



A Bee Stung Me, So I Killed All the Fish
(Notes from the Homeland, 2003–2006)
by George Saunders

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DESIGNED BY ELLEN MCLAURINE LUCAIRE

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My Guilty Pleasures

Those of us in the "literary game" often have "guilty pleasures" that we indulge in when not translating Cicero from the Latin into the German and then back into Latin, to see how funny it sounds. My favorite guilty pleasure is watching the new TV series *The Bachelor: Who Screws the Best?* in which an ugly, poor, middle-aged guy has sex with a series of young women who have been misled into believing that he is handsome, young, and rich, after which he decides which of them to propose to, at which time they are notified that he is actually ugly, poor, and middle-aged. I especially loved the moment when Desree, the series "bad girl," said: "Well, I thought there was

a lot of hair on his back, but still I felt we were really connecting." Also good is the new series *The Bachelor: Actually He Is Dead*, in which a group of young women attempt to win the favor of a propped-up, moldering corpse they have been told is a young, handsome, rich guy who is alive. It's still sort of hard for me to believe that none one of them—not the Lawyer, not the Senior Account Rep, not the Homeless Advocate—noticed the team of people behind the bachelor, manipulating his limbs via a system of wires, while a tape recorder on his chest emitted sayings such as "I guess I'm just looking for someone who'll like me for me, even

when parts of me fall off" and "Well, as far as
my house goes, all I can say is, it's very small
and made of wood." I'm also looking forward to the new series *The Bachelor: So What If I'm a Raccoon?* in which a group of young women live for six months in a mansion in the south of France with a raccoon they have been told is a human being who recently came into a lot of money. The last episode, where the young women all gang up on "Jake," kill him, make a hat out of his fur, and eat him, promises to be a ratings bonanza. Also worthy of note is the new series *The Hag*, in which a very tiny, wiry woman who is over one hundred years old is locked in a mansion in the south of France with three thousand muscular young men, who must fight one another with clubs and

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mallets to see which of them will be allowed to leave the house. When all of the men but one are gone, she reveals that she is actually a beautiful young heiress, at which time he reveals that he is actually a raccoon, after which she has sex with him, kills him, then makes a hat out of him and wears it to a day spa. But if I had to choose, I guess I would have to say that my favorite guilty pleasure is the new series *How Weird Is That?* in which a group of bureaucrats who have never themselves fought in a war are locked in the "Decision House" and allowed to select any country in the world for America to go to war with, for reasons they must invent on the spot. The candid shots of clueless families in the chosen country being blown apart as American bombers pass by overhead, along with the quick cuts back to the Decision House, where a group of young women are deciding which of the bureaucrats to marry (having been told that the bureaucrats are actually leaders of a great nation) make this a real "can't-miss" program.

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A Survey of the Literature

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The Patriotic Studies discipline may properly be said to have begun with the work of Jennison et al., which first established the existence of the so-called “fluid-nations,” entities functionally identical to the more traditional geographically based nations (“geo-nations”), save for their lack of what the authors termed “spatial/geographic continuity.” Citizenship in a fluid-nation was seen to be contingent not upon residence in some shared physical space (i.e., within “borders”) but, rather, upon commonly held “values, loyalties, and/or habitual patterns of behavior” seen to exist across geo-national borders.

For approximately the first five years of its existence,

the Patriotic Studies discipline proceeded under the assumption that these fluid-nations were benign entities, whose existence threatened neither the stability nor integrity of the traditional geo-nation.

A classic study of this period was conducted by Emmons, Denny, and Smith, concerning the fluid-nation Men Who Fish. Using statistical methods of retro-attribution, the authors were able to show that, in a time of national crisis (the Battle of the Bulge, Europe, 1944), American citizens who were also citizens of Men Who Fish performed their duties every bit as efficiently (± 5 Assessment Units) as did members of the control

7 group, even when that duty involved inflicting “harm” to “serious harm” on fellow citizens of Men Who Fish who were allied at that time with the opposing geo-nation (i.e., Germany). During this battle, as many as seventy-five hundred (and no less than five thousand) German soldiers who were citizens of Men Who Fish were killed or wounded by American soldiers who were citizens of Men Who Fish, leading the authors to conclude that citizens of Men Who Fish were “not expected, in a time of national crisis, to respond significantly less patriotically than a control group of men of similar age, class, etc., who are not citizens of Men Who Fish.”

