

**MY DAD AND SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS**

**PART ONE – THE CHRONOLOGY**

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*Dedicated to my sister Claire*

## CHAPTER ONE

### STATION TWELVE

One Saturday afternoon, I was ten years old, and my dad decided he and I would go do the stations of the Cross together at the church, which was open to the public, but quite empty that day. When we got there, I followed him around the aisles of the dimly lit church, and we paused at each station while he recited a prayer. The stations contained little sculptures on the wall going from the front to the back of the church.

I didn't know any prayers but my dad was well acquainted with Catholic ritual; he had been a monk for fourteen years before he left the orders and got married.

Nor did I notice anything stupendous – until we reached Station Twelve, which depicts the Crucifixion. There my dad caught my attention, he piqued my curiosity. He stood there facing the image of Christ crucified, with his own arms out in a cross like those of Jesus, and began to sob. And sob and sob. He was gushing with tears and shaking all over. The expression on my father's face was extreme pain. He seemed to be trying to say something but words failed him. He didn't turn around to look at me because he was totally wrapped up in the image of Jesus on the cross.

It was like an apparition, seeing my dad gush with tears while looking at Christ, and I vaguely understood that he was sad that I did not understand or have any kind of faith at that point in my life.

All I knew for sure was that my dad was a strange guy. He was not a one-dimensional or mediocre person. What I had seen of him so far in my life had been the surface, a man who went to work in the morning and came

home tired at night, who lost his temper at times and rarely laughed, who couldn't sleep well.

The man was forty years my senior, overweight, with a thin black mustache and thick black glasses over his piercing black eyes. He believed he could intimidate anyone, anyone who was threatening him, just by staring – and that included any angry dog that barked at him. It was obvious the man relied mainly on his will. If anything, he was very serious and very repressed. My uncle Rémi was a funny man, and he said my dad had a heart of gold but was so narrow minded that he could see through a keyhole with both eyes. And here at Station Twelve, he was engrossed in the pain of his Saviour.

After all, looking back, when he was in the monastery, the monks used to practice all kinds of ritual self-torture in order to better understand the sufferings of Jesus at Calvary. Plus there was a famine at the time when he was locked up, and for months they were short of food because it was during the Great Depression of 1929; afterwards, my dad was haunted by bulimia and constant hunger. So he ballooned out to be bigger than life.

The reason he joined the Franciscans was that his own dad died right in front of him at age 57, when my dad was just 14. His mother's father was a millionaire in 1900 and had made his money with his *calèche* factory. A *calèche* was a fancy horse-drawn buggy and the grandfather went bankrupt when they invented the car and the government nationalised the factory to build tanks during World War I. But in the heyday of *calèches* the rich men used to spend their Sunday afternoons going around Beaver Lake along Shakespeare Road, with their plump prosperous wives in their fur coats, displaying their wealth as they drove their ornate buggies. But my dad was born in 1909 and the family soon was bankrupt and then his own father passed away. But then my dad found a way to get an education: a lady in the parish offered to pay for my dad's education if he became a priest. Therefore, he spent the next 14 years in a cloistered monastery.

## SECOND CHAPTER

### WEREDALE PARK

One thing changed after my grandfather Sydney Smith died – my dad had only one parent left, a Francophone. Sydney had been born in England and emigrated to Longueuil, Quebec with his family after his own father, Joseph Smith moved to Australia. Joseph was a travelling salesman and a staunch Protestant. He returned from a trip one day and learned that his wife and children had converted to Catholicism. Immediately, he left for Australia, never to be heard of again. But one thing was certain: Markland had been brought up British. That is why he would occasionally sing hymns like, *‘There’ll always be an England, and England will be free, if England means as much to you as England means to me.’* He would sing this around the house, in the same breath as an elegy of the French language or the pope.

While Dad was in the Franciscan monastery, Lionel Groulx was the dominant voice in politics and philosophy in French Canada. So my dad became a French Canadian nationalist. He wrote an essay while he was a monk in which he claimed that the mission of the French Canadian people was to make Christ reign in Canada and in the whole world. In other words, he was a disciple of Groulx. In time he became anti-communist also. The main reason he did not believe in Quebec independence was that many separatists were really Communists.

But when my dad was a young lad, his life was normal and they lacked for nothing. He and his cousin Percy would get together and hide to smoke cigarettes. They spoke English together. My dad lived on a street on the edge of Westmount called Weredale Park.

My dad once told me that during the twenties, he saw King George when the monarch was staying at the Windsor Hotel on Peel Street. He also

mentioned that his family went to see vaudeville shows but he didn't like vaudeville. Then he had a childhood friend called Gabriel Brossard, who grew up to become a priest and a missionary in China.

My father went to the *Académie St-Léon de Westmount*. His mother spoke French to him and his dad, English. Markland always kept a trace of my grandfather's British accent. Then there was mythology. My dad believed he had blue blood through a Portuguese ancestor who was royalty. Today I know a few people who believe the same thing and it is nothing but urban legend. Maybe that was why my father turned into an anti-communist militant. But the ideas of Lionel Groulx about race and the anti-communism were not ideas that my dad pulled out of a hat – those were the prevalent themes in Quebec politics in the twenties and thirties. Hindsight is always 20/20; it is easy to say today we would not have fallen for those myths if we had lived in those days.

Anyway my father's ideas and lifestyle all came crashing down like a house of cards when Sydney his dad passed away suddenly and when my grandmother Alice Ledoux's father lost his fortune. Like a tornado blowing away a house, everything changed. The mansion on Weredale Park was sold; the family moved into a modest residence on Saint-Hubert Street. Shortly later, my dad's sister Marguerite died suddenly. Life was a shambles.

And Markland became a monk.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***ORARE ET LABORARE***

The Franciscans were cloistered monks, which meant there was no contact with the outside world. For instance, my aunt Pauline, that is my dad's sister got married in a Catholic church right across the street from my dad's monastery, and yet he was not allowed to attend the wedding. This was not considered a punishment, but rather mortification of the flesh, a little extra suffering to get closer to God. And my dad accepted this treatment.

The daily routine of work and prayer was punctuated with periods spent in the chapel, sometimes in the middle of the night, with Latin names like Vespers, Matins or Lauds. Basically, all monks followed the rules, and forgot about their personal projects. They spent several hours a day praying in the chapel. The only problem with the cloister is that when you spend so much time alone with God in prayer and contemplation, after a while you run out of things to think or pray about. Especially in contemplation, you are facing a void unless you receive a special grace or revelation. And all the monks are doing the same thing at the same time. There is light work to be done, and certainly, this whole regimen gets you closer to God, but you lose touch with reality as defined in the modern world outside the cloister.

My dad told me about "la cilice," which was a belt with nails pointing inwards, so that when you tightened the belt, the nails would penetrate your waist. Little tortures like that were meant to give monks a better idea of the sufferings of Christ at Calvary.

He also told me of an episode when he had to humble himself in front of the entire congregation. At meals they weren't allowed to talk; one of the monks read the Bible out loud while the others ate. One day it was my dad's turn to read the Bible, but he had forgotten the book in his cell, his

room. So he had to get face down on the ground and beg for forgiveness from the Abbot. The head priest replied that it was OK, he was forgiven, but not to let it happen again.

As a reform of the materialism of the Church in the middle ages, the Franciscans took a vow of poverty. The individual monks did not own anything. However, history tells us that in places like Mexico, the Franciscans owned much of the land, and the best land at that. In my dad's time in Quebec, the monks were a begging order: they survived on donations. However during the Depression of 1929, that lasted for ten years, the donations were sparse. Now the father of one of the monks was a farmer and grew pumpkins, so he paid his son's tuition with a truckload of pumpkins. This meant that for three months, there was nothing else to eat but pumpkins – pumpkins for breakfast, pumpkins for lunch, and pumpkins for supper, pumpkin pie, pumpkin soup, and pumpkin stew. And my father did not like pumpkin! He was often hungry and developed bulimia later in life; he became a compulsive over eater. Later on, the first year he was married, he put on 55 lbs. and the second year, 35 lbs. My mother fed him very well.

My dad never read the works of Saint John of the Cross but he told me – many years later – that he had gone through the dark night of the soul for the previous forty years. Saint John, who was a Spanish Catholic during the Counter Reformation, explained that the people who eventually become mystics, who reach direct contact with God, go through a long period of spiritual deprivation first. Heaven appears to them as a black night, a night of total darkness, with no signs from God, no consolations, no joy. They can never tell if God is pleased with them, and their faith is strengthened through long, sustained confrontation with this dark night. Some of these souls are tempted with fornication, or hearing voices, or visions, but none of these come from God. Finally, the night of the spirit is the worst,

because the person really doesn't know whether or not he or she is doing the right thing. Meanwhile, the soul is purged from sin by entering this cloud of unknowing.

My dad went through this while in the monastery, but also afterwards, for many years. I remember him telling me that absolutely no one knows whether or not he or she is worthy of God's love. What one priest told me was that it was God's grace and his love for us that made us worthy. But in my dad's case, he was plagued with self-doubt all his life. All those years of confrontation with God, who appears to the mystic as darkness, almost wore him out.

However, he told me that he did get signs from God during his life. The signs that he received were always under the form of a ray of sunlight. For instance, in September 1975, his cousin Phoebe Wright had died of breast cancer, and my parents were the executors of her will. Now there was a valuable diamond ring that she had bequeathed to my parents and they couldn't find it among her things. For two weeks they searched for it, and it was nowhere to be found. So one afternoon, my father was sitting alone in their living room, doing nothing, but wondering where that ring might be. Suddenly, the sun began shining in the room, inconspicuously, and my dad noticed there was a ray of sunshine that landed on a bookshelf, right beside my dad's chair. Therefore, my dad wasn't thinking of anything special or expecting anything, and he simply reached over and grabbed the book on the shelf on which the sun was landing. He opened the book at random – and there was the diamond ring!

My father was close to God, but almost always serious. It was scary sometimes. He had big black eyes that saw right through you. But as I said,

he could weep very easily. He was extremely sensitive, although very disciplined.

Finally, after fourteen long years in the monastery, he had enough, and a year before he was supposed to be ordained a priest, he left the orders. His digestive system was all screwed up, for one thing, and he got a break. I once met one of his colleagues who told me he always thought my dad was going to become a bishop. Dad told me that all his adult life he had struggled to become a priest – and suddenly he was facing a brick wall. His dream did not come true.

After he left the orders, he often went to consult Brother André at Saint Joseph's Oratory about his vocation. By then he was 28. The year was 1937. And the world was on the brink of war.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW MAN

In the thirties, all over Europe and America, the concept of the new man was appearing and was announced by the false prophets of fascism and communism. These two mass movements were clashing, although they were both born from German ideas. Demonstrators and rioters rushed through the streets, organized rallies and wanted to bring down the empires of the rich and the corruption of democracy.

A Spanish writer called José Ortega y Gasset wrote a book entitled *The Revolt of the Masses*, in which he predicted that the masses had come of age and were now the movers of history. Nietzsche, Feuerbach and Marx each responded to the new theory of evolution by adapting it to their own agendas. By the thirties, dictators like Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini became known and were challenging democracy. The people of the masses were all equal under the aegis of the demagogues. New media like radio and movies became instruments of mass manipulation. While the world's economies were reeling, people were desperate for solutions.

Meanwhile, even King Edward VIII was a Nazi sympathizer and was photographed showing his niece Elizabeth how to give the Heil Hitler salute when she was eight years old – she grew up to be crowned the Queen.

Then it seems many of the great writers in America, from Dos Passos to Hemingway, were including anti-Semitic passages in their novels. And after publishing *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck turned around and wrote *In Dubious Battle*, in which he criticized both unions and communism.

In Montreal, Adrien Arcand, the leader of the Canadian Nazi Party, organized rallies and badmouthed the Jewish population. During that time some Jewish intellectuals were members of the Communist Party, only to move to upper Westmount after the War.

And in 1933, Cardinal Pacelli, who became pope Pius XII, signed the Concordat with Hitler's representatives by which the Catholic bishops in Germany promised to limit the activities of the priests to religious duties and to swear allegiance to whoever was leader of Germany.

So what was going on here? It was a bit like Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*.

Meanwhile, my dad left the safety of the cloister and was sent out into the world on a ship of fools, to cope with a changed political conjecture, when he had not read a newspaper in fourteen years and had no idea who were the new rulers of the planet. He believed he had blue blood, so he was wary of the Communists. But who else was out there?

