

Ana Cervantes

## PEREGRINACIÓN A MI PADRE / PILGRIMAGE TO MY FATHER

2008

### PRELUDE

In August of 2008 I went to the US for 11 days from Guanajuato. I was in Washington, DC, in Roosevelt, NJ, in Olean, NY, again in Roosevelt and then in Hopewell, NJ, and finally in Washington. It was a giant irregular oblong of many hundreds of miles behind the wheel (you can't get to some of these places any other way), run through with rivers: the Susquehanna, the Delaware, the Allegheny, the Potomac.

I went because I was trying to process my Mexican nationality. To make this application I needed my father's birth certificate, as well as my own; and the two duly certified with the "Apostille" certification. The Apostille is a special notary certification recognized internationally by the countries signatory to the convention in which this idea was invented, in The Hague on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1961.

[I, like many other people, used to groan about the Apostille and complain about what an outdated piece of nonsense it is, until a high-powered Mexican lawyer explained to me that it is really the only way a legal document of one country has equal legal validity in another. And it really is not a pain, as such: you just have to take your document to a special notary who is certified to do this procedure, and, in the other country, pay to have it translated by a government-certified translator. ]

Those eleven days and hundreds of miles amounted to a kind of pilgrimage, around two uncompleted tasks: going to where my father was born, and finding a home for art left by my sister Madolin after she died in 1997. I had never been to the place where my father was born because I'd never particularly wanted to. The few bits of information about his childhood which I'd gleaned from him and from my uncle Miguel Ángel -Michael, my father's older brother - were not indicative of an idyllic childhood; and I suppose my curiosity was insufficient to overcome that.

They were an incredibly full eleven days. Along with all the miles behind the wheel they were replete with acts of kindness, some of them random and almost anonymous, some of them generously conceived and given by very dear friends. I renewed contact with those very dear friends and with family equally dear. Some things died and some were born.

As happened with the Chanticleer Festival and in other moments over these last ten years, I felt impelled to write about all this. I'm sharing it with those of you who were part of this voyage, before, during, and after. The writing ended up being a bit long, so it will arrive like Dickens, in chapters.

The data, los datos:

My father, Robert(o) Martínez Cervantes (Bravo, the matronymic) was born on 13 December 1921 in the town of Olean, New York, USA, of Mexican parents from the State of Guanajuato. His father was Miguel Cervantes (Martínez, his own mother's surname) of Silao, Guanajuato and his mother was María Eugenia Bravo y Galván of the capital city of Guanajuato.

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My father worked hard to assimilate; I believe this qualifies as a datum because the evidence is everywhere. He left the family nest as early as he could, enlisting in the US Army as soon as he was old enough to do so; his unit was on the point of being sent to the Pacific theater when the Second World War ended. Afterwards he came to Washington, DC to study economics at George Washington University on the GI Bill. There he met and later married (Grace) Lenore Teal, a woman from Lincoln, Nebraska, five years older than he who'd earned a Master's Degree in English Literature from the University of Nebraska. For all of his professional life he worked for the International Monetary Fund. Over this time and for a variety of reasons about which I can only speculate, he separated himself from his family and from Spanish. Later he reconnected. He died in December 1983 in Ávila, Spain.

## FIRST NIGHT TRAVELING NORTH

So here I am, a part of the way there, "incognita" in B\*\*\* & J\*\*\*'s house in Roosevelt. No one knows I'm here; I'm not supposed to arrive until Thursday.

Thank heavens I thought to send, from the DF, a last-minute email to C\*\*\*\* N in NY, asking her for confirmation that we'd meet on Wednesday morning. Turns out she is in the DF and returns that very Wednesday. S\*\*\* Z of the Americas Society, also out of town. So, lightning command decision time: I cancelled the reservation at the NY hotel via email and, from the stopover in Houston, called B\*\*\* to see if I could stay in Roosevelt Tuesday night before heading the long way north to Olean, NY. There was no problem. Now that L\*\*\* is all the way on the other side of the country working for Amazon her bedroom will be my little refuge for a couple of nights.

It was a relief. I am so weary, so unspeakably weary, of promoting. I feel –unfairly but understandably – something like, If they don't know by now who I am and what I've done, dammit, why should I be the one who has to explain it to them? Let them go and look at my website or something. I can't explain any more, tell any more history, I simply can't. Something akin to the allergic reaction I had in January after *Solo Rumores* was finished: I would sit down to write an email message to some presenter, and the words would not come out, the fingers would not type. Phone calls were no easier. It's not as bad now but a certain amount of that feeling obstinately persists.

I knew this pilgrimage would be a private one, as are all such journeys. Though there may be friends beforehand to give me courage, friends afterward to welcome me back to the hearth, the journey itself I must do alone. Thus it seems particularly right that I depart from B\*\*\* & J\*\*\*'s here in Roosevelt, tomorrow morning; and come back here on Thursday, returning from the journey I must make alone.