Significant and populous fluid-nations examined during this so-called “Exoneration Studies” period included

Men With Especially Large Penises; People Who Say They Hate Television but Admit to Watching It Now and Then, Just to Relax; Women Who When Drunk Berate the Sport of Boxing; and Elderly Persons Whose First Thought Upon Hearing of a Death Is Relief That They Are Still Alive, Followed by Guilt for Having Had That First Feeling.

A watershed moment in the history of the discipline occurred with the groundbreaking work of Randall, Cleary, et al., which demonstrated for the first time that individuals were capable of holding multiple fluid-nation citizenships. Using the newly developed Anders-Reese Distance-Observation Method, the authors were able to provide specific examples of this phenomenon. A Nebraska man was seen to hold citizenship in both Men Who Sit Up Late at Night Staring with Love at Their Sleeping Children and Farmers Who Mumble Soundless Prayers While Working in Their Fields. In Cincinnati, Ohio, twin sisters were found to belong to Five-Times-a-Week Churchgoers, as well as Clandestine Examiners of One's Own Hardened Nasal Secretions. An entire family in Abilene, Texas, was seen to belong to Secretly Always Believe They Are the Ugliest in the Room, with individual members of this family also holding secondary citizenships in fluid-nations as diverse as Listens to Headphones in Bed; Stands Examining Her

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Breasts in Her Closet; Brags Endlessly While Actually Full of Doubt; Makes Excellent Strudel; and Believes Fervently in the Risen Christ.

At the time, awareness of our work among the general public was still low. This would change dramatically, however, with the publication, by Beatts, Daniels, and Ahkerbaj, of their comprehensive study of the fluid-nation Individuals Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction.

In this study, a hundred and fifty-five citizens of the target fluid-nation were assessed per the Hanley-Briscombe National-Allegiance Criterion, a statistical model developed to embody the Dooley-Sminks-Ang Patriot Descriptor Statement,

9 which defined a patriot as "an individual who, once the leadership of his country has declared that action is necessary, responds quickly, efficiently, and without wasteful unnecessary questioning of the declared national goal."

Results indicated that citizens of Individuals Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction scored, on average, thirty-nine points lower on the National Allegiance Criterion than did members of the control group and exhibited nonpatriotic attitudes or tendencies 29 percent more often. Shown photographs of members of an opposing geo-nation and asked, "What sort of person do you believe this person to be?" citizens of Individuals

Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction were 64 percent more likely to choose the response “Don’t know, would have to meet them first.” Given the opportunity to poke with a rubber baton a citizen of a geo-nation traditionally opposed to their geo-nation (an individual who was at that time taunting them with a slogan from a list of Provocative Slogans), citizens of Individuals Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction were found to be 71 percent less likely to poke than members of the control group.

The authors’ conclusion (“It is perhaps not inaccurate to state that, within this particular fluid-nation, loyalty to the fluid-nation may at times surpass loyalty to the parent geo-nation”), along with the respondent’s professed willingness to subjugate important geo-national priorities, and even accept increased national security risks, in order to avoid violating the Cohering Principle of their fluid-nation (i.e., not killing for an abstraction), led to the creation of a new category of fluid-nation, the so-called “Malignant” fluid-nation.

At this time—coincidentally but fortuitously—there appeared the work of Elliott, Danker, et al., who made the important (and at the time startling) discovery that multiple fluid-nation citizenships did not occur in random distributions. That is, given a known fluid-nation citizenship, it was theoretically possible to predict an individual’s

future citizenships in other fluid-nations, using complex computer modeling schemes. The authors found, for example, that citizens of Over-Involved Mothers tended to become, later in life, citizens of either Over-Involved Grandmothers or (perhaps paradoxically) Completely Uninterested Grandmothers, with high rates of occurrence observed also in Women Who Collect Bird Statuary and Elderly Women Who Purposely Affect a “Quaint Old Lady” Voice.

