working-class kid from the East Side of Cleveland and she was obviously from a much better home, I loved her desperately, knew that she was perfect for me, wanted to marry her and go off into that three-bedroom, split-level life together.

But I was a phantom and she was a fantasy. I never so much as said a word to her in four years. Although I looked her way many times, she never saw me.

Meanwhile, on the educational front, the ostensible reason I was here in the first place, I was taking a normal sixteen-hour academic load and doing terribly. After work, when I got to the library to study, I fell asleep. I gobbled down No-Doz tablets as if they were popcorn. As I regularly fell asleep in most of my classes, I tried to sit in the back so that no one would see. Had I not wallowed in my alienation—and self-pity—I might have gotten a reasonably good education, for Marquette actually had some of the top Jesuits in America. My anger poisoned me; I had no one to turn to who might set my way straight.

What was it that had turned me into this kind of person? Was it the morning of May 1 that had forever set me on another path, one of guilt and remorse and yearning to be embraced by the mother I no longer had, and whom I had mostly ignored during those rebellious high school days? Was it the ethnic chip-on-my-shoulder mentality that working-class men often used as their shield against rejection? My own self-doubt that I could go to college, graduate, and go to a life that was different from that of the blue-collar men of Forest Avenue and St. Benedict's parish? It was all of these; each played its own part in the dissonant symphony of those years.

There was no one I could tell of my agonies, so I tried to tell God.

I stayed after Mass on Sunday to pray, and often during the week in Gesu Church, a few blocks from Red Arrow Park, which marked the downtown edge of the campus. With the wind screaming up Wisconsin Avenue from Lake Michigan and my frozen soul aching in my chest, I stopped in for visits at odd hours of the day and night. It was a gorgeous Gothic church, filled on Sundays with students and parishioners. On weekdays it was a dark and quiet place, and, in the same pew just off the main aisle on the right side, I knelt, head bowed, hopeful that God would answer a prayer I could not even clearly make. I wanted Gesu to enfold me. There was the lingering hint of incense in the air, but I could not find God in this place. I heard the dull roar of traffic outside, but not God's voice. I looked to the statues of the saints and Mary as they gazed over my head, little different from the Oak Park girls. The bleeding Christ on the cross was a fine work of art, not a man suffering as I was suffering.

I spent many Friday and Saturday nights in the park, with the consoling companionship of Blatz beer and Thunderbird wine and an occasional bottle of a cheap whiskey blend. It was even more precious when a major campus event was taking place, so I could read in the school newspaper of the king and queen (at times, My Fair Judy) and all those who had inherited the earth as I drank myself into a stupor. Those fools! I was having a far better time, shivering in the cold, peeing in the bushes. There was a group of us miscreants who gathered in Red Arrow Park, and we were devastatingly funny and cruel as we skewered people on campus whom we knew only by face and reputation—boys with close-cropped hair and a Volkswagen bug and their fraternity table in the Student Union. They didn't know we existed. I hated them.

Of course, had I drunk less and raged less, I could have had a much better four years at Marquette, but I couldn't see that then.

I rented cheap rooms on the edge of the campus in foul-smelling boardinghouses on Kilbourn and Wells and Juneau that reeked of stale urine and dirt and cigarette smoke, but one time, between jobs in my junior year, I didn't even have enough money for the $10 or $12 a week in rent. I was barely passing; my grades in journalism were appalling. I was ready to give up and go back to Cleveland, get a job in a steel mill, and live the life for which I was preordained. Someone mentioned a priest who might let me stay in a room at the back of his office. I looked him up.

Father James McEvoy must have been among the least distinguished Jesuits at Marquette, consigned to being the chaplain for the dental school and given no teaching assignments because he was obviously not on intellectual par with the rest of the religious faculty. He was a short, squat, overweight man who talked too loudly and had the unfortunate habit of hugging students close to a body that was always in need of bathing. But he did have a room (actually a tiny supply closet at the back of his basement office), airless, windowless—and free. At night, I had to slide horizontally onto a folding cot, which stretched beneath a shelf. If I raised my knees, I sent boxes of dental floss and rubber gloves raining down on the coarse woolen Army surplus blanket.

It was not merely that this man provided a place to stay until I could find another job that will forever bind me to him. Across from his office was a small chapel. Although Father McEvoy said Mass there each morning, students could come by at any time during the day to receive Holy Communion. Liturgically, canonically, it was probably illicit, but nonetheless he did it, supplying a sort of walk-in spiritual boost. I was like a starving man at Marquette, grasping for something to sustain me—which, sadly, I too often found in Red Arrow Park. I slowly began to realize that

liberate. I no longer made any pretense of dressing "collegiate." I came straight from factory to classroom, as much for convenience as to make a fierce statement of independence. I was proud, primevally proud, to be gathering my own food, providing my own shelter. I didn't have to dress for them. They had orange juice on their breath and a Corn Flake on their lips. I smelled of a workingman's aphrodisiac; my breakfast had been a length of beef jerky. I had grease on my knees; they wore starched chinos or plaid kilts. They were there to learn, to prepare for their careers. I just wanted a place to sit down after a night on my feet on the assembly line.