Nevertheless I have this abiding feeling of beneficence, of being watched over, somehow protected. Perhaps it's the little plastic card of San Rafael, a saint who protects travelers, which my dear friend and colleague L\*\*\*\* G gave me before I set out? I sense that congress of very old women, interested but observing neutrally, which I began to see in dreams after my sister died and the man in my life exited, is present again, although standing apart in the shadows.

I am accustomed to this feeling by now: I have been on many of these voyages. Some of them have been pilgrimages into *terra incognita* inside myself, or into those same lands inside others; some, explorations into new geographic places. At first there were many moments of apprehensiveness. I bless the moment when the thought occurred to me that adventure would not be adventure if it weren't occasionally scary as well as exciting. Later, by analogy, I realized that transition wouldn't be transition without feelings of instability and uncertainty; finally, that many times we are reacting not to the adventure or transition but to the feelings of uncertainty

or apprehension which they provoke in us. Goodness, what an epiphany. I learned a good bit about this by thinking about transitions in music, in which the same things are true.

Over the course of this pilgrimage, I came to realize that this feeling of beneficence, of being in some odd way *watched over*, had a great deal to do with many acts of random kindness. Certainly not all of them were random, as many had to do with people's fondness for me as a person; but some of them were really and truly random, acts of kindness by people who'd never seen me before in their lives nor were destined to again, most probably. And this, as I think on it, has been the case with those other voyages as well.

## REWIND

I left Guanajuato for Mexico City –the DF, Distrito Federal, as Washington is DC, District of Columbia – on Sunday 17 August. I stayed in a hotel that one night as all friends were either out of town or had other guests; and shipped out on Monday around 11AM, to arrive in Washington around 6 that evening.

I arrived into National Airport, and took the Super-Shuttle to my hotel up on Connecticut Avenue. As we crossed the Potomac into town I had one of those moments of grace, whose force, as it turned out, was to last the entire two weeks of my trip. It was not quite dusk, and the sunset was gorgeous, the air was fresh; on the tranquil Potomac there were small boats, and on its banks runners and walkers. Coming over the bridge you see the Lincoln Memorial straight ahead. I was overcome by a sudden wave of love for Washington, DC, the small city where I was born and grew up; and I resolved that when I returned here after my trip north I would visit the Lincoln Memorial, where I hadn't been for years. I said to myself, Dammit, in spite of everything, this is just the most beautiful city, and I love it so much.

That first night, I have dinner at the Italian restaurant a couple of doors down from the hotel. I had a craving for Asian food but the Thai restaurant that used to be a block away wasn't there any longer and I was tired enough after the trip to not want to investigate or travel any more. The food is good, the wine is decent, overall it's not too expensive. It's a neighbourhood kind of restaurant, various people who clearly live nearby stop in for late (by Anglo standards) dinner or a drink. The terrace, right on the avenue, is pleasant in the August evening. The waitress – who looked Asian but whose accent doesn't sound that way to me: I asked her, and it turned out that she is from Russia. But from the East, no? I asked, and she professed herself surprised by my knowledge of geography. Hard to believe, but I suppose in a country where many young people apparently don't know where either México or Canada is (not to mention Iraq, or Russia), one shouldn't be surprised. In spite of my fatigue, I had a good telephone conversation with Anne LeBaron about the new project that I'm incubating.

Because like most of the rest of the world, it seems, I get fat if I spend more than a week in the US, I'd decided to bring my running shoes and try to get exercise while I was there. I figured I'd been taking three fairly tough classes a week in Guanajuato at 2000 meters (7000 feet approx); and thought it would be fun to see if I could keep that regimen going at sea level. So that first morning I got up bright and early, had some of the coffee this very pleasant economical hotel provides in the room, stretched, and went out to see how the world felt.

I always forget how it feels to be at sea level instead of at 2000 meters. It's intoxicating, that extra oxygen, the sense of power it confers. I ended up running for a good 30 minutes, up to Fort Reno Park, which I'd always known was there but had never actually visited in all the years of my childhood. Nothing is now left of the fort which apparently once was there, but it's a

pleasant grassy hill with lots of trees and a couple of schools nearby: a nice residential neighborhood. It was hard to stop running!

One of the things with which I'd been battling for most of the year --a consequence principally of the "postpartum depression" which after *Solo Rumores* was particularly difficult -- was the sense of "who cares?"; what difference does it really make, this project *Rumor de Páramo*? What difference does this make in the world? Who cares? And should anyone even care? It became hard, from time to time, for me to remember who I am.

Today, on the ride up from DC to Roosevelt, I listened to *Rumor de Páramo* and part of *Solo Rumores*. I realized that there is moving music being made here. Charlie Griffin's piece made me cry, and Anne LeBaron's also. Fortner's is heart-poundingly dramatic, Marco's incredibly spooky; I could go on. Every single piece is absolutely singular, and formidable. And there am I, Cervantes. No denying it: as they said in that article in *El Economista de México*, the Muse. Who I am: la provocadora, la partera, la intérprete; the provoker, the midwife, the interpreter. Moving and splendid music being made here. Nothing more than that is necessary: I am that I am.