The implications of these data vis-à-vis the so-called Malignant fluid-nations were clear. Work immediately began within the discipline to identify and develop innovative new technologies for the purpose of identifying those fluid-nations most likely to produce future citizens of Malignant fluid-nations. The most sophisticated and user-friendly of these tools proved to be the Rowley Query Grid, which successfully predicted the probability that citizens of Tends to Hold Him/Herself Aloof from the Group (previously thought to be Innocuous) would, in time, evolve into citizens of Individuals Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction. Subsequently, dozens of these “Nascent-Malignant” fluid-nations were identified, including Bilingual Environmentalists, Crusty Ranchers, Angry Widowers, and Recent Immigrants with an Excessive Interest in the Arts.

Needless to say, these findings resulted in dramatic

improvement in both the National Security Index and the Unforeseen-Violence Probability Statistic.

Entire research departments have now embarked on the herculean task of identifying all extant fluid-nations, with particular emphasis, of course, on links to known Malignant fluid-nations. The innovative work of Ralph Frank, in which fifty individuals waiting for a bus in Portland, Oregon, were, briefly and with their full consent, taken into custody and administered the standard Fluid-Nation Identifier Questionnaire, indicated the worrisome ubiquity of these fluid-nations. At least ninety-seven separate fluid-nations were detected within this random gathering of Americans, including,¹² but not limited to: Now-Heavy Former Ballerinas; Gum-Chompers; People Who Daydream Obsessively of Rescuing Someone Famous; Children of Mothers Who Were Constantly Bursting into Tears; Men Who Can Name Entire Lineups of Ball Teams from Thirty Years Ago; Individuals in Doubt That Someone Will Ever Love Him/Her; and Individuals Who Once Worked, or Considered Working, as Clowns. A closer analysis of the fluid-nations identified indicated that *nearly 50 percent of these had been, would soon be, or very possibly could eventually be linked to Individuals Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction, or to another Malignant fluid-nation.*

It is thus no longer a question of whether a large number of Americans belong to these fluid-nations; it is, rather, a question of how willing Americans are to freely confess these citizenships, and then undergo the necessary mitigative measures, so that the nation need have no doubt about their readiness to respond in an emergency.

One need only imagine the catastrophic results, should the American membership of one of the more ubiquitous fluid-nations (Parents of Children Inclined to Cry During Thunderstorms, for example, or Inseparable Married Couples Who Whisper Together Late Into the Night) pause at the height of some national security crisis to consider the possible negative effects some proactive American response might have on their fellow fluid-nation members living within the geo-nation which is, at that time, posing the possible threat to American security.¹³

Although much work remains to be done, most Americans now recognize the tremendous danger posed by these fluid-nations, are energetically examining themselves and their acquaintances for the residual presence of any questionable loyalties or allegiances, and have come to recognize that national security issues are most efficiently addressed, not by the average citizen, who is (understandably) somewhat underinformed and dis-

tracted, but by the well-trained, highly skilled professionals working within the Patriotic Studies discipline.

This is not, of course, just an American issue; leaders of other geo-nations have now begun to recognize the potential gravity of this threat. Throughout the world, at any given moment, the justifiable aims of legitimate geo-nations are being threatened by reckless individuals who insist on indulging their private, inscrutable agendas. The prospect of a world plagued by these fluid-nations—a world in which one's identification with, and loyalty to, one's parent geo-nation is constantly being undermined—is sobering indeed. This state of affairs would not only allow for, but require, a constant, round-the-clock reassessment of one's values and beliefs prior to action, a continual adjustment of one's loyalties and priorities based on an ongoing evaluation and reevaluation of reality—a process that promises to be as inefficient as it is wearying.