But deep inside, behind all this posturing, was another person, whose face was not contorted in a snarl, whose lips were not quick with profanities. That was the young man longing to feel once again the excitement of hearing a gaunt Maryknoll priest tell of what a life could really be about. A young man searching for Thomas Merton so that the words of his books might be made real in that young man's life. Even a boy kneeling on the furnace grate, understanding pain as the presence of God. I desperately wanted my life to count for something, and I knew nothing about how to achieve that. Instead, I ground myself to bits day after day, night after night. Only those fleeting moments in the basement chapel had any meaning at all.

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In June 1960, my father boarded an airplane for the first time in his life and flew to Milwaukee for my graduation. He brought with him a small box, carefully wrapped in sheets of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* further protected by many additional interior layers of aluminum foil. But the contents easily triumphed over such flimsy safeguards, for within were huge links of garlic-infused Polish sausage that his friend Frank had cured in his backyard smokehouse. My father had to laugh at how the entire planeload of people quickly sensed his precious cargo. He was not the least bit embarrassed.

I cooked the sausage over my hot plate, and, with some good rye bread with poppy seeds and plenty of Milwaukee beer, we had a great feast the night before my graduation. He was proud of me, I could tell that, this man who went no further than the sixth grade before he took his first job in the coal mines, picking rocks in the breaker. He didn't exactly understand what I had been doing (had he known how anemic an education I had received, he would have had even more reason to wonder why I had spent four years in its pursuit), but he knew that I had stayed the course, completed the job.

slowly, almost imperceptibly, but moving nonetheless. After what seemed to be hours, my head bumped against the other side. The swimming instructor shook his head and signed the sheet on his clipboard.

My father had served in World War I in the Panama Canal aboard an oiler, the USS *Brazos,* and he couldn't swim a stroke. My brother Tom joined the Navy during World War II and was assigned shore duty on the West Coast. And on graduation day, May 12, 1961, when the call went out, "Officer candidates, rise," followed in a few minutes by "Officers, seats," the third nonswimming Wilkes joined the fleet.

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On a sparkling South Carolina fall day, I strode purposefully through the Charleston Naval Shipyard. I felt like a man in a movie, a powerful destiny awaiting me. I was a man fully prepared for battle, untroubled by the fact that he was in a peacetime Navy. I rounded the corner and saw the ship to which I had miraculously been assigned, the USS *Power* (DD-839). She was a thing of beauty, by any standards, even with patches of orange and beige primer dotting her hull and superstructure. Built in 1945, the *Power* was now in the final stages of a complete overhaul that equipped her with a rocket-launched antisubmarine torpedo that could carry a nuclear warhead, a platform for a drone helicopter, and a bristling array of antennae, for which I would be responsible as the new communications officer.

A salute offered, a salute returned, and Ensign Wilkes was aboard the ship that would take him to at least a taste of war, to an exotic romance, and then at full steam right out of his Catholic Church.

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For a kid whose only encounters with water deeper than that in a bathtub were few, I actually took to the open sea. When that last hawser was hoisted from a pier's bollard and the space gradually widened between ship and land, a certain sensation sweeps over not a few of us who have gone down to the sea in ships. Solid ground no longer had any claim on me. I was afloat, and the ship was everything, my universe. Life aboard ship is at once precarious and serene in its exacting limitation. All for the ship; the ship for all.

Each time we sailed from the security and placidity of sheltered East Coast port waters, there was a gradual awakening of this great gray beauty, a sinuousness to the gentle rising and falling of her 390 feet of

"Mr. Wilkes, remember the capacitor problems with the SLR-21 receiver we had in the yard? I asked you to have a backup on board. The SLR-21 just went down, and we can't get the fleet frequency we need to complete our trial runs. Is that backup capacitor on board?"

"Captain, I sent that request to the supply center weeks ago—"

"Do we have it on board?"

"Captain, I bumped it up to priority just last week, and—"

"Do we have it on board, Mr. Wilkes?"

"Captain, that request is in every supply depot from Key West to Reykjavik, over in Naples, all across the Sixth Fleet, and probably . . ."

The captain just stared at me. The bridge was stonily silent, a crackling over the speaker a reminder of the circuit we weren't on. And I realized that even though I might have learned that "intention equals the act" in some philosophy or theology course at Marquette, such a distinction wasn't going to work in the Navy.

"No, sir, it is not on board."