## FORWARD, AGAIN

Tomorrow northward, ever northward. Stop to see M\*\*\*\* and L\*\*\*a in Clinton on the way and pick up video and audio of the Raritan River Festival concert in May. Then on my way, alone, on the pilgrimage to the so far untouched-- at least by me-- part of my father's life.

My father, 100% Mexican who never came to México but who died in Spain. Who, I've long believed, went to Spain to die, unable to resist the call of his first language, the ache within him of his *mexicanidad* but unable to bear the poverty of the only other Spanish-speaking country he'd visited: Bolivia, on a mission for the IMF in the early 1960s. I remember him being horrified by that; and later horrified by the way his father, my grandfather lived, in that little bungalow in Glendale, California. Which, when I visited it a year or so after my father died, appeared to me clean and comfortable if humble, with a very sweet little backyard, a portion covered with the plastic *lámina* I would come to know well a few years later as I myself heard an irresistible call and came to México. Perhaps my father's standards had risen over the years with his ascent into assimilation and ever more senior positions at the Fund; who knows. When he visited Spain in 1969, returning from a mission to Liberia, he fell in love with the country. Somewhere around 1980, he took an early retirement from the Fund and decided he wanted to live in Spain.

In the end our schedules weren't able to coincide, but M\*\*\*\*, whose generous heart and Helpfulness Quotient almost defy description, has left me not only the audio and video recordings but also very detailed directions which augment what MapQuest has given me: another of those acts of kindness.

*Pensaba que sería norte-norte, pero cuando por fin me fijé en mapa y direcciones me cayó el veinte que norte-norte sí, pero mucho, muchísimo más oeste que había pensado.* It was indeed a long stretch north through Pennsylvania, I don't remember how many miles and on which two principal roads. But then once in New York State it was much, much further west, due west, ever westward for miles and miles and miles. So this is the Southern Tier Expressway, I thought: I'd heard the name and now I'm seeing the road. Lots of trucks. I had the impression that this is a major east-west route, up here practically in the north woods.

*Inmensa, esta tierra, casi igual de inmenso que California. Se me recuerda esa primera visita en octubre de 1998 cuando fui a Oakland a trabajar con Nin-Culmell antes de grabar las 12 Danzas cubanas.*

*Después conduje a Fresno a conocer a Jack Fortner; luego seguí a Los Ángeles a visitar a mi tía Zita. Fue durante esa parte del viaje que tuve que detenerme y orillar porque el paisaje, el mero paisaje, me daba vértigo. Quise llorar, quise yacer sobre el suelo, fue casi demasiado ese paisaje. Éste es casi igual pero menos intenso.*

Immense, this land, almost as immense as California it seems to me. It makes me remember that first visit in October of 1998 when I went to Oakland to work with Nin-Culmell before recording the *Twelve Cuban Dances*. Afterwards I drove to Fresno to meet Jack Fortner; then I continued on south to visit my Aunt Zita. It was during that part of the trip that I had to stop and pull over because the landscape, just the landscape, made me dizzy. I wanted to weep, I wanted to lie down on the ground, that landscape was almost too much for me. This is similar, but less intense.

Verdant, a dark-green vastness. Endless forests of pine mounting up and up. Bigger, more imposing than the Mid-Hudson Valley whose landscape I came to know during my time at Bard. It made me think of the French adventurers and trappers who arrived in Canada, not so terribly far north of here, back in the late 1600s. I think probably some of them wandered and trapped and got lost here in these vast forests. I grew up reading books which I suspect were meant for boys, some of which were set in these woods, and so I read quite a lot about these lands, about the Iroquois Nation, the early years of settlements here and the later French and Indian Wars, as they were called. One tradition of naming wars, right? –after the enemy. I wonder what the French and the monolithically-named Indians called those wars?

When did they arrive, my grandparents? I find myself hoping that it was not during the long winter of these lands.

I still remember my grandfather shivering when he talked about the cold in Chicago. That was where they first arrived after fleeing México, sometime during 1919, I believe. They went there first because my grandfather –like so many immigrants– had some *cuate* (buddy) or *pariente* (relative) who had work there in the railyards. Aside from the cold, their other reason for heading East was my grandfather's sister the nun, who'd been sent out of the country by her order because of all the anticlerical activity in the Bajío during that time. They sent her to Saint Bonaventure College in Olean, New York. Heaven knows how she must have fared, a non-English-speaking nun, unaccustomed to such cold, in that faraway place. Surely she was lonely. In any case, by the time my grandparents and the two young children had been in Chicago for a time, she had arrived in Olean and was agitating for them to come East.