The above summary has, of necessity, been brief. It will be left to future scholars, working in a time of relative calm, once the present national crisis has receded, to tell the full story, in all the rich detail it deserves.

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Exit Strategy

It is clear we are at a crossroads in Iraq. Naysayers are claiming the situation there is chaotic and confusing. Nonsense. It is not confusing. It is quite simple.

Allow me to explain.

There are, at present, two major constituencies in Iraq: those who want to kill us, and those who do not. Success will require minimizing membership in the former group. Complications along this path may include the following:

- 1) In the process of killing the ones who want to kill us, we sometimes kill some who are not trying to kill us.

This has been observed to cause a sudden increase in the number who want to kill us, which means a longer stay for us, since we then must kill, not only the ones who originally wanted to kill us, but also the ones who just started wanting to kill us.

- 2) In order to identify the ones who want to kill us, it is necessary, once we have caught someone who wants to kill us, to encourage him/her to help us identify others who want to kill us. Sometimes we mistake ones who don't want to kill us for ones who do, and catch them, and encourage them.

Upon their release, there occurs a sudden increase in the number of those who want to kill us. 16

- 3) Given the large number of us over there, it should come as no surprise that some of us are bad. Certain abuses have occurred. However, it is only fair to note that many more abuses were occurring before. Plus, if our abusers are abusing over there, they are not abusing over here. So really, it is a win/win: the Iraqis have less abuses than they were having, and we have less abuses than we would have had, had our abusers stayed at home. Everyone is happy, except, it has been observed, those who were abused, and

those who hear of the abuse, and suddenly join the group of those wanting to kill us.

Since it is clear that we cannot leave until they stop killing us, and equally clear that they will not stop killing us until we leave, I propose the following exit strategy:

- 1) Kill all the ones who are trying to kill us, in such a way that none of those who presently do not want to kill us suddenly start wanting to kill us.
- 2) At the moment of the death of the last person who wanted to kill us, race quickly out of the country before some additional person suddenly decides he/she wants to kill us, thus necessitating our continued presence in Iraq, in order to kill him/her.
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- 3) Having left Iraq quickly, do not look back, so as not to witness individuals claiming they would have liked to kill us, which would then necessitate a return to Iraq, in order to etc. etc. (See #2, above).

To implement this exit strategy, we will have to practice running quickly. It is further recommended that, while running quickly, the eyes be cast down, to avoid witnessing

any last-minute people trying to kill us. We will have to have established excellent communications so that, the moment that final person begins dying, we can all begin running at the same time, eyes cast down, quickly, to our vehicles, to get to the airport, to get out of the country.

This exit strategy will demand a high level of coordination, dedication, and planning.

But our leaders have already shown the way, by showing that, if one has a vision, and refuses to betray that vision by modifying it or becoming distracted by small details—such as, for example, the confusing data emanating from the non-theoretical world, filled with actual people, pets, clothes on clothes-lines, nuanced loyalties, etc.—mountains can be moved, nations can be changed, great things can be accomplished.

It is clear that the fate of Iraq now rests in the hands of Iraqis.

People of Iraq, I say to you:

Stop trying to kill us, so we can leave. But also, do not fear. We are in it for the long haul, although we cannot stay with you indefinitely. No, as soon as you stop trying to kill us, believe us, you will never see us again. Therefore, trust us, people of Iraq, have faith, we assure you: as long as you continue trying to kill us, we will never abandon you.

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Intermission

The Food Fundamentalist

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I was, of course, honored to be asked to write this essay on food, but also somewhat puzzled, since I completely ceased eating four years ago. Although the total cessation of eating has not always been easy—it's especially awkward, for example, when I'm invited to "go out to eat"—still, I believe I made the right choice.

There were a number of factors that led to my total cessation of eating.