A doctor told him there was a group of young intellectuals he might be interested in, so he attended a couple of meetings of the Nazi Party. The room where they met reeked of cigar smoke and the speaker was ranting about the story of David and Goliath in the Bible. He described David as a sneaky little Jew who used a sling shot to slay the beautiful, handsome giant Goliath – but wait a minute, my dad thought, this wasn't the interpretation he had heard about in the monastery! So my dad was cautious and went to consult a Jesuit priest he had met and asked him who were these people. The priest had been to Germany and warned my father not to get involved with the Nazis – they were dangerous! He had attended events organized by them and had seen how they manipulated the media and used underhanded tactics

to sway the masses. They lied and were violent. So my father never went there again.

When Markland left the orders, he did manual labour for Décarie farms, which made up what is now NDG in Montreal. Then he was a door-to-door salesman, selling household products. After that it was suggested he should be a playwright for Radio-Canada, because they needed material for the new radio medium. He would go to the library and write historical plays which were broadcast from 1939 to 1941. This went well for a while, until one day a producer stole his idea for a radio show, so my father quit.

But during that time, he was active in the Chamber of Commerce, where he met people like Michel Chartrand, who became a union leader in the sixties. At Radio-Canada, he also met Félix Leclerc, who had to wait for two years before selling one of his plays, although he had six hundred radio plays ready to go. Finally, Félix was fed up and moved to France, where he was recognized and became a star.

My father must have felt lost and confused in this brave new world, where all the traditional values of the past were washed away by the tides of progress. He did join the *Ordre de Jacques Cartier* which was a secret organization that used non-violent means to help the oppressed. They used the same tactics as the Freemasons to put their members in positions of power and prestige. This is how they created a French Canadian elite and operated behind the scenes to promote the rights of Francophones and help people who were suffering unjustly. It was comparable to the Knights of Columbus except it was not based in the United States. It was also a bit like the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. At the time French Canadians were blocked from managerial positions by the

Freemasons because they were largely Catholic. The situation was not at all like today; the Quiet Revolution had not happened yet.

So my dad heard that the federal government was hiring translators in the new Translation Bureau in Ottawa, so he applied and after being told to come back a year later, he passed the exam and worked as an English-French translator for six months. Then he was promoted to a managerial position, as a Section Head. They transferred him from General Translation to the War Department and then to Health and Welfare in the fifties and Employment and Immigration in the sixties. Eventually, there was a competition for a position opening the new Montreal Division in 1964, where he started with a team of six employees and he built it up into an office of three hundred employees. He remained there until he retired in 1970.

He never discussed the challenges he faced in government. He was always very careful not to tell anyone which party he voted for, because he did not want to get laid off from his job. He had to be clever as a serpent and meek as a dove whenever journalists interviewed him because saying the wrong thing could get him in trouble. Plus he worked as a civil servant during World War II until the October Crisis. As the government posters said during the War, "Loose lips sink ships."

He would come home after a long day's work exhausted and frustrated. He would sit down and fall asleep before supper. He didn't sleep well at night and was up before dawn. You could set a clock by him – he was so regular.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ISABELLE

When my father arrived in Ottawa to work for the Translation Bureau, he was lonely. Changing cities is never easy, especially if you don't have a friend or know a resource person to guide you around. My dad would work all day and then have supper alone in a restaurant, any restaurant.

At one point, he used to eat in a Greek restaurant on Elgin Street, and made friends with the owner. This gentleman had a brother who came from Cyprus, and at the time when this island country off the coast of Greece lost its status as a country, the brother's passport was no longer valid and the brother was put in jail. He was jailed because the government did not know what else to do with him. So the restaurant owner asked my father to help him. He figured my dad could do something, because he was then chief translator at Employment and Immigration. Therefore, my father took the initiative of approaching the head of the department, the Minister, and asked him to intervene with the authorities to release the brother of his friend from prison. And he did. The restaurant owner's brother was soon set free. As a result that restaurant served my dad free meals for many, many years later. This was the type of social service the *Ordre de Jacques-Cartier* did secretly.

My dad also got to know Charlotte Whitton, the Mayor, and she was a real character. One night, she got arrested because she had won the municipal election and drove down Bank Street in the middle of the night honking her horn full blast to celebrate. Markland told me that whenever she met him, she would always repeat the same thing, that my mother's cousin in Renfrew should have married her fiancée even though he was a Protestant. Mayor Whitton was also quoted as saying that all a woman has to do to

outdo a man is to be smarter than him and work twice as hard; but luckily, for most women this comes easily.

Meanwhile, in Ottawa, there was a young lady 34 years old who worked in the government, in the department which evolved into the Canada Revenue Agency, and she was single. Her grandfather had been a ship captain on the Saint Lawrence River and her father had worked for the federal government at the turn of the last century in the Yukon during the Gold Rush in the Klondyke. After three years he came back to Ottawa and had saved up \$ 3,000, enough to buy a three storey house at 634 MacLaren Street and furnish it, and with the extra money, he bought my grandma a fur coat. Then he settled down and got married and worked as a draughtsman in the government. The young lady, one of his three daughters, had had a few boyfriends but none of them was ever up to snuff. She was waiting for someone special. She took evening courses for her own interest and concluded at her age that she would have to be single for the rest of her life. She had heard of my father, because she used to listen to his plays on the radio at night. But she was lonely too.

One morning, my dad was walking to work and at one street corner, he and another pedestrian called John Allan almost got run over by a speeding car. They both stopped in their tracks, right on time – and then struck up a conversation as they kept walking together.

The other gentleman was an RCMP officer and got to asking my father where he worked, and he replied that he was a translator in the government. The officer was employed as a musician in the RCMP orchestra. So the officer asked him if he could have the lyrics of a piece of classical music translated. It was the opera Aida, and my dad said he could arrange that. Then the officer asked my dad if he had a girlfriend, and my

dad said no, he didn't. So the man in uniform told him he knew a young lady who was available. And that was the young lady who worked in the government.

That is how my dad met the lady who became my mom.

Almost a year after they met, they got married. At first, they lived in an apartment in Hull, on the other side of the Ottawa River, and that is where my sister was born and lived for the first few years. After three years, I came around and my father's mother gave my dad \$ 7,000 and he bought a house on Hickory Street in what was then called Ottawa West. And that is where I grew up. It was 1948, and my dad worked for the government down the street on Carling Avenue. He rented out the second storey of our house to a gentleman called Mr Slade and his family. And this gentleman taught me English when I was three years old. He did it while he was gardening in the backyard one summer and I was watching.

In the afternoon sometimes my mom would invite people over for a cup of tea, like priests or the ladies in her bridge club or her literary coterie. I had to be on my best behaviour at those times. Other times in the afternoon my mother would take a break from the housework and read me passages from the Bible. She wanted me to be well brought up. And she also wanted me to make a good impression on her friends – I was brought up with a silver spoon in my mouth.

My dad would leave to walk to work every morning, and the minute he left, I would begin to cry. And Dad could hear me crying as he walked down Breeze Hill all the way to Carling Avenue. One day my mother asked me whom I liked better, my mom or my dad? And I replied my dad. She did a double take but didn't say anything.

As they say, “*Les jeux sont faits, rien ne va plus !*”

## CHAPTER SIX

### DENOMINATION AND LANGUAGE

Around 1960, my uncle Wilfrid, my mom's brother, a devout Catholic priest, was stationed in a parish in Vars, Ontario, a village of two hundred people twenty miles from Ottawa. Sometimes I spent summer vacation there, and used to hang around with the local boys. One night, there were four or five of us talking to the man in charge of the small train station and he asked which church we went to. I said, "Catholic," another kid said, "Anglican" and so forth. Then the old man asked the last boy, "And you go to which church?" And the little boy protested, "No, no, I go to United."

It was very important back then to identify with a denomination, and our priest at *Sainte Famille* in Ottawa spent a lot of time in the pulpit screaming against "mixed marriages." This meant marrying a Protestant or an Anglo. And sure enough, thirty years later, I married an American lady whose father was Episcopalian, and we eventually got divorced. No doubt my parish priest was right. LOL.

In 1953, I was five years old, and a North Vietnamese Catholic priest called Father Nghat lived with our family for nine months. I remember he slept in my room and I was moved to a bed in the hall. His whole family in Vietnam had been murdered by the Viet Cong. He was very quiet and rarely said anything. He was studying theology at a Catholic university in Ottawa and my dad volunteered to have him stay with us. But that is all I remember.

I also remember my father pacing back and forth, raising his voice about the so-called Protestant neighbours who mowed their lawns on Sundays. I don't know how he could tell they were Protestant.

Then there is a parable of the Buddha in which a man is struck with a poison arrow and a doctor offers to heal him. The injured man asks however, “I can’t let you treat me until you tell me what town you are from and what country. Then I need to know what language you speak. And I need to know what is your religion and what are your political views, what colour you are and what your nationality is.” While the man is asking all these questions, the poison takes effect – and the man dies.

So just as it was important in the fifties to belong to a given church, it was of supreme importance whether you spoke this or that language. My mother would tell me about the Freemasons and the Orangemen who used to march down her street when she was young. Her mother, that is my grandmother, was a French Canadian who could not speak French because when she was growing up there was a law in Ontario called Bill 17, according to which it was forbidden to speak French in schools in Ontario, just like today in Quebec, Bill 101 forbids speaking another language than French in some places in the province of Quebec. Some people are quite pigheaded about language issues today. It was the same thing a hundred years ago.

Just for the record, some Catholics are still opposed to Jews in our day and age. In the Gospel of John, Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob and he tells her, “Salvation is of the Jews.” And for the people who believe that the Jews killed Christ, it is written that Jesus said, “No man takes my life. I lay it down of my own accord, only to take it up again after three days.”

My mom and dad fought for French rights in Ontario back then. I remember my dad and his friend Mr Jodouin printing up pamphlets to distribute at French parent-teacher meetings all over the province. Every

weekend they would drive to places like Kapuskasing or Temiskamingue or Sault Sainte-Marie and organize meetings to promote French Catholic education.

Eventually, he was recognized and I remember that in 1959, he was asked to go to Morocco to represent Canada at an international United Nations-sponsored conference that year. One or two years later he took me with him to New York City where he represented our country again. At a third conference a year or so later he brought me with him again to Detroit Michigan. Then when I was around thirteen, he was one of the talking heads on a French TV show called "*Les Idées en marche.*" I remember one Sunday afternoon the panel talk show was on and my father had us watch it. However I was too young to understand what he was saying or what anyone was saying on the air. And in 1956, he felt validated because he was decorated by pope Pius XII for his volunteer work for the Church.

On the down side, I also remember one Sunday afternoon around 1959, when on CBC television there was a documentary show about Black Power and we could see hundreds of Black people in a church chanting "Black Power! Black Power!" while listening to a fiery speaker talking to them about something I knew nothing about – and my dad jumped out of his armchair and turned off the TV set with all his might. Another time, I was listening to Tennessee Ernie Ford singing the great union song "Sixteen Tons" on the radio and my father burst into the room and slammed off the radio, screaming in French that it was "blasphemers' music!" Who was this man and what was going on here? I wondered.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE AUSTERITY SYNDROME

My mother once explained to me that my father believed that if he did everything correctly, he would be saved. She showed me his handwriting and pointed out to me how he dotted the i's and crossed the t's. He was a plodder and did things methodically and slowly, just the way he had been taught. He paid attention to every little detail and made sure things were in order. He had once read a psychology book entitled *Le Gouvernement de soi-même*, in which they taught a cerebral approach to life, rather than resorting to intuition. He believed your heart is in your brain and that the presence of God within you is your conscience. Meanwhile, the Bible says, "If your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart." He carried around his obsessions for correctness, and went to confession to a priest once a week – and got a haircut once a week too.

His soul was a barren land, a land that underwent a drought, even though it was thirsty for the rain of God's grace. A lot of men who lived through World War II and who survived the Great Depression were very disciplined – they had to be and carried what Rudyard Kipling thought was the white man's burden. Because if they carried a lot of secrets, you could scratch the surface and find a lot of prejudice too. Few of them were exempt from it and most wouldn't cross the colour line.

Jack Kerouac discussed this in the fifties. He and his friends were more adventurous and went into the ghettos and discovered bebop music and all the wonderful culture of Blacks. But my dad saw Communists under every bed and never even told his family whom he voted for, because he was so afraid of losing his government job. And to the day he died, he believed the Jews killed Christ. There was no reasoning with him – his mind was made up. And he also believed – like a lot of Catholics – that

Franco was a great man because he had saved Spain from communism. Meanwhile, the Catholics whispered hushed up stories about Cardinal Minzensty versus the Communist government in Hungary, and about the Viet Cong in Vietnam.

