The Huguenots Arrive

The Canadian Civil War, #2

by William Wresch, 1947–

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In 1685 Henry the XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes that protected Protestant rights in France. Within a decade the one million Huguenots in France were killed, converted, or forced into exile in Germany, Holland, England, and the New World. In this second volume of the series, the Huguenot settlements in Louisiana are begun, setting the stage for the civil war that will tear Canada apart centuries later.

Chapter 1

Versailles Pass.

The security outside the National Cathedral was unbelievable. Our car was stopped three full blocks from the church, and we sat in a long line while each car was searched and each occupant questioned. Being a complete idiot, I had two large suitcases in the back of my Citroen. It had seemed like a good idea yesterday—do all my packing early, so all we would have to do after church is go

to Elise's apartment, get her loaded up, and then take off for Philadelphia. Now I could see that anyone with baggage of any kind was being asked to open it. Nobody else had any bags as big as mine, so I could already imagine how suspicious my suitcases would look.

Slowly we moved up in line while I thought through the explanation I would give the police. Elise was silent as well. Normally she would have been talking nonstop, but this morning she sat in total silence. Of course she had lots to think about too—her new job, the developing conflict in her country, and the trip she was about to take to the United States to meet the family of a man who had asked her to marry him. I wondered what the priority order was for those three discussion topics. Was I anywhere near the top of the list?

"I should have left earlier," I said, as much to break the silence as anything else. After all, it was pretty obvious I should have left earlier. "I hadn't given any thought to this kind of security."

"Nobody has," she answered. "We are in Green Bay, in the middle of a country that has been at peace for nearly a century. None of us know what we are doing—not us, and not the police." I think I would have felt better if there had been anger in her voice, or impatience, but all I heard was a deep sadness.

I edged the car forward, and finally we reached the inspection point. Four cops ran mirrors under the car and looked in all the windows. One of them came to my window and asked for an ID, but it was Elise who answered him.

"Officer, I am with the Interior Ministry." She reached over me to hand him her identification. He looked at her identification and immediately straightened.

"Yes, Doctor DuPry. Good morning, madam."

"Good morning, officer. Is there anything else you need to see, or may we proceed to the service?"

"Please proceed, madam." He made some notes on a clipboard he carried and motioned for the other officers to move on to the next car. I didn't waste any time getting out of there. I drove the last blocks and parked in the lot at the bottom of Cathedral Hill. I was sad to see there were even more concrete blast barriers around the church than there had been two days before. How bad have things gotten when churches have become targets?

Elise and I walked the winding pathway up the hill as we had done so many Sundays in the past, she taking my arm, and waving periodically to people she knew. Many others had made it past the police gauntlet and were approaching the cathedral from several pathways. They were all subdued in their demeanor, but, there was something else different. It took me a minute to place it. Then I noticed the women. They always wore traditional long dresses for this service, but now every dress was the same color—white. Elise's gown was white cotton with long sleeves. It might have been a wedding dress from the past century, and I almost made a comment on it when she had put it on that morning, hoping that she was wearing the dress to tell me she had made up her mind—that her answer to my proposal was "yes." But she had stayed busy during the last hour before we left for church, so there was no time that felt right to ask. Now I could see every woman had made the same decision. Had they called each other? Somehow the word had gotten out. Now a thousand women were going to church as if each were a bride—or a Huguenot.

Elise's mother and sisters—also in long white dresses—waited for us in the family pew. I was relieved to see that her father wore the traditional dark suit and ruffled white shirt, the same outfit I had worn to church. Whatever was being communicated by the wardrobe decisions of the day, men had been permitted to dress as they always did. After brief prayers, we sat back in the pew and I had a chance to look around the church. It took me a minute, but then I saw the man on the tower with the large television camera. I should have guessed the service would be televised. With Claude Jolliet now as Information Minister, the service would probably be rebroadcast for days until every person in the country had seen the service and had understood the message of the dresses. It seemed to me the nobility of Canada was extending a hand—you Huguenots blew up a beautiful cathedral in Biloxi, they said, but you are French and we are French and we will find a way to work through this.

I took Elise's hand and leaned over to whisper to her. "I think I understand the white dresses now. Do you think the Huguenots will recognize the gesture?"

"Some of them will understand, I am sure of it." She squeezed my hand for emphasis. "I hate their philosophy, but we are all French. We will keep trying until we find a way for everyone to accept that."

The rest of the service went on as usual. The homily was directed as you would guess—forgiveness and peace. I think the most striking part of the service was communion. As we all walked down the center aisle to receive the host we must have looked like an endless stream of wedding couples. And I wasn't the only one who noticed. I could see several husbands and wives looking at each other, even smiling and joking quietly about their appearance. It was a nice moment and broke much of the tension.

After the service Elise's family and many of her friends followed us out to our car to say goodbye. We had told everyone we would be gone between one week and three (depending upon how my parents reacted to Elise it might even be less, but I never said that to anyone), so they wanted to see us off. There were long hugs for Elise and warm handshakes for me. I looked carefully to see how Elise's parents were taking this trip with me and the possibility of our engagement, but all I sensed was affection for her and trust that she would make the best decision. Elise's mother even gave me a small gift to pass along to my mother, as a gesture of friendship. I thought that was pretty considerate, and told her so.

Finally we got into my car and drove back to Elise's apartment to load up her things. I quickly learned that Elise did not travel light. She had three suitcases ready right away, and filled two more while I took her cases out to the car. I was glad I had a full-sized Citroen.

On my fourth trip out to the car I had one of those memory flashbacks you sometimes experience. I had filled a car like this before. I was seventeen and going off to the University of Virginia. I was really proud that my folks were not taking me to college, but were letting me go off on my own. Since I was the youngest of five kids I think they were probably tired of taking yet another child off to school, but that was not how I interpreted it at the time. I surmised that they were especially satisfied with my maturity and so trusted me to make this trip on my own. I had spent all day Saturday taking things out to my car, making decisions about what to take and what to leave—what would be part of my new adult life

and what would be relegated to my childhood—and then Sunday after mass I shook hands with my dad, kissed my mother good bye and headed south down I95. I was on my own, heading to a new life in Virginia.

A dozen years older now, I was set to make another trip after mass, but that was where most of the similarities ended. This time the trip was only partly about me. It was mostly about Elise. Would my parents accept a French woman? And then there was the political situation. Had I thought one bit about the larger world as I had headed off to college? No, I had only thought about me and about my personal adventure. If there were national issues of consequence in the early 90s, I didn't know about them. Now I knew our trip would be experienced in the context of a possible war. Elise's country was on the verge of breakup. Two years ago, when I had first moved to Green Bay, I would have relished the prospect. Now I had more sympathy for the disaster that seemed so imminent.

While loading the car made me more introspective, it seemed to lift Elise's spirits. She was happier now that she was active. She carried the last bag out to the car, gave me a big kiss, and said, "Now let's go meet that big, beautiful family in Philadelphia."

And with that we started the trip. As usual, Elise acted as tour guide while I drove. All the way down to Chicago she had something to say about every community we passed, describing its history or its people, or friends she had there. I relaxed, listening to the joy in her voice. She was having fun, and so was I. So neither of us mentioned what we were looking for as we drove—Huguenot families moving south. Two days earlier, before Claude Jolliet had turned national television into an endless series of church services, the last news broadcast to air had shown streams of cars taking Protestants south and Catholics north as each group hurried to the safety of its own kind. So far, we hadn't seen any special traffic on the road.

Even as we drove through Chicago, there didn't seem to be any more traffic than usual for a Sunday afternoon. As always, people drove about twenty miles over the limit, taking shaky French engineering faster than I was willing to trust it, while construction crews dug up yet another section of the roadway in an endless effort to build and rebuild the highway system down there. In short, Chicago looked like Chicago. We were both relieved.

By the time we got to Indiana it was approaching dinner time and I was looking for a place to spend the night. Truth be told, I was in no hurry to get to Philadelphia. I had called home the night before to tell my folks we were coming, and I had the great fortune that both were home and Mom quickly put me on the speaker phone so Dad could hear and I wouldn't have to repeat myself. At first they thought I was coming home because of the trouble in Canada, and they said how relieved they were that I was getting out of danger. Then I said I was just coming home for a visit and that I was bringing Elise home to meet them. They were so stunned they didn't know what to say, so I took advantage of their silence to give them a quick summary of my itinerary and then tell them I had to go. I had the phone hung up before either could say another word. What they were thinking at this point I didn't know, but I was willing to wait an extra day to find out.

Elise saw a sign for South Bend and suggested we look for some place near Notre Dame. It seemed like a great idea to me. I had seen their famous lacrosse

team on TV many times, but had never seen the campus. We found a nice hotel just off campus and decided to take a walk around the place before dinner. It really is a beautiful campus. It's no University of Virginia, but it's not bad for the French.

"Do you notice anything special about this campus?" I asked Elise. We were in the middle of the campus, walking between the two main rows of buildings.

"I like the way all the buildings hold the same style and even the same color brick." She replied. "They obviously put a lot of planning into the place."

"Actually I was thinking about something else special about the campus. Unlike your college, this one is above ground." That got me a gentle punch on the shoulder. "But I don't suppose I should complain. Those underground walkways will keep me a bit warmer this winter."

"So you are taking the job?" I just had time to nod a "yes" when she wrapped both her arms around me and gave me a kiss. Obviously I had given the right answer. And it was really the only answer that made sense. I couldn't keep working for my father forever, and the job at the National University was the right one for me. It gave me access to additional archives and also put me in contact with a good group of scholars. And, I should be honest about it, the job gave me another reason to be near Elise. I had called the department chair the day before to accept the job, and had been waiting for the right time to tell Elise. Based on the hug I was getting, I had picked a good time.

There's not much more to say about South Bend. We had a great dinner and a great night, and the next morning we were on the road again. Here is where things got a bit tricky. By mid-afternoon, it was my goal to be at Fort Duquesne. This could be problematic from at least two perspectives. First, there really aren't all that many people who like walking around old forts. I might bore Elise. Second, the fort had different meanings to each of us. To the French, this is where they had stood up to two invasions by George Washington and assorted British idiots wandering the woods in red uniforms. To Americans, this is where we had taken our chance on taking the Ohio Valley, and had lost badly—twice. Elise and I might love each other, but we were two different nationalities and nothing emphasized that more than Fort Duquesne. A smart man would have driven right past. But much of my PhD dissertation was based on the history of those battles. I could no more drive past than a drunk can walk past a bar.

I began to think through what I would say to Elise about stopping there, when things began to get out of hand. We were about ten miles west of Duquesne at this point, and more pertinently, about eighty miles west of the border. That's when the first squad car came flying past us down the highway. It is not unusual to see police on the highway, of course, but this one was really moving. I never would have driven a French car that fast, no matter how much extra suspension they must have put into it before giving it to the police. We just had time to look at each other and comment on how fast the car had been moving, when another one went by at the same speed. I had pulled off onto the edge of the highway and gave the road a very long look before I pulled back into traffic. Obviously something was going on.

"Have you heard anything from the ministry about Duquesne?" I asked.

“There is a sizable Huguenot population there, but no terrorist groups that we are aware of.” Elise scanned the horizon on all directions looking to see where the problem might be. “The only problem I am aware of is unemployment as the steel industry shrinks. Some of the factories have moved south.” We were approaching the outskirts of town now, and both of us looked for smoke or other signs of trouble. I didn’t see anything.

At this point a column of trucks carrying troops got onto the highway headed east. “Shawn, do you mind following those trucks? I don’t know if anyone else from the Ministry is in the area. I should at least see where they are going.”

I fell into line behind the last truck. “Do you think there is any chance they are just on routine maneuvers?”

“Look at the soldiers, Shawn. Each one is holding a rifle, and the rifles have ammunition clips in them. We can hope the clips are empty, but I fear they are not. These men don’t have the look of men out for a Sunday drive.” She was right, of course. The men were packed into the truck past what I am sure its usual capacity is, and each was holding a rifle in both hands. A few of them appeared to be talking to each other, but most were silent, and none of them were looking back at us or at any place else outside the truck. These men were in a serious mood.

I expected to follow the convoy into Duquesne, but they continued past, headed for the border. Now I began to get nervous. Were we at war? I couldn’t imagine how the U.S. could have gotten into another war with Canada just since last Thursday, but why else would hundreds of troops be headed for the mountain passes into Pennsylvania? I stayed behind the last truck in the convoy as we began to wind through the hills of the border region. Finally, just a mile or two from the border crossing, the convoy pulled onto a wayside and stopped.

Elise asked me to drive to the front of the convoy to where the command vehicle was. I was to stay with the car while she walked back to speak with the officers. She seemed a strange sight amongst all the khaki uniforms. As was her habit, she had worn a long skirt, but today her dress was pink with short sleeves. It was a spring dress for a woman on vacation. Here she was, pink dress and all, walking straight up to the officer in charge. She had her identification out, but somehow, the minute he saw her, the officer recognized her as one of the nobility, and he straightened to attention. They spoke for a few minutes, then she shook his hand and separated herself a few steps from the soldiers who were gathering around their officers.

Before she had taken three steps she had her cell phone out and began a long conversation with someone. I stared through the window of the car, trying to determine her mood. Angry? Fearful? No, it appeared more as if she were giving a report. I could see her looking up the road, and then back at the convoy. At one point it seemed like she was counting the trucks or the troops, but I couldn’t be sure. Then after about ten minutes she walked back toward the commanding soldier and handed him her cell phone. There were too many soldiers around for me to see him at this point, but I could catch glimpses of him talking into the phone, and once I thought I saw him talking to Elise again. Meanwhile the other officers got the men into lines by the side of the road, with one group backing a truck across the highway below the wayside. It appeared the pass was now closed.

I suppose I should have been nervous during all this. I was an American surrounded by hundreds of French troops. If we were at war, I was on the wrong side of the border. But I was really more curious than anything else. What was going on? I did reach into my sport coat to be sure my passport and visa were in the pocket. They, and Elise, were my best defense if things had gotten bad.

After about fifteen minutes I saw Elise separate herself from the soldiers again and carry on another conversation on her cell phone. Once again she appeared matter of fact. Whatever was happening had not made her angry or concerned. Finally she finished her conversation and walked back over to me.

"Are we at war?" I asked when she got back into the car.

"No, thank God. It appears there was a problem at the border post last night, and things got a bit carried away. The Interior Ministry and the Defense Ministry agreed it might be best to close this border crossing for a few days while things quieted down."

"Should I drive us back to Duquesne?"

"No, we will be able to cross. The major will be sending a couple men along with us to clarify things with the soldiers on the border."

"Is that what you were talking to him about?"

"No, we had other things to discuss, things I really can't talk about, Shawn." I could certainly understand that, and was about to say so when two soldiers approached the car. One was a lieutenant and the other a sergeant. Both got into the back seat. Elise did all the introductions. I was Messieur Professor from the National University. No mention was made of the fact that I was an American, and I kept my mouth shut about it. Both men were obviously deferential to Elise. While she was a civilian, I had the impression her ministry post gave her a higher ranking than them, or maybe it was her family name, which they obviously recognized.

The lieutenant told me I could drive up to the border, but that I should keep my speed slow—no more than forty kilometers an hour, so none of the troops we were passing got nervous. This of course made *me* very nervous, but that may not have been a bad thing. I moved slowly and watched carefully as we wound our way up to the border. Around the first bend I saw a squad car with its light still flashing. I guessed he had been the roadblock until the troops had arrived. Still farther I saw the first military vehicles. They were sitting empty along the highway. Where the troops were I didn't know and didn't ask.

We were nearly to the top of the pass when I saw the first smoke. I could see it above the trees first. Then when I came around the last bend I saw the source. Some number of cars were still burning and the building that must have been the border post was mostly gone. Cars that hadn't burned were abandoned all over the road making it hard for me to find a path through them.

"If you drive over on the right shoulder, you can get to where a temporary station has been established," the lieutenant told me.

"No, I need to speak with the senior immigration people here." Elise replied. "We need to go to where they are. Can you get us through this mess?" she asked the soldiers.

"Yes, madam." They both got out of the car, shouted to a few other soldiers, got some directions, and then walked in front of our car, winding a pathway through

the cars and over a sidewalk to a hillside near where the border post had been. As I got closer I could see that a hundred or more people were sitting and lying on a hillside while dozens of policemen and several soldiers stood guard. Off to one side a group of men were gathered at the back of a truck, using the tailgate as a table. They were talking, but barely in whispers. It was obvious I was looking at exhausted men.

"Please wait for me here," Elise asked. "I need to speak with these men." If she had looked incongruous standing with the soldiers down in the valley, she looked like a vision from another world standing among these men, all of whom were disheveled and many of whom were dirty from the smoke of the fires. Somehow they understood her rank as she approached, and all the men stood straighter. She shook hands all around, but I could see one man hesitate to take her hand, motioning that his own hand was still black from the smoke. She took his hand anyway, and then stood talking with them. Once again she got out her cell phone and talked briefly with someone before handing the phone to the one man in the group who still wore a tie. While he spoke on the phone, she asked questions of another man and he pointed to a variety of places around them before turning to the crowd of people on the hillside and giving her a long description of them. All of this took maybe ten minutes, then the man with the tie finished his phone conversation and started to give her phone back to her. She motioned for him to keep it, shook hands all around again, and then came back to the car.

"It looks like they had a rough night," I said as she got back in the car.

"Yes, some fool with rumors. A large group of Huguenots were going through customs, trying to get to the U.S. Someone said something stupid, someone else claimed no Huguenots were being allowed out of the country, and the next thing they knew fists were flying and the building was on fire. Luckily no one had a gun."

"What do we do next?"

"We drive over to America."

"What about passport checks? What about your cell phone?"

"They lost a lot of their communications gear last night. My cell phone is a lot more valuable to them than it is to me. As for passport checks, their stamps burned up in the fire. They said we could just drive over to the American station if we wished."

"Do you still want to go?" I looked carefully at her as I asked. I had yet to see any emotion from her. She seemed to be handling this event as if she were scheduling overtime at the office, or making routine work assignments. Was she really that comfortable?

"What happened here was a moment's insanity. There are good people working here. They can take care of this without me. I want to meet your family. Most of all, right now I want to get across the border and down from this pass so I don't have to smell burning cars or see the faces on those people." At the latter she closed her eyes, and I thought for a moment that she might cry, but she held on.

I drove farther down the sidewalk until I was around the ruins of the border post. Once on the far side I dropped down onto the road again, and covered the last few yards until the gate. The lieutenant we had driven up to the post was already at the gate and raised it as we approached. He stood on Elise's side of the

car, saluting as we passed. Elise answered his salute with a smile and a wave from her soot-encrusted hand, and with that we were out of Canada and back in my America.

There is almost nothing to say about the immigration people on the American side. They were fully staffed and only had the two of us to process, so things went pretty fast. They wanted to chat a bit, and made a comment about seeing French troops. Were there others around? They asked. Neither of us answered directly. I just said that it looked like things were under control now. The immigration people didn't ask anything else, and we were heading down the mountains within ten minutes.

We could have pushed on for Philadelphia and made it by nine or ten, but I think we had both had enough for the day, so I looked around for a mountain resort near the highway, and found one with a vacancy within half an hour. I called home while Elise washed up and changed. My folks were excited to hear from me and very surprised that we had made it through the pass. The local TV station was saying that dozens had been killed and fighting still raged. I explained that we had just been through the pass. No one had been killed and there was no fighting.

Elise could hear my end of the conversation and shook her head. "Four people were killed, and eight or ten injured. The ambulances had taken them all away before we arrived." I was dumbfounded. She had said nothing before. I passed the clarification on to my folks, and then told them we would arrive around dinnertime tomorrow.

"I'm sorry" was the only thing I could think to say after I hung up. I gave Elise a hug and we stood in the middle of the hotel room for a long time. What else was there to say? Finally we went out to the hotel restaurant. It had an outdoor terrace with a beautiful view of the valleys to the east. Under normal circumstances we would have really loved the view. But while both of us were facing east to see the hilltops glowing under the setting sun, we were both thinking about what was behind us, back up the mountain.

Worse yet, the other tables gradually filled with other diners, all of whom were talking excitedly about "the battle at Versailles Pass." Some had dozens dead, others hundreds. One man had American troops on the way to help the Huguenots before they were slaughtered by the French. A couple folks wondered aloud if they were safe being this close to the border. Elise and I had eaten most of meal by now, and while we had begun with little appetite, we had even less now. Finally we just looked at each other and knew it was time to leave. We put down our forks and wound our way back across the terrace. As we neared the exit I couldn't help myself. I turned back to the diners.

"Folks, we were just in Versailles Pass an hour ago. There is no battle. There was a riot and four people were killed. The police have everything under control. What happened there is over."

"But the television said…" one man started to object.

"Sir, you are free to believe anything you care to believe. But I am telling you we were just there an hour ago. We saw no battle." It looked like a couple others wanted to object or raise questions, but I had no interest in arguing with anyone. I

followed Elise out of the dining area, stopping just long enough to ask the maitre d to send a bottle of Riesling to our room.

Our room had a balcony and Elise and I spent the next several hours sitting there drinking the wine and watching the sun line move up the valley to our east until just the tree tops were lit across the way. I am not sure we said twenty words between us during those hours. When Elise finally did talk, I was disappointed, but not surprised in her topic.

“I am not sure how long I can stay in Philadelphia, Shawn. I had hoped that things would settle down, but it looks like they are getting worse."

“How does this sound. Today is Monday. We spend two or three days in Philadelphia, then drive up to New York for the weekend. I think you will like the city. We see some shows, do some shopping, attend an early mass at St. Patrick's, and then head back to Green Bay. I’ll have you home by next Monday night. Would that work for you?”

“And your family will not be upset that we would leave so quickly?"

“Of course they will be upset. The minute they see you they will want you to stay forever, but they will understand.” I hoped what I was saying about my family was at least partly true, but it worked for the moment. I got a very long kiss.

Chapter 2

Philadelphia and New York.

What was our week in the U.S. like? Actually it was far better than I had expected. I suppose I should have known Elise would charm everyone, but I had my doubts about how a French woman would be accepted.

Things got off to a good start in Philadelphia. We got to town in the early afternoon, and rather than go straight to my house, I took Elise down to the historic district so she could see Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. As luck would have it, we got there in time for the three o’clock re-enactment when some actors do a twenty minute debate summarizing the first Continental Congress in 1814. If you haven’t seen it, you will discover that it is pretty well done. The material is predictable—the British led us into two failed campaigns into the Ohio Valley (no mention of Washington’s role), they talked us into a terrible attack in Quebec, and then got us slaughtered in the Battle of New Orleans. If that is the best they can do as our leaders, who needs them? It is the usual distortion of history you would expect from politicians, but at least the actors use the exact language of the times—all the historical inaccuracies are accurately retold.

Elise was very taken with Andrew Jackson. I explained to her that most of his inaugural address was plagiarized from Thomas Jefferson, but she didn’t seem to mind. A speech about honor and freedom stolen from a slave holder was too much for me, but she insisted Jackson was our best president. I began to wonder if there was some family connection—one more thing for me to research between snowstorms in Green Bay.

By six I could no longer put off going home. I pulled up to our brownstone off Rittenhouse Square hoping Elise would like the place. Before I could say anything, however, the front door opened and half the population of Philadelphia emerged. Not only was my mother and father there, but so were both my sisters, both my brothers, and all my in-laws and nieces and nephews. If your last name was Murphy, you were in Rittenhouse Square that evening.

I very quickly learned four things. First, my mother could speak French. Who knew? All the men had to know French because of our business, but I had never heard my mother speak it. As it turned out, she was very good. Second, I learned that Elise spoke English. We had never spoken English to each other, but I assumed she probably knew a little English from school classes. But she had never been to the U.S. before, so I had no real expectations. But she was good! Third, everyone loved Elise. She was introduced to each one, and she had nice things to say about all the children, and gifts for my mother from her mother and gifts for my sisters and sisters-in-laws from herself (I have no idea how she knew how many there were, much less their names. I have never talked about them.) Fourth, everyone in the family was certain that she was far too good for me. Well, who can argue that?

That first evening went by in a blur. The dining room table looked better than it did at Christmas time, and it was extended out clear into the parlor. We sat for hours and talked and Elise was charming and beautiful through it all.

The next day I discovered that the women of the family had claimed Elise and were going to take her around town. I recognized Wanamakers on the list of destinations, but the rest were a mystery to me. In any case, she seemed happy with the itinerary, and was gone with the rest by ten. I sat at the kitchen table, had a second cup of coffee, and wondered what to do with my day. It was then that I got the phone call that led to the only uncomfortable time on the trip. My father wanted me to have lunch with him at the Capitol. He had an appointment with Senator Dodson, and since I was in town, would I like to join him? I agreed.

Senator Dodson was someone we had known since he was Congressman Dodson. He was now the senior senator from Pennsylvania and had helped us with a number of business matters over the years. We had helped him with his campaigns. Some critics would say we paid him to do our bidding, but it wasn't quite that simple. He sometimes voted against our interests. But he always listened to our side of the story and usually helped us, especially on international trade issues. I knew my father lunched with him several times a year, and they talked about golfing together, but I think that had just happened once. So how would I characterize their relationship? They were business acquaintances of long standing.

I arranged to meet my father in one of the parking garages near the Capitol – one of the many garages hidden under the lawns along the Delaware. I have always appreciated the job they have done in keeping the area along the river green, but the price you pay is that you always park underground. I had no trouble finding my father's limo and we quickly passed through a variety of security checks on our way to the Senate Dining room. The dining room was incredibly opulent, but then, that was its point – to make those who were invited

to dine there feel special. Our invitation to join the Senator there was a kind of gift from him to us.

He and a young aide were waiting for us when we arrived, which surprised me a lot. I don't know the man well, but he seemed the kind to make us wait a bit so he could make an entrance. But this time he was there before us, a waiter at his elbow to take us immediately to our seats. My next surprise was that he did not begin the meal with apologies for having to leave early to vote on something urgent or solve some national crisis. He seemed perfectly prepared to spend a very leisurely meal with us. I suppose that should have made me nervous, but I was too naïve to know what was coming.

The Senator briefly introduced his aide, someone from a committee whose name I didn't catch (mistake number 1), and then he turned things over to my father, who talked about me, my doctorate from the University of Virginia, the work I have been doing for the company in Green Bay, and my return yesterday. I was not surprised that Dodson asked about me and the rest of the family. One of the rules of business is that you try to learning something personal about the people you do business with. It establishes a different relationship—we are not just salesman and customer—we know each other and go way back. It may not guarantee a sale, but it helps. But Dodson seemed to be more curious about me than was required to be polite. I wondered if he was angling for a bigger campaign contribution this year. Was he up for re-election? I couldn't remember when his term was up. It was the aide who tipped me off to what was really going on.

"Do I understand you came through Versailles Pass on Monday?" he asked. In hindsight I recall that for just a second there was an expression on Dodson's face that made me think maybe the aide had overstepped whatever role he had been assigned, but I suspect he had gotten impatient with the endless patter about family and friends and wanted to get to the heart of the matter. Now I understood what the heart of the matter was—or at least I thought I did (mistake number two).

"Yes, we came through around three."

"But I had heard the pass was closed. How did you manage to get through?" he asked. But before I could answer, Dodson decided to take over the conversation. I don't know if he kicked the aide under the table, but that was the last word we heard from him.

"As you can imagine, Doctor Murphy," Dodson began. I tried to determine why he called me "Doctor Murphy" rather than "Shawn." I was grateful he wasn't attempting false intimacy, but it seemed out of step for a man trying to connect to the family. I had much to learn. "We have many citizens in western Pennsylvania who travel over the pass almost on a daily basis for business and personal reasons. The closing of the pass is a huge problem for them. Anything you could tell us to help us understand the situation up there would be appreciated."

"Sure." I described our arrival and what we had seen of the destruction, emphasizing that all hostilities had ceased by the time we had arrived. As I saw it, it was an unfortunate incident, but it was over now and normal passage should not be too far off.

"You were able to get through even though the pass was closed. Was that because you are an American? Are they letting Americans through?" I should have

known he already knew the answer to that, but I was too stupid (mistake number three).

"I am traveling with Elise DuPry. She is an official in the Interior Ministry of Canada, or at least she will be when she starts July first. She did an on-site investigation for the ministry. Afterwards the officials there let us travel on to the U.S."

"DuPry. Is she a member of the…"

"Yes, she is one of *those* DuPrys. Her godfather is Claude Jolliet." What on earth made me say that? Was I bragging? What an idiot. At this point my father jumped in to compound the mistake.

"Shawn is writing a biography of the Jolliet family. He regularly interviews President Jolliet."

"That must be very interesting. I have met the President on several of his visits. I liked him. Too bad he was almost shot the last time he was in Washington. I suspect he won't be back for a visit any time soon. But back to the pass. We hear lots of rumors about huge troop concentrations. There's no possibility they are going to invade us is there?"

That made me laugh so hard I made mistake number five. Or was it six? I was screwing up so badly who could count? "No, there were soldiers in a few trucks, but they were just there to block traffic. It was really a police matter, but I suspect they were grateful for some extra help after a long night."

"Well, that's a relief. I hear you will be going back to Green Bay next week. I would like to give you the card of one our embassy people there. And I hope you will call him. Should things get rough there, he has a responsibility to get our citizens out, so please give him a call so he knows where you are. Do you travel to other parts of Canada?"

"I went down to New Orleans for a few weeks last winter. I am not sure if I will do that again or not."

"Oh, we have a great man down there. I just spoke with him a few weeks ago. Great guy. You will like him. Let me see if I have one of his cards." Dodson rummaged around in his coat pockets, brought out a stack of cards, and dug through it until he found the one he wanted. "Here it is. And it even has his private number on the back. Why don't you take that in case you get down there again? And do call him. He already knows every good restaurant in New Orleans."

Am I a complete idiot? What are the odds that he would just happen to have the card of someone from New Orleans? But I took the two cards, put them both in my pocket and didn't think twice. At this point my father mentioned that he had to get back to work. Somewhere during all the talk, lunch had come and gone and almost two hours had passed. Yet the Senator had sat there as if there was absolutely nothing else on his agenda for the day. Very strange.

We shook hands all around, and my father and I left the Capitol Building. I was glad when he exited out on the river side. That is my favorite way out too, even though it is a longer walk to the parking lots. Standing high atop all those stairs you can look out across the Delaware and see for miles. Only later did I understand how blind I was.

Thursday I went down to my father's office and explained that I would be leaving the company. I would be teaching for the National University in the fall. He took it

much better than I had expected, and we talked for a while about things I might be able to do for the company on a part-time basis.

Friday we drove up to New York. “We” included the whole extended family. Somehow my father had gotten rooms for everyone at the Plaza. We took up half of one floor. But the women were still ruling the day, declaring that going shopping in New York with me would be like going to a museum with a blind man. Elise needed their help. So the women shopped while we men went to a ball game and drank too much beer.

The two scheduled highlights of the New York trip were the Broadway show and mass at St. Patrick’s. Dad hired a limo for the show, so we all arrived like royalty. The women had all worn their new gowns and really did look good. But it was Elise who drew all the attention. I was certain some of the people in the theater thought royalty had arrived, or at least one of the starring actresses. Maybe it was how comfortable she seemed under the lights, how relaxed. She reminded me of how she had looked at the President’s Ball—a stunning beauty who seemed totally unaware of the impact she had. As we walked into the theater I could hear conversations jolt to a stop while heads swiveled from every direction. She took my arm and I tried not to trip over my own feet.

What was the play about? Who knew? I got to sit next to Elise, my hand held in both of hers through the entire performance. I may have glanced at the stage once or twice, but mostly I watched Elise.

The next morning we didn’t go to the early mass as I had promised. The Plaza serves a very fine Sunday brunch and my father insisted we share one more good meal together. But we were at mass by ten, and I was pleased that Elise liked St. Patrick’s. We may be a protestant country, but we do have some fine cathedrals. It was important to me that Elise see that. After the mass it was back to the Plaza to pack and check out. It was noon before we were all back on the street gathered around our cars, the women hugging and exchanging promises to write, call, visit, etc. Nobody wanted Elise to leave. There were a few words for me from my brothers about taking care in Canada and my father made me promise I would come straight home if things got worse, but it was Elise who was the center of concentric circles of well-wishers. I swear we spent a half an hour on that sidewalk.

We were finally beginning to wind down the last of the hugs when Elise called me over. She took my hand in both of hers and then spoke to my family, which was still gathered around her.

“A few weeks ago, Shawn asked me to marry him.” That drew a few cheers and a “way to go Shawn” from my big brother. “I didn’t give him an answer then because a question of such importance deserves serious thought. But having discussed it with my family, and having met all of you, I am ready to answer now. Shawn,” she turned and faced me. “I would be very proud to marry you.” That brought so many cheers traffic stopped on the street. I couldn’t think of anything to say. Fortunately Elise kissed me so I didn’t need to speak.

That ended any thoughts of leaving town early. The attendants parked our cars again and dad led us all back into the Plaza for a huge and noisy lunch. My brothers patted me on the back so much I was sure I was bruised, and my sisters both congratulated me, but the look on both their faces said “What in the world

does she see in Shawn?" We were so noisy I was sure the matre'd was going to come over and quiet us, but my father handled it well, talking with people at adjacent tables and explaining the occasion. Sending champagne over to the tables helped as well.

Two hours later we were back on the sidewalk for more hugs, but this time my mother and all my sisters and sisters-in-law were in tears. The parking attendants had to be annoyed by all the time we were taking to collect our cars, but then my father tipped them, I tipped them, and I think even one of my cheap brothers tipped them. Everyone was happy. Finally we got into our cars, us heading north for the highway to Niagara, the rest of the family headed south to the New Jersey turnpike. It had been one heck of a visit.

What was Elise like in the car? She was marvelous. She talked nonstop about the family and about Philadelphia and New York. I plunged on through the traffic while I learned what my family had said and done over the last week. My contribution, about an hour down the road, was to take her hand and say "Thank you." Then I went back to driving and she continued her description of my family. Fortunately, it appeared I had a good one.

By six the excitement of the day was wearing off and we were getting near the border. Should we push on through Niagara tonight? We decided to spend one more night in America and cross in the morning. What we didn't say is that neither of us was sure what we would find at the border. It seemed better to deal with such things in the morning. I found a good hotel, got us a suite, and ordered room service. Having shared Elise for a week, I wanted her to myself for the evening. And, being the luckiest man on Planet Earth, that is exactly what I got.

The next morning we were up early. It would be a push, but there was still a chance we could make it back to Green Bay by the end of the day. Much would depend upon what happened at the border. We had stayed away from newspapers and broadcast news all week, but we weren't completely oblivious to what was being said. The "battle" at Versailles Pass was declared over, but the papers were full of ominous stories about riots all over Canada and more people escaping to the U.S. and California. We were not sure what we would find at the border.

We were in the car by seven and at the border by eight. The American side was pretty routine. They checked both our passports pretty carefully, but neither of us had to get out of the car. Since I was an American, I was handed a sheet of paper with a State Department warning. "*To all U.S. Citizens traveling to Canada: Be aware...*" I glanced at the first few lines, dropped the paper beside my seat, and drove through the gate.

The French side was more complicated, but not as bad as we had feared. We were directed to park our car, and then we went into a small building to have our passports scanned. Elise had the usual effect on the staff. She was wearing a yellow print sun dress, and while the long skirts signaled her French nationality, everything else about her would seem to indicate a woman returning from vacation. But the staff spotted something about her instantly. Every uniform in the room was suddenly turned toward her, and it seemed to me everyone was standing a bit straighter. The French seem to have radar for nobility.

She and I began with the usual passport checks, but as hers was completed she drew out her Interior Ministry identification and asked to speak with the site

manager. She was very pleasant about her request, and said "please," but the passport clerk immediately hustled off as if she had barked a string of commands. The clerk came back with the senior man instantly.

"Thank you," she smiled at the clerk, and then addressed the site manager. "I don't wish to trouble you, but it you have a few minutes, it would help me if you could provide me with a summary of how things have been the last few days."

"Of course, madam. Shall we go into my office? Would you like some coffee?" He looked at me to see if I was to be included, but Elise answered for me.

"Shawn, I will just be a minute. Do you mind?" I of course didn't mind. I took my stamped passport, walked around the parking lot a bit to stretch, and waited for Elise to come out. I found myself looking at the people who were leaving Canada. There seemed to be a fair number. Of course I had no idea what the normal traffic would be on a Monday morning, but the line was longer than I would have guessed—maybe forty cars. Many were pulling trailers—people taking personal belongings out with them. And they were irritable. The immigration staff greeted each driver politely, but I heard few polite responses. What was said was in monosyllables. One teenager even raised his arm out a window and made an obscene gesture—*after* the car had made it through the gate.

Elise joined me after a while and we stood together looking at the cars. "I would like to think they are all just going to vacation at Disneyland," I said. "But this looks a bit more serious."

"Have the immigration people been acting correctly? They told me that has been a point of emphasis."

"Yes, they are doing just fine. But they don't seem to be making any friends."

"Friends we can hope for later. Right now, we just need fewer enemies." Elise turned toward where our car was parked. "Shall we get back on the highway?" We alternated driving during the next fourteen hours, and I know we were both very tired of sitting in that stupid Citroen, but it seemed important for Elise to get back. She never said what was discussed with that immigration official, but she seemed a good deal more serious during the remainder of the trip. Her vacation was over.

I got her back to her apartment around ten. Both of us were so tired and stiff it was hard to get out of the car, but we struggled with her bags and got her things back into her rooms. I felt a bit funny about being back on the campus. Elise had graduated and would be moving out in the next month or two. I would be the one moving to the campus—a visiting professor. Soon this would be my professional home.

But that would be another day. For tonight, we just needed to unwind after a very long day. I opened a bottle of wine, and Elise stopped unpacking long enough to make some soup. I stood behind her at the stove and she leaned back into me. We were home in Green Bay, and we were engaged. Life was good.

Chapter 3

Green Bay.

I am tempted to describe that summer as the best of times and the worst of times. I am sure poor Dickens is tired of having his famous line used to describe all manner of ordinary events, but since he was describing the French revolution, maybe this time the description is appropriate. You can guess when I experienced the best of times – when Elise was with me. The worst of times? Well, they started when Elise was away from me, but they included many other problems, some of which I brought on myself.

The day after we got back from the U.S., Elise was up and gone by seven. I knew she wouldn't wait until July 1 to start her job at the ministry. What I didn't know was how long the days would be. From that day on, I never saw her before eight at night, and usually it was later. Most Saturdays she worked. Sunday she was pretty good about. We always went to mass, we usually had Sunday dinner at her family's home, and afternoons she spent with me. I liked Sundays.

Part of the problem was that her job kept changing. She was a demographer. For years she had been building toward a job in the planning section of the ministry, estimating population characteristics and predicting necessary government services. In a perfect world, her day would have consisted of planning site locations for grade schools. She would have worked the French thirty-five hour work week, and we would have had long evenings together.

I could only hope that such a perfect world would one day return. In the current world she initially headed a team of number crunchers who were charged with estimating all kinds of things, many of which she could not tell me. What she could tell me was that the ministry was in absolute turmoil. Obviously there was lots of work as they tried to respond to the growing separation of Louisiana. What was less obvious was the number of Protestants who were quitting the government. People who had worked in the ministry for decades suddenly left. No one had even known they were Huguenots. Then one morning they would come in with a typed resignation letter, shake a few hands—often very few—and leave. Often these were very senior people.

The result was lots of job openings and lots of backing and filling with the folks that were left. Elise barely had a few days of orientation when she was made a project manager. A month later she became an assistant director with over two hundred people reporting to her. She had barely settled into that job when her manager told her to be prepared to head the planning division if he was moved to another division. Three days later he was an assistant minister, and Elise was Director of Planning for Canada. Elise is very bright, but that would be a challenge for anyone.

As for me, my job was pretty predictable. I was assigned two U.S. history classes for the fall semester, one undergraduate, one graduate. The undergraduate class would be a large lecture class, maybe two hundred students, and I would have a teaching assistant to lead discussion sections and help with grading. The assistant hadn't been hired yet, but would be available in late August. The graduate seminar would be an elective course for students getting graduate degrees in history. In short, I got a very traditional teaching assignment, as promised.

I started going into the office daily in June. While I joked about the campus being underground, it was actually the passageways between buildings that were buried to keep them warm in the winter. The buildings were above ground, and my

office was on the fifth floor of the Humanities Building with a very nice view of the Bay. I moved in some books and some pictures and felt at home.

My new colleagues were a genial group, and made a real effort to visit me. Each offered help with various aspects of campus life – which faculty committees had the real authority, which librarians were the most knowledgeable, which cafeterias had the best food. The two men who had taught U.S. history in the past stopped by with books and course syllabi. Both were glad to be out of the course. They had other interests. I was pleased that neither would be looking over my shoulder, waiting for their turn to take over.

As for the course materials, I should have been less surprised than I was. We all know that each country portrays historical events its own way, so I knew at one level the French texts would not describe Washington the way I would. But I have to admit I was not really prepared for their treatment of all our military men. Basically they were bumblers inspired by ambitious land-grabbers. U.S. history was a series of mistakes led either by an antagonistic British foreign policy or by American naiveté. Then there was slavery, racism, and sectionalism. You had to wonder why anyone would want to live there. By the time I was done reading the assigned textbook, I wanted to find the author and punch him out. No such luck. I checked around and discovered that he was long dead. No wonder—the book was ten years old.

I checked with the department chair to see if I could use another book. Yes, but not this year. The books had already been ordered and were sitting on the bookstore shelves. I was free to augment with other books if I wished, and next fall I could order any book I wanted, but for the moment, I was stuck. Oh well, at least now I knew what kind of U.S. history my students had been exposed to in the past. I would take this on as a challenge.

For the next several weeks I ignored my own research and focused on finding materials for the class. Thank God for the Web. The Smithsonian has some great materials online, as does the University of Virginia. I decided I would match each chapter of the text with readings from those websites, and let the students see there were two ways of looking at America. If they still wanted to see us as racist boobs, well, at least I would have given them an optional viewpoint.

I was busy and proud of myself through June. I built several web sites, gathered materials for both my undergraduate class and my graduate seminar, and I even wrote my exams for the courses. I was going to be the most prepared professor at the National University.

But I had a problem. I was running out of things to do. I would wrap up my work at the university and head home around five—to an empty apartment. Yes, Elise was spending most nights at my place, but she would get home at eight or nine and be so tired she could barely speak. I had dinner ready for her, and a glass of wine, and some nights we would talk for a while, and some nights we would sit and watch a movie on the tube, but whatever we did, within forty-five minutes she had her head on my shoulder and was sound asleep. Most nights I carried her to bed.

There were plenty of reasons for her to be tired besides long hours and job responsibilities. Things weren't going well in Canada. Claude Jolliet had given the country a week of church services, and had then started broadcasting carefully

filtered news. Even the cheery version he was showing—neighbors reaching out to neighbors, cultural showcases where Huguenot cooking was enormously appreciated by housewives in Quebec, towns up and down the Mississippi participating in the "one river, one nation" celebration invented by the government—none of it could hide the brief references to fist fights and church burnings. Besides, we could all see the cars pulling trailers full of furniture. It didn't matter if the cars were headed north or south, they represented one more family that couldn't live where it had lived for generations. The country was coming apart.

Elise was pretty good about not bringing work home and not telling me about government doings. After all, while I was her fiancée, I was also a foreigner. But she didn't have to say anything for me to know what was going on. Two or three nights a week she would start some story, and then just break down and cry. By late June I knew something big was in the wind. Elise was going to go to some retreat for big shots in the government. She would be gone a week or two while they tried to focus on the latest, and I guess most serious, challenge. Something big was going to happen.

One morning a limo was waiting for her outside the apartment. I carried her bag down, gave her a kiss, and then watched her ride off. I had no idea when I would see her again.

By that evening I was already pacing around my apartment and drinking far too much Bordeaux. This wasn't going to work. I couldn't just wait at home, or fiddle around in my office for days or weeks. The country was coming apart and I was writing web pages and cooking meals. I tried to think through what I knew about the Huguenots. What was so different about them? Sure they were Protestant, but they were French, right? They had shot Americans in New Orleans just as well as the Catholics had shot Americans in Quebec. Why did they suddenly object to sharing their country? Why now?

Ask an historian a question, and you will always get an historical answer. I started thinking back to what I knew of Protestants. Sister Angelica had taught me much. In tenth grade all of us took European History from Sister Angelica. She had an interesting way of teaching the history of the continent. To her, every historical event—wars, pestilence, hunger—had a single source—heretics. Heretics had taken the unified church of Christ and broken it, taken the unified continent of Europe and broken it. Everything was due to heretics. If the older kids saw you with a European history book, they just said, "I see you've got heretics this year."

For silly fifteen year olds, it was a pretty interesting way to learn history. Heretics often did interesting things. Take Jan Hus and "defenestration." There is a word kids have to love. Anyone could shoot or hang or burn someone at the stake, but who would think to "defenestrate" someone? Sister Angelica loved to tell the story. The Godless Hus had challenged the Pope and dared to throw his bishop out a castle window – defenestration. But God had saved the bishop and he had landed safely in the mud below the castle wall. We kids read books more carefully than we ever had before and discovered the bishop had survived because the castle moat had become filled with garbage. The bishop was alive, but boy he must have been messy. As for the Pope, he wasn't interesting at all. He just burned Hus at the stake same as everyone else.

That was her approach to history. Bohemian history was Hus and the retribution he so surely deserved, German history was Luther and the agonies of Hell he will suffer for eternity. As for English history, we loved to get her started on Henry the Eighth, just to see her build to a boil about that adulterer and assassin. Who did she like? Louis XIV. Sure he kept Europe at war for a generation, but he kept his country Catholic. What happened to the French Protestants? They left France and good riddance.

It was well over a decade since I had taken Heretics from Sister Angelica, but I could still recall her storming around the classroom, nearly apoplectic about what the heretics had done. You had the impression she believed she was living three centuries too late to lead the righteous of God. Just put her in the same room with Martin Luther or John Calvin and God's will would be done fast.

So how did the Huguenots get to Louisiana? Did Louis exile them? I was suddenly embarrassed to realize that I had been living in Canada for two years, and I didn't know. Sister Angelica didn't say, and I didn't know. Worse, I hadn't asked.

Who should I ask now? When I had been researching the Marquette/Jolliet expedition, I had had the ideal situation. I had access to good libraries and archives, and I had been able to interview Claude Jolliet to get an oral history of the events. But I couldn't take this to Jolliet. For one thing, now that he was back in the government, he wouldn't have the time for me. Besides, he was part of the mystery. The Jolliet name was magic all over the country, except in Louisiana. Something wasn't right there. I needed a new source.

At this point the Bordeaux must have really been kicking in, because I decided I would drive to Louisiana to study Huguenot history there. There was a certain logic to it. Elise was going to be gone for weeks, so why hang around Green Bay? The Louisiana libraries would have better source materials. I could visit the local historical societies and talk with old timers. It made a kind of sense, except for one obvious problem—the country was on the verge of going to war and I would be driving right into the midst of it. The reasonable thing to do would be to sit down, wait until the wine wore off, and watch an old movie.

Instead, I picked up the phone, and called my father's business rep in New Orleans to see if it would be possible to rent a place down there for a couple weeks. He just laughed.

"Shawn, you may not have heard, but the tourism business is a little off this summer. It is never big in July, but I think this July you could have any suite in any hotel for ten francs a night—breakfast included. If you'd like, I'll make you a reservation tonight. But you do understand things can get a bit spooky, right?"

"Out and out dangerous, or just odd?"

"So far, just odd, but this city has the feel you get just before a major thunderstorm. It is too quiet, too still, and the air feels funny."

"Thanks for the warning, but I want to do some research down there again. Please make the reservation. I will be down in two days."

And with that conversation I was committed. Suddenly I felt better than I had in weeks. All the restlessness that had been building was now going to be released. I wrote Elise a long note in case she got back before I did, packed my bags, and went to bed early. I would be up at dawn and on the road.

Chapter 4

I Make Some Friends in Missouri.

I would like to say that I was up a dawn the next day, but in early July Green Bay gets nearly sixteen hours of daylight. Dawn comes much too early for me. But I was up by six and on the Mississippi Highway by seven. My goal for the day was Cape Girardeau, the last substantial city before Louisiana. I wanted at least a little time in the evening to determine just how safe things were before I crossed the provincial line.

I am no demographer, but I thought I might be able to gather at least a little useful data for Elise if I counted cars with trailers along the way. I even made a little tick sheet that I kept on the dash. I would see how many trailers were going in each direction, and would total them by the hour and correlate that with my location. Would that be useful to Elise? Who knew? But I wanted to find someway to help her. It also gave me something to do. For the first few hours I counted trailers – lots and lots of trailers. Clearly my family was in the wrong business. Someone was getting rich.

Have I mentioned that I hate French cars? Actually I hate anything manufactured by the French. They make great wine, and great food, but can't make a stove with a door that closes right. My Citroen is the top of the line for French vehicles, but being the best French car is like being the best Irish wine—"best" in this case doesn't mean "good." I was barely to Illinois when I was hurting where the seat springs were poking me, and I was nearly deaf from the engine noise. Most of the cylinders were running today, and they wanted to make sure I knew that by screaming to the world.

My solution was to turn on the radio. Each week Claude Jolliet was a little less restrictive of the media, so I was curious to hear what was being said in the communities I passed. I think he would have been happy with what I was hearing the first few hours. Were call-screeners keeping the nut cases off the air? The folks who were calling in to the talk shows had modest complaints, but lots of suggestions. One caller mentioned a brother whose family had been chased out of Baton Rouge. Everyone had suggestions on how to help that family adjust to life back in Illinois, and there was even one caller who made a plea for better treatment for local Huguenots so that they stayed in town. There was one rather spooky commercial with a hardware store advertising specials on guns and ammo, but everything else I heard that morning was reassuring. At least in the Illinois plains, people seemed to be looking for ways to help their neighbors.

Missouri was more mixed. By mid afternoon I was getting near St. Louis. My count of trailers was getting so high I thought there must be a factory someplace turning out trailers by the thousands. Where were they all coming from? I didn't see any broken down along side the road, so maybe they were coming from America. Comments on the radio were getting more testy. While Louisiana might have been the home province for Huguenots, it was clear there were plenty in

Missouri too, and they weren't going to leave without a fight, or at least some final words before they filled their trailer and joined the convoys. A num called in, sounding almost like my old teacher Sister Angelica, and gave all the heretics hell. How dare they blow up a house of God? They should move to America with the rest of the sinners.

That was the first reference I had heard to the U.S. all day, but it was not the last. Suddenly we became the main topic. Since we were a nation of hate-filled Protestants, should the Huguenots go there? Would the Americans accept them? Yes, in fact they were letting tens of thousands cross the border. Then the conspiracy theories began to spin out of control. This whole problem was created by the U.S. to inspire a religious war—a protestant alliance to overwhelm the Catholics and seize control of the Mississippi Valley. At this point the station suddenly cut to music—Beethoven's Ninth. *Ode to Joy* would take up at least an hour and whoever had been screening calls and had let the nuts get through would be long-replaced by the time the last movement was over. In any case, it was obvious one of Claude Jolliet's people was still monitoring the radio, and there was a line that was not to be crossed.

