

# We Should Have Seen This Coming



Can you hear  
me now?  
-God

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OUTDOOR AMERICA



★ OUR HEROES ★  
SUPPORT OUR....  
TROOPS  
WARRIORS

Martha Deed

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This Coming

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Cover photos by Author. Bottom photo is a Border Patrol checkpoint 100 miles inland on I-10.

## WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN THIS COMING

It was Spring 2008  
The Presidential Election season was heating up  
And so was Spring  
As the birds headed North  
we drove South in our dark blue  
Chevy Cobalt with New York plates

I wrote no poem about the boy  
who shot at our car windows  
He missed. Did he see our plates?

What we saw  
What happened to us  
What we heard  
We should have seen this coming

## AN UGLY TOURIST STORY

The Ugly Tourist (UT) considers him-or-her-self compassionate travels down the shores of the Ohio River/Mississippi River/ Arkansas River/ Green, Black or Red rivers. UT notes the levees, the parks on top of them, the bridges that pass very high above the waters, the flood gates.

Murals on the floodgates remind UT of a time before his-or-her birth: WPA.

The murals have that 1930s style, and, for awhile, they draw the traveler's interest. But finally, UT doesn't bother looking at them anymore. "You've seen one floodgate painting, you've seen them all," is what UT thinks but does not say, priding his-or-her-self on his-or-her cultural sensitivity.

The Ugly Tourist part of this is that in becoming bored by the proliferation of these earthworks along rivers with a tendency to flood, UT has forgotten the purpose they serve. They are not tourist attractions to please or bore UT. They are attempts at preservation and survival.

Day 2, Maysville, Kentucky

## BRIOCHE IN HORSE BRANCH KENTUCKY

“Everything I have ever said has been completely misunderstood,”\* my friend Gertrude opined over a *brioche au chocolat* at the Rescue Café in Horse Branch, Kentucky. “I cannot imagine my legacy as I am not famous enough to have a son or daughter capable of capitalizing on all my faults by writing a memoir laced with licorice and rattlesnake venom.”

“The commanding of the advance is the thing, you know,” I said. “Scandal without fame is commonplace today. The more famous you are, the less scandal it takes to destroy a reputation. Nixon was brought down in France for putting catsup on his *omelette*, as you must know. Watergate was *c’est normal* to them.”

But Gertrude was not to be diverted by this historical reference to breakfast. “We grew up in an age which preached liberty and built slave camps,”\* she continued, “an absurdity that prevails until the current day. Why – America is the only country in the world where a rich woman with servants can speak of being a woman oppressed and not be laughed at.\* Then a politician comes along, pretends to be a preacher, drops acid on our constitution and places the resulting doily on the altar of his church as worthy sacrifice.”

“It happens all the time,” I say. “First you simplify whatever is complex, reduce reality to desert sand and oil wells, demand loyalty oaths from all those you oppose, and raise a steeple over all of it.\* The church, of course, protects your legacy from those who take photographs inside the local carwash defying our young men in carwash uniform.”

“Shouldn’t you breathe three times, deep as can be, and sip your tea?” she asks. “You’ve turned a hue of red that ill becomes you. You’re not rich enough or thin enough to be remembered yet.”

Day 3, Horse Branch, Kentucky

## MINING BOOTS JUST IN

The ice **M**eans  
people lay over at the hotel w **I**th half  
bur**N**ed out  
but d **I**ssappeared  
last fra**N**chise  
si**G**n – none of which we knew  
when we stopped there–  
there not **B**eing that much  
**O**f a  
ch**O**ice in Beaver Dam  
Ken**T**ucky  
Of cour**S**e – being academic,  
but we don't want to learn  
anything new today– we **J**ust want warm familiar food  
in an **U**nfamiliar town  
But we know it i **S**  
impoli **T**e  
  
to **I**mpose our  
style o**N** a place

Day 5, Beaver Dam, Kentucky

## STORM SHELTER

Pale carpets  
strings of tiny lights  
brass and etched glass everywhere  
Women and children in pajamas  
an occasional man  
eat the free hot breakfast  
hot and cold cereal  
scrambled eggs and waffles  
chicken and biscuits  
fresh juices and coffee

A thin young man says  
no power yet at home  
and a woman in a wheelchair  
with splints on her wrists  
breathing with an oxygen tube  
gets off her cell phone  
and says

What do they mean—  
We hope to have your power on  
in twenty-four hours?  
Do they mean  
Do not bother us  
for twenty-four hours?