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Although I would never be considered the best officer on board the *Power,* I worked all the harder after that humiliation. The overriding concept was "completed staff work," taking a project from start to finish, without leaving any loose ends. I guess I got better at it, for when the assignments for battle stations (or "general quarters" as it is called in Navy parlance) were announced, I was designated the general quarters officer of the deck. If ever and whenever our ship would go into battle, I would be on the bridge, with the captain and executive officer. And thus I would meet my appointment with destiny—such as it was—in the unfolding drama that came to be called the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It was not long after we had returned to the States in spring 1962, after having been proven battle ready through our readiness training at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, that one of my radiomen breathlessly ran up to me as we sat pier side in Mayport, Florida, our home port. His hands were shaking as he handed me the clipboard with a huge "Priority" stamp emblazoned on the short message. We were to get under way as soon as our crew could be recalled, and return to a point two hundred miles west-northwest of Cuba and await further orders. We were to have a full complement of fuel, stores, and ammunition aboard.

As the intelligence officer, I knew that the Russians for months had been clearing barren stretches of land on the northern coast of Cuba, and ships had been offloading cargo. It was considered to be Fidel

chest-high in readiness. The five-inch, .38 caliber gun mounts locked on to the freighter. I ordered the signal bridge to hoist the "K" signal flag, which was the international signal to stop engines. The blinking light from the signal bridge transmitted the same order. We tried to raise the ship on channel 16, the common channel all ships are supposed to monitor. Nothing. Through a bullhorn, Captain Hayes hollered, "Lay to. Lay to immediately. You are suspected of carrying contraband. Stop your engines. Lay to."

Then an eerie silence, nothing. The only sound was the waves slapping lazily against the side of our ship in the twenty-yard gap of choppy water that separated us. There was no sign of life on the freighter, not a single man on deck as it plowed along, oblivious to the bristling arsenal of guns ready to blow it out of the water. We sounded the ship's horn, repeated the signal light message; the captain again took up the bullhorn and hollered still louder. Nothing. No one.

The captain and I looked at each other. To fire or not to fire? Would he be justified and commended with a battle ribbon, or torpedo his career on this beautiful sunny afternoon by firing on an unarmed ship? I'm sure the options and potential outcomes were flying through the mind of this Naval Academy lifer, by nature a cautious man. We heard a squeak across the water and turned back to the freighter to see the wheelhouse door slowly open. A magnificently fat man emerged, shirtless, with a beer bottle in his hand, blinking into the bright Caribbean sun. Then, suddenly focused and completely sober, his head jerked back when he saw what was alongside.

He shrugged his shoulders. A sign of insolence? Defiance? Who could say?

We flashed the message once more, sounded the horn, and the captain called even louder over the bullhorn. The man shrugged again. I could see him better now through the binoculars: tiny, furtive eyes; huge, puffy cheeks. The good Slav that he was, one of my people, was all I could think. He was just doing his job for the boss man and not wanting to get in any trouble. He was to deliver the goods, get his paycheck, and go home to Dubrovnik or Split. I knew him.

The captain was breathing heavily now. He picked up the bullhorn, but I stopped him. "Captain, let me try something." I went out on the wing of the bridge and took off my sunglasses. I locked on him eye to eye, Slav to Slav. He put down his beer bottle and stood there, motionless. I raised my right hand. I passed it in front of my face, and—traversing that channel of understanding between our met eyes—made a sweeping motion, a huge U. Once again. My finger held motionless in the air

Foolishly, I found a fleeting peace only in drinking myself into a stupor. But in Naples, after a first night devoted to the bars, with a well-earned and colossal hangover, I signed on for a four-day tour up to Rome.

I visited the ancient ruins and monuments, and, of course, I looked forward to seeing the Vatican. After all, I was a lifelong and practicing Catholic—that word *practicing* meaning no more and no less than what was expected at the time: regular Sunday Mass attendance, occasional confession of my sins, and generally not falling into grave sin so that I might gain eternal life. This was not about—in Augustine's view—"resting in God." No, our faith had been codified and routinized for centuries, and no one—least of all I—had any idea that a gathering storm of political, cultural, and religious forces would upend not only my country and the world but the Catholic Church itself. The man carried in a sedan chair into St. Peter's Basilica that morning looked like one of the broad-chested Italians I might have seen pouring cement at a Cleveland construction site or reaching for a length of Genoa salami behind a Milwaukee butcher's counter. He was so different from the only pope I had known, the thin, ascetic Pius XII. This was John XXIII, regarded as the interim pope, the compromise pope, really no one's favorite and everyone's third or fourth choice. So pitifully ordinary, not in the least charismatic or exuding holiness as one might expect of St. Peter's successor, he seemed so out of place in his splendid robes, a huge, glistening miter soaring above his chubby face. And yet as the crowd surged forward toward the main aisle, pushing aside the hapless ushers, it was obvious they were not here merely to pay him honor. They wanted to touch him, grab him, devour him if they could. I had never seen such an outpouring of emotion in a church before.

The rush of humanity pushed me forward until I was just a few feet from the red silk rope that secured his passage to the great main altar. Then he passed by, waving his gloved hand in the air, smiling. The pope was smiling! I had never seen such a thing. That smile would be engrained in my mind. What kind of smile was it? What was going through his mind?

for you while you're in Karachi, please let me know," then finally, to the obtuse me, "Dinner tomorrow night? . . . Good; I'll pick you up at six."