I like Beethoven, so I left the station on while I circled St. Louis and began the last part of my drive to Cape Girardeau. I had heard enough talk anyway. Were things down here a bit crazy? Yes, but at least they weren't shooting each other. And a few of them had even found a common enemy—the U.S. That made me a little nervous. The idea of an alliance with Louisiana was ridiculous. The average American couldn't tell one Frenchman from another, and didn't want to tell them apart. Whatever church they attended, they were French, and that was always bad. Would we get involved in this fracas? No. Could we be blamed for this mess? I hoped not. Our countries hadn't fought each other for more than a century. We would never be friends, but if we could go one century without killing each other, you could always hope we could go another century the same way.

I got to Cape Girardeau around seven, deafened from the car, too sore to sit any more, and tired of counting trailers and crackpots. I found a small hotel along the Mississippi, got my bags up to my room, and then stood on the riverbank for a very long time watching water move and feeling blood return to my legs after all those hours in the pinnacle of French engineering. I would love to give you a description of the river, but in truth I wasn't really looking at it, I was just enjoying the freedom of being out of my car.

Eventually I started to slowly walk down the street in the same direction the water was flowing. Cape Girardeau has a nice enough river bank, but the town itself looks a bit down on its luck. Within a couple blocks I was walking past shops and restaurants that looked like they needed a fresh coat of paint. There were a few people about, but no great numbers, just locals out doing a bit of shopping. I started looking for a café, torn between my hunger and my hatred of sitting down again. I walked a couple more blocks and found a small place that advertised catfish specialties. You'd be surprised by how little catfish we have in Philadelphia. I decided to give it a try.

The minute I walked through the door I knew I had made a mistake. The inside was far more run down than the outside suggested, and far too dark. I thought about walking back out when a waitress sauntered over and invited me in. She

was somewhere in her thirties and was wearing a black satin cocktail dress that probably fit her better when she was twenty pounds lighter. This was the moment to leave, but I followed her ample backside over to a table and sat down. I reasoned that they needed the business, and besides, how bad could catfish be?

Michelle was happy to have someone to talk with—there were barely eight or ten other people in the café, all aging men—and wanted to chat while taking my order. I had such a cute accent. Was I from Ohio? Would I be staying in the Cape long? She had been in town for years and found the people to be so friendly,,, Somewhere in there I asked for the house special and a glass of Bordeaux.

She took my order back to the kitchen and then I started hearing a loud male voice. “American?” Then some more questions, and then again, “American?” Suddenly a huge man came bounding out of the kitchen carrying a sawed off hockey stick and heading straight for me.

“Get out!” He shouted before he was halfway across the small room. “We don’t serve Americans here. Eat with your Huguenot friends down south.” He must have weighed three hundred pounds, and while most of that was fat, he was still an imposing sight as he approached. I now had one more reason to leave the café, and I should have, but I found myself getting really angry. I had just spent twelve hours in a French rattle trap. I was in no mood to be pushed around.

“You heard me. Get out!” He now stood directly opposite my table, sweating and panting from the exertion of getting his weight across the room. I stood up, stared straight at him, and did something I have never done before in my life. I unbuttoned the top three buttons of my shirt, and held my shirt open so he could see the gold crucifix that hung from my neck.

“I have no Huguenot friends. I am Catholic and I live in Green Bay.” I continued to stand with my shirt open, holding eye contact. I saw him look down at the crucifix and then back at my face. There was hesitation in his eyes now.

“Monsieur, she said you were an American…”

“Yes, I am American.” I held my stare. Suddenly he wanted to look anywhere but back at me.

“But you are Catholic.”

“That is what I told you. I am Catholic.

“You are not here to help the Huguenots burn cathedrals?”

“I don’t believe in burning churches of any kind.”

“Ah, monsieur, I apologize. We have heard stories…”

“I do not accept your apology. As you are proud to be Canadian, I am proud to be American. Now put down that hockey stick or use it.”

“Of course.” He set the hockey stick on the table. I got a good look at it for the first time and saw it would have done serious damage. I had gotten off lucky this time. “I did not know there were Catholic Americans. The radio has been telling us there is a Protestant alliance. The Americans will come to kill all Catholics as they have before.”

“Americans have not killed all Catholics before. We have attacked your country four times, and four times you have won.”

“Yes, that is right!” Suddenly he was happy as a child at Christmas. “Please monsieur. Sit and eat. Be my guest for dinner. I apologize again for my actions.” At this point I could sit and make a friend, or I could leave and make an enemy. I sat.

He took his hockey stick back to the kitchen to make my dinner, and every old man in the café suddenly moved to the tables next to mine. Were there really Catholics in America? Why had the Americans attacked at Versailles Pass? Weren't the Americans planning to invade in August? In amongst all the questions they were also all determined to buy me a drink, so during the course of the next couple hours I had some of the worst wine Missouri has to offer. The fat cook also brought me the house special—catfish quiche. I would describe it to you, but all you need to know about catfish quiche is that if you ever see it on a menu, order something else.

I explained America as best I could to men who had obviously never been anywhere east of the Mississippi, and tried to calm their fears. Ultimately, the argument that worked the best was the one that was also the most obvious. American had fought the French for three hundred years. Why would we suddenly fight on the side of some of the French—any of the French? It was pretty good logic, and we all believed it—even me. I guess that explains why I am historian—we never understand things until they have been over for a hundred years.

Hours passed and I had far too much wine. But the evening was a success. I had served as an American ambassador, solved all the continent's problems, and gotten a free meal. Not a bad night. I am not sure how I found my way back to the hotel, but I managed.

The next morning got off to a slow start. It felt like the wine and catfish were actually going to do more damage to me than the hockey stick would have. I had several aspirin, three cups of coffee, and decided I was off wine for a week and off catfish for a lifetime. Eventually I found my car and got going south again. I quickly got into Louisiana and should have been making profound observations about life in this rebel province, but in truth it was all I could do to keep the car on the road. Every couple hours I popped more aspirin and prayed that I would somehow, someway make it to New Orleans.

By mid-afternoon I was feeling more human again. I began to take note of my surroundings. I don't know if I expected to see barricades being built along the highway, but the only real change I noticed from January was how green things were. Louisiana is really an attractive place. It is also hot and wet. When I stopped for gas and got out of my air conditioned car (yes, even the French have air conditioners on their cars), my clothes instantly clung to my body. It was basically the most uncomfortable day I had ever experienced in Virginia, turned up a notch or two. This was obviously not the prime tourist season for Louisiana.

I reached New Orleans around dinner time. Our company rep had found me a suite at the Maison Dupuy Hotel on Toulouse Street in the Old Quarter. He had me figured out pretty well. It was an old hotel in the old part of town, exactly where an historian would like to stay. The hotel was actually five old town houses that had been converted into a hotel, much as they have done so often in London. The floors never quite match up, but the exterior looks as it did centuries ago, complete with wrought iron balconies. I had my choice of any suite in the place, street-side or courtyard side. I took the street side. I spent a quiet evening in the hotel and went to bed early. Good thing. New Orleans turned out to be a lot more eventful than I was prepared for.

The next morning I started what I expected to be a pattern—good breakfast, a walk over to the Louisiana Library for a day of research, followed by a quiet evening in the quarter. At least the day started off according to plan. The provincial library was just a few blocks away from my hotel on Canal Street, and I enjoyed the walk. It was already warm, and the air was wet, but it was a quiet morning. A few people were out and about, but no one seemed in a particular hurry. There were flowers in window boxes and trees shading the street. A few cars went by, but they created little noise. It felt good just to be present on that street.

The library was heavily air conditioned, and the minute I felt the cold air, I realized I might not be able to find the history I was looking for. Warm wet air killed books or anything else on paper. Mildew blackened and rotted anything not protected. Of course the library was now climate controlled to protect all the holdings, but there hadn't been air conditioning here for the first two centuries of Louisiana. All the old records would have been attacked mercilessly. Was there anything left here for me to find? It was a rude thought to begin my first morning of research.

I was tempted to go straight to the reference librarian to ask about the condition of the archives, but I didn't feel prepared yet. It is a point of pride with me that I don't just walk up to a librarian and ask general questions. I would seem like a school kid if I asked, "what materials do you have on the Huguenot immigration?" Presumably they have rooms full of materials. I needed to do some initial research to get a general understanding of the field. Once I had more particular questions to ask, I could find out what they had in the archives, and how much had survived the climate.

So I went to the general history section, found some books on the Reformation, and began to catch up on Europe in 1600. I knew from Sister Angelica that is when the heretics were active. Now I needed to know a little more about them than the fact they were all destined to burn in hell for eternity.

What did I learn? It took all the rest of the day, but I caught up on a very busy century. Luther had presented his complaints about the Catholic church, and then fought a running battle with the Calvinists, the Anabaptists, and all other sects. Suddenly lots of folks had alternative forms of Christianity. Why the explosion of religions? Pick your author and you picked your explanation. The technology folks pointed to the printing press. Now you had the quick spread of Luther's ideas, and the ready availability of bibles in local languages. People had the tools to begin making decisions for themselves about the afterlife.

The economists put everything on the improving economic life of Europe. There was a growing middle class, and with their new money they wanted new rights, both from the nobility and from the clergy.

The religious philosophers were the most difficult to follow. Calvin and Luther could not agree on what communion meant, and Luther and the Popes could not agree on who should get communion, and there were a hundred other issues of doctrine that everyone fought over. Less confusing was the current state of the Catholic church. Priests couldn't read, bishops were crooks, and popes had families to feed. The institution was at its low point. A literate middle class was not in a mood to take orders from illiterate priests and crooked bishops. They had much to protest and new strength to protest with.

The political scientists had it figured out a different way. Kings were gaining power. Something approaching the current nation state was becoming possible and kings wanted to assert their authority directly rather than through a hierarchy of nobles. The nobles were not very keen on this change, and looked to protect their turf. Sometimes a new religion gave them an advantage in this fight.

Skimming these books for eight hours I was reminded of the fable about the blind men and the elephant. Each scholar was certain he was seeing the Reformation when it looked to me like they were each grabbing one part and assuming they were seeing the whole elephant. What was the whole story? Lots of folks had died, France became a major power, Spain stopped being important, and the church got out of political matters. The elephant was very different at the end of the century than at the beginning.

I was just about to quit for the day when I found gold. I was getting a bit drowsy and losing patience with an endless series of Popes and kings and meetings and convocations and slaughters and wars when I happened upon Henry of Navarre, also known as Henry of Bourbon, and finally known as Henry IV, King of France from 1589 to 1610. Funny thing about old Henry—he was a Huguenot! For twenty one years France had been ruled by a Huguenot king, and furthermore, this Henry was the father of Louis XIII and grandfather of Louis XIV. The Bourbon dynasty was founded by a Huguenot. Wasn't that interesting?

And to make things real interesting, it was this Huguenot king who had sent Champlain to the new world, who had established France's possessions in Canada, and had founded the city of Quebec! Quebec had been built under a Protestant king. I wondered how common that knowledge was. This was getting real interesting.

I closed up my books for the day and left the library in a daze. I am always dumbfounded by people who think history is boring. I find amazing things every time I look into the past. But this was more than amazing. A country about to be split up by Protestants had actually been founded by a Protestant. Who would have guessed?

The streets of New Orleans were incredibly hot, and I would have normally wilted under the weight of the wet air, but I was too excited. I walked down Canal Street to the river and wandered along staring at the water but seeing only Henry IV. I had to learn more about him.

Eventually the heat overcame my excitement and I looked for a place to find food and air conditioning. I spotted the Granary. I had been there once before with Elise. It has all kinds of virtues – good food, good wine, and hundreds of years of history. I assumed today it would have one additional virtue – field stone walls and high ceilings that would provide a naturally cool temperature.

It turned out I was one of the few people in town who would appreciate the place that night. While it had been packed when we had visited in January, now it was virtually empty. A waiter came to my table immediately and stood and talked with me forever. He was so friendly I almost thought I was back in the U.S. I took his attitude as the surest sign that New Orleans was in desperate shape – the waiters were providing good service.

He had barely left my table to gather up my order when a man sitting at a nearly table turned to me.

“I am sorry to bother you,” he said in English, “But my hobby is trying to place people. Based on your excellent French and slight accent, I would guess western Pennsylvania.”

“Yes, I am American, “ I replied in French. In truth, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to talk with this man or not. Some people love to strike up conversation with total strangers. I am more hesitant about it. In retrospect I should have been much more hesitant about this conversation, but I was still excited about my discovery in the Library, and so let the conversation continue. “I am from Philadelphia.”

“Really? I have lived there for years.” He replied in very good French. I liked that. It just seemed proper to speak French while in Canada. ”I went to Penn and then went to work for the State Department. They shipped me out here about year ago—commercial attaché. That’s what I get for double majoring in French and International Business. What about you? I assume you also went to Penn. I graduated in 1997. Any chance we had classes together?” He was indeed almost the same age as me. Blonde and blue-eyed, he looked like the kind of person the State Department would want to represent the country.

“I went to the University of Virginia. They have a much better history department – my major."

“So what brings you down here?”

“I have become interested in the history of Louisiana. This seemed like a good place to study it.”

“Really? You do understand there’s trouble down here, right? It seems like half of the consulate staff down here is occupied with what it will take to get U.S. citizens out when the shooting starts. Speaking of which, you should stop by the consulate and register.”

“I only plan to be here a couple weeks.

“I am not sure there is any guarantee the extremists will wait until you get back to Virginia.”

“Actually I live in Green Bay now. I teach U.S. history at the National University.” There was a curious expression on his face when I said I lived in Green Bay. I couldn’t place it at the time. Surprise? Concern? He immediately pulled a card from his pocket, wrote a number on the back, and handed it to me.

“I have written my direct number on the back of my card. If you don’t mind, I would like to meet with you from time to time while you are here, just to make sure you are still doing OK.” I recognized the name on the card. This was the man Senator Dodson had wanted me to meet. Small world.

“For what its worth, Senator Dodson gave me your card last month. He thinks a lot of you—said you knew all the best restaurants in town. I guess that explains how you know about the Granary.”

“You know Senator Dodson?” I was never able to answer. At that moment half a dozen young men walked into the room. They were obviously American, and obviously drunk. I would have guessed their age at around twenty, and the way they were built, they could have been a rugby team—that would explain the shoulders and the drunkenness. Their French was terrible and they wanted wine and to find someone.

“I am afraid this lot is mine. I can’t remember if they are here for alligator hunting or bass fishing, but their company warned the consulate they might be a

handful. Now if I can just prevent an international incident, I will have earned my meager wages for the day." He got to his feet and started toward the group, but then stopped and put out his hand. "By the way, I am David Starr."

"Shawn Murphy."

"Shawn, do call later this week. I know it seems melodramatic, but we need to keep track of our nationals these days. OK?"

"Sure." And then he was off. He was greeted with a great cheer by the young men—apparently he was the man they had been looking for—and then he managed to direct them all into a private room in the back. The last sound I heard before they closed the door was "Do they have any beer in this godforsaken place?"

And that's how I met the first spy and the first American troops to arrive in Louisiana.

Chapter 5

New Orleans and a bit of French History.

Elise called the next morning while I was still in bed. I had been leaving messages for her most evenings, but it had been several days since she had had the time to return my call. You can imagine her first question:

"What are you doing in New Orleans?"

"It seemed like a good place to learn Huguenot history, so here I am."

I could hear her laughing on the other end of the line. "We sit in meetings all day everyday preparing for the end of the world, and you just drive down to study a little history. We need you up here, Shawn, to provide a cooler head and a little courage."

"I won't be down here that long. When will you be back from your meetings?"

"I can't really talk about that over the phone, Shawn, but I hope to see you soon." Our conversation got a bit more intimate after that, but didn't last long. She had a full day ahead of her.

My day was off to a good start and sure to get even better. I had a focal point for my research now – Henry IV. It was too hot for me to run or skip or hop to the provincial library, but that is how I felt. Today was my day to put the history of this country in a new perspective.

I was also ready to have a professional conversation with the reference librarian and learn where the best materials on Henry IV were. I found him alone at the reference desk, reading, and waiting. A man in his early sixties with the bad posture you expect of someone who sits hunched over books all day, he immediately wanted to argue with me—a very good sign. This was not someone who would just give me the names of ten books; he really knew this subject and wanted to steer my research.

“I can name three good biographies of Henry IV, but they are so sanitized they read like press releases. Worse yet, they were all written by Jesuits, so they focus on his conversion for hundreds of pages and ignore the more interesting years of his life. If you really want to understand this man, don’t research Henry IV, research Henry of Navarre. Under that name you can find five excellent biographies, including one written by the best historian Louisiana ever produced.”

I told him I would start with that book. We then had a general discussion about his library, and he asked me about my background. He was none too happy that I taught at the National University, but he was intrigued by my subject and asked that I visit him during breaks to give him some suggestions about the best U.S. historians. He said there was a sudden interest in all things American, and he needed some additional expertise. To seal our friendship, he awarded me a study carrel on the second floor where I could leave my materials while I was doing this research. I was very glad I had waited a day before talking to him and hadn’t barged in asking stupid questions and creating the wrong impression.

A half an hour later I left his desk with the call numbers of several biographies, and the keys to my study carrel. I was practicing my profession and felt some pride at the progress I was making.

By the time I found the volumes I wanted and walked down to my assigned study area, the door to the little room was already open for me, and both the ceiling light and a study light were on. I looked around for someone to thank, but the whole second floor seemed to be empty. I was grateful for the quiet and began my reading with the volume produced by the local historian.

What did I learn about Henry IV, a.k.a. Henry of Navarre? First I learned it was good to be an American. Our history is much simpler. French history reminded me much of the endless English history I had read – an infinite series of kings squabbling amongst themselves. I have never been a fan of royalty. If anything, French history was worse, in that it seemed everyone was named Henry. I decided maybe Louis XIV was remembered after all these years simply because he was not named Henry—a remarkable feat for French nobility.

In Henry of Navarre’s case, there are actually four Henry’s and a Catherine who dominated the history of France for a century. The first Henry was the easy one—Henry II. He did what you expect a King to do. He fought the Spanish, increased his power, and hated anything that might disrupt his kingdom. It was under him that Protestantism came to France, and his response was simple—he killed all heretics he found. He had some success in killing Huguenots, but not only were many of the newly-created middle class looking over Protestantism, but so was some of the nobility, especially in the south and west. Among the first nobles to declare themselves Protestant were the King and Queen of Navarre. Their son, Henry, inherited the religion from his parents.

Then there was John Calvin, who I always thought was Swiss, but it turns out he just lived in Switzerland most of his life. He was French and went to French schools. Here’s an odd footnote to history: At one point John Calvin, one of the founders of the Protestant movement, and Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, went to the same school in France. Can you imagine sharing a classroom with those two? Two of the most determined men of the 16th century, it is a wonder they didn’t kill each other in a duel before they reached adulthood.

But they didn't, so Calvin was around to correspond with the French nobility and help them as they set up congregations. Henry of Navarre's mother was one of this most active correspondents and loyal supporters.

Henry II died in 1559 still trying to get rid of Huguenots. One Henry down, three to go.

Enter Henry, Duke of Guise. Depending upon which biography I read, the Guise's were either ardent Catholics who sacrificed all for their faith, or political opportunists who saw a chance to put one of their own—Henry—on the throne. One thing is a certainty—they weren't above murder to achieve their ends.

The Guise's began their campaign by either protecting Henry II's boy-king Charles IX, or by holding him hostage—each biographer seemed to have a different view of their motives. In either case, Charles IX was too young to rule France, so he needed a Regent. The Guise's wished to play that role—all in the service of France, of course.

But Charles had a mother—Catherine de' Medici of the famous Italian Medici clan, and she had her own aims. A France aligned with her family's holdings in Italy might give her family even more power and wealth. So she began her own strategy, based on principles her family had applied for many generations—divide and conquer. Her best way to win freedom from the Guises was to find some group that might have the strength to stand up to the Guises. She picks the Huguenots. At this point there were somewhat over a million Huguenots in France, just about ten percent of the population. They included some of the strongest personalities in the kingdom. As it turned out, they were no match for the Guises, but she didn't know that.

She begins her plan to strengthen the Huguenots and create an opposition for the Guises. She begins by bringing in some of the leading Huguenots as advisors to the king. The teenage king is bright enough to appreciate the perspective these new advisors bring, and comes to make one of them—Admiral Coligny—his most trusted advisor. Under Coligny France begins to develop a navy and Charles begins to get a larger view of the world. Catherine is making progress against the Guises.

The Guises are not idle. Henry has succeeded his parents and uncles and is ready to make his move. He forms the Catholic League and begins raising supporters all around the country, but especially in Paris. Soon he has hundreds of nobles, and senior clergy in his fold, all of whom are stirring up the peasants of France. The message goes out – the Church is under attack by heretics. A Catholic insurrection is building.

The insurrection might have occurred in any event, but Catherine brings things to a head by going one step too far in support of the Huguenots—she marries her daughter—Margaret, the King's sister, to Henry of Navarre. On August 18, 1572 Henry comes to Paris and marries Margaret not *in*, but outside Notre Dame Cathedral in a Protestant ceremony. This is a provocation on two levels. First, it brings Protestantism into the heart of Paris, and second, it gives Henry of Navarre yet more legitimacy as a successor to the King.

Henry of Guise sees his chance and strikes. Six days after the wedding—August 24 (St. Bartholomew's Day)—he and his men are waiting for Coligny on a narrow street of the Ile de Cite. Coligny has two naval officers with him and two footmen,

but Guise has dozens of men armed with muskets. Coligny is barely out of his carriage when he is shot, and then Guise personally finishes him off with multiple sword thrusts.

At this point the massacre begins. Guise's men drag Coligny's body out where the gathering mob can see it, cut it into pieces and throw it into the Seine. One historian has Guise delivering a bit of oratory at this point about heretics and France, but most believe he had already set things up with the criminals of Paris—they can keep anything owned by a heretic. So the slaughter begins all over Paris and then all over France. Anyone appearing to be a Huguenot is robbed and killed and his body thrown into the river. Twenty thousand members of the middle class and the petty gentry are killed before the end of the day. The Seine is so full of bodies it is blocked up and unusable for weeks.

The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre changes the face of France. Henry Guise has shown he rules the streets. Charles IX is done as king. Whether he approved of the attacks or just let them happen, he has been shown to be irrelevant. France has no King. Within two years Charles is dead, despondent and alone. Catherine flees to Italy to the safety of her family. The Huguenots retreat to their safe regions in France—the south and the west—and turn to the leadership of Henry of Navarre.

Charles is succeeded by Henry III, the fourth Henry in this piece of history. Henry III is duke of Anjou and King of Poland and the least manly man in France. In twelve years as king he makes no effort to marry, produces no heirs to the throne, and has no policy other than to throw lavish parties with men like himself. Henry Guise and his Catholic League are the real rulers of France.

The problem of succession brings everything to a head. Charles had no children, Henry III will have no children if permitted ten lifetimes, and the rest of the brothers, uncles, cousins, and nephews are dying out. Henry of Navarre, once barely on the chart of the royal family, is suddenly next in line for the throne. By 1588 Henry Guise is ready to make himself king. He incites the mobs of Paris, and scares Henry III into leaving town. Guise then signs an agreement with Philip of Spain. Spain can have two provinces of France—including Navarre—if Philip will support Guise for King. The deal is signed and Guise begins running France as an uncrowned King while Spanish troops begin pouring into France.

Guise now makes two mistakes. First, by relying on Spanish troops and signing away French lands, he appears to be a foreign agent. Much of the Catholic League is embarrassed to be seen as part of such a plot. Second, he accepts an invitation to visit Henry III at his new digs in Chartres. It turns out Henry III is not an honorable man. He gets Guise to visit on the grounds that he will be holding a convocation that might determine who is the rightful king of France. Guise, owner of the world's largest ego, assumes he can maneuver the meeting into selecting him. He might even have done so, except that Henry III has him assassinated upon his arrival in the castle.

Henry III now makes his own mistake—he goes to church. There a Dominican monk kills him. Two more Henry's down, there is only one Henry left to rule—Henry of Navarre. In 1589 he is crowned as King Henry IV. Henry is thirty-five, young, strong, and the smart enough to still be breathing—no mean feat for royalty in those days.

Henry IV has a million Huguenots to fight for him, ten million French Catholics to fight against him, and thousands of Spanish troops attacking one French city after another. He does the numbers and concludes the obvious—he needs to be a Catholic King. Within a year of becoming king he has himself recrowned king of France *inside* the Cathedral at Chartres with various bishops and cardinals attending. The Pope welcomes him back into the fold and the people of Paris shout hooray as he marches triumphantly back into the city. They have a Catholic King and a warrior who can beat back the Spanish. With all of France now behind him, he does just that, beating Philip in battle after battle and beginning Spain's long slide into irrelevancy.

What did Henry IV do as king? Besides beating the Spanish and reclaiming French lands, he sent Champlain to the new world in 1608 to found Quebec and establish the empire we now call Canada. And he brought religious peace to France. His Edict of Nantes declared that France was a Catholic country, but that Protestantism could be practiced without fear. Churches were allowed, Huguenots could hold public office, and in fact most of his personal advisors were Huguenots. There were squabbles and skirmishes between Catholics and Protestants during his rule, but no open warfare, and France became more united as a nation. For twenty-one years, until he was assassinated by a Catholic, France had one of the better governments of the age.

By the time I had scanned my fifth history and summed up the basic narrative of those days, it was five o'clock, and I was hoping I never met another man named Henry. I locked up my study carrel and headed out to the stifling street. Inside two minutes sweat was rolling down my back and my head was even more filled with cotton. I needed a cool drink in a cool place. It was back to the Granary for me.

As I stumbled along Canal Street the sun felt like a weight on my head. Having lived so long in Virginia I liked to think that I could handle summer heat, but I was really feeling the wet air of New Orleans. What a shock after all those hours in the air conditioned library. But maybe it was the heat I needed. Because I had barely gone two blocks along the river when all the cotton in my head suddenly disappeared and I could see a date as clearly as if it was printed in front of my eyes in letters three feet high—August 24—the day of the St. Bartholomew's Massacre. If I were a Protestant with an axe to grind, that would be a special day for me. I wondered if Elise was aware of the day. Did it matter? I wondered if the group that had blown up the Biloxi Cathedral had any connections to history. Or was this just all about current complaints and a current power grab?

I was still thinking about August 24 when I reached the relief of the Granary. Stone walls are cool walls, and these were several feet think at the base. This is where the Jolliet family had brought wheat down from Illinois and Missouri. The stone walls kept out the rats and provided a solid foundation for the grinding stones. Today the stone walls dropped the temperature a dozen degrees. I felt like I had made it to a port of refuge.

The place was still empty—after all it was barely five—so I took a table near a wall and dropped my wet back into a cane chair. I needed lots of water, a little wine, and time to think through the implications of August 24. The waiter brought a pitcher of ice water almost the instant I took my seat—a real novelty for a French

waiter, and more indication of how slow business was this summer. Then he did something even more unusual—he gave me a message.

"Monsieur, I have a message from David Starr. He said to tell you the meeting for tonight has been cancelled." Even though the place was empty, the waiter kept his voice down like he was telling me some kind of secret. I just sat there looking stupid. Who was David Starr?

"I am sorry. I think you must be confusing me with someone else." At least that is what I think I said. I was hot, tired, and confused, and I think my French reflected that.

"Please, monsieur, I saw you speaking with Mr. Starr last night. He told me to tell the Americans there would be no meeting tonight. You need not worry, it is not an emergency, he just had another matter that required his attendance. And monsieur, "he stopped and looked directly at me now, emphasizing his words, "I am proud to be of service to my country and to our new allies. You need not fear anything while you are here."

"Thank you." I replied. It seemed like the most reasonable thing to say. He was really confused, but he was trying to be nice. So I thanked him. "I will be staying for dinner. When I have drunk about a gallon of water, I would like some of your house bordeau, and then dinner."

"Of course." Somehow he changed back into a routine waiter at that point, complete with bow and notations on a pad he then buried in his apron. Things had returned to the routine one expects in a restaurant.

I was midway through the pitcher of water when I realized who David Starr was—the man from the consulate. He had given me his card and we had spoken for a bit about Pennsylvania. Had I agreed to meet with him? My best recollection was that I had agreed that I might call him. In truth I had no intention of calling him. I might not be the most experienced traveler in the world, but I assumed I could last a couple weeks in New Orleans without a watchdog from the government. No, the waiter must be confused. Starr must have meant someone else. I just happened in to the restaurant when Starr's guest had been expected.

The waiter brought over my wine and then stood and had a long conversation with me. We talked wines, weather, the virtues of New Orleans, all the topics you might share with a chatty American waiter trained in customer service. For a French waiter such conversation was impossible. No one would believe me if I told them about such a waiter. And then he got even farther from the realm of the possible.

"May I speak to you in English?" If I were an older man, I think my heart would have stopped. He wanted to speak in English?

"Of course. Are you planning a visit to the United States?"

"No," he replied. "I think more Americans come now. Some do not speak French." He stopped at that point, looking like he needed to catch his breath. "Is my English correct?"

"Yes, you must have studied many years at school."

"I studied four years in school, but I forget so much. If you can speak English slow, I think I understand."

I agreed to speak slowly, and we began talking about wine and food, nouns I thought he might know best, and he handled the conversation well. We were about

to move on to another topic when the door burst open and the five rugby players who had been in the night before charged into the room, loud, and drunk.

"Misters," the waiter hurried over to them. "Mister David Starr said no meeting tonight. He is sorry." I could see where his English might help him if more guys like this became customers. It was clear their French was worse than his English. The rugby boys stood still for a few minutes looking confused. Then one of them saw me and walked over. The others followed as if pulled along in his draft.

"Do you know why the meeting was cancelled?" He asked.

"I don't know anything about a meeting. I am sorry." My response seemed simple and direct, but he wasn't buying it.

"You were in here last night talking with Dave, right?" He was a big man, standing over me, and his words were as much a challenge as a question. I almost felt like I should stand up to face him, but I kept my seat.

"Yes." I know he wanted more of an answer, but I wasn't sure I had more of an answer. David Starr and I had talked. What more was there to say?

"Look. You know who we are, and we know who you are, so why not cut out the cloak and dagger stuff. We just want to know where Dave is." His friends all nodded in agreement.

"I don't know who you are, and I am certain you don't know who I am, but if you will join me, I will buy a round of drinks." That did the trick. They all pulled out chairs and sat down, with their spokesman taking the chair nearest to me. He sat forward in his chair and leaned toward me. He didn't say anything, but it was clear he was unhappy and would have more to say to me when he chose. In the meantime, he made sure I could see all his arm muscles.

"If I remember correctly, you men prefer beer. If you want Guinness I will join you, otherwise, they have a very good house wine here." I called the waiter over and he tried to write down a series of shouted requests. Most went with Guinness or some other imported beer, but one decided to try the local wine so I drank wine too. The waiter was really good about bringing the drinks quickly, and set each beer bottle or wine glass down with a short comment in English. He was obviously making a special effort for this group, which confused me since they were drunk and loud. I would have expected him to be as cold as possible in an effort to get them to leave.

"Let me try again." The leader said. He stared right at me, apparently trying to intimidate me into some answer. "If the message is that we are to stay here for a while and wait for Dave, just say so. If Dave isn't coming, we need to know where to find him tonight."

"I don't know where he is, but I do have his card and a phone number. Would that help?"

"Yes, I would like to see that." I reached into my pants pocket and pulled out Starr's card. I hadn't put it any place more permanent because I hadn't intended to use it. It would have gone into the waste bucket as soon as I changed pants. But it might be useful tonight. The leader—none of them had introduced themselves yet, so I knew no names—took the card and studied the number Dave had written on the back. "I have this number—it is his secure line." He stared at me now, expecting me to respond. What could I say? How would I know why someone I had just met would give me a special number?

"He was just giving me a number I could call in case things got rough here and Americans needed to be evacuated."

"Oh things *will* get rough here, but we will take care of you. What do you say you tell us what you are doing here? I assume you already know our jobs."

"I am an historian, here to learn Huguenot history. And no, I do *not* know your jobs."

"We are soldiers, here to protect Americans."

"And maybe do a couple other jobs." Suddenly the other men at the table seemed to want to talk too. It was they who announced that they were soldiers, and hinted about their activities. Their leader still stared at me.

"Historian? That is the worst cover I have ever heard. If you're an historian, tell me about this building. It looks old."

"This granary was built in 1723. The Jolliet family used to bring grain down from Illinois and Missouri to various millers here in town. This is one of the oldest and best preserved buildings in town."

"Sounds reasonable. And what do you know about the Huguenots."

"I know August 24 is an important day to them." Life is full of things you wish you hadn't said, things you wish you had said differently, things you know were wrong the minute they were out of your mouth. But of all the things I have said in my life, this is the one that had the most consequences and made the least sense. Worst yet, it made my beer drinking friends very angry. I could tell by the looks of their faces that I had just said something unforgivable. All the men put down their drinks and stared at me. If I had just said the President should be assassinated, they would not have been angrier. Even their leader took an eternity before he could finally respond.

"This conversation ends now." He stood and motioned for his men to get up too. They were up and out the door inside of five seconds, leaving me sitting at a table with half-finished drinks, wondering what had just happened. What in the world had I said? Unfortunately, it would be weeks before I understood what a mess I had just created. All I could do at the moment was pay the bill and wander back to my hotel. The streets were empty and I felt totally alone.

Chapter 6

Huguenot History.

Elise called me again first thing the next morning. She was in a great mood—apparently planning was winding down. She couldn't really talk to me about what they were doing up there, but her mood told me everything I cared about. She wouldn't give me a day when she would be back in Green Bay, but when I suggested I might already drive back by the following weekend, she let me know she liked the idea. I hoped that meant I might finally get to see her again.

To prove that I was actually being productive during my time in New Orleans, I mentioned August 24th.

“History is constantly rewritten and reused.” I began a lecture. She knew she was marrying a professor, so I continued without embarrassment. “The best or worst example was in South Africa. During the 1930s the Dutch South Africans—the English called them “Boers”—began a series of historical reenactments, all meant to show how glorious their history was. It helped unite them. By 1948 they were able to win the national elections and bring apartheid to the country. On August 24, 1572 twenty thousand Huguenots were massacred in France. If I were a Huguenot looking for a rallying cry, I would do something with that date.”

“August 24th is an interesting date,” was her only response. We finished our morning talk with some more intimate conversation, and then she was off to her meetings.

I had breakfast in the hotel again—many of the restaurants in the Quarter were closed for the season, or open only for dinner. I wasn’t sure how much longer the hotel restaurant would stay open. I seemed to be its only customer. Wherever all those Huguenots who had come down from the north had gone, it hadn’t been to this part of New Orleans.

The library was just as quiet. I spoke briefly to the reference librarian to thank him for his help the day before, and frankly, also to hear another human voice. The vacuum that now existed in central New Orleans was eerie. Eventually I wandered up to my carrel and began browsing books again.

The year I left off in was 1610. King Henry IV has been assassinated, but he has left the Huguenots in pretty good shape. They had the Edict of Nantes to protect them, basically giving them the same religious freedoms we would expect people to have today. The only difference was that Henry had also given them a dozen cities that were fortified, so they had a place to retreat to if not all Frenchmen were as open-minded.

Henry’s son, Louis XIII, is nine and too young to be King, but Cardinal Richelieu serves as an effective Regent. Given all the stories about Richelieu and the Three Musketeers, you would have thought the next years would be interesting, but only if you love palace intrigue. Louis’ mother wants to rule through her son and attacks Richelieu as a rival. Louis picks Richelieu over her and sends her into exile. A sad little tale. Richelieu dies and is replaced by Cardinal Mazarin who later advises the next Louis.

Both Richielieu and Mazarin serve their king well. They bring him greater power, and centralize more authority around the king so that the government begins to take a form closer to what we would recognize as a central government. The nobles across France lose out over this period, but the King does just fine. He has a big army, a solvent treasury, his laws are obeyed in a greater part of the land, and he has fewer internal rivals. Louis XIII died at 42, but it looked like he had a pretty good life while it lasted.

Louis XIV is five when his father dies. Mazarin runs the country until Louis is in his teens, and then Mazarin dies and leaves Louis to run one of the largest and most populous countries in Europe. He rules for sixty years, most of them spent fighting various neighbors.

What about the Huguenots? They are left alone by Louis XIII, and by both Cardinals. They are protected by the Edict of Nantes and live ordinary lives

prospering in numerous industries. They go to church, raise their families, and live like all other successful Frenchmen.

It is actually Louis XIV, Henry of Navarre's grandson, who crushes them. By 1685 they are dead or forcibly converted or fugitives from France. Why? One king, one country, one religion. The two Louis's have been centralizing French authority since Henry's death in 1610. Over 75 years they have accomplished a lot. The petty nobles are broken, the borders are secure, there is just one variant from the order of the day—a million or so people who don't go to the King's church. He can't have that, so he revokes the Edict of Nantes, and lets local authorities break the Protestants. Within a decade the job is done—Huguenots no longer exist in France.

By the time I got this far in my reading it was well past lunch time, so I put away the books, locked my study carrel, and stepped out for lunch. Out of habit, I turned my cell phone on as I walked out the door. I never leave a phone on while I am working. I suppose I could say I kept it off for a courtesy to other patrons, but the truth is I hate to be interrupted while I am reading. Now my finger barely hit the power button when the ringer went off, and yes, I just have a ring or buzzer on my phone, not two movements from Beethoven.

"Shawn, I am glad I was able to get a hold of you." It was David Starr. "I would like to see you as soon as possible."

"Well, I am walking south on Canal Street, looking for lunch. Have you had lunch?"

"Lunch would be great, but do you mind walking as far as the Granary? They have a private room where we could eat and talk without being interrupted."

"Sure. I can be there in about ten minutes." I liked the Granary, but I still had a bad feeling about the place after last night. I still had no idea what I had said. I gathered the men at my table were soldiers, probably guards at the consulate, but they had been rude and secretive. And obviously I had broken some rule by mentioning August 24, but how was I to know there was such a rule? And why would someone make such a rule? I walked the seven blocks to the restaurant arriving hot, sweating, and on guard.

David was waiting for me when I arrived. The consulate must be close by, or he made this his second office. He reached to shake my hand, and then pulled me toward the back room where I had seen him and the soldiers go two days earlier.

"I am very confused by you, Shawn," was his opening after we had gotten into the room and the waiter had left. *He* was confused? I thought I was the one working through a mystery! "All I know so far is that you are a friend of Senator Dodson, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and that you know about August 24th, which frankly, I didn't even think the Senator knew about. How about helping me out here? Who the hell are you?"

Who the Hell was I? What a way to start lunch. I leaned forward with my elbows on the table and met his stare eye to eye. "To begin with, I am obviously not the person you think I am. I am not a friend of the Senator. My father is an acquaintance of his, and a campaign contributor. After all, he is the senator from our state. My lunch with him last month was just the second time I met the man. I have no idea what committees he is on, although I am surprised by intelligence. The man never impressed me that much. As for August 24th, I know that date

because I am an historian. I am here to learn Huguenot history, and the first major event of their history is their slaughter on August 24, 1572. Twenty thousand died that day. As for you, I don't know who you are either, but I assume you are not just in town to evacuate poor tourists."

He had no response to that, so we sat staring at each other across the table. The waiter, Francois, came and brought us two glasses of chilled chardonnay, and then left without a word. Neither of us spoke. Finally I took my glass of wine, sat back in my chair and drank. If we were going to have a staring contest, I would at least enjoy a glass of wine while it lasted.

"So August 24th was just a lucky guess?'

"What's so lucky about it? Twenty thousand men were cut to pieces and thrown into the Seine."

"Yes, of course." He went back to staring. It was annoying, but I let it pass. I sipped the wine, looked around the room, and waited for more pieces to fall into place. What could I guess so far? He and his soldier friends had something planned for the 24th. Fortunately I would be long gone by August.

"Dodson assured me you don't work for him."

"No, I don't. After finishing my degree I went to work for my father. He has an export business."

"And that's how you ended up in Green Bay."

"Now you are annoying me." I put down my wine and stood up. "If you are a spy, spy on the French. I am an American citizen and have the right to travel anywhere I want for any reason I want. Keep your lunch." He made a move to stand as well, but I caught him with a hand as he was half out of his chair and sent him sprawling back over his chair. I was out of the room and back on the street before he could get back up and cause me any trouble.

The street was insufferably hot, and of course I was hot too. Historians don't push people around very often. Too bad he was such a jerk. He was an American, I am an American, we should have been able to talk. Just a little courtesy would have made all the difference. Now I had a spy and some soldiers who were all angry with me. And I had another problem. I now knew for certain that something would occur on August 24. Did I warn Elise? I had already mentioned it to her once, did I call back and tell her more? But wouldn't that make me a spy for the French? I might dislike the representatives my country sent to New Orleans, but I am still an American. I decided to keep my mouth shut.

Somehow my feet found their way back to the provincial library. I was still hungry, but the cool air felt amazing, and I headed straight back to my carrel. I would read myself back three centuries to where the world made more sense. I had just sat down and started wiping the sweat from my face, when a beautiful young woman appeared. She was tall, brunette, with large brown eyes, and did I say she was beautiful? She was beautiful. And, what may have been the biggest surprise—she was wearing a yellow print dress. After several days of seeing all people wearing all white, she was a shock.

"Hello, I am Margaret Riemard, library archivist." This of course was the time for me to introduce myself, but I was still so stunned I just starred at her. She took my idiocy well. She just smiled and continued. "Monsieur Guillard explained the nature of your research and suggested I visit with you. We do not have the

archives of your library in Green Bay, or in Philadelphia, but I might be able to help you find some materials of interest."

"Thank you." I finally managed to get my mouth in motion. "I am Shawn Murphy. I appreciate your help." I held out my hand, only then noticing that it was still sweating from being outside and from the altercation with the spy. She reached out her hand, but I pulled mine back and wiped it on my pants. "I am afraid I am still sweating from my brief time outside."

"If there is one thing we understand in New Orleans," she said with a smile, "It is perspiration. Please follow me and I will take you to our collection." She turned quickly enough that her skirt flared out a bit. I noticed. In fact I stared. I followed along behind her hoping that I could get my mind back on history.

"If I might ask," I struggled to think of something professional to say. "I would think the humidity would have destroyed much of the old materials."

"Yes. In truth, we have no originals." She led me into small elevator and pressed the button for the basement. Even with my back up against a wall, I found myself very close to her—far too close. "Everything I will show you has been copied by hand, sometimes now for the seventh or eighth time. With our current climate control we can keep materials for nearly a century, but even now we cannot perfectly seal the room, so deterioration occurs much faster than it would in a temperate climate." I tried to look at her without staring at her. I think there is a difference, and I tried to achieve it, but still I was grateful when the elevator finally arrived in the basement and we were able to exit.

"Have you worked here long?" She led me down another hallway and then unlocked a large door.

"I was an intern here as a college student—Louisiana history was my major—and then again while I was earning my Masters of Information Studies. So I have spent eight years in this room. I can show you the deed to the original ten city plots, diaries from three thousand eight hundred and thirty four people who settled here before 1800, or medical records from all nineteen major malarial outbreaks." She walked farther into the room, but I just stood at the doorway and stared. The room was large—maybe sixty feet wide and well over a hundred feet long. Much of the right wall was taken up by equipment—computers, scanners, microfiche. It appeared they were digitizing much of the old materials. It would make an amazing web site when it was done, because there seemed to be no end of the materials in the room. There were a good ten rows of shelves, each just barely two feet apart—no wheelchair access rules here—and filled to the ten foot ceiling with folders, pamphlets, and books.

"Did you say all this material has been hand-copied?" I was incredulous. The work would have taken a factory full of people a lifetime to copy.

"We take our history very seriously down here, Dr. Murphy. Three out of every four settlers who arrived here before 1800 were dead within five years of arrival. Those people wanted their stories remembered, and their families were determined, generation after generation, to make that happen."

"To think all of this has had to be recopied time and again…" I took a few steps into the room and looked down two of the aisles. It didn't seem to matter how much I stared at the materials, I just couldn't grasp all the work I was seeing before me. "Fully reviewing this collection would take a lifetime."

“In the eight years I have been down here, I have had the time to read just over a thousand diaries. I think it will take me another twenty years or so to read them all.”

“Is that your plan?” I asked. She turned and walked toward me. I immediately turned from the room to watch her. She had no doubt been drawing the undivided attention of men for years.

“I know of no novels more interesting than these diaries. They make me cry, mostly, but sometimes they make me laugh. But always they make me understand what it means to be Louisianan. I can recommend several to you, if you like.” She was now standing much too close, even though she was still several feet away.

“That would be very helpful.”

“Just give me a minute.” Once again she spun on her heal, and once again her skirt flared up. I looked around the room for something else to draw my attention. Finally I walked over to the computing equipment. That would be safe. The computer monitor was over twenty inches in size, and high resolution. It was meant for long hours of use with finely detailed images. Currently on the screen was a database grid. The records appeared to be objects in the collection. Information fields included the original dates of creation, dates of the last copying, names of the author and copiers, and many coded fields I guessed were for location, content, length, and condition. The top record was:

Biloxi Diary | Renee Dousaults | 1732 | 1968 | Eduard Messier | CC443.98

“These are the three that I use to introduce people to the collection.” Margaret held out three books bound in black. “I would read them in the order you hold them. The top two describe the conditions we endured in France, while the last one describes early years here.” I couldn’t help but notice her use of “we.” She was not here as an impartial academic.

“Thank you. I assume they are not to leave the library?”

“No, but you may leave them in your carrel. They will be safe there.” I started the preliminary motions to go, one foot moving back, my body beginning to turn toward the door, yet I couldn’t help but notice her standing totally still and seemingly totally at peace. She stood and looked at me with the most relaxed expression on her face. I wondered what expression was on my face. I finished my turn and headed for the door. Somewhere down the hallway and halfway to the elevator I started breathing again.

Safely back in my study room I began reading the first diary. The author was Claude Renault and the year was 1684. The book appeared to have about one hundred pages. The paper was good quality stock with a high rag content, and the words were handwritten in black ink. I wondered if the copyists had tried to stay true to the original handwriting. If so, the gentleman liked to start each entry with a flourish stroke that sometimes made it hard for me to decipher the first word. Gradually I got the hang of it.

The French of 1684 not only had differences in penmanship, but in syntax and dialect. I was reading the words of a miller in Normandy. I assumed he was educated, but he was educated in the language and style of his day. Reading was slow. Part of my problem was my own faulty expectations. I have read lots of historical diaries, and my experience is that they tend to fall into two groups. In

the first, people try to comment on exceptional events. “Today I saw the inauguration of Lord So and so.” In truth, if Lord So and So is significant, we already have a hundred other descriptions of his events. What we tend to be more interested in after all these years is simple stuff—when you observed the inauguration, were you wearing shoes? What were they made of? How were they made? How much did they cost? When you stood on the street, was it paved? If so, how? We have far more interest in the mundane things of life, but of course that is what people never write about. The other diaries are emotional journals, and reading them feels like an invasion of privacy. “Today I was very upset with Priscilla.” After a few centuries you hope she is less upset with poor Priscilla.

As I read and reread the first page of this diary, struggling with the archaic French, I was trying to determine if I was reading an event diary, or an emotional diary. Only on my third read of the first page did I understand I was reading neither. This diary was essentially a prayer. Mr. Renault was talking to God. Part of the diary was a prayer, part was a bargain, part was a plea for forgiveness.

The prayer was for help in understanding God’s wisdom. Soldiers had been billeted at his home and at the home of all the other Huguenots in his village. But the soldiers had not been placed in the homes in order to receive food and shelter, they were in the homes to terrify and punish. Their first act had been to search the home for valuables and to steal everything they found. They made all the women their servants, cooking, cleaning, washing for them. The men they beat. After the first week a priest came and asked them if they were ready to swear off their heresy and rejoin the church. When they said "no" he went into a rage. He searched the house until he found their Bible and prayer books. The Bible was in French, obviously one of the Protestant versions printed in Geneva by the Calvinists. The priest was now even more angry. Tearing out pages, he offered them to the soldiers to be used as toilet paper. But they were afraid to use the book of God in such a way, despite the encouragement of the priest. Now so angry he was drooling and spitting, the priest threw the pages into the stove while the family screamed and cried. Finally the priest stormed out of the house, telling the soldiers they had been inadequate in their efforts to bring the heretics back to the family of God.

The next week the soldiers turned to torture. The women were tied to chairs and their feet burned. The men were hung by their arms and beaten for hours. The head of the family, Claude’s father, was nearly beaten to death. Again the priest came and again they refused to convert. There were more screams, more threats, and then the priest took one of the soldiers out behind the house and spoke with him privately. That night the head of the house was tied to a chair in the bedroom and each woman of the house was brought in and raped repeatedly in his presence.

At this point the diary went off into a long series of discussions that can only be seen as bargaining. Mr. Renault had a good grasp of his bible, and seemed to be bargaining with God using scripture. The main point was Peter. Peter had denied Christ three times before dawn, yet God had forgiven him. Would God forgive them if they denied Christ one time? The next day Claude’s father died. Now head of the household at twenty-six, Claude made his decision. He went with the head soldier to see the priest and to beg forgiveness. The priest made him stay on his knees for

most of the day before he would hear his confession and permit his conversion. Then the priest went back to Claude's house with him, heard the professions of belief of the rest of the family, and ordered the soldiers out of the house.

Much of the rest of the diary is a plea for forgiveness. They permitted the father to be buried in the Catholic cemetery, sold the mill, sold the house, and told the priest they were moving to Cherbourg to be away from the Huguenot influences in the village. No one cared that they left. The buyer of the mill and the house got a great bargain, and one more Huguenot family was gone. Within a week of arriving in Cherbourg they made contact with Protestant smugglers, and took ship to England. The diary ends with them taking shelter in a Huguenot colony that was growing near Bath. On a clear day they could see France from their second story rooms, but they knew there would be no day when they could return.

"I am pleased that you began with Mr. Renault's diary." Margaret was back, standing at the doorway of my study room. "His story is terrifying, but his reaction is so typical of the time. He believed he had a personal relationship with God, and he addressed all the events of his life in that context. By the way, it is almost seven, and we close the library at seven in the summer. Monsieur Guillard sent me to tell you."

"I had no idea of the time." And I didn't. I had become so absorbed in Mr. Renault's story that I had completely forgotten where I was.

"That happens to me all the time. Fortunately I have a key to the library, so I can let myself out if I stay late, although one time I did set off an alarm by mistake." She stood patiently while I closed up the diary and stacked up the books I had been using. No one else was going to be using my carrel, but somehow it seemed appropriate to arrange things neatly. Finally I was ready to join her and we walked out of the building together. The day was amazingly hot, and coupled with the mental change I had just gone through and the physical change I was now feeling, I felt totally confused. I just stood out of the street uncertain where to go next. Margaret stood next to me, waiting patiently and not saying a word.

"I would like to talk with you about that diary. Do you have time?" I finally asked.

"Of course. If you like, there is a cafe I often go to in the evenings. It is quiet and the food is good."

"That would be perfect." She led the way to a traffic island where we could board a street car headed south towards the river. They were all crowded with civil servants coming down out of the provincial office buildings, an army dressed in white. We were finally able to find room on one and held a strap as the street car followed Canal Street south to the river and then crossed the Mississippi on a trestle. There was more white ahead of us as the street car ground its way around a curve and headed into a commercial district that I had never visited before. My first thought was "So this is where everyone is." After several days of walking through an empty Old Quarter, I was surprised to see so many people on the sidewalks and in the cafes. This district was packed.

