

Blizzard

keith harmon snow

It was an unexpected storm. It was not one of those blizzards whipped out of the frozen New England woods with an icy gale that slaps your face raw, a gale that looses doors from latches and shatters them against the barns, blows snow through cracks where it frosts the hay and turns the greasy old blue tractor white. I grew up with blizzards like that.

We used to tunnel through snow banks and throw ice balls at the plow trucks and sled down the dirt road until dark, and we would gobble dinner, mittens and hats melting over the stove, and then go back out until our clothes froze stiff, and everything hurt.

The white house at Egesta Farm was built in 1826 and the bunk beds would be cold and I would lay on the top bunk watching snow swirl in the lamplight while the old windows rattled and the blizzard whipped down the chimney and puffed smoke out the black wood stove.

I haven't seen a blizzard like that for years, but that is the kind of storm I built my teepee for. Standing in the long field taken from the Indians and farmed by ten generations of my family, I expected winter's fingers to lunge and tear at my teepee like a pack of hyenas will lunge and tear at a zebra until it is exhausted and it comes unraveled and in despair it falls.

I knew in my heart my teepee would never stand such a winter, but I built it to stand, and it had a hope. The storm that took it came in the middle of the night and it was a storm of ignorance and it came in 4-wheel drive pick-up trucks. I was not sleeping in my teepee, and when I heard that it had been destroyed I did not believe. It was October and the days hummed in the sunshine of yellow oaks and red maples and my first harvest of acorn and butternut squash.

The blizzard that took my teepee blew in on September 13th, 2001, and it blew for months, and it is still blowing in its own way, and it was a blizzard of violence and isolation whipped up by a verse from the Book of Mathew painted on a sign and posted in the field. I meant it as an antidote to the hysterical flag-waving and hate, but it seems that the words "LOVE THY ENEMY" assaulted the sensibilities of my good Christian neighbors, and they found in their freedoms as God-loving Americans the duty to deface it and tear it down and run it over, again and again and again. And then they took my teepee.

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From the highway I could see a police cruiser in the field. My teepee, it was true, was down. The cruiser was running and it was David Martin, a local Williamsburg cop who grew up two towns away, and who dated my sister. From the tire tracks in the grass we figured a rope had been thrown over the apex and the

teepee toppled by 4 x 4 pick-ups. It was a mess and I will always associate the memory of my collapsed teepee with the World Trade Towers.

The sign was again defaced, some farm equipment had been overturned, and they stole the front wheel off a rickety ten-speed bike near my garden. The garden was intact. In the back seat of the police cruiser was a flimsy white-cardboard sign magic-markered with the message: "BIN LADEN SUCKS CAMEL DICK" -- or something equally clever.

Officer David Martin laughed when he showed me the sign. He scribbled notes on his official pad, but I felt that he dismissed the attack to "a bunch of crazy kids having a few beers." When people remind me that I am lucky to live in a *very* progressive area, I am not encouraged: there are plenty of adults capable of such genius. This was not David's first visit to the field.

It was a big teepee, and it was my *home*. Buried under the chaos of the tarps and the hefty poles hewn from young trees were two upholstered chairs and a twin mattress and box springs. At its heart were the granite slabs of the fire circle and sacred altar built by six boys from urban Boston, boys all beat up by the American way of life, boys who never saw such a teepee, or even such a field.

A seven year-old boy, Jonah, who has never had a father, helped chain drag the trees for the teepee. Jonah steered the tractor. Now the poles were tangled in tarps and staples and ropes, and I left this mess for two months in the field, crushed under its own weight, like something dead that I couldn't bury. When I returned from India I picked the carcass apart and put the poles back up. That is when I met my neighbor's son, the professional assassin.

I arrived in Delhi in November on assignment for a Japanese travel magazine, and when I signed onto email in a Tibetan exile camp I found the story had been killed. Tibetan monks in crimson robes processing email on expensive computers all around me heightened my confusion.