My shipmates could not believe that this leggy, lithesome, gorgeous creature in a fine silk dress getting out of a Volkswagen on that sewer of a pier was calling for me. Before dinner, I needed a stop at the Hotel Metropole, and after three throat-closing, head-spinning double Rob Roys, we had dinner with her host family. But we both knew there was more than dinner on the menu that night. She took me to a desolate beach to walk along the Indian Ocean and watch the giant sea turtles, lumbering up to lay eggs. We stopped to sit on one of the low dunes, watching the huge black humps inch back toward the luminous, shimmering water.

She had been raised on a farm in Nebraska, leading the most conventional of lives, but then moved to California where—and I was reading between the lines—she had both lost her way and experienced a profound religious conversion. She came here sponsored by her church to do educational work. I sketched out my own story, but it was obvious that we were both lonely people at sea—I literally, she in a foreign country.

The wind played with long auburn hair spilling over her shoulders. That fabulous sari material rustled sensuously each time she moved on the sand. The moon was full, and two innocents abroad—thousands of miles from home, hormones heated up in the soft, warm night—surely wouldn't let this moment pass, even though I was a sailor soon to ship out. We kissed, and of course I wanted more. Clumsily, we groped at each other. This was still the early 1960s, and, even on that sultry night, we only went so far.

We saw each other every night I was in port. We promised to write. She waved and cried—as did I—as that last hawser left the bollard and the narrow gap between ship and land—fantasy and reality—widened.

Her letters via Fleet Post Office, New York, somehow found me in Ceylon and Somalia and Aden. We continued the romance. It didn't take long: yes, let's get married. I, the lifelong Catholic. She, the Methodist missionary. Somehow we vowed we could work it out. And children. Yes, of course, children. "As many as the stars in the sky," I waxed on in one letter. Being at sea is perhaps the greatest aphrodisiac of all, and the letters were infused with the promise of a magical wedding and a great life to follow.

She was there—on another pier, in another silk dress—when I returned to Mayport, Florida. She meant it. I gulped. Now to this "working it out." My first stop was the base Catholic chaplain. He looked at me as if I were speaking a foreign language. I found the nearest parish, and when I called to make an appointment, the priest asked why. After I explained,

other Christian traditions as if they were just barely this side of paganism. I wasn't angry with the Catholic Church. I felt more numbed by it. When I had traveled to Rome the year before, in awe I had walked St. Peter's Square, stood before the *Pietà,* and kissed the well-worn bronzed foot of the statue of the first pope, St. Peter. But then I had seen something else, experienced something else. I hadn't yet put the pieces together, but there was an appealing and shocking humanity about Pope John XXIII. I didn't know it, but I had caught my first glimmer of another kind of God and would catch similarly fleeting glimmers during the years ahead. He was a God who would be so present and then capriciously disappear from view. Just like a portly pope passing by, a wise smile on his face.

I didn't know it, but exactly at the time I had been in Rome, the first session of Vatican II was beginning to change the face of the Catholic Church. As I was being married outside a Church that now seemed so cold and lifeless by comparison, the second session of the council had just pronounced that the Mass would henceforth not be in the regal Latin of Rome, but in the babel of people's languages around the world. The altar rail would soon be breached—ripped away—removing what had kept priests and the holy of holies separate from the unwashed and obviously unworthy masses of lay people. Eventually, a total of sixteen council documents would proclaim that the world was not to be avoided as hopelessly sinful and corrupt, but was to be encountered and made holy. And not just by the ordained. But by a new and larger legion, the "priesthood of all believers." The Catholic Church was about to undertake its most dramatic changes in history. And I would not be there to witness them.

I was about to spend ten years as a Protestant. Every so often during those years I would sense an itch I couldn't scratch, a hunger that wasn't satisfied with marvelous preaching and warm hospitality. I pushed such thoughts aside. The God I had been seeking all these years was about to be handily retrofitted.

a sprinkling of them with a byline, at that time not automatically conferred, but earned.

My editors would have been quite happy with my continuing to write stimulating and heartwarming articles about such earthshaking news as the lady who crocheted the faces of all the presidents into a dazzling set of potholders, but something uncomfortable and unsettling was beginning to stir inside me. I felt it first one day in Green Mountain Cemetery. I had all the facts: promising young Boulder High School graduate who left only a year before, proud to serve his country; a few months in Vietnam, killed in a rocket attack, airlifted out in a body bag, flown to the Denver airport in a copper-colored, government-issue casket. Check, check, check. I was already writing the lead in my head, with "God Bless America" playing in the background. Page one story. Certainly this one would earn a byline.