Margaret finally led me off the car and into the midst of a collection of sidewalk cafes. There must have been a hundred tables set up on both sides of the street, all with blue and white umbrellas shading the rapidly setting sun. She led the way

through the crowds on the sidewalk, heading straight for a matre d' who stood at the roped entrance to one group of tables.

"Mademoiselle Riemard! And you have brought a guest. Let me show you to your table." He seemed genuinely happy to see her, and led both of us to a table that was doubly shaded, both by a large overhanging roof, and by an umbrella. He even held her chair out for her, something I have rarely seen. They exchanged small talk, and she introduced me as a visiting American scholar. He left with promises to have a waiter come over immediately.

"This is quite a shock for me." I said. "I have been wandering the empty streets of the Quarter for the last several days."

"There are beautiful gardens in the Quarter, but gradually it came to feel more like a tourist destination and less like home. I sometimes walk through there, but as you can see, most people who live in New Orleans prefer the South District." A waiter brought us a pitcher of ice water, two glasses, and a plate of lemon slices—New Orleans tradition. Margaret ordered a carafe of wine.

"I am hoping you will tell me much more about Claude Renault, but may I ask you a personal question first?" She just raised an eyebrow in response and smiled enough to let me know I could continue. "So many people here are wearing white, yet you don't."

"That is actually a political question, but you ask it nicely." She paused for a moment before continuing. I found myself taken by the way she sat. Her arms were at her sides, her hands crossed in her lap, she leaned slightly back in her chair, looking as if she were at complete peace with the world. I wondered if queens sat that way. "White has always been popular down here. The sun is hot, and white clothes reflect at least a little heat. White also shows dirt—or the lack of it. After working in the fields, or in the shops, changing into white clothes meant that work was over. I think that is a feeling all people enjoy, is it not?" I nodded.

"I am not sure we paid any attention to our preference for white until several years ago when some silly travel guide talked about our clothing. It was quoted in local newspapers and was discussed, certainly more widely than the comment deserved. Local stores decided to take advantage of the discussion to push some spring fashions, and suddenly people were wearing more white and were doing it consciously. Politicians follow these things more closely than other people, and they all began to wear white as a sign of local pride, hoping obviously, to pick up a few votes in the process."

"And you?" I asked.

"I wear white on occasion. There are very good reasons to wear white in this climate. But I like other colors as well. And as you can see, I am not the only person who feels that way." She gestured toward the street, and I saw there were others, maybe one person in eight or one person in ten, who was wearing colors. In fact there were so few they appeared to be the exception that proved the rule. But I decided not to push the issue.

"May I change the subject then, and ask about Claude Renault? The diary ends with the family living in England. Since the diary is in your archives, can I assume he eventually made it to Louisiana?"

"Yes, he did. The family lived in southern England until 1720. They never ventured far from the coast. It's as if they wanted to stay as close to France as

possible, and they operated a series of mills. After the Mississippi bubble burst in 1720, John Law took off ahead of the mob and the Duc d'Oleans needed a new group of fools to populate this swamp. Who better than the Huguenots?" I had no idea what the Mississippi bubble was or who John Law was, but I saved my questions. There were plenty of books in the provincial library. "The Renault family arrived in 1721."

"He would have been over sixty." I wasn't trying to show off my math skills; I was genuinely surprised that a man of that age would try the voyage.

"Yes. He was dead within the year—new settlers died by the score, and older folks went first. But he got his family over here, and he got his business started."

"A mill?"

"Yes. You might know it. They made it into a fancy restaurant back in the seventies. The Granary?"

"I ate there last night."

"That's right. I heard it was particularly popular with Americans these days." She stopped and gave me a look that completely baffled me. What was she implying? I made no response and she continued. "It turned out to be one of the most important buildings in New Orleans. Not only did we need a mill, but he showed us how to build big buildings on this land. You see there is no solid land here. This whole area is just dirt left from river floods. It is like building on a sea of pudding. As long as the buildings were simple wood structures, they would just float on the mud. But Claude needed a large stone structure both to hold the machinery and to keep out the rats. Fortunately, he had built on river banks before, so he had some strategies for putting heavy buildings on soft soils."

"Did he put down pilings?"

"Unfortunately, bedrock is seventy feet down. He could never reach it with the technology of the time. What he did instead, was build his mill like a square boat. He brought in enough rocks for a floor and mortared them in place, and then built the walls. He then let it slowly sink into the mud. The main floor of the restaurant is really the second floor of the mill. The ground floor has sunk fifteen feet so far. It sinks a little more each year, as does much of New Orleans, but the walls are water tight, so the building floats solidly enough to be usable.

"That's pretty clever."

"Yes. He never lived to see it, but his grandsons finished the building. Once it was done and had survived a few years, others in town got the idea, and all of the buildings that survive from that time were built on that principle. We are a city of concrete boats." A waiter brought our wine and said he would return later to take our dinner orders. When I looked a bit quizzical Margaret explained the custom.

"We never eat before eight. By then the sun is down and the air begins to cool. It is also cooler for the women who have to work in the kitchen. Besides, is it so unpleasant to sit and enjoy an evening with friends?"

"No." I smiled. "This is very pleasant. Thank you for sharing this place with me. The restaurants in the Quarter are so empty I was beginning to feel like I was living in a haunted house."

"New Orleans is very much alive, as I hope you will see." At this point the conversation turned to small talk. We sipped wine, drank lots of water, and talked about college days. We had history majors in common and talked about some of

the courses we had taken. She had heard of George Washington, so I got to talk a bit about him, and she told me tales of Jean Lafite, the buccaneer. Eventually we did order dinner—blackened catfish, beans and rice. She described the arrival of rice in Louisiana and the struggle to create the first rice paddies. You could tell we were both history majors—we spoke for hours that evening and never spoke about the current century.

Sometime after ten they blocked off the street and a band stand was wheeled into place. A half dozen musicians with instruments I had never seen before began to play and folks moved out to the street to dance. The music was fast and loud and seemed to involve variations on a two-step and a waltz. Whatever they were playing, people seemed to like, since they not only danced, but shouted periodically. Within fifteen minutes the street was full of shouting, dancing people.

"Well, aren't you going to ask me to dance?" Margaret had an amused look on her face, almost like a dare.

"Margaret, I have no idea what kind of dances those are."

"You are here to learn about Louisiana, aren't you?" At that point I accepted the dare and led her out to the street. Out of habit I reached back and took her hand as we snaked through the crowd. She held my hand firmly and then stood closely when we finally found an empty spot in the street.

"Hold me as you would for a waltz. This is a two-step, with a faster beat. You hop on each foot, and try to stay in time with the music." It took me a few tries to get the beat right, but eventually we were doing something similar to what I could see other couples doing. Margaret was very quick on her feet and very forgiving if I missed a beat. With a good partner I could see that she would have been the star of this dance floor.

We were on our second dance and I was already winded when I heard my sister's voice in my head -- "Boys are such idiots!" We were both back from a CYO dance. I was fifteen and had just started going to dances. She was seventeen, and as always, was lecturing me. "Boys always want to know, 'Does she like me?' when girls are telling boys all the time if they would just look. First, girls tell you by looking at you. If they look at you, they are interested, if they don't, they aren't. Isn't that simple enough for you?" I wasn't sure if I was supposed to answer. Usually with Kelly, it was best if I just kept my mouth shut. "Second, if girls dance with you, watch their left hand. If they put it on the front of your shoulder, they are holding you off. They are just dancing with you to be polite. They are willing to dance this one dance with you, but don't come back for another. If they put it on the top of your shoulder, along your arm, they are neutral at the moment. It is up to you to say something nice. If they put it along the back of your shoulder, they are bringing you to them. They are interested. Does it get any simpler than that?" It took me two days to realize she wanted me to convey this message to Reginald, the boy she was currently dating. But by the time I could figure out how to talk with Reginald, she had already dumped him and moved on to another boy.

Kelly's lecture came to mind as I danced with Margaret. She was looking at me as we danced. And her left hand? It was on the top of my shoulder. Maybe some of her fingers were towards the back of my arm. I wasn't sure. But I thought adult women might be more complicated than seventeen-year-old Kelly knew. She was right about one thing, though. Men are idiots.

We danced several more dances, and then the band took a break. I was pleased to be able to catch my breath. Or at least I was pleased until I saw why they were interrupting the music. Several men with blue arm bands took the stage—two of them armed with rifles.

"Fellow Louisianans!" One of them shouted to the cheers of the crowd. "I love that word. Let me say it again. *Fellow Louisianans!*" Now the cheer was even louder. "These are historic times, aren't they? Our friends and families are returning from the frozen north." Another cheer. "I bet we have people here tonight who are back home again." More cheers, and lots of hands waving. "Aren't you glad to be back?" Deafening cheers. "We promise you will be safe here." The men with rifles waved them in the air to more cheers. "The Louisiana Police are your police. The Louisiana Guard is your guard. And the Louisiana Nationalist Army…" He didn't finish his sentence and the crowd thundered its approval.

"Some beautiful Louisiana ladies are going to pass among you with buckets. I want you to fill those buckets. We have a few things to buy. And I bet you know what those things are."" Knowing laughter from the crowd. "And we have a few men in national jails who need to get out of those jails." Loud boos. "These are historic times, and we are going to write some new history real soon. So dig deep and help your soldiers. Are you willing?" A cheer. "I said are you willing." A bigger cheer. "I said are you willing?" A huge cheer. While the shouts still echoed off the buildings, dozens of young girls ran into the crowd with buckets. Every person I could see put some money in. I wouldn't. I could feel Margaret staring at me, watching me. What could I say? She didn't wait for me to explain. She simply dropped a ten franc note of her own into the bucket when the girl approached.

"This is not your war." She told me as the girl moved on. "Unless you want it to be."

"I will pray for peace." I led the way back to our table. It was time to pay the bill and head back to the hotel. "Thank you for the dance lesson, and for sharing dinner with me. This was fun." I gave the waiter some francs and finished the last of my wine.

"It was my pleasure. Thank you for dinner. I guess I should head home as well."

"Shall I walk you home?"

"There is no need. My apartment is just across the street." She pointed to one of the windows over the shops."

"Isn't it a bit loud?"

"The library is quiet all day. It is good to have some noise in one's life too, don't you think?"

"Yes." I answered, but I was not sure if she was talking about the music or about something else. I walked with her across the street and stood a moment outside her door. She had beautiful eyes, and she kept them on me, waiting patiently until I said a simple "good night" and left. I followed her directions to a cab stand and rode back across the river to my hotel.

Do I agree that one should have some noise in one's life? No. It is my nature to be quiet. Whatever she meant by noise, I didn't really want it. I don't think I am alone. In my teens I read numerous biographies of soldiers. What they had in common was that most returned from battle to disappear into civilian life. They wanted to be invisible—to live simply. It has been nearly a century since the last

European war—the Second Franco-Prussian War. Those who survived until the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 simply wanted to return to their families. All those veterans are dead now. Do any of their grandchildren remember the blessings of a quiet life?

Chapter 7

Huguenots Arrive in New Orleans.

Elise didn't call the next morning. I assumed that meant she had gone into meetings earlier than usual. Was something going on? As usual, I had not done a good job of following current events. I hadn't read a newspaper in days, and hadn't turned on the tv since coming to New Orleans. I promised myself I would start doing a better job of staying current. In the meantime, I called Elise and left a private message.

Over breakfast in the empty hotel restaurant I pulled a newspaper from the top of a very large stack and scanned for events that might be confronting the powers of Green Bay. But things seemed unchanged. People were still migrating south to Louisiana or east into the U.S. One article said now over one hundred thousand Protestants were temporarily in the U.S. Various U.S. politicians were saying the usual things about helping people "in their time of need." But there had been no fighting or destruction. The Versailles immigration post was open again and all others were functioning well. If there was a significant new development in the current situation, I couldn't spot it.

After breakfast I warned the front desk that I would probably be checking out in two days. The manager was gracious about it, but I wondered if I was the last guest they had. These were not good times for the hotel business.

My goal for the day was to read the other two diaries Margaret had given me. Maybe if I got through them in one day, I could even start for Green Bay tomorrow. It would be a push, given the difficulty of the reading, but I would try. I walked quickly to the provincial library, spoke briefly with Monsieur Guillard, and then got to my study carrel.

The second diary was that of a young woman, Marguerite Guillard, but its tone was hardly feminine. This was angry woman. Some of the words I never could translate, but they seemed to be local profanity. Those curses I could understand were elaborate and very nasty. I soon discovered she had killed. The year of this diary was 1702 and began with the family joining a caravan of other Huguenots leaving France. The destination seemed to be Magdeburg in Germany, so this would be a long trek. The first few pages are filled with mild anger at having to leave home. Most of her friends were also in the caravan, but some had stayed behind, and that was a point of sadness for her. She wondered if she would ever see her friends again, or look out across a valley that she found beautiful.

There was also a bit of excitement in the first few pages. She had heard Magdeburg was a large city with lots of other Huguenots, and they would pass

through Frankfurt and other larger German cities along the way. She wondered if they would find other people from their village along the way.

They traveled in wagons and two carriages, a total of sixty people, all the men armed to protect them from robbers. Sixty people was enough so that there were other children her age (I guessed fifteen or sixteen from the references she made), and there was one boy who appeared for a few lines in the early pages. This might have been a bittersweet journey for her.

The first days describe the countryside and the care the caravan is taking to avoid contact with officials. It has always been illegal for Huguenots to emigrate, but in past years officials looked the other way, glad to be rid of them. But now so many have left that pressure is being put on to capture and try Huguenots attempting to flee. The caravan leaders had a cover story—they were headed to the market in Paris, and they had enough produce with them that they thought they could bribe or bluff their way past some officials—but they knew it only took one officious sheriff, or one angry priest to cost them their lives. So they advanced cautiously.

Things went well enough at first, but after four days the caravan is surrounded by troops. They were outside the town of Pont-du-Mauvert, a town they had wanted to bypass, but were unable to without traveling weeks out of the way. This was the town of the Francois du Chayla, a priest they knew about and feared. He had already tried and hung Huguenot émigrés. Rumors had put him in Chartres for the month, but obviously the rumors were wrong. The soldiers took the men's muskets and ordered the caravan into the town and into the fortress home of du Chayla. Here the men were locked on one room, the women in another, and they all waited breathlessly for the Priest to come.

Hours passed and then du Chayla appeared. He ordered them to their knees and demanded that they pray for forgiveness from their sins. He kept them on their knees for hours while he harangued them about their sins. They can burn forever in Hell, or they can beg his forgiveness now and be saved. No one replies. He leaves saying he will be back in the morning to accept their conversion or to force the demons from their bodies with the fire of God. They are locked in their rooms again to suffer in fear through the night.

Then a miracle occurs. A butcher's helper, Jean Cavalier, is allowed into the rooms to provide some food. He asks the men if they are willing to fight for their freedom. They are. At the bottom of a bucket of gruel he pulls out half a dozen kitchen knives. He tells the men they will have to use them. They say they are ready. He then goes to the women's room and tells them the men will fight. Will they too? They agree. He pulls more knives from the bottom of the bucket. Six of the women, including Marguerite's mother take them. The other women are to hide and protect themselves as best they can.

Cavalier then draws several soldiers to the women's room. He asks if he can have one of the women as a slave. That gets the soldiers talking amongst themselves about which women they can have. Soon most of the guard detail, about eight men, is in the women's room, talking to the women and making their selections. Somehow Cavalier has jimmied the lock on the men's door, and now they come in from behind the soldiers. Two soldiers are stabbed before they even

see the men. The others turn to fight but are stabbed from behind by the very women they had selected. Within a minute all the soldiers are dead.

Three soldiers and the priest come running, all (including the priest) with muskets at the ready. They fire into the crowd, killing four, including Marguerite's mother. In the struggle that follows they stab several more with their bayonets before the Huguenots overcome them. It is Marguerite, picking up a musket near her, who puts a bayonet into du Chayla. She writes of feeling his body moving on the end of her musket. She can endure it for just a moment before dropping the weapon. Others in the group finish the priest off.

Townspeople now begin to gather. It appears no one misses the priest much, but they know other troops will come and the town will be punished. Most want to hide, others want to kill the people in the caravan to save the town. Cavalier rallies the crowd. It isn't much as speeches go, but he points out the travelers now have a dozen muskets, so they make better friends than enemies. As for hiding, where would they hide? The best response is to act first before the authorities know what has happened. To the castle! All the men from the caravan and half the women, including Marguerite, immediately follow him. A couple dozen of Jean's friends also join in. They run up the hill to where the local nobleman keeps a small castle. He has a few guards who have weapons at the ready, but they run off when they see so many people coming.

Cavalier leads the group inside. They hesitate when they find no opposition, and are standing in the courtyard when the duc du Plessis walks out to meet them. He draws his sword and orders the townsfolk out of his castle. A few obey. But Cavlier raises his musket and kills the duc. Now the townsfolk have free run of the castle and they begin to loot it. Once the looting starts the rest of the town comes to join in and the people from the caravan go back down the hill in search of their wagons. They want to leave.

For the next hours, the town is chaos. The caravan finds its wagons and loads up all who survive. The dead and the dying are left in the home of the priest, their families crying and screaming as they are pulled away into the wagons. Marguerite has a final moment to kiss her dead mother's face, and then she is pulled into a wagon by her brothers. They race out of town just as the castle is put to the torch. The fire will be visible for miles; the best they can hope is that they are far away before troops descend on the town.

The next weeks are a horror. Afraid to travel during the day, they cover as many miles as they can each night, making for safe houses they have heard about from other Huguenots. They learn a patrol is searching for them. They also hear that Cavalier is having some success killing troops that near his town. They can barely cover fifteen miles a night, and feel that getting out of France is taking an eternity.

Much of the rest of the diary is vague. Aware that if they are captured her diary will be read, she says nothing about which roads they take, which towns they visit, and which homes shelter them. Instead, much of the diary is a lament over the loss of her mother. She is now the senior woman of the household, and has to do all the cooking and cleaning. She wishes her mother were alive to show her how to cook, and how to sew. Her skills are so meager compared to her mother's. And she misses her companionship.

There are more narrow escapes along the way, much suffering as food runs low, illness from bad water and fatigue, the deaths of two older women, but eventually they cross the Rhine into safer lands. They still have to fear robbers, but at least now officialdom will not arrest and kill them. Weeks pass and eventually they get first to Berlin and then to Magdeburg and the Huguenot colonies that have grown up in both cities. She and the remainder of her family are safe now—exiled, but safe. At this point the diary ends.

I closed the book and sat back in my chair. I was exhausted both from the content of the diary and from the effort to translate the text. I checked my watch and discovered it was already after three. That explained my hunger and fatigue. I put away my French/English dictionary, slowly straightened up the desk top, and closed my study carrel. I needed fresh air and some food.

The day outside was hot and blustery. It appeared the day was building up to thunderstorms. But so far there was no rain and the wind felt good. I headed for a small café just a couple blocks down Canal Street. I had just taken a seat at a table inside, when David Starr took the chair opposite mine.

"I came to apologize to you." He said. I said nothing. Since I had knocked him over the day before, I was waiting for him to retaliate. It was a small café with little room for a fight. He must have read my mind, because he raised both his hands, is if in surrender. "I didn't come here for trouble. I don't like getting knocked on my ass, but I was out of line, and I admit it."

"Fair enough." I replied. "I apologize as well. I value my privacy, but it was not fair for me to push you."

"Apology accepted." He held out his hand and we shook, although I have to say I was still wary of the man. What did he want? And how had he found me? Was he following me? I set back in my chair as if things really were settled between us, and looked over at the waiter. He came right over. Service was certainly exceptional in New Orleans that summer. We ordered food and wine and went back to staring at each other.

"Maybe it would help if I explained my rudeness." He was gesturing with both hands, waving them about as if to indicate he was being casual and open. "Since you seemed to know a great deal, and since you had told me you had a connection to Senator Dodson, I thought you might be connected to another government office. I have seen that happen before, where multiple agencies get involved in some project, often not knowing that there are other people from other agencies trying to do the same job. It gets all confusing, and can lead to real problems."

"You mean like multiple offices trying to help Americans get out of a troublespot?"

"Yes," he smiled. "That would be one example. And you can imagine that in times of conflict, there might be other examples." His smile now was so knowing, it irritated me. He was looking at me like a professor whose best student has just given a very good answer. But he was no professor, and I was damned if I would be his student.

"But I have never worked for the government, and so I don't know about such agencies, whether it involves rescuing Americans or any other type of work." I felt ridiculous talking in code like this. I just wanted to scream, "Whatever you are going to do August 24th, I don't want any part of it."

"I know that now. You are what you say you are—a history professor. But you do have some exceptional skills. Very few people could have grasped what you did about historical events. You also travel widely and talk with an interesting mix of people. You could be of great use to your country." At this point he just stopped and looked at me. There was an offer on the table—it was up to me to make the next move. The waiter brought some wine, some bread, and some water. I took some bread, sipped my wine, and then realized I was taking much too long to answer. Each minute of my silence made it appear that I was interested in the offer.

"No." I said it quickly, and I thought firmly. Explanations might or might not come later. For now, it was most important that I make my position clear. Starr waited patiently for me to say more, and then finally responded when it was clear I was done for the moment.

"I think if you really knew what I was asking, your answer would be 'yes.' So let me be simple and direct. One evening next month some young Americans, some of whom you have met, will be risking their lives on behalf of their country. All I want to know from you is if those young men will die. What I am asking you to do for your country is to help save those men's lives. Will you help those men?"

"You should send those men home."

"Why? Do the French know about that date?"

"Send the men home." In truth, I did not know what the French knew, nor did I want to know. But I did recall Elise's answer when I had told her about the 24th—*That's an interesting date*. The word "interesting" had been rattling around my brain for two days. Something was up about that date. It hadn't occurred to me until just now that the men I had met two days before were at risk.

"So the French know?"

"I don't know what the French know, nor do I want to know. I am just recommending that you send the men home. Their French is terrible and they drink too much. They are a danger to themselves. Send them home."

"I need more from you before I can make that decision."

"You aren't going to get any more. I have said all I will say."

"Fair enough." His hands, which had been flying around the air while he talked, now came down flat on the table – his signal of finality. "I won't push you. After all I can't have you roughing me up two days in a row." We both chuckled at that, me assuming that if he was who I thought he was, he was trained well enough to handle history professors without too much effort, not matter what their size. But I was glad he had stopped pushing. "Will I see you at the Granary tonight?"

"Probably not. I am trying to finish up my research at the library. I would like to leave Saturday morning and get back to Green Bay. I need to get my classes ready for the fall."

"Well, if you happen to stop in before you leave, I'll tell the boys they owe you a round of drinks." He stood up and left, even though his lunch had not yet arrived. I got stuck with a fairly hefty bill for lunch, but I was glad to see him go. Even the new, improved, smiling David Starr was a problem. I didn't want to see those young men hurt, and I wanted to help my country, but I didn't want to betray my friends. If I could stay away from Starr, I hoped, maybe I could avoid that problem.

I was wrong about that, as I was about so much else, but I still think I had the right idea.

It was nearly five by the time I was finished with my meal, and I was tempted to just go back to the hotel, but I was feeling pushed to finish up at the library. And then, as I started up the stairs, a name struck me—Marguerite Guillard. I had been so busy translating her words, that I had paid no attention to her name—Guillard. I knew another person named Guillard, the reference librarian. I headed straight for his desk.

"Monsieur Guillard, I have been reading the diary of Marguerite Guillard. Could it be that she is an ancestor of yours?"

"So, I see Margaret is still promoting my family tree," he said with a smile. "You will find that there are several hundred Guillards in Louisiana. We are actually descended from her brother Guillaume, but we are proud to be related to Marguerite as well."

"So the family made it to Louisiana?"

"Oh yes, they were on the first ships to arrive in 1720. Half the Huguenots of Magdeburg and Berlin came that first year, and more the next. They say when people met on the street they didn't know whether to address each other in French or German."

"Could you recommend a book that describes that migration?"

"Of course. Everyone here reads Jacques Madere's history. Let me show you." He went to a nearby shelf where several copies awaited us. "We always keep a dozen copies in stock."

"May I take it out of the library?" He agreed, and after some additional small talk, I checked out the book and headed back to my hotel. I felt excited. Here was another piece of the puzzle. I had tracked the Huguenots for a century in France. It was time I learned about their arrival in Louisiana.

Back at the hotel I turned my cell phone on, left a message for Elise, deleted two messages from Starr, and then set the phone down next to my chair in case Elise returned my call. I sat back and began reading Madere's history of New Orleans.

He begins in an odd way—not with the people, but with the geography. In sum, he believes that the Mississippi river is in some ways defective. A typical port is located near the mouth of a river, where a narrows creates a natural fort, or where higher ground provides safety from floods, or where a natural valley brings a trade route close. The Mississippi has none of those. It enters the Gulf of Mexico in three places, not one, is basically the same width all the way south from Illinois, and has no high ground at all. For the last five hundred miles of the river, there is no location that would be a natural place for a port. One of the world's great rivers has no site for a port.

As a consequence, the first port used by the French was at Biloxi. Here the ground was higher, and since the port was directly on the Gulf, it seemed closer to the security of France. At least the supply ships could get there faster than they could to some swampy outpost on the Mississippi. Since the early settlers were totally dependent upon France for food and clothing, proximity to such a port must have meant much.

Here I put the book down and thought about Biloxi and the cathedral blast. To me, and I guess to many others, Biloxi was just one more town in Louisiana. I had

driven to its outskirts when I had visited with President Jolliet, but I really hadn't given it any thought. Now I saw that Biloxi might be viewed very differently from the perspective of Louisiana natives. This was their port of entry. This was their connection to the motherland. I suppose it was their Ellis Island. Putting a large religious symbol there now struck me as a questionable idea. I wondered how much thinking the diocese had put into that location.

Meanwhile, back at the history, explorers pushed inland. Baton Rouge was settled first, and was made the official capital of Louisiana, although few wanted to live there. It was on the Mississippi River, but it was many miles up river, and must have felt like an island in the midst of unending swamp. Resupply was a nightmare. There had to be a place on the river that was less alien.

Finally some Choctaws showed Frenchmen a way to get from the Gulf to the river via Lake Pontchartrain. There was water almost all the way, plus a slight ridge running parallel so a wagon road could be built. Best yet, settlers could get from the gulf to this place on the river in two days travel. The river bent at right angles two times here, and each bend had attracted sediment deposits as the river slowed for the bend. Over the millennia, those bends had collected enough deposits to be a few yards above water. The land still was flood prone, but at least it was not complete swamp. This is where they built their new city—New Orleans.

Enough geography, now the history turned to people. The town was founded in 1716 when Louis XV was a boy of six. King since the death of Louis XIV in 1715, the country was being run by the Duc d'Orleans. The good Duc and Louis would eventually run France into bankruptcy, but both would be dead before the mobs took out their poverty on Louis XVI. The mobs probably should have struck earlier. The Duc certainly gave them cause. Determined to get settlers to his namesake, d'Orleans came up with a plan to get the moneyed people of France to pay for the settlement. He used a charmer from England named John Law to start a Mississippi Company and to sell stock to the moneyed and gullible. A port at the end of the world's greatest river was a guarantee of riches to all wiling to take a slight risk—or so they said. The fact that the "port" was at that moment just a clear spot in the swamps and that there would be no exports for decades, did not hold back the enthusiastic. After all, they could look at a map and see the strategic value of the town. They were right about the strategic value, but wrong about the timing. When no valuable exports had appeared by 1720, folks began to sell their shares. With few buyers, values fell, a panic ensued, and the "Mississippi Bubble" burst. John Law had to leave Paris fast, but somehow the Duc and the boy King survived with their heads.

Now how could they support their settlement in New Orleans? The duc came up with the Huguenot Proposal. The Huguenots were a major problem for the crown. A million strong, most had managed to escape to neighboring countries where they happily fought in every war against France, and even started a few. Germany and England had never been so strong as they were now, augmented by the peoples and money of the Huguenots. Something needed to be done.

Why not kill two birds with one stone? By offering safe passage, free land, and royal titles to all Huguenots willing to move to a state where freedom of the Protestant religion was guaranteed, the King could populate his swamp, secure his American possessions, and get a lot of Huguenots out of Europe. In secret

negotiations, the ten year-old king and the Duc d'Orleans promised Huguenot leaders that no Catholic clergy would be allowed passage to Louisiana for a period of fifty years. Tired of royal lies, the Huguenots demanded the guarantees in writing, but did promise not to publish the documents beyond their own congregations. The Huguenot Proposals were accepted, and emigration began in the summer of 1720.

The newly arrived Huguenots found a mess. The French crown had been trying to populate Louisiana with convicts and soldiers. The convicts had done nothing but steal from each other and wait for the next ship to arrive with food, and the soldiers were drunk and diseased. The Huguenots off-loaded in Biloxi, shot the first five convicts who attempted to steal from them, and then went looking for the governor. In the four years of its existence, New Orleans had had three governors, each dumber than the last. They had paid Duc d'Orleans for the office, dreaming of riches from bribes. The first one died of malaria his first year. The second took two years to realize there was no money in Louisiana and that he was better off poor in France than dead and poor in New Orleans.

The current governor, the Marquese d'urbeville, had been in Louisiana long enough to know there was no money in the colony. But he had hopes there was money he could take from the Huguenots. He invited their leaders to his house on the Mississippi, and made sure he was surrounded by what remained of his troops. He would intimidate the Huguenots and take their money as petty officials had done all over France for generations. The Huguenots arrived with fifty men. Ten went inside, while forty surrounded the house and trained their muskets on the Governor's party. Negotiations went fast. The Governor and his troops could die on the spot, or they could accept a deal. The soldiers could give up their muskets, return to their barracks, and be given food and wine and their back wages. They would return to France on the next ship. The Governor would be paid a small stipend and he would retain his title. He would also be given a housing and entertainment allowance so he could go through the motions of being a person of significance. The Huguenot Council would draft all rules for the colony. The Governor would sign all rules passed by the Council, no questions asked.

Since the troops had already accepted the deal—they were given gold coins for their muskets as they turned them in (most were so rusted they wouldn't fire anyway)—the governor had little choice but to accept his portion of the bargain. He was given fifty gold coins on the spot, and told he would be the host of a welcoming ball in two week's time. Thus began his main role as social director for the colony. It turned out he was a good dancer, told an entertaining story, and served as colony host for over a decade.

As I read of this encounter, I could see why the Medere history was so popular in Louisiana. I made a mental note to also look for a history of Louisiana when I got back to Green Bay. I suspected events would be colored somewhat differently there.

Madere's description of the next few years included less drama and more danger. Instead of facing soldiers and thieves, enemies they could handle with ease, the Huguenots were attacked by mosquitoes, water moccasins, and bad water. Already weakened by the long ocean voyage, dozens died within the first

two months in Louisiana. They organized themselves into congregations and went to work building the kinds of institutions they knew were their only protection.

One congregation they sent to New Orleans to begin building there, and to keep an eye on the governor. The rest of the immigrants stayed near Biloxi where they worked on food. Aware they could not count of France to ship food to Huguenots, they planted multiple crops in multiple locations. They were testing the land. One of the local priests had been planting rice. He hadn't been able to get much to grow, but two Huguenots experimented with this crop as well, and eventually they found approaches that worked. The priest never saw the rice paddies produce—the Huguenots had put him (and the other three priests) on the next ship back to France.

Land was cleared, fields planted, roads built, homes built, and wells dug. Rains came and destroyed some crops and washed out roads. Mosquitoes brought illness. Snake bites killed more. The summer of 1721 saw more ships arrive, this time to a struggling, but stable community. For those who had survived their first year in Louisiana, the ships were a chance to get French food, manufactured goods, and to hear of relatives left in Europe. It also marked a milestone in their lives. They had survived a year. The growing cemetery on the edge of Biloxi showed how many others had not made it.

At this point I heard shouting out on the street. This was very unusual. During my time here I had heard an occasional car go past the hotel, but I couldn't remember a single human voice. I walked out onto my balcony to see what was happening, and saw an elderly man being chased up the street by several teenage boys. All were shouting at him, and one was throwing stones at him. I ran down through the hotel and came out onto the street just as the group got to the front of the hotel.

"Stop that." I yelled. The boys, probably fifteen or sixteen years old, did stop. They were too young to take on an adult, but not too young to argue.

"He's a priest." One shouted.

"So?" I shouted back. I was now just a few feet from the boys, and they were backing away.

"Priests killed our relatives." Said the one with the stones. He was trying to hold his ground, but I had over fifty pounds on him, and he couldn't stop himself from edging away.

"Oh, which relative of yours did he kill? Give me a name." Now the boy was really confused, but he couldn't bring himself to quit in front of his friends.

"You know, lots of them. Back in the eighteen hundreds."

"Does this man look like he was around in the eighteen hundreds? No priests were. They were banned from Louisiana by order of the King. Now all of you go home and tell your fathers you need to be spanked. While you are there, read a book or two." The boys were backing away pretty fast, but it looked like the one with the stones wanted to take one swipe at me before running off. I took a step toward him as he was winding up to swing, and then he took off running with the rest.

"Priest lover" was the worst they could think to shout as they ran off into the darkness. The priest, meanwhile, was leaning against a post breathing hard. He

was a short man with gray hair and had to be in his seventies. He was much too old to be running.

"Are you hurt?" I asked. I held an arm out in case he fell, which, frankly, looked like it might occur at any moment.

"I just need to catch my breath. Those damn heretics…" he mumbled something more under his breath. He was obviously upset and angry.

"Let's go over to the hotel and sit down until you have caught your breath." I suggested.

"No, I should get back to my residence before more come back. It is not safe out here any more." He tried to stand straight, but it was obvious he was still weak. I grabbed his arm above the elbow.

"OK, father. If you will just tell me what parish is yours, I will help you get back there."

"You called me father." He looked directly at me now. "Is there any chance that you are Catholic?" I nodded. "Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, thank you. I thought I was the last Catholic left in this city of sin. Bless you, my son."

"Thank you for the blessing, father. Now, if you will tell me where you live…"

"Just up on Rampart Street, my son. Mary, mother of God, I already feel ten years younger, just knowing I am not alone." He gathered himself up, caught his breath, and walked with me up the street. When his breath would allow, he told me the story of his day. He had ventured out to see an old parishioner, hoping to be home before dark, but she had much to confess, and it was dark before he could leave. The boys had spotted him almost immediately, even though he had dressed carefully not to draw attention to himself. But the boys had guessed who he was. Under other circumstances I might have laughed. He was wearing a dark suit in the midst of summer, and his clerical collar would be a beacon to anyone hunting priests. He might as well have had "Priest" written in neon on his back.

He asked about me, and I explained that I was an American visiting for a few days. The fact that I was an American seemed to scare him. I could feel his arm tense up under my hand. "Are you sure you are Catholic, my son?"

"Just as sure as I am Irish." I held open my shirt so he could see my crucifix.

"Saints be praised for sending me a good Irish boy in my time of need. Come inside and let me give you a taste of the old country." We had reached him residence and he led me up onto the porch. Under normal circumstances I would expect him to spend his evenings on that porch talking with passersby. But there were no chairs on the porch now and he led me inside. I helped him to a chair in the living room while another priest came hurrying from the back of the house. As I reached over to turn on a light near his chair, the other priest shouted to stop me.

"Please, don't turn on that light. We'll have rocks through the window again." I looked over and saw that the blinds were pulled all the way down, but were moving from the air coming through several holes in the windows.

"Father Claude," the priest I had been helping said, "This is my Irish savior." I shook hands with Father Claude. He was easily as old as the other priest, and seemed slower in his movements. I could see why the first priest had been the one to visit the parishioner.

“You might want to sit with…” I began and then turned to the first priest. “I am sorry, but I don’t know your name.”

“Oh my. I am too old. I am sorry. My name is Father Jacques duPlessis.”

“Father Jacques had some difficulties with a few boys this evening,” I told Father Claude. “He should rest. A visit with a doctor would not be a bad thing either.” Father Jacques of course objected, and then he and Father Claude had a long talk about what had happened. Father Claude seemed more upset about it. He seemed fearful. I saw him glancing at the front windows as if more boys might be coming any minute. I waited a few minutes until it appeared Father Jacques was regaining his strength, and then I started edging toward the door.

“Please, my son.” Father Jacques had caught my movements. “Stay and have a drink with us. I would be a poor host if I did not offer you that at least. If you would not mind, there is a bottle of cognac on the sideboard over there. “ I found the sideboard easily enough. It was a monstrous assemblage of dark oak with carvings and inlays all over. It would have taken months to build something that ugly. Unfortunately, it fit the room well. I would have guessed it had been decorated once about half a century ago, maybe when these men had first arrived from seminary, and had remained unchanged since. The chairs sagged, the wall paper peeled away from the corners, and the carpet had long since gone to a threadbare brown. I found three dusty glasses and poured about an inch of cognac into each. Each priest accepted his glass with shaking hands.

For the next half hour I sipped my cognac, refilled their glasses once, and listened to two old men talk about better days. Theirs had never been a large parish, but there had been good times. Now they were mostly alone. Their housekeeper had moved north with her family, and only one Sunday service was needed in the small cathedral next door. Even that service had shrunk to nearly nothing.

“Now we are to abandon our church.” Father Jacques said. Father Claude nodded, nearly in tears. “The diocese has told us to come to the retreat house in St Louis until order returns to this region. We are to leave after fifty years. Will we ever come back? God only knows.”

“When will you leave?” I asked.

“We should have left weeks ago, but traveling is not so easy. If we call a taxi to take us to the airport, they drive off when they see we are priests.” These men were old, but they were not fools. They just sat and looked at me at this point, and waited. I held out about fifteen seconds, and then made the offer they were surely waiting for.

“I will be driving up to St. Louis on Saturday. I would be happy to take you with me. Could you be ready to travel by then?” The response was a series of “Saints be praised” and “Thank you Mary” and other priestly expressions of enthusiasm. They would be ready. I was to pull into the alley behind the residence by five, while it was still dark, and they would have everything ready to go. I gave them my number at the hotel to call in case there were any last minute changes, and then I left. I didn’t really regret the offer I had made. I was going to St. Louis anyway, and beside, how could I leave two old men in a house full of broken windows?

I stood on the street in front of their residence for a few minutes and looked around me. What kind of person would throw rocks at a priest or at their house? I

saw no one. The street was empty and completely quiet. Finally I walked back to my hotel and went to bed.

Chapter 8

Huguenot History—badly told.

I called Elise first thing the next morning. She wasn't available, but I left a message—I was leaving New Orleans Saturday with a car full of priests. If she had any prayer requests, now was a great time. Then I spent the rest of the morning being stupid. I drove around the rental places looking for a small trailer to haul what I assumed would be a mountain of personal items for the two priests. Even though I had personally witnessed hundreds of cars pulling trailers north, it somehow hadn't registered with me that renting a trailer would be hard. It was, of course, impossible. Every trailer in a thousand miles had been reserved weeks earlier.

By the third rental place I had given up on a trailer and started looking for a luggage rack for the top of the car. The first clerk I asked about that was aghast. "You would put a luggage rack on a Citroen 9000?" I wasn't sure if he felt it was beneath the dignity of a Citroen to haul luggage, or if he was worried the weight of the rack would crush the roof of France's finest effort in automotive engineering.

Finally I gave up on rental places and started visiting auto parts stores. Given the quality of French vehicles, auto parts are a billion franc industry and there is a parts store on nearly every block. It only took three stops before I found a simple pair of bars I could mount on top of the roof with suction cups and straps. One of the clerks was so interested in seeing how the rack would look on a Citroen, he came out of the store and helped me get the contraption set up. It seemed solid enough to me, at least solid enough to get a suitcase or two up there for the trip to St. Louis.

I then put the car back in the hotel lot and headed back to the library. I still had one diary to read. Margaret had been right about the value of the other two diaries; I was sure this one would be important as well. I spent a few minutes talking with Mr. Guillard and returning the book he had loaned me the day before. I told him I would be leaving the next day, and he seemed genuinely saddened. I was one of very few people who were using the library, and I suspected his days were now going to seem longer.

Back in my study carrel I pulled out my dictionary and the last diary and started translating. I saw right away that this was going to be an unpleasant diary to read. The diary was essentially a lament, written by Eloise deShazar, a woman in her late thirties who arrived in Louisiana in 1722—the third wave of Huguenot immigration. Her life was very hard. The trip over had been especially bad, with storms delaying the crossing and making most of the passengers continually ill. Her husband had been injured when the ship lurched in a storm, and with a broken arm and a concussion, he arrived in Biloxi already near death. He

contracted malaria within a week of arriving and was dead before they had even found a permanent place to stay.

She had two sons in their late teens, and three younger daughters. Would her sons take care of her now? The land that had been assigned to the family, their grant, was on the west side of New Orleans. This was not good. The farms at Biloxi were now in their third year and enough had been learned about where to plant and what to plant, that they were surviving, if with great difficulty. But New Orleans was a different matter. First, there was the two-day journey along the gulf then through the bayous and along the shore of Lake Pontchartrain. There were a few farms along the way, and a way-station had been set up where people would spend the first night, but much of the journey still had the feel of a trip into endless swamp, with every mile separating you from friends, family, and help. Her diary entries for those days were an endless list of fears.

Late on the second day they got to New Orleans. Their guide proudly pointed out the virtues of the new city—the wide streets, the regular layout of the city—grids and squares where most European cities were a jumble of narrow twisting alleys meeting at odd intervals and odd angles. Monsieur Descartes could not have designed a better city, was the claim of the guide. Eloise had no idea who Monsieur Descartes was, and rather than see wide and even streets, she saw emptiness. The houses could be counted in the dozens, the main streets on one hand. Off to the west, where their land grant lay, she saw ruts in the mud leading off into the forest. It seemed dark, and forbidding.

They spent three nights in New Orleans. They met people, went to church, studied maps of the area, and took legal possession of their grant. Eloise warmed to New Orleans and didn't want to leave it. Maybe she could find work there? Maybe someone would take in a poor widow lady? Unfortunately, New Orleans had no shortage of widow ladies. What was really needed was people willing to make farms and supply food to the colony. Several men would go out with the family for the first few days to help them clear an area and to show them the best places to plant, but they made it clear the proper place for the family was on their land.

Each family was allotted one mule. The men who would help them each brought their own mules, so four mules pulled four wagons of belongings, farm tools, seed, and food to the new farm. The trip to the land took four hours. They passed two other new farms along the way, and stopped to talk, but the rest of the walk was through towering trees and empty space. Eloise walked along beside her wagon and talked with her girls, but her thoughts were constantly about the distance they had covered. Four hours to the farm meant four hours back to town, four hours to get help in time of sickness, fire, or Indian attack. They were truly alone.

The mud ruts ended at their land. The children immediately went running off in all directions to see what was on the land. They had been raised in Berlin and so had never seen so much open land before. Eloise had also been raised in Berlin, and she stayed with the men as they discussed what to clear and where to build. They were near the river—she could see it through the trees. That was good, and that was bad. They could use the river to take crops to market once they had a boat. But the river also flooded every spring. They would have to both find high ground to live on and build levees where they could. For the moment that meant that trees along the river should stay—they would hold the ground. Trees back

from the river should be felled and left to lie parallel to the river—they would be an initial levee. The house should be at least one hundred yards back from the river on the highest ground they could find. Eloise didn't see anything that looked high. The men went out into the woods and spent the rest of the day looking for the best location. They eventually came back, looking cheerful, but she could read faces and she knew they had not found a location that would be totally safe. That night they slept in the wagons and swatted mosquitoes.

The next day she cooked near the wagons while the little girls gathered sticks for the fire and the men went out with saws to clear a trail to the homesite. She prayed it wouldn't be too far from the road. Her sons learned how to cut trees. Great care had to be taken. If trees got caught up in other trees as they fell, people could be killed. If the trees landed too far from where they were needed, mules might not be able to move them. Given the care that was needed, and the unbearable heat, that first day the men were only able to cut a wagon trail to the homesite, and get four trees down to build the walls of the cabin. She saw nothing would happen quickly on that land. They pulled the wagons to the homesite as darkness fell, and she built her first fire adjacent to the cabin. She would use that fire pit for the next thirty years.

The hardest day was the next, since she knew if would be the last before the men left. They used all four mules together to pull the base logs into place for the cabin, and helped her boys cut three more trees where the first field would be planted. That afternoon they explained to the boys what should be planted where, and how. Eloise was able to get them to stay through dinner, but then they departed, leaving her family alone. She felt like crying. They slept huddled together in their wagon, the cook fire throwing some smoke but not doing much to lessen the hordes of mosquitoes. She listened for hours to hear if Indians were sneaking up on them.

The next days were endless. The boys dug a shallow well but the water seemed half mud. She strained and boiled what they could. The boys had never done manual labor before and they got tired quickly and their hands bled constantly. She wrapped their hands in old cloths and sent them back out to work. She kept the fire going. She and the girls dragged every branch or bough they could find into the fire. She made it as big as she could—big to scare off the bugs, big to burn up the brush that made it impossible to walk, big, well, big because a big fire made her feel better.

Sunday came, but none of them had the strength to walk into New Orleans. She let the boys sleep most of the day. Before dinner she got out the family bible and read psalms. Psalms helped. They gave hope. As she now wandered in the wilderness she felt close to the ancients. Their songs were now her songs. She hoped the children were comforted as well.

Rains came the next week, and she nearly despaired. They had no cover but canvas sail cloth, and it soaked through quickly. They struggled to keep the fire going. The boys struggled to cut more trees. Days passed and she felt she was living in a wet hell. They walked through mud, they drank mud, their food tasted like mud.

When the rains finally stopped their nearest neighbors came. They had walked an hour through the mud to help them. The woman helped Eloise build a leanto

near the fire so she would have some shelter while she cooked. But her real help was talk. She talked about her first year, talked about the water, showed her how to filter the water through cloth, and talked about daily life. It was heaven to have a woman to talk to. The man showed the boys how to care for the mule. They had never had a mule before and had not been sheltering or feeding it properly. He also helped them move two more logs into place on the walls of the cabin. Their children played with the girls. It was so good to have others to see, and to hope that there would be others again – that they would not always be alone in the wilderness. She cried when they left that evening, but she also says in her diary that she is relieved to have neighbors—it makes the swamp feel at least a bit more like Germany.

Most of her entries during this period are short. She talks about writing beside the cook fire after the children have gone to sleep. Sometimes she writes about missing her husband. Other times she writes about her children and how well they are adapting. Many passages curse the mosquitoes and the heat and the rain. Days go by with no entries at all, I assume because she is too tired or because the rain will give her no chance to sit and write.

By late summer three events occur that give her some hope. The boys manage to get some crops planted among the stumps, and she is happy to see plants growing. They also take one Sunday and walk into New Orleans to attend church. It is a burden for the whole family. She spends two days washing and mending clothes so that they will look presentable when they arrive, and of course the four hour walk is a burden for all of them after all the work they have put in. But the children are excited about seeing others again, and she needs to be around adults again. They arrive about midway through the service, and sit in a stifling hot log building for two more hours before the service ends. Then they are welcomed by one and all, invited to share a meal with the congregation, and given a ready ear as all of them tell about their first summer in the swamp. They pass a joyful afternoon that she is still writing about three days later. But it is just an afternoon respite, and by early evening they are back on the rutted trail to home.

Two weeks later comes the biggest event of the summer—six men, plus their wives and children arrive on a Saturday to help finish the house. They bring their mules and their tools and lots of food, and finish bringing the walls up to a five foot height while one man cuts boards for a door and others trim branches to be the rafters of the roof. By the end of the day they would be under a roof for the first time in months. By any standards the cabin is tiny, squalid, and dirty, a place they would have rejected if they had seen it when they first arrived, but after living in the wagon for months, it seemed a godsend to her now.

The afternoon was running late, and I began to worry that I might not finish the diary before the library closed, so I began to skim the pages. The fall brought a small harvest, enough to give them some of their own food to eat over the winter. Mostly the harvest was a promise—if they could raise food this first year, they could raise more in the future. They might not starve.

The winter was colder than they expected, the boys cut more trees, improved the cabin, cleared more land for crops, they went to church at least once a month, that being easier once the rains stopped and the roads dried out. I thumbed through page after page. It appeared they were slowly succeeding.

Then sickness hit. They all came down with fevers and diarrhea, and she cared for all of them as best she could. A doctor visited once, but he had little medicine and no helpful advice. She refused to let the man leech the children. In three days the little girls were dead. She mourned them and buried them and feared what would come next. As much as she missed her baby girls, what if the boys died? She prayed that she would die before they did. Weeks passed and eventually the fevers subsided and she was left with her two boys.

The next entries are filled with her grief and her anger at Louisiana and her regret of having ever left Germany. It goes on for pages after page after page. I skimmed through days, and weeks, and months. It was rude of me—unfeeling—but my self-imposed deadline for leaving New Orleans was getting close, so I hurried through the next two thirds of her diary.

I hurried so fast I almost missed the Jolliet entry. It was the following fall and the boys had harvested enough food that they were able to put a load on the wagon and take it into New Orleans. They were so proud of themselves. In just their second year on the farm, they had raised enough beans and wheat that they had surplus to sell. She and the boys loaded the wagon before dawn and walked the four hours into New Orleans, dreaming of the money they would earn.

But they earned little. The crop sold, but days before a large boat had come down the river filled with wheat and corn. New Orleans had never seen so much food. And, they were told more would be coming each week well into the fall. There would be food for everyone! That was great news to the people of the town, and disaster to the local farmers. Prices were far lower than they had been in past years. There had never been competition before. Now there was. Who was this man who had undercut the local farmers? Claude Jolliet. She had his name underscored in her diary. This man had cheapened the work of her boys.

They sold their crop for less than half what it would have brought the year before, bought a few necessities, some cloth, some sugar, and trudged the four hours back to their farm fully chastened. Along the way they stopped and talked with their neighbors who told the same story. Crop prices had dropped. Food was coming down from some place called Illinois. They had worked so hard, sweating for every bean and every head of wheat, and now they got sous where they had hoped to get francs. It would be a long winter. They had fought the mud, the rain, the heat, and the mosquitoes. Now they would have to fight someone called Jolliet.

I was stunned. I had seen Jolliet as a savior. He had brought food to save hungry people. What could ever be wrong about bringing people food? I had given no thought to the local farmers. I closed the book, closed my eyes, and sat thinking about the deShazer family and all the other families who had homesteaded Louisiana. They had learned about weather. Now they were learning about market economics. I had given economics no more thought than they had. I wondered what else I had missed.

I was still sitting that way with my eyes closed, when Margaret arrived.

“Wake up, sleepy head. Time for the library to close.” She stood at the doorway of my study carrel as beautiful as before. She was dressed in orange today, but I tried not to look.

“I am awake, just pondering. You know, thinking deep thoughts.” I smiled and began putting my books in order.

“My father does a lot of pondering just like that, especially after a heavy meal.” She took the three diaries from me when I handed them to her. “Are you all done with these?”

“Yes. Thank you for picking them out for me. You say you have three thousand more downstairs in the archives?”

“Three thousand, eight hundred, and thirty one more. Would you like me to pull some more for you tomorrow?”