First, I was tired of eating. I had begun to find eating monotonous. Always the same choices: what kind of dead animal, what sort of yanked-up vegetable/fallen fruit,

in what manner would I like the cook to attempt to conceal the fact that I was eating one of the usual suite of dead animals/yanked-up vegetables/fallen fruits? Spices and seasonings had come to seem to me like the tools of a vast world lie.

Day after day, I found myself enacting the same cycle: eat, grow hungry, eat again. I began imagining my belly filling and emptying, filling and emptying, imagined my mouth chewing and swallowing, chewing and swallowing. For hours at a time, when I should have been working, I sat in my cubicle, imagining my swollen belly and filth-engorged mouth, which is when, as I recall, 21 I first started skipping lunch.

Also, there were the moral issues. Every time I ate, I was aware that I was exploiting someone. The cow, yes, of course, the pig, the duck, but also the farmer, the trucker, the cook, the dishwasher, and the waiter.

Frankly, with every bite, I felt more and more the oppressor.

But since I stopped eating, no. I almost never feel like the oppressor. With every meal I don't eat, I am aware that somewhere a cow, pig, asparagus, broccoli, waiter, etc., remains undisturbed. Sometimes, yes, when I drink, I still feel like an oppressor. Every time I drink, say, water, I am aware that I am exploiting the fish, the algae, the micro-

organisms, the men who built the pipeline, the filtration-plant employees, the woman who made the glass from which I am drinking, the poor oppressed lackey who, stooping like a lowly indentured servant, brought me the glass of water.

I am hoping, soon, to discontinue drinking, but here I must admit to a certain moral timidity. I like to drink. I find it enjoyable. I especially like to drink alcohol. Perhaps it is some sort of compensatory mechanism, to offset the cessation of eating, I really don't know. I am not a psychologist. I only know that, since I stopped eating, I am drunk most of the time.

Here you may be thinking: Well of course 22
he is drunk all the time; the poor morally pure
thing has probably shriveled up to nothing from not eating
and is therefore more susceptible to alcohol.

But no. The truth is, since I stopped eating, I have gained nearly seventy pounds.

Some may say: Well, this unfortunate weight gain must be related to his constant drinking. But no again. I didn't start getting constantly drunk until well after I had gained the seventy pounds and could barely fit into my pants.

Last month I tried an experiment. I stopped drinking alcohol and drank only water, water that I got myself, very

humbly, from the tap. I got it from the tap and skipped the oppressive glass stage altogether, taking the water directly into my cupped hands, bringing it meekly to my lips.

And guess what? I still gained ten pounds!

So I thought, What the heck, and went back to drinking alcohol.

Needless to say, the total cessation of eating has not been easy. I think of food constantly. I think of great meals I have had in exotic foreign locations. I think of mediocre meals I have had in boring neutral locations. Lately, depressed by my weight gain, I even find myself thinking of horrific inedible meals I have had in dangerously hostile places, where people were basically slapping the fork out of my hands while insulting me to my face.

But I know I must stay the course. Look at all the demons who ate! Hitler ate, Nero ate, Pontius Pilate ate, every murdering minor-league dictator and thieving banker in history ate. Now, I know what you're thinking: But good people ate too! To which I would reply: Yes, but they ate less. Or, if they ate normal amounts, they enjoyed it less. Was Jesus a gourmand? I think not. Mother Teresa? Don't make me laugh. Gandhi? Always fasting.

Therefore, if less food is good, is not zero food better? If great moral beings have always chosen paths of

minimal enjoyment, isn't the most righteous path no enjoyment at all?

Of late, we have become an aggressive and greedy nation. I believe that soon the pendulum will swing back, and we will become an ashamed, repentant nation. What better way to express our total self-loathing than to all stop eating at once, denouncing the endless cycle of intake and output, the corrupt global system of planting, harvest, and feast?

I will be happy to show the way.

What would help me is some company. Do you think, dear reader, you could join my movement?

Will you too swear off the cruel oppression
of eating? Will you too, empty-bellied and
clean-mouthing, join the ranks of the virtuous and ethereal,
swelling inexplicably to tremendous righteous proportions,
embarking together on the greatest repentance of all, saying no to anything and everything that is in the least bit enjoyable?