I happened to catch my reflection in the casket's glassy surface. I saw a guy with a very neat haircut, wearing a Sears wrinkle-proof plaid, polyester jacket, polyester shirt, tie, and trousers—his notepad at the ready. I had to look away. Something was wrong. I couldn't figure it out, but something was terribly, terribly wrong.

It wasn't too long after that experience that I was sitting across a table in a mobile home on the poor side of town with a fine young Mexican American Marine who had made it back, but had been blinded in the right eye by a tiny piece of Vietcong shrapnel. He held it on the tip of his outstretched index finger so that I could get a picture, shrapnel in focus, his face blurred in the background. He was a great kid, and it was a sad story. Again, something was wrong, but even though I might have been good at interviewing other people, I was lousy at interviewing myself.

Vietnam sneaked up on a lot of us in those days. Whatever was taking our country deeper into that conflict, I kept on assuring myself, was necessary. The late John Kennedy and now Lyndon Johnson knew more than I did about the Communist threat to take over the world, and anyhow, having been through the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was sure that we had either to make the other side blink or to bomb them into dust.

My Catholic faith had once been sure and unquestioning, but was now an ever-fading memory. My faith in my country and its leaders was not going to similarly waver. The great fissure that was dividing America was opening, and I knew what side I was on. My writing life was repeatedly taking me to the edge, but I always withdrew, opting for the acceptable, the predictable. As I lay in bed at night, I might see my face reflected in that casket or the tiny piece of shrapnel on that boy's finger, but I shook off these troubling images.

As a citizen I was reluctant even to consider that I needed to change, but as a journalist I began to see that there were better, more interesting

I got out of the car.

That I was in the middle of the George Washington Bridge during morning rush hour on a brilliantly sunny September day meant nothing. I had been planning this for the past two thousand miles. To my left was the winding, northbound Hudson River, shouldered by the sheer bluffs of the Palisades. Off to my right was the magical, gauzy Manhattan skyline, fringed by the soft sweep of Riverside Park along the West Side Highway as it hugged the Hudson's banks. Beyond, the gradually rising tide of buildings that began with humble apartment buildings and slowly ascended to the midtown crescendo. And there I stood—legs spread audaciously apart on the vibrating grating, as cars honked and whizzed by—the conquering hero. A force majeure had arrived, storming in from the West, pulling a U-Haul trailer behind his Corvair.

"New York!" I cupped my hands and bellowed at the skyline. I waited for an answer. "New York, ya hear me?" And, now screaming, "New York: you're going to know about me!"

Where had this display of hubris come from? This Slovak boy from Cleveland, son of parents who went no further than the sixth grade, who himself had barely gotten through college, had a reasonable but hardly sterling Navy career, and now, with two years of experience on a middling daily paper, boldly announcing his arrival in the Writing Capital of the World?

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Just rounding the corner on 116th and Broadway and walking onto the Columbia University campus the first day of classes gave me a buzz better than anything I had experienced downing Blatz and Thunderbird in Red Arrow Park, shots and beers at Johnny's Round-up, or the Cuba Libras and other alcoholic exotica in various officer's clubs and fleet bars spanning nearly half the globe. It was now fall 1966, and I was in the very place where Thomas Merton had walked some thirty years before, where Enrico Fermi split the first atom and Franz Boas virtually invented a new field called anthropology, where famous authors and Supreme Court justices, corporate giants, and a future president returned to pay homage to the alma mater that had so profoundly shaped them.

There was something about the way Columbia people walked—quickly and determinedly—as if they were always late for some earthshaking meeting or event. There was that certain look about the students and faculty on the Morningside Heights campus, as if every one of them was thinking great thoughts, having profound insights, and on the verge—just then, as I saw them whisking by!—of acting on them. The air seemed

know about the Port Huron Statement and the thrust of radical politics. I was still a conventional, law-abiding, nonactivist member of the class of 1967. But then, one noon hour in the fall, Dick Williams, Phil Smith, and I, walking out past the Jefferson statue, were greeted by a blaring, distorted voice coming over a portable PA system from the plaza. We smiled at each other. Why not? Thomas Jefferson would surely be with us, the true Americans.

The steps of Low Memorial Library provided the ideal vantage point for us, an unlikely trio who had found they shared a common dislike for the shaggy-bearded, smelly protesters who were violating our once-serene campus. This wasn't what we were paying tuition for. Williams, who would go on to write a biography of Newt Gingrich and be a darling of the neoconservatives; Smith, who would work for the *Washington Post* and then go on to far more substantial dollars as a Washington lobbyist and public relations man; and I, who would go on to . . . well, go on. Where the eggs came from I don't know—did we go to one of the little grocery stores on Broadway or Amsterdam? Anyhow, we bravely took up our positions on the steps, and as a ragtag group of a few dozen longhairs, flying the banner of "Vietnam Veterans Against the War," marched by, we reared back.