The times were called the Cold War because right after the Allies defeated the Axis countries in World War II, Winston Churchill went to America and gave speeches to influential people and warned them that the Enemy was no longer the Nazis but rather the Soviets. And the West realigned itself and began an arms race against the Communist countries, while both East and West supplied arms to smaller warring countries to spread their own spheres of influence.

In Africa and in all the colonies of the European countries, the people shrugged off the dominance of the colonial powers. That is how the decolonization movement came to places like Quebec. Television brought revolution into every living room and the world became a global village.

Like many fathers, I suppose, Markland saw Elvis's gyrating pelvis on the Ed Sullivan show and immediately turned off the TV set. He was always putting out fires around him. Movies like *The Manchurian Candidate* described brainwashing and the threat of communism to America in those days. There was a wave of propaganda books and movies, from *1984* to *Lord of the Flies*, while many artists, filmwriters and actors were blacklisted and brought before the House of unAmerican Activities because they were accused of being fellow travellers and supporting communism. Meanwhile in the Soviet block, there were similar trials charging artists and writers with being spies for the West and sending dissidents to the Gulag.

My dad believed anything leaders said. One day he came home from work and the pope was giving a speech on the radio. I was an infant and cried out, "Papa !" and my dad immediately yelled, in French, "Shut up, Robert! The pope is on the radio!" So a couple of years later I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up, a garbageman or the pope.

Markland never found peace of mind, because life was a struggle. He was earning his living and supporting a family. Marcuse was right in denouncing "the aggressive performances of earning a living." My dad was driven by his sense of duty, as a Christian and as a citizen. You didn't look to the right or to the left. You kept your blinders on at all times. In 1953, when he bought our first TV set, he was 44 years old, and I turned five that year. He would quote Jesus as saying you have to give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God. However, in his opinion, giving unto Caesar meant you might have to snitch on Communists to the authorities.

We were an uptight little family. But in the sixties all this was to change, for our generation at least. And the bottom line is that in any generation, there is nothing wrong with being a Catholic; the problem is that all Catholics have human nature, and human nature is a mess.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE FOUNDING MEMBER

Meanwhile, Mister Smith was busy. Apart from being the head of the translation sections of one government department after another, he was founding and managing various organizations to support the French Canadian community in Ontario and Quebec, the translators of these provinces and French-speaking families and their children. For instance, on March 30, 1965, he founded the *Fédération des associations de parents et instituteurs de l'Ontario* as well as a dozen other organizations in New Brunswick, Manitoba and elsewhere. He was constantly travelling during his time off, to champion the cause of the French language and the Catholic Church. The reason he did this was that Francophones needed to be organized to be able to survive in an English-speaking world. French Canadians were often treated as second-class citizens. There was a French-speaking elite in Canada, which was educated with the *cours classique* and held certain professional jobs, as doctors, lawyers or professors, but the vast majority of French Canadians were labourers and disenfranchised.

My father was also one of the founders of the STQ, which became the OTTIAQ, the *Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec*. The reason this professional association was created is that translators were not recognized; too often, companies would have their translations done by a bilingual secretary who was not paid nor qualified to do professional renditions into another language.

He was also a founder of Termium, the computerized data and terminology bank, that was originally based on the big mainframe computer of the *Université de Montréal* and provided accurate terms in several languages for translators who asked for this service, including those of the Secretary of State. This terminology service still exists nowadays.

Then my dad founded the *Association Canadienne-française de l'Ontario* and the *Corporation des traducteurs professionnels du Québec*; the *Association de parents et instituteurs (API) de la paroisse Saint-Gérard d'Ottawa*, 1943, the *Société des traducteurs et interprètes du Canada*, the *Fédération des associations de parents et instituteurs de langue française de l'Ontario*, which is today called the *Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario*, 1951-1959. He was also a member of the general board of the *Union internationale des organismes familiaux*, he was the Secretary of the *Chambre de commerce de Hull* and the list goes on. He was forever trying to advance and help the French-Canadian community, and always through peaceful means.

Incidentally, he did not support the various movements for Quebec independence, because he believed that in the sixties a certain percentage of these groups were Marxist-Leninist. He had studied the possibility of an independent Quebec when he was a member of the Hull Chamber of Commerce, and they knew it was economically feasible, but personally, my dad was viscerally opposed to unions or communism for religious reasons.

Now, apart from the pressures of his position in the government, my dad was always there for me, especially in later years when I became mentally ill and got into trouble. For instance, in Chicago in the fall of 1975, I was in jail and falsely charged with being a hit man for the mafia. My dad went all the way there and testified to the authorities that I was never in the mafia and that I was simply mentally ill; they turned me over to his custody and we flew back to Canada together, where I was treated in a hospital. Another time, in the summer of 1971, in Oshawa, Ontario, I was held on vagrancy charges while hitch hiking, and rather than let me be put in jail for thirty days, my dad showed up and explained to the Prosecutor that I had mental health problems, and I was committed to a hospital in Montreal instead. And a third time, I had been travelling through the Rockies in 1977

and was stuck in Calgary, Alberta, so my father provided me with an airplane ticket to fly back to Montreal, where I was hospitalized.

And that was the mission of the *Ordre de Jacques-Cartier*: to use positions of prestige and influence to help the oppressed. In these cases, charity began at home. For this assistance in time of need, I am forever indebted.

Another time, I had met a Persian refugee whose brother had escaped from Iran to dodge the draft and was stuck homeless and broke in Istanbul. So, I asked my dad to help this man out, and he wired him \$ 150 by Western Union. That was in 1983, and one more time, in 1968 I had met a deserter from the American army and this young man had caught the flu; he was very sick and my mother had him sleep in my bed while I slept elsewhere and she nursed him back to health for two weeks, until he got better.

Needless to write also that over the years, whenever I was in need, both my mom and dad were always there for me with moral support as well as financial assistance. When I was working as a translator in Winnipeg or in Fredericton, both my parents came to visit me if I was lonely. Because of my mental illness, there were times when I was not grateful for their help and even hostile, but they never were deterred from doing charity. And whenever I brought my friends home to meet my parents, they were always hospitable and my mother would cook them a good meal. My mom or dad never minded what nationality or what religion they were – the welcome mat was always extended. And sometimes I would smoke pot with my friends in the basement – my parents just ignored it. Their policy was to keep the communication lines open – no matter what.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MY DAD AND THE SIXTIES

My mom explained to me that whenever elections were coming up, my dad would sit down with her and show her who to vote for, so that her vote would not cancel out his. Whereas today a woman's place is as a judge at the Supreme Court or as a mayor at City Hall, my sister had to study philosophy at St. Paul's University in Ottawa.

Markland thought the problem with feminists was that some of them went so far as to cease believing in marriage. But after reading Ibsen's *A Doll House*, anyone could see beyond the concept of marriage. He never thought of doing the dishes or doing any housework. Both times that my mother gave birth, he was not in the same room. When my sister was born, he even had shock treatment. He would never cook anything and maybe he didn't notice that women today do untraditional jobs. He thought this took jobs away from husbands and fathers.

He was not really involved in our upbringing. He was very involved, however, in Catholic education by spreading parent-teacher associations. I guess that means not giving kids sex education and making sure they didn't read books that were on the Index.

By the time my sister studied philosophy, we had moved to Montreal and one night, over dinner, she and my dad had an argument about philosophy and she raised her voice. So my dad got up and started slapping her face. Within a few seconds, I jumped up and gave him a flying tackle and he went falling backwards into my bedroom. Then I stood there with my fists up and yelled at him to get up and fight me. He was in shock. That evening my sister and I walked out of the house and went for a walk. You were not allowed to contradict our father.

A friend of mine remembers that my mother would get very nervous whenever my father was around. She was intimidated by him. On the other hand, I went out for breakfast with him one time before work, and noticed he was very chummy with the waitresses and flirted with them. One night a couple of years after we moved to Montreal, he came home a bit drunk and carelessly started telling us that he had gone out dancing with some woman from his office and then – he realised what he was saying and there was a moment of silence. Then my mother looked at me and my sister and my sister looked around at me and my father – and then my mother said solemnly and strictly that we were going to have supper – and she turned to my father and declared they would talk about this later that evening. After that incident, my father no longer slept with my mother in their room. He had crossed the line.

In 1972, my father quit his job at the Translation Bureau. One day he learned the authorities in Ottawa had hired a supporter of the Liberal Party who was barely bilingual and they told my father to train him into his position. My father understood that they were getting rid of him and took two years of unused sick leave and quit. He had heard he wasn't pushing the translators hard enough to work and the new emphasis was on production. What one of my dad's employees told me was that under Mr Smith they had time to write elegant translations and that it was paradise working for him. But the new manager, who had worked for the Liberal Party during election time, just tightened the screws.

My father had built up the Montreal Division of the Translation Bureau from six to three hundred employees. At the same time, the FLQ planted bombs regularly in Montreal and often targeted federal institutions. My parents would receive death threats on the phone in the middle of the night, because my dad was a higher up in the federal government in a

province where the independence movement applied itself to get rid of the fact of Canada. One day I went to visit my parents in NDG, and there were about fifteen RCMP police cars parked near their house. Another time, in 1969, a bomb went off in a stairwell at Loyola College a few minutes before students finished classes. This did not relieve my dad's paranoia.

## CHAPTER TEN

### RETIREMENT

Once my father escaped the federal government trap, he started to breathe easier and to listen when we talked. He worked here and there, teaching translation at the *Université de Montréal*, freelancing as a translator, and he began to travel to Europe with my mom to visit my sister, who spent time in Germany. He could simply phone the dispatcher at the Secretary of State and ask for a contract. He got interested in my life and my sister's. He started to relax.

By 1978, we started to communicate, and I would play Bob Dylan records for him and he would appreciate them. I remember listening with him to Thelonious Monk playing a solo and my dad and I bonded once again. Within a year, he turned me on to translation, and I went back to university to study translation theory; he knew some of my teachers, like Irène Spilka or the director of the linguistics department, André Clas. I started to think normally and logically. I was then able to work as a translator. All this transformation took years and my dad grew old gracefully. He was no longer reacting to his passions or always trying to control his surroundings. Basically, he learned to let go and let God. Meanwhile, I was administered a different medication called modecate in 1977 that was from a new generation of neuroleptics and I underwent a remission from schizophrenia.

I remember giving him as a present *The Complete Stories of Stephen Leacock* and then watching him actually reading some of these texts and laughing wholeheartedly. Another time, he and my mother and I took a *calèche* ride down the winding road that goes from the top of the mountain in Montreal all the way to Parc Avenue, and being driven through the snow, my dad was laughing and enjoying himself. He had not lost the

capacity to have fun. One time, on Christmas day, our family was having its get together, and my father and mother started to square dance and let their hair down.

My dad cashed in an insurance policy after I got my bachelor's degree in literature in 1969 and my parents could afford to go on a few vacations in Europe quite comfortably. They were no longer punishing themselves and had some good years together before they got sick and passed away. They had happy times and met interesting people. They ate well and got some rest.

My dad had friends throughout Canada and met with several of them on a friendly basis in the eighties. He knew people like Georges Forest in Saint-Boniface and when I was working in Winnipeg, Georges and his wife Anita helped me out a lot. He also had nieces and nephews in the Vancouver area and met with them as well. He knew people like Father Morrissette who founded the Arts library for the University of Ottawa and I saw them socializing and exchanging a few words.

Finally, one Sunday afternoon at four o'clock on December 10, 1989, I received a call from my sister – my father had passed away at the age of 80. That evening I slept over at my cousin Jean's house and I was confused. I kept trying to understand: "Let me see here – my dad is alive and I am dead – no, I am alive and my dad is alive – no, he is dead and I am dead." I couldn't sleep as thoughts of denial went through my wretched mind.

My father died of a heart attack after Sunday morning mass. He had already had four heart attacks since December 1980. His last one was on the same day that Ceaucescu the Communist leader of Romania died. It was also a few days after the massacre at Polytechnique in Montreal. A young

mysogynist madman had shot and killed fourteen women in a university and their funeral happened at the same time as my dad's. This meant there was funeral music on television in the bus station on the same day that I was travelling to Ottawa for my own dad's funeral. It was very surrealistic, given my confused state of mind.

On the day of the funeral we drove by limousine from Ottawa to Longueuil in order to bury my father. In Longueuil we visited some relatives who explained that the fairy tale my dad told us about having blue blood was exactly that – a fairy tale. Somehow what they said made sense.

One night during this trip to Ottawa and back, I dreamed that I was on Rideau Street in Ottawa and had to climb up scaffolds and up ladders to cross the street, which was flooded with a river covering the pavement. The street was under construction and my mind was being restructured.

