

Words 1

1. Alexa and Leah Von Essen. Holmdel, New Jersey, 2003.

At that age, you live in a world of story. All you need is the right garment, or part of one. It can even be something you've devised yourself. Nearly twenty years later, I see the same thing in Ali and Leah's younger cousins, Samuel and Michael, only now it is wizards and superheroes: *Harry Potter*, and *Lord of the Rings*. The final image in Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed-Poems* (1970) is a photo of Ondaatje himself as a boy, maybe five years old, in his native Sri Lanka, dressed in a full cowboy suit—hat, cap guns, and all. At the same age, in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, I had most of the same outfit. Later, our stories get more complicated. They take form and are evoked by the moment, who we're with, an image we're looking at or showing to someone else.

2. Nick Blagona (audio engineer) and Ian Gillan (musician). Dundas, Ontario, 2008.

A kitchen break during an all-day recording session in Nick's studio when Ian and Michael Lee Jackson were laying down tracks for Ian's new CD, *One Eye to Morocco*.

Ian wrote Michael in an email that he'd lifted the title of one of my books—*Get Your Ass in the Water and Swim Like Me*—for one of the verses in a song he'd written for Deep Purple's then-new album, *Infinite*. "I hope Bruce doesn't mind," Ian said.

When Michael told me, I said, "I'm beyond delight."

As a kid, wanting to be a rock star, Michael had played—to a point that nearly drove me mad—the guitar riff on Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water," which Ian cowrote. All aspiring rockers of Michael's generation did the same. Somehow, Michael and Ian got to be pals, and then they got to be collaborators. And there came a time when Michael performed at Royal Albert Hall with Ian that put my kvetch about "Smoke on the Water" to rest.

Ian knew I loved John Fowles's novels. Fowles was Ian's neighbor in Lyme Regis. For one of my birthdays, he gave me a signed first edition of Fowles's *The Collector*. Ian told me about spending nights in the wooded area across the road from his house, the Undercliff, which you'll know about if you've read Fowles's novel or seen Karel Reisz's film, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Nick had been sound engineer (and sometimes producer) for Cat Stevens, Tom Jones, Chaka Kahn and Rufus, the Police, the Bee Gees, Nazareth, Chicago, Deep Purple, Ian Gillan and Roger Glover, Ian Hunter, Rainbow, April Wine, Kim Mitchell, the Tea Party, Jeff Martin, Crack the Sky, and many others. He died in 2019. There were technical medical reasons why it happened then and in that way, but basically, it was his whole life catching up with him.

A lot of music took place in this easy kitchen moment.

3. Percy Francisco Alvarado Godoy (spy). Rome, Italy, 2005.

Percy had been a spy for Castro among the Florida militias for decades. He broke cover when he learned that the group he'd infiltrated planned to blow up the Tropicana hotel in Havana, killing a lot of people, to disrupt Cuba's tourist industry.

We met in Rome on a forum about US policy in Cuba. I told the person who invited me, "I don't know any more about US policy in Cuba than I read in the *New York Times*." He said, "So what do you think people in Rome know? You have a sense of US politics. Come and put it in that perspective. Business class for both flights."

"How long do you want me to talk?"

"An hour," he said.

"Okay," I said. "I can do that."

I lucked out: not long before the event, then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice released a huge report—200 or 300 pages—about US policy in Cuba. It was all red meat for me. I prepared a great one-hour talk.

The Rome forum was Percy, two other people, and me. I was third, after Percy. Neither he nor the woman who spoke before him used a note and neither spoke more than fifteen minutes. I dropped the neatly typed pages that would have filled a mind-numbing hour to the floor and did the same. I think I ended with "*Vencemos!*" So much for data analysis. Percy hugged me and gave me a huge Cohiba cigar.

The next day, he and I did two interviews about US policy in Cuba. The driver who picked me up at my hotel told me he was a Rome policeman. Our first stop was at the office of one of Rome's two Communist Parties, which did not speak to one another. After the interview, waiting for the elevator, he told me he was a communist. He said, "Are there many communist policemen in the US?"