America's foreign policy changed very quickly just about the time I was leaving the Navy. The *Power*'s sister destroyer, the USS *Maddox*, was supposedly attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964. With the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, America went to war in earnest. The 12,000 U.S. "advisers" mushroomed to 200,000 combat troops in a year, quickly doubled, and by now were over a half million. There were voices to stop the war and bring home the troops, but I was appalled. "Zap the gooks" easily tumbled out of my mouth. After all, this was America. We were always on the right side. These commies in flip-flops and pith helmets had to be taught a lesson. As did the placard-carrying demonstrators chanting, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many boys did you kill today?"

We flung the eggs and howled with laughter when one splattered on the back or, even better, on the head of one of the protestors. How righteous, how brave, how American we were. Had I been a drinking man, I would have joined Dick and Phil for a beer at the West End, the famed Columbia drinking spot on Broadway and 114th Street. No, I had some journalism ethics to read up on, so I left them to have a quiet Coke in my Columbia University married students apartment in the building over the liquor store on the corner of 112th.

When I got to the apartment, I went to wash up. I looked in the bathroom mirror. It was an oversized mirror, so there was a lot of me to see.

paramount; authority was suspect. As one writer put it, the syllogism of the 1960s went this way: when everything is possible, nothing is real. I didn't know what was happening to me, and it would be fifteen years before I would even begin to understand that line. When everything is possible, nothing is real.

Wearing his one suit and dress wool cap, my father came to New York for my graduation. We walked up Broadway, side by side, a Columbia blue graduation gown draped over my arm.

"What are you going to do now, Butch?" he said, shifting his wad of Havana Blossom to the other cheek.

"I want to write, Dad."

"About what?"

"Stuff, Dad, stuff."

He spit into the gutter. "They pay for that?"

"I'll have to see."

dressing room after a rehearsal, and when I noticed him picking through all the lush fruit in the basket the theatre had provided, and choosing some sickle pears buried near the bottom, I did what any thinking reporter would do. I noted it, drawing deep meaning from his selecting the most inelegant and least sweet of all the proffered choices. Then I went to the best greengrocer in Baltimore and bought a few pounds in a nicely appointed basket to take him for our second interview, in his hotel room. Perhaps it was the sickle pears that made the difference later on.

Near the end of the first act on opening night at the Morris A. Mechanic Theatre, when the script called for Jimmy Shine to slash a canvas he'd been painting, Hoffman did it with D'Artagnon-like gusto. He went through the rest of the first act and all of the second with his hand in his pocket. When I went backstage after the play, I saw why. Someone had failed to dull the blade, a standard stagecraft precaution. His hand was wrapped in a towel, and his manager was frantic. The entourage raced for the limousine parked outside the stage door. I tried to climb in, but his manager shoved me aside. "No reporters!" I then uttered three words that changed the course of my life.

"Johns. Hopkins. Hospital."

His manager grabbed me by the shirt and yanked me into the backseat. "Get in."

That I didn't actually know where Johns Hopkins Hospital was located was, of course, of some concern. In the nanosecond between the transmission to my brain of the alarmed look on the manager's face, Hoffman's angst-ridden silence, and the sight of the bloody towel, and my lips' blurting out those three words, I had actually made a quite thoughtful decision, drawing on Aristotelian logic and Thomistic Scholasticism, overlaid with the imperatives of the New Journalism. I came to the conclusion that my presence would certainly not exacerbate Hoffman's condition and, although I didn't know where Johns Hopkins Hospital was, I lived in Baltimore and could probably get there quicker than these out-of-towners. Trumping all considered thought was one of the commandments of the New Journalism: Thou Shalt Be Where the Action Is.

"Let me just make sure we're taking the quickest way," I said as we wheeled out onto the street. At the light, I leaped out and asked the cab driver alongside. "Right on Mulberry, left on Broadway. Got it." Minutes later, there we were, pulling up beneath the brightly lit Emergency Room sign. I had saved the day—and probably, I have convinced myself, made that 1.44-mile trip quicker than if they hadn't had this schemer on board.

Hoffman had done the play because he wanted to show that he wasn't a flash in the pan, he confided to me as we sat there in the waiting room,

I worshipped at another shrine, at 207 East Thirty-second but a few blocks away. In a second-floor walk-up, *New York* magazine was transforming journalism. *New York* today is a compendium of the Ten Best, Five Most, and Fifty Least of just about everything, but in those days, with Jimmy Breslin ripping pages out of a typewriter that his stubby fingers were demolishing, Peter Maas bringing in his sunglass-wearing Mafia buddies, and Gay Talese arriving with precisely crafted (and meticulously typed) pages of symphonic prose, the magazine was a writer's dream. *New York* chided urban stupidities, held up the aching beauty of the Imperial City, and trod the thorny paths of politics, race, gender, and power. Writers wrote in their own voice; there was none of the Cuisinarting into uniform, style-book slurry that other publications demanded. The New Journalism was about what we saw, found, felt, and concluded, all structured within a compelling narrative, an approach considered seditious in the established magazines of the day. The classic way of quoting experts and officials was passing; the participant-observer method employed by anthropologists was emerging as a journalistic form. I was eventually listed on the masthead between Gloria Steinem and Tom Wolfe. Ah, the fate of the alphabet! But I was ready for any cabbie to run me down the first week my sandwiched name appeared. I would have died a happy man, knowing exactly how the lead for the obituary would read. "Paul Wilkes, a contributing writer for *New York* magazine, was struck and killed. . . ."

