

CHAPTER 7

GOOD SAMARITANS AND GOOD VAGABONDS

A result of the yes philosophy was that I quickly created an identity as a "vagabond", since a hitchhiker has a goal from A to B, while a "vagabond" lets himself be thrown here and there as the people on his way want it. In and of itself, it was already in me as I constantly recalled my grandmother's confirmation speech to me, "The goal you shall never reach, but in the wandering you will find your happiness," followed by the admonition or "call" in the Holdt family hymn, "Command your ways" from the verse, "Way you have everywhere, you're not without means; if only grace you spread, only light will guide your way." Like Ahasuerus, I had to learn to overcome my own pain by recognizing that it directly pays not to go after a concrete goal, but to move in both time and space by consistently saying yes to traveling into each person's life.

Having slowly overcome my fear of drivers and police, with which the population had so thoroughly indoctrinated me, vagabonding was mostly about overcoming drivers' fear of me by thinking lovingly and empathetically about them, thereby helping them to open up themselves. Of course, this was difficult to practice at first, when I stood for hours on the edge of muddy ditches, unable to understand why they weren't picking me up. But soon I became aware that the way I thought about them directly influenced whether and how quickly they picked me up.

Hitchhiking in America was an endless attempt to make it a positive experience for people picking you up. Not least by entertaining them with interesting vagabond stories during the often endless drives.



It was illegal to hitchhike on I90 along the Indiana Toll Road through the black and polluted ghettos of East Chicago and Gary, which I had to struggle my way through every time I headed east and to Canada from Chicago.



It seemed crazy at first to venture onto these "freeways" from which my hitchhiking trips would necessarily always start. But I had no choice when, as I had learned in English, "free" meant free for the penniless traveler. So how was I supposed to find my way into the human in this misanthropic jungle?

But just as frequently by listening to their own stories - not least their tales of woe - which they had often never had anyone to share with before and only dared to unload on a complete stranger they knew they wouldn't have to deal with again. Often I found I was the first person they had ever confided in - not least criminals on the run from the law and later even mass murderers. Meeting so many lost and lonely fates, I soon found that my new role in life was to be a kind of itinerant social worker, street priest or confessor - an almost natural calling for a priest's son as I could use many of the skills, I had seen my father use as a priest. Since I don't exactly have a reputation for being the most attentive or the best listener, I often wonder how competent I really was at listening as a vagabond. However, I think I was very good - especially at being compassionate rather than critical. Partly because in such a closed space in a car with a lone person, you had no choice but to travel into people or get bored yourself on the bland highways. And partly because their "case stories" were so appalling to me in my naive youth. Today, much of my lack of presence - especially with my own family - is precisely due to the feeling of "having heard it all before" and "my God, it's nothing compared to what I experienced on the road", which is not exactly a constructive approach to people's pain.

Some of the first people who felt I understood their pain were the many Vietnam veterans who picked me up almost every day. Either they sat completely silent at first, or they began to tell me that they needed to talk because their relationship with their wife or girlfriend had just broken down because they had been drunk and violent with them. "So, you were in Nam?" I asked, to their surprise, because here, 18 years before PTSD was known, they did not see these archetypal patterns themselves and therefore only blamed themselves for their failures. Even with my knowledge of the war, I was shocked to hear what they had been through. These were experiences they had often not confided in anyone before because of the disdain they felt from the youth at home for the war and these "baby killers", but which I now began to see a common thread in because of their frequency on the road.



Here at the huge Vietnam demonstrations in New York in November 1971, I was suddenly proud of my country. For my old comrade-in-arms, Anker Jørgensen, had only a month before been elected as prime minister and then recognized North Vietnam along with Norway, thus breaking with the right-wing's long policy of cooperation with the United States. Oluf Palme had already done so in Sweden in 1969.



I spent a lot of time hitchhiking around in support of Sharon Lee Holland and the Vietnam veterans' demonstrations. Here we are in Miami with Ron Kovic in the middle, who later became famous in the guise of Tom Cruise in the film Born on the Fourth of July about his conversion from patriot to war resister.

I will never forget March 29, 1973, when at seven in the morning I left a white hippie farm in Crystal Springs, Mississippi, and immediately got a ride with a white redneck truck driver. He had just been robbed at gunpoint, but something told him to pick me up that day anyway. Soon we both understood why, as we got to talking about Vietnam, from which he had just been repatriated - involuntarily. During a long jungle war, he had seen all his comrades killed, so when his best friend was finally killed too, he had gone on a killing spree among the women and children of a village, their men being in the field. Finally, he had ripped open the stomach of a pregnant woman with his bayonet and pulled out her baby and smashed it against a tree. An officer had seen and reported it, so he was immediately given a "dishonorable discharge," and after years of fighting in the jungle, three days later he was wandering down the streets in Los Angeles' unreality - completely disoriented and alone - with no one to give him help. Trying to forget it all, and with no desire or ability to face his family with his shame, who knew nothing of his return, he had



All over the country, I was moved by seeing the deep wounds of these Vietnam veterans, which they tried to illustrate by crucifying a black veteran in front of Congress, while they, along with later Secretary of State John Kerry, threw their medals at the heads of their irresponsible politicians in disdain.



immediately taken a job as a truck driver to escape onto the lonely highways. Now I was the first person he had shared it all with, and since he was goodness itself, he helped me almost as much to see the extent to which Americans themselves had become victims of their ideological blindness.

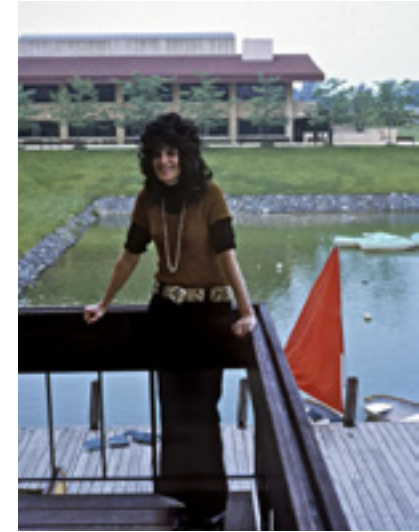
So immersed were we in conversation that we ran out of gas, yet he insisted on taking a huge detour to drive me all the way to the blood bank in New Orleans. This was where I hitchhiked twice a week from all over the South, because at six dollars and ten cents a tap it was the best paid in the country, and I needed the blood money to finance my films.

I've since thought back wistfully to this PTSD-damaged veteran every time I've since as a lecturer picked up that kind of lonely, but now old long-bearded, Rambo's when they occasionally wander out of the woods from their "self-chosen" recluse existence. To the amazement of my young fellow riders, I know their life story even before I slowly open them up. Then it is as if there is a secret bond of destiny between us - from a bloody past - that has shaped us both for life. "Without the ruined lives of these self-sacrificing men, I myself would not have become your long-haired and long-bearded lecturer today," I tell today's spoiled college youth, devoid of the fear of conscription, senseless death and crippling, but who have an obvious loathing and fear of these savages who never managed to escape the government enforced jungle hell of their youth.

I have no doubt that as a young vagabond I was good at listening to people who needed loving attention in that way, because with my own low sense of self-worth they helped me to find a mission in life. That we were mutually helping each other was confirmed to me every time they ended up inviting me, completely spontaneously, into their often very miserable homes, shacks and trailers to continue the conversation. Already in the vagabond years I was aware of what I called Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity, which I vaguely remembered from high school was about the fact that you cannot study something without intervening to change the phenomenon - in my case often by the "phenomenon" falling in love with the "measuring instrument". Especially with lonely women, this was a standing challenge.

That first summer, just after the great Vietnam demonstrations, when we tried to "shut down Washington and the Pentagon" and I myself was hospitalized after police tear gas attacks, I was picked up by a young white man on the J. F. Kennedy highway in Delaware who clearly needed help in his wreck of an old, rusted car.

The day before I ended up in bed with the poor drug addict Linda Craige, I had stayed with this rich woman, Beatrice Dolores Gladden, in the cushy suburb of Columbia outside Baltimore, where I also experienced "the concept of complementarianism". For her four sons, the oldest almost as old as myself, attached themselves too strongly to me as their new father. It was Beatrice who gave me one of the sensations of American Pictures - the drunk drive with Ted Kennedy and Bert Bacharach. Beatrice died at age 90 on April 30, 2019, while I was writing these lines and wanted her approval of the text.



I don't remember exactly what his problem was (like I've forgotten most of these sad fates because there were simply too many of them over five years of vagabonding and 40 years of lecture tours) - only that he stuttered so much he was almost incomprehensible while telling me he had no friends and kept asking if I wanted to go with to Philadelphia. And even though I was on my way to New York, I had to say yes.