Rest in peace, Markland.

**PART TWO – APPENDIX**

**RANDOM SKETCHES**

**CHAPTERS ELEVEN TO TWENTY-FOUR**

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### EPILOGUE

What is the legacy of my father, Markland Joseph Smith? First of all, he personally touched a great many people, from many walks of life. He was a listener, and made many friends. In his old age, he never phoned these people, but at his funeral, the church was full. There must have been three hundred people, acquaintances, relatives or friends. In the newspaper there was a half-page article about him and his achievements. He left behind him several organizations and associations that he had founded and directed, where he had served. When I worked in government, it happened often enough that people who knew him testified to me about his wisdom and ability as a leader. I mentioned the lady translator who told me it was paradise under his governance. In Winnipeg, Ottawa and Montreal, I met translators who expressed to me their great respect for my dad. And anywhere in Canada, whenever translators used Termium to find an esoteric term, they may not have realised it, but they were benefiting from his services – even today.

I personally have been inspired by his example, and have found faith in God. I had lots and lots of spiritual conversations with the man, and admired his thoughtfulness and depth. After he passed away, my mother told me she was hoping to go to heaven riding on his coat tails.

Through his good works in the *Ordre de Jacques-Cartier*, he helped dozens and dozens of people in need, people in all parts of the world and people from all professions. Those who were aware of his intercessions would gladly testify to his generosity and kindness. Later on in life, whenever I ended up between jobs, I knew I could count on him to assist me personally and financially. I had a friend who was intellectually challenged, and he wanted my dad to adopt him, so he also could receive a handout.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### EULOGY FOR A HERO

One Sunday afternoon, around 1959, as we were watching television in our living room, there was a documentary about a new social phenomenon in the United States. My dad and I and the whole family were watching this show, when the camera showed a church full of people chanting, “BLACK POWA! BLACK POWA!” They looked pretty militant and determined. I don’t remember what the news commentator was saying, but I was interested, having never been exposed to these ideas. Immediately, my dad jumped out of his chair and ran over to the television set and violently turned off the set. He was visibly very upset – and I didn’t know why.

There were other expressions of black culture that appealed to me around that time. Little Stevie Wonder, as he was known then, was only about ten years old, when he produced a 45 r.p.m. record called “Fingertips” and my friends and I thought it was a cool song, especially since it was recorded by someone our own age.

There was a movie featuring Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis called “The Defiant Ones,” in which two prisoners escaped from jail and were handcuffed together. Sidney Poitier portrayed a black prisoner, and Tony Curtis, a white one. They had conflict which added drama to the story, but the message was that they needed each other to escape the authorities. Neither one of them could make it on his own. Symbolically, it was a message of solidarity.

In the early fifties, a North Vietnamese priest came to live at our house for nine months. Apparently, all his family had been killed by the NLF and he was studying theology at a university in Ottawa. I didn’t understand what he was doing there or why he slept in my room, while I slept in the hallway.

Another time, a missionary came to visit our house and described being tortured by the Chinese authorities. Also, my dad would confide in people

that he had blue blood – or so he thought. It boosted his self - confidence. He had been decorated by pope Pius XII for his volunteer work in 1956, and his credentials included being royalty. He had studied for the priesthood and we never did find out why he left the orders at age 28. He was a boss in the federal government but they got rid of him because he didn't push his employees hard enough to produce. He was a pillar of the community, which helped me achieve in grade school.

Like all kids, I believed that my father was important. I saw him on television on a talking - heads show: he sat on a panel with a few other men and discussed ideas that were over my head when I was nine or ten years old. I idolized my father. He could do no wrong. He was, well, bigger than life.

However, my dad began disappointing me. He took me to New York, on a trip to a UN - sponsored convention about education in which he represented Canada. He took me to the offices of the United Nations, and I was allowed to sit in the spot where the Secretary of the UN, Dag Hammersholdt, meditated. We went to the Little Church around the Corner for Sunday morning mass.

But an incident happened the next time he took me on a trip to a UN - sponsored convention. He was talking to a priest, who asked him, in French, how his kids were doing in school. He must have imagined I was hard of hearing because he answered, "My daughter is doing really well, but this one here is kind of slow." I tried to protest and was hushed up in short order.

I thought of course I was his pride and joy, because when he came home from work, I ran upstairs to his bedroom and fetched his slippers, which I put on his feet as he sat with his feet up. And he would sit me on his knee while he smoked cigarettes. I always had pulmonary diseases because of his constant smoking, like whooping cough, pneumonia, bronchitis, fevers and colds, of course. But I wanted his approval. He was my hero.

His employees would sometimes come for dinner and speak to him with deference. I certainly didn't earn respect like that from my colleagues at school. I may have been a high achiever academically, but I was useless in sports. For instance, when our class played baseball, the two best players were appointed captains of the two opposing teams. They in turn picked the best players for their teams. I was always last to be picked, right after a kid who was blind. So I wasn't very popular. There was a girl who liked me. She on the other hand was very popular. I would walk to school with her every morning and carry her schoolbooks. But when we got within a hundred and fifty feet of the schoolyard, where all her friends were watching, she would take back her books and tell me, "OK Peewee, walk fifteen paces

behind me." I guess she called me Peewee because I was no giant. I was in awe of her and found her cute. I had a crush on her.

Once in a while, my mother's friend Jeanne Sauvé would come for dinner, but my sister and I were not allowed to listen in on the conversation after dinner. We had to go to bed right after supper, because my mom's friend would get into arguments with my dad. She would criticize the clergy and of course, my dad would defend the Church and there was a lot of harsh arguing going on, as my sister and I sat at the top of the stairs, listening in.

Sometimes, the Jehovah's witnesses would come knocking at our door and my dad would whip out his bible and scream at them and they would scream at him for a whole afternoon. My cousin and I would be upstairs in the bathroom looking out the window and listening to my father's apologetics.

What was embarrassing was that my dad knew the mass better than the priest and at Sunday mass, he would sing the Latin hymns louder than anyone else in the church and if everyone else in the parish was sitting down, my dad would insist we stand up.

After Sunday mass, we would come home to dinner and everyone would gossip about a parish member who was effeminate. "Imagine that! He lives

with his parents and has his own telephone!!” Nevertheless, this guy turned out to be one of the smartest guys in the parish and got a Ph.D.; he became a professor at the University of Ottawa.

Sometimes on Saturday afternoon, dad would take me to do the stations of the cross with him. And when he reached the twelfth station, where Jesus is crucified, my dad would extend his arms as though he was crucified also, and he would gush with tears. I wondered what was wrong with him.

If I got in trouble – for instance if a neighbour saw me smoking cigarettes with my friends, and reported it to my mother – my mother would side with me and tell the neighbour to mind his own business. But if I got into trouble and my father heard about it, he would go one step further and denounce me to the authorities.

One day, I asked my uncle what he thought about my father. He replied, “Robert, your dad has a heart of gold, but he is so narrow - minded that he can see through a keyhole with both eyes.” On the Lord’s day, if the neighbours were mowing their lawns, he would pace back and forth in our house, while he would scream insanely, “Those Protestants are mowing their lawns on Sunday!!”

Yet I wanted dad to be my friend. Once, he took me fishing and another time, he went into the backyard and threw the football around with me. I was very proud that day. And every school day, he would help me learn my catechism lessons.

I felt a deep loneliness because I knew my father didn’t understand certain things. One day when I was nine years old, he overheard me saying the word ‘fuck’ while talking with my friends. So, he took me into his office, which was at the back of the house, and did a crude drawing of a penis.

He explained to me what he knew about procreation. He said that when the penis gets hard, it ejaculates a little man into the vagina of the woman. I

giggled at first, but then I got really fascinated. And when the lesson was over, he advised me never to say the word ‘fuck,’ because only sailors say that. So I was privileged because now I knew something that my friends did not know.

I had mixed feelings. My dad was the door to privilege. On the other hand, his religious views were an embarrassment. A kid wants to feel cool. Parents always embarrass their children. Kids understand right away in life what is cool and how to be cool. But parents and other adults are always an obstacle to gaining cool points.

Kids are very conformist, especially when they are nine or ten. But when Elvis appeared on the Ed Sullivan show, my dad turned off the tv set again even though the camera blocked Elvis’s gyrating pelvis. I wanted to see Elvis, because everyone liked him. My dad had another agenda. No sex! No gyrating pelvises! My son wasn’t going to get corrupted right in our own living room.

It wasn’t easy. There was no one to talk to about this. I certainly wasn’t going to talk to a priest about it. After dad died, the whole family agreed he was in heaven! There wasn’t anything I could say to anyone. Everyone knew he was a saint.

## EPILOGUE

Recently, my family doctor and I were discussing my dad, and she told me, in French, “Listen, Mr. Smith, your father didn’t pull those ideas out of a hat. Those were the ideas that were prevalent in the thirties in Quebec.”

My father was influenced by Lionel Groulx, who was a leading intellectual among the French Canadians during my dad’s formative years. And being raised in a monastery, he never did go through adolescence properly. Any kind of rebellion or protest was strictly taboo. He felt he had to defend the Church against its many enemies. Today, I certainly wouldn’t want my own children to get corrupted either. And if I have a resentment against my

father, I did have a part to play in that conflict. I am not sure the baby boomers have solved any of the problems we were protesting about back then. “O brave new world, that has such people in it.”

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### PORTRAIT DE MON PÈRE

Je possède quelques photos de mon père. Je les conserve dans un album avec les autres photos de famille. Il y en a une qui dit beaucoup au sujet du caractère de papa. Elle a été prise le jour de mes noces avec Nancy Hough, le 5 septembre 1987; au moment où la photo a été prise, mon père descendait les marches de la chapelle avec ma mère. Toute sa volonté, tout son effort paraît dans la photo. Il fronce des sourcils, qui sont épais, noirs mais grisonnants. Il est chauve. Il y a quelques cheveux noirs, extrêmement courts, sur les côtés de la tête. Il se faisait couper les cheveux toutes les semaines. Il porte sa cravate éternelle, sempiternelle, qu'il n'ôtait jamais, même à la maison. Le nœud est parfait, le nœud d'un perfectionniste acharné. L'habit est sombre et sobre, comme mon père. Le bonhomme porte des lunettes noires et épaisses, qui encadrent des petits yeux perçants. L'expression de son visage indique que le monsieur fait un effort énorme pour être correct, tout en descendant l'escalier. La bouche crispée est celle d'un homme renfermé, refoulé, introverti. Aussi, il essaie d'avoir l'air jovial, même s'il s'est jamais amusé de sa vie. C'est un visage sérieux, trop sérieux, comme s'il s'apprêtait à me chicaner. Mais là, j'interprète ce que je vois dans la photo. En ce moment-là, le bonhomme avait soixante-dix-huit ans. Il était toujours sur son trente-six, de peur de révéler ses secrets personnels.

La première fois que j'ai vu mon père, je ne m'en souviens pas. Lui m'a raconté notre première rencontre. Il était derrière une vitre, et ma mère venait d'accoucher, au bout de cinquante-six heures de labeur. Je suis venu au monde en retard de trois semaines. Mon grand-père, le père de maman, était décédé le jour où je devais venir au monde. En plus, l'accouchement était très difficile. Ma sœur Claire était née par césarienne. Elle est mon aînée de trois ans. Après qu'elle est venue au monde, mon père a subi des traitements électrochocs. Toutefois, c'est ma mère qui a accouché. Mon père, Markland Joseph Smith, m'a raconté son impression de ma naissance. Le médecin me tenait dans les bras, et j'avais l'air fâché. Selon mon père. Et je pleurais fort, ce qui n'est pas surprenant, parce que, en 1948, les médecins avaient la fâcheuse habitude de donner une tape sur les fesses au nouveau-

né, afin qu'il crache tout ce qu'il a dans la bouche. De nos jours, il paraît que nous sommes plus civilisés, et une infirmière suce au bout d'un long tube en plastique ce que le bébé nouveau-né a dans la bouche. Autrement le bébé pourrait s'étouffer. De toute façon, mon père me regardait à travers la vitre, et il avait l'impression que je le jugeais, en lui disant : «C'est toi, le grand responsable!» En fait, mon père ne connaissait pas grand-chose à la génétique et il croyait que la femme jouait uniquement le rôle d'un réceptacle pour le bébé contenu dans le sperme. C'était une conception médiévale de la génétique. Alors, mon père se prenait pour le grand responsable. Quant à ma mère, elle devait être épuisée, au terme d'un accouchement qui avait duré aussi longtemps.