If so, write me. I will respond during one of my brief sober periods and offer you some valuable advice on how to stop eating.

Until then, I hope you will enjoy the following recipe:

Light-as-Air Brunch

Serves 1–20

Ingredients

Air, approximately 6 cubic feet

1 pound highest-grade sirloin

3 eggs

4 perfect lobsters

Whipping cream, basil, and the most expensive mushrooms available anywhere in the world

1. Mix, in a mixing bowl, the air. Set aside to cool.
2. Take the sirloin, the eggs, the perfect lobsters, the incredibly expensive mushrooms, and return them to the store.
3. Come home.
- 25 4. Remember that you also should have returned the stupid basil and the idiotic whipping cream.
5. Bag up basil and whipping cream, go back to the store exasperated, return basil and whipping cream, stomp out of store.
6. Come home, pretend to be eating the air in the bowl, look at imaginary person to your right, slowly shaking head as if to say, Wow, was that good.

Important: If you experience actual pleasure during any of the above steps, you are doing it wrong. Smack yourself in the head with tenderizing mallet until headache develops, then repeat steps 1 through 6, watching carefully for signs of enjoyment. A desirable variation involves skulking around the neighborhood to see if anyone is enjoying a lush, decadent meal. If so, lecture on benefits of self-denial and sinful nature of self-gratification until he or she loses appetite or chases you away. Sneak back later, firebomb his or her grill.

Flooding the Zone: A New Approach to Global Diplomacy

I've completed the math.

There are approximately twenty-five million Iraqis in Iraq. There are approximately three hundred million Americans in America. This means there are approximately twelve Americans per Iraqi. This means that, if we all go, each American will be responsible for one-twelfth of an Iraqi. An Iraqi family of five will thus be attended by sixty Americans. We will come, this second wave of three-hundred million of us, unarmed. We will bring nothing but ourselves. We will simply show up, saying, "What would

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you like for dinner?" While we cook, our Iraqis can just relax. God knows they have had a terrible couple of years. We will encourage them to sit on their couches, if they still have couches, while we clean up after dinner. We will bring them coffee, tea, dessert, whatever they like. All these months, we have winced from over here, imagining their pain. Now that we are there, we will do what we can, to say, "We like you, and want the best for you. We're sorry. This is not what we intended. No matter what it might have looked like to you, we have always wished you well."

27 After dinner, our Iraqis will smile, whispering among themselves. "Not so bad, these unarmed ones," they will say. "That coffee was super."

Some of you might be wondering: What about the insurgents?

Well, even the most energetic insurgent will have a hard time getting much done, saddled, as he will be, with his twelve designated Americans. Imagine how hard it will be to sneak off with your insurgent friends, much less deploy a roadside bomb, when every time you move, your twelve Americans leap up and ask if there's anything you need. Say you are going out to assault a convoy. Good luck! You skulk into the night, and suddenly the six Fitzsimmonses and four Jacksons and the five elderly Peter-

kin brothers are walking along with you, asking where you're headed, wondering if that distinctive style of Iraqi hut has a particular name, asking if there's anywhere to get a decent cup of decaf, telling an endless story about how hard it was to get a decent cup of decaf in Paris, for God's sake.

Some might ask: What about provisions? Simple. Each American will bring a thirty-day supply of food from his or her local market. Hams, turkeys, huge roasts of beef, wheels of Brie, large jars of Greek olives, bottles of champagne. We will also bring our TVs and our microwaves and our refrigerators, along with generators. We will sit around with our host families, eating ourselves into a pleasant stupor, watching TV, playing board games (we will also bring board games). If anybody gets sick, we will locate a good American doctor in one of the nearby host homes and lavish the sick Iraqi with the finest in American care.

Because medicine? We brought it. The finest in medical technology? We brought it. Is there a plumbing problem? Please. We are great with plumbing. No power? Don't make me laugh. American electricians are the finest electricians in the world.