I had a journalist's visa for Pakistan – difficult for a freelancer to secure -- and from India I planned to get up to the Afghan border, at least, and maybe get inside. It felt like the only honorable thing to do – to help those poor people tortured by the decades of organized crime that Americans can't accept about their own leaders, their own friends, and sometimes family. I wanted to protect innocent women and children from the yellow plastic packages airdropped by the U.S. military. I wanted to scream: THAT'S NOT FOOD, IT'S A BOMB!

I did not have the support. When I lost the travel story I lost income I was counting on. But more than ever before I was afraid. I gave a slide lecture at Delhi University on U.S. terrorism in Africa and I met the writer Arundhati Roy (Arundhati said that furious Americans were sending her prizewinning book *God of Small Things* back to her after she published *War Is Peace, So Now We Know*) and I wandered amidst the masses in Delhi. I took two photographs of Arundhati, but that was it. And then I came home, filled with despair and shame and sadness, to the obscene spectacle of Christmas in America.

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It was early January and I was unraveling the teepee mess with our 1946 tractor. I had a steel cable tied to the former apex, and through the proper application of force, leverage and magic I envisioned an instant resurrection. (I was wrong.) That is how I put it up in the first place. Rain had puddled on the grounded tarps and frozen into ice sculptures, and the tractor spun its wheels, and shook, and stalled.

I heard gunshots over the tractor, and the neighbors have a shooting range some 500 yards through dense woods from my teepee, but this was closer. I object to the shooting range. I felt personally violated about the teepee, and I hated my self for running away from Afghanistan, and every one else for it, and every gunshot heightened my distress.

So when this man with a rifle comes out of the woods I am astonished. He is a Hodgkins boy, I suspect, and after the trouble with the sign, I figure he has come to provoke me. Slung over his shoulder is a .308 bolt-action rifle with a variable scope and collapsible tripod mounts. It is the gun of a specialist. Rob Hodgkins is proud of his gun. He wants to talk about Afghanistan.

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I grew up with a gun in my hand. At twelve, I was tracking deer with a .22 caliber rifle, and I was a good shot, and a .22 slug between the eyes or through the heart will kill a deer. Licensed at fourteen, I hunted all the nearby woods with a 12-gauge shotgun. I even skipped school for Deer Week. In my twenties I kept a small arsenal. I never shot a deer. I had the chance, but not the heart to do it.

Rob Hodgkins and I had never met. I was exploring the land that I will always know as Hodgkins' Pond before he was born. I skated and swam and fished there. My mom played there as a kid, and her friends were the men I hunted with and whose sons hunted with me. I never shot at the Hodgkins' shooting range. I don't know why. My uncle shot there, and he coordinates 4-H programs for children to shoot there, and when I complained about the shooting range my uncle took the Hodgkins' side.

I have seen otter, beaver, mink, bear, deer and snapping turtles at Hodgkins' Pond. The dam is busted up. The river cuts through silt and mud some 10 feet below the cattails of the old pond, and it changes course with every season, and every storm.

The banks crumble, the currents shift sediments around and sandbars grow out of black pools. The Hodgkins tear out the beaver dams.

I am a lower-middle class, red-necked Yankee, by default, and I say that with neither pride nor shame, but this is my home, these woods of bear and barred owl and fields of crow and woodchuck and streams of trout. Every tree and rock is etched in my soul. It is *my* land, but it is not about ownership -- and if it is then it should be given back to Native Americans – and it is *your* land and it is no *man's* land.

I love the land. That is one reason I started this big organic garden in our family field in the summer of 2001. The land is my sanctuary from the lostness I feel in this world.

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People see me as a troublemaker. In 1994, I *disturbed the peace* in Williamsburg with evidence that shooting lead into the neighboring marsh violates four Federal laws. Lead kills: Citizens have forced the EPA to close gun clubs for discharging toxic lead into the environment.