Three days after the ice storm  
staff pour evening wines  
plump pillows  
clean rooms  
they leave homes  
with no phones  
no internet  
no power  
cold and wet

Day 6, Miner, Missouri

## THE EARTH WAS IN CONTINUAL AGITATION

the earth was in continual agitation, visibly waving as a gentle  
sea  
its waters gathering up like a mountain  
and the town settled down at least 15 feet below the river's bed  
fissures opened and closed, some of them very deep  
twisting 200 year-old cottonwood trees out of the soil  
spewing sand and a dark substance of unknown kind  
and the river moved its course through a new formed lake  
nearly 200 years later people  
visit the museum below the level of the water  
walled from brilliant river views  
the headwaters of the Mississippi placid in the afternoon  
March sun and the end of the Ohio river, too  
seen from the promontory – the water flat and calm  
sky blue and innocent – the land flat below and stretching out  
covering a fault turning in its sleep and likely to awaken  
the promontory built to save the town from flood  
house front windows overseeing a levee coated with grass  
and trees – the flag and cross their hope  
30 feet high would be close enough the man at the New Madrid  
Museum tells me on a warm April day. He's looking out the  
window at it, wonders why no info on its height can be found  
Only thing that bothers me he says  
if the Mississippi floods and the earthquake comes  
and breaks the levee and kills us all

Day 7, New Madrid, Missouri

## TORNADO DAMAGE

white-faced  
Rescuer finds  
six dead

huddled together  
inside imploded  
farm house

Fatality Team  
stays in  
tourist motels

downed wires  
no water  
leaking gas

Port-a-potty  
blocks US  
Rte 62

First Responders  
clear rubble  
mile after mile

Bereavement Counselor  
tells tourist  
passing through:

steep hills  
no tornadoes  
dead wrong

Day 8, Powderly - Hardy, Arkansas

## THE HEART HAS FOUR WINDS

“The heart has four winds”\*  
more vivid than a diagram  
of auricles and ventricles

The child is born.  
The child is cherished.  
“The bag of white arrows is heavy with rain.  
“The earth is wet with happiness.”\*  
The child’s naming connects her  
to a spirit world she knows but cannot see:  
places beneath the land  
places beyond the clouds

The child is wary of the people who speak with forked tongues  
The child is trained to speak to them with delicate politeness  
the child cannot quite be friends with descendants of  
conquerors  
the child carries in her bones the memories of ancestors  
traveling the Trail of Tears from a land rich in gifts  
to a land no one wanted

the child knows  
she is “the next loop  
in the spiral of memory”\*

Day 9, Trail of Tears, Tahlequah, Oklahoma

## VISITING A RATTLESNAKE FARM

Five miles outside of Crawford, Texas, we see the satellite towers reminding us that some people require wireless in every motel room and others like First Guy gotta have good communications at home on the ranch. A hysterical marker, too, in bronze and blue announcing what an honor it is to have First Bubba residing at this dusty crossroads where world leaders come to ride the fences, see this President's smart sayings and life-sized photos on every square foot of concrete wall like Assisi before the earthquake, and if they're out of gas they can fill their tanks at "The Home of President Bush" gas station at the only four-corners in this godforsaken town, and eat at the Coffee Station where the servers wear designer camo t-shirts, the tables are covered with the red, white and blue, and a stuffed deerhead oversees the unisex *salle de bains*.