I'll never forget the night I ran into Tom Wolfe on the East Side as he was browsing in a bookstore for a book on Japanese enamel painting that would spur one of his magnificent digressions in *From Bauhaus to Our House*. I was working on a piece on New York City garbage—where it goes (Staten Island) and why anyone should care. (The city was drowning in it.) I told Wolfe I'd been riding garbage trucks to get a better feel for the story, and he looked on me so tenderly, like a father whose son was finally ready to take over the family business. "Great. Exactly right way to do the story." He had dropped acid with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, and I was riding a garbage truck out of the Gansevoort Receiving Station, but we were soul brothers. To this day, I wish I had told him about the path to Johns Hopkins Hospital.

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J.C. and I eventually bought the lower two floors of a rundown brownstone in Park Slope, Brooklyn, which at the time was considered, like *New York* magazine, beyond the outer reaches of polite society. We were a young married couple in the midst of those disorienting crazy years,

proficient at dramatizing who people were by what they did, even more than by what they said. Somehow I could *see* them, stripped of all artifice.

Perhaps that was why I was so masterful at allowing the world to see only those personal significant details that—if I were the reporter—would paint the most favorable portrait of me.

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My marriage—like the other aspects of my carefully scripted and ascendant life—could not have looked better. Mr. Compassion, Mrs. Empathy; never a harsh word or raised voice. The 1970s were here with a vengeance, but we were lost in the lull of the 1950s world of Ozzie and Harriet, sans kids. The Wilkeses showed so well, looked so good together, this churchgoing, nondrinking couple. If you were a certain type of self-satisfied cipher in New York, you just loved having them around. So sincere, so pleasant. We wrote those pasty Christmas letters you love to hate about how absolutely ducky our life was. Each year we told you exactly What a Husband and Wife Should Be.

J.C. came from solid Methodist but emotionally distant and frugal Nebraska farm stock. She tried to re-create herself in college as a sophisticated lady, joining a sorority and earning straight A's. Coming from Catholic, working stock, with four years as a college lout, I married her as much for her looks and her missionary aura as for the fact that she knew not only what side of the plate what piece of silverware was to be placed but also how to get soup from bowl to mouth with a minimum of sound. Around the Formica table on Forest Avenue, these were not major concerns.

In a way, we were both continually reinventing ourselves. The flag-draped, My Country Right or Wrong sweethearts fresh from the Navy looked aghast at the excesses in Boulder, becoming, in turn, the wise and proper Columbia University house parents to all those immature, radical twenty-two-year-olds. In a rented Baltimore townhouse, we served quiche and added spinach to our iceberg lettuce salads and thought we were quite the au courant, worldly couple. All of which was preparing us for New York. It wasn't that we were gimlet-eyed climbers, intent on clawing our way to top of any heap we found. It was more innocent than that, but just as insidious.

Assembling and reassembling the ill-fitting pieces that each of us brought to the altar, we somehow wanted it to be perfect, unblemished. Even during those cataclysmic years, when the unspoken bargains that people agreed on to make marriages work began to be articulated and

Why was it that sex was so perfunctory? For one thing, J.C. hated her body, a rather beautiful body by today's standards, but in the bust-conscious era when she came of age, J.C. looked upon herself as sadly deficient. I never thought that. She wore breast enhancers—"falsies" was the popular term—and each night before bed, she would turn her back to me and embarrassedly take off that duplicitous bra. Perhaps I should have just spun her around, thrown the bra in the wastebasket, and told I loved her exactly the way she was. I think I tried to convey that, but obviously I didn't succeed. As for birth control for that ever-diminishing number of times, there was the pill, which was a waste of money, estrogen, and progestin. Because, after all, we would never allow anything to happen unplanned.

Such as children. Funny how the issue of having children kept being put off—next spring, next year, not right now. How the soaring refrain of "as many as the stars in the sky" faded into the rumble of a two-career life. She wanted to go back to graduate school when we were in Baltimore; in New York, I was about to quit my Harper & Row job and take the leap as a freelance writer. With the women's movement in high gear, she started a women's center to help foster the emerging consciousness of women. I finally got my first book contract. We always had an excuse, but we were kidding ourselves.

Once settled in Brooklyn, we attended Park Slope Methodist Church, and on the surface I was a happy, churchgoing Protestant. It was a good church, with an excellent pastor, Phil West, who was an inspiring civil rights activist. My politics had changed by this time. I was one of the hundreds of thousands of protestors who marched in fall 1971 to protest the Vietnam War, and Richard Nixon, seemingly on his way to reelection. The war was wrong—that wasn't hard to see. Like many of late awareness, I wanted to make a statement.