“Thank you, but I am leaving for Green Bay tomorrow. I need to get back to the university.” I packed away the rest of my materials, discarded some notes, and grabbed the rest of the books I had checked out, so the carrel would be clean for the next user.

“Well, for your last night, how would you like to see a play? Some of my old college friends are producing a play based on one of the diaries of the original families. I think you might find it interesting.”

In truth, I was exhausted. I find translating difficult work, and this diary had been a real challenge. And then there was the matter of the Jolliet food boats. What I really wanted was some quiet time to think through the implications of that. Sometimes I feel like a dog that just wants to lie still for a while and chew on a bone. This new view of Jolliet was something I needed to chew on. On the other hand, I didn’t relish going back to an empty hotel room in an empty hotel. Besides, I think I was too tired to think of a good excuse for not going to the play.

“Sure. If you will give me directions, I can meet you there after I change.”

“There is no need for that. This is a very informal production. Some of these people are still graduate students, so you can imagine how they will be dressed. We can leave directly from here, and grab a sandwich along the way. It is an easy place to get to. The theater is just a block or so from my apartment.” The minute she said “apartment” I know my pulse rate jumped about twenty beats per minute, but I let that pass and followed her out of the library.

We took the streetcar again over to the south side of the river, and got off where we had two nights earlier. If anything, the street was even more crowded, and most of the tables were occupied. We wound our way through the crowd to her apartment where she said she just needed to stop for a couple minutes. Walking behind her through that crowd, watching her move, I struggled to look anywhere but at her, but I found that nearly impossible.

“Would you like to come up and have a glass of wine?” She asked at the door to her building. She said it so lightly you would think she was talking to an old friend. There was nothing in her look or in her voice that implied anything other than a glass of wine. But for me the temperature in New Orleans had just gone up about twenty degrees.

“Thank you, but I’ll wait here.” She just smiled and slowly opened the door and went inside. I waited in the shade of the building entrance, looked around the street, and tried to get my mind on history, or geography, or economics, anything but the obvious. She came down in about ten minutes and swiftly led me down the street. She had changed something, but I wasn’t sure what. She was wearing the same dress, but maybe she had changed her hair, or put on some jewelry. I looked everywhere but at her as we walked up the street toward the theater.

In the next block we found a bakery and got two ham and cheese sandwiches and then ate them on a park bench outside the theater. As it turned out, the "theater" was just an open area up two flights of stairs. There was no marquee outside, just a bulletin board announcing each night's activities scheduled for that space. It looked like the play *Founding Families* was going to have a three night run. We sat in the shade of the building and ate our sandwiches. Given our position near the entrance, Margaret became a kind of informal greeting committee, hugging old friends and introducing me as "an American historian."

For a college play presented in a glorified attic, the crowd was fairly large. Most of them were young, but there were some older folks too. I wondered if they were the parents of the performers. Margaret seemed to know everyone, and barely had time to eat her sandwich. She also had me jumping up regularly to shake hands, although I nearly balked at one point. Four young men with blue arm bands greeted her and seemed to get extra long hugs. While she was hugging, I was trying to decide what politeness dictated for me. Did I shake hands with people who blew up cathedrals? Maybe these men hadn't been involved; maybe they had. I edged backwards so I would be out of reach. But Margaret was having none of that.

"Shawn, I would like you to meet four members of our army." She then gave me each of their names. I tried to wave to them and take a step back, but "Captain Goulet" held out his hand so directly I couldn't pretend not to see it. Finally I took it, but then I did something I have never done before—I crushed his hand. He responded after an instant and we stood locked in a contest of grips, but I had the larger hand. Finally he yielded and took his hand away, shaking it.

"You Americans seem to like contests of strength." He stared at me, now seeming determined to stare me down.

"You French have been powerful enemies for a very long time," I responded.

"Yes," he answered. "The French have been your enemies. We Louisianans can be many things. And I promise you, we will remember our friends and our enemies when this war is over."

"I hope the war never starts."

"The war has already begun. We fight for our independence, and we will win our independence. Most Americans understand that and support us."

"This American hopes your political differences are settled before more people die."

"Tell that to the Pope and the bastards in Green Bay," one of the other "officers" retorted, and all four of them pushed past me and into the theater building.

"You have an interesting approach to making new friends" Margaret smiled at me, attempting to defuse the situation.

"I am sorry if I embarrassed you," I replied.

"They have certain expectations about Americans. You just confused them. They will be fine in a while." At that point she took my hand and led me into the building. What is it about French women and grabbing hands? They do it so well. I instantly forgot about the blue arm band guys and meekly followed Margaret up two flights of stairs to see a play I had absolutely no interest in.

As it turned out, the play was awful, but short. The plot revolved around one family and the terrible times it had in France and then in New Orleans. About

every terrible thing that can happen to a family happened to them. I knew from my diary reading that all the things they were acting out probably happened, but the playwright had no sense for drama. After the first two kids die, you know that more will die, and then the father will die, and then the uncle. The only dramatic twist was deciding which, if any, of the family members would be alive at the end. I had my money on the plucky daughter, and sure enough, she makes it to the end where she gives an incredibly long speech to her fiancé about how much she loves him and Louisiana and how sure she is that they will prevail despite all the hardships they have endured.

If the play was written by a college student, I hoped the student was still a freshman, but I was the only one who had any questions about his talent. When the curtain came down (after several tries at getting the old curtain to move through the pulleys), the crowd cheered and gave the actors a standing ovation. Then the playwright came out (a guy in his late twenties already balding) and the crowd really went wild. They loved this guy. I hoped much of the attraction was the fact that the play was over in an hour, but I might have been wrong.

Margaret needed to stand and mingle for a while after the play. I stood a bit off to one side and was largely ignored. The blue arm band guys glared at me as they exited, but that was the extent of our interaction. Finally Margaret had hugged most of the cast and half the audience, and we left.

"That wasn't a very good play, was it?" She asked as we walked down the street. She took my hand and we walked side by side toward the band and the cafes.

"It was short, that's always a good thing."

"Ours is a hard story to tell. I think those three thousand eight hundred and thirty four diaries tell it best, but they are locked up in a basement and known only to the families."

"Yes," I agreed, "they are very powerful."

"Will you dance with me?" We were near her apartment building already, standing at the edge of the crowd. The band was playing something slow. I took her in my arms and we danced the last of the song. Where was her left hand? Well around on the back of my shoulder. I could imagine Kelly smiling at me as she saw it.

Then the song ended and Margaret kissed me. Both her arms went around my neck and my arms went around her waist, and she kissed me for a very long time. She was a beautiful woman and she felt very good. When she was done with the kiss, she laid her head on my shoulder and said softly in my ear, "When you come back, I will be waiting for you." Then she slowly separated herself from me and stepped over to her door. She unlocked the door and stood there looking at me for about seventeen eternities. Finally she went inside and the door closed behind her. I felt like a fly frozen in amber. Finally I could breathe again, and I slowly turned toward the cab stand and my ride home. There waiting for me was Elise.

"Elise!" I ran the last few steps to her and grabbed her around the waist. She let me take waist, but held me off when I started to kiss her.

"First, you can't kiss me until I get that woman's lipstick off your face." She pulled out a handkerchief and ran it over my mouth, being none too gentle in the process. "Second, you have to tell me that I saw all there was to see."

“That is the only time we kissed. I promise. She is an archivist at the Provincial Library and she invited me to see an historical play.”

“She’s a bimbo and gets frequent flier miles from the local cosmetic surgeon, but I wouldn’t expect you to know that. But I believe you about the kiss.”

“Thank you for coming down. I missed you.”

“That’s the right answer. Now you get to kiss me.” And we kissed for a very long time. I was still very confused about how she was here, and what she had seen, and what I had done, but at the moment, it felt great just to hold her.

“Ah, I don’t know what to do next.” I finally said. “Can we go back to my hotel, do you want to eat dinner in one of the cafes here, do you have time to be with me, or are you in meetings down here? How long do I get to keep you?”

“You get to keep me forever. But let’s talk about it in the car.” She nodded towards a very large man who had been standing at a discreet distance, and we followed him through the crowd to a large car that was parked illegally at the corner. I followed her into the back seat and the car was instantly in motion.

“I’m staying at the Maison Dupuy Hotel,” I told the driver.

“We already know that, Shawn,” Elise replied. “We dropped my bags off there hours ago before we started tracking you down. Fortunately, you are very predictable. You are the only man I know who could spend every day of his vacation in a local library. Two calls to staff and we knew who you were with and where you had gone. We ate dinner at a cafe near her apartment and waited for you to come back there.”

“I am sorry about how that looked…” I was really struggling to think of what else to say. She had seen what? Us dancing? The kiss? What was she thinking at that moment?

“What I saw was Miss Biloxi 2002 invite you up to her room, and you turn her down. The rest I can live with.”

“She’s the archivist at the Louisiana Library.”

“Actually, she is not.” As Elise delivered the next few sentences I noticed two things. First, she knew a whole lot more about Margaret than I did, and second, her speech patterns had changed. Her sentences were short and crisp. Her two months in government had already had an impact. I have to admit to being a bit put off, both by the message and by the style. “She may have worked there while in college. That isn’t clear yet. What we know for sure is that the regular archivist is Robert deVille, a nice old man who was apparently sent on an early vacation. Miss Biloxi was brought in for your benefit.”

“Elise, why would someone do that?”

“Nobody seems to know at the moment, but we have people working on it.” She left that last hanging in the air, for me to imagine who “people” were and what it might mean that they were “working on it.” I had nothing to say to that. I sat basically numb while the driver took us back over the river toward my hotel. Somewhere during the ride Elise took my hand and held it in both of hers as she had so many times before, and I felt a little better. The driver pulled up to the front door of the hotel to drop us off when I suddenly remembered the fathers.

“Will we be staying in New Orleans? I promised two priests I would drive them to St. Louis tomorrow.”

“I have several reasons to want to get you out of New Orleans,” Elise replied with an expression I would be puzzling over for days, “but I would like to stay a few days. Can we move the fathers up on Tuesday or Wednesday?”

“I think so, but we should go talk with them. I suspect they are in the midst of packing.” I gave the driver directions to Father Jacques’ residence and he had us there in seconds. As before, there were no lights on in the front of the house, but I was confident they were inside. Elise asked to meet them, and the two of us walked up the stairs to the front door. I heard a noise in the front room and knew we were being watched. Rather than ring the bell or knock, I just announced myself.

“Father Jacques, this is Shawn Murphy. Can we come in?” I heard several locks being undone on the huge wooden door, and then Father Jacques pulled the door back as far as his aging body would let him.

“Shawn, welcome. We are almost packed.” Then he looked at Elise and his face changed. He was suddenly tense. It was only then that I realized Elise was wearing a white dress. Did he think she was a Huguenot?

“Father, this is Elise DuPry, my fiancé. She works in the Interior Ministry and is visiting New Orleans for the weekend.”

“Come in, come in.” He was suddenly very solicitous and waved us into the dim living room before pushing the dark oak door back into place. “Did you say DuPry? Would you be a Green Bay DuPry?”

“Yes, father.” She then did a very formal curtsy and kissed his ring. At this point Father Claude also shuffled into the room and the two stood somewhat agog. They looked star-struck.

“And to think…” I heard Father Jacques mumbling. “Because of the white dress, I almost…” I introduced her to Father Claude and Elise once again curtsied and kissed his ring. There was a long silence, and then both men started anxiously looking around for someplace to sit or something to offer her. They suddenly both wanted to be good hosts, but the situation was impossible. The place was a shambles. I saw two cardboard boxes in the living room, and several more down the hallway. Finally Father Claude noticed an old settee in the room and motioned Elise to that.

“Please my child. Won’t you sit?” Elise immediately sat on that old relic, looking as comfortable is if she had just been seated at the Plaza Hotel.

“Fathers,” I hesitated a second for the priests to remember that I was in the room. “We had talked about leaving tomorrow morning, but since Elise has come to visit me for a few days, would you mind if we made our trip Tuesday or Wednesday”

“Of course not.” Father Jacques answered. He was still looking at Elise, but I was fairly confident he was talking to me. “That will give us a bit more time to pack.”

“About that. I tried to rent a trailer to help with your belongings, but there are none in town. I did find a pair of bars for on top of the car, but I would expect it would only hold several suitcases.”

“Oh, that’s not a problem.” Elise interjected. “I have been assigned a fairly large car. What if the four of us ride north in your car, Shawn, and my driver can take the luggage in the second car.” That seemed to be agreeable, and then the fathers

turned the conversation back to Elise. They wanted to tell her about their three trips to Green Bay, and the service they had attended at the National Cathedral, and the members of her family they had met. And she expressed a great deal of interest in their church and the local parish and to their personal histories which seemed to pour out of them. How does that happen? I can know people for years and not know if they have kids or have ever been to Europe. Other people, and Elise is a master at this, can spend twenty minutes with a person and find out who their third grade teacher was. I stood to one side and watched in amazement.

Eventually the fathers began to wind down and Elise and I made our exit. The driver had us back at the entrance to our hotel minutes later, and I finally had Elise alone. We took the elevator to my room, I carried her over the threshold, and we had a marvelous end to a very confusing day.

Chapter 9

New Orleans with Elise.

We lay in bed for hours Saturday morning. We had our arms around each other and talked—mostly about family. Elise had sent "thank you" notes to all the women in my family after our visit, and they had been corresponding with her ever since. Our mothers were writing to each other. Earlier in the week my father had flown into Green Bay to visit our corporate office there. My mother had flown in with him, and they had had dinner with the DuPrys. All this was news to me, but I was glad to hear our families were getting along.

Then there were Elise's sisters, who appeared to be spending their summer vacation riding horses and planning Elise's wedding. They were down to flower arrangements and the color scheme for the napkins.

"Speaking of weddings," I asked, "have the girls decided *when* we will be married?"

"French engagements always last a year. My father reserved the National Cathedral for May 28th."

"Good. I really liked those chapels on the west end of the Cathedral. Will we use the one we visited that one Sunday?"

"Actually, we won't be using the chapels." Elise stopped there, looked me straight in the eye and let me figure out the rest.

"We're getting married in the sanctuary? We'd better bring in whole bus loads of Murphys."

"It sounds like that is your family's intention. As for DuPrys, you'd be surprised by how many of us there are." Our conversation stopped there as I tried to imagine the scene. Good thing I had nearly a year to polish my shoes and get a haircut. During my reverie Elise moved even closer to me, and well, an hour or so later we showered and got dressed.

I ordered room service for breakfast and we sat around the table in my suite, eating eggs and catching up. Mostly Elise explained why she was in New Orleans.

“It is because of you. Of course I wanted to see you. I know I have been absent too much. But I am also here because of your example. After you called earlier this week and I heard you were in New Orleans, I mentioned it to several other people. Uncle Claude responded immediately."

“You see,” he said to all the others in the room. “That is what we should all be doing. The longer we sit up here in Green Bay, the better our plans are, but the closer we come to developing a bunker mentality. We begin to think of these people as alien beings. But they are French, just like us. We know them. A fourth of our colleagues in the ministries now live down there. We know their names, we know their children, we attended school with them. We should all go down there—today—and visit old friends.”

“It was great news to me, because it gave me a chance to come see you. So I made travel arrangements right away, as did many others. A few refused to make the trip, and there was some talk about security, but I pointed out that you had been walking the streets all week without any security, surely the rest of us could travel with light security.”

“That was the man with you last night?” I asked.

“Yes, Anton. He drives the car and watches out for me.”

“So you will be visiting former Ministry employees this weekend?” There must have been something in my voice or expression as this point, because Elise put down her fork and came over to sit on my lap.

“I will be with you all night, every night.” That certainly brightened my mood.

“I suppose in the meantime, I can keep reading up on their history. So much happened here, I feel badly about how little I know.”

“Speaking of history,” suddenly she was all business. “If you happen to run into other dates like August 24th, please pass them along.”

“I haven’t, but you should know this—history matters to these people. And they have real grievances. To begin with, I think Biloxi was a mistake for a cathedral location. This was their main port of entry. It’s their Jamestown or Plymouth Rock, or Ellis Island. The symbolism of a major cathedral there was just bad. Secondly, the Jolliets have problems down here. We see them saving the locals by providing food in their early years. But the farmers down here saw the Jolliets as undercutting their crop prices at a time when they were desperate for income. Of all the diaries in the archives here, Margaret made sure I saw one that talked about the Jolliets, so I assume there is some reason why she wanted me to know about that problem.”

“And third?” Unfortunately, Elise was shifting around on my lap. This was not the kind of conversation a reasonable man has with a beautiful woman sitting on his lap. To prove just how unreasonable I am, I kept talking about history.

“They are going to use history to rally the locals. I went to a terrible play last night. The playwright should be banned from word processors for life. But the crummy little theater they used was packed, and the audience gave the play a standing ovation, led by some folks with blue arm bands. They weren’t applauding the play, they were applauding a vision of history they want to promote—Louisiana as hero overcoming adversity. This particular play won’t go anywhere, but I would bet there will be other efforts.”

“You and Uncle Claude should talk. I will see if I can arrange dinner with him tomorrow.”

“Dinner is fine, but remember, I get you all night every night.” That got me a long kiss, and well, eventually we each finished getting dressed and headed out for the day. Elise gave me her cell phone number, I promised to keep my cell phone on, and we made general plans to meet back at the hotel early in the evening.

Normally, I would have headed straight back to the provincial library, but now I was not sure I could ever go back. Who was Margaret Riemard really? And if she was lying to me, was the reference librarian too? Monsieur Guillard seemed like such a nice man. But what role was he playing? No, I would keep my distance. Then it occurred to me there was a growing list of places I couldn’t go in New Orleans—the Granary, the South Side… How could a guy spend one week in a city and be unwelcome in so many places?

At least there was the National Library. I walked over thinking happily of the weeks I had spent doing research there in January. That was a mistake. The National Library I found in July bore little resemblance to the library I had used six months earlier. The metal detectors at the door were the first change, but not the last. Users now had to register at a desk near the door. Since I seemed to be the only person using the library that day, I walked right up to the desk and signed the registration form. A uniformed security guard sat on the other side of the desk waiting for me to finish the form. Then he asked for some identification. I pulled out my passport. Big mistake.

He must have pushed a button somewhere, because suddenly there was another security guard at each of my shoulders. They didn’t have weapons drawn, but they did have holsters.

“The National Library is not open to foreign nationals,” the guard said in heavily accented English.

“It was open to me in January,” I answered in French. “I am a history professor at the National University in Green Bay, and I am here to do historical research.” That brought a long pause as the guard tried to reconcile the American passport with the French job. Apparently he had been given a set of rules to follow, and I was not fitting those rules.

“Could I see your university identification, please?” Fortunately I had gotten my faculty ID earlier in the summer. I had thought it might be useful in getting a parking place. It had never occurred to me I would need it just to get into a public library. I handed him the ID. “Please wait here.” He said, and went off to talk to a supervisor or make a phone call. This was a decision he didn’t have the authority to make. Meanwhile, I stood in close proximity to two very large men who made it clear any sudden moves would be a mistake. Eventually the guard came back with a second man, a librarian I vaguely recalled from my visit in January.

“Doctor Murphy.” The librarian began, extending a hand over the counter. “It is good to see you again. Congratulations on the appointment to the university.”

“Thank you.” The two guards at my side disappeared, and the guard behind the desk pressed a buzzer that let me through a half-door next to his station. The librarian waited for me on the other side of the door.

“How is your biography of the Jolliet family coming?”

"It has been going quite well, but as you can imagine, there have been some disruptions lately."

"We have had our own disruptions. We have cut the serials budget 30% to pay for additional security, and then we received orders to further restrict access to the collection. These are not good times for people whose primary joy in life is sharing information." He led me back towards the reference area, an area of beautiful wood work and long shelves of reference works. I felt much better the minute I was back on such familiar turf. I suspect it provided solace for him as well.

"I am surprised about the decision to forbid foreigners access to your materials. There is so much of value here."

"In truth, our rule is to ban Americans." He looked me straight in the eye as he said this. I could see he was uncomfortable, but he would not hide the truth. He was, after all, a librarian.

"But why?"

"Rumors, Professor Murphy, rumors. Americans have become the new boogie man. Americans are coming to invade, Americans are coming to plunder, Americans are coming to destroy. A squad of the Louisiana Nationalist Army could come in here, blue arm bands and all, and I could not keep them out. They are, after all, French. But Americans we can keep out. So we do. I hope the rumors are false and that all this turmoil can be resolved peacefully and soon."

"Amen to that."

"Now that I have explained our sorrows, how can I help your research?" I then explained my interest in Claude Jolliet—the one from the 1720s—and the research I wanted to do on his grain shipments. Monsieur DuBois seemed genuinely interested in helping me find materials. I was the only scholar in the library that day, and for all I knew, the only scholar he had seen all week. He quickly walked to a computer and accessed materials from several sources. This was obviously a topic he had reviewed before, since he knew to look not just under Claude Jolliet, but under *Illinois Grain Company* and *New Orleans Tariff Laws*. He printed off several sheets of access codes, and then started bringing me microfilm.

"We had hoped to get all these materials digitized this year," he apologized as he brought another four rolls, "but every metal detector is less money available for updating our collection."

"I love microfilm," I replied. "It reminds me of being an undergraduate and the first time I could find a century's worth of newspapers through the viewer. There is something about rolling through history that is very attractive." He went off to pull more microfilm for me, while I threaded the machine and began cranking first through newspapers, then through court documents, and finally through corporate reports. In short, I was one happy, productive historian. Monsieur DuBois returned periodically to check on my progress and we had good talks about what I was finding. By five I was willing to attempt a preliminary summary.

"Please tell me if you agree with my initial interpretation," I began. DuBois had taken a seat near me and was boxing up some of the films. "By 1710 farming has progressed so well along the Illinois River that Claude Jolliet and his partners are feeding all of Quebec and beginning to export back to France. By the way, I drove through those lands on my way back to Green Bay in February, and I am not at all surprised that farms there were so successful. We have nothing comparable in the

U.S. In 1719 he tries taking a boat load of grain to New Orleans, but the trip is a disaster. The river is harder to navigate than he expects, and when he arrives in New Orleans all he finds are drunks and criminals. He sells his food at a loss and starts poling back up river—a tough job for a disappointed crew. OK so far?"

"You left out Baton Rouge, but you are right in the main. The first settlements were havens for criminals and drunks. Say what you will about the Huguenots, prior to their arrival these were pretty desperate outposts."

"Jolliet hears about the Huguenots, somehow, and tries again in 1721. As I read it, that first year goes really well. People are half starved and none of the local farms have started producing much, so he not only makes a lot of money, he makes lots of friends. He and his crew stay in New Orleans for a week after their wares are sold, and even take a trip to Biloxi to meet with the leaders there. He gets to know his customers, and they get to know more about the river and about the folks up north."

"Yes, he is practically a hero. We have a couple diaries down in archives that describe dances that were held in his honor, and parties. He was one popular man"

"But not for long." I replied.

"There, I would be cautious. I think he was always popular with some parts of the population. He was generous with his money, careful with how his men behaved, and he was a charming man. He knew what to say and how to say it. And don't forget his name. The Huguenots knew about his grandfather. In the world of 1720s New Orleans, Jolliet was a celebrity."

"But that didn't stop them from shooting him."

"Unfortunately, you are correct. That did not stop them from shooting him. But we must leave off this discussion for the moment. The library closes at five on Saturdays. Shall we continue our talk at a café?"

"I would enjoy that, but I promised my fiancé that I would dine with her."

"A fiancé! You have had a very successful spring. Would I have met her?"

"You may have. She did research here and in the Provincial library in January as well. She is Elise DuPry, now Doctor Elise DuPry." Needless to say he had the same expression all men who know Elise have when they hear about our engagement.

"Congratulations." That is what he said. What he meant was, you lucky dog, how did you pull that off? I thanked him, gathered up my notes, and headed for the exit. I suspected the first question Elise got when she explained our engagement was "Who the hell is Shawn Murphy?" But I didn't care. She said "yes." All the rest was just detail.

It was unbelievably hot outside so I stood for a minute at the top of the marble steps and adjusted to the heat. I also sent a text message to Elise "Done at library, to hotel." My fingers are really too big to do much text messaging, but I didn't want to disturb her if she was in a meeting. I put the phone away and started down the stairs only to see Margaret waiting for me under the shade of a tree. She was wearing a greenish floral print dress and seemed to fit perfectly into the background she had chosen. I hesitated for a second and almost tripped on the stairs, but then I continued down to her.

“I came to apologize.” She took a step toward me as I reached the sidewalk, but still stayed in the shade of the tree. While she was apologizing, she didn’t look particularly upset or uncomfortable. She looked at me with the same calm she always had, looking regal somehow. I could see her now as a beauty queen. She had the poise. “I wanted to impress you, so I inflated my credentials.”

“I understand you are not the archivist for the library.” I stopped a couple steps from her. I was still in the sun, but I had this odd feeling that if I stepped into the shade with her, I would somehow be stepping into her space, a space she had prepared for me.

“Not the permanent archivist. I did intern at the library as an undergraduate. That much is true. When I graduated I thought I might try a career in modeling, so I entered some pageants, got a few jobs, even had a small part on a television show. But the last year or so I have been looking for something more substantial. So I checked back with the library and they said I could fill in for the archivist while he was on vacation. It would be one way for me to see if I liked the job and wanted to head back to school for a masters.”

“Actually that is a very reasonable strategy. I hope you like the job and go back for that Information Studies degree. The world needs good librarians.” I hoped I sounded like an older brother or the professor I would be in the fall. I gave my advice and took a step down the street.

“Shawn, the diaries are real. I read fifty or sixty while I was an undergraduate. The three I showed you made me cry. If you want to understand Louisiana, and our cause, remember those diaries.”

“Good by, Margaret.” I walked down the street and back toward the hotel. I was even more hot and more uncomfortable now, but I just kept walking. Was she telling the truth this time? Did it matter? I kept walking.

On the way back to my hotel I stopped and bought some flowers. Everything was in bloom that time of year, so I bought a mixed bouquet of cut flowers and took them up to my room. It took me a few minutes to find something that I could use as a vase, but I got the flowers out on a table in the middle of my sitting room, and I thought they looked pretty good. Now it was just a matter of waiting for Elise. She called a bit after six to tell me she was on her way. I would see her in half an hour. That gave me time to call room service and have a couple trays of chilled vegetables and chilled fruit sent up along with wine. What wine goes with vegetables and fruit? I couldn’t guess, so I asked room service to figure something out and send it all up. All I knew for sure was that we were eating in.

Elise arrived at the same time as the room service people. They wheeled a table into the room, I signed for a huge tip, and then I kissed Elise the instant the door closed behind them.

“Tell me you had a great day.” I began.

“I had a great day.” She kissed me again and then looked around the room. “Flowers and room service. Thank you.” We pulled the rolling table around near the couch and sat down.

“At this point you tell me that you love me, and that everyone you talked with today admitted they made a huge mistake and want to move back to Green Bay.”

“I love you. But excuse me a minute. I need to take off this stupid Huguenot dress. I feel like I am dressed for my first communion.” She did look odd in her

long white cotton dress—pretty, but odd. She disappeared into the bedroom and came out about ten minutes later wearing the red silk gown she had worn months before when we had visited Claude Jolliet. As always, I thought my heart would stop, just to look at her.

"Thank you." She said.

"For what?"

"For the way you look at me when I walk into a room." She sat next to me and took my hand. There wasn't much more to be said after that. I put an arm around her and we just sat for a long time. I began to wonder if this evening would end the way so many had in June, with her falling asleep in my arms. But then she began to describe her day.

"It could have been much worse. I called three people and all three agreed to see me. Philippe worked in the budget section of the ministry. I had met him years ago at various parties, and when I began visiting the Ministry prior to working there, he was one of the people I was introduced to as a good person to help plan and control a budget. He has an apartment now south of the river, and I met him there. I knew where things stood the minute I came through the door, because he was wearing a blue arm band. Leave it to Philippe to be that direct. No wondering about his politics, he made it clear immediately.

I made the pitch we had all been told the make—he was welcome back any time. No resignations had been formally accepted. The payroll people had marked him and everyone else as "on leave." He could come back with no loss of seniority or pension. We wanted him back.

"He was courteous. I will give him that. But I could tell just from the way he sat—stiff, formal, unsmiling—that he wasn't coming back. He had been offered a job in the provincial government, and depending upon how the September elections went, he might have a place in the new national government. This had been his family's home for centuries. This is where he belonged. So I asked. Why break up the country? What is so wrong with the way things have been for three centuries? His response?

"We are just too different. This has never really been one country. We have just been pretending all these years. This break up should have happened many years ago."

"What do you say to that? I finished my coffee and left. Marguerite was next on my list. I called her from the car and she invited me right over. She was sharing a small house with her sister. The house was much too small for the two families and all their children. She invited me out into the backyard and we sat drinking lemonade while mobs of children played on swings and jumped in and out of a small rubber pool.

"We had trouble hearing each other over the shrieks of the children, but I explained again that she was welcome back. Hers had been a clerical post—an administrative assistant to an assistant director, but everyone loved her, and we really did want her back. And I was certain she wanted to come back. She said her kids missed their friends back in Green Bay, and it was taking her and her husband longer than they had thought to find new jobs and a new place to live. But, some kid had threatened her children at school in Green Bay. The kids had come home scared. They didn't even know they were Huguenots. She had to

explain what that meant. They attended a Calvinist church maybe three times a year, and the kids were aware that they weren't Catholic, but that hadn't meant anything to them—or to her—until the incident at school. She had rushed right over to the school to talk with the teacher, but he was a smug old man who said if kids wanted to believe in "a dangerous religious cult" they shouldn't be too surprised if other kids were unhappy about it. She had kept the kids home from the school the next day, as it happened school was cancelled anyway, and they had moved down here the next week.

"I told her things had calmed down a lot in Green Bay, and I would help her find a better school for her children in the fall, but she just said she would wait down here until things were settled one way or the other.

"My last visit was the worst. Monsieur Gaugin was actually my boss for my first week in the Ministry. I didn't see him much. He was a director and I was just a new person going through orientation, but I heard a great deal about him. He was highly respected. He was around sixty and had run the financial directorate for nearly thirty years. He knew about every dollar of revenue in the country and could tell you the expenditures of every department off the top of his head. He had a small horse farm on the country, just a bit down the road from my family's place, and I had seen him many times growing up. This was the visit I had most expected to go well, and so it really hurt when it went badly. To tell you the truth, I broke down and cried halfway through our conversation."

"What did he say?" For a minute there I thought she would start crying a second time, but she caught her breath and continued.

"He said he had spent thirty years watching the national government steal the wealth of Louisiana. He had been waiting for decades for some leader in Louisiana to stand up for the province. Now that it had finally happened, he was determined to help that party succeed—by any means necessary. If you had seen the look on his face while he said those last four words, he was so frightening at that moment, and so ugly. I had always thought of him as a family friend, and here he was threatening me. I left and we came back here, and you were waiting for me with flowers and wine."

"Don't forget the vegetables." I added.

"And fruit too." She was laughing now. She had willed herself into a mood change, determined to have some joy this evening. "Please tell me about your day. Tell me you found a diary that describes all the good times down here, that shows everyone having a huge party and celebrating life."

"Actually I spent the day reading about how the first Claude Jolliet was shot." Somehow that got us laughing. I know it sounds strange in hindsight, but it was just so awful following Elise's three stories of woe, that we just had to laugh. The whole situation was absurd and overwhelming. So we laughed at it. We drank more wine, ate fruit, kissed, laughed, and laughed some more. And that is how we spent the rest of our evening. Thank God we were able to laugh, because from that point on, things just kept getting worse.

Chapter 10

Old Priests plus an Assassination Attempt.

Mass was terrible, but in hindsight it was a fitting way to begin a day that would be the worst day of my young life. Elise and I had decided that we would attend what was likely to be the final mass in New Orleans by Fathers Claude and Jacques. I don't know what we expected, but what we found was two old men in a nearly empty church, going through the motions of something resembling a mass.

The cathedral had never been much. I would expect it to hold maybe a hundred people. Some private chapels are larger. And most private chapels are more opulent. This one had square windows, no stained glass, a water-stained ceiling, and an overwhelming smell of mildew. The fathers noticed us right away—how could they not, since there were barely a dozen parishioners. Besides, we were the only people under seventy in the place.

We came in the main doors and looked for holy water, but found none. Had they packed it away? Or had they just forgotten? We walked to one of the front rows, genuflected, and kneeled on one of the most battered pads I had every seen. Then we sat back and waited for the service to begin. Ten o'clock came and went and the two priests continued to stand by one side of the altar and talk. Finally Father Jacques stepped down to the center aisle and walked up to us.

"Our organist has left for Green Bay and the woman we had hoped would play the piano for us has not come in this morning." I had no idea why he was telling us this. I sat nonplused, but Elise offered to help.

"Father, my piano playing is very poor, but I think I could lead us through a couple of the more simple hymns." And while Father thanked her profusely, Elise walked back through the church to find the stairs up to the choir loft and the piano. Father Jacques waited for her below the loft, while Elise ran through a few songs, and then gave him the numbers of hymns she was comfortable with. I learned one more thing about Elise—she could play the piano. But unfortunately, she could not salvage the rest of the mass. Father Jacques returned to the altar, spoke some more with Father Claude, and then began wandering around looking for his Bible.

It occurred to me these were very old men who had spent many nights preparing to move. They had the stress of all the packing, the disorientation of the move to a new home, plus the disappointment of having their parish closed down after all these years. I wondered how much sleep they were getting. From the look of things, not too much. Finally Father Jacques found his Bible and placed it on the altar. He then began a ten minute search for the passage he wanted. Meanwhile, Father Claude found a seat and dropped into it like a man who might never stand again. Finally Elise started playing a hymn in the background, and it began to at least feel something akin to a mass.

The service consisted of brief interludes of activity separated of long pauses while the fathers looked for one thing or another, or tried to remember what came next. Father Jacques read some scripture, asked Elise to play a hymn, and asked us to join in, but he never told us the number of the hymn so I and the others sort of nervously mouthed words and hummed along with the piano. Then there was another long pause and more scripture, and then I think Father Jacques was

expecting Father Claude to deliver the homily, but when it became clear Father Claude was not getting out of his chair, Father Jacques talked for a while about the founding of the church. He jumped around quite a bit, but the main chronology seemed to center on their arrival in 1957 and some of the first families they had met. The duTemps family was important to him. He named all the members of the family and talked about their first year in the church and gave details of all the children. Then he went off on a story about a church picnic. Finally he just seemed to wind down.

There was another long pause, and then he started back to the place where the communion materials are kept. I am sorry, but I was never an altar boy and I can never remember the name of that little door churches have with the wine and wafers behind it. As it turned out, the door was jammed somehow, and Father did not have the strength to open it. He struggled for a while, and then I went up and pulled it open for him. I am not sure if I committed a sin by doing that, but I was worried that Father would give himself a heart attack pulling on the door. I then got out of the way quickly while he said his blessings.

Eventually he carried the wine and the wafers to the altar and invited us to come forward for communion. He took the time to bless each person individually, and to raise a shaky hand and place it on our heads. Elise climbed the stairs back down from the loft and stood next to me as we accepted the wafer and the blessing. Then she was back up the aisle and back up the stairs. I sat back down and hoped the fathers remembered how to end the service. Mercifully they did, and people began to file out of the cathedral while Elise played another hymn.

She and I stayed and helped the fathers fold up and pack away everything on the altar. Then we helped the men back to their residence. Once we saw what their kitchen looked like, we immediately guessed it might have been days since they had eaten anything substantial, so Elise asked Anton to go out for some food. In the meantime we sat around the kitchen table, the fathers obviously tired, but happy to have Elise with them.

There's not really too much more to say about that morning. Anton did a nice job finding very bland Chinese food that the fathers could handle. We ate off paper plates and then practically led the fathers back to their rooms so they could nap for the afternoon. We explained that we would be back Wednesday morning very early, and they repeated that it was important that we come at five, so we could pack and leave while it was still dark. And then we left.

We were invited to President Jolliet's home for dinner, but we had the afternoon to ourselves and decided to spend it looking around town at the various gardens. New Orleans really is a beautiful city, and even though the heat was rough on us, we had a good time walking around town. Elise took my arm as she usually did, and we strolled among flowers and grasses and along the river. Call it the calm before the storm, or the interval between rounds of a prize fight, in any case that afternoon was very pleasant and I think gave each of us additional strength to deal with the problems about to come speeding our way.

By late in the afternoon we went back to our hotel, relaxed for a bit, and then changed to go to dinner. Elise put on a sleeveless yellow silk gown, and I put on a coat and tie, possibly a bit over dressed for July, but we were going to dine with

the former President of Canada. Such dinners were still a major event in my life, and I knew it was special to Elise too.

Elise had given Anton the evening off, so I drove us to the President's estate outside Biloxi. As we drove, suddenly I was the one dominating the conversation as I explained how the highway we used had once been a wagon trail leading the Huguenots from their landing at Biloxi to their new home in New Orleans. I think I actually impressed Elise—always a good thing to do.

As we approached Biloxi, I began to look for police. How intense would the security be around the President's house? As it turned out, there appeared to be less security than normal. A security post was set up just down the road from the President's home, and we had to stop and show our identification. There was a cursory check of the car, but having Elise along made a big change in the way the guards treated us. They called ahead to another check point, and I saw cameras looking at us to verify our identities, but then we were allowed to continue on right up to the President's front door. Then the president himself came out to greet us!

"Uncle Claude" Elise gave him a big hug. I got out of the car as a valet took my seat and drove the car off. Four very large security guards stood around us looking across the lawn into the trees north of the house.

"Thank you both for coming." Jolliet was in a jovial mood. He gave Elise a long hug, grab my hand with far more force that I had expected, and looked more like a kindly old grandfather than like a minister in a government about to go to war. "Congratulations to you both. I have already marked May 28th on my calendar. You did intend to invite me, didn't you?"

"Of course," Elise laughed. "Invitations will go out as soon as my sisters can agree on a card design and a type style for the lettering. So you may not receive anything until sometime after the wedding is over." Eventually we moved into the house, much to the relief, no doubt, of the security folks.

Jolliet led us through the house to the sun room where we would have wine and talk before dinner. The sun room faces south, of course, but we could still get a very good view of the sun setting through the trees to the west. It also lit up a line of clouds out over the water. In short, I had trouble concentrating on the conversation for the next few minutes while I looked out across the garden at the Gulf and at the sky. Not that Elise and Jolliet needed me. They had family to talk about.

"What's this I hear that the Biloxi Cathedral was built in the wrong place?" Jolliet addressed this to me. Apparently he had decided it was time to include me in the conversation.

"I wouldn't quite put it that way. But the more Huguenot history I read, the more important Biloxi becomes. They settled it before New Orleans, and used it as their main port of entry for generations. Something smaller or less prominently placed might have been more sensitive."

"Since Elise called yesterday, I asked the history chair at the National University what he thought. For what it is worth, he agrees with you completely. He claims he told Cardinal Minnieu exactly that five years ago. But the diocese had the land and the money and wanted to build a huge cathedral for all the new Catholics in the area. I suppose that includes me."

“If you look at population trends, I am sure a cathedral there makes sense. But if you look at history…”

“I have met the good Cardinal. He may look at history, but I suspect he reads it differently than you or I would.” A servant brought a tray of chilled wine into the room at that point. Jolliet used the moment to change the conversation.

“Let me propose a toast.” He raised his glass to the two of us. “To love, to marriage, to new life. I am so pleased the two of you will marry. When you first dined with me months ago and I saw you together, I knew God would smile on your union.”

“I must add a toast as well,” I began after we had each sipped our wine. “To the most beautiful woman in Canada, a woman with the courage to say ‘yes’ to a poor assistant professor.” That earned me a kiss.

“Now it is my turn.” Elise raised her glass to the two of us. “To men of peace in times of war.” We all drank to that. The conversation then turned to lighter matters. Elise described our tour of gardens that afternoon, and Jolliet described what was blooming in his garden. Obviously it was an inconsequential topic, but one that seemed to cheer the darkening evening. Flowers still bloomed and people still tended gardens. There was hope in that.

In time we moved to the dining room. There was less paneling in this dining room than in his Green Bay room, and more glass. After all, this was a summer home. But he also chose to illuminate it that night with candles, and as always, Elise looked even more beautiful bathed in that glow.

“Are you enjoying your visit to New Orleans?” Jolliet asked Elise somewhere during the salad course. It was a casual question, but also brought us closer to more serious discussion.

“I have visited three of the people on my list, and have not been very successful. I have several more visits to make tomorrow and Tuesday. I hope to have more luck then.” Elise was basically talking to her salad. It was clear this was not a report she wanted to deliver. Finally she took a deep breath and looked directly at Jolliet. “I wish I could tell you why they want their own country, why they want to start a war. Each person I talk with has a different reason, but none of the reasons seem so overwhelmingly important to me.”

“Maybe that’s where we start.” Jolliet responded, his voice not much above a whisper. “Maybe we just address one little problem at a time, and hope we solve enough of them that this problem cools off to something less than the boiling point. Unless, Shawn,” and now he turned his attention to me. “There is something else we are missing, some other cathedral going up without our notice.”

“I don’t know of any more cathedrals, but I fear the opposition will work just as hard to break the country apart as you will work to hold it together. Elise may have told you about the play I attended. There are people working very hard to create a culture and a history distinct from that of Green Bay.”

“That reminds me.” Jolliet sat back in his chair and searched his pockets. “Your new boss at the university has a request of you. He says the local historical society is having a meeting tomorrow evening. He faxed me a notice of it. He suggests you attend. I think it would be a good idea too.”

As he turned to pull the fax from his pocket, we heard a glass break in the next room. We looked in that direction, but didn’t think much of it, and then another

glass broke. Jolliet started to call out to the servant to see if there was a problem, when we started hearing pops—first a couple, then a whole series of them. Still it took us an eternity to understand what was happening. When we finally understood, things seemed to go from slow motion to fast-forward in an instant. I used my long arms to take a swipe at the candelabra and knock that over, while Elise and Jolliet jumped out of their seats and hit the floor. I burned my fingers on the wax but got the flames out and then jumped to the floor as well, hugging both of them. I wish I could say I was trying to shield them with my body, but in truth, it just seemed important to hug someone at that moment.

One more glass broke in the next room, and then there was a three-man security team pulling Jolliet off the floor and carrying him to some other room. Elise and I stayed on the floor for a few more minutes until another security man came and told us to follow him. We moved quickly and at a crouch, ducking into the hallway and into the library where Jolliet lay under a blanket of security guards. Were books a good barrier to bullets? Or were the walls lined? It was a stupid thing to think about at that time, but my mind was going in a million directions, and stopping bullets seemed at least a reasonable focus for the moment.

“Gentlemen, get off me, and that’s an order,” I heard Jolliet's muffled voice. The guards moved off of him but never left his side. They urged all of us to stay on the floor and asked us to be quiet so they could hear updates over their headsets.

“Let me talk to Commander Gillette.” Jolliet was sitting up now, his back resting against book shelves. He appeared out of breath, but he still uttered his commands with force.

“Please sir,” one of the guards replied. “He is in pursuit.”

“That is exactly why I need to speak with him. Now!” There was a pause, and then the guard began speaking into the microphone mounted on his shoulder. It was not easy for him to speak with his commander, and from the part of the conversation we could hear, it was apparent the commander did not want to be interrupted. But finally some agreement was reached and the guard handed his headset and microphone to Jolliet.

“Commander, this is President Jolliet.” I had never heard Jolliet refer to himself as President before. I wondered if it was the shock, or if he was reaching for additional authority. “First, tell me if any of your men are hurt.” There was a pause and I could tell from the expressions on the other guards who were listening on their head sets that the answer was reassuring. “Thank God for that. Paul tells me that you are in pursuit of these people.” There was another long pause. “I appreciate your fine work tonight, but I want you to stop the pursuit.” A very long pause. I thought I could hear shouting clear through the headset. “All of that is true. Now tell me this. What are you going to do if you catch them? Yes, I am sure you will attempt to arrest them and only shoot if necessary. But now think of this. If you catch them or shoot them, I want to you envision the headline in tomorrow’s Green Bay Gazette, and the reaction people will have as they read that story over their breakfast. OK, let me help you. “Huguenots attempt to assassinate ex-President Jolliet.” Does that headline unite our country or divide it? No, you are right. We cannot hide it, but we can minimize it. No one was hurt, right? We announce that a stray shot hit the house, possibly from local hunters. Security

saw no one. Local police are investigating. It makes page three and disappears the next day. Yes, I understand that. If they come back tomorrow, I expect you to shoot them. But for tonight I am requesting that you serve your country in a different way. Yes, yes. Thank you. I know this is hard for you, and I appreciate your service to your country." He returned the headset to the guard and took several deep breaths. The guards listened to some order on their headsets and then left the room, with two of them standing at the door with guns drawn.

"You want them to get away?" Elise asked

"I want no Huguenot martyrs and no French mobs. So, for this one time, these people get away free." He was struggling to his feet now, and Elise and I went to him to help him up. Elise then wrapped her arms around him.

"Uncle Claude, you are the best man in the world."

"And you are engaged to the dumbest." A thought had just struck me with such intensity I thought I would drop back to the floor. "Today is July 18. This is a date I know. This is a date you told me to tell you about. On July 18th 1725, Claude Jolliet was shot in New Orleans."

"I guess I should have known that date too," Jolliet responded. "After all, he is my namesake. I just remembered it as being sometime that summer."

"I was just reading about it yesterday. I am so sorry."

"Knowing about it would not have changed anything. Although I suppose we would not have eaten so near the windows." He tried to chuckle at that, but he was also massaging a shoulder. "I have to train those guards to haul me around without banging into walls. I am getting too old for so much protection."

There was not much more we could say after that. The guards eventually let us out of the library, but they would not let us back into the dining room while they completed their investigation. And Elise and I could not leave until the grounds were thoroughly searched. We ended up in a small guest bedroom, and talked for a while. What did we talk about? We talked about Elise's family, and my family, and Jolliet's family, just about anything other than having people shoot at us. Although eventually Jolliet was joking about it. "They should have warned those people a five foot eight inch man makes a pretty small target."

After an hour or so we were allowed to move around the house and Jolliet headed straight for the kitchen. He wanted to console the staff, all of whom had been held there since the shooting. He found them in tears, huddled in a corner away from the windows. His first comment? "First, I need to tell you this had nothing to do with your cooking." That got them laughing. He then hugged each one of them and asked if they were all right. He tried to give them the next days off, but they were having none of it. They refused immediately, and then demanded that he eat the dinner they had prepared. So the three of us sat around the kitchen table while four women and two men served the meal they had planned for us. Periodically security people came in to report, but Jolliet made them sit and eat with us. He asked for wine for everyone, and even got the kitchen staff to join him in a toast to the security men. I know I had come to Green Bay two years earlier looking for a way to embarrass Jolliet and his family, but truthfully, at that moment I would have followed that man anywhere.

Hours later Elise and I were allowed to leave by the security team. They wouldn't let Jolliet anywhere near the open front door, so we said our good bys in

the front hallway. Elise gave him a long hug and started crying again. I shook his hand and apologized again for not remembering the date. He forgave my idiocy one more time. Then I almost walked out the door without the fax, but finally remembered to get the meeting notice from him. I would attend this historical meeting, if for no other reasons that to learn which dates would be the most dangerous.

Elise cried most of the way home. I tried to think of comforting things to say, but my mind was a blank. Finally I just started talking about Claude and about how much I admired how well he had handled events. That got Elise talking, and eventually we were both laughing. "I now know," she said, "the best line that will never be public. 'This had nothing to do with your cooking.'" That got us both laughing, and then, as people do in these situations, we laughed for a while, teared up, and then laughed again, alternating emotions all the way back to New Orleans.

Chapter 11

New Orleans, Economic Basics, and the World's Largest Man.

You can imagine how Elise and I felt the next morning. Having never been shot at before, we woke wondering whether the whole thing had been a bad dream. But as we talked about it and grew to accept the shooting as bitter reality, Elise and I reacted in opposite ways—extremely opposite ways.

Elise seemed to drop into slow motion. She got out of bed much later than I did, took forever in the shower, stood staring for a long while at the white dress she had planned to wear, nibbled distractedly at her breakfast, and worst yet, had very little to say. When I asked her which former ministry employees she planned to visit, she was vague in her answer. I had the impression it might take hours for her to finally get started on her visits.

Here's where I should say I held her and reassured her and made her feel better, but my reaction to the shooting was to become more manic than I had ever been before in my life. I practically jumped out of bed, raced for the shower, ordered breakfast and then paced around the suite until room service finally delivered it, all the while scanning the morning paper and watching a news show on TV—the first time I had turned the TV on since arriving in New Orleans.

What was driving me? Guilt. The rebels were using history, I was an historian, I had not done my job. But today I would do my job. I would hit the library like a hurricane, and find any clue that might identify a risk to my friends. The library opened at nine. I was ready by eight and paced the suite with a coffee cup in my hand. By eight thirty I couldn't stand the wait any more. I kissed Elise, talked to her a bit—yes, not nearly enough—and then headed out the door.

The library was a fifteen minute walk at most, and I made it in under ten. That gave me twenty minutes to pace around on the sidewalk in front of the building. Fortunately, I only paced for five minutes or so before DuBois took pity on me and let me into the library early.

“You look like a man with a mission,” he said as he held the door open for me. I bounded up the stairs two at a time and led him straight back to the reference area.

“Elise and I will be leaving Wednesday morning, so I only have these two days to conduct my research.” I sat down at the microfilm machine and waited for DuBois to bring me some of the films he had accessed Saturday. I don’t think I drummed my fingers or tapped my foot while I waited, but I was very impatient, and he must have seen it somehow.

“This will just take a minute. Shall we start with the tariff laws or the dock riots?” I liked his use of “we” and forced myself to take some deep breaths and calm down.

“Let’s go back to the tariff laws. I want to know more about what people were thinking before they started throwing fists and shooting each other.”

“Good. We have solid analysis on that.” He handed me two films still in their boxes. “You should find what you need in these two. I will check back with you after I open the library and soothe the security guards.” He walked away before I could apologize. It was obvious he had just broken a major library security precaution by letting me in early, and I suspect he was going to hear about it. I would have to find a way to mend that fence, but first I wanted to get reading.

What was on the film? A nineteenth century economist had analyzed the tariff laws of New Orleans, showing how they were the precursor to many similar laws used up to our day. To support his argument he had all the original bills that had been presented, minutes of one of the debates held before the governor, and income statements from the colonial treasury. In short, he had done all the digging in the archives that I might have had to do, and he had explained the economics of the law, something I was far less equipped to do. Put another way, the film was gold.

I read through forty five pages of dense academic prose, and then went back and read it a second time, this time taking notes. He painted the portrait of a community that was divided, and of a governor that used the division to finally gain some power for himself. The chronology went something like this: 1721 Jolliet brings down one boat with some corn and fruit. 1722 he and his company bring down four boats. 1723 the number is up to eight, and in 1724 his company and a competing company in St. Louis bring down fifteen boatloads. In 1725 they are on a pace to hit nearly thirty boat loads when the riots hit.