I had just gotten a lot of love from a woman in a rich Washington suburb who lived like high society with a Jaguar and mink-fur-covered round bed, and who had driven me on a drunk drive with Ted Kennedy and Bert Bacharach. So I figured I might as well give myself a bit to a poor guy who had gotten nothing out of life before I moved on. Then in Philadelphia we wandered the streets all evening, and it turned out that he had no place of his own to live. Late in the evening he began to agitate that I should go home with him to a girlfriend he had just got and moved in with - the first he had had in his life - because it would mean so much to him to show her that he had got me - "a great Dane" - as his friend. And then I could probably spend the night in my sleeping bag on the floor under their bed in her one-bedroom. I didn't think much of it, as I had already become used to having to be shown off to motorists' friends. Either to show them how brave they had been to pick up such a long-haired "Charles Manson" type, or in his case to show how exciting a friend he had made.

Linda Craige welcomed me in her thigh-high, worn jeans and dirty T-shirt, covering a body embroidered with tattoos. As I recall, she was a drug addict, and we took some drugs and picked up some booze at a shop, to which she limped, stuttering, and swearing. But when we got back, she became more and more interested in me and more and more annoyed with her friend, whom she began to scold endlessly and finally throw out late at night. But me she begged to stay, and being well attacked by liquor and fatigue, I quickly fell into bed. He never returned, and the next morning she told me that she had thrown "that loser" out because she would rather have me. Although I had not yet developed an identity as a wandering soul mourner at the time, I was genuinely ashamed of this sad manifestation of the complementarity concept and vowed to be more attentive when I was with exposed people later - especially under the influence of intoxicants, where it can be difficult to predict the course, a long night will take.



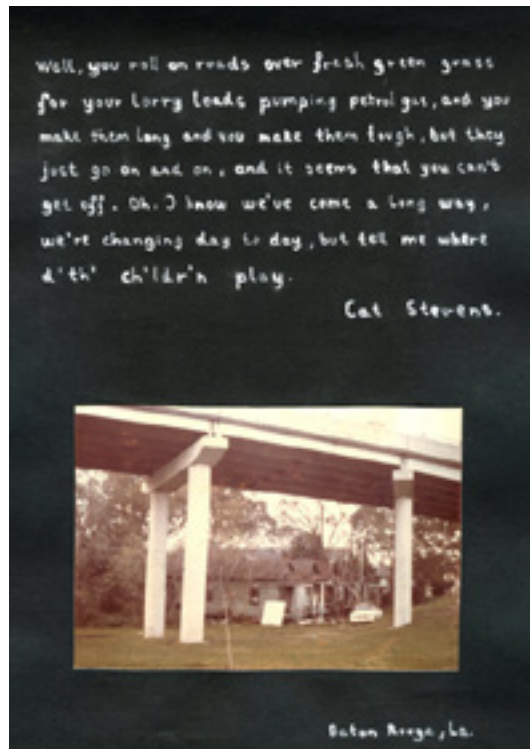
On the road, different rules applied than in the homes, where I was treated to piles of grass.

Nevertheless, I experienced numerous similar cases and had to take special precautions, especially with women and their flirtatious friends, not to hurt my hosts' feelings. Precisely because I got so close to people and saw so many cruel examples of how such abused and weak people's exploitation of each other was a cry for our help, I quickly developed the concept of the "good vagabond". Not only to preserve my identity as a mourner of souls, but probably more so to keep my head above water myself and not get sucked into their love-hungry morass.

The swamp of racism, in particular, I felt was far harder not to be consumed by than, say, drugs. I felt psychologically strong enough to share ordinary drugs with people - if only to avoid signaling distance or risking being seen as a snitch in many environments. Still, while hitchhiking, I had to be careful with the most common drug, marijuana. Because the most common kind of ride I got was with kids who, as soon as I got in the car, passed around a joint before the driver, after many inhalations, finally asked, coughing and hacking, "So where are you going, chap?"



Among the musicians I came to love was Cat Stevens, whom I introduced for a week in The Gaslight folk music club in New York. I illustrated his song "Where Do The Children Play," about the inhuman "highways" in my hitchhiking photo books. When he later converted to Islam as Yusuf Islam, it was a great experience to meet him again 36 years after in 2007 giving him my book and going to Friday prayers with him in the mosque in Dubai.



And if I was already well stoned, my English suddenly got even worse than in high school under teacher Little P's critical boring gaze, and I started switching the correct order of words. Then my fellow passengers laughed sympathetically, but the problem came when it was often only a short lift and the next was with a "straight" conservative banker or business traveler. Then, if I couldn't articulate correctly either, I knew that without being able to communicate satisfactorily I probably wouldn't be invited home with them for the night. So, like President Clinton, I quickly learned to smoke without inhaling.

The fact that it took a long time before the young people asked who I was and where I was going was also due to the fact that in the first few years, they were so used to picking up hippies and that they were typically in the middle of a piece of music turned up to full blast. Why stop the enjoyment just because you had an extra person on board? Typically, they'd not ask question before changing the big 8-track tapes (used in those years before the little cassette tapes took over). But since some of these were made to run in endless loops, and if we were stoned at the same time, we never got to talking. This puzzled me at first, but I learned that it was part of American hospitality. When you were invited home by the young, their parents continued to watch television unchallenged, whereas in Denmark you immediately start dishing up all sorts of things - and therefore never get around to inviting guests spontaneously. Without instant hospitality the vagabond cannot survive.

The music was one of the things I enjoyed most about hitchhiking. Partly because I then didn't have to entertain, and partly the youngsters introduced me to the era's amazing and truly epoch-making American music like Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Grateful Dead, Crosby, Still & Nash and Simon & Garfunkel with my favorite track, "Bridge over troubled water". But I preferred to be picked up by women who always played quieter music like Joni Mitchel, Joan Baez, Melanie and Carole King. I've been driving the American highways almost ever since, but everything since seems like pure garbage compared to what came to define my youth generation. And many of my drivers as a vagabond I today remember mostly for the tunes and musicians they seduced me into on those smoke-filled rides.

The good vagabond

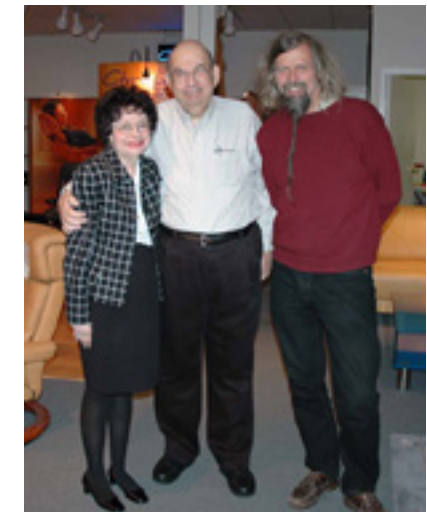
Many had never picked up a hitchhiker before, but because they were in the middle of a crisis and needed someone to talk to, they suddenly did it spontaneously and wondered afterwards why they had done it. So, I literally waded into daily crises in all walks of life. By following many of them through their later lives, I confirmed that my complementary intervention in their lives had, fortunately, had a positive effect on them in the vast majority of cases. Even among the richest and the millionaires. In Philadelphia, where I also met Linda Craig, the wealthy Jewish businessman Allan Tunick picked me up in the pouring rain after a night I had spent in bed with a fat self-hating homosexual - at an exit to the New Jersey Turnpike's eight lanes in each direction - probably because I was wearing my sign saying I was from Denmark (which saved the Jews). I immediately began talking openly about "my work in the ghettos," for which the Jews always showed deep solidarity. He didn't really want to take me home, as he felt completely knocked out - partly because business was bad and partly because his brother was dying of cancer. He was therefore heavily influenced by nerve pills, but he realized that he needed someone to talk to and took me home to his wife, Bernaise - or Neicie, as she was called.

It was a very powerful experience for me. They were frantically waiting for a call from the hospital that their brother had died, and it was against this somber background that my images had a powerful effect on them. Allan told me that the pictures reminded him of another Dane who had photographed the Americans 100 years earlier, and showed me the book by Jacob Riis, which I had never heard of before. When I left the next morning they thanked me very much and he tried to express the experience by quoting "I used to cry because I had no shoes until I saw a man with no legs" with tears running down his cheeks. Before I left, he took me to a photo shop and bought me 15 films - the biggest contribution I had ever received.

Normally I lived in Philadelphia with a poor black family inside the ghetto, where the son Larry Yates walked miles every day because he couldn't afford the bus.



My last visit with my sponsors, Allan and Bernaise Tunick, in 2004 and poor student Larry Yates, at the time they helped him get a high university education that enabled him to take his mother, my longtime hostess Dorothy Yates, on a trip to Denmark in 1987. Below, they are seen on the left opposite my ex-wife Annie, who is almost covering for my pregnant wife, Vibeke. Larry died from cancer in 2018.





I returned again and again to my food giver, Dorothy, as a vagabond, and since had my Danish fellow travelers with me - like here Danish poet Pia Tafdrup. In 2004, Larry called and told me that Dorothy was dying, and I drove night and day the 800 miles from the Ku Klux Klan headquarters in Indiana and just had time to say goodbye to her before she closed her eyes. She was present and on stage with me every time I presented my slideshow at the University of Pennsylvania right next to her ghetto home on Ludlow St. - shouting proudly out over the audience when the naked pictures of her daughter came on the screen, "That's my daughter, that's my daughter!"