Cela, c'est du ouïe-dire. Évidemment, je ne me rappelle pas de ma naissance. Mais tout ça pour dire à quel point mon père se prenait au sérieux.  
\*

Son nom était Markland Joseph Smith. Joseph, c'était son grand-père à lui, Joseph Smith, qui était commis-voyageur. Apparemment, quand il rentrait à la maison au bout d'un voyage d'affaires de six mois, il donnait systématiquement la fessée à chacun des enfants, y compris le père de mon papa, que l'enfant ait été obéissant ou non pendant son absence.

Un jour, Joseph Smith est rentré de voyage et toute la famille s'était convertie au catholicisme. Alors Joseph Smith a plié bagages et est parti pour l'Australie. J'imagine qu'il a laissé mon arrière grand-mère avec de nombreux enfants. Cela s'était passé en Angleterre.

Un de ses fils s'appelait Sydney Joseph Smith. C'était mon grand-père, que je n'ai jamais rencontré en personne. Il est mort bien avant ma naissance. J'ai entendu des bribes au sujet de lui de la part de mon père, qui racontait une certaine version de sa vie à tout venant.

Sydney Smith et au moins un de ses frères, Eddy, ont émigré au Canada et se sont installés à Longueuil. Lui, Eddy, je l'ai connu et il est décédé quand j'avais seize ans. Il en avait quatre-vingt-cinq environ. Eddy était un comique, comme mon grand-père Sydney. Je me rappelle de voir mon grand-oncle

venir en visite. Assis autour de la table, nous nous esclaffions à l'entendre jouer de la cornemuse en se plaçant un doigt à la gorge et en se tenant le nez de l'autre main. Il imitait ainsi la cornemuse. Il racontait aussi des farces racistes, assez innocentes, mais qui en disait beaucoup sur l'éducation qu'a reçue mon père. Par exemple, il demandait : «What happens if you squeeze a lemon over a synagogue? All the juice run out.» Aujourd'hui, ce serait impensable de dire de telles choses, mais en 1900, je pense que beaucoup de nos ancêtres étaient antisémites.

En tout cas, un autre souvenir que j'ai d'Eddy Smith, c'est qu'il racontait que lorsqu'il allait chez un client pour conclure une vente, il attendait dans la salle d'attente et laissait son chapelet paraître dans sa poche de pantalon, pour s'assurer que l'affaire soit réussie. Ainsi, la secrétaire apercevait le chapelet qui dépassait l'ouverture de la poche et l'affaire était dans le sac.

Sydney Smith, lui, était comptable de métier mais n'a jamais pratiqué sa profession. Il était aussi artiste peintre et peignait des aquarelles assez bonnes. Je possède son diplôme du Montreal School of Arts and Manufacturing, qui est devenue l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal. Le diplôme est daté de 1899 et rédigé en anglais uniquement. Autre phénomène de l'époque. Si l'on se rend au Château Ramezay, dans le Vieux-Montréal, on apprend qu'en 1900, un tiers de Montréal était francophone, un deuxième tiers, à Westmount, était britannique, et l'autre tiers, à Pointe Saint-Charles, était peuplé d'Irlandais.

Mon père m'a raconté un anecdote qui fait preuve du sens d'humour de mon grand-père Sydney, ainsi que de la mentalité de l'époque vis-à-vis de la langue. Mon grand-père travaillait chez Nordheimer Pianos, à vendre des pianos. Or, mon grand-père était marié à une francophone et suivait des cours de français sur disque. Si un client francophone téléphonait au magasin, mon grand-père prenait l'appel. Puis il se mettait à réciter ses leçons de français au client qui n'y comprenait rien. «Jean va à la bibliothèque. La plume de ma tante est sur la table de mon oncle...» Et on s'imagine que le client à l'autre bout de la ligne s'indignait en demandant : «Quoi? Pardon? Pardon? Je veux acheter un piano...» Alors le blagueur raccrochait l'appareil

et disait aux autres employés, d'un ton assuré : «See? I took care of that!» (Cela se passait environ soixante-dix ans avant la Loi 101.)

Mon père m'a aussi raconté que Sydney et Eddy, les deux frères, avaient habité ensemble dans une maison de chambres. Selon eux, il y avait deux desserts, qu'on offrait tous les deux jours : «Sirop d'érable, compote aux pommes.» Le lendemain, c'était : «Compote aux pommes, sirop d'érable.» En tout cas, mon père trouvait ces anecdotes très drôles...

Sydney Smith était marié à une dame Ledoux, qui était la fille de Charles Ledoux. Lui, Charles, était millionnaire. Ses usines avaient bâti toutes les calèches qu'on voit encore dans le Vieux-Montréal et sur la montagne. Il paraît qu'il avait vendu au CPR le terrain au centre-ville où l'on a érigé la Gare Windsor du Canadien Pacifique. Quand il est décédé, il a laissé l'héritage à ma grand-mère. Toutefois, il a dû faire faillite parce que Henry Ford, aux États-Unis, construisaient des véhicules automobiles qui ont remplacé la calèche comme moyen de transport des riches de l'époque. En tout cas, en 1914, la guerre est déclarée, et le gouvernement nationalise les usines de Charles Ledoux pour y construire des chars d'assaut.

Ensuite, mon père, qui est né à Weredale Park, une petite rue au bord de Westmount, le 17 juin 1909, voit mourir son père devant lui à l'âge de quatorze ans. Mon père, Markland, était nommé après Markland Molson, qui était un homme d'affaires de l'époque que mon grand-père admirait. Ce M. Molson avait fondé les brasseries Molson ainsi que la Banque Molson, qui se trouvait à Place d'Armes, dans le Vieux-Montréal. En tout cas, mon père faisait ses études à l'Académie Saint-Léon, qui est maintenant l'École internationale, en face de l'hôtel de ville de Westmount. Il rentre chez lui un jour après l'école, son père Sydney lui demande comment ça s'était passé à l'école ce jour-là, et tombe raide mort. Sydney était assis dans son fauteuil, d'où il ne s'est jamais relevé. Il était âgé de 57 ans. Il laissait derrière lui mon père Markland, sa fille Marguerite, qui est décédée à l'âge de dix-sept ans, ainsi que sa fille Pauline.

Quand Charles Ledoux a fait faillite, la famille de mon père a déménagé de la rue Claremont à Westmount, qui était un quartier foiné, à la rue Saint-Hubert, un quartier francophone.

Mon père se retrouvait donc face à rien. À la maison, il y avait sa mère, sa grand-mère, la couturière, la bonne, ses deux sœurs – une maison peuplée de femmes. Ça le dérangeait. Voici qu'une dame de la paroisse offre de payer des études à mon père s'il devient moine franciscain. Lui, il saute sur la chance et s'inscrit au monastère. Il passera un certain temps au monastère de Rosemont puis à Trois-Rivières. En tout, il passe quatorze ans moine. D'après ce que m'ont dit ses collègues du monastère, ceux que j'ai rencontrés en tout cas, mon père, qui s'appelle maintenant le frère Charles, était heureux dans sa vie de moine. Un de ces vieux franciscains m'a même dit un jour beaucoup plus tard qu'il croyait que mon père deviendrait évêque. Lui, mon père, faisait pénitence. Il portait par exemple la silice. Ah, vous ne connaissez pas? Il s'agit d'une ceinture qu'on se serre autour de la taille, de plus en plus serrée, sauf que la ceinture porte des clous par en-dedans. Alors plus on serre la ceinture, plus ces clous s'enfoncent dans la chair du ventre. Pendant qu'on se martyrise comme cela, on réfléchit aux souffrances de Jésus sur la croix. Charmant, n'est-ce pas?

Mon père me raconte toutes sortes d'anecdotes au sujet du cloître. Parce qu'il s'agit bien d'un cloître. Un jour, il réside au monastère de Rosemont et sa sœur se marie en face, dans une église de l'autre côté de la rue. C'est Pauline, qui épouse Eddy Aubut. Mais l'abbé, c'est-à-dire le directeur du monastère, refuse à mon père la permission de traverser la rue et d'assister aux noces de sa sœur. Pourquoi? Pour faire pénitence. À l'époque, les gens croyaient qu'il faut souffrir pour Dieu, pour faire plaisir à Dieu. C'est une phase du mysticisme, de la nuit de l'âme et de la nuit de l'esprit. C'est ça – souffrir pour Dieu.

Mon père me raconte un autre incident. Pendant les repas dans un monastère, pas question de bavarder ensemble. Un lecteur lit la Bible à voix haute pendant que les autres mangent. On l'écoute lire. Or c'est le tour de mon père, le frère Charles, d'apporter la Bible et de faire la lecture pendant que ses collègues mangent. Voici que mon père oublie la Bible dans sa cellule,

dans sa chambre. Il s'étend à plat ventre devant l'abbé et demande d'être pardonné. Et l'abbé lui répond : «C'est bien, mon petit frère. Mais que ça ne vous arrive plus.»

Entre-temps, mon père étudie. Il avait déjà terminé un cours commercial à l'école secondaire, où il avait appris entre autres à dactylographier. Au monastère, il a appris des sujets comme la cosmogonie, qui est une matière médiévale selon laquelle la Terre est le centre de l'univers et les étoiles tournent autour. Même vieillard, mon père ne croira jamais à l'évolution. À tous les étés, quand il rentre chez lui en vacances, il commence par lire les quatre Évangiles (il y en avait originellement une douzaine). Il écrit sa thèse de maîtrise en théologie sur l'épître de Saint Jacques. Et il apprend les idées de l'époque, y compris le messianisme québécois. Ma mère me montre un jour une dissertation que mon père avait rédigée quand il était en rhétorique, et on y parle de la mission du peuple canadien français de faire régner le Christ au Canada et dans le monde (sic). On m'a déjà dit que mon père était un disciple, un fils spirituel du chanoine Lionel Groulx. Effectivement, j'ai fouillé dans la bibliothèque de mon père après sa mort, en 1989, et il y avait des volumes tels que L'appel de la race, et Notre maître le passé, de Lionel Groulx. Mais il y avait aussi un livre intitulé «L'infiltration gauchiste du Canada français», par un historien et traducteur ami de mon père nommé Robert Rumilly. Ce monsieur avait travaillé pour mon père au fédéral au Bureau de la traduction. Je n'ai jamais ouvert le livre, mais il me semble que le titre dit tout. Et mon père apprend au monastère à lutter contre les communistes. Et contre tout le monde. Il me racontera un jour que sa philosophie consiste à «résister à l'environnement». Il apprendra à avoir la tête dure.

En tout cas, mon père passe quatorze ans au monastère, jusqu'à l'âge de 28 ans. Il semble qu'à l'âge de quinze ans, il subit un coup de soleil et passe une semaine dans le coma. Il prétendra plus tard que cette expérience lui a causé du dommage au cerveau. Puis voici, tour de chapeau. Un an avant d'être ordonné prêtre, il lui reste seulement un cours de théologie à suivre, sur l'hyperdulie, ou le culte de la Sainte Vierge, et il quitte le cloître. On ne sait pas trop pourquoi. Il racontera toute sa vie à notre famille qu'il a eu des problèmes digestifs causés par l'extrême rigueur du régime. Par exemple,

pendant la Dépression de 1929, les Franciscains, qui sont un ordre qui quête ses biens, n'ont rien à manger sauf de la citrouille pendant trois mois. Ils mangent de la tarte à la citrouille, de la salade à la citrouille, de la citrouille à tous les repas – et mon père n'aime pas la citrouille!

Ensuite, mon père nous raconte qu'il aurait fait une dépression nerveuse. Puis, il me raconte quand j'ai dix-sept ans qu'il aurait eu des amitiés particulières pendant son séjour au monastère. Et deux semaines avant de mourir, en décembre 1989, il raconte tout à ma mère. Il sait qu'il va mourir. Il cesse de porter la cravate tous les jours. Il cesse de se faire couper les cheveux une fois par semaine. Il flâne dans la maison, en robe de chambre, sans se raser. Et il se vide le cœur. Il raconte à ma mère qu'il y avait tant d'homosexualité au monastère que cela troublait le frère Charles. En fin de compte, moi je constate que le fait de quitter le monastère à ce moment-là fait son affaire. Il a obtenu une licence en philosophie et en théologie. Mais de là à se faire ordonner prêtre, il y a tout un pas. Il hésite à s'engager pour de bon. En tout cas, il vit des rationalisations comme ça pendant toute sa vie. Et il ne s'ouvre pas à personne, de peur de vendre la mèche.