How much food is this? The economist calculates the volume of the boats of that time and comes up with a figure of hundreds of bushels to thousands of bushels by 1724. The figures are a guess, of course. No one has an exact record, but I check his figures and the math look reasonable for a French economist. He then presents some sales records of the time to show the rapidly dropping price of food in New Orleans. Between 1721 and 1724 the price of corn drops over fifty percent. I can see why the local farmers are none too happy.

But there is another side of the problem that I had not thought about—Biloxi. It had been the port of entry for French food. Now that food was coming down the Mississippi, the French food was less necessary, and so the port was less necessary. The city of New Orleans is gaining ascendancy as the Mississippi River finally become useful for something. This reminded me of the situation Jolliet

faced as he was discovering the Mississippi. Every Indian tribe he met other than the Mascoutins, wanted him to go no farther than their locale, and told terrible stories about dangers just ahead. The rationale was the same in both cases—you want to be at the end of a trade route. Biloxi had been at the end of the French trade route. Now New Orleans was at the end of the Mississippi trade route. The two towns were going to struggle.

The governor sees the chance to pour gas on the fire and divide the Huguenots, before coming to their rescue and gaining power in the process. Since the Huguenots essentially seized control of the colony in 1720 and sent his soldiers packing, the governor had been relegated to ceremonial duties, living off of what silver they would give him. Now he has a chance for his own income stream. He will establish tariffs on the boats coming from Illinois. Better yet, he will have the Huguenots debate the amount of the tariffs, making all their feuds more open and more hostile. The economist, by the way, does not ascribe any of these motives to the governor; he just copies minutes of meetings and of the debate. For economists, everything is about numbers. But given the way the Huguenots challenged his authority when they first arrived, I can read between the lines and see personal satisfaction in every remark of his included in the transcript.

The debate is raucous because someone will lose in the end. The governor works the crowd and ensures that everyone loses, and takes three days to arrive at that point so that emotions are at a fever pitch by the time the tariff law is finally signed. How does everyone lose? He maneuvers the debate over the size of the tariff until a number is arrived at—ten francs per boat arriving from either direction—down the Mississippi, or over from Biloxi. Now everyone will have higher prices. The tariff will force Jolliet to charge more for his grain, but ten francs is not enough to satisfy the local farmers. They will not be able to raise their prices very much. The townspeople in New Orleans will now have to pay more for food. And everyone will have to pay more for goods imported from France. Basically, in the guise of protecting local farmers, the governor has created a retirement fund for himself.

By evening of the third day (July 18th) everyone in the little town of New Orleans is very drunk and very angry at everyone else in the town. Fists start flying by the public docks and soon shots follow. Claude Jolliet goes down with a bullet in his left side that will cause him pain the rest of his life. Jolliet's crew defends their captain and four locals go down. The gun fire escalates and more than a dozen men end up shot, seven of them fatally. Finally everyone breaks for safety, the farmers back to their farms, the Biloxians back to their boats, and Jolliet's surviving crew back to their boat which they pole up the river that same night. Traders avoid New Orleans for months and the Huguenot leadership is splintered.

The only winner is the governor. Fortunately for the Huguenots he is a stupid man who overplays his hand. He continues efforts to motivate one faction against another, but they all go to the same church and by the second Sunday are sober enough and smart enough to understand what is happening to them. They pray for guidance, pray for peace, and eventually find a compromise that they can live with. Within a month the duty on boats coming from Biloxi is dropped—that had raised prices for everyone and had benefited no one other than the governor. As for boats down the Mississippi, they keep that tariff, but determine that the money

should go to the church for charity work, not to the governor. They also promise that the tariff will be reviewed each year.

The main discussion is how to create exports. They know the colony will never be self-sufficient. There will always be a need for imports. So, what can they export to cover those costs? They need to determine if there is anything they can sell the folks up river. A half-dozen volunteers agree to take a boat up the Mississippi to Illinois to see what the market might look like up there. In short, within a month of beating each other and shooting each other, they have come to their senses and begin to look to the long-term economic needs of the colony.

By now it is early afternoon and I invite Monsieur BuBois out to lunch as a peace offering. But we talk history all the way to the cafe and all the way through lunch. This will be a working lunch.

"I haven't finished reading all the accounts of the tariff riots," I begin the minute we begin our walk to the café. "But I get the impression that Jolliet was not the sole target of the riot. There was general discontent with the tariff decision and he just happened to be there when the guns started going off. Is that a fair assessment?"

"No, I have read a number of accounts, and I have the distinct impression that he was more than an innocent bystander. Did you read the minutes of the meeting? He was one of the people who spoke against tariffs. He came to town specifically to address the meeting, and he made his opinions very clear. As a result, I think he became a target, especially for the local farmers who were really unhappy with the competition he represented." DuBois and I took a table at a sidewalk café. It was unbearable hot, but there is a limit to how much time I can spend in air conditioning. DuBois must have felt the same way. Have I described him yet? He is mid fifties, very tall, thin, bald. And he is friendly. I get the impression he likes his job and is happy to talk to me or to anyone else about any subject in his library.

"But what is the point of shooting Jolliet? If he doesn't come down river with trade goods, someone else will."

"I am not sure that is true. In fact let me give you a focus for your biography of the family. I am convinced that Canada has always been two countries—Louisiana and the North, and there were always just two forces holding the country together—the Jolliet clan and England." At this point a waiter came to take our order so there was a natural pause in the conversation, although there would have been a pause anyway, as I tried to internalize what DuBois had just told me.

"OK," I finally say, "that is an interesting thesis. And you are right, it would be a great focus for my biography. But can you prove it?"

"Certainly. Begin with trade routes. Louis Jolliet has found a route through the interior of the country, and it is a good route, but compare that route to the ocean routes." At this point he unfolds a napkin and begins drawing on it. "The ocean voyage from Quebec to France takes less than three months and brings a shipload of goods and people. The trip from New Orleans to France is about two weeks longer, but still it is in the vicinity of three months. And of course the ships can trade along the way. Now calculate how long it takes to get a canoe's worth of goods from Quebec to New Orleans. Four months? Five? All that time and expense to get a few hundred pounds of goods down the Mississippi."

“So your argument is that each colony has its own trade sphere and that trade with France will always be cheaper and faster than trade from the northern areas to Louisiana. The Mississippi River unites the colonies on paper, but not in reality.”

”Exactly.” At this point our lunch began arriving but we didn’t pay much attention to it. “The two colonies are legally distinct, each with its own governor, each with its own corporate ownership. When Louis is displaying maps of Canada to other kings in Europe he shows a unified colony with unlimited lands, but that is never the way he ran his colonies. And that is not how the colonies functioned economically. There was no real connection between the north and the south for generations.”

“Except for the Jolliets and the English.”

“Actually the Spanish and the Dutch helped too, but the English were the most useful since they ultimately had the best navy. If French ships could sail the Atlantic unhindered by enemy ships, then French goods could be sold cheaply in Quebec and in New Orleans. If French shipping was stopped, then the colonies had to fend for themselves. Suddenly the extra month or two on the Mississippi was worth the effort since the Mississippi was always protected from hostile forces. Trade among the colonies benefited whenever France was at war.”

“We had something similar over in the British colonies,” I added. “Whenever England was at war we were unable to import their goods, so local companies began manufacturing the goods that had been imported in the past. With no English competition, these new companies could struggle through the first few years of a business, learn how to improve the quality of their goods, and often prevail when English goods came back on the market at the end of the war. No one wants to say it, but European wars were helpful to the U.S.”

“And they were helpful to Canada. But they were intermittent. What was constant was the Jolliet family. For centuries they were determined to unify Canada along the river their ancestor discovered. I sometimes think this country is held together by the will of the Jolliets alone.”

“That explains why they tried to kill Claude.” I said under my breath.

“Well, in 1725 it was mostly about the price of corn,” DuBois responded to my mumbling. “But it might well have changed the future of the country.” Our conversation continued for another hour or so as we finally began to work on our food, but it was casual conversation as I moved the conversation away from the Jolliets, afraid I might make another misstep about the attempted murder of Claude Jolliet. As far as DuBois was concerned, the only effort to kill a Claude Jolliet happened in 1725. I needed to keep it that way.

It was well past two before we finished a typical French lunch, and I was no longer in a mood to sit in the library. I walked back to the library with DuBois, apologized again for arriving early and disrupting the security procedures, and then headed back to my hotel. I needed to change for the evening historical society meeting, and I wanted a few hours to put some ideas down on paper. My biography of the Jolliets had just taken a new focus.

When I got back to my suite I was surprised to find Elise partly dressed and asleep on the bed. I closed the door quietly, but she opened her eyes and looked

around at me. I could see instantly that she was miserable and had been crying. I hurried over and sat on the bed next to her.

"Are you sick?"

"No. I just can't bring myself to go talk with Huguenots today. They almost killed Uncle Claude." The look on her face was so agonizing, I thought my heart would break. I laid down next to her and took her in my arms. I had nothing brilliant to say, so I just held her. We must have stayed that way for nearly an hour. I wasn't sure if she was awake or asleep. Finally she began to stir again, moving even closer into my arms. "I don't like hating people," she said so softly it was almost a whisper.

"We will never know if it was part of a political plot or just some crazy guy with a hunting rifle. He may be running for his life now, afraid to look back over his shoulder." It was an image that worked for me.

"Were you afraid?"

"Yes. I was very afraid. And then I was very angry, mostly at myself. You had asked me to watch for special dates, and I hadn't done my job. I hope you can forgive me for that."

"Oh Shawn. It was not your fault. Of course I forgive you." And then she kissed me to prove she meant it.

"I had lunch today with a man from the national library. He made an interesting point about the Jolliets, a point that seems especially true after what I saw last night. He said the Jolliets have been holding this country together for centuries. Do you believe that?"

"Yes. I am certain Uncle Claude would die for Canada."

"And what about the DuPrys?"

"Our job has been simple. We stand one step behind the Jolliets and do whatever they need. We serve Canada by serving the Jolliets. That has been our role for over three centuries."

"You served him well last night. I saw how quickly you got him to the floor and shielded him with your body. Your family will be proud when Jolliet tells them." That earned me another kiss, and then we lay together quietly for the rest of the afternoon. At some point during that afternoon I had an unnerving thought. Her role was to serve the Jolliets. Did that include marrying me? I quickly pushed that thought to the back of my mind, but I couldn't completely get rid of it. Gradually I felt Elise drift off to sleep, but sleep eluded me.

Elise roused herself around six and looked much more like herself. She phoned one of the former coworkers she was assigned to see, and very pleasantly arranged to meet them for dinner. She found yet another white dress (I wondered how many she had, and where she had found all of them on such short notice), and was dressed and on her way within the hour. I got a quick kiss as she left, but I could tell she was all business now. The lady who was born to leadership was ready to lead again.

I put on a cotton suit and took a cab to the hotel where the historical society was meeting. Even before I arrived I felt that several things were odd about this meeting. First, historical societies don't meet in hotels. They never have the budget for that. Usually you get the basement of the local library. Second, they never have dinner meetings—for the same reason. Yet the cab took me to one of the best

hotels in New Orleans, and the dinner was being held in the main ballroom, with all the elegance (and cost) that implied. I was disoriented before I even crossed the threshold into the ballroom.

Things got more confusing when I went in. First, there was a receiving line. That was a first for me. I am used to wandering into a basement room, looking around for a pot of coffee, shaking a few hands and then sitting on a folding chair at a folding table. More surprising was the way people were dressed. I was glad I took the time to put on a suit. But many in the room were wearing tuxedos, and lots of women were dressed in formal gowns. I was stunned and confused and so was totally unprepared when a security guard asked to see my invitation. I pulled out the fax I had gotten from Claude Jolliet and handed it to the guard.

"Dr. Messier, could I see some identification?"

"I am not Henri Messier. He is my department chair at the National University. My name is Shawn Murphy. As you can see from the fax, he has asked me to take his place." I had barely gotten 'I am not Henri Messier' out of my mouth when a second guard was at my shoulder.

"Excuse me, monsieur," he said. "But this meeting is by invitation only." Now I was really confused since it was my experience that you had to drag people kicking and screaming away from checkers and shuffle board to get them to attend an historical society meeting, and here they were, keeping people out!

"As you can see, " I insisted, "I have been asked to attend by the chair of the history department at the National University." I don't know why I was pushing to attend. Maybe I was insistent on getting in just because they were so determined to keep me out.

"I am sorry, Mr. Murphy." He didn't look sorry at all, and he was edging toward me as a means of getting me to back out of the doorway. "But we are only allowed to admit invited guests."

"Did I hear you say your name was Shawn Murphy?" The largest man in North American had broken away from the receiving line and stood next to the guard. The two guards instantly backed away. Whoever this guy was, their body language said he was the boss.

"Yes." I wasn't sure what else to say, so I held out my hand. The man-mountain took it and shook it vigorously. Every motion he took made rolls of fat shake all over his body, but his hand was strong and hard. I wondered how tough the man was under the fat.

"If I am lucky, you are the man who wrote a dissertation on Washington's battles at the headwaters of the Ohio." I don't know if I was more surprised by the fact that he knew about my dissertation or that he referred to the location of the battles in relation to the river rather than in relation to Fort Duquesne. The difference was significant—at least to me.

"Yes, that was me." I still couldn't think of what to say, and was beginning to feel like a little kid.

"We need to see that dissertation in print. It is first-rate work."

"I had thought there might be some possibilities of that when I wrote the dissertation, but I found few publishers are interested in a general who lost the only two battles he fought."

“Now see, that is why you didn’t get it published. You have the totally wrong attitude. Washington may have lost the battles—although if you ask me we can blame that on the British, not on him—but he at least knew where to go. He was the only man in Virginia—then or now—who understood why Duquesne had to be taken. Let me introduce you to some people.” At this point he spun me around like I was weightless, and led me over to the receiving line.

“Friends,” he had a voice as large as the rest of him. “I want you to meet the most brilliant American historian of his generation, Doctor Shawn Murphy.” He then started me at the head of the line and introduced each member of the receiving line, telling me about each of them. The first man in the line, and obviously the least important, was the head of the Louisiana Historical Society. Normally I would have spoken with him for a few minutes, but my big friend didn’t seem to think he was worth much time, for he pulled me along the line after I had barely shaken the man’s hand. Next came two provincial ministers, both of whom were polite to me and practically fawning on my large companion. Then came the three big shots, each wearing a blue armband and standing so erect you would have thought they were posing for their own statues.

“Tonight we are honored to be hosted by the three legendary leaders of the Heritage Party, Thomas Lebeck, Paul Andrees, and Rene Soisson. On September 2nd they will take the title of Governor and Assistant Governors. Later this fall, well, we have every hope that their titles will become even more august.” Lebeck and Andrees I had never seen before, but all the world knew the likeness of Soisson. He was the little man who had made the speeches while the cameras rolled and the Biloxi Cathedral exploded in the background. I had thought he was in jail. Did I shake his hand? Yes. I shook all their hands briefly, said “how do you do” as formally as I could, and moved on. What did I see in their eyes? Confidence. In their minds they were already royalty. They shook my hand the way they expected to shake the hands of kings and presidents from around the globe. They were practicing to take their place among world leaders.

“Jacques,” the big man said to a security guard who followed in his shadow, “I want you to take Doctor Murphy to my table. We Americans need to stick together, don’t you think?” It was only then that I learned he was American. His French had been flawless—or at least flawless to my ears. “But please excuse me for a little while, I must help with the greetings.” Then he went back and took up a very large place in the receiving line. Everyone else was going to learn his name, but I still had no idea who my benefactor was.

Jacques led the way across the ballroom. I made three observations as we crossed the huge room. First, the place was crowded—one more sign that this was not your usual historical society gathering. Second, the crowd was young. Usually people begin to take an interest in history after they have some history of their own. Tonight, at twenty-nine, I was about average age. Third, almost half the people in the room were wearing blue armbands with white crosses on them, including Captain Whatsis and his three stooges that I had met Friday night. I wondered if the good captain still had a sore right hand.

Out of pure malice I stopped following Jacques and wandered over to their table. The tables were so crowded together it was not easy to wind a way through all the

chairs, but I managed. They saw me coming and all four of them stood ready to continue our debate.

"So, our American friend returns," the captain said. "You seem to know all the right events to attend. Do you now have the right values?"

"If it is a value to blow up cathedrals and brag about it on TV, then no, I do not have the right values." We were barely six inches apart and it was obvious both of us were looking for trouble.

"That's right. Murphy. Irish Catholic, no? I wonder when the time comes, will you choose your country, or will you choose your pope."

"I will always be a loyal American. Are you a loyal Canadian?" He was fast. I barely had the last words out of my mouth when he got a punch into my ribs. As he pulled his fist back to strike again, I brought both my palms up and hit him as hard as I could in both collarbones. I hoped I would break one or both, but that only happens in movies. But I did manage to push him backwards. The knot of chairs did the rest as he tried to step back to get his balance and instead tripped backwards over one chair and into several others. While he pushed chairs around to try to get up again, the security guards did their job. Two of the biggest men I have ever seen pulled me across the room while several others grabbed the Captain and his friends. We were all out in a side hallway before our feet touched ground. The guards pinned us to a wall and waited. I noticed that they were hardly breathing, while I felt like I had just run a marathon. There was a message there for anyone smart enough to heed it.

"Let them go, but stay close." The man giving the orders was Lebeck. He had looked small even next to Soisson, but he seemed pretty big in that hallway. It was obvious he was giving the orders and these big guys would follow them.

"You two have blemished an evening that will go down in history. I should have these men show you what a real punch looks like." He said to me and the Captain. "I think they might enjoy beating you up and dumping you in the river. But there are two reasons I won't. And no," he now stood just inches from me and looked up at me with his rat eyes. "Not because you are some snotty historian from some prissy college. I don't give a rat's ass what degrees you have." He then stepped back and looked at both of us.

"First, you are both boys, and boys do stupid things. I hope that you will still feel so much like fighting when the real battle comes. Second, our countries have been fighting for three centuries. Only a fool thinks that we can change habits so quickly. But old habits or not, you will not disturb this meeting. Do you understand?" I could hear the captain to my right mumbling "Yes sir." I loved to hear the groveling in his voice. I refused to answer.

"You are about to hear some of the most important historical plans of the century." Lebeck was in front of me again. "You can hear them on the sidewalk, you can read about them in the newspaper, or you can hear them while enjoying a fine dinner with the leading citizens of the province. Which will it be?" He jammed his index finger into my stomach with each of the last four words.

"I'll read about it in the paper."

"See? Now that's a choice I can respect. Don't be a toady for anyone." He looked over his shoulder at the captain. "But tonight is your lucky night. Mr. Foster likes you, and so you will go back in, sit at his table, and behave yourself. Jacques." He

turned now to one of the guards. “You were told to get this American to Mr. Foster’s table. That seems pretty simple. I never give people a second chance to disappoint me. You are fired. Eduard. Now it is your turn. You will walk Doctor Murphy to table 2. He will go directly there, and he will stay there until Mr. Foster decides he can leave.”

The hand on my arm now pinched a nerve I hadn’t known I had, and we began the walk back into the ballroom and to a table near the platform. I might have resisted had that been physically possible, but I also was interested in seeing what this meeting was all about, so I really didn’t put up too much of a struggle. Mr. Foster was waiting for me at the table.

“I see that you already know some people in attendance. How pleasant for you to have friends here.” Foster addressed me in English. I ignored his irony and sat down. I noticed immediately that he was lucky to have long arms. Given the size of his belly he wasn’t getting anywhere near the table. I tried not to stare. I also tried to calm my breathing. Growing up I had had enough fights with my older brothers to know the winner was always the one who cooled down the quickest at the end. I was determined to appear the winner.

“I apologize for causing a disturbance,” I finally replied when I was sure I had the breath for words. “Those officers and I have had previous dealings.”

“Think nothing of it. As an American, I was happy to see you stand up to four French men. But I have to admit I was surprised. I have been attending historical society meetings in New York for decades, and I have never seen a fist fight. Most evenings it would have helped end the tedium.” He was giving me hints as to his identity, but I still wasn’t making the connection. I know I had not seen him at national history association meetings, so I was fairly sure he was not a professor. So what was he, and how did he have connections with the blue arm band crowd?

“May I ask what your role is in tonight’s meeting?”

“I am afraid my role is simply to write a check. My family has a small foundation that likes to support historical research. Perhaps you have heard of the Plymouth Foundation?” Had I? There was a small flicker of recognition in the back of my mind. I had heard the name, but I couldn’t remember the context.

“I am sorry. Since it is so early in my career, I have not pursued many grants yet.”

“Yes, you have so much ahead of you. Should you decided to do additional work on Washington, do send us a proposal. We have a special interest in him.” At that point two other couples joined our table, including the head of the local historical society. Foster and I instantly switched back to French, and I had a long talk with the head of the historical society about the archives in the provincial library. It turned out he was a frequent visitor to the archives and was pleased to extol their virtues. Dinner came and went while we talked. There is no need to describe the meal other than to say it was the best hotel food I have ever eaten. Clearly this was not the rubber chicken crowd. I wondered how large a check my new friend had written.

For about an hour I spoke with Monsieur Levin while Foster entertained the rest of the table. He told a series of jokes and had everyone listening to him as large people often do. Finally the lights dimmed and the speeches began. Mr. Foster was introduced at my table, as was Mr. Levin. Foster drew the louder applause.

Another half dozen dignitaries were named before the real introduction began. At this point Lebeck took the platform to the loud applause of the audience. He stood beside the podium, his hands at his sides, and smiled slightly while the crowd first applauded, and then quickly got to their feet for a standing ovation. The roar in that ballroom was overwhelming. The young men and women shouted and yelled as if a rock star were on stage. Lebeck let it build for several minutes, and then finally raised one hand to quiet the crowd. They gradually sat down and Lebeck moved back behind the microphones to begin his speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen of Louisiana." That brought another roar and I thought the crowd would leap to its feet, but they stopped just short of that. "We gather this evening to celebrate our heritage and to prepare for a new life for our beloved homeland—Louisiana." This did bring them to their feet, and just about deafened me. I had never attended a political rally before, but it was obvious I was attending one now. "We have much work to do tonight. Much to plan for, much to celebrate. But let us begin this special night with a gesture of proper respect for this land we love." Suddenly musicians poured in from each side of the ballroom and began playing a song I had never heard before, but assumed immediately must be the provincial song, now being sung as a national anthem. The musicians hadn't hit their third note before a thunderous cheer went up from the crowd, they stood yet again, and then began singing their anthem. I stood up as well, wishing to stand with my hands over my ears to blunt the volume, but unwilling to be that obvious despite the real pain I was experiencing.

I have no idea who handled the video systems, but simultaneous to the beginning of the anthem a huge provincial flag began slowly descending behind the speaker, while two floor-to-ceiling screens came to life on each side of the flag and showed images of the river, the state house, groups of citizens, squads of LNA troops, and finally an image of Soisson standing atop some stairs and reviewing crowds of adoring fans. The images seemed timed to the music. I wondered how many hours the band had practiced to get that right. But I am pretty sure I was the only person wondering about the wizard behind the curtain. Everyone else was singing their lungs out.

Mercifully they only sang one verse of the provincial song, but then they continued standing and cheering while my ears rang. Lebeck finally brought them down to their seats before they exhausted themselves. "Friends," he finally began again. "You have all worked wonders to get us to this moment in our history. You had the vision. You had the courage. You had the love for our homeland." He paused and let them cheer again. Thankfully they didn't bound out of their seats again. "But we all know one man who shared your vision, shared your courage, shared your love. This man has stood up against petty politicians and corrupt national judges. He has stood up against the Pope. Time and again he has stood up to national police. He has faced bullets. He will face any obstacle, overcome any enemy to make your love a reality. I give you the next governor of Louisiana and the first president of the free nation of Louisiana, Rene Soisson."

Well, I was deafened again. The crowd was on its feet screaming, and the band joined in playing some other song I didn't recognize but one the crowd obviously did. I was waiting to see Soisson descend like some god from the sky, but they just had him walk from the back of the room while crazed supporters threw flowers or

hugged him until a security guard pulled them away. It must have taken ten minutes for him to walk across the room, meanwhile the musicians blared and the crowd thundered and I wondered if I could sneak out an exit with my hearing still intact. All in all, it appeared that dynamiting churches was a great way to make friends around here.

What was he like when he finally spoke? He had a baritone voice so low I wondered if they were playing some magic with the sound system. And the crowd listened. They were so quiet I am not sure they were breathing. He did have an impact.

"My fellow Louisianans. My fellow soldiers. My friends." That got the ovation going again. I hoped his speech was not more than fifty or sixty words, because at the rate we were going, it was going to be after midnight before he could even say that much.

"We have much to celebrate. Our impending freedom." More cheers. "Our culture." Cheers. "Our heritage." Wild cheers. "Tonight we begin our celebration by paying our respects to those who came before us and sacrificed much so that a persecuted people could live in peace and worship without fear." Cheers again. You get the idea. About every third word brought cheers. He did a nice job of pacing his speech to allow for those cheers.

"In 1720 the first ships brought thousands of proud people to this land. They were sick, they were strangers in an alien land, but they were proud. They faced swamps, mosquitoes, snakes, and a governor representing a corrupt and repressive regime. They overcame the swamps. They overcame the mosquitoes. They overcame the snakes. And we know what happened to that governor." I really needed ear plugs at this point.

"No one in Green Bay helped our ancestors. No one in Green Bay paid any attention to them. No one in Green Bay recognized their sacrifice. In all these centuries the national government has never recognized the lives lost to build this land. But we will. We are. Beginning August 1st we will show the world what kind of people built this land." I actually started looking around the table for paper napkins that I might be able to tear into pieces for ear plugs. Unfortunately, the napkins were huge cloth affairs that wouldn't tear.

"Beginning in Biloxi." At this point the video screens at the front of the room showed a huge map of the province. It appeared to be animated. The camera swooped down to Biloxi as Soisson mentioned the name. "We will gather our wagons and our mules and walk the miles along that trail so well known to the founders of this land. We will share a tiny portion of the hardships borne by those brave people. We will follow the old trail along Lake Pontchartrain." The camera showed that section of the trail now. "We will follow the portage to New Orleans. Then we will walk the trail to Baton Rouge and to all the settlements to the west." Here oddly, the camera showed the trail wandering off to the west clear into Texas. I wondered if they had made a programming error.

"We will show our respects to all the heroes of that time. I will be proud to walk that trail. I wish to celebrate that heritage, to teach that history, to show the world what a proud people did so many years ago. Who will walk with me?" That brought them all to their feet and got the band playing again. The decibels were so high in that room I wondered if we were registering on the Richter scale. It was obvious

the speech was over. He stood nodding and gesturing as everyone in the room chanted over and over "*WE WILL WALK. WE WILL WALK*." He let them stand and cheer for fifteen minutes, and then he turned and walked off the podium and disappeared from sight. The minute he was off stage young girls in blue arm bands ran into the crowd with booklets explaining the route and the times and all the details just in case anyone had any questions.

My only question was whether I could finally get out of the hotel with some portion of my hearing intact. But as I started looking around for an exit, Foster grabbed my arm.

"There is a bar on the roof of this hotel that has the best Irish whiskey in Canada. I would be pleased if you would join me." I looked down at his hand on my arm, waited for him to release it, and then agreed. First we had to wait while dozens of excited people came up to Foster to thank him for his support and to exclaim about the virtues of this historical re-enactment. Was I supposed to see how popular he was? I stood nearby, shook the occasional hand of people so frenzied they were shaking every hand in the place, and waited. Eventually Foster pointed to a side door and we found an elevator to the roof.

The rooftop bar was filled, but a waiter led us to a reserved table and took Foster's order for two Bushmills. It was still hot up there even at this late hour, but a breeze made conditions acceptable. More than anything, I was grateful for the relative quiet. Lots of blue arm band people were up on the roof too, but with no walls or ceiling to echo their excitement, the decibel level was much better.

"One of my goals has always been to bring history to the people." The drinks came almost immediately despite the crowd, and Foster took a large draft of his whiskey before waxing eloquent. "Book history is boring. Kids hate it in school and never touch a book after they graduate. But look how successful re-enactments are. People will spend their precious weekends dressed up in wool uniforms, stand out in the sun and hold in formation for hours if you give them a chance to fire a musket just once. I saw that in Massachusetts first. But it is true everywhere. People love to role play."

He took another drink of his whiskey, draining it, and held up a hand to a waiter who seemed to be stationed ready to follow his every command. Foster must be one helluva tipper. Meanwhile, I tried to figure out what to say. Foster had stopped talking, now it was my turn, that is the way conversations worked. But I had no idea what to say to this man. What did he want from me?

"I have never liked re-enactments." This was obviously the wrong way for me to start, and I could kiss off any grant from the Plymouth Foundation now, but my head hurt and my ribs hurt and I wanted to go back to the hotel. "The men stand in formation and fire their muskets, but none of them piss their pants from fear, or finish their lives minus an arm or a leg or a brother. Women dress up in colonial dresses, but they don't die in child birth or watch their children die from pox while doctors put leeches on their little bodies. Nobody chooses to dress up like a slave or like an apprentice, and I have yet to see anyone walk behind a plow from sunup to sundown. What you call an historical re-enactment, I see as Dungeons and Dragons for middle aged men—fantasy role playing with too little imagination."

“God I wish I were twenty-five again.” Foster sat back and laughed. “To walk into a room and pick a fist fight even when out numbered five hundred to one, to sit across from a man who could make your career and spit in his eye. Ah, to be that young again.”

“I apologize for being direct, but I assume you wanted to hear a different perspective. If you were looking for fawning support, you would be drinking with the blue arm band people. And for what it is worth, I am twenty eight.”

“Well, Doctor Murphy, let’s see how good your imagination is, and whether I am drinking with the right man.” Foster put down his second drink and focused his eyes on me like I was a series of numbers he intended to memorize. “What is the point of this re-enactment?”

“The Heritage party will use it to meld cultural support for their political ends. By the time they reach Baton Rouge they will be wearing the mantle of the founding fathers. It will be unpatriotic to vote for any other party.”

“And you believe it will be successful.”

“Yes. It worked in South Africa when the Dutch minority re-enacted what they called the “Great Trek.” They took covered wagons from Cape Town to Johannesburg, roughly a thousand miles, and by the time they were done, their candidates were able to beat the British candidates and run the country for nearly two generations. First came history, and then came apartheid.”

“So let’s assume Soisson wins. Now what?” This Socratic inquiry technique was beginning to get on my nerves, but I decided to answer him.

“He calls the provincial legislature into special session and asks them to support independence. That is what he has promised everyone, and I assume that is what he will do.”

“I agree. It is yet to be seen if he has the votes for that, but let’s leave Louisiana aside for a moment. We’re both Americans. What does all this have to do with us? By the way, are you sure you are Irish? I’m about to have my third drink and you are still on your first.”

“Actually, I prefer scotch.” Foster motioned with his hand and a waiter was there immediately. Foster ordered me a single-malt scotch and a third whiskey for himself. In truth, I didn’t mind drinking whiskey. I was just being grumpy. I had been pushed around all night. Was it too surprising?

“So what would George Washington do?” he asked.

“New Orleans meant nothing to Washington. When he marched on Fort Duquesne in 1754 he faced an army reinforced by Phillipe Jolliet out of Green Bay. Jolliet had more men, and the support of local Indians. Washington had no Indian allies and was outnumbered three or four to one. He won two skirmishes and then was forced to surrender and retreat back over the Alleganies. New Orleans had nothing more to do with that battle than Rome or Peking.”

“So far you have just shown me you are not a military strategist. What if Jolliet had not arrived with the reinforcements? What if he had to take them south to St Louis rather than east to Duquesne?”

“Then Washington would have won and Ohio would have gone to the English.”

“That certainly would have changed things for the Americans, wouldn’t it?” He had a smile on his face that looked that the famous Cheshire cat smile. With all

those rolls of fat dropping off his chin, the effect was truly revolting. So was his implication. How sick was this guy? Attack Ohio?

"I don't know where you are going with this, or at least I hope I don't know, but let me point out the obvious. In 1754 the battle at Fort Duquesne cost less than one hundred lives on both sides. Had Washington won and pushed on, the death toll might have reached two hundred on both sides. That is two hundred tragedies for two hundred families, but for a battle so crucial to our history, the number is very low. But that was two hundred and fifty years ago. If George Washington were to try the same invasion today, the losses would be in the tens of thousands and could start a larger conflict that took the lives of millions. So let me tell you what George Washington would do today. He would drink his scotch, go home to his fiancé, and wake up the next day to a world where kids got to grow up never having to hear machine guns." I got up at this point, wondering if he or any of the blue arm bands would stop me. But all he said as I brushed past the table was, "Sleep on this, and we will talk again."

I was fortunate. The elevator quickly got me to the lobby, a row of cabs was waiting out front, and ten minutes after leaving Foster I was back in my suite. Elise was already there, asleep. I sat in the living room in the dark and wondered if I should pack our bags and get back to Green Bay right that minute. New Orleans now scared the hell out of me.

Gradually I calmed down. It took over an hour. Finally my breathing slowed and my fists unclenched and my jaw unlocked. I got undressed and joined Elise in bed. I could survive one more day. But I would be very careful about where I went and who I spoke to. As it turned out, I wasn't careful enough, but it was probably better I didn't know that as I struggled to get to sleep.

Chapter 12

I Get into Yet Another Fight.

To say it took me a while to wake up the next morning is an understatement. I was exhausted, and my ribs hurt like hell. My left side was so stiff I could barely move. Elise, meanwhile was up, and sitting in the living room reading the morning paper and eating a room service breakfast. She brought me a piece of toast when she saw I was awake.

"So the big show begins August 1st." She pointed to the headlines on the morning paper she carried in her other hand. The headlines were so big you would have though Lindbergh had landed again. "I wondered if they would try something before the election. Did they say anything last night about how many people would participate?"

I struggled to a sitting position, trying not to show how much pain I was in. "As near as I can tell, if you wear a blue arm band, attendance is compulsory. I would expect to see a pretty big crowd walking along the highway."

"And it says here that Soisson addressed the historians. How did they react?"

“Yes, Soisson spoke, but that was no more an historical society meeting than the local topless bar is a dance studio. It was a room full of blue arm bands and friends. As for Soisson, watch out for him. That man can give a speech. He had that room at the verge of hysteria.”

“What do you know about topless bars?” Elise leaned over to give me a kiss, which was nice, but she also leaned right into my ribs, which was not so nice. I flinched. “What’s wrong?” But before I answered she pulled the sheets down to look at my chest. My ribs were actually pretty impressive. I doubted any were broken, but the skin was interesting shades of blue and red. It also appeared Captain Whatsis wore a ring, because the skin was broken at one point and a few drops of blood had scabbed up. All in all it was a much more interesting bruise than I had ever gotten playing soccer or baseball. “What happened to you?” Elise, unfortunately, was taking the thing all wrong. She was genuinely concerned.

“I just got into a wrestling match with one of the blue arm band guys. He claimed lacrosse players are better athletes than baseball players.” I probably could have pulled off that line with some bravado, but I also tried to move at the same time and the expression on my face sent a totally different message.

“We need to get out of here. These people are dangerous. I have two ex-colleagues to visit today, but you should stay in the hotel and rest up. I will be back by late afternoon, we can pack, and then grab some sleep before we get the fathers tomorrow morning. Promise me you won’t leave the hotel room.”

“I promise I will only leave the hotel to go to the library. And if you had seen the security at the library these days, you would know I will be safer there than here.” Elise quibbled a bit, but how can you argue against a trip to the library? Eventually we agreed on how we would spend our day and when we would meet back at the hotel. Then she was off to make her visits, and I was free to move around and try to loosen up my left side. After about ten minutes I could turn without grimacing and raise my left arm almost to shoulder height. The nice thing about having big brothers is that I had been punched before and understood the recovery process. This one seemed about half a day maximum. If that was the captain’s best punch, he never wanted to meet my brother Paul.

It was after eleven by the time I got to the library, so late that DuBois wondered if I had left town. We spoke for a few minutes and he offered to pull microfilm for me, but I had a different subject today. It occurred to me that I was not the only historian resident in Canada. I was fairly sure that Henri Messier, who knew more about French history than I ever would, had been called and asked to check for prime dates too. I suspected many others in and out of government were checking to see what historical antecedents might be used for political purposes by the LNA and the Heritage Party. If there were other dangerous dates, they would be found.

I decided to research something no one else would be checking – the mysterious Mr. Foster and the Plymouth Foundation. DuBois sat me down at the highest speed internet terminal the library had, and I began my search. I couldn’t check for Foster without a first name, so I began with Plymouth Foundation. They had a fairly typical web page. Their mission statement explained that they supported various kinds of research, but listed history among the first categories. They also listed recent recipients of grants.

Here things got interesting. Over the last three years they had funded a number of historical and geographic projects, with the vast majority being in Virginia and Pennsylvania, mostly up in the mountains. As for Canada, there was no mention of any grant to reenact any wagon ride, nor were there other instances of foreign grants. It didn't appear the foundation had ever spent a dollar outside the country before. So why start now?

What were they funding up in the mountains? Just as Foster had said, much of it was re-enactments. It appeared any local historical society that wanted to dress up a militia and parade around, found money for uniforms and expert consultants. All of the projects were small, too small for me to have heard about them before. I searched for a pattern, something to hint at a conspiracy to invade Ohio, but the re-enactments were scattered all over the mountains and involved everything from local feuds to a small whiskey tax rebellion. That apparently was the most successful re-enactment, with a local distiller now providing refreshments after the battle.

There was only one re-enactment that had any relevance to Ohio. A small community in the mountains celebrated a rear-guard battle fought the second time Washington was defeated at Fort Duquesne, this time leaving the British General Braddock dead behind him. The grant was large, but the participation was small. How many people want to waste a perfectly good weekend celebrating a defeat?

I started looking around the web site to see what I might learn about Mr. Foster. Under "History of the Foundation" I learned that the foundation had been created as a bequest from Tilden Foster Junior who had founded New England Concrete when concrete was new in the mix of building materials, and rode the construction boom of the 1890s to 1920s to significant riches. Since the motto of the company had been *Concrete hard as Plymouth Rock*, the foundation took its name from that. Initial deposits had been twelve million dollars, but investment returns over the last century made the foundation worth over a billion dollars now.

Now for the mysterious Mr. Foster. The board of directors named three Fosters among the officers: Daniel, Tilden, and Jeremiah. There were no bios provided about any of the men, but I moved to the Who's Who web site and only needed five minutes to find the huge smiling face of my friend – Tilden Foster. Age 48, he served on several boards, including New England Concrete, was a member of several private clubs, and was currently unmarried. At Yale he had majored in history and French, and later he had taken an executive MBA at Harvard. His hobby was sailing, and he had won the annual Chicago to Mackinac Island race three times, which surprised the heck out of me. Why was he racing on the Great Lakes rather than on the Chesapeake or around Long Island like his Yale classmates? This guy had spent more time in Canada than I had. This was all very interesting.

By now it was past lunch time and I decided I had done enough work for my last day in New Orleans, and the last day of my "vacation." I spoke to DuBois for a few minutes and explained that I would be returning to Green Bay. He gave me his card in case I wanted to contact him later with questions, an offer I could see he meant. Thank God for librarians.

Within an hour I had grabbed a small lunch and was back in my hotel room pounding away at my laptop. I had one file I called “random notes” and I poured in everything I could think of from my last several days. “Random” was a good title for the comments because it occurred to me I had covered a lot of intellectual ground since coming down just over a week ago to read up on the Huguenots. I had learned about French Kings, Huguenot settlers, tariffs and Jolliets, and now about wealthy Americans. I type fast, but it still took me two hours to enter my observations.

Elise found me at the keyboard when she got home around four. “Shawn, look who I have with me.” She stood at the door and motioned with her head. In walked President Jolliet. I jumped to my feet, nearly tripping over the coffee table I was using for a desk. As I took the three or four steps needed to reach him and shake his hand, four very large men hurried into the room. While one closed all the drapes in the suite, the other three checked every corner of the room.

“Mr. President. It is good to see you again.”

“Hello, Shawn. I see I am interrupting you at your work. Do you mind if I come in?”

“Of course not.” I motioned him toward a chair in the living room. Elise took my hand and sat with me on the couch.

“First, I want to thank you for attending that historical society meeting last night. But Elise tells me you might have had a little trouble there.”

“Not really. It was just boys being boys. I have been trading insults with a member of the LNA. Last night things heated up a bit and we traded punches. It was all over in a few seconds.”

“Are you certain you are safe here?”

“Certainly. But we will be leaving tonight anyway,” I began, but there was a look on his face that made me wonder if maybe there had been a change of plans. I looked over at Elise, and she tightened her grip on my hand, but wouldn’t meet my eyes.

“I have come to ask you a very large favor. I know you and Elise were planning to return to Green Bay tomorrow, but I wonder if you would be willing to stay on and observe the re-enactment of the walk from Biloxi to New Orleans.” Since he used the singular form of “you” I understood I would be doing this alone. I looked over at Elise, but before she could answer, Jolliet answered for her. “I have asked Elise to return to Green Bay with the other senior administrators. You would have to do this on your own, probably until the middle of August.”

“I don’t understand what I could do. I assume you will have other people watching the walk.” I was not being modest. I really could think of nothing I could add. There would be reporters around, and probably a host of spies.

“I am sure Soisson will have endless TV coverage arranged, and he will have the local newspapers there. But you are a professional historian. You will have insights into this event that few others can have. I am sure you will see things that they will miss.”

“And what would you like from me? Reports? Private correspondence?” I had a bad feeling about where this was leading.

“No, I want nothing private.” He must have read my mind. “I would like you to think of this as the kind of report you would give to your students at the

university, the kind of log you might put in the campus web site. In fact that would be a good place for it. You are trained, you are impartial, just tell the story as you would to students."

"Yes, I suppose I could do that." Actually I was interested in how they were going to pull off this re-enactment. It might be fun to watch. But I didn't like the idea of being away from Elise for another month, and I had one other worry. "If I do this, I would need to leave here by mid-August. Something is going to happen here August 24th. I don't know what it is, but I don't want to be around here when it happens."

"We also know about August 24th. We are on the alert for whatever they are planning. But I agree, you should be back in Green Bay before then. Elise will miss you, and you will want some time to get ready for classes in the fall."

"May Elise and I talk about this and get back to you later today?"

"Ah, you are already learning to think like a married man. That is excellent." Then he was up, shook my hand, hugged Elise, and was out the door with secret service people racing ahead of him. Elise and I sat back down on the couch and didn't say anything for a very long time. She took both my hands, put them in her lap, and laid her head on my shoulder. I found it very hard to think in that position. In a minute she was kissing me, and then one thing led to another. An hour later she had her head on my chest while we lay in bed.

"I saw Uncle Claude at a lunch meeting we had and he asked about your historical society meeting." She was talking quietly, just above a whisper. "The meeting was in the headlines, so that is what everyone at lunch was talking about. They are really afraid of how this whole thing could be manipulated. If Soisson can turn himself into some kind of latterday Moses, re-leading his people out of Biloxi and into the wilderness, it might give him much more credibility than he has now. At least that is what everyone was saying. Uncle Claude asked to speak with me later, and it was then that he asked me about this new plan for you to stay here as a kind of witness. I told him I hoped you would say 'no'. I don't like us being apart that long, and I am worried about you getting into more fights with these bigots."

"There are lots of reasons for me to say "no," and of course you are the first. If I were in Green Bay at least I would see you evenings and Sundays."

"Thank you."

"The best reason to stay would be to represent history. I have great sympathy for what the original settlers went through. I have no sympathy for the blue arm band nuts. I could see putting together some notes and some pictures so my history students could get another perspective of this event." We didn't talk much after that. My decision was made. We just held each other, aware that it would be a long time before we were together again.

By seven we were getting hungry and started talking about our last evening in town. I was really tempted to just order up room service, but it seemed best to enjoy the city while we could. We put on our best clothes, asked Anton to bring the car around, and headed for one of the better restaurants along the river. As we drove, we called Jolliet and I explained that I would be staying on. In truth I owed him a favor or two for all the time he had spent with me over the past year, and I was curious about this re-enactment. Jolliet was grateful, talked with Elise a few

minutes and thanked her too, and wished us well on our last evening in New Orleans.

Our choice of restaurant was easy. We wanted to be right along the river, and LaFayette's has a long glass wall right on the water's edge. Given Elise's usual impact on matre d's, we were given a table right along the water. We could see across at the lights on the south side of the river, and of course we could also watch boat traffic going past us. I had trouble looking at anything other than Elise. She had given up her white dresses for the night and was wearing a very low-cut red satin gown. She held my hand through dinner and we talked about friends and family and a bit about the wedding, anything except the primary topic on both our minds—our impending separation. The waiters were attentive, the food was good, and so was the wine. It was a very pleasant evening.

Somewhere between courses I happened to look up and noticed we were being stared at by a couple with blue arm bands. She looked really stupid with a blue band on the sleeve of her loose while dress, and he looked not much brighter. They were both busily talking on cell phones. I wondered how long you had to be married before you could sit across from a woman and talk to someone else. And it appeared that was all they were doing—calling other people. Occasionally they looked over at us, and then they were back to their calling. What a sorry pair of people.

Midway through our next course I saw another group of arm bands going to their table – my old friend captain Whatsis and the three stooges. They spoke with the couple for a few minutes, and stared over at me, apparently working up the energy to come over and start another fight. I was in no mood. The food and the wine had relaxed me to the point where I could have melted into my chair, and there was Elise to think about. This was the wrong time and the wrong place.

Then things got worse. The soldiers from the consulate showed up, also staring at me. It was clear from their expressions they were still angry. Had they been looking for me since our argument last week? Had David Starr sent them? They were far scarier than the LNA goof balls. Whatever they were still angry about, I was in no position to take them all on. It was time to leave.

Anton must have seen what was going on, because he suddenly appeared at our table. "Doctor DuPry," he said, "Please come with me." She looked confused, and I got a couple of words out about trouble coming, before Anton took over. "Doctor DuPry, we need to leave now." Elise still hesitated, and suddenly Anton just picked her up and carried her out. I stood up and started following, but Captain Whatsis moved pretty fast to cut off my exit.

"There's no security tonight to save your butt, altar boy." He and his boys were winding through the tables, coming in single file. I noticed the soldiers had also started toward me, but it was clear the arm bands would get first crack at me. OK, so be it. At least I could get in a punch of two. I stood my ground, waited for Whatsis to get near, and then started throwing punches before he could say another word. I hit with a left to his face, but missed with my right, and left myself open to two really good punches to my ribs, including one right where he had hit me the day before. That one really hurt. I stepped back, dropped my arms, and tried a punch my big brother had taught me—a punch right to his diaphragm. I don't know if I was more surprised by how much it hurt my hand, or by the fact

that big brother's advice actually worked. It knocked the wind out of Whatis and left him standing pretty defenseless. I then used big brother punch number two and hit him as hard as I could in the nose. He went down and stayed there.

I stepped back to take on the next thug and saw that there weren't going to be any more. Two were on the ground with soldiers pounding on them pretty hard, while the other two were held restrained by the man with the big biceps and another soldier. When I look confused, Big Biceps said,

"I told you last week our job is to protect Americans." All I could think to say was "thank you."

"This isn't over," said thug number two. I noticed he wasn't struggling too much with Biceps. I was sure he didn't want to join his friends on the floor.

"I understand that. I don't know what is wrong with you guys, but you won't have any trouble finding me." I nodded to each of the soldiers and walked out of the restaurant. Anton had parked the car right by the front door. I could hear Elise screaming at poor Anton about how he had to go help me.

"His job is to protect you, and he did it well." I pulled open a back door, got in and thrown back into the seat as Anton pulled away from the curb and demonstrated how quickly he could accelerate from zero to sixty. For a French car, this one moved pretty well.

"Are you hurt?" Elise asked.

"No, it turns out I made fewer enemies than I thought last week. Some American soldiers taught the arm band guys what real soldiers can do." At that point Elise was all over me, which was good, and not so good. I enjoyed having her in my arms, but I was not completely sure I didn't have broken ribs this time. I was going to have to protect myself better in the future. I was also going to have to call Paul and tell him that in all those years of childhood roughhouse, at least one thing he taught me actually worked. I suspected he would be as surprised as I was.

What happened the rest of the evening? We went back to the hotel and Elise put ice on my ribs. You have no idea how much that hurts. It also tickled like crazy as it melted. Good thing. Once I started laughing she couldn't hold the ice against me any longer and we were both able to get a few hours sleep.

Chapter 13

Elise Leaves; I Stay.

When the alarm went off at three, I was sure it was the hotel fire alarm. I started to jump out of bed, only to discover that my whole body was frozen up. There was nothing I could move that didn't hurt my ribs. We agreed that I would take first shower while Elise started packing, and I stood under the hottest water I could stand for as long as I could stand, until I could finally raise my arms. This was going to be a long day.

Fortunately, since I was staying on, I didn't have to pack. I got dressed, and was really proud that I could tie my own shoes. I was glad Elise was in the bathroom

and not around to see the faces I made whenever I bent over. By the time she was out of the bathroom and dressed, I was able to walk about the suite like everything was normal.

Anton came up at four and started taking bags down to the car. I made a motion as if to help him with a bag, but he waved me off insisting that this was his job. I didn't argue much. Elise was methodical, folding and packing carefully, and didn't have much to say while she worked. She had her last bag ready to go just before five, and we headed down to the car.

The fathers were waiting for us at the back door like they had been standing and watching for days. I hoped that wasn't true, but I wasn't sure. We pulled up in the alley as they had requested, and were barely out of the car when a huge moving van pulled into the alley behind us. Three young men jumped out and headed straight for the residence.

"Uncle Claude made a phone call," was the only explanation I got from Elise. When they saw all the extra help arriving, I thought the two fathers were going to start jumping around the back porch like children. Elise took a large grocery bag from Anton, and made everyone go into the kitchen and have a croissant breakfast before we began loading boxes. The way the fathers put away the bread and butter, I wasn't sure when they had eaten last. It was also pleasant to spend one final meal in the kitchen they had shared for so many years.

Once the food was gone, the boys started loading boxes. There must have been a hundred of them. I have no idea what the fathers would have done had we just shown up with a car as planned, and for that matter I had no idea what they were going to do with all this in St. Louis. But at least for now there were no fights over what stayed and what went—everything went.

Elise and I stood and talked with the fathers while the young men loaded the van and Anton prowled the grounds. As before, they were pleased to be with Elise, and walked around as quickly as they could to show her this item or that and tell her stories about their half century in the building. I began to wonder what Elise's trip to St. Louis would be like. It seemed like these men had a lot to say, and she was going to hear all of it. Fortunately, Elise didn't seem to mind. She asked an occasional question, laughed when the time was right, and showed she cared. That kept the priests busy for the hour it took the boys to load the van.

Then the moment came when I was most nervous. The house was empty, as was the cathedral, and it was time to leave. I wondered if the fathers would break down at this point, but it went smoothly. Each father had a small case that they insisted on carrying personally, and Elise walked with them to the car. She let Father Jacques open her car door for her, then she got in, they got into the back seat, and Anton got behind the wheel. I thought for a minute Elise had forgotten about me, but as soon as the fathers were settled, she got back out of the car, gave me long kiss, and talked for a few minutes about how much she loved me. We held each other for a very long time, I told her I loved her, and then she was off, with the moving van following close behind.