When I told Allan Tunick, he wanted to drive me to the ghetto, but didn't dare and instead gave me a bag of tokens for Larry so he wouldn't have to walk the long way to his college. And it was a good investment, because when Larry visited me in Denmark many years later, and I boasted that over here - unlike in the US - we could pay by card in shops, he told me that this was exactly what he was currently developing as a programmer for US banks.

I later went back and told that sunshine story to Allan Tunick. "Look what came out of your investment, Allan. Larry Yates got a top engineering degree and here's my book with you in the colophon as the one of my four sponsors who made the biggest contribution to making this book possible," I said. The last time I saw Allan Tunick and his beloved Neicie in one of their great furniture stores was just before his death in 2007. Here I had brought my wife and was able to tell Allan that it was precisely through his great investment in my pictures and belief in me as a vagabond that I ended up meeting Vibeke.



Students donating sacks of food to the poor before my performance in the Rackham Auditorium at the University of Michigan, where 1,600 people attended each performance - which is why there was plenty each time for my friends in the Detroit ghetto.

In the last years of my five vagabond years I loved the role of "the good vagabond", and often imagined that I would continue it the rest of my life. Later, when I started lecturing at US universities, I developed the concept even further when I realized that my slide show made the rich students feel so guilty that they would do anything for the poor afterwards. So at many universities it was introduced that each student had to bring some food items to my lectures, which were collected in big boxes outside the lecture halls and then I took them to my friends in the local ghetto, whom they had just seen in my pictures. Or if I flew to the university, I gave them the addresses so that they could drive themselves in small groups into the ghetto and deliver them. My friends in the ghettos later told me, laughing, how the whites had always arrived in larger groups, never alone, and yet trembling with fear. This was as much an outgrowth of my lifelong idea of integrating "the oppressor with the oppressed," which I was already learning as a vagabond.



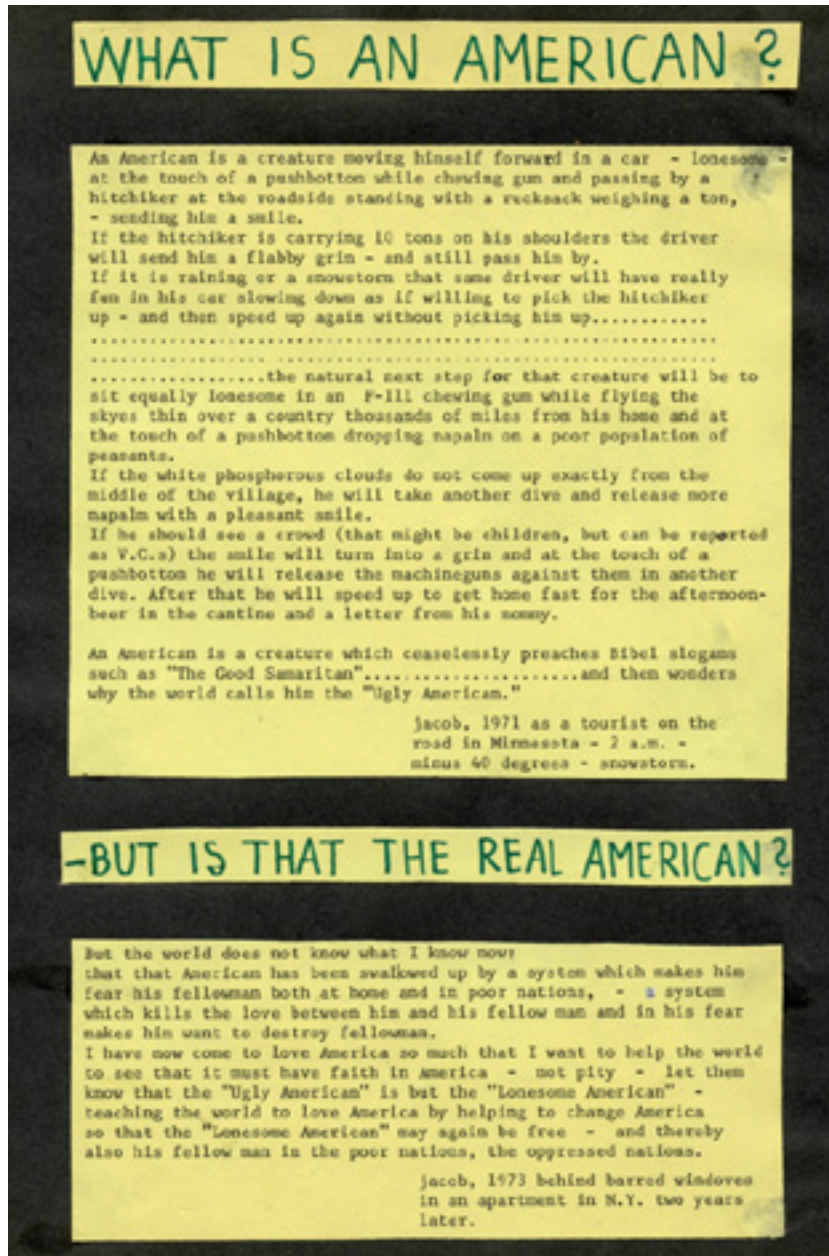
Renee at 14 with her son Michael, bottom left at 16 and bottom right at 51 in 2008. Renee was fascinated by my vagabond stories and always pestered me to take her on the road, "out of this ghetto," as she put it. Only when she turned 16 did I relent, if she could get her mother's written permission. For I knew how the police would react to a white hitchhiker with a black girl, but aside from countless sexual assaults by white drivers, the ride went fine. During a month of travel in the South, we developed a deep intimacy with each other by sharing beds or floors every night. When, as I had promised her mother, I returned home with her, Renee was so happy to see her boyfriend again that they immediately jumped into bed together. And because of the intimacy we now had, she didn't think about my photographic presence at all during the entire act. So, the recipe for making such a picture, which has now become something of a classic, is simply to invite the female "victim" along on a thousand-mile hitchhiking trip through the South to "loosen her up".

The concept of the "good vagabond" is a bit muddled, for as I began to define the term, the vagabond role involves consistently saying yes to meeting human needs in the here and now - and not through lofty ideologies or tear-jerking fund raisers. By contrast, the role of the hitchhiker is by definition selfish, as it is only about reaching your own goal. The most important human need to meet as a vagabond is to free the motorist from his imprisoning fear. Even when I stood still at a traffic light in a busy city with lots of people around me, I never experienced any reaction when I just stood there. Often the stopped motorists would smile at me, but in the same instant I put out my hand to hitchhike, I would hear them immediately pressing all the automatic locks - "click, click, click" - as if I were instantly transformed into a serial killer.

Fear always rules at the irrational level, and although motorists can understand logical arguments, they have little positive effect on them the moment they see the figure of a hitchhiker on the roadside. And when I was standing out there, how could I communicate to them that I meant them no harm? For five years I experimented a lot with this - especially when I often could stand all night waiting for a Good Samaritan. It took me a while to understand them. In my small luggage I always carried a thick black book with my pictures, which I could show to the drivers. But in the first years I was too political and negative in my captions. Here is one of the texts, which clearly but clumsily shows the slow transformation I went through:

"An American is a creature moving himself forward in a car - lonesome - at the touch of a push bottom while chewing gum and passing by a hitchhiker at the roadside standing with a rucksack weighing a ton - sending him a smile. If it is raining or a snowstorm that same driver will have really fun in his car - slowing down as if willing to pick the hitchhiker up - and then speed up again without picking him up ... and then wonders why the world calls him the Ugly American", I wrote in 1971 somewhere in Minnesota in a snowstorm and minus 40 degrees.

And two years later I had come to this realization, sitting safe and warm in an apartment in New York:



My gradually changing feelings toward Americans expressed in my vagabond picture books.



My hitchhiking sign and a shoulder bag with the thick political photo book, the four "nicer" photo books, a thick diary, two cameras and a flash were all I hitchhiked with in the last years. There was no room for the clothes that Good Samaritans kept giving me on the road. The bag was open as I had to constantly keep my eyes on it in criminal ghetto environments.

"No, the world does not know what I know now: that that American has been swallowed up by a system which makes him fear his fellowman both at home and in poor nations, - a system which kills the love between him and his fellow man and in his fear, makes him want to destroy his fellowman. I have now come to love America so much that I want to help the world to see that it must have faith in America - not pity - let them know that the "Ugly American" is but the "Lonesome American" - teaching the world to love America by helping to change America so, that the "Lonesome American" may again be free - and thereby also, his fellow man in the poor nations, the oppressed nations."

It goes without saying that I didn't get very far with that kind of politicizing texts, even if the motorists were affected by my pictures. Only among the radicalized youth did they have a constructive effect. So then, out of sheer necessity, I soon started using Bible and Shakespeare quotes in my picture books, with the result that motorists now often sat and cried over them and started giving me money for my photography.