Alors, Markland Smith quitte les ordres et annonce à son beau-père (car sa mère s'est remariée avec un certain M. Laberge) qu'il a l'intention de travailler. Il commence par vendre des produits de beauté Paula à des salons de coiffeur. Puis il est vendeur de porte en porte. Et il travaille pour les fermes Décarie, à planter des arbres. Car à NDG, il y a des vergers, des centaines et des milliers de pommiers. Les terres où l'on a bâti Montréal, et surtout NDG, sont les terres les plus fertiles du Québec. Mon père me racontera plus tard qu'en faisant du travail manuel, il se rétablit et son estomac malade prend du mieux.

Puis il y a sa carrière de dramaturge à Radio-Canada. C'est à l'époque de Guy Mauffette, de sa sœur Estelle, qui deviendra l'amie de fille de mon père et évidemment, de Félix Leclerc. Aux dires de mon père, Estelle Mauffette, la «reine de Radio-Canada», joue le rôle à la radio de l'épouse de Séraphim Poudrier, au début des années quarante, et elle incarne si bien le rôle de la pauvre femme de l'avare, que des gens du public lui envoient des dons par la poste. On lui envoie des vêtements et des vivres. Mon père prétend que les

gens de l'époque étaient si naïfs qu'ils pensaient que Mlle Mauffette crevait vraiment de faim.

Ensuite il y a Félix. Mon père raconte que pendant deux ans, Félix a deux cents pièces de théâtre qui sont rédigées et prêtes à passer à la radio. On le laisse attendre. Il est assis sur des bancs dans les corridors de Radio-Canada à attendre d'être reconnu. Rien. Enfin, au bout de deux ans d'attente de ce genre, un réalisateur lui achète six scénarios, pour se débarrasser de lui. Alors Félix est écoeuré de ce régime et part pour la France, où c'est la gloire. Il est enfin reconnu et quand il revient au Canada, au bout de quelques années, on l'accepte. Ce sera l'histoire de biens des artistes et écrivains canadiens. Nous vivons dans une colonie et les décideurs croient que pour que ça soit bon, il faut que ce soit français de France ou britannique. Ce qui est canadien est considéré inférieur. C'est pourquoi Irving Layton s'écrira un jour : «Canada, why do you murder your children?» Du côté anglais, même scénario. Emily Carr, la grande artiste de Colombie-Britannique, raconte comment le Groupe des Sept sera rejeté et ne s'attirera jamais l'attention des critiques parce qu'ils sont Canadiens. À l'époque, au Canada anglais, si l'on veut être reconnu, il faut que le produit soit britannique.

Mon père, lui, va à la bibliothèque tous les jours et compose des pièces de théâtre historiques, qui portent sur l'histoire du Canada. Ma mère écoutera ces pièces à la radio, à Ottawa, bien avant de rencontrer mon père. Mais mon père est dégoûté de l'ambiance à Radio-Canada. Si l'on veut que sa pièce passe aux ondes, il faut toujours acheter une boîte de cigares pour le réalisateur. Un jour, mon père avait rédigé une émission dans laquelle il comparait la peinture, la musique classique et la poésie. On n'achète pas sa pièce, mais l'épouse du réalisateur vole ses idées et l'émission passe à la radio sous le nom de l'épouse. Mon père quitte Radio-Canada en claquant la porte.

Il me racontera plus tard qu'à l'époque, il voulait un poste avec sécurité d'emploi et un régime de retraite. On lui suggère de devenir traducteur au fédéral, à Ottawa. La première fois qu'il tente l'examen d'admission, il manque son coup. Mais l'année suivante, il réussit. Il décroche un poste de traducteur au Bureau de la traduction. À l'examen, qu'on écrit sans dictionnaire, il faut réussir vers le français ainsi que vers l'anglais. C'est le

régime «hurry up and wait». On le fait attendre pendant six mois, puis tout à coup, on lui ordonne de paraître dans un certain bureau à Ottawa dans deux semaines. Alors mon père, qui habite au début des années 40 dans la maison de chambres d'une certaine Madame Noblet à Chateauguay, plie bagages et se rend à Ottawa, où il entreprend une carrière de traducteur qui durera quarante ans, dont trente ans comme chef de bureau à temps plein et dix ans à la pige.

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Entre-temps, quand mon père quitte le monastère, il a des problèmes de santé. Il va voir un médecin qui lui recommande d'adhérer à un «groupe d'intellectuels très intéressants» dirigés par Adrien Arcand. Vous ne connaissez pas ce type? Tiens, je vous le présente, tel que raconté par mon père. Markland assiste à plusieurs des réunions secrètes de ce fameux groupe. Ça sent le cigare. L'air est plein de fumée. Il y a des centaines de gens qui écoutent cet Adrien Arcand déclamer contre les Juifs. M. Arcand raconte le passage de la Bible au sujet de David et Goliath. Il décrit Goliath comme un bel homme, un géant magnifique, qui se fait tuer par le petit Juif sournois, David, qui ne lutte pas à armes égales, mais lui jette une pierre dans le front. Et mon père trouve ça bizarre. Ce n'est pas l'interprétation catholique de la Bible. Alors mon père, un homme prudent qui se fie toujours à l'autorité de l'Église, va voir un Jésuite qui lui conseille fortement d'éviter cet Adrien Arcand. Avez-vous deviné? Monsieur Arcand est le directeur du Parti nazi du Canada.

Mon père avait toutefois des amis bizarres. Il participe à la Chambre de commerce de Hull, où il rencontre Michel Chartrand, qu'il traite de «bouffon»! Ensuite, à un moment donné, il y a la grève générale à Winnipeg. Mon père est lié d'amitié à un colonel de la Gendarmerie royale du Canada qui infiltre le Parti communiste à Winnipeg comme agent double. Cet ami de mon père devient le secrétaire général du Parti communiste, puis fait un coup de théâtre. Au moment où tous les dirigeants du Parti se font arrêter, ce secrétaire général comparait en cour vêtu de son uniforme de GRC et dénonce tous ses supposés camarades. Mon père trouvera ce type de trahison le comble de l'intégrité et de l'honneur. Il me racontera que cet agent double

doit ensuite s'évader et se cacher dans les Territoires du Nord-ouest. Mais c'était le genre de gens que mon père fréquentait. Puis il y a Georges Forest, qui sera connu comme un grand patriote canadien français. Il contestera une contravention qu'il a reçue à Winnipeg sous prétexte qu'elle est seulement rédigée en anglais. Son cas se rend jusqu'à la Cour suprême et en fin de compte, toutes les lois du Manitoba doivent être traduites en français. Une grande victoire. Mais Georges me dira bien des années plus tard dans le salon de ma mère qu'en 1948, il fonctionnait lui aussi à titre d'agent double. Il avait infiltré le mouvement pacifiste parce qu'il cherchait des communistes parmi ces gens. Et son employeur était encore une fois la GRC. Et ce sera un autre collègue de mon père.

Mon père avait l'habitude de déblatérer contre certains groupes – les communistes, les syndicats, la révolution tranquille, les indépendantistes, les Juifs, les hippies, les anglais, les noirs, les Protestants, bref tout ce qui n'était pas Markland Smith. C'est peut-être pourquoi Félix Leclerc refusait de lui parler, après l'époque de Radio-Canada.

Ma mère m'a déjà montré des poèmes de guerre de mon père. Il écrivait des sonnets enthousiastes où il proposait de tuer les Japonais et les Allemands. Il a été recruté trois fois par la conscription. Chaque fois il a été refusé. La Deuxième Guerre mondiale rageait. Alors mon père a fait son effort de guerre en traduisant dans les bureaux du ministère de la Guerre, qui est devenu la Défense nationale.

Une ancienne collègue traductrice de mon père m'a dit que mon père n'était pas un traducteur extraordinaire, mais qu'au bout de six mois au Bureau de la traduction, il a été nommé chef de section. Il paraît qu'il avait des talents de gérant, de directeur, de patron. Il a été chef au ministère de la Santé, à la Défense, à la Traduction générale, puis à Emploi et immigration, etc. A la fin de sa carrière, il a obtenu un poste de chef de Division, pour fonder le bureau de Montréal du Bureau de la traduction, en 1964. Il était responsable de 300 employés. Cette division a commencé avec deux traducteurs et six secrétaires, puis mon père a monté tout un bureau.

Entre-temps, il était capable de dire des énormités comme le fait que Franco était à son avis un grand monsieur, car il avait sauvé l'Espagne du communisme. Ce serait comme dire que Hitler était un grand monsieur parce qu'il avait sauvé l'Allemagne du communisme. Mais mon père n'a jamais compris cela.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **LARA NOBLET SLEPT HERE**

In 1939-41, while my dad was writing his plays for Radio-Canada, he lived in a boarding house in Châteauguay and rented a room from a lady called Lara Noblet. And many years later, when we lived on Hickory Street, she would drop by and visit every year.

She was Swedish, but born in Turkey, and raised in a private school in England. She was supposedly in the British Intelligence – but perhaps none of this is really fact. Apparently her son was the Secretary of International Nickel, which owned one-third of northern Quebec.

By the time she visited us in Ottawa, I was two or three, and she lived in New York. Every year she would mail me an ugly plaid shirt for Christmas, but this was as Christian as she got. And every time she dropped by to visit my dad, she had converted to a different religion.

One time she would be a Jehovah's Witness and would argue with my dad about his very Catholic beliefs. And he would fall for it, and get all hot under the collar yelling from his bible at her.

The next time she would now be a Buddhist, and quote from the Upanishads at my dad and he would give her the Catholic rebuttal to Buddhism.

And the next time, she was Bahai, and would argue during her whole visit from that angle.

My mother found her excentric, because Mrs. Noblet would walk in the pouring rain, without a hat or an umbrella, wearing just a trench coat.

Also she did yoga and when I was two or three, I could keep up with her.

Finally, I cracked. When I was eighteen years old, I wrote her a long letter and mentioned that I had been experimenting with LSD – so she stopped mailing me plaid shirts for Christmas and cut me off.

She never aged. She could have been seventy – or eighty – or ninety.

And my dad would get suckered into religious arguments with her and would get very frustrated with her, because he could never convert her.

She spoke with a British accent. She talked about the squirrels and called them “skwirrels.”

After a few years, I stopped hearing about her. I guess she had found nirvana – or heaven – or the happy hunting grounds.

Everyone should have an excentric old lady in their childhood.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

Just like Henry VIII, my dad was a defender of the faith. If he were still around and reading this, he would turn over in his grave.

One evening, when I was about eight years old and my sister eleven, our mother insisted we stay in our rooms upstairs – not because we had been bad – but rather because our parents were expecting company for supper. So of course, we didn't listen and stayed at the top of the staircase and listened and giggled and listened eagerly some more to the conversation raging in the dining room.

The guest was Jeanne Sauvé, a childhood friend of my mother's and the future Governor General of this country, and she and my dad locked into a bitter argument lasting all evening about the Conference of Catholic bishops. Ms. Sauvé, a journalist, had negative opinions that my father found heretical and they screamed at each other for hours. Meanwhile, my sister and I covered up our giggles at the top of the stairs.

I used to love it when daddy got hot under the collar over his religious views. At least he wasn't yelling at me.

Not only was my dad a higher up in the federal government, he was also well connected. So, let me name drop.

Twenty-five years later, I was at a poetry reading downtown and met a poet who impressed me. His name was Eric, an American. He was gifted with an incredible memory and could recite reams of poetry from memory. He had been the erstwhile lover of Suzanne Verdal, the subject of Leonard Cohen's song *Suzanne*. Anyway, one night the two of us, Eric and I got drunk in his loft near Montreal harbour. At one point, I was sitting and the great Eric was standing up, shouting, "Dig it! My grandfather is the head of Exxon Incorporated! Dig it! My uncle is the head of the American National Gallery!"

OK, I told myself. All I answered him was that my ancestors were just unknown French-Canadian farmers, dot dot dot.

It turned out the next morning, Eric and I had been invited to have breakfast with my parents, who were in town for a visit. We all met at a Hilton Hotel, the Queen Elizabeth, in Montreal. It was a pretty fancy place, and Eric began by condescending to my mom by complimenting her about her jewelry. Fine, fine, I was thinking.

Suddenly, an old well-dressed couple in their eighties walked over to our table and addressed my parents in familiar terms: ‘Markland! Isabelle! What a nice surprise! And I imagine these are your two sons?’”

Eric spoke out and said, “No, I’m American...”

The old gentleman replied, ‘Oh, Americans! I love Americans! I’ve known four of your Presidents! My favourite one was Roosevelt! I met him when I was Minister of Finance! But I’m retired now – I’m just a Senator...’”