“I don’t think so,” I said, “and if there are, they’re quiet about it.”

“Here,” said, “you don’t have to keep quiet about it.” I asked him what his job in the Rome police department was. “Wrestling coach,” he said.

After the second interview, Percy gave me another Cohiba. His greatest pain, he told me, was that his parents, who remained in Havana after he went to Florida, died thinking he had betrayed a cause in which they all believed.

“You should come and visit Havana,” he said. “It’s a beautiful city. I’m a colonel in Cuban intelligence now so I can show you things you wouldn’t otherwise get to see.”

4. Convict guards returning weapons to armory. Cummins prison farm, Varner, Arkansas, 1971.

I was driving from Buffalo to California to spend a Guggenheim year in Berkeley and San Francisco. I stopped off at Cummins, the first prison in the US to have been declared unconstitutional by a Federal Court (*Holt v. Sarver I and II*, 1969 and 1970, respectively).

I had become friends five or six years earlier with Don Hutto, an assistant warden at Ramsey prison farm in Texas. Not long before my California trip, Don had been appointed Arkansas commissioner of Correction. He gave the same freedom to roam around Cummins that I’d had in Texas, when I’d been doing research on Black convict work songs.

The only people I saw carrying guns in Cummins that time were convict guards. There were hardly any civilian employees. Most of them worked in the building. The only people who had uniforms were the convicts working in the fields and the convict guards.

I spent four or five days in the fields with the work crews and in the building. I thought I’d write an article for the *New York Times Magazine* or *Harper’s* about daily life in what federal judge J. Smith Henley had declared the worst prison in America. The photos would be aide-mémoire for me and illustrations for the article.

When I got to Berkeley and began working on the notes and photos, I decided I didn’t have enough of either; I needed a second visit. I did that on the drive back to Buffalo the following August. By then, the convict guards had been replaced by free world guards and the whole operation seemed like a clone of the Texas prisons. Little wonder: the field major, deputy commissioner, and the Cummins warden were all former Texas Department of Corrections employees. During that visit, I realized that my Cummins story wasn’t going to be words with supporting images; it was going to be pictures with supporting words.

I would make six more visits to Cummins over the next three years. On the eighth visit, I realized I was repeating myself—the shots were almost entirely interchangeable with earlier shots. It was time to stop.

I never did the article, but the work resulted in three books and half of a fourth: *Killing Time: Life in the Arkansas Penitentiary* (Cornell University Press, 1977); *Cummins Wide: Photographs from the Arkansas Prison* (Center for Documentary Studies/Center Working Papers, 2008); *Pictures from a Drawer: Prison and the Art of Portraiture* (Temple University Press, 2009); and, *Inside the Wire: Photographs from Texas and Arkansas Prisons* (University of Texas Press, 2013).

I saw Don Hutto one more time. It was in Austin, Texas, at the funeral of George Beto in 1991. George had been director of the Texas Department of Corrections during the first part of my research there (1964–1968). He'd given me free run of the place, which is why Don gave me similar freedom to roam at Cummins. On the church steps after the funeral, he said, "I'm in Tennessee now. I started a new business." The new business was Corrections Corporation of America. It was the start of the infamous private prison industry in America.

5. Lieutenant (with blackjack) and sergeant (with cigarette) in control picket, Maximum Security building. Cummins prison farm, Varner, Arkansas, 1974.

In 1971, Cummins had only a few cells. They were used for punishment or protection. Everyone else was housed in large, crowded spaces they called "tanks." The Max was built in 1973. The solitary cells were as awful as solitary cells everywhere, but the protection cells were spacious. I met some guys I'd photographed in the tanks the previous year. I asked one what got him into Max. "I worked at it," he said.