Will it be crowded? It will. A ten-person Iraqi home will overflow with 120 Americans. Will it be hot? Iraq is a desert country, and our new homes will, yes, be quite hot

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and crowded. Plus, as the Iraqis eat our food and watch our TVs they will no doubt become fatter, thus making their homes even more crowded.

But the overall result will be: no more violence. Nobody killing anybody. We may get cranky, we get a little bored, an Iraqi may now and then accuse an American of cheating at Risk, but nobody will die. Everyone will be eating and watching TV and struggling to move around and waiting in line for the bathroom, and in this atmosphere, all killing will stop.

And once the killing stops we can all begin to discuss democracy.

29 What is democracy? Is it right for you people? If not, what would you prefer? Is there anything we can do to help? Is there anything we can build, fix, expand? If not, not. If so, let us at it, there is no charge, our government is paying. Those suckers have no idea where the money is going, let's sock it to them, I don't care a bit, as long as you get what you need.

Now, a reasonable question is, what will be happening in the completely deserted United States of America at this point?

This is where Phase II of my plan begins.

Once the U.S. has been vacated, the Palestinians will be moved into the western U.S., and the Israelis will be moved into the eastern U.S. Between them will roll the

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mighty Mississippi. Even if they wanted to get to each other and do some killing, sorry, no, armed UN guards will be posted at every bridge.

Besides, the Palestinians will be enjoying San Francisco and Los Angeles and the Grand Canyon, and the Israelis will be moving freely up and down the East Coast, having wonderful weekends in Boston and Chicago, seeing Bar Harbor, tooling around Manhattan, whatever they like.

Meanwhile, the Canadians will move into Palestine and Israel, and do a National Makeover. All existing houses will be razed and replaced with beautiful mansions. The mansions will alternate: Jew, Palestinian, Jew, Palestinian. Every house will have a pool and a grill and a sauna, and a new flag hanging in front of it, the flag of a new nation, Plisraelistine.

Phase III involves shipping everyone in Kosovo to Canada, while the Canadians are getting Plisraelistine ready. Since there are only approximately two million Kosovars, it is expected that any remaining tensions will dissipate, as the two million Kosovars wander through this vast new land, rarely even seeing one another, being frightened into a peaceful humility by the occasional wolf or bear.

Meanwhile, back in Iraq, we will be saying our goodbyes.

The country, sated and plump, gone soft with months of leisure, will finally be at peace. They will be so glad to be getting rid of us. Suddenly, their houses will feel sprawling and roomy. Suddenly, their country will seem again like their country.

From there, it's fairly simple. The Plisraelistinians fly home to their beautiful new country. They are so amazed at their excellent houses, all thoughts of fighting disappear. The Canadians return to Canada just as the Kosovars, refreshed from their stay in Canada, inspired by the boundless wheatlands and staggeringly beautiful mountain vistas, relieved at the relative absence of wolves and bears, return home, resolved anew to give peace a chance.

I think it could work. It is only a matter of will, of giving up certain comforts (our homes, any concept of privacy, our jobs, our businesses, etc). The hardship is great, but so will be the reward: an Iraq where nobody is killing or dying, an Iraq caught up in an ecstasy of normalcy, boredom even: people bickering, committing adultery, gossiping, sleeping in the middle of the day, mouths hanging open, flies flying in.

And then we can all get to work on the Sudan.

Manifesto:

A Press Release from PRKA

Now it can be told.

Last Thursday, my organization, People Reluctant to Kill for an Abstraction (PRKA), orchestrated an overwhelming show of force around the globe.

At precisely nine in the morning, working with focus and stealth, our entire membership succeeded in simultaneously beheading no one. At nine-thirty, we embarked upon Phase II, during which our entire membership simultaneously did not force a single man to simulate sex with another man. At ten, Phase III began, during which not a single one of us blew himself/herself up in a crowded

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public place. No civilians were literally turned inside-out via our powerful explosives. No previously funny person was reduced to a baggy pile of bloody leaking flesh, by us, during this phase of our operation. In addition, at eleven, in Phase IV, zero (0) planes were flown into buildings.