The Hodgkins' range abuts a river and the trees are splattered with lead and they shoot into the marsh. The river flows through town and that is a public health threat. Waterfowl ingest lead shot from mud, and die, and they are eaten as carrion, and the lead rips through the food chain as poison, and it is a *migratory* poison.

Williamsburg would not have it.

A neighbor showed up mowing a piece of field owned by the Hodgkins that abuts ours, but he had not hayed our fields as promised, months earlier. When I confronted him, and I was by then feeling cornered by the town, he snapped some nasty remark about the shooting range. I blasted right back.

This guy is big and burly, and alcohol has made him stupid, and he expects to get his way. He jumped off his tractor, and I could smell beer on him, and he swung at me. He was a head above me and he could have crushed me, but I ducked and before we both knew it I had a grip on his throat. His eyes blazed and we were both surprised, and I jumped clear before he found his balance.

I was scared, and I was *furios*, and I circled him wide and shouted, “WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? IS THAT HOW YOU GET YOUR WAY? YOU BEAT IT OUT OF PEOPLE? DO YOU BEAT YOUR WIFE? DO YOU BEAT YOUR KIDS?”

Blood flushed his face and he snorted and I will never forget the look. He wobbled a bit, looking out of place and stupid, and then he got back on his tractor and continued cutting. It would not be the last time he tried to muscle me. I was not proud of my self, my reaction to his rage, my eye-for-an-eye mentality. I certainly did not practice what I have since then preached.

The Williamsburg police shoot and train at the Hodgkins’ range. Police Chief Pat Archibald bought a *Realistic* sound meter from *Radio Shack* and with that he scientifically concluded that the loudest caliber tested – a 12-gauge shotgun – was less of a problem than “regular vehicle traffic” and “birds chirping.”

An environmental investigator for the state found “nothing of concern.” I never saw him. No surprise, state environmental protection agents shoot at the nearby Deerfield range. I believe they are shooting at the Hodgkins range as well.

The gun lobby pumped the Select Board with studies funded by the National Rifle Association *proving* that lead shot is harmless. There were also a lot of un-public discussions going on.

“We recognize the right of a property owner,” the Selectmen wrote, offering their excuses to do nothing, “who has carried on an activity within the law for decades, the

right to freedom from governmental interference.” Applying this logic, the Ku Klux Klan has the right to hang blacks on private land.

Next the Selectmen wrote: “We do not intend to enmesh ourselves in a debate where experts on one side or the other could endlessly contradict each other.” The ruse of contradictory “science” is deployed by every multinational corporation, and their lawyers, and by the U.S. government. It suggests that officials sanctioned with the public trust cannot reason for themselves. Indeed, there are plenty of officials, repeatedly re-elected, who retain their posts *precisely* because they are *un-reasonable*.

And there you have it: *democracy* in action.

Very large calibers are fired at the Hodgkins’ range, and there is no mistaking the rapid bursts of automatic assault weapons. And then there are the paramilitary DARE officers and state and local police training exercises. Often there is a constant blasting. It has always been bad on Sunday mornings.

Q: What is a DARE officer doing at a paramilitary shooting range? A: Getting certified. Q: Certified for what? A: To teach children about drugs.

Such is the madness I weed carrots to.

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This is the climate in which I planted my garden and put up a farm stand by the highway and sold produce to local markets and luxury health food stores last year. By August business was booming. Fall swept in and locals and some neighbors and a regular traffic of transients were buying from the farm stand. It was hard work, and until you are a farmer you do not know how hard, but it was fun, and it was organic, and I smile to think that no animals were persecuted and no workers enslaved and that my vegetables will not kill people like agribusiness.

Then September 11 happened. At the *Dove's Nest* diner with my lover, I watched the Twin Towers collapse, on a scratchy TV with a six-inch screen, and we ate butter pancakes with maple syrup and horror. It was awful. We held each other in the parking lot and cried, and then we drove four hours to the ocean. We cried all day.