We liked the flocks of cattle we saw on our way out of town.

Day 11, Crawford, Texas

## GUADALUPE STREET

“Peace Now!” cries a sign posted at the curb  
of a forest green and red bungalow on our way  
into town and NPR hosts the news  
garden apartments, the gleaming capitol dome  
we’re feeling at home among the mission  
furniture and navajo rugs  
spanish arches and stucco walls,  
eating tortillas, black beans and rice  
while contemplating the homogenization  
of america until we exit the mex-tex café  
and flinch at the sight of the U of T clock tower  
even before we remember it for what it was:  
a fortress for a disgruntled ex-Marine  
who climbed the tower and shot  
and maimed and killed more than anyone  
else had done – up ‘til then –  
in civilian life and on Guadalupe Street  
where we are standing – killed the beauty  
of the tower, too, which forever after  
would be seen as a convenient  
sniper site – reminding anyone  
who could see the moorish  
pilasters and the gilt:  
If I can see the tower top,  
then he could see me as well.

Day 12, Austin, Texas

## TALK RADIO

At least, you should try.  
Obama is a dumbass. not to weaponize space  
and put a dreidel under his Christmas tree  
in this town where drop houses are resorts,  
and your best friend wants to borrow  
your social security card 'til Monday  
and you – the neighborhood candy ass –  
stand there waiting to be executed  
the gun owners blink in terror  
and the steam rises in me  
It's a radiant love for humanity  
despite the rudeness  
and I your rower across the River Styx

Every Day, New York - Arizona

## RIP-OFF MOTEL SMIRK

we are independently owned  
no other city for 100 miles  
and we gotcha  
with our automatic wake-up call at 4 am  
after you persuaded us not to overcharge you  
the smoke detector on the bed  
the toilet that runs all night  
the knock on the door at 8  
just above the Do Not Disturb sign  
you hung out last night  
we don't understand  
your East Coast gringo language  
so hard and loud  
not soft and sweet like Texas—  
the free newspaper you requested  
it comes out once a week  
it came out the day you arrived  
but it was gone by 4  
and you arrived at 6  
we charge 50% more than our cousins in Dallas  
because we don't like you Anglo people  
with your gray skin  
matter of fact  
we hate you  
can't you feel it in the air?

Day 13, Fort Stockton, Texas

## LUNCH AT CHOY'S

they found you in the AAA guide  
the only place safe for tourists  
to eat among 18 restaurants  
the tourists want home cooking  
their home cooking in Ohio  
and they disapprove of your menu  
explain to you the evils of chopped beef  
complain about the lack of chicken  
wrinkle their noses at your t-shirt  
and they disapprove of your lettuce, too  
in case it's not organic  
they each order a single taco or burrito  
for three bucks, accept it on the little plate  
dissect it with their fingers  
then pick at it with their forks  
as if it were a stick of dynamite  
you'd like to stick into their ear

Day 14, Van Horn, Texas

## VISITING THE BORDER

The Rio Grande is not for you to see  
nor the western-most point of Rt 62  
as Mapquest says  
“Cannot compute intersection”  
I know you see it on the map  
I know you know it’s there  
the river, too  
blue or brown and wide or narrow  
flat calm dishwater or wind-roughened sea  
the river is a secret now  
no way to see it up close and personal  
it lies low in the city  
like a snake in the grass  
as dangerous to homeland security  
as snow and ice in Tennessee