I stood in the alley behind the residence and watched them disappear into the darkness. It was barely six o'clock. What did I do with the rest of my day? Nothing that I am very proud of. Mostly I just moped around. I drank some, I slept some, I sat around the hotel room like a lost puppy. I thought over and over of Elise riding

off into the darkness. It would be nearly a month before I would see here again. This wasn't one of my better days.

Chapter 14

Philadelphia.

Over the next few days I tried to put some structure back in my life. I was going to be in Louisiana for another several weeks. I needed to plan how I would spend that time. I would drive over to Biloxi around the first of the month to see the walk get started, but that still left me with about ten days to kill. Under normal circumstances I would have headed straight back to the Provincial Library to read more materials from the archives and learn more about the first years of the colony. But I suspected Margaret would still be there. I wasn't sure what was true about her and what was not, but I did know she was beautiful and I was engaged. I needed to keep my distance.

As a substitute, I went back through the notes I had made on the arrival of the Huguenots. I pulled up maps and made sure I understood how people had traveled from Biloxi to New Orleans. I imagined how I would present that material to a group of college students. What was crucial for them to know? I began roughing out a report along the lines of what Jolliet had suggested—a web log that students could follow. And as I did that, I found that my mood improved. I still missed Elise, but as long as I stayed busy, things weren't so bad.

On Friday afternoon I got a phone call that made me busier. Harry Stuart, my dissertation advisor at Virginia called.

"Shawn, I hear you are in New Orleans. Are you wearing a bullet-proof vest?"

"It is perfectly safe down here. The only problem I have is heat. Did you know there are hotter places than Virginian in August?"

"I think I can rescue you from the heat. Would you like to fly up here for a couple days? I got a call this morning from the managing editor of UV Press. He is trying to track you down to sign a contract for your Jolliet series."

"That is great news. Thank you for pushing the idea to him. But I am afraid I don't have much material ready yet."

"This is where it gets interesting. You see I never mentioned the biography to him. I thought you wanted more time to organize it. He called me because he has been getting requests for your book from several libraries in Europe, and also got a call from the National University of Canada to co-publish a French translation. You have been a very busy boy."

"I have been busy in many ways, but unfortunately, I have not been busy with the book. I have taken a temporary job with the National University, so that explains that connection. But I don't even know anyone in Europe, so that whole thing baffles me."

"Shawn, editors don't normally call up assistant professors and request books. I suggest you move while the opportunity is there. Can you put together an outline and a first chapter? Fly up this weekend, and I will take a look at it and see if I

can make a few suggestions, and then we can meet with the editor on Monday. Can you do that?" I hesitated for a few seconds while I tried to decide if that was even remotely possible. After a few seconds of silence from me, Harry put his advisor hat on again. "Shawn, the answer is 'yes.' Even if you have no idea how you are going to get it done, say 'yes.' Your career is calling you. Don't put it on hold. You know where I live. I will expect you for dinner Sunday at seven. Bring a good bottle of wine and about fifty pages of your manuscript." And then he hung up.

It was three o'clock. Assuming I could get a flight out Sunday morning, I had less than forty eight hours. If my career was going to call, couldn't it have called earlier in the week? I started moving. First, I called the airline I normally used and was able to get a direct flight to Richmond just after lunch on Sunday. A rental car would be waiting for me.

Next I started looking back at my interview notes. A secretary at our company had transcribed all the interviews so I had them in text on my computer. The problem was they were just words. There was a narrative, Louis goes down the river and comes back. But there was no perspective or context. Seven men paddle a canoe for two thousand miles. So what? Was this an adventure story? An heroic struggle? A geopolitical feat? Given the fifteen seconds you normally get at a cocktail party before being interrupted, what would I say the book was about? I stared at the screen, paced around the room, and watched the clock race ahead. Time was disappearing.

Finally I began by making a list of opinions I had held over the years about the trip.

It was vastly overrated

It gave France huge tracts of land

It gave France a way to block American/English westward expansion

Then I realized that all of those opinions were true, but unimportant. Louis gave the French potential. Even forty years—two generations—after his discovery, France had barely managed to put some settlers into Illinois, and to put a few diseased soldiers into New Orleans. The map of the land ignored the fact that Canada was basically empty and divided into two colonies too far apart to interact much at all. The current divisions in the country were not new, but had been there for centuries.

So what mattered in the story? The Jolliet family. A dozen generations had fought to make Louis's discovery mean something. There was my story. I sat down at the computer and wrote a two page summary of the project. Then I stopped, took a walk around the block, tried to think of other things, and finally came back to reread my summary with a clear head. I gave myself three questions to determine if I was on the right track.

Is it true? Were the Jolliets really that important?

Was it new? Or had other folks already written the book?

Did it matter? Could I show that this Jolliet family influence mattered?

I tried lots of counter arguments, but in the end I was convinced that the answer to question number one was yes, the Jolliets really were that important. If nothing else, I had witnessed it last Sunday night when the assassin had tried to kill Claude Jolliet. There were lots of possible targets, and he had selected Claude.

As for the question of newness, this was a harder question. I had done lots of reading about the Jolliet family during my first year in Green Bay. There were many biographies, but nothing that really addressed the entire family, or explained the consistent impact they had. For that matter, no one (including me) had considered how it was even possible for one family to maintain its influence over three centuries.

Did Jolliet family influence matter? I could think of ten examples of how their influence affected life here in Canada. Did their influence extent beyond the border? I hadn't looked at that yet, but I was fairly confident the evidence was there.

In sum, I was confident I had the correct approach. But I didn't have any time to go off in the wrong direction. So I walked away from the computer again and read newspapers for an hour. If the schedule had been better, I would have preferred a night to sleep on it, or a week to talk through ideas with other historians. But my career was calling; I had forty some hours to get this project rolling. I read the paper, even played with the crossword puzzle, and read the weather report for every city in the world. Then I read the summary again. Did it still make sense? Was this a project I was willing to commit myself to for the decade it would take to compete? Ten years from now would I be proud of my work, or would I be embarrassed? Basically, this was gut-check time. In many ways I was taking a bigger risk that I had fighting Captain Whatsis and his fools. That action might have sent me to a hospital. This decision might send me to academic oblivion. Was this the biography series I wanted to bet my academic life on?

Yes. It was six o'clock Friday night. I started writing, and kept writing until nine o'clock Sunday morning. I ordered room service food, took several showers, slept three hours each night, and kept writing. I wrote an overview of the project, an outline of the series, and the first chapter of the first book – the childhood of Louis Jolliet and the implications it would have for his later career. By the time I was done I had about eighty pages (double spaced). I took another shower, packed a bag, called a cab, and got to the airport. I was even at the airport half an hour early. Now, if I could just stay awake through my dinner with Harry, everything would be fine.

Harry lived in what I think of as a professor's house. It was older, English Tudor style, with a large library, lots of books and leather chairs, and walls covered with odds and ends from various trips around the world. I gave him my manuscript, he took it into his library to read, and I sat in the kitchen with his wife, Molly, talking French politics. Eventually Harry joined us in the kitchen, tossed my manuscript on the table in front of me, and pulled down a bottle of scotch.

"Did you remember to bring the bottle of wine I asked for?" He asked.

"No, I had a couple of other things on my mind. Besides, when did you drink anything other than scotch or ale?"

"Molly and I like to live on the wild side occasionally. We could at least try some wine once in a while. But no matter, the good folks at Glennlivet will help us celebrate tonight." He poured a small glass for each of us. No ice. With Harry, scotch was always drunk "neat." "Molly," he turned to his wife and spoke to her as if she were clear across the room. "Our young friend has an idea about Canada. It

may be brilliant. We will only know that if he can prove it, and it will probably take him a decade to do so, but even if he can't, the series will be interesting. He can tell a story. Must be the Irish in him."

"Do you have any suggestions before I show it to the editor tomorrow?" I asked.

"There are several places you need to fix up, but they are obvious. Any editor would spot them right away. Leave work for the editor, I always say. They have a bad job and it helps if they can feel useful. What you have is enough for our meeting tomorrow."

The rest of the evening is a blur—partly scotch, partly fatigue. I remember eating dinner, taking a walk around the yard to look at flowers, and talking about anything and everything. It had been over six months since I had last seen Harry, and much longer since I had talked with Molly, a French professor who had finally managed to improve my pronunciation skills. They were interesting people and interested in everything going on in Green Bay and New Orleans, so we talked for hours. I don't know when I finally got to bed, but eventually they steered me towards the guest room and I dropped off without even getting undressed.

The next morning I drank a lot of coffee, but never did seem to wake up. We drove over to the University of Virginia Press, just off campus, and I was introduced to the entire staff – all eight people. Two of the editors took my manuscript off to read in an office, and I had hoped I could have some quiet time then, but the rest of the staff wanted to talk about the publishing business, and French politics, and their business agent wanted to talk about contracts. I nodded, tossed in an occasional comment, and gulped coffee.

An hour later the two main editors were back, all smiles. They liked the direction the book was talking, it would be a significant contribution to scholarship, they could see why a French translation would be appropriate, they needed two scholarly reviews before they could commit to anything, but they were very excited about the possibilities. I nodded lots, smiled where appropriate, and edged toward the door. They had done all they were going to do this morning, and I needed sleep. Finally I edged enough toward the door that they got the idea. Five of them gave me their business cards, and the business person gave me a contract to review. I smiled, shook hands all around, and backed out of the room.

"That wasn't too bad, was it?" Harry asked as we stood out on the street.

"They seem like nice people, but I haven't had much sleep the last few days."

"Would you like to stop back at my house to rest before you catch your flight?"

"No, I think I will drive back to Philadelphia and sleep there. I haven't been home in a while. But thanks for offering. And Harry, thanks for your help with the book. I hope someday I can do as well for my students." I shook his hand, and then actually hugged him, something I never do. I got into my car and started north, hoping I could stay awake for the two hour drive.

The two hour drive was nearly four hours—I had forgotten how bad traffic is in the U.S.—but I made it back to Rittenhouse Square without falling asleep at the wheel. Mom must have been sitting in the front of the house, because she saw me get out of the car. She also must have thought I was returning from a tragedy. I could see fear on her face as I climbed the front steps. Mothers worry so much. How do they ever sleep?

"Shawn what's wrong?" My mother held the door open and then hugged me.

“Actually everything is very good. I came back to Virginia to sign a publishing agreement for a book. But I haven’t slept much in the past few days. Since I was so close, I thought I would stop by.”

“That’s marvelous. I am so glad you came home. I will call your father right away and tell him the good news. But you need some sleep. You go up to your room right now, and I will call you later when dinner is ready.” She said the magic word, “sleep.” I dragged myself up the stairs and dropped onto my bed like a load of laundry.

Hours later, it was my brother Paul who woke me up. He punched my shoulder a couple times and shook me, all very gentle by his standards. “It’s after eight, Shawn. We have already fed the kids. If you want to see anyone, you need to get up.” I hate taking naps because I tend to wake up confused, and that evening I was really confused. Where had Paul come from? I followed him downstairs and into the dining room, only to be laughed at by my whole family.

“How much did you pay a French barber for that haircut?” My brother Seamus asked. I slumped into a chair, my father handed my mother a comb, and she combed my hair like she had back when I was in third grade.

“Hi, everybody,” was all I could think to say. Both my brothers were there, with their wives, as was Kelly and her husband. I could hear kids in the next room watching television.

“So we hear you are an author now.” Seamus again. I nodded, which was a mistake, because my mother was still trying to drag a comb through my hair. “Well, congratulations.” He raised a glass of champagne as did everyone else. I reached for my glass, but my mother slapped my hand.

“It’s lemonade for you at least until you are awake enough to tell us all about the book and what you are doing in New Orleans.” Actually lemonade sounded pretty good. So I raised that glass and we toasted.

“So tell us about the book,” Paul asked.

“I told you last fall I wanted to write a book about Louis Jolliet and the discovery of the Mississippi. Well, that has changed, and now I am doing a book series on the Jolliet family and their political influence in Canada. The University of Virginia Press wants to publish the series, and the National University of Canada will publish the French translation.”

“Cool. So are you rich now?” Leave it to Seamus to look for money.

“Harry Stuart, my old thesis advisor, told me the average academic book just makes a thousand dollars or so.”

“A thousand dollars? And for that you will spend how long writing the book?”

“The series will take several years. In fact, it may take ten.”

“So you are going to get a thousand dollars for ten years’ work. Shrewd business move, Shawn, shrewd.” We all laughed at that.

“The money does not matter,” my father put in. “It is an honor to have a book published. I congratulate you Shawn.” And we all toasted again, with me sticking to lemonade. With that out of the way, we began eating, and catching up. The kids were in and out of the room. The older ones said “Hello, Uncle Shawn,” the younger ones just waved. I got an update on the neighbors, some comments about business (apparently things were going well), and a report on the trip my parents had taken to Green Bay to meet the DuPrys. My mother described their house and

explained how pleasant the dinner had been. Eventually, the conversation turned to politics and the current rumors that there would be a war between the U.S. and Canada. At first I thought I hadn't heard them correctly.

"What's this about a war? Why would we fight the French?" I asked.

"We always fight the French," Seamus replied.

"It's the refugees," my father answered. "The rumors are that once Louisiana breaks from the rest of Canada, the two sides will fight. Huguenot refugees in the U.S. will want to fight for Louisiana, and there will be border skirmishes as they try to get back into the country. It will be Versailles Pass on a much larger scale. Once that starts, the U.S. can watch it happen or it can help the Huguenots gain their independence. I think that sums up the arguments you hear in the papers and around the water cooler."

"Well, if you want to trade rumors," I replied, "Let me tell you two. First, when I was in Missouri a couple weeks ago, I had dinner with a group of men who were convinced the Americans would be invading any day now, for the purpose of killing all Catholics. Then last week I had drinks with an American who was convinced we should invade Canada and occupy Ohio. I checked the guy out, and I think he has plans to help that process along." That ended conversation at the table. They were all stunned. It was my mother who broke the silence.

"They think we want to kill Catholics?" She was already starting to tear up and I was sorry I had mentioned the conversation.

"Taking Ohio is not such a bad idea." Seamus replied before his wife caught him with an elbow. I always liked her.

"Taking Ohio was a fabulous idea in 1754," I replied. "Washington tried, and blew it. We could have taken thousands of square miles of land for the cost of a few hundred men. What do you think it would take today?" That brought silence again. I struggled for some other topic of conversation. I hadn't seen my family in months. This was not how I wanted to spend my evening with them.

"Let me see if Dodson can see us tomorrow," My father said. "Do you have time to go over to the Capitol for lunch again?" I agreed, and then we all sat locked in concentration as we collectively looked for something else to talk about. Thank God for kids. Two of the little came in begging to see a movie they had just seen promoted on television. That gave us something else to talk about, and we latched onto it for the next hour or so while we finished the meal and then got everyone packed up and back into their cars.

The last surprise of the evening came after everyone else had left and it was just my mother and father and I left in the house. We all carried dishes into the kitchen and did some stacking and washing, and then my father was gone. A few minutes later he returned with an envelope in his hand.

"I brought home your second quarter sales commission check." I took it and started shoving it in my pocket. For the last several quarters my father had been giving me part of the sales commission for sales calls I had gone out on or had set up. The checks had been around two thousand dollars, and I assumed this one would be too. "You may want to look at that," my father pointed to the check I had poised above my pocket. I opened the envelope and was truly shocked. The check was for more than eighty two thousand dollars.

"Wow. Thank you. Did we really do that much business?"

“We had the best quarter the company has ever had. The French think they are going to war, so they are stocking up.” I gave the check back to my father and asked him to deposit it in my account. The last thing I wanted to do was to walk around New Orleans with that kind of money in my pocket. And then I had a thought about all the sales.

“Are they also trying to buy us off?”

“Yes. All importers are doing well, but the French seem especially interested in buying from Americans. They want to make friends over here. They need friends.” I didn’t know what to say to that, so I just helped with the dishes for a while and then went to bed. Given all the sleep I had missed the last three days, you would think I would drop right off to sleep, but it took me a long time to finally clear my mind.

A few hours later my father was shaking me awake. I wish I could say I was gracious about it, but at the time it appeared the entire world was conspiring to keep me sleep-deprived. I mumbled and complained and finally got out of bed.

“I left a voice-mail message for Dodson last night.” My father explained while I rubbed my eyes. “He must have his staff working around the clock. I just got a return call fifteen minutes ago. He would like us to meet him at his house for breakfast—in thirty minutes.” I nodded and hit the shower. Within fifteen minutes I was at least presentable, and was out the door. My father drove what was luckily a short distance through the traffic that was already heavy at dawn.

The Senator himself met us at the front door. He was even loud and affable at seven a.m., a skill they must teach in politician school somewhere. We followed him into his formal diningroom where two of his assistants were waiting for us. One I recognized from our last lunch. The second was new to me. Dodson did introductions all around, which was really a meaningless exercise since we had no idea who his assistants were. They were just two young men, a couple years out of college, starting careers in government.

“I am anxious to hear about your latest adventures in New Orleans, Doctor Murphy. I understand we have a mutual friend down there now.”

“I assume you mean David Starr. He told me he called up here to check on me. I think he was very confused about what I was doing there.” As I answered his question I was also filling my plate from the various bowls and platters on the table. I was hungry.

“Yes, he thought you might be doing some observing for me. He was very curious about why you were in New Orleans at a time when so many people are trying to leave.” I had the sense Dodson also wanted to know why I was there but since he wasn’t asking me a direct question, I felt no need to provide an answer. I guess I was just in a mood.

“Could I have some coffee, please?” I asked between forkfuls of eggs.

“Of course.” Dodson passed a silver coffee pot down the table. “So, your father says you have been hearing some very ugly rumors while in New Orleans. Could you tell us about them?”

“Certainly. First, a large number of people in Missouri assume that when the people of Louisiana declare war, the U.S. will invade and kill all Catholics. I know that sounds bizarre, but I heard it on a talk radio station and then from a large number of men in a restaurant. They are certain we are coming.” One of the

assistants started to respond, something about “But we would never…” but Dodson cut him off.

“Rumors are running wide over here too. I don’t know which is worse, talk radio or the World Wide Web. I sometimes wish we hadn’t invented either.” This got a laugh from his assistants. I was tempted to explain to Dodson that the web was invented by an Englishman—Tim Berners-Lee—while working in Switzerland, but then what would have been the point of that? I just kept eating.

“Your father said there was another rumor about Ohio,” Dodson continued. Here I got much more serious. I even put down my fork.

“There is a man you may have heard of—Tilden Foster. I met him at a rally for General Soisson. He said he was financing a re-enactment of the initial travels of the Huguenots in Louisiana, and he talked a lot about Washington’s attacks on the Ohio. He never said he had an invasion planned, but he made it pretty clear he thought possession of Ohio by the U.S. would be a good idea.” Dodson was now serious too. I saw his too assistants make eye contact when I had mentioned Foster’s name, but they had the sense to keep quiet.

“This seems an odd thing to tell you.”

“I agree. I think he assumed I would be excited about the prospects because I had studied Washington’s battles. He had read my dissertation, which makes him one of six people in the world. For what it is worth, he is also funding battle re-enactments along the invasion route Washington used.”

“That’s not true.” Assistant number two slipped his leash and managed to get that much out before either he was kicked under the table or somehow warned to shut up.

“Actually it is public record. Look at the Plymouth Foundation web site at the distributions they have made in the past three years. They have to list distributions to maintain their tax-free status, I believe.”

“We will certainly look into that,” Dodson replied.

“I wish you would.” I directed the rest of my comments at the assistants. “Let me make my position perfectly clear. I wish Washington had won in 1754 or 1755. It would have had enormous consequences for our nation. But he lost both times, and we have lost every other time we attacked. Now I have to believe it is too late. Changing the map would cost millions of lives, and to what end? My suggestion is you get this guy under control. Unless he is working for you, in which case we have even bigger problems.”

“I assure you he is not working for us, and it is not U.S. policy to invade Canada.” Dodson again. “It was kind of you to take the time to tell us about these rumors you are hearing. What are your next plans? Will you be returning to Green Bay, or staying here in Philadelphia?”

“It is my intention to return to New Orleans and observe the Huguenot historical re-enactment. I thought my students might be interested in it.”

“I would be interested too. Do you think you could give me your impressions from time to time?”

“I can do better than that. I will be writing a web log of the event. If you like, I will send you the URL, so you can read as much about it as you like.” That seemed to make everyone happy, especially me, since it meant I could keep the man informed, something I wanted to do in the hope that he was being straight with

me, yet I wouldn't be sending private correspondence or anything else that smacked of "spying."

Breakfast went on a little longer and the conversation turned to football, baseball, basically meaningless talk for men. It filled the time it took us to finish our eggs and toast. Then we made our exit, shaking another round of hands and getting back into our car by eight.

"Do you think he was telling the truth about Ohio?" I asked my father as we drove back home.

"Not completely. He isn't a bad man, but I suspect there are all kinds of plans being prepared these days. Many things could happen." That was all we said about politics. Back home, I enjoyed another breakfast cooked by my mother, talked to her for nearly an hour after my father went to work, and then I gathered up my things and drove to the airport. If I was going to follow the re-enactment, I needed to get back to New Orleans and Biloxi.

Chapter 15

Biloxi.

My first job that last Wednesday in July was to sleep. My hotel room in New Orleans was beginning to feel more and more like home, and I felt the world owed me at least twelve hours in bed. I only had a day or two left before I moved over to Biloxi, so this would be my last chance to rest. So I took it.

Finally, around noon, I was too embarrassed to stay in bed any longer, and I began making phone calls. Elise was first, of course. I actually got through to her on her cell phone, a fact that reassured me in itself. If she had time to take personal calls, the sky must not be falling too fast. I told her about my trip to Virginia and Philadelphia, ignoring breakfast with the senator. At some point we needed to have a serious talk about politics, but this wasn't the time, and a cell phone was not the means.

My next call was back to campus. I didn't think I needed to be there much before classes started the second week of September, but it never hurts to talk to your boss when you are new on the job, and I wanted to talk with Messier about this web log project. He seemed to already know I would be staying on in Louisiana (had Jolliet spoken with him?), and he said he would have the tech support people set up a web log for me. He would call me back in an hour or two with a URL. Less than an hour later he was back with the web address I needed, along with a password that would let me write to the log. He also reminded me that the account would accommodate digital pictures if I wished to add them. In short, I now had a web site set up to record my observations, and I had a boss who knew about and approved of what I would be doing. Things were moving along.

There was one more thing I had to do before I left town, but I put this off until after I had eaten lunch and prepared what I wanted to say. I guess I have as much

trouble with apologies as anyone. Finally, I took the walk north to the U.S. consulate to speak with the men who had saved my bacon the week before.

The consulate in New Orleans looks like a maximum security prison. There has been enough bad blood between our two countries that periodically some Frenchman will have too much wine and attack the building with everything from a tossed bottle to a home-made bomb. So there is a heavy wall all around it, with reinforced concrete the first three feet up and then tall bars that must go another twelve feet in the air. There is only one entrance through the bars, and it only gets you into a glassed booth where a soldier looks at your documents and decides if you get to go any farther into the building. I pushed open the heavy glass door and stood across from the soldier who sat behind a small counter.

"Could I see your identification, please?" He asked.

"Actually, I don't want to go in. I just came to thank you for what you did last week. You were one of the guys who saved my butt at the restaurant, weren't you?"

"Yes." Suddenly a big grin crossed his face. He was a large man with a serious job, but with the smile you could see the twenty year old boy still there underneath the formalities of his job. "That was fun. They can say all they want to about us being allies and all, but I can tell you, it still feels great to beat up a Frenchie."

"Well, it was great that you jumped in."

"It was our pleasure. But I have to warn you. Those LNA guys are all just politicians pretending to be soldiers. If you ever come up against a real French solider, you better start looking for the back door out."

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind." At this point I shook his hand and started edging toward the door, but he held my hand.

"Don't you want to talk with David Starr?"

"Was he involved?"

"How do you think we knew where to go?"

"Is he in?"

"Sure. I will buzz his office." He called through to Starr's office while I stood there uncomfortably. I had done everything but spit in Starr's eye, and it turned out he had helped save me. I guess this was my afternoon to eat crow. Fortunately Starr didn't keep me dangling too long. He came bounding out to the security booth almost immediately.

"Shawn, how good to see you. Come on back to my office." He shook my hand like we were old college chums and then led the way down a long hallway.

"I just stopped by to thank you and the men for helping me last week. By the way, how did you know where to go?"

"Cell phones, Shawn, cell phones. Why people don't understand they are really talking on the radio is a mystery to me. Some of the LNA folks are good, solid folks, but boy have they attracted a lot of losers." He pointed me to a chair in his small office. The walls held pictures of various American presidents, all framed in exactly the same way and exactly the same size. There must be an embassy warehouse where they have stacks and stacks of the things.

"There's an LNA captain who trades punches with me periodically. Do you put him in the loser category or the solid folks category?"

“I had him in the fairly solid category, but it appears he is about as hot headed as you are. Since you are a professor, you can afford to be. He is a politician and an officer in a new army. He needs to learn some restraint.”

“So you know him well?” This was obviously none of my business, but it irritated me to think that Starr somehow knew Captain Whatsis. “By the way, what is his name?”

“The guy you have been sparring with his Jean Goulet. He was a law student until last year when he started his political career a bit earlier than lawyers usually do. He is not a stupid man. And the LNA does not hand out officer ranks as easily as you might think. I’d like to think you two could kiss and make up, but I can see it isn’t going to happen. Can I ask that you at least keep your distance?”

“That should be easy. I am headed for Biloxi in the next couple days to watch the wagon train.

“That’s a good place for you. You should meet some good people there, people who appreciate history and want to educate the world to the struggles that have gone on here for so long.”

“Yes.” I suppose I could have told him I was already nervous about politicians misusing history, but I was there to thank the man, not argue with him. I began to stand so I could leave.

“One more thing before you go.” I sat back down and then waited while Starr paused for effect. He was very serious now, and apparently wanted to be sure I understood just how serious he was. “I hear you had a couple drinks with Tilden Foster. He is an interesting man. But one thing you should know about him. He is really good to his friends, and very hard on his enemies. And in his world view you are either one or the other, no third option. I suggest you find a way to make him your friend.”

“I suggest you watch him more carefully.” I replied, just as serious. “History is full of characters who drag their countries into places they shouldn’t be. He may sound like an ally to whatever you have going on down here, but I would be willing to bet his game plan is not the same as yours, despite what he is telling you.” This time I stood all the way up and extended my hand without hesitation. It was time to leave. “Thanks again for your help.” I headed down the hall, thanked the guard again, and was out the door. I wish I could warm to Starr, after all, he had helped me even after I had treated him badly, but the man made me uncomfortable. Weren’t spies supposed to be likeable? I walked back to my hotel determined to be even more careful about what I said on my cell phone.

What did I do the rest of the day? I read local newspapers, trying to see what the LNA was saying about the upcoming re-enactment. It turned out they were saying a lot. There were full-color pictures of wagons and smiling guys with arm bands and lots of folks in period costumes. Then there were maps, and timetables—this thing was being professionally organized. They had their stops down to the minute so each small town along the route could experience a parade and local folks could make speeches. There were even pony rides and petting zoos for the kids. Foster’s money was going to create a rolling party.

But it would be more than that. August 1st was Sunday. They were going to use that. People would be off work so they could get big crowds the first day, but they would also bring in lots of preachers and launch this event with a huge church

service. Before the wagons even left Biloxi, they would prove that God was on their side, always had been, always would be. I had to be impressed. These were not stupid people. They planned carefully and used every edge they could get.

I decided I would leave tomorrow—Thursday—to get there early and see some of their preparations. If nothing else, this was going to be one heck of a show. That decided, I turned in early, not sure how much sleep I would be getting once I got to Biloxi.

Thursday morning I got two surprises as I checked out of the hotel. As soon as I told the desk clerk that I would be checking out, he summoned the hotel manager who informed me first that my suite was being direct-billed to the Ministry of Information in Green Bay, as per President Jolliet's orders, and second, that he recommended I keep the suite since all the rooms in Biloxi had been booked weeks ago and I would be unlikely to find any room closer than this one. I hadn't thought of that. Given all the publicity the event was getting, there would be a crowd, and Biloxi would be filled. I should have known that. I had already made my first mistake as an observer, and I hadn't even gotten to Biloxi yet. I thanked the manager for his advice, carried my bags back up to my suite, and drove to Biloxi with just my lap top computer and digital camera in a bag.

The drive took much longer than I had expected. Traffic was terrible. There were thousands headed to Biloxi. By the time I got to the outskirts of town, traffic slowed to a crawl, and I inched along, following signs to the parking areas that had been created for the event. It appeared every grassy field within ten miles of town had been converted to parking. I had visions of a heavy rain converting every field into a muddy mire with thousands of cars simply sinking out of sight, but so far the weather was hot and dry and I parked in a long row with thousands of others. There were lots of buses and we were gathered up quickly and carried to the event site. I don't usually use "French" and "efficiency" in the same sentence, but I was seeing it now.

Within minutes we were carried to the old harbor area of Biloxi along the Rue Dauphin and Joan of Arc Circle. I hadn't been into Biloxi before, so I don't know what this part of town normally looks like, but all the paint was so fresh and the streets so clean, I have to believe they had spent many weeks getting ready for this event. I have been to harbors before, and only the harbor at Disneyland looks anything like Biloxi harbor looked that morning.

The streets were crammed with people. No cars were allowed and families wandered from store to store to buy ice cream and souvenirs. I tried to get a picture of the scene, but I was bumped by so many people hurrying by, that I finally gave up. Instead, I pushed my way south to get to the actual harbor. Here, if anything, crowds were worse, as people crowded together to see the tall ship moored along the dock. It was a good looking boat, with tall masts, freshly painted sides and decks, and a Louisiana flag flying from the top of the third mast. Tours were available, and a long line had formed with people who wished to get on board. With temperatures in the nineties, the last thing I wanted was a two-hour wait in the sun, so I took a quick picture and started backing out through the crowd. But I hadn't taken five steps when my way was blocked by the huge frame of Tilden Foster.

“I heard you would be visiting us,” he exclaimed. “Welcome.” His voice practically thundered above the cacophony of noises around us. If people had turned to look at him before, they certainly all looked now as he suddenly seemed to swell large above the crowd. There might have been a thousand people on that dock, but only one was seen and heard by all. It was obvious I wasn’t going to be able to slip around him, so I stepped onto center stage and took my place in whatever scene he was in the midst of creating.

“It appears you have drawn quite a crowd. I am surprised to see so many people here before Sunday.” I shook his hand and tried to appear at ease, but in truth, I had no idea what to expect from the man.

“Oh, we have been very busy all week.” He gestured around, taking in the ship, the dock, the streets behind him, as if he was master of it all, and I suppose he was. “Folks here are excited about history. They are proud and respectful of those who came before.” That sounded like a line from a speech and I wondered if I had just heard the valediction address for Sunday—“proud and respectful” as the watchwords for the show. “But I understand you are taking some notes—for your students?” He uttered the last phrase like he didn’t believe a word of it and wanted me to know he didn’t believe it. “I should show you a bit of the place so you have a complete picture when you report back.” He grabbed my arm and plowed through the crowd toward the ship, assuming—correctly as it turned out—that the sea of people would part before him. Maybe people knew his role in the event, or maybe they just had the good sense to get out of the way of four hundred pounds moving fast, but a path cleared instantly all the way to the gangplank.

Minor officials who had been performing various duties on board, suddenly appeared at the rail and welcomed Foster aboard. Somehow they all reminded me of medieval supplicants, lined up outside the castle hoping for a boon from their liege lord. They were pretty eager to please. Foster said hello to each of them and introduced them to me, and then introduced me as “Professor Murphy from the National University in Green Bay.” That drew at least one confused stare from one of the men not sophisticated enough to hide his feelings, and was followed by more confusion when he added that I was a leading scholar on George Washington, a man unknown to any these people, and probably to any person currently in Biloxi. But they managed to stumble through a “welcome” or “Hello” while they waited for Foster to tell them what they were supposed to do with me.

“Professor Murphy is sending information back to his people in Green Bay. I wonder if we could show him around the ship and explain some of its history.” Foster’s comment made me sound so much like a spy, I just had to respond, whether he believed me or not.

“I will be teaching US history at the National University this fall, but since I know all the students up there will be interested in an event of this magnitude, I thought I would create a web log so they could see some pictures and get a first-hand account.” I paused there so they could internalize my interpretation of my presence, and then I started asking questions about the ship—size, age, previous uses… One of the men appeared to come with the ship, and he took the lead in answering questions and guiding me through various cabins and holds. What did I learn? For starters that Foster couldn’t fit through any door, so he had to stay on deck, and second, the farther we got from Foster the more amenable the main

guide became and the less friendly the other henchmen became. Gradually they excused themselves and went back up on deck leaving me with the captain. As for the ship itself, I learned it was a replica of a British man of war from the 1800s that had fought in the Caribbean during the endless British/French sea campaigns, and had been sitting in a dockside museum in Trinidad when the call went out for something somewhat similar to the ships used in the early 1700s. Captain Lockett was head of the Trinidad museum, spoke pretty good French, was happy to see his boat under sail, and excited that it was getting far more visitors than it ever had sitting dockside in Port-of-Spain. We stopped in one of the cabins that was used as an office, and he pulled out a detailed brochure in English that gave the boat's dimensions, fighting history, and visiting hours back home.

At this point Foster must have slapped one of his boys alongside the head, because suddenly a well-scrubbed PR type came flying down one of the ladders to seek us out and change the conversation from Trinidad to the terrors and privations of the early Louisiana settlers. Monsieur Poincaire now took over the tour and walked me through the lower deck where he was careful to show me how they had rebuilt the bunks and hammocks used by the settlers, and how carefully they had researched the number of settlers who would have been aboard each ship, replicating the crowding and the sanitary privations that would have been endured for months at sea. He talked about one voyage that had taken eighteen weeks and endured not one, but three hurricanes, describing events and people as if he had been along on the voyage. Obviously Foster had found his varsity PR person, and I was now in professional hands. I took lots of pictures, copied down names, and took notes, and enjoyed the irony of the dramatic retelling of French privations while on board a British man of war.

Eventually we came topside again, and Poincaire led me back to the captain's cabin where he told me Foster was waiting for me. I liked the cabin—it extended across the stern of the ship and had a beautiful row of windows and elegant wooden paneling—but I admit to being a bit nervous about what Foster would say to me now that we were alone. And alone we were, since he immediately suggested Poincaire guide some other dignitaries about the ship. Foster and I sat on opposite sides of a huge wooden desk that looked like it had been brought in recently. Some effort had been made to find wood similar in color and grain to the paneling of the cabin, but the style was at least a century out of sync with the rest of the room. I didn't know whether to applaud the effort, or observe the obvious—you can't go back in time, no matter how seriously you try.

"I hope you enjoyed your tour. So far this week we have had over eight thousand people come on board."

"It is a beautiful ship. Were you the one who tracked it down and brought it up here?"

"Our foundation employs several staff historians. They did some checking. There is a somewhat better replica in a museum in Lehavre, but there was some concern about how seaworthy it was. This ship was far closer, and while somewhat larger than the original ships were, it handles crowds better, and it still gives people the flavor of what the sea voyage was like."

“That seems like a very reasonable compromise.” We were both being so polite, I think we could have made a training tape for high school kids—“proper business etiquette.” I wondered how much longer it would last.

“There is a small envelope on the desk in front of you.” Foster motioned to a white envelope placed squarely in front of my seat. “It has a letter of introduction from me asking all site managers to give you full access and cooperation, and it has an invitation to a banquet we will be having on board Saturday evening. There is also the address of a tailor in New Orleans who can help you with a period costume. We are all dressing as we would have in 1720.”

“That is very kind of you.”

“I ask only two things in return.” He paused and waited for me to nod my assent. “First, I hope you will be fair in what you report back to your ‘students.’ Whatever you think of re-enactments in general, this re-enactment is being attempted to recognize an important historical period that has long been neglected. Those old Huguenots are worthy of our respect. Second, I want you to tell me what Washington did wrong.”

“Washington?” The change of topics was so dramatic it took me a second to register what he was asking. What in the world did Washington have to do with Huguenots and sailing ships? But I decided to answer. As far as I was concerned, I had known Washington’s weakness for years. “Washington was too slow. The only skirmish he ever won was his first in 1754. The minute he got his men over the mountains, he found out where a group of French troops were hidden, and he immediately attacked. That volley started the Seven Years War, but it was a success. In every battle after that he tried to maneuver large numbers of troops and he just took too long. He never won again.”

“You just summed up your dissertation.” Foster replied. He was wearing a very irritating smile and leaning back in his chair as if he had just won a victory over me. “You were right then, and you are right now. When you have some time, you ought to give some thought to what your dissertation means.” He actually winked at me (a pretty gruesome expression on the face of a four hundred pound man), and struggled to his feet. Our interview was over. He came around the huge desk and actually put his arm around my shoulder as he led me to the door.

“And let me give you some career advice. Teaching hung-over eighteen year olds gets tedious very quickly. But you will be an American teaching American history to hung-over Frenchies. There is no need for you to put yourself through that. There are far more productive things for good historians to do.”

“Thank you for your concern.” I twisted out from under his arm, shook his hand, and left the cabin. The sun was blinding, the heat was unbearable, but I immediately felt more comfortable. Was it the man’s size, or his constant hints at plots that made it so hard to be around him? In either case, I dodged a group of tourists that was boarding the ship in a long line, and got back to shore. I felt better the more distance I put between myself and Foster.

Next stop? I looked around for places to stand to get pictures of the crowd. There was a gradual rise away from the docks, and so I walked uphill back to Joan of Arc Circle and found first a park bench, and then a rock wall to stand on and take pictures. It really was an interesting sight – the mass of people, the old buildings around the harbor, the ship, and then the blue water of the harbor

extending out into the Gulf. I stood and looked, and took pictures until the heat finally overwhelmed me and I headed away from the harbor, looking for any place cool.

The streets were crowded with tourists, and every store I poked my head into was packed with folks doing the same as me—looking for a cool place and a cool drink. I walked for blocks before the crowd began to thin just a bit. Along the way I was stopped three times by people asking me to take their picture. Two asked in French, but one couple asked in English and was surprised when I responded in English. They got me wondering how much of the crowd was not only from out of town but out of the country. But mostly I focused on finding some place cool.

Eventually I found myself back where the busses were lined up. Should I get on and leave the area? At least that would get me back to my air conditioned car. But I wasn't quite ready to give up yet. I spotted a young woman standing under a sign that said *Information*, and I headed in her direction. Then, just as I was about to ask her for help finding a restaurant, a strange thought crossed my mind.

"There was a large cathedral being built here in Biloxi. Do you happen to know where that was?"

"Why yes." She was young, and pretty, and so happy to help, my whole mood instantly changed. "You can see the site from here." She pointed up the hill towards a bare area amongst some trees. "It is just to the left of those trees. But I have to tell you there isn't much left to see." And she seemed genuinely troubled by that fact. I thanked her and started toward the site. It looked to me as if it was a mile or so away, all up hill and all unshaded from a very hot sun, but I decided that is where I wanted to go.

Half an hour later I was hotter than I ever remember being. But I made it up the last block to the site of the cathedral. I could see right away that they had intended to do the same thing here as they had in Green Bay – put the parking lots slightly lower than the church so people had to walk up to the cathedral. They must have expected large crowds, because the parking lots were massive. They had already been blacktopped and even had yellow lines drawn to mark proper parking spaces. Everything was ready for a church that now wasn't there.

I stopped in the first parking lot to catch my breath and look around. It was instantly obvious to me why the church had chosen this spot. The hill the church was on was not particularly high, but it gave an unobstructed view of the harbor, and for that matter, the entire city of Biloxi. I could see small sail boats out on the gulf, and the large sailing ship at the dock. Most of Biloxi had grown up west of this point—towards New Orleans—but this was still a great location.

It also turned out to be busy. I had assumed I would be alone amongst the wreckage, but I had only been standing there a minute or two when two cars went by me in the parking lot, and then a third followed. Suddenly I heard voices and noticed there were people walking around the ruins. I followed some stairs up to what was meant to be the main doors to the cathedral and discovered there were dozens of people on the site.

Maybe some description here would help. The cathedral had been built of white limestone. When it had been blown apart, the exterior walls had been blown out, onto the surrounding lawns, and the interior pillars and roof had collapsed down onto the stone floor. Everything was covered with white dust from the broken

limestone, and wherever people walked, a small white dust cloud was kicked up. But people were able to walk around most of the cathedral. Two front-end loaders, still parked inside the cathedral, had obviously moved much of the debris into piles, and the central part of the floor was now open. Dozens of people were walking up the central nave through the cleared area. Some were just looking around, but others were walking as if they were praying, their heads bowed, their walk slow, their destination a stone cross that had been set at an angle near where the altar would have been. Forty or fifty plastic chairs had been arranged in several rows near the altar, and many were occupied. This ruin was actually serving as a cathedral!

I walked up the central aisle as well, pausing to look at the broken remains of limestone pillars and to look at pieces of carved arch lying among the debris on either side. It would have been a huge cathedral, every bit as large as the National Cathedral. I didn't count my paces, but it had to be over four hundred feet from one end to the other. Below me, the stone floor was still solid, to each side piles of rubble climbed ten to fifteen feet high. I sat in one of the plastic chairs, white with dust, and imagined how the place might have felt when completed.

I was about ready to get up again and continue my explorations when two priests came in carrying a cardboard box. They put it on a large stone block near where the altar would have been, and began setting various communion pieces out. They had all the appearance of two men about to begin a mass, but that wasn't possible, was it? It was about two o'clock on a Thursday afternoon, certainly the wrong time for a mass, but as people took their seats around me, it became apparent that a mass was exactly what everyone was expecting.

I think I sat there more in disbelief, than any religious inclination (I am sorry to say), but sit there I did, and watched a full mass materialize in the rubble. We sat there in the midst of the afternoon sun, and with the sun also reflecting off the white stones I felt like I was being baked alive and blinded. But the two priests, both young men, went though every step of the mass as if it was perfectly normal to do so. They served communion as usual, with all of us walking up for the wafer and for very hot wine, presented a short homily about the family of Christ, and made every other motion and blessing that you would expect in a mass. The fact that we were sitting in the midst of rubble on a Thursday afternoon seemed of no consequence to them at all.

When the mass was over, I waited while several others spoke with the priests, and then I proceeded to the "altar" to ask about the mass.

"Father," I asked the younger of the two priests. He was wearing black vestments with a short sleeved white shirt and a navy blue baseball cap with a cross on the front. He was sweating as much as I was, but seemed at peace and happy to talk with any of us. "May I ask about the mass?"

"Of course." He put down the Bible he was putting into the cardboard box and gave me his full attention. He looked me full in the face, his dark eyes wide. It seemed the standard posture he assumed, ready to hear anything and everything from his "flock."

"I have never been to mass on a Thursday afternoon before, and I was also surprised to see a service conducted here in, well, the rubble of a church."

“But it is a beautiful space, would you not agree? And people have come for a mass, so we gave a mass. Later this afternoon we will give another. Every afternoon and evening when we come here, there are people waiting for a mass.”

“Have you been doing this ever since the bombing?”

“No, like everyone we mourned the loss of the cathedral for more than a week. And then when the big equipment arrived and started moving the broken stones around it started feeling more like a construction site than a church. But one evening, after the workmen had gone home, we came and saw people here. Someone had pulled that cross upright, and people were standing in front of it praying. So we joined them. We did that for days until someone started bringing these chairs, and then one Sunday morning we decided to do a mass. We have been doing them ever since.”

“Will you keep at this until the church is rebuilt?”

“We don’t know if the church will be rebuilt. That decision is months or maybe even years away. In the meantime, there are people, and we are priests, so…”

I asked his permission to take his picture, and then I took more of the church and of some of the people in attendance. Gradually I backed away from the altar and took wider angle shots, both interior and exterior. Then, as hot as I was, I decided to try for a wide-angle shot of the church. There was little that was higher than the church, but there was a tree, and yes, believe it or not, I actually climbed a tree some distance from the cathedral to get a picture.

Once I was up in the tree I moved from branch to branch to get the right angle. It was not easy, and I have to admit I felt pretty stupid up in a tree like a kid. But I finally found an angle I liked. It showed the two priests still standing near the front of the church, the plastic chairs covered with dust, the rubble on all sides, and off in the distance, Biloxi Harbor. I took three quick pictures before I could fall, and then slowly climbed down, hoping nobody had seen me being so childish.

That was enough for me. I plodded back down the hill to a waiting bus, collapsed into a seat while the air conditioning revived me, and rode the bus back to my car. Two hours later I was back at my hotel and in the shower. I had survived my first day in Biloxi.

Later, after dinner and two or three pitchers of water, I tried to determine what I might say about the day on my web log. In the end, I decided I would say very little, but would let my pictures explain the day. I transferred the digital pictures to the lap top, picked out seven that showed the crowd, the ship, the harbor, Foster, the cathedral, the priests, and the wide view of the cathedral ruins with the harbor below. I wrote about two hundred words describing each one, and then FTP’d the entire file up to the web log URL. By that time it was nearly midnight. I drank two more glasses of water and fell into bed.

Chapter 16

I Meet Some Grumpy Old Veterans.

The phone started ringing at six. Fortunately, the first call was Elise.

“I had no idea you were such a good photographer.” I puzzled over that comment for a few seconds—I am not a morning person—and then understood.

“So you have been to the web site? Which picture did you like best?”

“I have the web site up in front of me now, and I like all of them, but the picture that caught my attention was the one in *Le Monde Nouveau*. It shows the ruins of the cathedral in the foreground and the harbor in the background.”

“Why would that picture be in the Green Bay newspaper? I just posted it to the university web site.”

“It appears they took much of what you had on the web site, and gave you a byline. You are ‘American professor studies Louisiana historical re-enactment.’ They have three of your pictures, the other two are much smaller, and they have about one third of your web comments. They mention that you will be filing further reports from New Orleans.”

“That’s theft! I never gave them permission. I was just posting materials for my students and others at the university. They can’t do this.”

“I don’t know what the legalities are, but Shawn, please don’t be too upset. You are doing exactly what Uncle Claude hoped you would do. You are providing balanced information about this event, and since you are an American, people trust what you say. And what you said is beautiful, Shawn. It should be shared with more than students. Your descriptions of the families in the harbor, the priests in the bombed-out church, even the funny story about the ship being British. It was all too good to leave on a web site.” What could I say to that? I have my pride too. I began to wonder where I could get a copy of the paper.

“But it still doesn’t seem right that they printed it without telling me.” I guess that was my final complaint.

“If you hang up the phone, Uncle Claude would like to speak with you. I think he will explain the situation. And Shawn, I love you.” Then all I heard was a dial tone. I hung up my phone, only to have it ring the instant the earpiece hit the cradle.

“Good morning Shawn.” It was President Jolliet.

“Good morning Mr. President.”

“Shawn, as you can probably imagine, I asked Elise to call you first this morning. When you have done something really good, the best praise comes from the ones you love, and it should be the first praise. Now I want to add my praise, but I also want to extend an apology and an explanation.”

“Yes, sir.” What else could I say? I was still trying to understand what was happening.

“First, the praise. That picture you took of the cathedral with the harbor in the background is the best picture I have ever seen. It captures the priests, and the sailing ship, and the people in the cathedral and in the harbor. It is amazing. I have no idea how you did it.”

“I climbed a tree.”

“You what?”

“The only way I could get everything in frame was to get higher than the cathedral, so I climbed a tree.”

“Ha. Now I have a story to tell around the office. People will love it.”

“Thank you.”

“But your words are great too. You show respect. We need that. The Huguenots did suffer when they arrived, and they deserve great credit for what they accomplished in that first century. It is too easy for our current political arguments to lose sight of that, and you don’t. Now for the apology and explanation. By our laws, anything posted on the university web site is public domain, and can be used without permission. They need to give you credit, and they need to pay you, but they can take what they want. I should have explained that to you. I am sorry I did not. But there is more. I told several editors to watch that web site and encouraged them to use what they found valuable. I did that for two reasons. First, I knew you would be good, and second, I wanted to help protect you. I know you feel safe there, even though you have had several fights. My hope is that with your name now known across the country, people who might wish to harm you will be more cautious.”

“Thank you Mr. President.” Actually I had stopped listening after he mentioned the word “pay.” I wondered what my photos might be worth. Was I now a rich man? That would be nice. Jolliet and I exchanged pleasantries for a few more minutes, and then he hung up. I was about to call Elise back and talk to her some more, but again, the instant my phone hit the cradle it began ringing. This time it was David Starr.

“You really are a professor, aren’t you?” The statement made no sense to me so I ignored it.

“Good morning, David. I assume you are talking about *Le Monde Nouveau*.”

“No, I hate that piece of crap. I just read it to get the Green Bay party line. The paper I read and normally enjoy is the *Philadelphia Enquirer*. There you are on page five with some sob story about priests serving mass in the rubble of a church. There won’t be a dry Catholic eye in the U.S., and for all I know half the Presbyterians are bawling in their oat meal too. “

“That was fast.” I guess I was less concerned about the story than about how it could have made the U.S. papers so fast.

“It’s the digital age, sweetheart. Bull shit moves at the speed of light.”

“I was describing what I saw yesterday. And it’s not bull shit.” If I hadn’t been fully awake before, I was now, and I didn’t like what I was hearing.

“I just hope you eventually get around to noticing that there are Huguenots in Biloxi too. They have a story to tell, and some people find it compelling.”

“David, I am going to give you a web address, and after you have read what I wrote, not what was excerpted, I want you to call back and apologize.” I gave him the URL and hung up. Once again my phone appeared to be magic. I just touched the hook switch and the phone started ringing. It was my brother Seamus.

“Shawn, you are famous.” Somehow he didn’t sound all that pleased. “The whole family is talking about it. Everyone is trying to call you. Did the others get through?”

“No. I hear there was something of mine in the *Enquirer*.”

“Yes, and the *Times* too. We have been running around the various newsstands looking for you in papers. So far we have found you in about half. Half the major papers in the U.S. Pretty good, little bro.”

“Thanks.”

“Well, I just wanted to let you know.” And he hung up. This time I got smart. Before I hung up the phone, I disconnected it. I would find another line somewhere and call my folks and Elise. In the meantime, I needed some peace and quiet. I lay back in bed and tried to think through what had just happened. My weblog had been printed, at least in part, all across the continent. That didn’t happen by accident. Jolliet had been involved. Had he pushed it to the U.S. papers as well, or did he have friends there to help? One thing was certain—I was being used. I didn’t like that, and I didn’t like the idea that whatever I wrote might be broadcast. I would have to be very careful with tonight’s log.

I called room service for breakfast and then took a shower. It was in the shower that a totally new thought struck me. Foster had been giving me a message, and I had ignored it while I played amateur reporter. Washington had been slow. It was not a brilliant insight on my part—it was largely accepted as gospel. He had been slow on his own, and dreadfully slow in his second attack under the command of General Braddock who was determined to build roads and create supply bases all the way over the mountains. The result was that the French knew Braddock and Washington were coming and had months to gather forces from all over Canada.