It was awful, and I knew we had it coming. And when the war clouds grew, fanned by the media, I stood a sign of peace beside the farm stand. The idea that another country deserves to be bombed because someone with connections to the Bush and Clinton gangs – no matter how remote, and it is *not* remote – perpetrated violence on *American* soil is pure mental illness. Even more outrageous is the public denial that innocent people are being killed. It is not a war of justice. It is not even a war of vengeance, although that is the popular mood. It is a war of *profits*. It is the latest thrust in America's globalization of terror.

The sign said none of that.

It did not say "TERRORISM BEGETS TERRORISM." It did not say "GEORGE BUSH IS A TERRORIST." It did not say "IF YOU SUPPORT THE BOMBING OF AFGHANISTAN THEN *YOU* GO THERE."

Laughter is a good antidote to national hysteria: I resisted the urge to put a shooting gallery in the field – like a turkey shoot – with blow-up posters of our favorite terrorists. I could make a *killing* selling "tomatoes for terrorists" -- one-dollar pot shots at your favorite terrorist with a rotting tomato. There would be a few *token* Islamic fundamentalists accused of September 11, for which evidence of their crime has yet to be provided, and a whole cabinet of veteran war criminals: Dick Cheney; George Bush Sr.; Donald Rumsfeld; Henry Kissinger; Bill Clinton; Madeleine Albright; the Rockefellers...I would not waste a rotting tomato on George Bush Jr.

The sign said, "LOVE THY ENEMY". Beneath these words there was a big peace symbol and the citation from the *Holy Bible*.

It was defaced the first day. It read: KILL KILL KILL THY ENEMY. There was a local police detail working construction to widen the highway, but no one saw anything. I replaced the sign.

The farmers haying the field wouldn't work behind a sign that said LOVE THY ENEMY. I hunted with the Nichols clan. Don Nichols and his dad are police officers and "they" lost fellow officers in New York and somehow the sign negated that tragedy in their minds. They wanted war. They wouldn't work unless the sign came down, and they asked for three days to hay the field, and it didn't come down. They left the hay, and there were 360 bales, at two-fifty a bale, and that's a lot for a farmer.

I painted LOVE over the FORD decals on the tractor and PEACE on the wagon and I scraped up help and equipment and hayed the field. Over the next month the sign was defaced, torn down, mangled, run over, disappeared. It was an apt reflection of the death squads of American foreign policy -- mutilations and massacres and innocent people "disappeared" by the tens of thousands. Officer David Martin investigated the first attack. I did not see him again until the teepee came down.

Business at the farm stand died. New friends and old friends complained about the sign. Customers pulled up, pointed at the sign, drove off. People in trucks trumpeting their newly *wounded* patriotism and sporting giant dual flags – an extension of themselves -- like dual exhausts and chrome wheels – would slow down and scream and then race off. It doesn't take a lot of courage to do a drive-by screaming. We could never understand what was said.

Three burly, redneck 30-something men jumped out of a car and rushed my dad, who is sixty five, shouting "we're gonna get you, you fucker." Another customer

pulled up and the men fled. The *Spruce Corner* Restaurant up the road stopped buying my tomatoes, and they had raved about them, and when my dad went in for greasy eggs and toast they treated him like an Arab. This lasted for weeks. My dad's mechanic had a couple guys hovering about his garage whining about how they were "gonna kick his [my] fucking ass." They wanted his encouragement. He said, "Go ahead. What are you waiting for? Do it. And by God if he doesn't kick your asses, then I will!"

Word spread. People drove up just to see the sign – unbelieving and outraged by such an un-American *heresy*. Members of the church hassled my mom. The pressure to remove the sign built. The minister got involved: *Love Thy Enemy*, she despaired, is the teaching of Jesus Christ. It's right there in the bible. Mathew. Chapter 5. Verse 44.