My problem at first was not only my anger at the crimes of the Americans in Vietnam, but also that I soon began to travel between the divided worlds of blacks and whites and was angry at the racism of whites. Since most drivers were white, it was not only myself I had to sell as trustworthy, but also the cause of blacks as I began to see myself as a messenger between blacks and whites. And I could do this effectively only when I began to realize that whites were not racists out of malice, but out of fear, and that their fear of the violent anger of blacks was interwoven with their fear of me as a hitchhiker. The parallel between myself as a vagabond and the ghetto's incarcerated blacks I saw more and more clearly and later described in many places in "American Pictures."

But no one is born to be a vagabond, and it took me a long time of education to work my way out of my fear-based prejudices and learn such genuine compassion for motorists that I could change them in the process. When, after hours of waiting, I finally saw the intoxicating red brake lights and, in the dark of night, rushed to yank open the car door - only to look down the barrel of a frightened driver's gun - I eventually realized that it was mutually beneficial and reassuring that I was forced to show my passport or the contents of my pockets or bag in this way. But wow, how afraid I was of then making the slightest wrong move that might make them pull the trigger again out of fear. Especially because they often stopped so clumsily - in the middle of the lane rather than pulling off to the side of the road (if there was a road side at all) - why it was all about getting into the car as quickly as possible before the police came along with a ticket, or before they changed their minds and suddenly nervously stepped on the accelerator.

Sign painter

Trust, I quickly learned in the US, was fostered by a beautiful, elaborately painted sign reading "City Name from Denmark", which I had help making in the first year on some cardboard at the family I had just stayed with. And it worked well that first summer, when I still saw myself as a hitchhiker with a clearly defined goal.



The black photographer, Steve, whom I stayed with on December 28, 1972 in Cambridge, took both this picture and the cover photo of this book. It was only for the last three years that I hitchhiked with a ready-made sign. Here I still have my first backpack with the Danish flag on it, which - I soon learned - caused people to think I was from the Red Cross or the like.

Other hitchhikers were usually just holding signs with town names - if they'd even bothered to make a sign. That I always walked over and admonished them to do in the future, lest people think they were escaped convicts. For most hitchhikers had as little forethought as motorists. And when I discovered that Americans always reacted positively when I told them I was from Denmark, I got the idea to tell them already on the signs. I'm pretty sure I was the first person in the world to think of this, because I've never seen anyone else do it.

I particularly remember one day in front of a toll booth in Pennsylvania, where there were already 17 hitchhikers when I arrived as the last in line. It looked like it would take days to get out of there. But that very day, I think I had written "Pittsburgh from Denmark" for the first time, with the result that a Jew, Rachel Trueblood, immediately slammed on the brakes and took me to her luxury home in the Jewish neighborhood of Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh. I don't forget the guilt as we drove past the long line of hitchhikers. I suggested to Rachel that we might be able to fit a few more in the car, but I was the only one she wanted. She was young and beautiful and had never had the courage to pick up a man before. Thus I learned that in hitchhiking all the tricks apply, and that it's hard to be supportive of the other hitchhikers - although I remember instances where I persuaded the drivers to take another hitchhiker along, once I'd given the driver confidence in myself. For the first two years I still saw many students and hippies on the road, but then these quickly began to disappear as violence and fear increased in society.

The transition to my beautifully stitched and permanent sign, "Touring USA from Denmark" came in tandem with my transformation from hitchhiker to vagabond. Because when I couldn't help but say yes to all sorts of people who took me in directions other than where I wanted to go, what was I supposed to do when my goals gradually changed over the course of a long day? At the same time, I had discovered that only the most highly educated got the word "Denmark" right. Most assumed that I simply came from a city with that name, since several states have them, and a majority of Americans - especially in the South where I spent most of my time - have never heard of a country called Denmark.

But by using the juxtaposition of the United States and Denmark on the same sign, they now came to think of a foreign nationality, which made them curious while appealing to their nationalistic pride to do something for this "Dutchman," "Swede," or whatever they associated with the word. The positive effect was that it gave me lifts especially with intellectuals and wealthy people who had themselves travelled in Europe and Denmark - not least a lot of Jews who would thank me for



How well the Denmark sign worked on the Jews, I toast here on New Year's Eve 1972 to the Jewish woman Barbara Jennynen in Boston, who had also picked me up and helped me sew my new sign. In my diary, I can see that it was only a week after the 21-year-old Jewish Judy Jailer picked me up in New York, where I woke up Christmas morning with her in bed at 68A Thompson St. I had to such a degree integrated myself with Judaism that I hadn't noticed it was Christmas Eve the night before (in Jewish New York). Meanwhile, I had hitchhiked to Boston to meet a former Jewish girlfriend, Janet Crayne, who had previously picked me up in Dane County, WI. We now met outside Harvard (where she later was a librarian for, among others, Obama in the Law Library), and with her I spent the night in black photographer Steve's bed at Mt. Auburn 15, which is why I look happy in his cover photo. Shortly after Barbara's New Year's Eve, I hitchhiked with her well-crafted new sign toward Maine, and was immediately picked up by Sharon Feigenbaum, a Jewish girl only 17 years old, on January 15th. She had courage to take me home to Haverhill to her parents, who let us spend the night together in her room. We are still friends, but in 2008 she had a Jewish wedding with a lesbian. And so, it continued out the highways with my undeserved attraction from the Jews as a Dane.



I was always trying to find the Ku Klux Klan, like here in Smithfield, NC, where I'm standing under their sign put up on steel beams because the blacks kept burning it down. However, it was 30 years before I managed to become a "member" of the KKK. Next to me the little shoulder bag with my picture books about blacks and racism.



Here I get a ticket from the police in front of the old slave market in Louisville, Georgia.

saving them, to which I always replied, "Don't blame me, I wasn't born then". But they were far more understanding of my social commitment than any other group and therefore sponsored me emotionally, financially, and not least, intimately. One negative effect was that I was picked up by a lot of perverts who associated Denmark with "sexual freedom", to which I always replied, "yes, we have sexual freedom, but Americans make much more use of the little freedom they have. With freedom comes responsibility." To which they laughed and made a pass at me anyway. This constituted the vagabond character's perennial problem with saying yes, which for a long time caused me to seek back the oh-so-liberating role of "hitchhiker only."

I also experimented with other signs such as "Bible belt - and no Good Samaritan?", since I was always stuck for hours going through the Tennessee and West Virginia Bible belt when I hitchhiked from the South up to Washington once a month to see my pictures sent there after processing. I never understood why these Christians couldn't see that I was a great opportunity for them to live out their Christianity and have "eternal life" - which is the stated desire of Jesus' parable of the

Samaritan overcoming his fear (of being attacked in a similar mountainous area) to help the lost stranger.

In other words, since it gave more lifts to advertise that I was a foreigner and not an American than to appeal to Americans' Christian love, during the great gasoline crisis of October 1973 I tried to appeal to their selfish interest in picking me up. Under the Arab countries' oil embargo, there were suddenly endless lines at gas stations and prices skyrocketed. I remembered my shock every time my ghetto friends in Detroit filled up the car for only one dollar that first year, when the price per gallon was 19 cents. Now the price went up to 57 cents, and it was ruining Americans (although in Denmark it reached \$8 per gallon). With the great shortage of petrol, anyone should be able to see that it was a question of carpooling. So now I was signaling that, conversely, it was me who was "self-sacrificing" my own private driving so that there could be more petrol for the rolling egoists who still insisted on driving their own cars. But even as I stood with thoughtfully promising signs like "Saving fuel for you", motorists remained just as mindlessly tormented by the idea of a dangerous, long-haired man out to mug them, not to rescue them in their mindless solitude. But just wait, I'm patenting my foresighted sign during our present-day worsening climate crisis!

The "Touring USA from Denmark" sign, a woman in Boston helped me sew onto a large yellow cloth with carved dark red letters, painstakingly sewn on and then attached to two sticks so I could quickly roll it up when I saw the red taillights of a car pulling up. In several places on the large fluttering canvas I cut holes for the wind to blow through, as I was frequently being blown away like a sailing ship when I held it in stormy weather, or when the enormous trucks roared past. For a long time I devised plans to get some luminescent, electric letters so that the cars could see it better at night. I also thought of standing with my camera around my neck to look like a foreign tourist but feared that criminals would then stop and steal it. The sign also had the positive function that several "good lifts" picked me up before the criminals or drunks, who I could always count on sooner or later would come when the good ones failed to appear. Another reason I came to love the "bad" and "evil" people.



One night, while waiting for hours in the dark on I-95 in Virginia, I took this picture. It later became one of my best-selling "art photos" for businesspeople's offices. My graffiti-loving son told me one day that graffiti artist Dash Snow was a big fan of my photos and, among other things, made his own "Hell" version out of Shell (which as a motorist I still boycott to make up for all those who didn't during Shell's support of the apartheid regime in South Africa).