6. Marine honor guard. Funeral of James Boyer, former president, Road Vultures Motorcycle Club. Lockport, New York, 2010.

In October 1967, shortly after I moved from Cambridge to Buffalo, a member of the Road Vultures Motorcycle Club (RVMC) asked me if I'd write an article about how they were being harassed by Mike Amico, the head of the Buffalo Police Department's narcotics squad.

Amico would turn up at their clubhouse once a month, always accompanied by a camera crew from Channel 7, and would toss the place while the news cameras rolled. They'd never find any drugs or arrest anybody, but Channel 7 ran the footage anyway. Amico always did the raids early enough in the afternoon for the footage

to make the 6:00 p.m. broadcast. After most of the raids the Vultures would have to buy a new TV set because the cops tossed their current TV from the clubhouse porch to the sidewalk.

The president of the Club, Tommy Bell, knew I'd recently written about criminal justice affairs for *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New York Times Magazine*. He told me he hoped this would make an interesting article.

One Sunday afternoon, about fifteen members of the Club came to the small suburban house where I was then living. The roar of the bikes as they arrived shook glassware in the kitchen cabinets. They came in, we talked for a few hours, I agreed to write the article, then they mounted up and roared away. A few days later, I visited the clubhouse. They showed me damage from the most recent police visit.

A week after that, I was on the Pentagon porch during the October 21 anti-Vietnam War demonstration. A line of troops with bayonets kept us confined to a small area. I smelled marijuana. I was curious who'd be smoking dope on the Pentagon porch, so I followed the odor. It was Tommy Bell and another Road Vulture. "Who's gonna arrest us for smoking dope *here*?" Tommy said.

Two weeks after that, Tommy was shot to death in an argument over a wristwatch. He was my main contact in the club. I didn't do the article, but I photographed his funeral.

In 2009, the University at Buffalo hosted an exhibition of artwork by underground comix artist Spain Rodriguez (*Trashman, She, Che: A Graphic Biography*). Spain, a Buffalo native, had been a member of Road Vultures. I saw him at Tommy Bell's funeral and then twice again by chance, once in New York when I was visiting Bill Beckman at the office of an alt newspaper, the *East Village Other (EVO)* in 1968, then in 1972 at the office of Rip Off Press in San Francisco, when we were both visiting another comix artist, Gilbert Shelton (*Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, Wonder Wart-Hog*). Both times, at *EVO* in New York and Rip Off in San Francisco, our conversation began with the same ten words: "What are *you* doing here?" and "What are *you* doing here?"

Many current and former Vultures came to that 2009 exhibit. I knew only a few of them. Most of the guys I'd known had by then died or had been killed. It was strange seeing so many old men in the leather colors I'd last seen on young men. The exhibit included a dozen or so of my photos from Tommy Bell's funeral: at the clubhouse, the funeral home, and in the cemetery. The current president of the Club asked if they could get prints for their clubhouse, now located in rural Albion, New York, far away from where a local cop like Mike Amico would make a career bugging them. I sent them a set of prints, which they put on the clubhouse walls. (In return, they invited me to join them on rides and they gave me an RVMC T-shirt. I declined the rides; I still have the shirt.)

A year later, I got a call from one of the Club officers. He told me that James Boyer, who had been president of the Club for years, had died. I was, he said, sort of their Club's president funeral photographer. Any chance I could document Boyer's funeral for them, like I did the last time? "Sure," I said.

7. Dog sergeant with ground rattler. Cummins prison farm, Varner, Arkansas, 1975.

My ten-year-old son, Michael, was with me on my second Cummins visit in 1972. We were driving from San Francisco back to Buffalo. I'd go out photographing in the fields and Michael would find things to do. One day I came back to the place we were staying, and he was sitting on the grass in front of it with a watermelon split cleanly in half. He was happily pulling out and consuming the heart of it.

"Where did you get that?" I asked him.

"Some guys going by saw me. They stopped and one of them got it out of a truck and gave it to me. He opened it up for me."