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Williamsburg is not unique in its social unraveling. There are factions, and the good-old-boy, redneck, blue-collar Yankees are perpetually feuding with the invading affluent, over-educated, white-collar yuppies, and everyone wants an SUV, who doesn't already have two, and there is a lot of squabbling and deceit. Many early architectural homes are heated, year round, but empty third homes for vacationing urban elites. Locals struggle to pay taxes.

Williamsburg is as American as it gets. Ignorance is redeemable, and celebrated, and you see it in the bumper stickers. People are indifferent to suffering, and they can be nasty and heartless. Children take the brunt of it. Beneath the public veneers of tolerance and diversity are deep currents of racism and hatred, and people never question who they scapegoat or why. Elite groups gather and flourish in their insularity, fed by the local newspaper and NPR and the TV, and if exclusion and mere

silence do not suffice to suppress individuality and creativity and novelty, and if the circulation of a few nasty rumors does not do it, then violence might be used.

And, of course, this is my little town. For every word uttered in ignorance there are pages of good intentions. Folks can be genuinely kind, and I like to think that my neighbors would not hesitate to save my life or save my home from fire. People are strong, basically good, and they are people just like me, wondering what to do, how to do it, searching for happiness in a world overrun by the arrogance of humanism and the indifference of greed. And because I am aware of my own contradictions and shortcomings, and my own Faustian struggle, I am remiss to criticize others.

But there are greater truths. There are wars going on, and local issues about environment and rights and peace -- in my backyard -- are a reflection of global American violence. The actions of “a bunch of crazy kids” are born in the ideas of their elders, schooled by institutions of proscribed education, anchored in the psyche through the celebrated icons of our provincial American *cult-ure*.

There is no space for discussion. Selfishness prevails. Almost everything is laced with alcohol and propaganda. And we *all* say: “such things do not apply to me.”

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My mom and dad organized a candlelight peace vigil with the help of the Minister. (This *before* the teepee came down.) Over a hundred people shared feelings of devastation and grief for victims of terrorism – victims in New York, Columbia, Congo, Afghanistan. The fire department and police were asked to come, and the police agreed to direct traffic, but no one came. As the vigil began, in darkness, distant gunshots sounded, and then a police cruiser screamed up with siren and lights blaring. Someone had reported “shots fired at the peace vigil.”

A small following grew in support of the sign. A prominent woman sent some young people up to protect my dad should the threatening men return. A stranger told me that a block of families threatened to boycott the local fuel provider, *George Propane* -- because the *George* drivers eat daily at the *Spruce Corner* -- unless the oilmen in turn convinced the *Spruce Corner* to treat us equitably. Strangers attacked the sign, strangers replaced it, day, night, in a few hours the sign would go down and up and down and up. We couldn't keep up with it. The police worked hard to learn nothing.

Letters to local editors were equally polarized -- although the papers are never equitable, and one cannot say what letters were edited or unpublished. The papers were first amused, then oblivious. The Daily Hampshire Gazette ran a tiny, inconsequential news clip, on page B-5, about the teepee incident. The same day's page-one headlines and photograph were about a local man who made a U.S. flag out of thousands of light bulbs. There was also a statement by President Bush about the importance of shopping in these hard times of *America Challenged*.

In their internal employee newsletter, the Gazette management awarded kudos to the reporter who broke the lighted flag story. The editors made it sound like it was a major expose. *Six Thousand Die in New York. America Launches War on Terrorism. Local Man Builds Flag From Christmas Lights. Shop Early at Wal-Mart...*

To begin with, it wasn't six thousand: The New York Health Department official count is 2617. Second, they stopped the rescue of trapped firefighters and police -- and firefighters protested this and were arrested -- to first remove the gold bullion of a Canadian Bank buried beneath the wreckage. Third, George Bush Sr. is affiliated with Barrick Gold, a *Canadian* gold corporation. Here's the ultimate rub: In the post-World Trade Center world, the U.S. flags sold in record volume were manufactured in China.