According to the family history as it's been told to me, my grandfather bought train tickets to New York, not realizing that this is a city as well as a state, and having little or no English. It took practically all their available resources to do this, so when they arrived in New York City they had to stay there for some time while my grandfather got together the additional cash to take them to Olean, so far north and west, ever westward.

*¿Qué habrán pensado, sobre todo esa abuela mía, María Eugenia, la hija indudablemente algo consentida de la familia Bravo y Galván, pequeña burguesía de Guanajuato de principios del Siglo XX – María Eugenia con su marido el ex-arriero?*

*¿Le habrá parecido un lugar completamente olvidado de Dios, hermosísimo pero godforsaken, literalmente olvidado de Dios?*

What must they have thought, especially that grandmother of mine, the doubtless rather spoiled daughter of the Family Bravo y Galván, petit bourgeoisie of turn-of-the-century Guanajuato ... María Eugenia with her husband the ex-mule-driver?

Did it seem to them a completely Godforsaken place, beautiful but *olvidado de Dios*, “forgotten by God”?

I see a farm –well-set-up, with silos, barns (many of them red), low walls between fields, a fair quantity of livestock, principally cows— and then there are miles and miles before the next farm. Some of these landholdings look quite old: solid, built to resist the winters here.

It must have been way emptier in 1920-something than it is now, and even now, in 2008, it seems not desolate exactly –because of the lushness of the pine-forests and the beauty of the mountains-- but certainly very scarce in terms of human habitation. For all its beauty, it seems forbidding to me. I sense the vastness of those pine forests as something beautiful but also as something in which a person could become terminally lost and wander about for years, finally going mad. No doubt this is the perception of my urban self, accustomed to human habitation piled up as it is in Guanajuato, Washington, Paris, Madrid, Mexico City, Urban Ana who is utterly unattracted by the idea of having to get into the pickup to borrow a cup of sugar from the neighbors.

About 10 miles from Olean I see the railroad tracks, paralleling the road to my right. My grandfather worked in the repair depot of that same railroad line. I suppose it was the Erie-Lackawanna: as I am about to enter Olean I see a sign that says ERIE 75 MILES. Goodness me, I say to myself, I’m halfway to Chicago.

## OF OLEAN, AND PERSISTENCE

I took a few minutes, in Roosevelt, to read the basic data about Olean. Wikipedia says, “*As of the census of 2000, there were 15,347 people, 6,446 households, and 3,803 families residing in the city. The population density was 2,588.0 people per square mile (999.2/km<sup>2</sup>). There were 7,121 housing units at an average density of 1,200.8/sq mi (463.6/km<sup>2</sup>). The racial makeup of the city was 93.31% White, 3.47% Black or African American, 0.43% Native American, 0.89% Asian, 0.03% Pacific Islander, 0.43% from other races, and 1.45% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 1.24% of the population. ... The median income for a household in the city was \$30,400, and the median income for a family was \$38,355. Males had a median income of \$32,341 versus \$22,469 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$17,169.*”

It had not been a prosperous town in the 1920s; it apparently still is not.

My hotel- the most economical one I’d found on the Internet- turns out to be across from a Walmart, a few blocks out of town, which as one gathers from the Wikipedia data is not large. In town, not-too-distant traces of that small town of the 20s –diagonal parking on the main street, for example. The hotel is one of those places where the windows don’t open. I have now learned not to ask if there are rooms where they do: the inevitable response is that there are none. These buildings, I suppose, date from a time when the relationship with the surrounding air was one of profound mistrust, based on a belief that with climate “control” we could actually make better air than nature. Curious, how this resembles the Elizabethans’ belief that night air was noxious, a belief which led them to coop themselves up in stuffy rooms where microbes doubtless had a chance to multiply just as –surprise! – those of Legionnaires’ Disease did in air-conditioned environments various centuries later.

Bone-tired after 8 hours of driving, I go to the Applebee’s Restaurant which is a big 4-minute walk from the hotel. I really can’t complain: it’s a better-than-average meal served by a waitress anxious to be attentive, just what I needed at that moment. No matter how many times you stop to stretch, eight hours at the wheel is an awful lot when you’re not accustomed to it. Goodness, even in my “Ramblin’ Gal” days I rarely drove more than seven! On the other hand, the place

did make me think. There was the usual sensory overload: TV, “music”, conversations of others. And you complain about this living in Mexico?, I ask myself. So I thought about it and I think it is because of the *standardization*. This Applebee’s is tarted up to look like the “one and only Neighborhood Bar & Grill” that it says it is. Of course it is one of --¿how many?-- that all look exactly the same, built to specifications determined at Corporate HQ by some team of marketing people trained to eke the last possible dime of profit from every menu item. It’s not as though we don’t have similar stuff in México – of course we do: Sanborn’s, for example; but each Sanborn’s is in a different building, THEY ADAPT: they don’t seem to need to remake their environment the way these businesses do.