Day 15, El Paso, Texas

## THE RAVEN HUNT

It was an unknowing pursuit  
that is to say – unknowing that the bird existed there  
not in a single form, but two – and then  
only slightly smaller than a Piper Cub – and blacker  
A Raven straight from Salem's Poe  
but silent and not beguiling  
soaring above the cacti  
above the desert between El Paso  
and the Guadalupe Mountains  
and East of the war-spawning salt flats  
of Western Texas – and the Raven  
flew close to the ground  
skimming the roof of our car  
with the low gas light – lit –  
(110 miles between gas stations no exaggeration)  
few cars – a single Texas trooper pulling one over  
on the other side of the two-lane highway –  
red sand shoulders bleached in the late February sun  
the mountains of New Mexico pale in the distance  
and the Raven – a Chihuahuan or a Common –  
no way to know which –  
and maybe hungry as it flew above our car  
in the desert and we – (this bears repeating)  
riding on fumes –  
landed on the road ahead of us  
walking and hopping on the ground–  
an activity that worried us since the bird experts say  
this is how it does most of its hunting

Day 16, Near Guadalupe Lakes, Texas

## DIRTY PEOPLE IN BUSINESS DRESS

a border patrol officer  
rides one-lane dirt park paths  
lights out on cliff edges  
500-ft drops at midnight –  
darkest nights the best  
for finding backpacks,  
shoes, human “sign” –  
the moonlit nights the worst  
for border hopping  
in the high mountain desert  
the worst for getting home alive

When you study medicine  
every runny nose  
is a sign of this week’s disease  
and if a Border Patrol officer  
patrolling a national park,  
bird songs, butterflies,  
and flowers are no longer  
noticed or enjoyed, replaced by  
surveilling –  
each unauthorized path  
each piece of litter  
in the national forest:  
suggests a possible crime

the legal tourists come  
they are warned against  
scorpions, rattlesnakes  
lightning, floods and bears  
and dirty people in business dress  
crossing the mountains  
only the latter need be reported

Day 17, Montezuma Pass, elev. 6575, Arizona

## WALLS

You ask: Does one strike a stone  
to see if it is thinking of water?  
There is no need to ask

It is not thinking of water  
Rather, it is contemplating Jerusalem's Wailing Wall:  
its cousins roughly stacked with empty cracks

between them for the pilgrims' prayers  
and ill-considered wishes of curious tourists  
for whom it is a Jewish wishing well

while a newer wall winds through the holy city,  
across the sea, a metal fence snakes across another desert  
protecting a nation of immigrants from Mexican

cacti like a homebuilder who intrudes upon a forest  
objects to bears and snakes, complains of urban sprawl,  
and tries to kill the deer and geese that preceded him.

The stone lies where the glacier dropped it.  
The stone that cannot think of water, cannot wage war  
on other stones, or gaze stone-faced at a hungry child.

Day 17, Naco, Arizona

## VISITING THE TOWN TOO TOUGH TO DIE

Ladies of a certain age wear cowboy hats  
their men belly up to the hostess's desk  
with a swagger left over from 35-cent  
westerns at the Broadway Skouras  
Theatre as if still rolling from the motion of  
their trusty steeds beneath them  
not the silver Lexus they parked at the lip  
of the reconstructed wooden sidewalk  
down the dirt-blown street next to  
Big Nose Kate's Saloon – their fingers  
strangers to a rope or saddle wrapped  
around martinis while the rest of us drink  
ale, and most of us at the Longhorn Restaurant  
in Tombstone, Arizona, older than the oldest  
citizens lying outside of town at Boot Hill  
under piles of polished stones  
the soil too thin for digging

Day 18, Tombstone, Arizona

## TRAVELOCITY

once again we are sorry that we have interrupted your beautiful journey to better motels than ours with our intermittent bleating apologies for the inconvenience our infernal going-nowhere emails cause but we do so wish to explain ourselves:

while others say Tell us what the unsatisfactory condition is  
and we will make it right or we will not expect you to pay  
for that night's stay we bet our money on horses of a different  
color – our pintos of discontent can carry you anywhere  
except to where you wish to go  
and our palominos – bite  
we love our Best Western desk clerks  
to sidle up to new arrivals to announce  
their ranches are independently-owned  
and answer to no one while they cheat you  
and our Days Inns lie through their yellowed teeth  
we are here and accountable to no one  
independently-owned as well  
We are not your pandering  
Quality Inns  
Drury Inns  
La god-help-us Quinta Inns  
with their wussy assurances of complete satisfaction  
or else – the mark of a wimpy traveler  
is a AAA guide and an affiliation credit card –  
we would rather feed you to the pigs  
than eat you for lunch  
we hope to conclude our correspondence  
with you very soon, though it will not be  
soon enough for us.  
Thank you for allowing us to service you today.