But that rumbling in my soul, set off each Sunday in church as we sang the final hymn, wouldn't go away. What was wrong with me? There was an altar and stained-glass windows; the God that John Wesley sought was the same God I sought. Wesley, that preacher on horseback, should have been an inspiration: no fancy High Church for him; he went to the common people, the marginalized ethnics of his day. But each Sunday, it was as if a meal were about to be served, but after the tasty hors d'oeuvres of sermon and scripture, I was shown the door. I left hungry, not exactly knowing why. So what do the unsatisfied do? They turn elsewhere. Before I knew it was happening, I was carrying on an affair.

It began innocently enough as I was putting books on the shelf in my tiny office just off the bedroom on the second floor of the newly renovated brownstone. My hand grabbed two paperbacks. Their well-worn spines

left me a shell. A nice-looking, middle-class shell. Hollow, so hollow. When our Brooklyn brownstone was featured in *House and Garden* magazine and I saw on those glossy pages our exposed brick walls, fabulous U-configured kitchen, and glistening walnut wainscoting, I felt no sense of either pride or accomplishment, only sheer embarrassment. I knew I had to spend time in another house. In one of those intersections of need and grace, the *New York Times Magazine* liked my hastily written query to do a piece on my old Cleveland neighborhood. Just about this time, I happened to meet a local parish priest who was active in the community. I thought he might make an interesting profile, but I put that story off. I had to get back to Cleveland; I had to get my bearings.

my last hours with him, my feet resting on the heating grate that was the site of my early prayer life, watching his chest rise and fall with each labored breath. I hoped he was proud of me, his only child to go on to college. I was now thirty-four, and one thing I had not given him, which all of his other sons and daughters had, was grandchildren. My sister Marian had eight children, the others a minimum of three, for a total of thirty-two grandsons and granddaughters. If my failure to produce children disappointed him, or if anything I had accomplished filled him with pride, or if his heart still ached from the death of his wife, I would never know. He never told me. It was simply not his way. As a writer, I was constantly making judgments about people; he never did. He was not a man to talk about success or failure, of good or evil, and certainly not about his faith. I know for certain that he never uttered the word "Catholic." That would have been too "fancy" for him. *God*, *Catholic*, *morality*—these were just words. He was so much like Merton, after all. If you were yourself, nothing more or less, that was how you were measured in his eyes. What mattered was that if you promised something, you delivered; if you bought good tools, you kept them sharp and rust-free. You didn't grab for more than your fair share, and you had enough sense to go home to bed when you had had enough to drink. His benchmarks for personal excellence were as clear as the lines on his Craftsman ruler hanging on its designated nail in his basement workshop.

Georges Tames, the legendary *Times* photographer who took the famous picture of JFK standing at his desk, back to the camera, that came to be known as "The Loneliest Job," had been assigned to this story. His stories of photographing famous people dazzled my family, but when he picked up the camera, he was not raconteur but worker. He shot perhaps one or two frames for other parts of the story, but he shot many of my father. He recognized greatness and wanted to portray it honestly and well.

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A month later, Peggy called to say that my father had died. His heart had simply grown tired of beating for lack of oxygen. The funeral was a simple enough affair, a village funeral really, with his children, grandchildren, and a scattering of neighborhood and parish people, all of them old, in attendance. There was no one from outside our enclave, for he was a man of this place, not of the world. Except for the priest facing the congregation and pronouncing the prayers in English—this much I knew had changed—the funeral mass seemed little different from those I remembered from when I was a Catholic.

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IT IS AMAZING HOW SOMEONE WITH A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, a home, a promising career—all the elements of what we call a life—could so quickly fall off the face of the earth. To be reincarnated only blocks away, where the conventions, courtesies, and usual amenities of middle-class life suddenly were gone. These were strange days. Did I turn my back on the Park Slope friends when they saw me? Or did they conveniently look away, avoiding eye contact as you do when you see a madman raving to himself? I certainly must have been an embarrassment to them, this once well-dressed fellow who now wore tattered, ill-fitting castoffs and a pitiful parka with a faux-fur hood liner, which I bought at a discount army surplus store in downtown Brooklyn, lest I use one of our donated coats. Made in Jamaica. $19.95. Useless against cold winter winds. Shivering, I just put on another sweater beneath, then another, the more tattered the better. Layer by layer, I was taking on the uniform of the people who came to me for help.

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The Friday night "clarification of thought" meetings at the Catholic Worker—with speakers on various social justice and spirituality topics—served as an ingathering of a certain, mostly Catholic tribe, not the overtly religious ones or those working in Church institutions and none of the hierarchy, but nuns for sure, a priest now and again. The life and witness of Dorothy Day and the Worker had implanted something they could not erase from their minds, and they wanted to be around to hear the stories and stir the embers of their own consciences to live a more intentional life.

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