One drunk in particular I won't forget. He picked me up in his truck full of beer and drank himself into a stupor, throwing one empty bottle after another out the window. He drove at breakneck speed down the narrow 100-mile road that ends in Florida's Key West almost at the ocean off Cuba. As a hurricane was brewing, roadblocks had been put up in many places, but no matter how big the barriers across us, he blasted right through them, sending pieces of wood flying around our ears. I tried in vain to shout that I wanted to get off and thought several times of throwing myself straight into the sea. But every time when I was deepest down during my vagabonding, I always found that my sufferings brought me straight to heaven. And this hard-won experience probably also effected that I not only persevered and survived the trip, but immediately got in touch with a couple of fisherwomen in Key West, who invited me home. Throughout the night they vied over which of them should sleep with me, but they were too tense to agree on much because they spent the night nervously listening

to the weather radio. They knew that if the storm suddenly changed direction, their men would turn their fishing boats around and head home. And so I had to get out of bed in a hurry.

On weekends, when such drivers were drunk, my hitchhiking sign had the protective function of requiring them to drive almost all the way up to it in the dark at night before they could read it. So many of these violent rednecks, already poor readers, didn't have time to shoot at me or throw bottles at me before they had already driven past. Sometimes they did get around to throwing bottles at me, but only a few times did I experience being shot at - and each time it was probably just to scare me. The film "Easy Rider", which I had seen just before I went to the US, ran like a recurring nightmare for me as the drunken rednecks in it turned around and drove back to shoot Peter Fonda after first shooting Dennis Hopper. So especially on the slower local roads where they could turn around and come back, I was inherently nervous when I saw cars with drunks in the dark stop and turn back. Fortunately, it was usually to spontaneously pick me up and take me to their party, and at weekend parties like that I could always quickly find someone to shelter me for the night. Drunk people are always more hospitable than the anxious sober ones, but that does not give the losers among them the right to take aim at us who have the energy to stand out there in the dark to get a seat at the party table. So every moment was charged with tension, because I had to decide in a split second whether to run up to a car that had slowed down, with several drunk or crooked rednecks in it, and risk one of them suddenly pulling out a gun and shooting at me - or flee into a dark field and end up standing there all night. I almost always chose to have faith in the best in people, though.

There were many stories of mentally ill drivers who had picked up hitchhikers and murdered them or taken them home and sexually abused them - or outright eaten them as happened to Jeffrey Dahmer's 17 victims, several of whom were hitchhikers murdered between 1978 and 1991. I recall from the vagabond years at least five families who confirmed that their hitchhiking sons had

been murdered, including a loving family in Minnesota. Here, psychiatrist Dr Gove Hambidge picked me up and invited me home one night for the same reason to protect me, as it was just after their son Eric had been murdered that way.

Far more vulnerable, of course, were female hitchhikers, of whom I saw a fair number in the first few years before violent motorists nearly wiped them out as a group.



Poor white "redneck" of the trigger happy/crazy type that I feared when they were so drunk that I couldn't at a distance communicate with them. Since in my inner thinking I had internalized the prejudice of blacks towards them, I never managed very well as a vagabond to integrate with them. It was only when, many years later, I worked with the Ku Klux Klan, that I learned to think lovingly of poor whites that they suddenly opened up to me everywhere.

Hearing them recount so many harrowing variations of rape to which they had been subjected, I have long since forgotten most of their stories. One girl who picked me up told me how she and female friend had hitchhiked and that a driver had raped her in the back seat while, with the gun pointed at both of them, he forced the other to drive the car. In my workshops many years later, it was an almost standing accusation among women how privileged I had been as a man to travel in this violent male society, but most frequently I was asked the cautious question, "Could I as a woman travel like you?" - implying that, to them at least, already in the very different 80s, it seemed completely beyond the reach of their imagination. I always replied that as a man I would not be so chauvinistic and arrogant as to advise them on what I thought a woman could do, but that if women wanted to try to travel like me - though without, like me, consistently saying yes to everything - then they should build up their confidence in men by first hitchhiking around safe Catholic countries like Ireland and Poland. Then, once they had gained sufficient confidence in men, perhaps they could try the US, where I knew several women who hitchhiked without any problems. But it was dangerous to talk about miraculous exceptions, as it could easily be interpreted as other women's own fault for being raped as hitchhikers. I myself had experienced these violent patterns when hitchhiking with Black women, where several truck drivers tried to force me out of the car to rape my friend, as Black women are almost by definition seen in the White mind as a sex object.

Precisely because the sexist pattern of violence is so ingrained in everyone's mind, I remember best the exceptions to the pattern. Later, when I became a driver myself, I once picked up a man standing almost without a tread on in the winter cold on the highway south of Chicago. He told me, shaken and trembling, how he had driven along that day and picked up a mother and her daughter. Then the mother had suddenly pulled out her gun and forced him to drive somewhere where he would first have sex with either her or the daughter, after which they had robbed him of all his clothes and cell phone and taken his car. In the rush to get to a lecture, I forgot to write down the details afterwards.

Of course, I hear many strange things on the road, but in his case, I had no doubt that the story was true, since he was a nice and normally married businessman. Still, I never told the story in my sexism workshops, as it could easily seem like irresponsible entertainment from the insurmountable anxiety my female participants are always stuck with in a violent society.

On "dressing in love"

In practice, my faith in humanity meant that I always had to "calculate" where I could best communicate my inner positive thinking to the driver. I was appalled at how lazily American hitchhikers stayed at the exit ramp, while I always wandered for miles in the great freeway sprawl to get to an entrance ramp where people were driving slowly onto the freeway. It always paid off. I particularly remember one time when I had persuaded a beautiful Indian girl to hitchhike with me from Texas to New York. Her beauty alone gave us many lifts, including in a Ferrari, but I had difficulty persuading her to make a long walk to a better hitchhiking spot for that very reason. But wandering a few miles ahead on the highway, we suddenly came to a place where a huge number of dollar coins had been dropped on the road, which we cheerfully picked up and spent on the rest of the trip. And with the happy faces we now had, it wasn't long before we were picked up on this most desolate mountain stretch of the Bible Belt.

For this was always my big problem, how to artificially stand and smile invitingly and trustingly to drivers, even when inside I was feeling like hell from hunger or lack of sleep after standing for hours in freezing or suffocatingly humid heat. For the first year, the smile was often stiff and artificial, revealing my inner negativism. But as I learned over time that help always came when I was furthest down, it became more natural and in fact now reflected my inner belief in the inner good and loving in the passing motorists. Everyone is influenced by naturally smiling people, and from the moment my smiles came from within - the loving thinking vagabond and not an annoyed hitchhiker who only thinks selfishly about getting ahead in life - then vagabonding went like clockwork for me.

Once I got into the warmth of the cars (not to mention the cold of air-conditioned cars after being completely dehydrated and drenched in the humidity of the south), this whole wonderful game with people became so much easier and more exciting. For real play, of course, requires dialogue, and through the exciting revelations of dialogue, life first becomes mutually enriching. But here too I learned how difficult it can be to open up lovingly to people if you are in pain yourself and therefore easily end up thinking negatively, fearfully or blamefully of the criminal or mass murderer. After all, I quickly noticed how my own mood fluctuated from day to day - indeed from hour to hour - in line with the love I received from others, which is why in my good moments I paid particular attention to those people who revealed that they had never received love.

During a long day's wandering I got many different lifts and could sometimes in the afternoon be completely burnt out by listening to people's stories. Usually, I took a nap in a car around 4 or 5 pm, after which in the evening hours I had to start thinking about finding a place to stay. Some had divulged such personal things about themselves during the conversations, knowing they would never see me again - the criminals, for example - that it was not easy for them to take me home. Others wanted me to come home and live with them for the same reason. When I had just left a Christian home after morning prayers, I remembered how I always loved the freedom of the road again - why it could be annoying shortly after to have to pray with Buddhists and finally to kneel in prayer in a Muslim home in the evening. So, for most of the day I tried to make myself so uninteresting that people would not immediately invite me home, to enjoy instead - admittedly with some guilt - the non-committal freedom to swim like a fish all day long. Right until my faith in humans, and through them all their loving gods, let me in again get caught up in their ever-present "saving" tentacles. That my faith was strong and redemptive I know, because even in the smallest towns after midnight in less than half an hour I ALWAYS for five years found a home to live in.



I said Christian morning prayers when I lived with Bob Cload and his wife in Durham, North Carolina, and Buddhist evening prayers when I lived with Joyce Frampton in Seattle, WA.



Oh, how much I miss today the freedom of just wandering out on endless highways without being forced to relate to people. My readers have often misunderstood me and believed that I am the born lover of people. No, being fundamentally very awkward and stuffy, this is a side that I only gradually acquired and could only live out in the real world for shorter moments.

But in the evenings things began to get critical, and if the drivers seemed to me a little bit interesting, I began to entertain them with my vagabond stories from real life, whereupon they often said: "Wouldn't you like to come home and tell my wife about all the exciting things you've experienced?" Although I thought in selfish terms about being invited home, I learned that it only worked if it came naturally wrapped in the form of a mutual dialogue, where I lovingly and empathetically asked them themselves about their lives. Calculating and manipulative to the point of nausea, I learned exactly which stories worked on which kinds of people, but if out of desperation, when night fell, I simply started reading them off on automatic pilot turned on, it always backfired. Just as I later learned as a lecturer.