So I eat, and walk back to the hotel, on the way having a brief conversation with a pleasant woman there from California to drop off her son at St. Bonaventure College. She is African-American, one of the two Black people I see during my few hours in Olean. I sleep. I arise the next morning and run for half an hour down and back the winding lane to one side of the Wal-Mart. Shower, pack up, check out, and a short drive to the modern City Hall building in the center of town.

I’m in a state of waiting: I have no idea of what I’ll find. Among the possibilities, I know, is that it won’t be possible to locate my father’s birth certificate; and I will have to come up with a Plan B.

I’d been in email communication with Ms. JL, the woman who manages the birth records section and so she knew to expect me. She turns out to be blonde, sturdy but petite, pleasant in a reserved way. I introduce myself, and while I am filling out forms, Ms. JL starts looking in the large books of records which they keep in a special climate-controlled room ... ah, the First World.

When I am almost finished filling out the form, I hear her voice from the room saying “I’m not finding it, not in 1920 or in 1921”. I take in air and think, Is it time for Plan B? I breathe in and out again and finish filling out the form, and hear her say, “It’s here”. She emerges with the birth certificate, an unassuming piece of half letter-size paper; and explains that it had been misfiled. Understandable: the surname Cervantes was not something seen every day in those parts and they’d spelled it with a “b” instead of a “v”. It’s one of the most common orthographic errors in Spanish as well. The correction had been made officially some six months later, and duly noted on the form itself; but the paper itself had never been re-filed correctly. At Ms. JL’s suggestion, I go to the tax-collecting office in the next room to get directions to Little Falls, the county seat, where I will get the county apostille on the birth certificate. It’s about 30 miles west, they tell me, and obligingly print me out a little map from Google.

I’d brought some CDs with me, in case of wanting to give random gifts of music, and had thrown a couple of them in my shoulder bag when I left the hotel. I’m thinking, By such fragile threads hang so many important things: if Ms. JL had not continued to look, I would be up the creek. I go back to her office and, while she’s finishing up my paperwork, write a fast dedication on a copy of *Amor de la Danza*. When she gives me the envelope with the certified birth certificate I say something like, “I want to thank you for your perseverance and kindness, so here’s some music”. She looks at the CD for a minute, says “Thank you”; and then the penny drops. She looks at me with her eyes round and says, “Is this YOU?” I say that it is, and she falls silent and then says, “I love music, and especially piano music. And my mother does too!” Another silence, and she says, almost to herself, “Seventeen years I’ve worked here and no one has ever given me anything like this”. Her eyes well up, and so do mine. For a minute I think

we're both going to burst into tears, in that well-organized office on a beautiful sunny day in August.

It's at that moment that I think, Well, yes, I could indeed have done it all via email and Federal Express or something, surely there would have been a way to do that ... but at the end of the day it would have lacked legitimacy, would not have been authentic. I may never go back there, but there was some connection in those few moments which simply doesn't happen without face-to-face contact.

I take some pictures on the main street -the bank, I believe, is the one where my grandfather had his second job, as a night janitor-- and then make a beeline for the place down the street where I'd detected the aroma of espresso. 24 hours without real coffee is a long time. Back onto that Southern Tier Expressway, westward bound again.

Photos in Picasa: <https://picasaweb.google.com/laquijote/OLEANNYAUG2008>

## OF THE SENECA NATION, AND OLDER WAYS OF TRANSPORT

About a third of the way to Little Falls I see the sign by the side of the road: YOU ARE ENTERING SENECA NATION TERRITORY, in English and in what I imagine is the Seneca tongue.

I'd known this land was part of the Six Nations (of the Iroquois League), but aside from my fantasies about European trappers going mad wandering in those woods, I'd inquired no further. Later, investigating a bit on the internet, I find in Wikipedia that *"The Seneca nation's own name is Onöndowága', meaning 'People of the Great Hill', and is identical to the endonym used by the Onondagas. With the formation of the Haudenosaunee ('People of the Longhouse') or the Iroquois Confederation in 1142, the Seneca became known as the "Keepers of the Western Door" because they settled and lived the farthest west of all the nations within the Haudenosaunee."*

All this time I have had at the edge of consciousness and moving to its center, rivers and my crossings of them. They have been a connecting thread in this journey. Entering Washington, I crossed the Potomac; driving north to Roosevelt the Delaware and then the Susquehanna. On the way to Olean I crossed the Delaware again, higher up and heading west. Now, in these Iroquois Nation lands, the Allegany (this is how it seems to be spelled in here, though elsewhere I see it as Allegheny) winds its supple way through the landscape. It is not a majestic river on the scale of the Delaware and Susquehanna, but rather small and intimate; sun-dappled, reflecting trees and clouds, it looks very clean and somehow comforting, perhaps because it is a moment of smallness in this very large landscape.