"Guys in white suits?"

"Yes. In a bunch of carts pulled by a tractor."

That would have been a wagon train of prisoners coming in from the fields. The tractor driver had seen Michael sitting in front of the house where we were staying. He stopped. One of the prisoners got a watermelon from one of the trucks following them, sliced it in half with a machete, and gave it to Michael, after which the wagon train moved on so the prisoners could go back into the building. (Don't tell Family Services.)

One day, Michael and I spent about two hours in the kennel where the dog sergeant told us dog stories. Other than the watermelon heart that was his and his alone, it was Michael's favorite part of the Cummins visit.

I'd see the dog sergeant on some of my subsequent visits. I never learned his name. One day when I was photographing a hoe squad, I saw his pickup coming, a plume of dust following it on the turnrows. He and got out with the snake in his hand. I backed off. "Don't wave that in my face," I said.

"I'm not waving it in your face," he said, "I'm just *showing* it to you."

8. Patti Smith (singer and writer) in concert in Just Buffalo's BABEL series. Buffalo, 2015.

In 2007, a Buffalo arts organization, Just Buffalo, began a visiting writer series called BABEL. They had funding to bring four major writers to town each year. The first year, the series took place in a rehabilitated and repurposed church owned by Ani

DiFranco. The series quickly outgrew that space and moved to Kleinhans Music Hall, home of the Buffalo Philharmonic, where it regularly drew audiences of 1,500 or more.

I began photographing the visiting writers for fun. The camera gave me an excuse to hang out with writers I admired at the preperformance reception and to lurk at the edge of the stage. The first was novelist Michael Ondaatje; the playwright Ariel Dorfman was the second. My intention was to do it just a few times.

I don't know how it came about, but my role in the visits changed. Over the next ten years, I would photograph thirty-five of the forty writers in the series, not only from the edge of the stage and at the receptions, but on the stage during the readings, backstage before they went on, and in their afternoon encounters with local high school students. Many of those photographs appear in *BABEL: The First Ten Years* (Just Buffalo, 2018).

Patti Smith and I had met before her BABEL performance. Twenty years earlier, we'd both been part of the memorial service for our mutual friend, civil rights attorney William Kunstler, at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine. She'd sung Kurt Weill's "Lost in the Stars" a capella, and I'd read the text from Whitman's preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* that had, a few months earlier, been carved into the rock outcropping in West Shokan above where Bill's ashes had been buried.

In the middle of the song, Patti forgot the words. The only sound in that vast space was 3,000 people breathing. After what seemed an eternity, she remembered the words and finished the song.

In the Green Room later, she paced back and forth, saying, "I fucked it up. I fucked it up."

"What are you talking about?" I said.

"The song. I forgot the words and fucked it up."

"Nonsense. You were singing about being lost in the stars, you got lost, then you picked it up. Everybody thought it was a bit."

"Really?"

"Sure."

I had no idea what people thought. I recently listened to a tape of the service: that eternity of silence was about twenty seconds. Stage time isn't ordinary time.

When we reminisced about the St. John the Divine event during the reception before her BABEL performance, I pointed at the decoration in her lapel. "The French Order of Arts and Letters," she said. "I'm a *commandeur*."

I pointed to the ribbon in my lapel. "I'm a *chevalier*," I said.

"That means I get to give you orders," she said.

9. Janis Joplin (singer). Newport Folk Festival, Newport, Rhode Island, 1968.

At the performers' party in one of the big Newport mansions after that night's concert, I saw her sitting alone on the staircase, drinking out of a pint bottle of Southern Comfort. Those Newport performer parties were communal—huge tables of food and drink and people making music all over the place. She was the most alone person I ever saw at any of them. There was no way to say that. What I said instead was, "You look bored."

"I'm always bored," she said.

Maybe she was bored in day-to-day life and at after-concert parties. But not onstage. Onstage, she was on fire.