An interesting businessman in Florida seemed to me to listen intently and said all the time: "Oh yeah, really, oh yeah, wow, hard to believe" etc. But when the time came for him to turn off, and I was sure he was going to take me home now, he just opened the car door and said something to the effect that I had to go further out into the boonies with such hoaxes. It probably says more about the enormous hospitality of Americans than about me, but after such relatively few failures I always concluded that I had been too selfish and manipulative, thinking more of my own immediate needs than of the motorist's. The "good vagabond", I learned, had to think first of his driver's deeper needs, which for many on the long and tedious drives naturally included the need to be entertained, so picking up a hitchhiker became a positive and thought-provoking experience.

For example, it was always more interesting for them to hear about my experiences in their own society than in mine. Though they often started out with the question: "So what is Denmark like?", I knew it was a polite phrase and that they did not have the ability to think beyond America's borders.

Except for the politically interested few, where I particularly enjoyed debates with deeply conservative people about how much money they could save through the blessings of the welfare state. Here I learned on the road what I later came to teach in universities, that only by appealing to people's own selfish pocketbooks could I convincingly "sell" them a more just economic system. Especially when it came to my perpetual hunger, it could be hard not to think of my own immediate needs. Often I went for days without food. Most of the time, though, I had dinner and breakfast in the homes I stayed in and got used to not eating anything during the day so as not to get quick hunger pangs. But often I hitchhiked for days and therefore needed drivers to offer me food. Still, I don't remember a single time when I directly asked someone for food, as I didn't want to be seen as a freeloader. However, I learned once again that when I consistently thought of the driver in a loving and empathetic way, they always felt so comfortable that at some point they asked if I would like something to drink and eat. As a rule, these were business people who had no problem writing off our shared meal in a restaurant, on their "expense account." I also remember how I then could not and would not choose a dish from the menu, since the mere act of choosing would mean thinking of myself. So I always told my driver to pick something for me that he liked. After which I always praised his good taste, even if it was steaks or something else, I wouldn't have chosen myself. This became so natural for me that I have never since been able to choose for myself in restaurants. When I travelled around the US with Danish rightwing politician Søren Pind in 2012 to film "Pind and Holdt in the US" for DR2, I always let him choose for me, as he always guessed my deeper needs with his great empathy, when I couldn't decide.

If I wasn't with people, in my vagabond years I would just sit in restaurants and eat other people's leftovers before the waitress came, then look at the menu and say I needed more time to decide - and then disappear before she came again. A little more dishonestly, the first year I used the trick of sitting down in big restaurants and just ordering a cup of coffee and getting the bill for 25 cents - then sit down at another table and ordering a real meal with a bill from another waitress and finally at the exit just pay the bill with the 25 cents on it.

But as I eventually developed my identity as a vagabond, I abandoned such dishonest practices, inspired in part by Bob Dylan's, "To be an outlaw you have to be completely honest."

I was frequently amazed at the confidence people had in me when they invited me home and left me alone all day long surrounded by expensive paintings, silverware and all sorts of things I could have stolen without them noticing. Since in such rich suburban homes they often threw all their change on one table, it was always tempting for me to "just borrow 35 cents" for a bus ticket into town. But I never did, knowing that such dishonesty would gradually reflect itself in my mind so that I could no longer signal the honesty that made people show me so much confidence. That I was so aware of this was because I kept crossing back to the criminal world of the ghettos, where it was easy for me to study how dishonesty gradually erodes the human being to the point where the environment begins to "ghettoize" him. And as a ghettoized person, you get nowhere as a vagabond.

I am eternally indebted and grateful to all those Americans who helped me to realize that even the most closed and hostile people could, with a little forethought and help, be transformed from ugly ducklings into loving proud swans. Especially I think of all the police officers who helped me every day, even though in many places they had orders to arrest me. For example, on the long stretch of Interstate 95 through Virginia that I had to drive through at least once a month to hitchhike up and see my newly developed slides, which I stored first with Eveleen Henry in Washington and then at Marly's in New York. They threw all the other hitchhikers in jail, but I learned again that when you thought positively and lovingly about the police, you could make them do anything for you. When they stopped to arrest me, I quickly folded up my hitchhiking sign and ran up to the police car, cheering happily and shouting to them, "Oh, wow, I can't believe how nice American cops are. They always come and help me when I am stuck in the most awful places." In this way I partly made them realize that I was a naive Danish tourist who didn't know the law here, and at the same time appealed to their national pride with the result that they always drove me to a better place to stand.



One of those who believed my stories was the banker Jack Ray, who picked me up on December 17, 1973. After showing me his private airport and bank, he made me the key speaker at his Lions Club. When I returned in 1978, he invited me to a dramatic dinner at a private whites-only club, with the very FBI director as his guest, whom I accused of murdering my black friend Popeye. When I last returned in 2011, he was dead, and a large park in the city named after him. Below, his widow shows me the living room where I had photographed them together 38 years earlier.



Once, however, things went wrong when, as usual, I was dropped off just past The Harbor Tunnel toll station on the Baltimore bypass, where there were hefty fines for hitchhiking. Here I was thrown into the back of the police car while the officer began checking my information. Suddenly he turned around and said, "Didn't I give you enough warning last year when I picked you up here?" But he was as surprised as I was to have picked me up twice in exactly the same place, that he let me talk my way out of it this time too and drove me to a better place. Often, I also praised the police for stopping and checking on me up to three times a day "because by making it impossible for 'the bad guys' to hitchhike, the drivers can safely pick up the rest of us."

Although every tenth ride was with women, they often claimed that they had only picked me up because I posted a sign saying that I was not American. And even then, older ladies frequently wouldn't let me in the car until I showed them my passport, "since you look like Charles Manson" - even when I hitchhiked with my short-hair wig on for the first few years. Often older ladies would suddenly gorge on my long hair and pin it up. "Oh, how cute you would look with a haircut," I heard them say one after another. It is hard to imagine that such women had the courage to overcome their fears when they picked me up, despite all the crimewhich they did not associate with "foreigners".

Once I got a glimpse of what suppressed needs might be behind it, when I started sending out signals that were a bit too loving. A motorist on I-90 north of Chicago had just offered me the so-called love drug, MDMA, which makes you fall in love with all people. But the next ride I got was with a stiff 80-year-old woman who, because of my uncontrollable infatuation, couldn't help but be affected. Over the next few hours, she started acting like a teenager just fallen love, so it was a bit of a flat feeling we were both left with when the high wore off. Afterwards, I pondered at length whether such a small dose of powder every day could possibly make me the perfect vagabond but concluded that artificial stimulants would probably eventually reveal me in the form of dishonest vibrations. The only love drug that worked and counted was the genuine love I was persistently getting from other people.



Poor Celia, when she frightened held me at gunpoint during my first visit with her after a 50-mile bike ride from Mary's shack in Alabama. I had come to see her town, Notasulga, where blacks were outraged when it had recently come to light that for 40 years whites had been conducting a syphilis experiment on 400 poor black men who were unknowingly denied treatment with penicillin. So, Celia's fear of black anger was well founded.

Sometimes I was appalled at how much fear older women might have of me. One day, as I stood photographing an old white woman outside her ramshackle shack in Alabama's vast woods, she wanted to talk to me in her solitude. But she kept me at a safe distance the whole time with her gun. The result was an image that didn't make it into my book, but which a French curator discovered 30 years later as "art" and exhibited in Europe's leading photography museums. Just as the Dutch musician Marike Jager was inspired by it for her song about "Celia Trigger" and used the image on her album cover. When I saw how much fear the woman had, it became all the more important for me to win her trust through loving thinking. Indeed, I succeeded to such an extent that after several visits to her, the poor 87-year-old woman finally begged me fervently to drive her to Phoenix, Arizona. She wanted to go and die with her sister. I helped her board up the windows of the dilapidated shack, which she knew she would never see again, but she didn't want the surrounding blacks to move in. She was scared to death of my long hair and beard, but since she had no other way to get out there, she sat with a gun in her hand the whole way. She was so weak that I had to carry her every time she had to go inside along the way, but still she kept clinging to the gun. The car was so old that we could only go 40 miles an hour, so the 2,000 miles journey took us four days. She had been saving for years to get enough for gas, but she had no money for food, so I had to go out several times to steal carrots and other edibles along the road. Almost the entire trip she sat and talked about the racist Governor Wallace, and how she hoped he would become President before she died. I learned more about racism on that trip than I could have learned in a lifetime.



At the top, the 30-mile-long narrow curb I had to walk along every time on the noisy highway to get out of Chicago. And the spaghetti highways, often five stories high, that in many cities I had to crawl up and find my way around on walking - with no road signs for vagabonds - and then hope I'd ended up on the right one when someone picked me up - both of us at great risk of being fined by police for stopping there.