This was too much for Eric. A minute after my parents’ friends were gone, my new American friend abruptly left the table. He quickly told us he wasn’t feeling well.

I chuckled to myself.

Another time, when I was a young adult, I was psychotic and had taken off hitch-hiking to Ontario. My intention was to go picking tobacco but I got arrested for vagrancy in Oshawa and was facing thirty days in jail. Just after I entered the courtroom, the Prosecutor stood up and said affirmatively to the Judge, “Your honour, this young man’s father came here in person yesterday, and he is a very important man in government. Therefore, I suggest we drop the charges against his son.”

That day, they dropped the charges but had me committed to a psych ward for the criminally insane. About four days later, I was driven by two detectives and a driver to Montreal, where I was committed to Douglas Hospital, a large institution for the mentally ill.

This was not great, but it sure beat going to jail. It goes to show how a good job in government can be helpful to you and your family.

Finally, I want to emphasize how my father was important. When he went to Rome, they took a photograph of my father beside the pope. It appeared in the newspaper the next morning and everyone asked, “Who is that beside Mister Smith?”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### MISTER SMEEEZ ON THE OTHER LINE

In Catholic high schools a long time ago, there used to be a tradition of having the boys or girls attend a closed retreat for three or four days to prepare them to go out into the world and fend for themselves. In our case, the boys would be locked up in a religious institution and listen to sermon upon sermon about spirituality.

As far as I was concerned, this sounded like a boring proposition; so I decided to bring a bottle of whisky poured into a shampoo bottle, which I would hide in my suitcase.

I was in our family dining room using the phone to tell my friend Michel Damphousse about my plan, but didn't know my dad was upstairs listening in on our conversation. He didn't make a peep and I never suspected he could be so sneaky.

Immediately, he went to my high school and told his friend Father Gendron, the Vice Principal, that I was about to bring the whisky to the retreat.

Father Gendron forthwith had me kicked out of school.

When my father heard about this, he rushed back to the Vice Principal's office to have me reinstated into the ranks of the high school, so I could write my final exams. He hadn't planned to have me become a high school drop out.

Meanwhile, at the closed retreat, the word had gotten around about my whisky. One morning, for a joke, one of the students knocked at my room door and pretended before coming in that it was the priest. I hastily stopped drinking and threw the shampoo bottle back into my suitcase. But what I didn't expect was that the whisky spilled over onto my clothes.

By the time the real priest came into my room to check up on me at the Vice Principal's request, the whole room reeked of cheap liquor. The priest just stuck his nose into my room, detected the odour and went back to the hall.

I was caught.

Actually, I was allowed to write my high school finals. The only consequence was that I was supposed to win the first prize for Latin translation, but they gave the award to the runner-up. I thought that sucked.

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However, my father was not the only Catholic who listened in on phone calls. Our neighbours across the street on Marlowe Crescent were from the Middle East and the father was very traditional. He came from the countryside and when his family walked to church on Sunday mornings, the dad was in front along the sidewalk, walking with his eldest son, while his wife walked twenty feet behind him with the rest of their kids.

Now the father had spent a year in Paris before emigrating to Canada, so he changed his accent. He would meet my dad on a street corner and exclaim, "Mais bonjour, Monsieur Smeese!" This sounded so ridiculous that it stuck with me and I still have friends sixty years later who call me "Smeese" for fun.

The old gentleman's wife was friends with my mother but she let mom know that whenever she phoned my mom, her husband used to listen in on their phone calls.

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Now what goes around comes around. One day when my dad moved to Montreal and ran the huge office of three hundred employees for the Translation Bureau, one day a journalist contacted him and asked him what he thought of a certain federal government policy. My dad thought discretion was the better part of valour, so he replied that he was not at liberty to discuss the administration's policies.

The next morning, in *Le Devoir*, there were big headlines that read – and I translate – Markland Smith gagged and bound by his bosses in Ottawa.

Then the next day after that, my dad received a personal phone call from his immediate supervisor the Deputy Minister in Ottawa. As he answered the phone, he heard a series of clicks, as one telephone after another, up to half a dozen higher ups listening in on the phone call, as the first caller asked my father, in French, Mr. Smith, what exactly did you tell the journalists at *Le Devoir* yesterday???

After that day, my dad became very paranoid.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### MY FATHER'S ANGLIA

In 1963, we lived on Marlowe Crescent and my dad bought his first and only car. At that time, Ford Motors made a car in England called the Anglia, and daddy went to Hull, across the river to buy one. Now he had never driven a car, and he was a particularly bad driver. I mean when he slammed on the brakes, you went flying. When the road sign said to stop, he stopped immediately and promptly. When the sign said the sixty mile an hour zone began, he really, really stepped on the gas. And he would fuss over hills, because the Anglia was a very small car with a very small engine; the fuel injection pump wouldn't carry the gas to the engine. But he paid \$ 1,900 for his little car and he loved it.

He would drive me to the Eidelweiss Ski Center in the winter, and come and pick me up in the afternoon. Once we moved to Montreal, he drove me to the National Film Board on Côte-de-Liesse in the morning when I had a summer job there and I had a ride back home with an employee of the NFB called David, who felt sorry for me because I was on crutches that year. (I broke my leg skiing that winter because I never took skiing lessons. I didn't know how to turn or stop.) The guys at the NFB would play tricks on me, like leaving my crutches at the other end of the building.

My mom even got a learner's permit and my dad gave her driving lessons. However, one afternoon, we were driving in the country around Vars, which was near Ottawa, when we almost got hit by an oncoming speeding train. As I said above, my dad was a bad driver. That scared my mom and she didn't want to drive after all.

Once in Montreal, my dad never asked me whether or not I wanted to go to college, but he singlehandedly decided to register me at *Collège Sainte-*

*Marie*, which used to be a good college in the 1930s but was by 1964 the worst school in Montreal.

Anyway I was taking driving lessons that fall when I studied there, and the other students could see my paperwork for the Quebec Safety League and my learner's permit. So I bullshit them into believing I had a Ford Anglia of my own and that I used to drive up North on weekends. This increased my popularity – anyway it got me some attention for a year.

Meanwhile, my dad's toy was his Anglia and he didn't know I was living a lie with my school colleagues.

Now there was a guy in my class called Yves Tanguay and we were sort of friends. One evening he had an agenda and took me to meet his family in a working-class neighbourhood off Saint-Denis Street. I met his dad and then Yves blurted out, in French, "Dad, could you also buy me a car like Robert's father did for him?"

His dad looked at me and sized me up. I was caught. His dad asked me, "What kind of work does your dad do?"

I answered, "He works for the government."

Yves' father then muttered, "Eh ben," and turned around and walked into the kitchen.

I wasn't class-conscious and didn't know much about classes, but I couldn't help but understand that I had just embarrassed this poor man before his son. And I wished more than anything else that I wasn't there at that time on that day. Suddenly I realized I was privileged – and it was embarrassing.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *SCHNELL! SCHNELL!*

I always wondered what motivated my father to be such a high achiever.

In 1988, I had passed the entrance exam to get back into the federal government as a translator towards French and towards English. This was a translation we did without divulging our names; all we were for the revisor was a number. Applicant number so-and-so wrote the exam. The results were pretty objective.

A few weeks after I got the results by mail, I was summoned to an interview at the Guy Favreau Complex, which is a huge building housing offices of the federal government in Montreal.

The night before the interview, I had a drink and looked in the mirror and said to myself, “Don’t want the job.” I had worked for the feds before, at Statistics Canada, as a TR-1, that is as a junior translator, and didn’t like the experience.

The next morning, I also heard on the radio that starting that day, smoking was no longer tolerated in federal offices of any kind. That confirmed my decision. Nevertheless, I went to the interview.

I arrived before the two interviewers. They were both Francophones, a man and a woman. One of the main questions was, “What would you do if you had to translate a photocopy machine manual?”

I replied that I wasn't very good at technical translation. They pursued and asked, "Suppose you had no alternative? Suppose you were on the job and had to do it?"

I answered that I would ask the secretary to do it for me. They laughed but I knew I had sabotaged the interview. They also knew I was throwing in the towel and asked me why I had done that.

I told them there was no way I could quit smoking. At that point the gentleman interviewer pulled out a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket.

I walked out of that situation feeling cheap. Smoking had nothing to do with my decision.

I went to visit my parents in Ottawa that weekend. Of course they asked me how the job interview had gone. I told them honestly I didn't want the job and had sabotaged the interview.

My mother was visibly displeased and said we were going to bed now.

I was sleeping on a cot in my mother's room when I heard her talk in her sleep.

Now my mother's main language was French and she spoke English flawlessly but when she talked in her sleep that night, she spoke broken English and addressed her comment to my father, who was called Markland. And she spoke with a French accent.

She said harshly, “YOU DIDN’T GET THE PROMO-TION, MARK-LAND!!?”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### ELI'S COMING

In 1965, I was a teenager and my dad and mom and I decided on the spur of the moment to go for a drive from Montreal to New York City. And we drove literally all the way to the Big Apple, without a pit stop or a break. My dad drove all the way. And when he got there, he was burnt out.

First, we got caught in traffic. We were stuck going through Harlem, following a wedding procession that was travelling at a snail's pace. At one point, my mom noticed that all the neighbourhood was sitting on their front steps, to get out into the July sun, and everyone seemed to be relaxing and watching the wedding cars drive by. And my mom realized all of a sudden that everyone there was black – so she locked her car door, by pushing down the lock button.

Right away all the people out there noticed us too and started to scream, “HEY WHITEY! HEY WHITEY!!” So my mom and dad freaked out, they were turning around and staring and having kittens. Meanwhile, I was in the front seat and laughing insanely at my parents and the whole situation. I had my leg in a cast because I had broken my leg skiing that winter.

Finally, we got out of Harlem and were driving down Madison Avenue, I believe, and by then my dad had lost control. He drove through three red lights in a row and I was yelling at him to stop. Suddenly, around Fifty-Fifth Street, we were driving through the intersection on another red light, when I saw the accident about to happen. I had my leg in the cast but I jumped below the dashboard. A taxi was crossing the street at full speed and for him the light was green, so my dad saw him in front of us too late and he turned right to avoid the collision. It was too late and we collided.

Our left front light crashed into his right fender. Smash. My mother went flying and my dad crashed into his steering wheel.

We stepped out of the car and my mother was screaming, “The engine! The engine! Don’t lose the engine!” What she thought was the engine, was in fact the carburetor, which had flown out of the hood. Our car was totalled. It looked like an accordion.

A cop came by and said to my dad, “Looks like a good bye car,” and my father answered, “No, no, it’s an Anglia.”

No one was hurt seriously, except that my mother had two broken ribs and a whiplash in her neck. That night, my dad broke down and wept in our hotel room.

As it turns out, we did get back to Montreal and a few months later, an insurance guy came to our house. I was the only witness. So I told him that the taxi driver was the one who went through a red light. I was protecting my father – even though back then we weren’t even talking to each other. I was under oath but didn’t believe in oaths.

After the insurance representative took my statement and left, I told my dad, in French, “You know I lied for you there...” But my dad was very upset. He couldn’t understand why I had done that.

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Two years later, one night I showed up at my parents’ house in the pouring rain and asked my dad if I could sleep at their place that night.

An hour or so later, my dad walked down the stairs into my old bedroom in the basement, and I explained to him why I wasn't sleeping at my own apartment. I said, in French, "I think the cops are waiting for me there. But tell me something – if the cops showed up at your front door and asked you if I was sleeping here, would you tell them I am hiding here?"

He grunted back, indignantly, "I would have to tell them!! It is my duty as a citizen!!!"

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And twenty years afterwards, plenty of water had gone under the bridge, because my dad had had a heart attack again, and was in the hospital one night in Ottawa. He had tubes coming out of his nose and his arms. He was connected to a monitor that recorded his pulse and his heartbeat.

But he was on morphine and he had a bad trip. He started to hallucinate that there were assembly lines and elevators in the Emergency Room, and that the nuns were selling merchandise to the patients. He had to put an end to this. It was his duty.

He disconnected all the wires and got out of bed. That was when someone phoned our house in Ottawa and I rushed by taxi to the hospital.

When I got to the Emergency, actually it was funny and pathetic too. There were a dozen nurses and doctors standing around my dad, who wasn't wearing his teeth and not a stitch more, except for a johnny shirt and his bare feet. In his left hand, he was holding one of his slippers, ready to beat whoever approached him.

Suddenly, he recognized me. I was the guy that he used to rescue from trouble. It was his son.