10. Mike Seeger (musician). Buffalo, New York, 1977.

I don't know if Mike ever had any formal musical training, but he was the most accomplished performer in an accomplished musical family. His father, Charles, was an ethnomusicologist; his mother, Ruth, was a composer; his uncle, Alan, was a poet ("I have a rendezvous with death . . ."), his sister and half-brother, Peggy and Pete, were well-known folk singers. Whenever Mike visited we'd hear him practicing or just making himself happy on a wonderful range of instruments: banjo, fiddle, autoharp, dulcimer, guitar, mandolin, jaw harp, pan pipes and more. He was always delighted to have people join in or listen. Sometimes, as here, he'd even play for the dog.

11. Dalai Lama (spiritual leader). Buffalo, New York, 2006.

During his visit to Buffalo, the Dalai Lama talked to a huge audience in the University's stadium. He also did two smaller events: one at the Law School, one in the music building. There was a lunch for him, to which maybe 300 people were invited. While we were inside waiting for him to arrive, I got a cell phone message from my son in LA, but the building blocked the signal, so I went outside to take the call. When I tried to go back in, the Secret Service guys bodyguarding the Dalai Lama (he's a head of state) told me I'd have to stay at the entranceway until he was in the room, then I could reenter. That injunction didn't make much sense, but you don't win arguments with the Secret Service, so I stood with one of the rows of people bracketing the path to the entranceway.

The official party approached: the Dalai Lama, university officials, more Secret Service guys. Suddenly, he broke out of the formal line and came up to me. "Moishe Dayan, my old friend," he said. We bowed to one another; we hugged. He rejoined the procession.

I was, at the time, suffering from a transient episode of double vision, so, that day, I was wearing an eye patch. The Israeli general Moishe Dayan (1915–1981) who, late in his life became an advocate for a sane peace with the Palestinians, had lost an eye early on, during his Irgun days, and was always photographed wear a large black eye patch. The Dalai Lama was making a joke that only I heard. We had never seen one another before that moment.

The procession moved on. John Simpson, the University president, who had watched our entire encounter but heard none of anything either of us said, said to me as he passed by, “You just know everybody.”

12. Pete Seeger (folksinger and political activist). Buffalo, New York, 1996.

In our kitchen. He was staying with us while he was in town for a concert. Earlier, we'd been at the university campus where I worked. As we walked from one building to another, he said, “This is a pretty bleak place.” I acknowledged that it was. “It's got a lot of empty walls.” He pointed to one large windowless wall on the side of the music building. “A wall like that. You could have a competition among high school kids to design a mural for that wall. The best one gets painted on the wall. But you do it with paint that won't last more than a year, to the next year you can have another competition.” I don't think I ever saw Pete when he didn't come up with at least one new project worth thinking about or even doing.

13. Pete Seeger. Beacon, New York, 1977.

Pete was boiling down maple syrup he had tapped earlier that day. He and his wife, Toshi, had built their house themselves years earlier. He looked across the Hudson and pointed to some housing developments. “It didn't used to be like that here,” he said. “In the night, it was dark as far as you could see.”

The first time I'd visited them in Beacon had been in 1966, when we were doing the final edit of a film Pete, Toshi, their son Dan, and I had shot in Ellis prison a few months earlier, *Afro-American Worksongs in a Texas Prison*. I noticed an old Japanese man on his knees in a flower bed.

I mentioned him to Pete. Japanese gardeners are rare in this part of the country. “That's Takashi Ohti, Toshi's father,” he said. “He's living with us.”

Takashi had been born in Japan, Pete said. He'd met Toshi's mother, an American citizen, in Berlin, where Toshi was born in 1922. They all came to the United States, where Takashi became a US citizen. During the war, he was smuggled into Japan where

he served as a spy for the Americans. When the war ended, he identified himself to the occupation forces and asked them to get him back to his family in the US.

When they checked his story, Pete said, they discovered that he had, in his youth, belonged to a communist or socialist organization. Because of that, the US wouldn't let him back in.