When, after my five years as a vagabond, I later spent 30 years of my life traveling in a very different unfree way as a lecturer, I have ended up driving many of the same routes I hitchhiked back then, over and over again. So in the car I've spent a lot of time pondering what I did right and where I failed, every time I drive past the places where memories surface of standing there for hours waiting for lifts. I still can't believe I made it this far around - 100,000 miles total in every state I could hitchhike. Only Alaska and Hawaii I didn't make it to then but have since flown there for my lectures. Averaging 30 miles an hour, I must have spent over 3,000 hours in the cars. Yet time flew by because I always had someone to talk to, whereas today, in my car-solitude, the same stretches seem endless. Back then, I could cover the 3,000 miles from coast to coast in four days (because I could sleep in the cars while driving), whereas every time since then it has taken me eight days to cover the same distance in my own car. Back then, I would go from San Francisco to New York to buy a pair of "Georgia 5000" shoes, because I knew they were a few dollars cheaper there - and along the way I always ended up saying yes to someone who took me to Florida instead and gave me a pair.

Driving the same stretches today, I myself - or my fellow Danish passengers - have often become my greatest admirers of what I accomplished back then. My American students, who know these roads, never understood how I could do it, and that I nevertheless kept returning to my friends or former lovers in these challenging giant cities. E.g., in a single freezing cold day, I managed to visit four former "girlfriends" in Chicago and St. Louis, walking 30 miles and hitchhiking 500 miles to reach them all.

From the diary February 28th, 1973, in North Chicago:

"After breakfast at Christian's I went over to see Denia Lewis, who was very happy to see me again. Her best friend Theresa had just been murdered. Hitched a ride south around noon. The police picked me up. After walking along the freeway 30 miles, I got various rides out of town, including a "straight" conscience objector who gave me his card. Then some long-haired rednecks. An Air Force guy drove me all the way to St. Louis. Looking for Sharon Lee's house. Finally found it.

Then went to Ann (Ruffner), who wasn't home. Finally found it. Went back to Ann, who was now home and took me to Carol and Chris."

After spending the night at Ann Ruffner's, two girls picked me up the next day and took me down to Mardi Gras in New Orleans to the heat of the South. Too often I hitchhiked to friends in vain, since I had no phone or other way to contact them in advance - and found myself lost and homeless in the abandoned suburbs. Chicago, for example, I returned to at least eight times in those five vagabond years, Detroit far more often, and New York no less than 28 times. Although on the way up to NYC I had to fight my way through "the shithole of the nation" - New Jersey's gigantic industrial sprawl of spaghetti highways, which I saw as an image of the blacks' struggle against what I, like them, perceived as a human-destroying "system".

Deeper needs

I am grateful that my father, the first year I was in the United States, sent me a camera with the words, "Why don't you send us home some pictures of all the interesting people you meet instead?" He was tired of both he and I spending so much time on the typically 70-page angry political letters I wrote home in my continuing paternity showdown. It was almost only in the letters to my father that I wrote so ideologically and rhetorically, while to most other friends I simply wrote about the experiences I actually had. I discovered this only recently by comparing the "tone" therein. So, my radicalization was perhaps, after all, mostly about puffing myself up to my father. As a priest, he preferred that I like him related to people in a more down-to-earth way than to ideas far removed from reality. In our correspondence he thus slowly turned me into "Che Guevara with a camera", as the famous war photographer Susan Meiselas later wrote about me.

But as a good vagabond, it could be distracting at the same time to "focus" photographically on the people I met along the way. When I started photographing in earnest, I did so in my own head in order to remember these fates, in other words as a kind of photographic diary, so that I didn't have to spend so much time describing them all in my diaries, which I spent far too much time doing in the first year. But when the photography started taking over, because I realized that I was creating a document of interest to a wider audience, it could be difficult to be fully present towards the people I was photographing while at the same time distancing myself from them in the process. To prevent this dishonesty from shining through, I tried to make it a rule to achieve intimacy, presence and understanding with my hosts by staying with them for several days before I naturally began photographing them.

Among the many mistakes I made as a vagabond - besides sometimes hastily unfolding my hitch-hiking sign and standing for hours with it upside down, unable to understand that no one was picking me up - was my incessant human failure when, after a few years, I got up the courage to hitchhike on the rural backroads of the South. Because then I could have trouble "focusing" on the deeper needs of my predominantly white drivers while scouting for the dilapidated black shacks on the side of the road. Since many of those with the greatest psychological need for an understanding conversation were also the greatest racists, I couldn't even let them know that I cared about the needs of blacks, too. And since it was usually on really deserted back roads, it also took an enormous amount of courage to be let off when I saw an exciting shack where there were often only people home at nighttime. Indeed, it could be hours before I could get a lift again on that stretch, and most poor blacks were too frightened for me to ask to spend the night with them. So, for both this or that reason I ended up staying put and continuing the conversation with the driver in the car but remembering where I had seen this or that interesting shack. With the result that, with my continued "on saying yes" way of travelling, thousands of miles of hitchhiking usually passed before I could return, after which the situation often repeated itself, so that I felt that even with the new driver I could not afford to get off. I still have booklets with notes of all the places I wanted to return to but didn't get to during the vagabond



Above, Glynn and Vicky, when I brought my Danish family to stay with them in 1986. I have no photos of them from the vagabond years, since I could rarely afford to photograph the whites with the only 72 photos, I had available weekly from the sale of blood plasma. Below Hugh, who I stayed with before he went to prison for the burglary of Glynn's and other homes.

years - and by the time I finally returned in my own car 3-4 years later in 1978 to give my book to all those I had photographed, it was already too late in many places. Many of the poor blacks moved out of their historic shacks and into the unphotogenic plastic trailers in the late 70s. So "genuine" vagabonding could be both a plus and a minus for the development of "American Pictures" - and certainly for portraying an important historical period satisfactorily.

Glynn and Vicky

The concept of time is also part of my definition of "the good vagabond". That is, to follow the people I met then through life to see how they later evolved - and in so doing, perhaps find the deeper truth they embodied. Since my images of them brought us together almost symbiotically, the mere fact that they appeared in my work has been all the more reason to revisit them throughout my life.

Once, the hippie couple Glynn and Vicky Queen had picked me up in their VW bus outside Raleigh. That was in 1973, in the years when, whenever I saw a VW van in the horizon, I knew I was always getting a lift. There weren't many hippies left at the time, but progress was a little slower here in the South. They were originally from Virginia but had both broken with their families because they were racist and now had no white friends at all because they had started hanging out with the blacks (whom I still referred to in the diary as "negroes" in 1973.) They now invited me out to their little farmhouse, which the long-haired Glynn had rented from an uncle and put a few hippie sheds on. It was to turn into a photographic breakthrough for me to discover the blacks around here in the tobacco fields. I had originally hitchhiked from the North to North Carolina to see the tobacco harvest out there in the poor eastern NC but had ended up in the more affluent Greensboro with Tony, who introduced me to so many exciting educated middle-class blacks that I was now several months late for the tobacco harvest. Typical of me to be late everywhere when I had a goal. But I was not to regret it as Tony, with his deep insight into black and white psychology, became my lifelong and indispensable companion as a lecturer.

But I wouldn't eventually have "made it" without the white hippie Glynn either. For every night all his poor tobacco-working friends would come and drink beer with him, and it was actually through these contacts that I took many of my best pictures in the "black belt" that ran from the tobacco fields there down through the cotton and sugar cane fields further down south. Pictures that would otherwise have been impossible for me to take, as hitchhiking was not an easy option on these desolate back roads.

At the time, Glynn and Vicky were vegetarians and strongly left-wing. But every time I visited them since, small changes had taken place. Even on my first return in 1978 to give my book to those I had photographed, I noticed that they had become more prosperous on their plot of land, and Glynn was now driving around with an ice cream van selling ice cream to the poor black children. And when I came to live with them in 1985 with my wife and our now five-year-old son, Daniel, they had gotten a couple of kids he could play with. Fine, but now Glynn's long hair was gone because he had a steady job, and my vegetarian wife was disappointed that meat was now on the table too. It was through them that I found my black friends in this vast forest area for the first few years, where they were constantly moving around to new shacks (left by white people who had moved) whenever their old ones burned down after chimney fires. So, I was shocked to discover that their black friends now never came to their house anymore. "They turned niggers on us!" replied Glynn, a little hesitantly, knowing full well that I didn't like such racist language. It began with the fact that one of their friends (Hugh, who in "American Pictures" is in bed at the top of page 184) had robbed them of everything. Hugh later served 25 years in Central Prison in Raleigh, where I never managed to visit him. Now that I had a car of my own, however, I was able to find all my black friends without Glynn's help, and I am still visiting them today.

Glynn and Vicky have since grown richer and richer, eventually turning their little rotten farmhouse into a small chateau, while Lefus, and all the other blacks in the area have grown poorer and poorer. Why? Well, as Glynn told us, when in 1995 I brought Danish high school student Ulla Dalum to live with them again, because now, like the other



Glynn and Vicky had an enormous impact on American pictures. At drinking parties in their living room here, I met Lep Whitley, who was to become my lifelong friend, on the very first night. At left, Lep's girlfriend, Carolyn, who was later murdered.