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My teepee was torn down the same week that U.S. pilots bombed an Afghan village, absent any military targets, and returned for the next four hours to strafe women and children running for their lives. I wonder if one of those pilots was a Williamsburg man. There was a story about him in the Gazette. He is, of course, a hero.

I dismantled the farm stand. I painted "NOW WE ARE TERRORISTS" on a big white freezer and I left it in the field. The freezer was defaced; later a truck rammed it.

Now, over *ten thousand* innocent people have died in Afghanistan. American troops and allies have raped, tortured, and massacred. Afghanistan is just one more infinitely unjust horror story manufactured by our government, our friends and our families.

As a journalist, I have investigated covert western military operations and multinational corporations in Africa, and I testified about this at a special congressional hearing convened by U.S. Representative Cynthia McKinney. I have witnessed profound human suffering all over the world. It is completely unnecessary.

So let's talk about *terrorism*. Let's talk about U.S. covert forces and the Clinton and Bush family ties to gold and diamond cartels in Africa. Since 1998 alone, over three million people have died in Congo. I knew some of those people. They never did anything to anyone -- certainly not the children.

Let's talk about the U.S. supported invasions of Rwanda (1994), Zaire (1996) and Congo (1998). There's about five million dead buried under that wreckage. There is no one waving a flag for these people. There are no *honest* media exposes, no manhunts for the *terrorists*, no questions about arms shipments, no silent vigils for the dead, no million-dollar payoffs to keep the families quiet. Our *news*-papers were

blanketed with images of bloodied victims in New York, but there is never any blood in the sanitized images from the Third World. People are still being killed in these places. These stories are in whiteout.

And that is another reason I started a garden in our family field. To develop food independence is to radically protest the inhumanities of American *democracy*, the pollution and war dumped on innocent people, the indefatigable lies about truth, freedom and the pursuit of happiness. Such are the blizzards of American fascism.

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So perhaps you can imagine what it was like for me when my neighbor's son walked out of the woods with his rifle and boasted about his imminent mission to Afghanistan. The LOVE tractor was running, and Rob Hodgkins and I shook hands, and I felt like such a hypocrite, but I was practicing peace, not anger, and in that moment -- in the admission of our common history and the shared boundary of our parents' land and the kinship of our people -- I saw that we could not be further apart.

He and his buddies, he said, were on alert, waiting to being shipped out. He is an advance scout, he told me, with the 14th or maybe 16th -- I was *trying* to listen -- Mountain Division of the United States Army. Rob Hodgkins lives with his wife in nearby Deerfield, MA. He is the 14th competition ranked marksman in the United States, he declared, and he was "waiting to go to Afghanistan to shoot the bad guys."

"These police and states and SWAT teams think they can shoot," he said, matter-of-factly. "They don't know how to shoot."

In his mind, I know, Rob Hodgkins is doing me a favor -- doing us all a favor -- and he was fishing for appreciation of his bravery and the Rambo romanticism of his mission. I am thinking: The audacity of this guy to walk out here with a rifle and brag about going to "shoot the bad guys!"

I think: If I kill this guy, how many innocent people will be saved? Hundreds? *But then I am no different from him.* My mind is in a panic, searching for the wise thing to say, but he likes hearing himself talk, and the Buddha is sitting on my tongue.

Please be clear: Donald Rumsfeld does *not* speak for me, and I do not want any American military *favors* or the horror of American *charity*. This is war, and it is terrorism, and it is criminal, and in the accounting of war crimes, I expect to be exonerated. I do not *shop* to support war. I do not *work* for corporations or affiliates or their university programs. (I worked for GE Aerospace once.) I work for peace. I pay no taxes. My income is less than \$7000 a year. By the standards of the *American Patriot Act*, I am the enemy.