What had Foster said? I was to learn the lesson of Washington? Was he telling me he was going to strike quickly? Was that even possible? The elections would be held September 2. Even assuming the LNA gained a majority in the local legislature it would take months for them to meet and pass a bill of secession. They would probably not want to go out alone, so they would try to get Texas and maybe Colorado to go with them. That would take more time. It didn’t seem possible for war to start before this winter. Assuming Foster wanted to use the war to make a land grab in Ohio, that would probably have to wait until spring. Wouldn’t it? Was he lying to me? Taunting me?

There was one other possibility. In December 1753, Washington has ridden over to Fort Duquesne on his own. He had a few Indians for guides and half a dozen assistants, (a man of his stature didn’t do his own cooking), but he was not at the head of a military command. For that reason the French allowed him into the fort, spoke with him, and allowed him to leave. The following spring Washington used what he had learned from his personal reconnaissance, and attacked in force. What if he had attacked in December? War had not been declared, and the fort had not been reinforced.

What did that mean two hundred and fifty years later? What was Foster cooking up? Was this all a magician’s trick? He got the whole world looking at New Orleans, while the real action was in Ohio? How could he do that?

I dressed quickly and headed for my laptop and its connection to the internet. I saw room service had put my breakfast on the table next to the computer. They had also brought up half a dozen newspapers, all turned to my article. Elise was right about that picture of the cathedral, it did look pretty good in color. I pushed the papers out of the way, grabbed some toast, and dialed up my internet account. The hotel connections were pretty fast and so it only took me minutes to find the web site I wanted—the Plymouth Foundation. What new projects were they funding? Were they planning a “re-enactment” in Duquesne that might be more enactment than anyone was expecting?

I searched the site, going back to where prior funding announcements had been made, but suddenly that section of the web site was absent. Instead of a list of funded projects, there now was a simple announcement—"*call 906-334-2455 for information about recently funded proposals*." I wondered what they would tell me if I called. Probably very little. So why the change? I had mentioned the site at breakfast with Senator Dodson. Was there a connection? Maybe him, maybe one of his assistants? I didn't like where that train of reasoning led.

I tried a different approach. I checked the Chamber of Commerce site for Duquesne. Was anything on the calendar that could be connected to Foster? Maybe. The last weekend in September had a re-enactment scheduled for some of the sites where Washington and Braddock had fought Jolliet. Based on the billing the Chamber was giving it, there appeared to be many people involved, enough to fill lots of hotel rooms. Hotel information was provided, restaurants were listed, and maps were available with a schedule of events.

Was there Foster money behind this? I checked for information about the group organizing the event, and for a list of major sponsors. Lots of groups and corporations were involved in the event, but I could find no reference to Foster or the Plymouth Foundation. Did that mean he was not involved, or that he was getting better at hiding his tracks? I had no idea. I just had my suspicions and Foster's taunt.

In the meantime, not only was Foster and the LNA drawing attention to Biloxi and New Orleans, but now I was too. If this was magic act, I was the silly assistant holding Foster's cape and helping direct the audience to look everywhere but at the hand that held the gold coin. Suddenly I had no appetite.

There was another problem that pushed me back in my chair. Which side was I on? Control of Duquesne gave control of the Ohio Valley and millions of acres of prime farmland. For an overcrowded country like the U.S., the Ohio would provide land for millions. They would swarm over the mountains, multitudes building new homes and new towns in the sparsely populated valley. Wouldn't that be good? Sure, in the abstract. Half a million French leave their estates and vineyards to be replaced by millions of hard working Americans. Except both countries had nuclear weapons. Both had huge armies. Jolliet would no more walk away from Ohio than we would walk away from Pennsylvania.

But if I tried to stop Foster, was I working against my own country? I was not a traitor. Was Foster's foreign policy also my government's foreign policy? There was only one way to find out. I printed out several of the pages from the Duquesne Chamber site and headed for the American consulate.

A different guard was on duty when I entered the consulate, but I also recognized him from the fight in the restaurant, and I took time to thank him as well. He also seemed to think it had all been good clean fun. I asked to see David Starr, but it turned out he was away. I said I would wait, and another guard walked me to a small room right near the entrance. I was told not to leave the room for any reason until I was escorted out. That guard was barely out of the room when my cell phone rang. It was Starr.

"I'm pretty busy this morning, Shawn. Can this wait?" He asked.

"I'm pretty busy too, and no. I need to talk to you."

"I'll see what I can do." Fifteen minutes later he had come back from wherever he had been, and he walked me back to his office. "You know I really wanted to speak with you some weeks ago, but you were not interested. Now I get two visits from you in three days. Is it my new after shave?"

I followed him into his office, shut the door, and put the web pages on his desk. "I have a theory that war between the U.S. and Canada will begin September 24th in Duquesne. If my theory is wrong, that is great news. If the theory is right, I just need to know whether this is official government policy, or if your friend Tilden Foster is acting on his own."

"I don't understand what you are showing me." He looked down at the Chamber materials and looked genuinely confused.

"Foster supports military re-enactments. A very large one is scheduled for Duquesne on the weekend of September 24th. It would be a great way to bring lots of guns and lots of soldiers into Canada. Done right, it could completely surprise the French and give you Duquesne before war was even declared. If that is your plan, I have to tell you I don't like it, but I will keep my mouth shut. If it isn't your plan, you have lots of work to do and less than two months to do it."

"Sit down a minute." Starr picked up the web pages and read them carefully. "Shawn, I don't know anything about this. But I respect your concern and appreciate your trust in me. I will do some checking."

"And then?"

"Shawn there are things going on in the world that neither of us will ever understand. Maybe your grandson will be the historian that explains these days to his generation. You and I can only do our bit. In the meantime, I thank you for this—and—for your continued discretion."

That was a pretty clever observation for a Penn grad. I had nothing more to say in response, so we shook hands and he escorted me back to the entrance. He was right. There was much going on that I did not understand.

I stepped out the door and caught a cab. It was already late morning and I needed to get to the tailor Foster had picked. It was a silly waste of my time to go chasing after some silly suit, but it also felt good to do something simple—something I understood. I could buy a suit without getting into too much trouble. As it turned out, the shop was so close the cabby was annoyed that I had bothered him for such a small fare, and I was annoyed that I hadn't had some quiet time to reflect on my discussion with Starr.

The tailor made me more annoyed. He had done lots of costumes in the last few weeks, I was coming in at the last minute, and he was tired of the whole thing. I showed him the invitation to the dinner, and he just nodded.

"Count or marquis?"

"What?"

"Do you want to go as a count or as a marquis?"

"This is a Huguenot dinner."

Of course, sir." He now was staring at me like I was mentally challenged. "Do you wish to attend the dinner as a Huguenot count or as a Huguenot marquis." He enunciated each word as if I might be too slow to grasp his question.

"Most Huguenots were merchants. There was some nobility, but the vast majority came from the middle class." His expression became even more derisive. I

had just gone from being mentally feeble to being a pedant. He didn't have time for either.

"I have to have lots of costumes done by tomorrow, I have almost no time, please, just tell me what you want to wear."

"Give me what a merchant would wear."

"I have a plain dark wool suit that would probably pass, but I have to warn you it will be unbearably hot and probably itch like hell." I hesitated, and he started tapping his foot. He had no time for this. I balanced wearing a really uncomfortable suit against dressing up like a peacock. I would go with the wool. He took my measurements faster than anyone in France has ever moved before, dragged out the dreariest brown wool suit I have ever seen, and was all over me making chalk alteration marks the instant I had the coat on my shoulders.

"I will find a muslin shirt and black tie to match and the entire ensemble will be ready for you to pick up tomorrow before noon. Please be here before noon." With that, he practically ripped the coat off my back, waited impatiently while I stepped out of the pants, and then walked into one of the back rooms. I was done. He might think he was a Louisianan, but he sure seemed French to me. Maybe I had just discovered one more unifying principle for the country—rude shop clerks.

What was I to do with the rest of the day? I didn't want to face the crowds in Biloxi again, but I felt I should learn something more about the event. It occurred to me I might backtrack the trail a bit and see how the wagons were coming along. With luck, I could spend most of the day in my air conditioned car. As I walked back to my hotel and my car, I dug through my pockets for a map. Finding the trail would be easy, I saw. Even after all these centuries, much of the land between Biloxi and New Orleans was swamp. There was a major highway between the two now, and a smaller road. Since the smaller road went right through the heart of several villages, that would be the road they would use. I got in my car and headed east.

The first town I got to, Fountainbleu, was so close to New Orleans, it was really just a suburb, and had the feel of sprawl you get around large French cities. Most of the houses looked like they had been built in the last twenty years. I doubted much would be made of the town. It reminded all of us that history keeps moving along, and the new overwhelms the old. I didn't think this was a message that Foster and Soisson wanted to broadcast. But the town didn't understand how unphotogenic it was. The people had hung large banners from store fronts, and Louisiana flags hung from all the poles. They were ready to welcome a wagon train that would probably hurry down Main Street.

Picayune had more promise. The western end of town had been subdivided into five acre "horse-estates" all available for "leisure country living" according to the developer's billboard, but Main Street had been preserved in a form resembling what would have been there a century or so earlier. Only the old town had never seen this much paint or as many flags. I pulled the car over and tried to see where the parade route might go. There was a small square on Main Street, actually "Market Street", and a reviewing stand had been set up. So this is where one of the stops would be, complete with speeches and pictures with the buildings as a fitting backdrop. I looked around for workmen adding finishing touches, but it was clear this town had been prepared for weeks. Foster's work?

Gulfport was the next town in line. Almost to Biloxi, it would be the first stop on the trail. If the train moved on schedule, it would leave Biloxi about noon and cover the fourteen miles to Gulfport in about six hours, arriving here for a parade and speeches, dinner, a barn dance, and an encampment. This would be an important stop as they tried to work the bugs out of their re-enactment. Despite the heat I decided to park the car and look around.

I wasn't alone. Small groups of men with blue armbands were scurrying around town on various tasks. I saw one group putting up signs directing the wagons to a large park where they would camp, other signs pointed to the town hall where the "barn dance" would be held, etc. They were very busy and moved very fast despite the heat.

Sitting in the shade were groups of older folks. Were they waiting to the parade on Sunday, or was this where they always sat in the afternoon? It turns out they were curious about me too. The minute I got within hailing distance, one of them shouted, "Where's your arm band?"

"I don't have one." I walked over to their porch. There were four men sitting in wooden chairs, all of them in their eighties at least. The one who had hailed me sat waving a hat in front of his chin. From the sweat on his face, it didn't seem to be doing much good.

"Aren't you one of the historicals?" There was a word I hadn't heard before.

"No, I am a professor from Green Bay. I just happened to be down here this summer and thought I might get some pictures to show my students."

"Green Bay?" One of the others asked. "So maybe you know what this is." He made a motion in the air with one scrawny pale finger. He had to do it twice before I caught on that he was drawing a fish in the air.

"Sir," I leaned on the porch railing, and tried not to smile. "If that was a fish, it is an old Christian symbol used to during the days of persecution so that Christians could tell if they were talking to a fellow Christian or to a pagan who might want to turn them over to the Romans. Are you trying to send me a secret message?"

"Damn right. I want to know if you are Catholic, or if you want to chase us out of town too."

"Yes, I am Catholic. But remember that Huguenots are Christian too, so the fish is also their symbol."

"You're a professor, alright," the man with the hat replied. "Ask a simple question and get an hour's lecture in return. But at least you are a Catholic professor. I assume you will prove it." He stared at me with the most intensity his old face could muster. I had so much trouble not laughing. But I controlled myself and unbuttoned the top two buttons of my shirt so he could see my crucifix.

"Hell, anyone can wear a cross around his neck," one of the other men said. This started an argument between the four of them about whether it was legal to wear a crucifix if you weren't Catholic, and whether that would get you arrested, or sent to Hell. It looked like the argument could go on for some time, so finally I interrupted.

"Can I assume you gentlemen are Catholic?" I asked.

"You can assume any damn thing you want, young man, but we're not telling." Actually his terms were a bit less polite than my quote, but you get the idea.

"Yes, we are telling," hat-man interjected. "He should know not all the Catholics were run out of town this spring. We're all veterans. Half the retirees in town are veterans come down to get out of the cold. So don't you worry. If any of the historicals give you trouble because you are Catholic, you just come to us. We'll take care of them." Having promised me protection seemed to break some barrier, and suddenly all four of them wanted to explain where I should go and where I should avoid, and which areas of town had men like themselves who would protect me. From their description of it, there appeared to be hundreds of men like themselves all over town.

"So what do you men think of the wagon train that will be coming through here on Sunday?" I asked. Wrong question. It was immediately apparent that they had been debating the train for weeks, and my question opened a flood of comments, few of which seemed logically connected. One man immediately explained that he was a mule expert and knew they couldn't force mules to pull that much in August. Another described some other mule train he had used in the army, and how it was much harder than this would be, while hat-man mused about how many women might be on the train. In short, they had nothing to say about the politics of the event, and everything to say about women, mules, and their own expertise. I listened and nodded and paid attention for the first two minutes, and then nodded for another ten while I planned an exit strategy. I finally decided the best thing I could do was back off to take their picture, and then just keep backing away. These were nice men, but they were going to talk some poor soul to death, and I wanted to be sure it wasn't me. So I backed off, took a couple pictures, and waved as I headed down the street. The last words I heard were, "Button your shirt." Actually not a bad idea, and I obeyed.

I spent another hour or so walking around town and getting pictures of the town square and the preparations there, and then the small town park where a huge row of portable toilets had been set up with other washing facilities. I debated taking a picture and then realized that most people had seen portable toilets before. They didn't need my weblog to learn about them.

I was so busy debating what to photograph, that I almost missed a man bring a wagon into the park. I wasn't expecting to see wagons, so I wasn't prepared at all, and ended up taking a really odd shot of two mules pulling the wagon past a row of toilets. I knew I wasn't going to get any awards for that shot, so I actually ran across the park in all that heat to get a shot from a different angle. I wish I could say the later shots were better, but they all looked pretty odd—one wagon, one driver, an empty park. Finally I gave up taking odd photos and went over to talk with the man.

This was not a pleasant conversation. Either he had been drinking, or he wished he had been drinking. The one certainty was that he didn't wish to be in a wagon in August trying to get mules to pull him around town. Now he was looking for water for the mules and not finding it, and instead of finding help he was being asked dumb questions by a college professor. I persisted for a few more minutes, and learned that his was a replacement wagon, here to be a spare in case anything happened on Sunday, which meant he had to spend two days with mules, not his first choice for companionship. I told him I would help look for water, but what I really did was head back to my car. It was too hot, it was getting too late in the

day, and I still had no idea what, if anything, I would post to my web log. I assumed once I got back into my air conditioned car I would have all kinds of brilliant ideas, but in truth it had been a strange day filled with all kinds of odd encounters, none of which seemed likely to be instructive to my students back in Green Bay.

Sitting in my room in New Orleans, glass of wine in my hand, I decided that a couple hundred words about preparations for the re-enactment would be plenty, accompanied by a few pictures of mules and portable toilets. It didn't make for a dramatic narrative, but it met my requirements for the day. I had everything uploaded to my web site by the third glass of wine, and went to bed happy.

Chapter 17

The Boat Ride from Hell.

I had no idea how bad that Saturday would turn out to be, but I did know it was Saturday, so I slept in. Elise finally called me around nine. It sounded like she had been sleeping in too. She said she had a good laugh about the "historicals" when she saw that in the paper, but mostly we talked about us. Now that the re-enactment was finally starting, it would only be about two more weeks before the thing dragged to its conclusion and I would be able to come home. The way she talked about my return to Green Bay, I wished I could get on a plane that instant.

Eventually I got out of bed, had a late breakfast in the empty hotel dining room, and then got over to the tailor shop for my costume. He had it all tied up in a neat package, warned me once more time how hot the wool would be, and asked me to get it back first thing Monday morning. Even taking my money seemed to be an annoyance to this guy. Here was a man in a desperate need of a vacation. Being French, he no doubt took six weeks a year, and being French, it was not nearly enough.

I was in no hurry to get to Biloxi—dinner on the boat did not begin until eight—but I really had nothing else to do, so I drove the wagon route one more time, had a light lunch in Gulf Port, and despite how much I dawdled, I still pulled into the massive parking lots outside Biloxi around three. I left the costume in the car and went wandering around the crowd. If anything, there were more people than ever wandering around town. I could just imagine what the place would look like tomorrow when the show really began.

I had no particular destination for my wanderings, other than finding smatterings of shade, but I knew I didn't want to get near the boat and the main players in this show—I would get enough of them this evening. So eventually, I started looking for mules. I figured if the wagon train was going to pull out tomorrow, the mules and wagons must be somewhere in the vicinity already. If nothing else, it gave some purpose to my steps.

I got some help from a woman at an information booth, and other help from people I met on the street, but eventually I got the most help from my nose. Forty mules corralled in one location are no flower garden. These were being kept in a

warehouse several blocks from the dock. Huge fans were blowing air through the warehouse, which is to say, huge fans were blowing an incredible smell down the street. Everyone else who ventured down that particular street suddenly found good reason to hurry despite the heat, while I decided I had a professional responsibility to inspect the mules. What can I say? I was pretty bored.

What did I learn about mules? I learned Louisiana has more mules than it has qualified mule drivers. They had a wagon on one end of the warehouse, and about fifty men were struggling to hitch up a team. Each of the men had his own opinions on the best way to put on the harness, none of the mules was in any mood to go wherever they were wanted, and the whole process was being accomplished with typical French efficiency, which is to say, at their current rate they might have that one wagon connected in time for the Christmas parade. I took a few pictures, talked to a few men, and basically enjoyed the show, if not the smell.

The other smell I thought I detected was fear. I had come to believe that this whole wagon train effort had been completely choreographed and organized to perfection. From the sound of panic I heard in a few men's shouts, and the increasing volume of profanity, it occurred to me that these men knew they were just hours away from a national television appearance, and they were not at all ready. Somehow they had to get the mules harnessed and the drivers trained by ten a.m. They were down to their last seventeen or eighteen hours, and the clock was moving fast. Hadn't this been organized months earlier, I asked? No, was the short answer. Some so and so who was supposed to get the mules and the drivers had taken forever to get it all organized, only to have several of the drivers not show up. Meanwhile, the wagons were newly built to be particularly photogenic and the rigging wasn't right for the harness, and so on. My French cursing vocabulary was expanded considerably by this conversation, as was my awareness of just how precarious tomorrow's event might be.

Eventually, the smells overcame my professorial curiosity and I left, the wagon just as unrigged as it was when I arrived. I spend the next hours taking crowd shots, hunting for cold drinks, and claiming any shady spot I could find. Time passed. Finally the sun hit the horizon and I went back to my car to emerge as Shawn Murphy—Huguenot merchant. The suit was heavy to begin with, and immediately began to absorb buckets of my sweat, adding somewhere in the vicinity of a pound an hour to its weight. The only saving grace was a wind that picked up as the sun set.

I was thinking the evening's dinner better be special to be worth all my discomfort, but of course I had no idea how "special" the whole night would be. Instead, I innocently returned to the dock area, passed through crowds of staring tourists, and waited in a short line at the gang plank to be checked off a list and checked for weapons. Everyone else in line was in silks and wigs, marquis Huguenots to the last. The women, all marquises, wore long silk gowns, mostly in white—after all, this was a political event, but a few were daring enough to wear pale colors. So not every woman on board looked like an aging bride. All women, however, looked terribly hot under layers of silk. At least I wasn't the only one on deck who was suffering.

It's hard to count all the mistakes that were made that night, but they started early, and occurred often. Which was the first mistake? Was it the toasting? While a few people were fashionably late, including Foster, Soisson, and his henchmen, most people were in board soon after eight, and were having a reasonably agreeable time drinking good quality champagne and wandering about the upper deck to greet friends and admire costumes. I was largely ignored—after all, I was just a merchant amongst royalty—but everyone else was in good humor as they modeled their play clothes and showed off new shoes, and basically had as much fun as kindergarteners have on the first day of school.

Then the heavies arrived. Foster was first. And he was astonishing. Whatever kind of count or earl he was, whole forests of mulberry trees had been denuded to produce the silk for his stockings. Everything above the knees was purple, and seemed to glow in the oil lamps that had been hung from the rigging. He looked like something from a unique species. Four hundred pounds and already wet clear through the back of his coat, it suddenly seemed a lot less fun to be dressed up like he was. Did others look as ridiculous, you could imagine people asking themselves?

Soisson and his boys decided to dress up like soldiers, and they came with matching uniforms that vaguely resembled something an officer might wear to a ball two or three centuries ago, but then they went over the top with sashes across their chests and silk stockings on their legs. Instead of looking gallant, they came off as comical. And then Soisson struck a pose. He walked around the deck shaking hands and being admired, but then decided to take up a champagne glass and propose a toast. He climbed a few stairs to the higher deck with the wheel, and people started taking pictures. Women had cameras in their purses, men had them in their coats, I had two with me, and we all wanted to capture the moment. Soisson instantly responded by raising his chin and posing while they snapped pictures. Then he did the unforgivable. Joking about their future success, Soisson raised his champagne glass with one hand, and then slipped his other hand into his coat vest, ala Napoleon. Instantly a hundred cameras flashed and he knew he had just made a huge error. I watched his face change as he realized what he had just done, calculated the political consequences, and searched for a quick recovery. His response wasn't bad. He smiled, and took a couple more poses to make it appear he had been joking, but it was too late. The digital images were there, and he was stuck with them. By morning his enemies would have a shot of him pretending to be Napoleon. I would provide one of the photos.

The next mistake? Food. The deck below had been set with long tables. Everything was beautiful. Candles and flowers highlighted the linen table cloths. Utensils were all gold. The China was the finest, and the food was perfect. It was a bit crowded down there, but we managed to find our assigned seats, and waiters carefully moved between rows of chairs to bring us food and keep our wine glasses filled. No French restaurant offered better service than we had that evening. As a lowly merchant, I was near the foot of the table, and to keep me company Captain Whatsis and one of his friends were assigned to seats across from me. I would do nothing embarrassing this evening. Next to me? Margaret Riemard, library archivist, Biloxi beauty queen, and who knew what else? She wore a deep red silk gown so she would have stood out from all the other women in the room in any

case, but she was also the most beautiful woman on the boat. Candlelight did amazing things for her face. She swept into her seat, said a pleasant "Good evening" to all those around her, and then looked at me, waiting for me to say something.

"The generations of Riemards who came to Louisiana on boats like these would be proud of you. You are beautiful tonight. I am pleased to see you again." Yes, I said all that. And I meant it. I had no ill feelings toward her. She would make some man very happy. I just wasn't going to be that man.

"Thank you. I am pleased I was able to see you again. I expect you will be going back to Green Bay soon?"

"I will stay another week or two to learn some more about the re-enactment, and then I have to get back to the university. Will you be part of the wagon train?"

"Yes, I am going to ride all the way to the end. I wouldn't miss it for the world. I think we owe it to the memories of all who built our land, don't you?"

"I am an historian. My life's work is to show respect for the past."

"So why are you trying so hard to make us all look foolish?" Captain Whatsis decided to interject himself into our conversation. "Your web site has geezers talking about 'historicals', and you have more pictures of that damned cathedral than of the good people trying to show what life was like when this nation was founded."

"What do I have to do not to talk to you?" I asked. "I know it is a small boat, but there are one hundred guests here. Surely one of them would be willing to have a conversation with you." At this point he started blowing himself up like he was going to take a swipe at me, but I was pretty certain he would do nothing to interfere with the banquet. Instead, he stalked from the room, left his lieutenant to glare at me, while Margaret and I talked about the wagon train.

Hours passed. The wine flowed, the food was excellent, there were a few perfunctory toasts, but mainly the wind bags left people alone to eat and converse. At some point the boat seemed to move a bit more than it had, and Foster got up to explain that we had left the harbor and would be sailing in the gulf. He thought we would enjoy the ride, and we would make a more dramatic entrance as we returned to Biloxi Harbor just after dawn.

It seemed like such a good idea at the time. What could be simpler? We would just sail around a bit, and then slip back into the harbor. As it turned out, it took just under an hour for the problem to become obvious. We sat and we ate, and we sat and we drank, and the ship leaned to one side and then it leaned to another, and then it rose up, and then it slid down, and then people started turning green. While Louisianans live on the gulf, very few ever go out onto it. They are the farmers. We Yanks are the sailors. They were riding on very gentle seas, but they weren't gentle enough for Frenchies with a gut full of food. We were barely out of sight of land, when people started hurrying from the table.

Near midnight, the waiters brought around a cherry desert, and that cleared out another bunch of counts and countesses. Soon the room that had been so crowded held fewer than two dozen people. Among them were Margaret and myself and Foster. Foster, looking like a purple silk whale hoisted himself to his feet, pushed past all the now–empty chairs, and came down to our end of the table.

“Well, now I know who to have crew my boat next time I sail the Chicago to Mackinac Race.” He was loud and smiling, but I wondered if he was just a bit nervous about the way this was going. We wouldn’t look very good sailing into Biloxi in the morning with a hundred Huguenots hanging over the rail.

“It might have been better to have stayed in the harbor.” I offered. Count on me to advise the obvious.

“Oh, they’ll be fine in a couple hours. We have a doctor on board and plenty of dramamine. By one o-clock I bet half of them will be dancing up on the deck. They may not be sailors like us Yanks, but they will do all right.”

“Don’t you think the deck will be pitching a bit too much for a dance?” Once again, I had a firm grasp of the obvious.

“No, we told them to drop the sails. Once we stop moving, the ship will settle down.”

“With no sails, won’t we lose steerageway?” Our family only had a thirty-two foot sloop, but we had sailed enough on the Chesapeake to understand the basics.

“I am sure the captain will have addressed that.” At this point Foster lost interest in us and headed for the one exit that might permit him to get back up on deck. Margaret and I sat and talked more about the wagon trail and about her job, and basically passed the time in polite conversation until a quartet began playing and we went up on deck ourselves to join in the dance.

I might point out before my description of the disaster begins, that I did mention the steering problem to Foster. Whenever a boat stops moving, it loses directional control—“steerageway”. Without steering control, it no longer faces into waves, but may end up sideways—“abeam” to them. Foster was right to expect our captain to deal with that problem, but it soon became obvious he hadn’t. Hence, we had a short dance followed by several hours of excitement.

Initially, the dance was fun. Margaret and I waltzed on a nearly empty deck. At no time do I recall more than half a dozen couples actually dancing, so we had plenty of room, and it was a funny sensation to turn with a waltz step just as the ship rose or fell on a swell. Couples bumped against each other and against other couples, and we all thought the whole thing was pretty funny. Dozens of people who had been leaning over the rail now had something else to watch, and waiters brought around glasses of champagne and quietly handed out sea-sick pills. For a while there, I thought the dance would be a success.

As miffed as I was that Margaret had not been completely honest with me about her various connections to the blue armband people, I enjoyed talking with her, and I enjoyed dancing with her. For those initial dances, I forgot about the politics of the evening and the threat these people represented, and enjoyed the music, the sea breeze, and the woman in my arms. I had fun. My fun lasted about thirty minutes. Then a slightly larger swell caught the boat and I could feel it begin to slide around. With that swell we healed to starboard a few more degrees than before, and people laughed as we were pushed into each other. I am sure many of the men enjoyed the opportunity to pull their partners even closer.

The next swell took us farther over, and while there was still some laughter, we could hear things crashing below decks. Whatever crystal had been left on the tables would never make another trip. Gravity accentuated the tilt a bit, as people slid or fell towards the right side of the boat. With a hundred silk-enwrapped

counts and countesses now all on the same side of the boat, we were already several degrees off vertical when the next swell hit. We rolled farther this time, and something below deck let loose and slammed into the hull beneath our feet with a violence we could feel through the decking. Several sailors broke from their stations to run for the lower decks. The guests on board might not know what was wrong with the boat, but when they saw sailors running, they knew things were not right. The quartet had stopped playing when the last swell had pushed them nearly out of their chairs, and now the silence was overwhelming.

The next trough brought the boat closer to vertical and I used that time to move Margaret and myself closer to one of only two lifeboats I could see on deck. We got there just as the first of the smoke wafted up through the planks at our feet. The next swell took us even farther over and now a couple women started to scream. The boat was so lopsided now I wondered if it might capsize. More things crashed below decks. Something else hit the hull so hard the deck shuddered. Obviously we were in big trouble.

For a boat filled with politicians you would have thought one of them would have jumped to the lead at that moment, but all I could hear was a gaggle of voices shouting ever louder as they neared hysteria. No help was going to come from the Huguenot royalty. I took matters into my own hands and lifted Margaret into the lifeboat. There was a moment of hesitation as she looked at me seeming to wonder if this was really necessary, but she never said a word and settled herself in the middle seat. I pushed my way to the block and tackle that would be needed to first raise the boat to railing height, and then, after it had been pushed over the side, to lower the life boat into the water. This was a museum boat that hadn't carried passengers for centuries, so I was worried the rigging might be rotten, but as I pulled to tighten up the block in the bow, nothing snapped. The lines tightened, and I was able to raise the bow a few inches.

The minute I got the bow raised, people around the boat noticed, and instantly they lunged for the boat. Mostly women were put in first, but several men also jumped in, including Soisson. In an instant the boat was filled and the men on board had to shout to keep others from coming on board. Meanwhile, I tried to make my way around to the stern lines, but I couldn't fight through the crowd. To my surprise, Captain Whatsis grabbed the block and tackle at that end and waved me away. I went back to the bow, and with both of us pulling, we were able to raise the boat the three feet we needed to get it over the rail. Now we needed to push it sideways, and of course with this full load, it weighed a ton. Fortunately, a dozen or so men helped push the boat over the side, some of them no doubt thinking this would be the last time they were able to look brave before their beloveds. Minutes later we had the boat lowered into the water and the rigging detached so the life boat could float free. It drifted next to our boat, just a few feet away, so couples could keep talking across the gradually increasing gulf of water. I took a couple quick pictures of the boat, and then headed for the other lifeboat.

Here is where statistics failed me. In a normal population distribution there are always a few outstanding individuals—people at the top of the curve, who can do extraordinary things. Statistics would predict that even in a crowd of Frenchmen, there would be one or two who could figure out a block and tackle and get the second life boat launched. But these were not only Frenchmen, they were French

politicians, so any hope they could make anything mechanical work was in vain. Whatsis and I both pushed our way through the bodies and grabbed the lines. We got the boat raised a few inches, only to have a mob of people jump in. Here Whatsis did something truly admirable. One of the rats deserting the ship was Lebeck, elbowing his way through several women to climb on board. Just as he got one foot on the life boat, I saw Whatsis grab him by the back of the uniform collar and whisper something in his ear that stopped him as short as a knife in the chest. Lebeck froze, then stepped back out of the boat and actually helped a woman get in. I'd love to know what he said, but he taught that weasel some manners real fast.

Once again men helped us swing the life boat over the edge, and we slowly lowered it into the water. There were almost no men in this boat, just gunnel to gunnel silk skirts. It was probably overloaded by a few women, but it looked like as long as they all stayed low in the boat, they would be safe. I took a few more pictures and then tried to figure out what to do next.

There were still over sixty of us left on board, and we had two main concerns—finding life preservers, and keeping the boat afloat. At the moment, neither was going very well. Had the boat been inspected by the Coast Guard before it sailed? Before it left Trinidad? Before it left Bristol two centuries ago? Who knew? Someone found one locker with a couple dozen life preservers. That seemed to be about it for safety. As for the fire, I could hear the whoosh of small fire extinguishers, but smoke was still squeezing up through the decking planks and billowing out of every door way. Meanwhile, the swells kept us rolling farther and farther, and we seemed to be riding lower in the water. It looked like it would be race to see if we burned, capsized, or sank first.

Whatsis and his lieutenant headed below decks to help, and I followed, even though the smoke made it nearly impossible to breathe. I tied a handkerchief over my nose and mouth and followed down two decks. We found the fire almost at once. A stove had been installed for dinner, but if it had been secured to the deck it must have been with thumb tacks. As soon as the boat started rolling, the huge stove had slid across the deck and right into the hull. There it had simultaneously cracked the hull and let in a stream of water, while setting alight all the other detritus that had slid with it across the deck. Water poured in through the hull while fire raced across the ceiling. Crew men and waiters shot fire extinguishers at the ceiling while all of us beat on the flames with table cloths. It was obvious immediately the best we were going to do was slow the fire down. This boat would never make port.

When the heat got too intense we all backed out of the room and climbed up on the top deck. Someone had the bright idea of pouring water on the deck, and that worked well enough to keep the flames down below. We hoisted ice bucket after ice bucket of water out of the gulf and threw the water towards the flames. We were probably sinking the boat faster this way, but I think we all feared the flames more.

How long did this go on? You know how these things are. It seemed like days, but probably took less than an hour. We stayed busy throwing water while the ship rolled, burned, and slowly sank.

And then we were rescued. Three boats arrived almost simultaneously. Two local shrimpers went for the life boats, while a U.S. Coast Guard boat pulled along the port (the high) side, and put some ladders across so we could climb over. I was pleasantly surprised that there was no final rush to get off. People helped each other climb the sloping deck and steadied the ladders and each person went over. Some even continued to pour water on the flames until most people were across. The Coast Guard sent several men over to see if their equipment could save the boat, but they returned quickly with their faces showing the obvious answer.

In the end, it all went quickly and smoothly. The crew made a final check of the cabins to make sure everyone was off, and the captain, bless his heart, really was the last to leave his ship. I managed to get a picture of him walking fully erect over the ladder, proud to the last. Later he would be arrested for all the safety violations on his boat, but for the moment, he looked the captain of historical romances.

The coast guard boat was large enough for all of us to be seated inside a large cabin, and that is where we stood as we watched the boat go down. In the end it took so long it almost felt like an anti-climax, but it did go down, rolling onto its side as flames sputtered in the sea. Almost instantly the three rescue boats and several others that had arrived on the scene all headed to shore. The party was over.

Chapter 18

Sunday spent in several places.

You can imagine our exhaustion as we settled in aboard the Coast Guard cutter. Seamen found temporary quarters for the dozen or so women who had still been aboard the burning boat, while the rest of us were grateful for chairs. A seaman walked among us and asked for names and addresses so relatives could be notified. I handed him my passport and then fell asleep.

Sometime later an officer tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to come with him. At least I think that is what he wanted. I had no idea how long I had been asleep, but it hadn't been long enough. I was too tired to argue, so I followed him up some stairs to the bridge of the ship. There I found Foster, Lebeck, and several other men in old uniforms browbeating the ships captain. He was out numbered five to one, and outweighed by half a ton, but he didn't seem to mind. He stood his ground and simply repeated slowly and quietly, as if he were speaking to slow children, "This is an American ship, so it must return to an American port." Lebeck was shouting in heavily accented English, and Foster was nearly as loud, and both of them kept repeating the same points—they had to be returned to Biloxi. For a minute I thought I might have been brought up to intercede in this argument, but it was immediately apparent to me the captain had everything under control. As much as the blue armband people might need to get back to their show in the morning, the captain was not taking a US war ship into a foreign

port. This was not subject for debate, especially not with men who looked and smelled as badly as we all did.

No, the captain wanted me for something else. He noticed me come up on the bridge and nodded to the officer who had escorted me. The officer took me back into a small room filled with electronics gear, and offered me a chair and some coffee. I was grateful for both.

"You are Shawn Murphy, aren't you?" He asked. He looked to be just out of college, not much younger than myself, but far cleaner and alert than I felt at the moment.

"Yes. Thanks for the coffee. By the way, can I have my passport back? I plan to return to Louisiana later today if that is possible."

"Of course." He pulled my passport from a pile of papers on the table, and handed it to me. "We have already notified your parents and your fiancée that you have been rescued."

"Thank you." I looked around for a clock and saw that it was after four. It would have been a scary call for my parents and for Elise, awoken in the middle of the night and told that I had been in a ship wreck. Then the coffee seemed to open one or two of my tired synapses and I had a realization. How did they know I had a fiancee? There was nothing on my passport about her. The officer seemed to be waiting for me to draw that conclusion. Then he continued.

"When we uploaded the guest list to our system, it only took a few minutes before we were alerted to the fact that you were not just a boatload of tourists. This is a significant event. We received several calls that indicated you might be helpful in explaining the situation to us."

"Did you say you uploaded the passenger list from the boat?"

"Yes, we have satellite communications."

"I have a digital camera with pictures of the accident. Do you have the bandwidth to handle images?"

"Our telecommunications capabilities are classified, but trust me, we can handle any images you have on a commercial camera. Let's see what you have." He held out his hand, and I reached into my pocket for my camera. I had an initial sinking feeling as I felt how wet the pocket of my coat was. We had been splashing water around pretty liberally. Had I ruined my camera? I took a good look at it before I gave it to him and to a technician who now rolled his chair over from one of the electronic consoles. Had the memory chip survived? I guess we would find out fast enough. The technician plugged in a firewire and had images up on a screen in seconds. The chip had survived. Thank God for American technology.

"Can you walk me through these images and explain what happened?" the officer asked, as we watched the images fly past.

"Yes, but I would like to use a special approach." I thought of the pictures I had of Soisson—Napoleon—abandoning his ship, leaving women behind. If I could get them uploaded to a public place soon, they would be out and about before Soisson made land and started lying about what he had done. "I have a web site for my students at the National University in Green Bay. If I upload the images to that site, they will be available to everyone. And, if you will give me a keypad, I can type up some descriptions of events. You will get what you want, and so will everyone else." I could see from the expression on his face that I had just made a request

that was—as they say in the military—beyond his pay grade. He thought for a moment and then left the room. He needed approvals.

I had finished my coffee and helped myself to a second cup before he returned with the captain. It was the captain who took over now.

"We have no authority to transmit data to a civilian site in a foreign country. But if you give us the URL and password, you have my word that once the images and text have been accepted by our communications people in Pensacola, they will forward everything to your personal site." I wondered how many other places they would also forward the materials, but since that was exactly what I wanted, I could hardly object. I agreed, and spend the next two hours sitting with the technician, and keying in a caption for each image, and then a short summary of the evening. I was too tired for more than five or six hundred words, but I had enough energy left in me that I didn't want to let this opportunity pass. Soisson might be able to blow up cathedrals, but I was in a position to blow up his reputation. This was payback time, pure and simple.

It was after six by the time we were done. The sun was coming up, and we were nearing Pensacola. I had one last cup of coffee, put my camera in my pocket, and went out on the deck to get some air. Foster was waiting for me. He had a blanket wrapped around his shoulders but his purple silks still showed. He looked awful, just as I suspected we all did.

"So what did you tell them?" he asked.

"I assume I told them the same thing you did—what happened, when it happened, who did what—your basic incident report for their log."

"Two hours is a long interview."

"I had lots to say." We stared at each other for a while. He was still huge and powerful, but he looked so bedraggled at that moment I felt more companionable than intimidated. "Tilden," I said, letting his first name hang in the air a bit to warn him I was going to be personal. "You need to think about your connection to these people. People stupid enough to forget to bolt down a stove are stupid enough to forget other things. Later today I think you are going to find they are too stupid to train their mules and mule drivers in advance. Assuming the wagon train ever leaves at all, I suggest you have ambulances standing by. These are nasty people, and they are dumb people, and whatever you want, they are not in a position to help you get it."

"We could use your help." He sounded tired, even pathetic at the moment. Was he playing a role, or did he understand how much trouble he was in? I didn't care.

"No." Neither of us spoke after that. We stood looking out at the port, watching the cutter angle in to its assigned dock. Our long night was at its end.

Our next few hours consisted of bureaucratic and personal basics. The cutter landed and we were escorted onto busses and taken to a holding area. It wasn't quite a jail, but it was also clear we weren't to be wandering around. There were identifies to check, forms to sign, arrangement to be made for our transfer back to Biloxi. Eventually we were put back on busses and allowed to do some shopping at the base exchange. This made everyone happy. All of us looked pretty bad—smoky, wet, ripped, sweaty—and worst yet, since most people were wearing silks and such, we appeared to be royalty from a past century who had climbed out of our graves. You should have seen the stares we got. Wherever we passed, people

stopped dead in their tracks. I wouldn't be surprised if we caused a traffic accident or two. All the counts and countesses were happy to find blue jeans and white shirts. All the silks went into the store trash bin, including some gowns that must have cost thousands. I couldn't help noticing two store clerks edging their way toward the trash. With typically Yankee business sense they were going to retrieve all that silk and go home much wealthier than they had arrived.

Back at the reception area, we were shown large bathrooms and given time to clean ourselves up. Nothing was going to get all the smoke smell off our skin and out of our hair, but this at least cleaned us up some and made us feel more presentable. By noon we were back on busses and headed west, spurred on by the friendly waves of the good folks of Pensacola.

Somewhere in this process Foster disappeared. He is not the kind of guy you can just lose, so I assume he headed back to New York or had a more grand means of getting to Biloxi. The rest of us took the bus, grateful to sit down. The guards on both sides of the border stopped us and took names again, but they obviously had been called about us and knew there would be no passports. They passed us by and we all began to grow more interested in our final destination.

What would be waiting for us in Biloxi? It was about a hundred miles from the border to Biloxi, and if there had been an anxiety meter on the bus, it would have risen exponentially with each mile. These folks were the cream of the blue armband crop, and they had expected their Sunday to go a very different way. After a beautiful—and exclusive—night aboard the very scenic sailing ship, they would return to port to adoring crowds, massive news crews, and prominent positions on the stage. This was to be their day to show one and all that they had arrived. Instead, here it was mid-afternoon, and they were sneaking in to town in a pair of very plebian buses. As much as they wanted to be on camera, this wasn't what they had had in mind.

As it turned out, things were even worse than they had feared. The party had gone on without us. The buses drove all the way down to the port only to find remnants of the crowd, a stage being taken down, and banners already being rolled up. We had missed the big send off. Take your pick—people were relieved (given the way we all looked, who could blame them), confused (how could the party happen without them?), or angry (how could Soisson dare to hold the event without their august presence). By the time we had all left the busses and found ourselves standing in a largely-empty street, it was anger that was taking command of their emotions. Soisson had jumped ship with the women, gotten to shore more directly on a shrimp boat, and taken all the limelight for himself. Somehow this surprised all of them. Lebeck quickly huddled with his leading henchmen, mayhem clearly on his mind, while the rest of us drifted away.

I headed back to my car. Wherever the parade was, and whatever trouble Lebeck would cause, I was too tired to care. I have never wanted to see a bed so badly. The walk back to my car woke me up enough that I wasn't too dangerous on the road, but I mostly made it back to my hotel from luck and habit. I'm not even sure if it was six o'clock when I went to bed. I didn't care. I called Elise and explained in under fifty words that I was safe and back in my hotel, asked her to call my family, and was never so grateful to anyone as I was to her when it became apparent she could hear the fatigue in my voice and was willing to hold all

questions until the next morning. I disconnected all phones and slept for fourteen hours. It had been a long, wet, scary day.

Chapter 19

My final week with Morons.

I had shut off my cell phone and disconnected the hotel phone before I had gone to bed, but there was nothing I could do to prevent someone from banging on my door. There, just before eight, was David Starr.

"We need to talk." He looked like he was tempted to just charge into my room, but he was restraining himself.

"I need a shower. Come back in fifteen minutes with a cup of coffee and I will talk all you want." He hesitated long enough to let me know this was not what he wanted to hear, but then he nodded and disappeared down the hallway. I locked the door again and took a shower. I shampooed my hair three times to get the smoke smell out of it, and never did get all of it. But I felt better when I was done. From the insistent rapping on my door I knew it had been longer than fifteen minutes, but I was desperate to get clean. Finally, I finished, got dressed, and let Starr in. He had a cup of coffee and several newspapers.

"I read your web site, and I have seen your pictures in every goddamn newspaper on the continent. Now I need you to tell me what really happened" he said as he shoved the newspapers at me. I sat down and concentrated on the coffee. The newspapers could wait.

"It was all because of a huge old cast-iron stove. I have no idea how they got something that big below decks, but when the boat started rolling, it slid. It hit the hull like a wrecking ball, and punctured it pretty badly. It also set half the room on fire. The whole thing was caused by the stove." As I talked, he stared at me like I was suffering from some mental disability.

"Murphy, I am not here from the fire department. I am here from the State Department. What I want to know is what happened to Soisson and Lebeck."

"Soisson jumped into the first lifeboat, leaving women on the burning boat. Lebeck tried to do the same thing on the second boat but your lawyer captain friend stopped him. Did any of those pictures make the newspaper?"

"Only on half the front pages on the continent." He laid several papers out so I could see the front pages. Soisson was on most of them. There was reasonable color, considering the lighting. I felt pretty good about my photographic abilities. But it was the captions under the pictures that were actually more interesting. A paper from Baton Rouge had it, "*Rene Soisson helps a group of women to safety*," while the other papers had some variant of "*Rene Napoleon Soisson forces himself into a lifeboat meant to carry women to safety*." The politics of the paper determined the caption, but all the pictures showed the same face—the guy was clearly scared out of his mind. "You ruined this guy," Starr added.

“You know how sorry I am about that.” I replied. I tried to determine if Starr felt the same way I did. But his diplomatic training kept any reaction from me. All I saw was continued agitation. Clearly there was more to this story than the photo.

“Tell me about Lebeck.”

“He was just one more rat jumping ship, but the captain you know grabbed him by the shirt and said something. Whatever it was, it got him under control. He stayed on board. After that he was just one more face in the crowd until we got to Biloxi. There he went nuclear when he saw the parade had left without him. So did the rest of the boys, for that matter. I guess they were hoping for horsy rides.”

“Soisson was shot about an hour ago. There’s lots of talk about who did what, and no arrests or evidence. Police found him in a Gulfport alley with a bullet in the back of the head.”

“And you think Lebeck?”

“Why not? Alive, Soisson’s an embarrassment. Dead, he’s a martyr. He died in service to the long suffering people of Louisiana.”

“Is there evidence to show it was Lebeck?”

“My guess is Lebeck’s friends in the local police will take the case and find whatever he wants them to find, but then, that’s not my problem. I am not a cop. I just need to understand the politics of the situation.” He stood up and let himself out of the room “Thanks for your help,” was the last thing I heard as the door closed. I was left with a pile of papers and half a cup of coffee.

I rummaged around in the papers for a couple minutes, trying to see which of my pictures they had used. Every paper had at least two. As for my description, there were a few quotations, but no one had used too much. That was probably just as well. I’m not too sure how lucid I was when I wrote it.

Having assuaged my vanity, I turned on my cell phone, ignored the list of messages, and dialed Elise. For the next hour we had an impassioned conversation that basically consisted of two main points—she wanted me back in Green Bay, and I wanted me back in Green Bay. Enough was enough—it was time to head north. I sketched out some preliminary plans for getting back to her, and we both felt better.

After our conversation I asked room service for a pot of coffee, and then checked my web site to see what I had written and if it had all been transmitted from the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard had been true to its word, but now that I read what I had written, I saw I could have used a good editor. I had events out of order, one paragraph just trailed off into nothing, it was a mess. I spent an hour or so rewriting the description of the party and fire, and added a description of our bus ride to Biloxi, complete with the disappointment of the armband guys when they saw the parade had gone without them. That satisfied my duties to history. Now I had to satisfy my duty to Elise. I needed to get out of Louisiana.

As I reasoned it out that morning, if I followed the wagon train for a week, I would have most of what I needed. A week would take them through the three towns before New Orleans, and get them into the city. I would see what was working and what was not, and most importantly, I would see how folks were reacting to the event. A description of all that should be enough for my students, for “Uncle Claude” and for anyone else who was reading my weblog these days. And even if it wasn’t enough for them, it was enough for me.

My first step was to catch up with the train. It was already midmorning, and I wasn't sure what time they would leave Gulfport. It was time to get going. I stopped on the way out of town to get a new digital camera (the American model was $100 more than the French model, but still an easy choice), and so it was nearly noon by the time I pulled into Gulfport. I was worried that I might have missed the train, but the crowds in the street told me that I was not too late. Parking lots were clearly marked and lots of signs got me from the parking area to the departure area for the train.

I was in time to hear two speeches and to see mules be mulish. Let me see if I can describe the scene. All the activities were arranged around the town square. The wagons were being lined up on the far side of the square, and it didn't take me long to realize I didn't need to rush. These wagons weren't going anywhere fast. The mules were either moving where they shouldn't, or not moving when they should. So far only four wagons had been lined up, and they didn't look ready to go anywhere. All the re-enactors dressed up in period costumes stood some distance from the wagons, mostly looking for shady trees and cool drinks.

In the middle of the square was an octagonal gazebo that was burdened with countless flags and banners. Thirty or forty dignitaries were crowded up there, all struggling to look dignified while their clothes darkened from streams of sweat. There was a crowd—not enough to fill all the square, but enough to fill most of it. Not bad for a workday in August. Most of them were seated on park benches that had been arranged in rows, but lots of folks also stood in the back or wandered from shade tree to shade tree to speak with friends. Whoever the current speaker was, he was obviously not the main draw, and folks only gave him superficial attention. I took a few pictures and wandered around.

I hadn't gotten too far when I ran into three of the old veterans I had met the week before. They were headed out of the crowd, one in a motorized chair, one with a cane, and one looking like he needed one or the other.

"Gentlemen, I am pleased to see you again." I shook their shaky hands and then took their picture.

"You are that historical professor," the man in the chair said. I recalled his name was Jean. "The last time you took our picture it ended up in the local paper, and I had to buy a round of drinks."

"You haven't bought a round of drinks since the Franco-Prussian War." That Jacques. Or was it Claude? Were they all named Jacques?

"Did I miss any good speeches?" I asked.

"Hell no." Jean again. "The only one of those boys who could give a speech was Soisson, and Gui shot him."

"He did not." Both his friends turned on Jean. "You know that's a lie."

"Are you talking about that man I saw on the porch with you last week? He shot Soisson?" I asked.

"That's what the police say."

"Don't listen to him, " Claude/Jacques said to me, pointed a bony finder at Jean. "Gui didn't shoot anyone. He didn't even own a gun."

"So why did the police arrest him?" I asked.

“That makes a good story,” Jean replied, looking significantly at both his fiends. “But it is hot sitting out here, and a story like this should be told over a glass of good wine, don’t you agree?” I didn’t need a Ph.D. to know where this was going.

“Is there a good place in town to sit and talk?” I asked.

“Well, I suppose we could go to that café over there,” Jean replied. And we were off. Or we were sort of off. Jean’s chair was apparently French made since it had a top speed of one mile per millennium, and even at that, the other two were having trouble keeping up. I was convinced we would all have sunstroke before we covered the thirty meters to the café. Eventually we got there, and of course all of them were regulars who were greeted loudly by the other patrons, all of whom were aged well north of eighty. I was introduced as the “Historical Professor” which meant nothing to anyone until Jean added that I had put their picture in the newspaper. I immediately saw one man try to comb four hairs over his bald spot. We found chairs around a pretty beaten old table, and ordered wine. Jean immediately added “and don’t bring the cheap stuff. This man is a professor. He is used to good wine.” At this point I knew I was going to be swindled mightily over the course of the afternoon, but I can’t say I minded.

“So,” I began after the wine appeared, “Can you tell me why Gui was arrested?”

“Sure,” Jean replied. “He gets up too early. If he was in bed where he belonged, none of this would have happened.”