It took years, but he was eventually allowed to come home. "It took more time for him to get home," Pete said, "than he spent in Japan working as an American spy. If he'd ever been caught, he'd have been tortured and executed. All those years he was fighting to get home, he was a man without a country. The Japanese had no use for him because he had worked for the Americans. The Americans had no use for him because of his political activity as a kid. It's a terrible story."

14. Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins (blues singer) and Michael Lee Jackson, Newport Folk Festival performers' tent. Newport, Rhode Island, 1965.

Some of my favorite moments in the years I was involved with the Newport Folk Festivals (1964–1968) occurred in the performers' tent and lunch area, and during the performers' dinners/parties after the evening concerts. There would be music and talk all over the place. I remember one night in one of the large Newport mansions we rented when the Clancy Brothers were singing Irish songs in one room, while in the adjacent room Junior Wells and Buddy Guy sang the blues: Buddy Guy played his harmonica and sang from a chair; Junior Wells strutted back and forth with his guitar atop on a highly polished dining room table. Earlier that day, in the performers' tent, Joan Baez was in intense conversation with Maybelle Carter, while outside, civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer sat at a picnic table in an equally intense conversation with Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt, and several other people. Another time, that same weekend, my three-year-old son Michael (now an intellectual property lawyer and accomplished rock musician) and bluesman Lightnin' Hopkins started hanging out. I don't know what they were talking about, but I have photos of them doing it in three different places that weekend.

During the performers' lunch one Saturday, a few people started singing "Diamond Joe," a beautiful song performed by a convict named Charlie Butler and recorded by John A. Lomax in 1937. The song appeared on one of the phonograph albums published by the Archive of American Folk Song, *Afro-American Blues and Game Songs* (AAFS-4). Those albums and Harry Smith's six Folkways LPs, *Anthology of American Folk Music*, provided the core repertoire for many of the urban folksingers of the 1950s and 1960s.

After a few minutes, the group singing “Diamond Joe” grew. Now there were guitars and banjos. The promotions lady from Hohner showed up and gave harmonicas to anyone who looked to her like a real musician. Someone from the Kazoo company gave kazoos to people who couldn’t play one of the other instruments but could hum.

The melody for the chorus and verses differs, but the song consists mostly of the chorus, so even people who’d never heard it before were able to join in. We sang “Diamond Joe” again and again, with more and more voices and instruments taking part.

Then, just as the group came together, it began to dissolve: people went back to conversations that had been in process when the music started or hit the food tables again or got ready for one of the afternoon workshops.

There is no recording of it and no photographs: I have no idea how long we sang “Diamond Joe” or how large the group became. All that remains is what I just told you.

15. Sweet Willie and others. First town meeting. Resurrection City, Washington, DC, 1968.

The Poor People’s Campaign was Martin Luther King’s last big project. He was murdered before it happened, but his colleagues at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) carried it on. The plan was for poor and working people from all over the country to come to Washington to lobby Congress for a fair piece of the American Dream.

The Newport Folk Foundation was one of the many organizations involved. Ralph Rinzler, Alan Lomax, and I worked with SCLC and Smithsonian Institution staff setting up a music program at Resurrection City, the A-frame complex set up near the Reflecting Pool. There were daily events for kids, music at meetings, and concerts (my favorite of which was a Muddy Waters concert on a stage in the Reflecting Pool, with the steps leading up to the road and the steps in front of the Lincoln Memorial as the seats).

This photo is from one of our first days there. The A-frames were still being built and the buses from various parts of the country hadn’t arrived yet. But the big tent was filled anyway. There were only a few white faces, most of them at the press table in front of the speakers’ platform. There was speechifying, music, more speechifying. Alan Lomax and I stood at the back, listening to one incredible speaker after another.

Sweet Willie had only one arm; he’d lost the other in Vietnam. His words were electric.