In Little Falls I find the City Hall and get my document apostille'd at the County level. Suspecting that I'll need the State of NY certification as well, and not knowing exactly how I'll get that done but trusting that somehow it will happen, I ask for the address and phone info for those offices in Albany [which, as it turned out, I did need later]. Everyone is very pleasant to me and I am reminded of the really good, helpful side of people in these small towns where you still may have trouble getting through the winter without a good relation with your neighbors.

On the way back east, driving towards the expressway, I stop to salute and take some shots of a whole parade of people on horseback and riding in covered wagons. I'd picked up a brochure about this in the County offices, and now I am seeing it in the flesh! It is the penultimate day of the Bicentennial Wagon Train and Stagecoach Run of Cattaraugus County, observing the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the stagecoach mail, passenger and freight service on the Chautauqua Trail. For 14 days and 180 miles, this quite substantial group of people has apparently been living and

camping on the Trail as part of their commemoration. In the brochure is a picture of Moses Taylor and Abraham McIntyre, the two men who led the centennial celebration in 1908, along with their bow-top caravan wagon. The brochure notes that of this Bicentennial's main vehicles, the chuck wagon's running gear is original; the wagon box and chuck box were built from 1908 Sears and Roebuck Catalog plans, by Jim Little and Len Brainard. The stage coach, it says in the brochure, is a refurbished coach originally built in New Hampshire around 1890 and weighs about 1500 pounds; the coaches from the South and Midwest were much heavier.

Surely my maternal great-grandfather James Ezekiel Davey --whose father William Francis Davey had immigrated from Sligo County, Ireland in 1837 --traveled westward, ever westward to what would become Nebraska in a wagon much like some of these. Was it a New Hampshire or a Midwest model, I wonder?

For some reason --I think because these people with wagons and horses represent a kind of connection over many years and great distances, which in a sense is what this pilgrimage of mine is all about -- I am crying as I'm waving and taking pictures.

I am strongly drawn to the Seneca Nation Museum which is right at the entry to the expressway but I look at my watch and realize that there won't be time: it's almost 2PM. Another day, I say to myself, knowing full well that it's unlikely I'll ever return to these parts. My consolation prize is dawdling for 15 minutes on the outskirts of town, taking some pictures of the river and the railroad tracks.

Just as well to forgo the Museum. I'd been thinking in terms of a six-hour drive, remembering the time up from Clinton, NJ where I'd picked up the Raritan River Festival recordings. It's not until I cross the Delaware back into NJ that I remember there will be two hours *more* to get to Roosevelt.

## RETURNING

I had forgotten, but was reminded on the way up, about Roads In Pennsylvania. Back when I lived in Roosevelt, NJ, they had a deservedly terrible reputation, and some things just don't change. The north-south road I took through PA has two lanes, and intermittently one of them was closed for maintenance, making for almost walking-speed traffic on various occasions; especially since there was no way to avoid hitting some of those spots during various rush hours.

Returning, I think that maybe I'll miss some of that traffic as it will be later in the day. Indeed, I make good speed for much of the way; but almost at the end of this part of the trip there is a mammoth slowdown and the road turns into practically a parking lot for a number of miles, losing me a good hour. Thus by the time I cross the majestic Delaware it's almost nightfall; and it's then I realize that my wishful-thinking time estimate is almost two hours off.

Southward, ever southward, it's been; and slowly edging east. Now I'm going due east and at great speed. Route 78 up there is now a mega-highway, built I suppose to accommodate ever-increasing loads of commuter traffic, and the speed is brutal: if you're not going 85 you're cat food and people even honk their horns.

Sometime during the half hour after crossing the Delaware I realize that I am weary: weary of the wheel, weary of the constant watchfulness, weary of moving at these speeds. I have a moment of almost panic up there on Route 78, with the bright lights and the aggressive traffic, the noise, and my increasing fatigue. Suddenly, like a blessing, I remember the little plastic-coated card of San Rafael, L\*\*\*\*'s travel gift, tucked into one pocket of my bellybag.

Remembering this valiant-woman friend of extraordinary imagination gives me *valentía*, valor, and I am quite sure that San Rafael was part of the reason I arrived in one piece that night.

Southward, ever southward, now, and moving ever more decisively east. I stop in Flemington to buy water and road-food and call B\*\*\* and J\*\*\* again to say I'll be even later than expected. By the time I get close to Hopewell I realize that I can't stand another minute of highway driving and will be better off on secondary roads, those old roads I used to drive practically in my sleep, from one student's home to the next. It's barely an hour, now, I keep saying to myself, just 45 minutes, just 30, stay with it, stay alert; and then I'm on that well-loved approach to Roosevelt, straight as an arrow, slow down, over the tiny dip and rise, right turn and a curve, remember the speed bump (*if they could see the ones we have in México!*, I always think), and into the driveway. I stumble out of the car and limp inside with my suitcase, to be received with open arms, many questions, wine and hot food. Ah, bliss, the homecoming: or at least an intermediate one along the way.