“I should tell the story,” Claude/Jacques interrupted. I asked, and found out he was neither Claude nor Jacques—he was Anton. So Anton took over the story. He rested his cane against the table, leaned forward, and began. “We all get up early because none of us can sleep. Maybe after a glass of wine we can get a few hours sleep, but in truth, none of us have really slept since we were in our sixties. This morning we were all sitting on our porch by six, drinking coffee, same as every other morning for the last two decades. You too, Jean, you don’t sleep any better than the rest of us.”

“Last week I slept until seven one morning. If Gui had done that today he wouldn’t have shot Soisson.”

“He didn’t shoot anyone,” Anton answered. “Can you imagine such a thing?” Suddenly he raised his voice was addressed most of the café. “The man is eighty six years old. I am not sure he could lift a nine millimeter pistol any more. And even if he got it raised, he couldn’t aim it. And if he somehow managed to pull the trigger, the recoil would have broken his wrist.” There seemed to be general assent around the room, not that Anton seemed to need it.

“So why did the police arrest him?” I asked.

“Because he confessed,” was Jean’s reply.

“I’m telling the story,” Anton stared hard at Jean. Forty years ago it might have been a look of intimidation. Now it had more the appearance of two men who were very nearsighted. “The four of us were sitting on our porch when we heard the shots. It was six forty five. We all agreed that it was a nine millimeter gun probably about three blocks away. We know weapons, professor. We were all career soldiers.”

“Yes, I can see that.” And somehow I could, but don’t ask me how. Anyway, it seemed like the right thing to say at the time.

“Nothing happened for about twenty minutes after the shots, and then we started seeing police cars racing down our street toward the gulf. Then about a half hour later a car stopped by our house and the police got out to ask us questions.”

“You should have seen these goofs,” Jean addressed the rest of the café. “I don’t know what turnip patch they found these boys in, but those mules out in the street have more brains.”

“These weren’t very bright boys,” Anton agreed, directing his comments at me. “They wanted to know if we had seen anything. We told them when the shots were fired and what caliber the gun was, but they didn’t seem to believe us. Gui kept insisting it was a nine millimeter, and one of the boys asked him *How do you know it was a nine millimeter?* Gui got angry that the boy would question his knowledge of guns, so that’s when he said, *I know because it’s my gun. I shot him.*”

“And that’s when the police arrested him?” I asked.

“I told you those boys were stupid. They even handcuffed him. He’s sitting in Gulfport jail right now.” There’s no reason to repeat the rest of the conversation. There were general expressions of indignation, a few derogatory comments about the local police and a couple of similar comments about Soisson, but the main points of the story were now clear. I bought a second glass of wine for the boys, paid the bill, took a couple pictures, and left the café.

It was still unbearably hot outside and the crowd seemed to be thinning as the noon hour ended and folks went back to work, or maybe just got bored and went home. I listened to the current speaker who was earnest enough, but really had nothing fresh to say, and had no special magic in his words. He might have been a college professor speaking to bored students. If this was the main event to unite all Louisiana, it was not going all that well.

I wandered around the square, walking from shady spot to shady spot, listening to the speaker and watching people drift away. Down one of the side streets I saw another group of people and saw folks walking purposefully in that direction. I decided to follow, and quickly found myself outside the Gulfport Police Station where one of the officers was giving a press conference while half a dozen tv cameras rolled.

“We are pleased to announce that we already have a suspect in custody in the murder of General Rene Soisson. Detectives are with him now and are taking his statement. As soon as the suspect is formally charged we will release his name. All I am prepared to tell you at this time is that the suspect is a local resident.” There were excited questions from the reporters assembled in the street. The police officer was very happy to answer them, to point out the officers who had brought in the suspect, and to again claim pride in how fast his officers had worked. He was having a great day, and the reporters were getting great photos and excellent quotations for the evening news. Maybe because everyone was so happy, I felt compelled to throw some water on the fire.

“Is it true the suspect is eighty six years old?” I shouted from the back of the crowd. Only a few people heard me over the other shouted questions, so I tried it again. By the third time I shouted, enough people had heard me that some of them turned to look at me, and a few even made room for me to move somewhat forward in the crowd. I had probably shouted my question eight times before most of the

crowd had heard it and the police officer looked at me. It was clear he had heard me that time, and then he looked away. He wasn't very good at pretending not to see people, and the reporters caught his reaction. One of them repeated my question.

"I am not prepared at this point to release any description of the suspect. All information about him will be released after he has been charged with the crime."

"Do you think," I shouted, "an eighty six year old man is capable of raising a nine millimeter pistol, aiming it, and firing at a moving target." I shouted this but didn't need to since now the rest of the reporters were much more quiet.

"The capabilities of an eighty six year old man are up to a jury to determine." The police officer was staring at me with all the authority he could muster, but he knew he was mouthing garbage and couldn't keep a look of confusion from crossing his face. "Age is no deterrent to crime." Suddenly he seemed compelled to justify his actions. "We have seen many terrible crimes committed by the elderly. This is especially possible where a man has had extensive military training." Now he had crossed the line and knew it. He appeared to be casting all veterans as latent criminals. "We will have another press briefing after our interrogation is continued and the suspect has been formally charged." With that he turned from the microphones and went back into the station followed by his men. A few reporters shouted questions at his back, but most turned their attention to me. I decided to keep my involvement in this very brief.

"The suspect is an eighty six year old veteran who happened to be sitting on his porch this morning when police came by with questions. If you wish to hear about the arrest, there were three other men on the porch with him. They are now sitting in the café around the corner, and would be happy to describe this morning's events." At this point most of the folks started for the café. They weren't quite running, but they were walking as fast as their dignity and equipment would allow. A few remained to talk with me, but I assured them I knew nothing more, and that they would be much better off talking with eye witnesses. Eventually that worked and I was left alone.

Suddenly I was very hot and very tired and very tempted to drive back to New Orleans. I thought if I could just get a couple pictures of the wagons and mules, I might be able to call it a day. So that is where I pointed my very hot feet. The wagon train now consisted of eight wagons, and enough people were gathered around that it seemed departure was approaching. I got what I thought was a fairly well-framed photo from the front of the train, and then I went down the row of wagons looking for anyone I could talk with. I was curious to know what kind of people were willing to ride a wagon through this kind of heat. I avoided anyone with a blue armband—most of the folks—and spotted a young couple just getting up into the front seat of their wagon. They were wearing white, same as everyone else, but they had no armbands, and there was something in their expressions that said this ride was more about fun than about politics.

"Do you mind if I take your picture," I asked.

"Not at all." And it was clear they didn't. They both sat up, posed and proud, and the young man took the reins of the wagon as if he were directing the team of mules, neither of which paid any attention to him.

"Do you plan to go all the way across the province?" I asked.

“Oh, no” the young woman answered. “There were hundreds of people in Baton Rouge who wanted to be on the train, and so few wagons, so we drew lots, and Robert and I got this day. Tomorrow it will be a different pair. Everyone wants to do it.”

“Are you worried about controlling the mules?”

“It looks simple enough,” the young man answered, only to be overruled by the woman.

“There will be drovers assigned. Is that what they called them—drovers?” she asked the man, but didn’t wait for an answer. “They will keep the mules moving. All we need to do is keep our seats and enjoy the ride.”

“What made you decide to come on this re-enactment?” I asked.

“This is our chance to show our respect to those who came before,” the woman answered. I suspected I knew the young man’s reason for being along—the woman was beautiful. “We should do this every year.”

“Aren’t you worried about heat, and any problems along the way?”

“Oh no, this will be the most fun we have had all summer. We have friends all along the way, and we are planning a big party in Picayune. You should join us. The wagons are all reserved, but lots of people are walking along side.” At this point I said one of the three dumbest things I have ever said in my life, and I can’t remember the other two.

“Well, maybe I will. I have a couple other things to do today, but maybe I’ll walk along tomorrow.” How can anyone go to college as many years as I have, and still be so dumb? We spoke for a few more minutes, but the drovers were moving to each team and it appeared time for them to finally leave, so I got out of the way.

As it turned out, I hadn’t needed to hurry. The drovers lectured the men on each wagon, setting a new standard for pedantry, while the men nodded endlessly and waited to finally get moving. I found some shade out of the way, took some pictures, and waited. Just when it looked like the train would finally move, some local official had to delay thing still more by inserting himself near the first wagon and making a loud speech extolling the virtues of the train and of the people, all of whom wished he would just disappear so they could get on their way. Finally he shut up and the first wagon began rolling to the cheers of several hundred people who had remained in the square. It turns out mules move even slower than you might imagine, so it was several minutes before the final wagon actually got underway, and even when they were all moving, they were moving about as fast as a shopper wandering down the vegetable aisle of a supermarket. Several dozen people who walked behind the train had time to talk, wave to their friends, and contemplate the nature of the eternal as the wagons gradually rolled down the block. I took a couple more pictures and then headed back to my car and air conditioning.

My evening was far more sensible than my day had been. I had good food, good wine, and an air conditioned hotel. I posted a summary of my observations and some of the digital shots I had taken. It was during my review of the photos I had taken that I was struck by the white clothes everyone was wearing. Had the first Huguenots really dressed that way? My hotel room didn’t have the fastest digital lines, but I was able to find a number of on-line collections of portraits of early leaders, and even one painting of Louisianans at work in their fields. What all the

paintings had in common was dark clothing. There was some white, but far more black. The portraits showed grim people facing a harsh world, dressed in black as if they went to funerals on a daily basis, which, unfortunately, was closer to the reality of that time than we often imagine. I made a comment about that on my weblog and also posted copies of several of the old portraits that struck me as especially evocative. My last act of the day was to call Elise. We talked about this and that, but most we counted down the days. I would be back in Green Bay in less than a week.

Tuesday I at least began the day like a fairly bright person. I slept in. I now knew that the wagons moved at glacial speed. I could get plenty of rest before driving to Picayune to walk along. It was late morning before I finally went down to the dining room for breakfast. And maybe because I was less rushed, I finally noticed something—the dining room wasn't empty. There were people at maybe half a dozen other tables, either reading papers or having conversations, doing normal things that people do in hotels. How long had this been going on? New Orleans was coming back to life! I heard bits and pieces of conversations, heard the words "clients" and "markets," and deduced that things were normal enough that salespeople were returning. It wasn't exactly a dove returning to the arc with an olive branch, but it did strike me as a hopeful sign.

So with hope in my heart and a smile on my lips, I drove to Picayune, found the town square, bought two bottles of water to carry in my backpack, and got ready for the walk. Finding the walkers was easy. These were the people behind the last wagon joking about mule droppings. I got a couple tight-lipped looks from the blue arm band folks (do I need to point out that I wasn't wearing white?), but the rest of the people didn't seem to care what I wore, and I quickly mingled—must be my inherited salesman genes. I found out where people were from, how many days they were walking, who was with whom, who had had the most to drink the night before, you know, the casual conversations of strangers meeting at a party.

Then all fifty heads turned at once, and conversations stopped. Margaret had appeared. She was dressed in white like everyone else, but while they looked like people at a party, she looked like an angel descended to earth. She had ribbons in her hair, her dress was obviously tailored for her, and she walked as if she was about to begin a ballet.

"They wore white to parties." She stood directly in front of me, and much too close. I could choose between looking at her, or trying to determine what she was talking about. Basically I stood speechless while all my circuits melted down. Where had she come from, and what was she talking about? She waited several centuries and then helped me out. "Your pictures were from formal occasions. But they had parties too, and the women wore white. I have seen a picture of a ball in New Orleans, and I have read about it in several diaries. This wagon train is a rolling celebration—a party for all of Louisiana, so it is appropriate to wear white, don't you think?"

"You saw my web site." Talk about a firm grasp of the obvious.

"Yes. By the way, my mother is having the lifeboat picture framed. She says I have never looked as determined and noble under stress."

"You did look very capable out there.

“And you were very kind to put me in that boat. Thank you.” At this point she kissed me on the cheek and every man within sight felt the temperature jump a dozen degrees. “Are you here to take more pictures, or will you be walking with the train?”

“I plan to walk with the train.”

“Good, then I will too.” And she did. It took me a minute to get used to the idea of walking across Louisiana with Margaret, but within a few minutes I was glad she was with me. She seemed to drop into tour-guide mode, and spent the next eight hours commenting on everything we saw. She had plenty of time. Not only did the train start late and move slow, but it stopped frequently for reasons that were invisible to us back at the rear. We just walked—or “ambled” would be a better label—and talked as we followed a country road from Picayune to Fayette, a distance of just over twenty miles.

As I think back to walking eight hours in the August heat of Louisiana, it seems impossible that the afternoon and evening could have been anything other than agony, but it was actually far better than I would have imagined. For one thing, there were plenty of trees arching over the road, so we had shade for much of the time. We were also close to the coast (every once in a while I thought I could see it through the trees), so there was some movement of the air. It wasn’t exactly a wind, but something moved past our faces.

But the real surprise was how well we were treated as we walked along the road. There were people at every crossroads, and at every farm, and any place you could park a car. They waved, shouted “welcome” or “Thanks,” and showered us with cool drinks and cookies and fruit. And of course, given the pace we were traveling, we had plenty of opportunities to stop and talk and eat a few bites. We met people from all over the world who wanted to see this thing. And if they were disappointed by the small number of wagons, they didn’t show it. They treated us like royalty.

Margaret seemed to be a floating hostess. She would work one side of the road, and then the other, talking with all who had come to see, and pointing out various people on the train, or answering questions. In between, she would come back to me and tell me stories about how the first events were going, and how much interest they were getting, and the cute things kids were saying… An endless stream of enthusiasm. I guess that was her real contribution to the event, and it helped. We were still walking when the sun set, and no one complained. A couple people had turned back or fallen out to be picked up by one of the buses that trailed us. But the rest of us were still walking happily along this country road, seemingly willing to walk all night if necessary.

A little past seven lights started coming on. The wagons apparently had batteries in them, and they were connected to small lights that outlined the canvas covers. It was a complete breakdown from historical reality, but it added considerably to the spectacle we made. Then we walkers were handed battery-powered lights shaped like candles. They must have been made in the U.S. because they were light and actually worked. I had preferred walking down the dark road, watching the stars up through the trees, but we were not there to star gaze, we were there to entertain folks along the way, and this we did. The crowds along the roadside were growing as we approached Fayette, and the kids loved the lights and the mules and the wagons. Margaret was great with the kids. She waved

to all of them, and stopped and asked the names of many of them, and thanked everyone for coming out. She must have seemed a goddess, coming out of the night with her battery-powered candle, white dress, and big smile.

By the time we got to Fayette, the road was lined with people, in some cases three or four deep. And they all applauded. We waved, the women periodically stopped and curtsied, and everyone had a great time being stars for a day. I was hotter than I have ever been in my life, my feet hurt, and all of my clothes were stuck to me by rivers of sweat, but even I have to admit it seemed fun to be part of the parade. Every once in a while I remembered to take a picture or two, but mostly I just walked along as "Parson Murphy." And, I have to admit, I was impressed by the genuine enthusiasm the parade was engendering. The town's people really liked the show.

Maybe I should have left at that point, while I was feeling good about the re-enactment for the first time. But I followed the parade through the town to the town square (was every Louisiana town designed around the same town plan?), where we circled the square once, and then walked over to a picnic area where we could help ourselves to food while the mules and wagons were led away. The last thing I wanted was a spicy Louisiana meal, but I did take a couple ears of corn and three bottles of lemonade. I also found a seat and immediately decided that whatever my future held, I would make sure it did not involve walking again.

I had gulped the first two lemonades and was savoring the third when my evening started to go downhill quickly. First, I realized that the price we would pay for our dinner was a steady diet of political nonsense. Every local who had ever won a contest for oratorical excess was invited to give a twenty minute talk about the meaning of the re-enactment. They all stood in the central gazebo and were given far more amplification than their ideas warranted. I was too tired and hot to pay any attention to the first guy, but by the second and third orator they were like persistent mosquitoes—I just couldn't ignore them. It was time to leave.

That's when things got worse. Captain Whatsis found me and sat down next to me at the picnic table I was using. I looked over his shoulder to see how badly I was outnumbered, but he seemed to be alone.

"I hear you walked in with the train."

"Yes, you are looking at 'Parson Murphy,' the first Huguenot minister from Ireland." Whatsis' only response was to stare at me like I was an alien species. I returned the stare, trying to tell with my peripheral vision if he had a weapon in his hands. We were surrounded by thousands of people, but who could tell what dumb acts French lawyers turned revolutionaries were capable of.

"Every instinct tells me to punch your lights out," he finally said, his voice not much above a whisper. "But I came over here to thank you for what you did on the ship the other night. You were very useful to us."

"Feel free to trust your instincts, if you think you have a chance. And there is no need to thank me. I just did what any normal person would do. If there was any surprise that night it was that you could figure out how to use a block and tackle."

"I started my career as an engineer."

"Oh, so there was a time in your life when you were useful to the world."

"We owe you for what you did that night, so I am going to let that pass, but you have to know you are running out of time down here. You should think about packing your bags and driving north."

"You have no idea how often I think about driving north. One of these days I'll finally get to do it. But you are the one running out of time. If you are bright enough to be an engineer, you are bright enough to know where all this is leading. You need to take that silly uniform off before it gets you and lots of other people killed."

"I wear this uniform to protect the people of Louisiana." He drew his face closer to mine, clearly challenging me. His instincts were taking over. So be it.

"You wear that uniform because a bunch of petty criminals thought they could grab power by shouting slogans and blowing up churches. Your probably think you are better than them and will rise to the top over their stupid bodies. But it never works that way. The criminals stay in charge and guys like you end up the losers."

"You don't have any idea what you are talking about."

"I know exactly what I am talking about. You are in the midst of the final IQ test of your life. Pass the test and you get to live a long and happy life. Fail it, and you will be one more body buried while the world curses."

"You are so full of garbage." He moved to stand, and I instantly tensed, ready for the first blow. "Don't worry about me. We owe you one for your help. You are safe here."

"The fact that you have to tell a guest in your country that he is "safe" tells you just how screwed up your crowd is." He paused, and I paused, and then I made the most charitable statement of my life. "It doesn't have to end with bloodshed. You are a lawyer. Be one. Take off that stupid uniform, back away from these thugs, and find a legal way to get whatever you want for you and yours. You can still come out of this a hero instead of a corpse." The light wasn't real good where I was sitting, but I thought maybe I saw some brief change in his expression. If so, it was fleeting.

"Watch out for yourself, *Parson Murphy*. Louisiana can get real hot this time of year." And with that bit of weather advisory, he was off to strut with the rest of the morons.

I was tired of weak oratory and veiled threats, and truth be told, I was just plain tired. So I left the remains of my meal, got directions to the buses, and caught a ride back to Picayune and my car. The bus ride was embarrassingly short—twenty minutes on the outside was all it took to cover all the miles I had spent eight hours walking. Oh well, I was paid to write about history, not to walk it. My air conditioned car had me back in my air conditioned hotel room half an hour later, and my very comfortable bed ended my day.

Wednesday I did nothing. I was entitled to a recovery day, wasn't I? I uploaded some images to my weblog and added maybe five pages of notes and reactions to a day on the road, trying to explain just how impressive my achievement had been to walk twenty miles through heat and bugs and sun and… Well, eventually I ran out of problems to overcome, but as you can imagine, I let everyone know just how heroic I had been. Yes, I know it was petty, but I just couldn't pass up the chance to inflate myself a bit. I also got in some pictures of cute little kids, so if people got

tired of reading my whining, they could at least look at the pictures. The rest of the day I spent eating, drinking gallons of water, and talking with folks in the hotel. It seemed now that a few of my words and pictures were showing up in various newspapers, people felt free to come and talk with me in the hotel restaurant. I can't say I minded. I have enough ego to enjoy being noticed.

By Thursday I thought I had a plan to wrap this thing up. The train would be coming over the Lake Pontchartrain causeway later in the day and would camp at the edge of New Orleans for the first of four days parading through various city neighborhoods. There was no shade on the causeway, and with the concrete reflecting an August sun, the temperatures were going to be astronomical. In short, I had no intention of walking with the train, but I would wait for it as it crossed to the other side of the lake, take some pictures, talk with some people, try to come up with some profound summation to this event, and then get out of town.

Like most of my plans, it never quite worked out that way, but at least I tried. The first problem was the train itself. It was scheduled to come across at about three. I knew it would be late, but I was there at three just in case. The New Orleans side of the bridge is largely industrial and commercial, nothing with a very photogenic background, but about a quarter of a mile into the city is a small beach area where the planners had erected tents and a speaker's platform and all the rest of the stuff you need if you wish to harangue people in relative comfort. I walked around there, took a few pictures, talked to anyone who looked at all interesting, and then kept wandering back to the bridge to see if the train was anywhere in sight. It wasn't. Three became four, four became five, five became six, and suddenly this thing was running seriously behind schedule even for a political event.

Somewhat after six a few people started walking east across the causeway to meet the train. I don't know how you measure temperature in a situation like that, but even with the sun getting near the horizon, the concrete was scorching to the touch. The last thing I wanted to do was to walk some unknown number of miles out in that sun, but eventually boredom overcame my good sense and I joined a growing number of people who were walking east.

The Pontchartrain causeway is two strips of concrete raised up over the shallow lake maybe ten or fifteen feet. My guess is that one two-lane road was built first, and then when traffic necessitated, they built the second road parallel to the first. These days cars going east take one of the roads, and cars going west take the other. Because of the wagon train, the west-bound road had been closed to traffic and all cars were directed onto the other road. So the bridge we walked over was empty. At one point a couple of emergency vehicles passed us going east, but otherwise it was just us walkers trudging eastward and praying for an early sunset. There were probably twenty people within fifty yards of me, but no one was talking. I think we were all cursing our stupidity and wondering how far off the train would be.

As it turned out, we had to walk nearly an hour before we could even see the first wagon, and then another twenty minutes before we got close enough to see what the problem was – the mules had died. No doubt it was the heat. They had dropped and were now lying on their sides—three of them—still connected to their

wagons by leather and chains. The other dozen or so surviving mules were being attended to by anxious volunteers who fanned their heads, gave them water, and whispered encouraging words into their huge ears.

I got some pictures and looked for people to talk with. Conversations were not easy. People who could still stand were tending to the mules. People who had been overcome by the heat had either been loaded into ambulances, or back into air conditioned buses, or were lying in the shade of the wagons while others gave them intravenous supplies of liquid. The train looked like it had been attacked and the survivors were not going to make it.

The senior blue armband people were back by the first bus conferencing hard while shouting into cell phones and looking for divine intervention. Their faces were as red as tomatoes, and it wouldn't have surprised me if several of them were the next to hit the pavement. Margaret was in this group, a cellphone in one hand, her other fanning the group with her white straw hat. Leave it to Margaret to do the one useful thing in the group. When she saw me she waved me over, much to the obvious displeasure of various admirals, generals, and colonels standing about her in sweat-soaked uniforms.

"We had hoped for some clouds, maybe even some rain to keep this road cooler." Thus, she quickly explained the problem—and the wishful thinking that had caused the problem.

"For what it is worth, the park on the other end is all set up. The tents are up for shade, it looked like the food was there. If you just ran the buses over there, people would have most of what they need." I offered. It seemed like a reasonable action to take, so of course it was immediately challenged by one of the head morons.

"We will *not* arrive in New Orleans by bus!" He closed his cell phone and directed his stare at me, not doubt expecting me to fold like one of his subordinates. I was too hot to care what his pretend rank was, and I stopped taking orders from morons when my older brothers moved out of the house.

"You have the next three days to parade around New Orleans wearing your pretty uniform. By tomorrow no one is going to care how you arrived in town. For tonight you have a crowd waiting in a park for your brilliant words to enlighten their poor lives. What do you say you give everyone a break and get them into these buses before you need any more ambulances?"

"He's right that we should get our people over to Pontchartrain Park." One of the brighter generalissimos replied. "We can truck the wagons over later."

"You're going to listen to this bastard?" The top moron was even more incensed now. His face went from red to purple, and I was waiting for a coronary to cleanse the world of the guy, when he tempted fate even further. "His bitch is the Catholic Interior Minister." I have never thrown the first punch in my life, and I never will again. But this time my right fist was flying before a single thought crossed my mind. The punch was wild and caught him on the side of the head just as he turned to dodge it. I ended up hitting him squarely on his left ear, and he let out a yelp, but I was the one in pain. He really was a block-head. It felt like I had broken all the knuckles in my hand and probably the wrist as well. No matter, I wasn't going to have a chance to take any more swings at him or anyone else. Four or five of the top goons threw me up against the side of the bus and started flailing away.

I was probably lucky there were so many of them since they got in each other's way, but enough punches were landing that I was in big trouble fast. I could hear Margaret in the background shouting, "Stop, don't hurt him," but of course that is exactly what they intended to do.

Fortunately, before they could break the last of my ribs, Margaret had a stroke of brilliance, and said in a stage whisper, "Cameras. There are cameras here." That stopped them so quickly it was like a switch had been turned off. I have no idea if there really were cameras pointed at our little scene, but then neither did the goons, so they stopped. The head goon started shouting at all the generalissimos to get into the first bus, and as soon as they were loaded in, the thing went tearing across the causeway.

Margaret held my arm and walked me back to the last bus with the medical staff. As she helped my up the steps she whispered in my ear, "They will be waiting for you in the park. Go straight back to your hotel. Better yet, go straight back to Green Bay."

My mouth was pretty smashed up and I assumed some of my ribs were broken since I could barely breathe, but I wanted to say something to her. The best I could do was, "You are the one in danger, Margaret. These people are criminals. Get away from these people. Go back to your family." At least that is what I tried to say. I am not sure the words actually came out that way, nor could I be sure I was even talking loudly enough for her to hear me. What I remember is that she helped me to a seat, motioned for one of the doctors to look at me, and then kissed me on the top of the head before leaving. As farewells go, ours was pretty lousy, but then these were lousy times.

A doctor sewed up several of the cuts to my face and said he thought many of my ribs were broken, but he couldn't be sure without X-rays. What concerned him most was that a rib might have punctured one of my lungs, so he had me breathe over and over while he felt my chest and listened for problems. In the end he decided my lungs were probably safe, but I should go immediately to an emergency room to be sure. Then he did the most important thing he could—he gave me some pills for the pain. He even had me wash them down with wine. Sometimes you just have to love the French.

The bus driver turned out to be a prince too. After a brief conversation with the doctor he started the bus rolling, but kept it slow not to jostle any of us. I wasn't the only one on the bus with problems. There were eight or ten people who had heat exhaustion and were in a very bad way as well. This bus wasn't going to the park but to a hospital. I explained where my car was and asked the driver if he would drop me there. I promised to drive myself to the hospital, and fortunately, both the driver and the doctor believed me.

Getting down from the bus was agony, and walking the five steps to my car was the longest walk of my life, but the real pain didn't begin until I tried to get into my car. I had to bend and turn ribs that were no longer taking commands from me. Worse, I had to smile and wave to assure the doctor I was fine so he would drive away. By now it was nearly dark so he couldn't see the look on my face. Maybe it was concern for the other people that let him accept my wave as genuine, but in any event the bus took off into the city and left me sitting in my car panting from exhaustion and pain.

I suppose I could describe my ride back to my hotel, but the high points should be enough—I didn't pass out, and I didn't hit any cars. Eventually I pulled under the canopy in front of the hotel and sat there slowly breathing as if I had just run a marathon. One of the uniformed car boys came running around to open the door for me, already shouting "Hello, Mssr. Murphy," only to stand speechless when he opened the door and saw my face. He must have waved at the doorman because suddenly he was there to help me out of the car.

"Francois," I managed to whisper to the doorman as he held my arm like an invalid. "I will be checking out tonight. Please keep my car near the entrance so we can load it, and please send up some bell boys in about half an hour so they can carry my bags." At least I think I said all that. The key points were car, checkout, and bags, and he seemed to understand that much. He held my arm as I shuffled into the lobby and to the elevator, and he even took the elevator with me and walked me to my room. Along the way I could hear him quietly, but insistently talking to me about a doctor. I shook my head, told him I had seen one, and eventually made it to my room.

Once in my room, I sent Francois after bell boys while I tried to determine what to do next. I was desperate to sit or lie down, but I knew the pain would be unbearable, so I took a shower instead. I wasn't thinking real clearly, but a cool shower seemed a good idea, and there was blood I wanted to wash off.

When I came out of the shower, David Starr was standing in my living room, looking through my digital camera. "Dead mules. That won't go over big with the folks down here. It's not like killing a collie, but it's still no way to make friends or win elections."

"What are you doing here?"

"If you look at your face in a mirror, you might understand why the hotel people would call the US Consulate."

"I don't need you. I am leaving."

"I know you are leaving, but you still need us. You haven't been nice to the other children on the playground, and they intend to get even."

"I'll be gone in half an hour."

"It'll take you half an hour just to get dressed, but you have the right idea. You need to be gone. But before you go, isn't there a web site where you send these things?" He held up my digital camera.

"I can do that tomorrow."

"A better time would be tonight. Here, I have already fired up your computer, dialed the web site, and logged you on. Why not put on some pants and get the story out while the hotel people pack and load your bags." I suppose I could have asked how he had gotten my password, but I was too tired and sore for stupid questions. And I did want to get those images up to Green Bay. So I struggled into some clothes, slowly lowered myself into a chair, and updated my weblog. There wee seven images from the park and from the train I thought should be uploaded, and I was able to add a few hundred words about the heat and the mules.

"You aren't going to say anything about what happened to you out on the causeway?" David was reading over my shoulder.

"No. That was a private matter."

“How noble.” He said it with derision, but he didn’t push the matter. In the meantime, the hotel staff had been very good about packing my bags and getting them down to the car. I put the computer and camera in a bag, let the bellboys take it, and then concentrated on getting socks and shoes on my feet. It hurt so bad I thought I would be sick, but eventually, I got through it. Finally the room was clear and I was dressed and Starr and I took the elevator down. The hotel manager must have been called at home, since he was waiting for me in the lobby, all concerned, and practically crying when he saw my face. Somehow he decided it was his job to apologize—for all France? For Louisiana? I didn’t understand what he had to apologize for. I just thanked him for his service over the past months, and tried to give him some money to tip all his staff. He refused it and then followed me with his entire staff out to the street to see me off. It was really a very amazing scene.

While I once again thanked the hotel manager and once again thanked everyone else who was out there, Starr pointed at a black Renault sitting at the curb.

“Two of our boys are in that car. It will follow you. Sometimes you will see it, and sometimes you will not, but it will be there until you leave Louisiana. You know the highway north. Get on it and stay on it, and don’t stop for anything until you get to Missouri.” And then he was gone. I waved once more to the hotel employees and then slowly got into my car. It was even harder this time, and the pain was so bad I think I would have cried if there hadn’t been an audience right there. But I managed to smile and to wave and to get that silly Citroen in gear and headed out of New Orleans.

Chapter 20

St Louis Again.

Driving was agony and I was suddenly exhausted, but I didn’t have to worry about falling asleep at the wheel—whenever I moved, my ribs sent a shock wave through my body. My driving was terrible—I didn’t seem to be able to hold a speed very well, and I knew I was wandering all over my lane. I was lucky I wasn’t pulled over as a drunk driver. But the cops left me alone and I kept the car pointed north up the Mississippi Highway, pushing hour after hour through the darkness.

Finally sometime after one I saw the sign welcoming me to Missouri. I have never been so pleased to see a simple road sign. I immediately started looking for an exit with several motels, assuming that at least one would still be open at this hour. Four exits later I got lucky. I pulled into the lot of the Notre Dame Inn and found the office light still on. I figured this had to be a Catholic establishment, and besides, I felt like I really could use some mothering at the moment. The lady at the desk looked like a retired nun, and she was very concerned about my injuries, but I told her I had already seen a doctor and I just needed a bit of time to recover from my “traffic accident.” Nuns hear a lot of garbage during their lives and get good at dealing with it. This one (if she was a nun) took my money, gave me a key

and explained where to find ice and how important it was that I put some on my face right away.

I thanked her, left, and walked right into the two Marines who were standing on the front steps waiting for me. The bigger one (they were both huge) immediately began giving me orders like I was a private.

"Where is your room?" I pointed in the same direction the nun had pointed, and he seemed to think that was ok." Good. There is plenty of light there. But you can't park there, your car would be visible from the highway. Park down this other side. Do you see where there are several cars in a group? Park yours in the middle. Sargeant Stone will put some adhesive letters on your license plate later so the car will be camouflaged. And professor, this is important. No phone calls. Don't use your cell phone or the hotel phone. She knows you are coming north, as do your people in Philadelphia. There is no need to call them. Just go to bed, and stay there until after it gets light in the morning. You are only about four hours out of St. Louis. You can call anyone you want, once you get there. Do you understand?" I nodded, parked my car where he had pointed, and went straight to my room. Actually I didn't mind taking orders at the moment. I can't say I was thinking too clearly at the time, and my body was sending my mind a continuing message—"find the room, hit the bed. Find the room, hit the bed." It was almost a cadence as I walked from my car to the room. Actually lying down took some work as I found the movements that caused the least pain, but eventually I was flat on the bed. I was asleep milliseconds after my head hit the pillow.

It was nearly noon when I woke up on Friday, and my body was telling me even that was too early. During the hour it took me to finally rise to my feet, take a shower, and get dressed, I finally took a good look at my face in a mirror, and I realized I had even bigger problems. I couldn't go back to Green Bay looking the way I did—Elise would scream. My lips were more black than blue and they looked like they were ready to burst. The cuts on my face were red around the threads used to close the wounds, and my left eye was completely red. My hand was also swollen from the one punch I had gotten in, but at worst that would just need a cast. No, it was my face that would scare Elise. Why hadn't I put ice on it? Was it too late?

I stumbled outside, still trying to determine what to do. The Marines were waiting for me.

"Jesus, Professor, I was once in a humvee hit by an RPG and I didn't end up looking that bad. You need to either take up boxing lessons or stop fighting."

"What do you think, a little ice and it will be fine tomorrow?" I knew it was a silly question, but I had to ask.

"Assuming nothing is broken, which is doubtful, I think with lots of ice you might look presentable to a lady in about a week. Until then, I think you're sleeping alone"

"Thanks for the good news. By the way, why are you guys still here?"

"Our orders are to cover your back until relief comes."

"So, when does relief come, and who is your relief?"

"They pulled in a few minutes ago." I looked around to see who was now my protection, but the Marine warned me off. "They are pretty shy. I checked them out and they are the good guys, but you probably won't see them. But if you

happen to see a fortyish guy with a mustache from time to time, it's ok. Now we need to go. Take care, Professor. If you ever get back to New Orleans, maybe we will run into you at the Granary." We shook hands (I used my left hand, holding my bandaged right hand near my belly), and I went over to shake the other marine's hand as well. I can't imagine how they had spent the night—had they slept in their car? In a minute they were gone.

I checked out of the hotel, talked with another clerk who could also have been a retired nun, and then eased myself back into my car one millimeter at a time. It was a four hour drive up to St. Louis and I used the time trying to determine what to do next. I couldn't go back to Green Bay yet. So where could I go? Somewhere along the way I remembered the two fathers from New Orleans. They were in St. Louis, right? I could look in on them, and maybe spend a few days talking with them. Maybe with lots of luck and lots of ice, after a few days I could safely drive home to Elise.

My first act in St. Louis was to find a cheaper hotel—one I would never use again, and so would not be remembered as the guy with the mashed face. St. Louis has lots of cheap hotels, so that part was easy. I settled into my room and ordered room service to bring me lots of ice and a bottle of wine, only to discover they had no room service. So I wandered the hotel until I found an ice machine that would work, and a shabby bar that would sell me the worse bottle of wine I have seen in Canada. The only good news was that no one stared at me. Apparently this hotel had seen faces like mine before.

Back in my room I called Elise. We talked for a very long time. How much did she know about New Orleans? She seemed to know I needed protection, and was quick to advise me to get back to Green Bay where I would be safer. I assured her I would be back soon, but wanted to look in on the two fathers. How could a good Catholic girl object to my seeing a couple of priests? She accepted my assurance that I wouldn't stay long, and then gave me their address. After that our conversation grew more intimate, and I pushed the ice pack harder and harder against my face, hoping I could accelerate the healing process. Elise was just one day's drive away—one day and one face full of bruises away.

I spent the rest of the evening alone in my room drinking cheap red wine and finding new positions for my ice pack. Need I mention how miserable I felt?

Saturday morning I imagined I saw some improvement in my face. In truth, I was probably just getting used to my new looks, but there was always hope the ice was doing some good. I looked through the phone book and found the retreat house Elise had mentioned. It took me several connections to get to Father Jacques, and a few more minutes of conversation before he remembered me, but once he understood I was in town, he invited me straight out to the retreat center.

While I was really just going to kill time until my face healed, once I got out there I was glad I had gone. The retreat was on the northwest side of St Louis along the Missouri River. This was the river Father Marquette had thought would be an easy ride out to the Pacific—a trip he planned to make himself. Of course he was wrong by over a thousand miles plus two mountain ranges, but still it was interesting to stand along the shore and look west, imagining what life would have been like if the Pacific Ocean had been where Marquette had thought it was.

Should I describe the retreat house? It confused me. It was large and dark and long, and looked like it might have been a boarding school or abbot or small college. It had to be a century old. The paneling would have taken that long just to get as near-black as it now was. I was not sure who would actually want to retreat here, but there must have been some people, because there was a receptionist and an office, and the usual brochures in the lobby that indicate they regularly accept visitors.

There was a young man working the reception desk, and I could see right away my face was going to be a problem. I still hadn't worked out a good story for my appearance—had I been hit by a car? Attacked by a dog? Hit by an asteroid? I tried to make up my mind quickly while the young man practically gushed with sympathy and pulled out a chair for me. The worst part was I was actually grateful for the chair. The only thing worse that looking terrible is feeling as bad as you look. I took the chair and asked to see Father Jacques. Fortunately, Father must have told him I was coming, since he said I was expected and dialed father's room.

Father Jacques looked every bit as bad as I did, only he had fewer scars. He had aged at least ten years since I had seen him in New Orleans, and he moved so slowly I wondered if he would ever make it down the hallway to where I sat. I met him halfway and we exchanged greetings. We tried to shake hands, but his was arthritic and mine was smashed, so basically we just touched fingers and tried to think of cheery things to say.

"Shawn, you look like you were attacked."

"I am afraid it is my own fault. I started the fight."

"I thought you Irish were better at that sort of thing."

"Yes, I think maybe the family acquired some non-Irish blood along the way. So how are you, Father. What have they got you doing up here?" This conversation took place as we stood in the hall and tried to decide should we sit, stand, go to his room. We looked and acted like two men who didn't know what to do next. Finally Father Jacques found a way to give our meeting a bit more purpose.

"Mostly I look after poor Father Claude. I am afraid he was badly harmed by the stress of the move. Shall we go see him?" And that is what we did—eventually. The rooms were down another hallway and we moved at a sprightly pace of about one step per hour. It didn't seem possible that Father Claude could be even worse off, but he was. He was in his bed in a tiny room that could have been a monk's cell, lying flat on his back with the covers pulled up to his chin. When we came in he barely opened his eyes. I have never seen anyone die, but it appeared he was close.

"Claude, you remember from young Shawn from New Orleans. He has come by to visit you." This he said in that false cheery voice people always adopt around invalids. I wonder how sick you have to be to not be scared by that voice—you know you must be bad off if people talk to you that way.

"Hello, Father Claude," I added. I hoped my voice was more normal. "Do you mind if I sit down?" There were two chairs alongside his bed. I took one and Father Jacques took the other. "Would you like to hear about New Orleans?" I thought I saw some flicker from Father Claude, and Father Jacques said "Yes, Please do." So I talked for the next half hour or so about the wagon train and the sinking of the

ship and the rest. I managed to keep them both awake. Father Jacques even seemed to perk up a bit. When I was done with my story he wanted me to keep on.

"Now tell us about the fight. How many were there?"

"I am not sure. Four or five, maybe six. I got in one punch and then they got in theirs."

"I knew it. You hot blooded Irish. Always more courage than sense. I assume they were Protestants." Poor old father Jacques was really getting animated now. He was trying to clench his arthritic fists as if he were there. I wonder what he must have been like as a young priest.

"They were Protestants, but the fight was not about religion. One of them said something he shouldn't have, and I lost my temper. But tell me about this place. What do you do here?"

"They say eventually they would like me to counsel some of the men who come here for retreat, but so far they haven't asked me to do that. So Claude and I sit and pray." I could imagine the two of them sitting in this tiny room hour after hour. I wondered if even the holiest man would not sometimes feel despair.

"If you have the time, and if you can get permission, I wonder if you could help me with a history project." As you can guess, I had no history project and had no idea what I was talking about. "As you know, the people of New Orleans have a great collection of diaries and other family histories, but I am not aware that any history of the local churches exists, does it?" Neither of them said there was such a history, so I was on solid ground so far. "The fifty years you were in your church is an important period. You were there when Catholics began moving there in significant numbers. You could describe the growth of the church, the first families, the main events of those years. I think there would be general interest, and of course it would be essential when the church is reopened." Of course I had no idea what I was talking about, but as I described the project I was reading their faces, and it seemed to me there was interest—maybe even excitement.

"Well, Shawn," Father Jacques replied, nodding reflectively. "I think we could help you with your project, don't you Claude?" Father Claude didn't move much, but I thought I saw his head move a bit. Maybe it was imagination, but at least it seemed they were both somewhat engaged in the idea. So I kept talking, outlining possible approaches, explaining how histories are generally laid out, watching their faces, and looking for how I could make the project as engaging as possible to them. An hour later I think I had them. Even Claude was now moving his head enough so I could be certain he was hearing me and agreeing, and Father Jacques looked ready to start right that minute.

At that moment a young woman—I assume a nurse—came in with a tray of food for Father Claude and told us that lunch was served for the rest of us. Father Jacques and I began the long walk down the hall, still moving with glacial speed, and arrived when everyone else was finishing their dessert. Fortunately some kind young woman brought bowls of stew to our table.

And then a miracle happened. One minute the room had the usual chatter thirty or forty Frenchmen make over a meal, and then suddenly the place went still. Every head turned toward the entrance to the room, and I could swear I saw amazing improvements in every posture. My ribs didn't like turning much, but eventually I got my body around enough to see the cause—Elise.

She was wearing a floor-length yellow cotton dress and so was already more colorful than the entire contents of the building, but she was also Elise—a woman who looked like film stars hope they will look after their next surgery. When she saw me turn, she smiled at me, but stayed waiting in the doorway. I got to my feet, hurried to her, and hugged her as hard as my ribs would allow.

"I couldn't wait."

"I'm glad you didn't."

"My father wanted me to wait. He said you wouldn't want me to see you like this." She waved a hand near my face. "He said men have their pride."

"So you knew I had been hurt?"

"Shawn, we watch out for those we love. I knew. I waited one day, and then I had to see you. Do you mind?"

"No. I missed you." I hugged her again, and then we stood momentarily confused. I wanted to talk with her alone, but it was polite to say at least a few words to father Jacques, and maybe some others. In the end, Elise handled it well. She took my hand and went to say hello to Father Jacques, and then she went with the two of us to be introduced by the Father to most of the other people in the room. Two or three eons passed while we met every person and heard how each knew some person in government or had met some other DuPry. Elise kept sliding her hand back into mine, and I practiced patience. Eventually she had spoken with everyone, hugged Father Jacques (I wasn't sure you could do that, but he didn't seem to mind), and she led me outside.

"Where can we sit and catch up?" she asked. I pointed down the lawn to several park benches arranged along the Missouri. She said nothing while we walked down the slight hill, and I was still too dumbfounded by her arrival to think of anything clever to say. But it felt good holding her hand and hearing the rustle of her dress as she kicked her hem with her steps.

"You should have come back to Green Bay." She finally said as we sat on the first bench. "We have good doctors there."

"Your father is right about pride. I wanted a few days for the swelling to go down."

"There were four of them?"

"Your intelligence is good. I was too busy to count, but four seems right. Maybe five. It actually helped that there were so many. They got in each other's way."

"I am so sorry I asked you to stay down there." She was looking full into my face and was suddenly crying. I hugged her again.

"I was a volunteer. I wanted to see what the re-enactment would be like. And as for the fight, did they tell you I started it?" That stopped her sobbing. She pulled her head back and looked at me again.

"You started it? Why would you do that?"

"What can I say. Men are dumb. So it's not your fault. It was my fault. And for what it is worth, I have learned my lesson. No more fighting with groups of strange men on bridges." She smiled – what else could she do?

"Can we go home now? I have a car. He can have us in Green Bay before dark."

"I would like that, but I started something with the fathers this morning. They both look terrible. Father Claude looked like he was dying to me. So I started them on a history project. I thought it might give them something to do.

“For an Irish brawler, you are a very sensitive man.”

“I think I can have this well started in two days. OK? I will drive up first thing Monday morning.”

“I’m not leaving you now. Give me a kiss and let me make some phone calls.” I leaned forward to kiss her and then hesitated. In part, I wasn’t sure what part of my mouth I could kiss with, and then I also had this odd thought about kissing at a religious retreat house. Was it legal? In the end Elise solved the problem by kissing me.

And that is how we spent the next two days. We spoke with the old fathers, and whenever we had time to ourselves, well there was lots to say. It was great medicine for me, and I swear I think she brought Father Claude back from the dead. The first time she walked into his room he lifted his head, spoke to her, and tried to sit up. By the second day, he did sit up.

As for the church history, we got a good start on that. Like any oral history the trick was keeping the fathers from telling an endless series of stories that just wandered off in any direction. I kept bringing them back to main topics while Elise found a laptop computer somewhere and transcribed what they said. By the second day the administrators of the retreat house were taking an interest in the project, and they assigned a young man to do the transcribing. I assumed that was Elise’s influence—if the project was worth her time, they decided it must also be worth their time. So suddenly the fathers had a staff. I gave the young man an outline to follow and wished him luck. Keeping two elderly men on topic was not going to be easy.

Evenings in St. Louis we wandered the streets of the old part of town along the Mississippi, we talked endlessly, and I wondered again and again why I had left Green Bay when I could have spent the summer with Elise. I am really dumb.

Monday morning we said our good bys to the fathers, I promised to return periodically to get updates on their history, and then we were off for Green Bay. Her driver took her car, and Elise rode with me. As always, she spent most of the ride turned toward me, talking about anything and everything, and the hours disappeared.

Chapter 21

Finally Back to Green Bay.

September is the best month in Green Bay. The mosquitoes are gone, the snow hasn’t started yet, and the sun is still up at five. Our days were warm and happy. On the political scene, things seemed to have stabilized. The September elections came and the blue arm band people finished third in Louisiana. Part of that was technical—with their leader dead, there was some question of who would be on the ballot. But part of that may also have been growing disillusion with the party. And

the opposition had gotten energized. The ruling party down there had run Louisiana for more than a generation. It may finally have occurred to those aging bureaucrats that they would lose their sinecures if the new guys took over. They campaigned hard and no doubt bought more than their share of votes. Their rhetoric was harshly anti-Green Bay, but with them it appeared to just be rhetoric. They were too old and fat to actually rock a boat that was supporting them so well.

On the Ohio front, I watched the papers to see if anything might be happening there, but I could only find one odd reference to a reenactment. One day in the back pages I found an article that came with the heading "Oddly enough." It told about half a dozen Americans who had been arrested and deported for bringing the wrong caliber guns to a war re-enactment outside Duquesne. The story made them out to be clowns who couldn't tell one gun from another—just a bunch of goofy Americans. Maybe that was really the case, and maybe something more serious had been headed off. In any case, it appeared Ohio would be quiet for a while.

And I watched the papers for news of my ancient friend Gui in Gulfport. They released him after two weeks, no doubt to the relief of the jailers and fellow inmates who had been forced to listen to him 24/7. I am sure he had great stories to tell back on his porch with his buddies.

Back in Green Bay, things could not have been better. I started teaching, and while a few students complained they were having trouble with my accent, most students seemed somewhat interested in my courses, and a few had even read my weblog about Louisiana. I knew that the first few weeks of any semester are a honeymoon period when students have yet to take a test or do a paper, but still it was pleasant to walk into class and talk about my country's history.

Elise still worked a long day by French standards, but she was able to spend one or two evenings a week with me, and we had several weekends to ourselves. Once we went up to Door County for a weekend, and another weekend I drove her up to Mackinac Island. We stayed at the Iroquois Hotel, laughed about the irony of the name, and took long walks along the shore.

But my best time that fall came one Saturday night in early October. I told Elise we had been invited to a dinner party by one of the new professors. She dressed in a long, orange silk gown, and joked that she must look like a pumpkin. She didn't of course, but what struck me most was not her dress, but her face. She had worn her hair up, as she often did for parties, and her face was beautiful. But the beauty came from happiness. She looked as happy and contented as I had ever seen her. It occurred to me that my primary job for the rest of my life was to help keep that look on her face. I hoped the rest of the evening would help with that.

As we drove to the dinner party she noted right away that we were in the neighborhood of her childhood, and in fact we drove past her parent's house and then around to the next block. She started telling me stories about each of the houses and families, and then stopped when I pulled over in front of a large two-story house shaded by oaks and maples.

"This is the duChamps' house. Their children were our ages, so we played here sometimes. Our house is right behind this one."

"I understand he retired and moved south. The new professor moved in just a week or so ago."

“Oh you should have told me. We should have brought a house-warming gift.”

“Well, at least I brought some wine.” At this point we got out of the car and walked up to the front door with Elise looking around at all the places that were familiar to her, looking for things that might have changed. She talked about playing hide and seek there as a child while I rang the door bell and then knocked. When no one answered, I put down the bottle of wine, opened the front door, and picked up Elise to carry her inside.

“Shawn, you can’t just walk in…” she was saying as I picked her up, and then she was silent as we walked into the empty house. I stayed for a moment in the entry way, and then slowly carried her around the rest of the rooms on the first floor. “Shawn? Shawn what have you done?” I kissed her and carried her from room to room.

“I hope you like it.”

“Shawn!” She screamed and hugged me so hard I thought she might break all my ribs again. At this point I had to put her down, and we just stood hugging for a very long time. At some point I noticed that she was crying. All she said was “Thank you.”

Eventually I led her into the kitchen where a card waited on one of the counters. “It’s from Mr. DuChamps. I met him last week at the closing.” I handed the card to Elise. It read:

> *Dearest El: I am so happy to know you will be in this house. I know you will love this house as much as we did. It is a big house. Fill it with love and the laughter of children.*

That brought more hugs and more tears.

“Shawn, can we afford this house?”

“Yes.” I didn’t have the heart to tell her the Green Bay real estate market had cratered and that the sales commission checks I was getting were enough to buy the entire block.

“Oh Shawn.” More hugs, more kisses, you get the idea. “Shawn!” Suddenly she perked up. “Do you mind if I go tell my parents? They will be so excited.”

“Of course.” After one final kiss she was out the back door that she knew so well, down the stairs, and with fists full of orange silk she ran across the backyard shouting “Mama, mama.” I saw the light over the backdoor come on, and then her father was at the door. Elise rushed up to him, and then was inside the house looking for her mother. Her father stood by the backdoor for a moment and waved to me. I waved back, and then we each went into our houses.

I walked back through the empty house to retrieve the bottle on wine I had left outside. What I saw before me was Elise’s face and how happy she was that evening. There was much ahead for us, and much ahead for Canada. I knew not all of it would be pleasant. But for that one night, I had done my job. I had made Elise happy.