The speaker after him said, “The beautiful thing about history is, it doesn’t liberate you, but it does locate you.”

“Have you been to the top of the mountain?” someone yelled.

“Yeah.”

“What did you see?”

“I seen the world playin’ with itself.”

16. William Kunstler and Ramsey Clark (civil rights attorneys). Erie County Holding Center, Buffalo, New York, 1975.

In spring 1975, I was teaching a University at Buffalo Law School seminar on prison law with Constitutional scholar Herman Schwartz. Herman—who had been one of the prisoner-invited observers in the 1971 Attica Uprising—told me he was assisting civil rights attorneys William Kunstler and Ramsey Clark in their preparations for one of the key prisoner felony trials: John Hill and Charles Joseph Parnaslice, charged in the death of guard William Quinn in the first few minutes of the uprising. Bill was then one of the best-known civil rights lawyers in the country; Ramsey had been US attorney general. I told Herman I was envious.

“Would you like to meet them?” he asked.

“Absolutely.”

Herman said they were staying at the Statler Hotel downtown and were no doubt bored with hotel food. “Invite them to dinner,” he said, “they’ll be delighted.”

A few nights later, Bill and his associate, Margaret Ratner (they would later marry), Ramsey, and Herman came over for dinner. Bill and Ramsey were both great storytellers and extremely funny, but in very different ways: Bill performed stories; Ramsey was dry, and subtle. As they were leaving, Diane said, “That was wonderful. We have to do it again.”

Ramsey said, “How about tomorrow?”

We reassembled a few days later (without Herman). It was even better.

Something else happened: Bill, Margaret, Diane, and I fell into immediate friendship. We would, in the years that followed, stay at each other’s houses in New York, Buffalo, and West Shokan, and vacation together in Bermuda and Mexico. The relationship with Bill continued until his death in 1995; Margaret is still Diane’s closest friend.

Not long after those two dinners, Charley Joe and Johnny went to trial. The day the jury began deliberations, Bill and Margaret were having dinner at our house. Bill got a telephone call: the jury had reached a verdict. We rushed downtown.

Charley Joe and Johnny were both convicted. They were taken from the courtroom immediately. Bill, Ramsey, and Herman were told they could talk to them across the

street in the Holding Center in thirty minutes. This photo was while we were waiting for them to be brought down.

I said to Herman that it must be terrible to put so much work and care into a trial, only to lose, to go home with nothing. “Bill got something out of it.” His voice was unusually tight, and his face seemed to be constraining anger.

“What?” I asked.

“A friend,” Herman said.

17. William Kunstler and Margaret Kunstler (civil rights attorney). Oaxaca, Mexico, 1990.

Bill and Margaret were in Oaxaca with their daughters, Sarah and Emily, who were spending a month there learning Spanish. We joined them for part of it. Mostly, we hung out, which is what we always did, but we also visited Coyotepec, Mitla, Teotitlán, and Monte Albán. In Coyotepec I bought a black pottery flute that plays a scale unique to itself. When we were going single file through a dark tunnel in one of the smaller structures at Monte Albán, someone ahead of us heard Bill’s voice, turned, and said, “You’re William Kunstler!”

“Of course I am,” Bill said.

A few years later, the four of us went to Bermuda. In the hotel elevator one night, someone recognized Bill and mentioned an event at which he’d seen him. Bill immediately told a wonderfully detailed story about that event. He finished just as the elevator doors opened. “Isn’t that right?” he said to Margaret.

“No,” she said. She was every bit as taciturn as he was voluble, and equally eloquent.

Every night, after dinner, we sat on our joint patio and played Rummy Cube, which Diane, Margaret, and I always conspired to let Bill win.

One afternoon we were walking from our hotel to a nearby beach to go snorkeling. Bill forgot which way the traffic was coming from (British rules in Bermuda) and almost got hit by a moped. He stood in the middle of the road and looked at it as it rounded a curve.