Day 19, Carlsbad, New Mexico

## CHECKPOINT ON THE I-10

This isn't Naco, you know, Maybelle said. And Fred knew she was on a rant again, so he just hunkered down over the steering wheel, flexed and unflexed his knuckles, ducked his head below the cannon fire, and drove on toward the mirage up ahead. A mattress under a trailer is not for me to sleep upon, worse than the Comfort Inn in Cleveland, I can say, though no more dangerous either, but not my cup of tea – nor the sanctuary of a hard pew in the mission church, Maybelle continued, undeterred by the lack of argument from Fred. You see those lights? red and green snaking across the road? cobra of the desert? Does that not offend you – a free american and hence free to travel – to be stopped by officers in the middle of the day on a major godfearing highway to Florida? It's not a toll house, you know, it's a goddammed customs house in the middle of the desert filled with folks who have nothing better to do than to ask you where you spent the night, what the is purpose of your trip, demand to see your i.d., to hear you speak, lest you are hiding some accent beneath your tongue, it's a damned affront. I don't care if they build the fence with trash to keep the migrants out, but stopping Republicans in a Lexus is ridiculous unless we left our license plates at home. I mean, we're New Yorkers and proud of it even if it means we can't eat lunch in Altus, Oklahoma, all those pickup owners staring us down and shifting in their seats until we leave. It's freedom that we crave, Fred, and freedom that we've lost. . . Fred, are you hanging on to my every word? Look up, stare those officers in the eye, but not defiantly. Here's checkpoint charlie coming up

Day 19, Interstate 10, Texas and New Mexico

9:01

silence of no birds in the Survivor's Tree  
empty chairs translucent with sun  
the smaller ones for dead children  
a single fallen leaf on a paver  
a line of people passing the pools of memories  
beneath the obelisks etched with the minute  
the building standing here  
crowded with civil servants  
and poor people waiting in line for Food Stamps  
and children laughing in the nursery  
turned to dust

Day 22, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## NIAGARA

Silence

The rocks, the mist

Do you hear the water?

The call to life below the Falls?

The pull –

## NOTES

### BRIOCHE IN HORSE BRANCH KENTUCKY

Quotations taken from Charles Simic, (1995) in Kuusisto, Tall, and Weiss. The Poet's Notebook . New York: Norton. Pp. 272, 274, 280, 284. Marked with \* in text.

### THE EARTH WAS IN CONTINUAL AGITATION

Title and phrases from a letter written by Eliza Bryan, March 22, 1816.

Personal conversation with docent, New Madrid Museum, 1 Main Street, New Madrid, Missouri, April 20, 2010

### THE HEART HAS FOUR WINDS

Quotations from Joy Harjo (1995) in Kuusisto, Tall, and Weiss.. The Poet's Notebook. New York: Norton. Pp. 78, 83, 88. Marked with \* in text.

## Locofo Chaps

2017

Eileen Tabios – *To Be An Empire Is To Burn*  
Charles Perrone – *A CAPacious Act*  
Francesco Levato – *A Continuum of Force*  
Joel Chace – *America's Tin*  
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Mary Kasimor – *The Prometheus Collage*  
Iars palm – *case*  
Reijo Valta – *Truth and Truthmp*  
Andrew Peterson – *The Big Game is Every Night*  
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John Lowther – *18 of 555*  
Jorge Sánchez – *Now Sing*  
Alex Gildzen — *Disco Naps & Odd Nods*  
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