I just said to him in a low voice, in French, “Daddy, it’s OK. Just go back to bed. Everything’s going to be all right.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### NOT MARKLAND'S SON!

In 1981, I was pretty lonely. I was working in Winnipeg, where I didn't know a soul. I had met a couple of people, but hardly any long-lasting friends, except maybe Anita Forest. She and I kept in touch over the years.

I had written a translation exam to get admitted to the federal government in December 1980, while I was studying at the *Université de Montréal*. A translation colleague of my dad's, Mr. Dante Artuso, had notified me that there was a competition in the federal government to hire seventy-five translators. Three thousand people had applied. So I tried my luck. The exam was about wine, and how it travels. So I was familiar with the subject of the exam and breezed through the test.

Then I waited. And waited. And waited. It is called "hurry up and wait." Finally, I finished my school year in April 1981, and got the results about my translation test around the same time.

I had passed – and was summoned to show up two weeks later for a position in Winnipeg! But I really didn't feel like living in Winnipeg!

I didn't know anyone in Winnipeg... But my dad had a great friend there called Georges Forest, who took care of me once I moved out there. I became friends with his wife, Anita, and met all their children. One of his daughters had a photograph of me and recognized me at the airport. She drove me to her mom's house and we all had a meal together. The next day, one of Georges' sons helped me find an apartment. And so on. Their family even made sure I went to mass every Sunday, and afterwards, we would have a meal together. They welcomed me as though I was family.

I started working as a translator in the government office and everything was going smoothly. Except. Except. My own friends were fifteen hundred miles away, in Montreal. So I was lonely.

I had been working there for a couple of weeks, when one of the executives from Ottawa was scheduled to show up to visit our Section and meet the employees.

That day, all of us, the translators and our boss, were lined up around a conference table, waiting for the visitor to enter the room. A man in a suit walked in and sat at the head of the table. I didn't know him from Adam. He greeted every one of us in turn. When he got to me, I said my name, "Robert Smith."

And the gentleman exclaimed, in French, "Not Markland's son! Well I've seen everything!" He had a big smile on his face.

That evening, I phoned my parents, who now lived in Ottawa, and my dad explained to me that the gentleman was an old colleague of his and that they had known each other for many years.

And that is how it was, throughout my whole translation career. I kept meeting people who knew my dad, and who always spoke well of him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### THE SPANISH INQUISITION AND ALL THAT JAZZ

When I was growing up, I was groomed for the priesthood. Jack Kerouac explains that in French Canada, parents used to lay that trip on their eldest son, and convince him to become a priest, so that they could go straight to heaven when they died. This is written in his French manuscripts, which were discovered much later after his death.

But for me, it fits. I never had any intention of joining the clergy, but my mother's aunt, Marie-Louise, once offered me a rosary, if I could tell her what I wanted to be when I grew up. Now I was about five years old at the time, and I knew what she wanted me to say. I tried my luck. I said I wanted to be a sailor. She answered that no, they whip sailors. Then I said I wanted to be a policeman. She answered, that no, they shoot policemen. And so on.

Finally, I gave in. I said I wanted to become a priest. So she answered, in French, "That's a good boy. Here is a rosary for you."

Meanwhile, my mom kept reading me the Bible every day, until I started school. After a while, their prayers were heard and even I thought I wanted to be a priest and that I wanted to go to heaven when I died.

Later, when I was in seminary school, I told my mom I didn't want to be a priest anymore. By then I was thirteen or fourteen. So on Christmas Day, our whole extended family was gathered at my uncle Wilfrid's rectory, because that is what he was, a priest. That was his gig. And he was my mother's brother.

At one point, I came up to him and naively asked him if there was any more ginger ale. I couldn't find any anywhere. He answered, in French, "I have some upstairs in my room."

We went upstairs and I knew there was serious monkey business afoot when he locked the bedroom door and put the key in the pocket of his cassock. Uh-oh, I thought.

He told me to go to confession to him and get on my knees before him and tell him why I didn't want to be a priest anymore. I didn't dare imagine the consequences so I did what he said.

I was thirteen or fourteen. More stuff like that happened when I was sixteen, a couple of years later.

That year, we lived on Patricia Avenue in Montreal, and if you looked out our front window, you had a direct view of Saint Ignatius church, a Jesuit parish where I went to mass on Sunday mornings.

I did this a few times, and then, one day I started doing what I wanted. It was a two block walk up to the front door of the church. I decided that day to walk one block, up to Westmore Avenue, and then turn right down to the Golden Moon Restaurant, where I would sit, order something and kill time for an hour until the mass ended at the church. Then I would walk home. I did this two or three Sundays in a row.

On the following Sunday, I did this again – but this time, I had been sitting in the back of the restaurant, when my dad walked into the place and stood

there by the door and screamed at me, loud enough so I could hear him, “ROBERT, COME HOME IMMEDIATELY.”

Like a beaten puppy, I went home.

And I explained to my mom and dad that I no longer believed in God and that therefore, there was no point in forcing me to go to mass anymore. It was a very emotional statement and confrontation, but they finally agreed and dropped it.

They said they wouldn't force me to go to church anymore.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### THELONIOUS MONK

It was perhaps in 1966 that I got hold of four tickets to Place des Arts concert hall in Montreal to listen to performances by Dave Brubeck, Oscar Peterson, Count Basie and Thelonious Monk. I was seventeen years old and had no one to accompany me to the events, so I asked my dad. He was glad to accept, and we went.

We didn't go to the Count Basie concert because at that time, I was not fond of big band music. But we had good seats for the three other shows. I had opera glasses and could see, for instance, that Monk played with his fingers straight. I was taking piano lessons and had been taught to slightly curve my fingers as I struck the notes. Well, Monk conceived and played music his own way. And his originality stayed with me all my life.

We could also hear him humming as he played. He was constantly mumbling something. But he never spoke a word to the audience. Even at the end of the concert, the audience asked for an encore, but he simply took a wide bow and walked off the stage, without acquiescing to the Montreal audience. It was quite impressive. I learned that he was not a people pleaser.

Oscar Peterson really wowed the audience with his Hymn to Freedom composition, with the crescendo that swept us off our seats. It must have meant a lot to return to the town where he had grown up and to bless us with his great musical achievements.

And Dave Brubeck really impressed us with his technical genius, playing in those esoteric key signatures, and his performing prowess. In those days,

Brubeck's Take Five was on the pop record charts, as well as Peterson's Night Train. You could hear those tunes on the juke box in the restaurants. Brubeck was so cool.

It was a thrill to have my father there listening to my favourite composers and musicians. He could sing Gregorian chant and often would in his spare time around the house, but he greatly appreciated the jazz scene.

One day around fifteen years later, in 1978 or 79, I was listening to an LP of mine of solo Monk piano, while my dad joined me. He pointed out to me that the pianist was telling a story. And we both got immersed in Thelonious Monk's excentric genius. I felt at one point that we bonded – I had not been very close to my dad most of my adult life, but I envisioned him taking a latch and holding on to a window in my imagination that had been flopping around wildly in the open wind. He pulled me back to shore as I was drowning.

That was in my parents' living room at 4500 Patricia in NDG and after that date I began thinking logically and shortly afterwards, dad started to farm out translation contracts to me. A year later he paid the tuition fees and my cost of living allowance while I studied translation at the *Université de Montréal* and prepared to pass the entrance exam into the Translation Bureau, which I did in 1981.

I miss my dad and wish we could exchange points of view when we don't see eye to eye.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### SAVING FACE

If I visited my parents any time without notice, if they were not expecting my visit, they did not have any pictures of me anywhere in their place. There were photos of my sister or her daughters, but no pictures of me.

On the other hand, if I told them an hour or a day before my visit that I was coming over, they were at the front door of their place the minute I showed up, wearing their finest clothes and smiling at me with all their teeth, and they shook my hand and asked me how I was. Meanwhile, the record I had bought my mother for Christmas was playing on the record player.

One time in 1983, I had published a book in Ottawa and was interviewed on the radio. So my mother borrowed a tape recorder to copy my interview as I was talking on the radio. However, she didn't realize that their comments to each other in the background were also recorded.

So a few weeks later, my parents both came to Montreal and visited me. My mother proudly gave me the tape cassette of the interview. But when she recorded my voice from the radio, the tape recorder was a foot away from the radio and that is how I heard her comments to my dad.

As the interview went on, I started discussing things like revolution, drugs, prison, madness and living on the streets. So my mother heard my voice and started yelling at my father in French, "The little fucker! The little bastard! Can you hear him, Markland? We will never be able to shut him up! Listen to him!" This was in the background.

I played the tape after they had gone back to Ottawa. I didn't know whether I should laugh or cry...

Still, it is nice to find out what people really think of you behind your back.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### MAGICAL THINKING

My dad told me that in the forties, during the War, Radio-Canada used to broadcast a radio play called *Un Homme et son péché*, about a miser called Séraphim Poudrier and his wife Donaldda. Well, the wife was supposed to be poor, and people from the public at large would mail care packages of food and clothing to Radio-Canada, for poor Donaldda. People who believed the radio show was real actually were concerned about this poor woman.

For that matter, in 1948, Orson Welles broadcast a radio play called *The War of the Worlds*, about Martians landing on Earth and taking over New York City. People heard this drama and believed it was real. Some people killed themselves because of the panic.

So maybe it is not surprising that my dad believed it when he told me there was a holy monk in Trois-Rivières who could walk on water like Jesus. He told me that one day, a man was dying in the state of mortal sin and the holy monk walked across the Saint Lawrence River to go see this dying man so he could confess his sins and die in the state of grace.

Also, in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, he describes Jewish people as being evil and having syphilis. If people were as gullible as I just showed above, it is maybe not that surprising that they believed in Hitler's anti-Semitism. Maybe it is not such a stretch of the imagination that priests burned heretics, witches and mentally ill people at the stake in the Middle Ages and thought it was the right thing to do.

In the fifties, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a flood of Japanese science fiction movies describing atrocities. I remember watching *The Return of the Fly* and other scenes of horror at the movies when I was around ten years old.

My father would not let me read American comic books, but he bought me Catholic comic books in which Jesus looked handsome and blue-eyed, while the Pharisees had green skin and pointy noses. There was another comic book about Cardinal Mintzenty, who was arrested by the Communists in Hungary in 1956.

Television started around the fifties. Dad bought our first TV set in 1953, and we watched the coronation of the Queen. There was a lot of propaganda over the airwaves – as there is today.

Hindsight is always 20/20.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### AFTER THE RESURRECTION AND THEN SOME

As Edgar Allan Poe said, “The fever called living is over at last.” In my father’s case, the struggle for spiritual survival, the battle over who has rights on his soul, the warfare between the light and the darkness, all of it ended when he split this scene. He left his wretched suffering body and what was left was the Word, the Word made flesh that had dwelled inside of him all these misunderstood years. His *kaw*, that is the portion of his soul that belonged to this world, stuck around us as long as it should – and then, Mr. Smith went out out out to the horizon and beyond.

I never did see the inside of his heart. All I knew – and I knew him well – was that his intentions had always been good. But they say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I am not saying he was damned – no, sir. But sometimes he was so right that you wished he had had the humanity to admit he was wrong. Like the rest of us.

But Markland Joseph Smith was not like the rest of the sheep in the flock. And the ones who knew him were on the same squeaky narrow path that he followed to the letter, right to the door of heaven. Were his friends Pharisees? Were my parents Pharisees? I wonder. I saw them nursing people to health, I saw them visiting me when I was alone, I saw them greeting my hungry friends at their door to offer them a meal. I wish all Pharisees were as kind.

And then again – I also remember the militant prejudice, the anger and rage my father felt against the minorities, against the disenfranchised in the spiritual world. Against the circumcised. I feel shame in admitting my father was prejudiced. But he was. As Meathead says to Archie Bunker, my

father perhaps would not burn a cross on people's lawns – but he might roast marshmallows on the fire of that burning cross.

Anyway, I put him in God's hands a long time ago. I am sure heaven will be fair towards him and towards us all. I don't see the Church building any statues in his honour. I don't know if he will be canonized soon. But he left many of his employees happy to have known him and worked for him. At least that is what they told me.

Then again, how does God treat any sinner or any saint? I am sure he heals their broken limbs that are bent out of shape. He is like Lord Buckley's character the Naz, fixing the old guy with a bent frame. Some of the people who cross the threshold into heaven must have a grudge against God; but he gives them time to mellow out.

I am sure that all that is left of my dad is all the good things, like the presence of the divine within him. The rest, the clay and mud, the angels will wipe on the door mat of heaven. And it will all be forgotten.

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2021.