Standing eye-to-eye with Rob Hodgkins in my field, I thought about his wife and his father and no matter our disagreements over the shooting range I felt a deep sadness for this man: another unconscious victim of the American Way of Life. Mixed with sadness was a simmering rage rooted in the deceit of the establishment and the absence of honorable employment and education that drives young men, in their foolishness and bravado, and in the absence of love, to soldiering.

We are a society of hired killers, and we afraid to talk about it.

Rob Hodgkins and his buddies come with their military-issue automatic weapons and their \$2800-dollar night-vision goggles and their four-wheel ATV's and they train to be paid assassins at Hodgkins' pond -- the swamp where I grew up. They train to kill people on demand, no questions asked, and they are salaried professionals, and they are assured it is righteous, and they do it, and are commended for it, and at the end of the day they will look you in the eye and deny it unblinking.

I have always said there was a militia organized around the Hodgkins property. They are staunch *patriots* – Democrat, Republican, none of that matters -- and

counted amongst their basic human rights, in their reading of America, are the rights to bear arms, the rights to disturb the peace, the right to expropriate land and shit on it as they please. At the pinnacle of this injustice is that greatest of virtues ascribed to American *leadership* – business acumen and the conqueror-settler ethic and the golden fleece of success. That is what makes it O.K. in the public mind for citizen Clinton or citizen Bush to bleed Congo dry for diamonds and gold and oil.

“We do all our killing at night,” Rob Hodgkins told me, talking about the U.S. military, *his* military, an American *cult* of lethal force and violence, accountable to no one. “Everything of significance happens after dark. That military stuff you see in the newspapers? That doesn’t happen.”

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It was January and a cold wind was blowing out of the north but there was no snow anywhere and the winter drought was just coming on. Shooting had been going on all day, and I have accepted the shooting, though I will never accept it, and every gunshot rattles my guts, and the shooting wears me down like the rain and the sun wear down and crack the alabaster Buddha in my garden.

And here is the third reason I started a big garden last year: Sometimes I don’t know what to do. The garden was my compass of sorts, a beacon in the lostness, a refuge that helped me through these blizzards of inhuman nature. But even that refuge was not secure. And so when it gets so hard that I do not know what to do next, I say a prayer of gratitude. Today is one of those days. They come often.

My prayer of gratitude is an oft repeated story from a concentration camp: The prisoners were forced out in the snow, half-naked and starving, to watch a fellow prisoner being tortured. When it was over, and the man was mutilated, the prisoners went back to the barracks. One man ran back ahead of the others, and they found

him kneeling, saying a prayer of gratitude. They could not understand: "You have just watched a man tortured by other men: What do you have to be grateful for?"

"I am so grateful," he said, tears streaking his face, "I am not capable of that."

And that is how I live with my neighbor, the hired assassin. I routinely treasure my humanity. It is my last refuge. It is a place of sadness. I celebrate my incapacity for violence while never forgetting where I come from, for though I was never a *formal* soldier, there was a time in my life when I *was* capable of that.

I eventually put up the poles of the teepee. It has stood like a skeleton all winter. The PEACE wagon rests in the field, where the horses run, and the LOVE tractor sleeps in the old barn, mice nesting under the hood. The parsnips have just come in, over-wintered and sweet. And you can still see the final incarnation of the sign, all beaten up, the LOVE THY ENEMY spattered with mud, next to Route 9, in Williamsburg. It lies where it last fell, rotting like a corpse.

I did not see Rob Hodgkins again. At one point he just stopped talking and he shrugged his shoulders under the burden of excitement -- waiting to be sent to war -- and we looked in each others eyes, and he shifted his rifle and walked into the woods.

I stopped the tractor and I sat down in the field and I cried. Cars passed by in the distance, and a flock of geese flew over, and the wind bit my wet cheeks. And when I stopped crying I said a prayer for the people who are suffering in this world. I began by praying for Rob Hodgkins. ~ **end.**