Here, and with my father's birth certificate, having seen the place where he was born and grew up, with the photos to show how it is. I have returned from the thing I had to do alone, and can now sit down and break bread with others knowing that Part One of the pilgrimage is complete.

## TRUSTING THE UNIVERSE

The next day is occupied with leaving the original video and audio recordings with Webwizard RL so that he –and his technologically-enabled daughter G\*\*!– can make some copies which I'll be able to send to the US composers whose music I played in the Festival; having my annual Day of Financial Wellness with A\*\*\*\*; and doing the bookkeeping handover from her to P\*\*.

The other thing I do is to get out of A\*\*\*\*'s basement the six large boxes of my sister Madolin's artwork which have been residing there since mid-November of 2006. This is, in a sense, Part Two of the pilgrimage. I suppose you could say that there is only a distant connection between this art and my journey to our father's birthplace. In another sense the connection is immediate, vivid, and at times still dolorous.

My sister Madolin died suddenly in late January of 1997. I say suddenly because, although this was practically a death foretold for many people who knew her then, for me it was sudden –and even more painful– because she had elected to not speak to me for almost ten years before she died. I had been looking for her: when I found a phone number and called, she hung up on me and the next time I tried I found that the number had been changed to an unlisted one. As it turned out, that was the last time I heard her voice.

To make short work of a rather long story, this cutoff was related, I believe, to the disconnection between my father and his family, his *mexicanidad*, his culture and language (if not physically his country) of origin. "Amputation" might not be too strong a word to use were it not for the fact that some eight years before he died, my father reconnected with his family and with his mother tongue. Quite possibly, I thought in those really dreadful months following Madolin's death, she never found any other models for relating to other people except that original one of complete cutoff.

I spent some months piecing together the fabric of those ten years in which I'd not been permitted to be present. In that house I found, among many other things, a Level One Spanish workbook, and some silver jewelry from Taxco, México. Like my father, Madolin never went to México, as far as I know.

I also found a large quantity of art, principally boxes: she was a disciple of Joseph Cornell. Much of it I found compelling, some of it not; none of the pieces was pretty in the conventional sense but many of them were beautiful and haunting in a way that has nothing to do with the conventional.

I attempted to place this art institutionally but with no success. Joe Hirschhorn had acquired a couple of her pieces years ago for his private collection, so I tried calling the Hirschhorn Museum; also, later on, the Museum of Visionary Art in Baltimore; as well as some other possibilities. In 2006 I gave some pieces away to particular friends and kept three for myself. I know nothing about the museum world, but I learned that you can't give away art, even if it might possibly be quite good art. The administrative and bureaucratic aspects seemed quite forbidding to me, implying months and perhaps years to even give an answer about accepting a bequest. All completely understandable, given the bureaucratic realities of that world; but –also understandably given the realities of my own life during that period– frustrating and difficult for me.

Finally, I suppose, I gave up; or at least did what amounted to the same thing – I sought refuge in putting the whole issue on some very back burner in my mind while bailing myself out by parking the art itself first in the climate-controlled storage facility outside DC and then in A\*\*\*\*'s basement for a total of eleven years. All very irresponsible, all things I generally try very hard not to do. Now I am down to the wire: I must find a way, all these years after my sister's passing, to honorably deal with what is left of her work.

So I leave Roosevelt with those 6 boxes of art in the back seat of the rental car and in my mind and spirit the growing worry about what will happen to them; a worry which is underlaid, nevertheless, by some sense that it will work out. Even as all this is happening I am saying to myself that I must find my way back to that Trust the Universe way of being, that easy movement of being in touch with my own intuition. Find my way back to that place, as I find my way back to the mountaintop place where, naked on the roof of the earth (as I think of it), I meditate.

Ridiculously, this lightning in which I so want to trust has two days in which to strike: I will arrive in Hopewell with dear friends R\*\*\*\* and C\*\*\*\* on Saturday, after driving up north again to see my Aunt Fannie, widow of Miguel Ángel (Michael) who was my father's oldest brother, who is about to turn 92. On Monday I'll head south again, to DC – and since there is nowhere in DC to park this art yet again, the moment of truth has arrived.

I suppose this sounds as though I am expecting a lot from the Fates, to trust this will happen with No Plan Whatsoever; and in a sense that's true. But I have the very strong feeling that I have done my work, exhausted every other possible option –or at least those possible for me – and now must place my trust in the universe. This has turned out to be a sort of credo for me, these last 10 years: do your work and trust the universe, make a good gate and get out of the way.

On Saturday I pick up the copies of the Raritan River Festival recordings and drive two hours north. There I have a wonderful visit with my Aunt Fannie, who continues sharp as a tack and most of all a great lady of great heart; and arrive in Hopewell in reasonable time for cocktails, a joyful reunion for the three of us and even more amazing considering that we saw each other barely three months ago, after the Raritan River Festival concert. Rare indeed for us to have two visits in one year!