All of this was accomplished so surreptitiously, it attracted little public notice.

During Phase V, just after lunch, while continuing to avoid the activities listed above, we were able to avoid bulldozing a single home. Furthermore, we set, on roads

33 in every city, in every nation in the world, a total of zero (0) roadside bombs which, not

being there, did not subsequently explode, killing/maiming a total of nobody. No bombs, cluster bombs, or rockets were launched into crowded civilian neighborhoods, from which, it was observed, no post-bomb sickening momentary silences could be heard. These silences were, in all cases, followed by no unimaginable, grief-stricken bellows of rage and loss. No sleeping babies were awakened from sleep by the sudden collapse and/or bursting into flame of their domiciles, followed by the tortured screams of their family members, during Phase V.

In the early afternoon (Phase VI), our membership focused on using zero (0) trained dogs to bite/terrorize

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naked prisoners. In addition, no stun guns, rubber batons, rubber bullets, tear gas, or real bullets were used by our membership on any individual anywhere in the world. No one was forced to don a hood. No teeth were pulled in darkened rooms. Drills were not used on human flesh, nor were whips or flames. No one was reduced to hysterical tears via a series of blows to the head or body, by us. Our membership, while casting no racial or ethnic aspersions, skillfully continued not to rape, gang-rape, or sexually assault a single person. On the contrary, during this afternoon phase, many of our membership engaged in tender loving sexual acts, flirted happily, and even consoled, in a nonsexual way, individuals to whom they were attracted, putting aside their sexual feelings out of a sudden welling of empathy.

As night fell, our membership harbored no secret feelings of rage or hatred or, if they did, prayed, meditated, or discussed these feelings with a friend, until such time as the feelings abated, or were understood to be symptomatic of some deeper sadness, at which time they made silent promises to continue to struggle with these feelings.

It should be noted that, in addition to the above-listed and planned activities completed by our members, a number of unplanned activities were completed, by part-time members or even nonmembers.

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In Chitral, Pakistan, for example, a new al-Qaeda recruit remembered an elderly American woman who had once made him laugh with a snide remark about an ugly lampshade, and the way that, as she made the remark, she touched his arm, like a mother. In Gaza, an Israeli soldier and a young Palestinian exchanged a brief look of mutual shame. In London, a bitter homophobic grandfather whose grocery bag broke open gave a loaf of very nice bread to a balding gay man who stopped to help him. A stooped toothless woman in Tokyo pounded her head with her hands, tired beyond belief of her lifelong feelings of anger and negativity, and silently prayed that her heart would somehow miraculously be opened before it was too late. In Syracuse, New York, holding the broken body of his kitten, a man wept.

Who are we? A word about our membership.

Since the world began, we have gone about our work quietly, resisting the urge to generalize, insisting upon valuing the individual over the group, the actual over the conceptual, the inherent sweetness of a peaceful moment over the theoretically peaceful future supposedly to be obtained via murder or massacre. Many of us have trouble sleeping, and lie awake at night, worrying about something catastrophic befalling someone we love. We rise in the morning with no plans to convert anyone via beating, humiliation, murder, or invasion. To tell the truth, we are tired. We work. We would

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just like some peace and quiet. When wrong, we think about it awhile, then apologize. We stand under awnings during urban thunderstorms, moved to thoughtfulness by the beautiful, troubled, umbrella-tinted faces rushing by. In moments of crisis, we pat one another awkwardly on the back, mumbling shy truisms. Rushing to an appointment, remembering a friend who has passed away, our eyes well with tears and we think: Well, my God, I was lucky just to have known him.

This is us. This is who we are. This is PRKA. To those who would oppose us, I would simply say: We are many. We are worldwide. We, in fact, outnumber you. Though you are louder, though you create a momentary ripple on the water of life, we will endure, and prevail.

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Join us.

Resistance is futile.