Lep had been in prison as a gangster in New York and had 15 children with 15 different women. He appears in many places on my slideshow. Glynn and Lep had been best friends, but when in 1986 I lured the reluctant Glynn to visit Lep and his sweet wife, Gertrude, who "saved" him from his criminal past, they hadn't seen each other in 13 years, even though Lep's poor trailer park was only a few miles from Glynn and Vicky's now large extended estate.



The muscular Lep, who had worked hard to expand Glynn's land, and I measure over the years strength and hairiness, here in 1986, in 1994 and in 2007. Last he was in deep mourning after Gertrude's death from cancer - the woman who had saved his life. During my visit in 2009, he had a new girlfriend and had again been "saved". Together they now attend the large integrated evangelical megachurches.



Lep took me to a myriad of the local blacks who became part of American Pictures, and friends for life. But of greatest significance was his father, Lefus, who has been exhibited in museums throughout Europe. Every year since when I returned, Lefus was always lying dead drunk in another shack as he burned off the old ones in chimney or stove fires.



My "honest" images of Lefus made it difficult to get my show into American high schools, which feared they would intensify students' negative prejudices about blacks as "lazy" and "apathetic." But that images can lie even for the photographer was also exemplified by Lefus. When I traveled around in 2003 to video record my friends' own perception of their lives, as opposed to MY interpretations in American Pictures, the truth about Lefus dawned on me. Contrary to the image of a "lazy drunk nigger" with broken family and so on, everyone confirmed to me that Lefus had never lost a single day's work in his life. He started drinking on weekends as a sharecropper but lost the land when the white farmers forced out the black farmers. Then, as a construction worker, he was picked up every morning at five o'clock by the crew and driven to Raleigh, where he built all the skyscrapers seen in the capital today. It was only after quitting time that he started drinking - that is, when I visited him in the evening. My superficiality consisted in the fact that I had never stayed with him for 24 hours, but with his son Lep. During each visit they lived in a new dilapidated shack, but had always had the closest family relationship, just as the family still meet today every Sunday. Yes, it was indeed Lefus who built America, I realize today. So how could I lie to myself and others for 30 years with my stigmatizing image? My hero died March 17, 2004





Leps søskende i 1973, Kenney (født 1969), Gween (født 1968) og Terry (født 1966).

like the other whites, he only employed Mexicans, and all the blacks in the tobacco fields had likewise been replaced by Mexicans. And now that he had only white friends and a growing arsenal of guns, he had become a mirror image of the fearful racism he had reacted so strongly against as a young hippie. He had even become the local leader of the Republican Party, dragging us along to meet his Republican friends. Here he stood over their cozy barbecues and complained to Ulla and me about all the taxes they had to pay and all the welfare the blacks get (that is, because he and his employer friends won't give the blacks jobs anymore!) But it was good for me to live with Glynn again, for I had been raging against the Republicans for the past year over their obstruction of Clinton's policies to such an extent that they had gradually become a faceless enemy for me. And because I cared so much for Glynn and his white friends, I had the opportunity to empathize with the human being behind the depressing Republican facade in today's United States. For the transformation I have seen Glynn and Vicky and many others of my generation go through over the years paralleled the historical evolution white America had gone through - right up to Trump.



Jeg kunne skrive en hel bog om blot denne familie, som Glynn og Vicky dengang førte mig ind i. Øverst sammen med moren Mosel, da de i 1978 fik overrakt min bog, som Gween står med. Og til venstre ses Gween mere sig over billederne af sig selv i 2003. Som dataspecialist er det hende, der e-mailer mig de seneste nyheder, nu hvor jeg selv er blevet pensionist og ikke længere kan besøge dem hvert år. For kun over tid lærer man sandheden om mennesker at kende.

DARKNESS AT NOON



Baton Rouge, La

36 år efter at jeg tog dette billede, fotograferede jeg den samme familie det samme sted under disse larmende "højveje" i Baton Rouge under fortravlede hvide bilister og gungrende lastvognstog – i sandhed billeder af en fastlåst underklasse generation efter generation.

DARKNESS AT NOON



In contempt of mankind: while two thirds of mankind is starving, the super powers waste billions trying to reach the moon. Here a moon rocket is being sent up while an old black man sits in front of his shack with no electricity or water - too weak from malnutrition and disease to lift his head to see the rocket rising over his "house".
Titusville, Florida

Jeg var blaffet hele vejen fra Norden ned for at se denne raketopsendelse, og når man betænker, hvor ofte disse blev udsat grundet dårligt vejr, er det egentlig utroligt, at det lykkedes. Jeg var så glad bagefter, at jeg stolt blaffede de 2.000 kilometer op til Marly i New York for at fortælle hende om det.

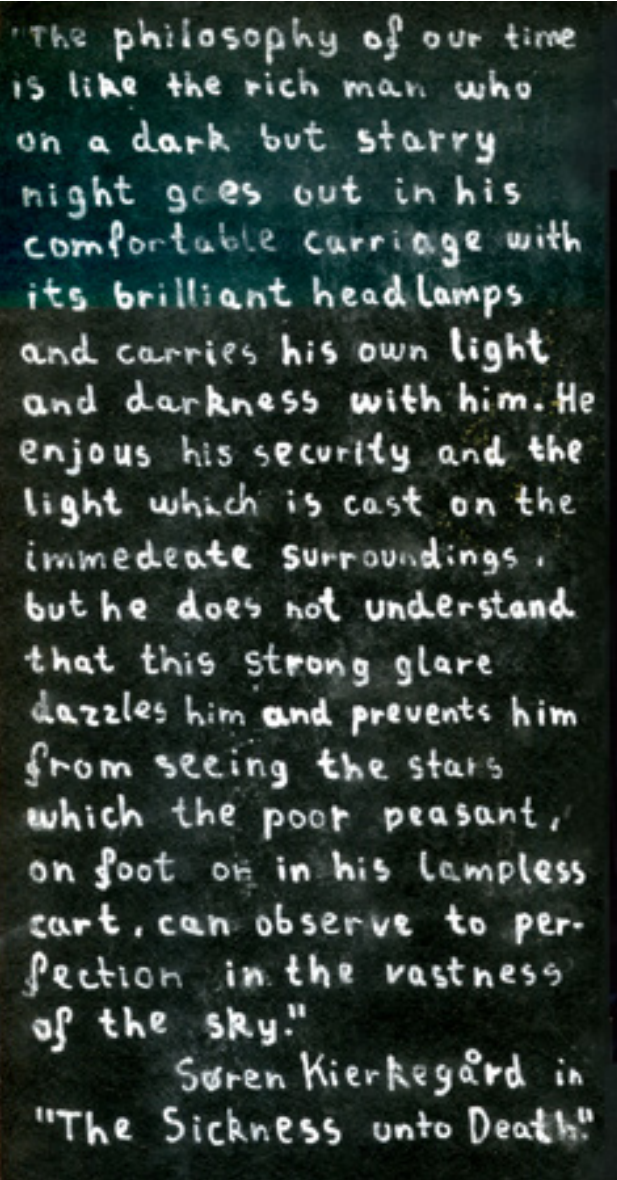
Glynn died in 2012 of the hippie disease hepatitis C, but Vicky told me after the election that she had voted for Trump just as Glynn - the old hippie - would have done. Whereby they once again contributed to widening the economic gap between blacks and whites that had exploded ever since the relative equality of my vagabond years. It was this growing gap I could see so clearly every time I visited Glynn's old black friend, Lep, who wasn't even aware that Glynn still lived only half a mile from him. In their little village, I had truly become the messenger between black and white America - the journey I had embarked on as a vagabond - but the deeper meaning of which I can only see the real value of through the passage of years.

Through the fourth dimension of vagabonding - with the time factor included - I had slowly transformed myself from Kierkegaard's "tragic revolutionary hero" who can sacrifice the people around him for a higher good, to his "road-knight of faith" who could be unaffected by, and even forgive, the people he met on my road murdering and harming each other - in the firm belief that this absurdity could only be prevented by a faith in God's love.

So let me end this chapter with a quote from Søren Kierkegaard that I used in the illustrated picture books I travelled with. I put the quote next to my picture of a poor black man sitting outside his shack as a moon rocket rises over his house, unaware of it because he had no electricity or radio to inform him of it. I write it in English because it was on the highway between eloids and morlocks that I first learned to understand a little of Kierkegaard, as he was handed down to me by both my enlightened and not-so-enlightened drivers:

"The philosophy of our time is like the rich man who on a dark, but starry night goes out in his comfortable carriage with its brilliant headlights and carries his own light and darkness with him. He enjoys his security and the light, which is cast on the immediate surroundings, but he does not understand that this strong glare dazzles him and prevents him from seeing the stars which the poor peasant, on foot or in his lampless cart, can observe to perfection in the vastness of the sky."

Soren Kierkegaard in "The Sickness unto Death."



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Søren Kierkegaard in "The Sickness unto Death."