I have already decided that I will not even glance at the automobile on Sunday: still recovering from 16 hours of driving in two days. At some point during dinner I mention the six boxes in

the back seat of the car. Not then, but later, R\*\*\*\* talks about the many boxes of slides that were part of a close relative's estate, and about how he arrived at a place of peace with that stuff.

That night before turning in, I am out on the back porch, like being in a treehouse, so high amidst the murmuring late-August leaves, saying a kind of prayer to the night sky, Lady, grant that I find my way back to that feeling, that faith, that trust in the Universe, if I do my work and believe that it can happen, it will. I think of that metaphor of life as a garden, in which something is always dying and something else always germinating, and wonder what is dying right now, what is being born.

As in Roosevelt and Olean, it's green here, green, green, these are the Waterlands, this is the time of fecundity, the corn is as high as an elephant's eye, the tomatoes hang heavy on their vines, the night is balmy, threaded with drowsy birdsong and the incessant busy murmur of the crickets, who, it's said, never repeat themselves. This was always my favorite season here. In Hopewell, as in Roosevelt, in these two places which have been refuges, places of rest for me on this voyage, I feel drawn into the landscape, the feel of the air, the scent of the trees and the earth. They're a part of the sense of sanctuary, which is made most real for me by these people whom I love so much, who are like family to me, I who have so little; and again I'm reminded of Mary Oliver's poem "The Wild Geese".

The next morning the three of us get out and take a fast walk around town. Sometime during this walk we decide that we'll have an absolutely traditional late-summer "Joisey" supper: BLTs and sweet corn. M\*\*\*, who I never get to see, will come over, which will be a treat. Soon thereafter C\*\*\*\* and I set off to get sweet corn at the local organic farmer's market, with a couple of other stops for provisions. We're driving off from the farmer's market when C\*\*\*\* says, "*You know, when R\*\*\* and M\*\*\* moved downstairs and had to get rid of a lot of stuff, they finally just put it all on a couple of folding tables out next to the street with a sign that said FREE. And the next morning there was nothing left. The only bad thing was that someone misunderstood and took one of the tables as well! I don't know how you might feel about that, but it might be a way to dispose of your sister's art. We could put a sign that says GOOD ART, FREE TO A GOOD HOME, or something like that*". I am dumbstruck. Here I am flapping around and calling museums, and wonderful dear C\*\*\*\* with her clear vision and her open heart, she has the answer. So I mumble something like, Oh my goodness, that would be incredible if it's not a hassle, and two minutes later she is on her cellphone calling R\*\*\*\* and asking him to get the remaining folding table up from the basement and out next to the street.

R\*\*\*\* and I unpack the art and arrange it artfully on the table, with a few pieces on the grass. C\*\*\*\* makes a couple of signs that say GOOD ART, FREE TO A GOOD HOME and another one that says TABLE NOT INCLUDED. She also brings, in true garage-sale spirit, a jug of lemonade at a critical moment. François, the metal-worker who has his studio across the street, stops by to look at the work and we have a most agreeable chat for quite some time. He calls another person there who is an art dealer, and she comes and has a look. At some point we decide it's time to leave it in the hands of the universe and go inside and have a drink. M\*\*\* arrives; I, filthy and sweaty, excuse myself to take a shower. An hour later there are five or six pieces gone. Amidst BLTs, sweet-corn ecstasy, R\*\*\*\*'s amazing margaritas, and much good conversation and laughter, we periodically look out the window. By 10PM there are only a couple of boxes on the table and a few on the grass.

I arise very early (for me) on Monday morning to see C\*\*\*\* off since she has administrative stuff to do at her school. R\*\*\*\* has wonderfully postponed leaving for work in order to spoil me with more of his incredible coffee. It is a gift to have this little extra time with the two of them. When R\*\*\*\* leaves I go out for a quick run; shower and finish packing; and then to the Post Office for

one of my semi-marathonic visits -- to open a box, send a bunch of stuff to Europe, and connect with P\*\*\*\*.

I leave for DC around 2PM, and there is not one single piece of art left on the table or on the lawn. It has been given to the universe.

I realize that more people will now see and enjoy my sister Madolin's art, in all likelihood, than would ever have seen and enjoyed it in any museum. Thank you, Universe. Thank you, C\*\*\*\*. Some circle has been completed here, some wound healed.

In effect, this is Chapter One of what --as I started out by saying -- turned out to be a very full time indeed. Insanely --although perhaps less so considering all I've been doing in the meantime --I still have not written that chapter. But it is very clear in my head, and I hope to do so soon. I got the answer to my question about what had died; and I went to the Lincoln Memorial. In fact, I went there the afternoon of the day that Barack Obama became the Democratic nominee for President of the United States, in itself a kind of birth moment.