teams, mom of two priests imprisoned for loving Jesus, and fiercely proud of her "boys," sat in the car looking on, smiling.

Doing the Right Thing

Carl met us in the driveway of the Catholic Worker, his community service post, a radical religious house that serves 300 free dinners nightly. Upstairs, we watched the Cardinals baseball game and talked. Carl loves sports. In jail he plays basketball, hard for him now because of a limp and blind eye from prison abuse. He turned radical doing missionary work in the slums of Brazil. Seeing the trouble lay not in the slums

but the business-military system that creates them, he returned to the USA in 1972 to confront nuclear arms. He has spent years in prison for peace actions. A fiery, rock-solid man who talks in short bursts of impassioned down-to-earth bluntness, he has no interest in movements, only personal acts of conscience. His faith, like his brother's, is far more direct than any Christianity I knew. At the Sunday

liturgy, a pleasantly informal celebration of the church of the future, we sat in a circle, read aloud, told personal tales, and shared the sacrament, all taking turns; Carl, the only priest, had no special role. A woman spoke of feeling joined to God. Carl, seven years imprisoned, said softly, "Look, God isn't up there. God is love. That's all. *Doing the right thing.*"

Roses From Granite

When Paul drove me back to the St. Louis airport, his two young nieces came along. We played a tape of nursery songs and sang aloud. During those gay, carefree hours, one question haunted me, and haunts me still: how did these three radical Kabats grow from that conservative farm life? What called those two young priests to social action? What called their mother to support them in the face of condemnation?

Whatever I heard on my visit, it remains a mystery. All the explanations run back to a vast answerless question. I feel as if I'd seen roses growing from granite. How? I cannot say. Such love and courage from unseen roots surely is a miracle, a wonder, a beacon to the future. For what these Kabats have done, surely all of us, each in our way, can do.