“Oh, to die in Bermuda by moped,” he said in his great baritone. “How inappropriate!”

18. William Kunstler and clients. Fort Apache, the Bronx, New York, 1988.

Bill’s staff was usually on guard to keep strangers from approaching him. It wasn’t a security issue. It was rather that if someone had a problem that interested Bill,

he'd take the case, whether or not there was any money. Most of the time, there wasn't.

In 1988, Bill was defending Larry Davis, charged with shooting six New York Police Department officers two years earlier. (Davis claimed self-defense. Bill got him off everything but illegal gun possession, for which he got a sentence of five to fifteen years. Davis was also convicted in 1991 for the murder of another drug dealer; he got twenty-five-to-life for that. He was stabbed to death in Shawangunk Correctional Facility in 2008.)

A group of people got to Bill on the steps of the Bronx County Courthouse. They told him that the owner of a derelict apartment house had promised them that if they rehabilitated the building, he would give it to them and walk away with a tax deduction. They did rehabilitate it. When they were done, he sold the building. The new owner said he wasn't bound by the previous owner's promise. He got a Bronx judge to issue an immediate eviction order: any of their possessions in the building would be tossed onto the street by bailiffs.

That kind of case was irresistible to Bill. He talked to another New York judge, Bruce Wright in Brooklyn, to issue an order countermanding the order of the Bronx judge. (Wright was often referred to as "Turn 'em loose Bruce" by Brooklyn cops and prosecutors. He was not a fan of cash bail. He had presided at Bill and Margaret's marriage.)

Wright told Bill that an order from him was meaningless: he couldn't override an order by a judge at the same level in the Bronx.

Bill said it didn't matter. He'd show Wright's order to the bailiffs, who wouldn't know the law and who wouldn't want to get into trouble, so they'd go away. It was a Friday. "By the time they get it sorted out," Bill said, "I'll have time to get a legitimate order blocking the eviction."

Which was exactly what happened. Not only were the evictions blocked, but the residents got ownership of the house. This photo was at a party celebrating the victory next to their vegetable garden in an adjacent empty lot.

19. Brice Marden (artist). West Shokan, New York, 1995.

Bill Kunstler died on September 4, 1995. His memorial service, at St. John the Divine on November 19, was a quilt work of his life: brief statements by family, friends, and clients, and a dazzling range of musical performances: Danny Glover, Patti Smith, Ritchie Havens, the Harlem Boys Choir, Lakota drummers and dancers, Jimmie Breslin, Amiri Baraka, Allen Ginsberg, David Dellinger, Angela Davis, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee,

Diane Christian, Michael Ratner, Margaret Kunstler, and more. The cathedral was packed. An improvised sound system carried the audio part to an overflow audience in the street. One protestor from the Jewish Defense League walked back and forth, shouting, "William Kunstler is where he belongs!"

The musical performances took place on the altar; the statements were read from pulpits on either side of it. There was a visual problem: on the wall behind the altar and two pulpits was a huge cross. During the entire ceremony, the audience there to honor an atheist Jew would be looking at the speakers and performers against a cross bigger than any of them.

Bill's friend Brice Marden solved the problem. Behind the altar and adjacent to the two pulpits, he built a huge frame containing a portrait of Bill. The afternoon he set it up coincided with St. Francis's feast day: as Brice's crew worked with hammers and saws, New Yorkers came and went with their animals needing blessings: dogs, cats, goats, snakes, fish, pigs, turtles. Memorials are one-day things, but the work of the church has its ineluctable calendar.

A few months earlier, Bill's family and a small group of friends had gathered to put Bill's ashes at the foot of a stone outcropping about a hundred yards up a dirt road from Bill and Margaret's cabin in West Shokan (near Woodstock). All afternoon, as we hung out and told stories, we heard the *chip-chip-chip* of the hammer and chisel of the stonemason from St. John the Divine, as he carved into the rock these lines from Whitman's Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*:

This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown.