

Statue of Liberty

by [Kirby Olson](#) (May 2019)



Statue of Liberty, Peter Max

Falstaff needed to see the Statue of Liberty. I didn't know how to sell it to Mari, so a few weeks later, I said we should go down to the Paramus Strip and go shopping. On the way down, a noise began in the engine. It sounded like a rocket, and then like a motorcycle revving, and then like rocks in a blender. I stopped at a gas station in Paramus, New Jersey. New Jersey is one of two remaining states that have gas

station attendants. There is no self-serve. A squat Hispanic gas jockey said, "My friend, you have trouble." I found that description a bit obvious, and I wasn't his friend..

I stopped at another gas station, and a Pakistani man said, "It's your alternator. I tell you, my friend, there is trouble with your ball bearings."

"Do I have to get it fixed?" I asked.

"No, this thing is loud, but you can drive for a few days," he said.

We found a parking spot on the street at 78th and Broadway. My one skill as a driver is reverse parking. I slipped into the slot, just big enough for the van. Parking lots charge a minimum of thirty dollars for ten hours, so I always park on the street in New York City. I paid the Muni-meter 4 dollars with the credit card. An Asian doorman watched me pay for the meter, and take the slip to put on the dashboard.

He then said, "Shtupit. You don't have to pay if you're on that side of the sign. Shtupit."

I looked at a blue sign amidst five other signs, and I thought that perhaps he was right. The arrow on the sign pointed the other way. The problem with signs in NYC is that there are so many they seem to cancel one another out. I often wondered if this was deliberate. If you get it wrong, you pay 200 dollars for an infraction.

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I lost four dollars. We walked over to the Natural History Museum. It was two blocks, but a twenty-minute walk. The kid hates museums, but I wanted to interest Falstaff in the pygmy owl, and the lemurs, and the dinosaur bones, and the twilight displays of wolves in the Canadian north, and the cascade of butterflies that showed evolution in color and morphology between butterfly species. A life-size blue whale did catch his eye but only momentarily. Mari snapped pictures.

“Let’s eat!” The child cried.

The A train going south wasn’t working so we had to go up to 125th and then back down. A Peruvian man complained to us about his fat Dominican girlfriend, and he kept saying, “Your wife is thin! My girlfriend is fat! I have smashed holes in her kitchen telling her to stop eating so much! She’s a f... b...” He was a human Krakatoa.

In the New York subway underground, you can see rats down on the platform, as actresses check their lipstick on the way to assignments or auditions. Times Square has so many lights. Apparently it’s possible thanks to Niagara Falls. All the electricity turns into electrons that glide through the grid and it lights up entire buildings with Burma Shave ads and red triangles that advertise non-essentials over forty stories. My boy said, “This is my kinda town!”

Toys R Us is noisy and has a Ferris Wheel in the lobby. It’s right on Times Square. There’s a life-size T-Rex replica which growls out of Jurassic Park. I said to my child: “Is it alive?”

“Nope. It’s a toy monster,” he said.

“What is life?” I asked.

“It’s when something needs food and water,” he said hesitantly.

I was cagily planning to get us to the Statue of

Liberty.

We went back up on the metro, eating candy from the Toys R Us on the platform. Four E trains went past before the A train finally came, and it was so packed we couldn't get on. Finally another A train came. We had to get our "friend" Dali who was flying into LaGuardia again. We got back up to 81st, and walked to the car. I had a note on the windshield that was from the NYC Department of Finance. It said, "Failure to Display Muni Receipt." I looked at the Muni Receipt on my dash and I had put it in upside down. The penalty would cost 35 dollars. I hid the receipt from wife and child. I did have to pay for the parking after all, and had, but had put the receipt upside down on the dash, or perhaps when I had closed the car down it had caused the muni receipt to flutter up, and go face down. Where was the Asian doorman? I wanted to show him, but he was nowhere to be found.

We shot across the Queensborough Bridge and were in Queens, expecting to see signs to LaGuardia. I stopped and a Hispanic man at a gas station told me to ask his wife in the van how to get there.

"She works at LaGuardia," he said.

I went around to her side, it was 9 pm. She looked scared.

"Your wife is afraid," I told the man.

"Answer him," the man said into the cab. "If he fucks with you, I'll kick his ass."

"Go to the end of 21st," she said, "and then duck down on Hoyt Ave., for six blocks, and then get on the highway—the Van Wyck—and you'll whip into LaGuardia."

Twenty minutes later we pulled into the Delta-Northwest terminal arrivals and Dali hopped in the car, from

whence we went north, the engine still grumbling, screaming, and then settling down, up to New Rochelle's Marriott, where we settled into two adjoining rooms overlooking the town, which in turn overlooked the Atlantic.

Dali looked in my car's engine, said, "It's the Idler Pulley that's making all the noise. They're a real pain to change. I'd need a big wrench to change it."

"Will it continue to drive?" I asked.

"For a couple of days," he said.

Breakfast had a big selection: no bagels, but there were sausages, oatmeal, juices, muffins, waffles, (I had oatmeal with a strawberry topping, and one glass of grapefruit juice). We went down to Columbia University in Morningside Heights because Dali insisted. We ate at Tom's Restaurant at 112th and Broadway, where *Seinfeld's* group hangs out in the show. Hamburgers were \$4.50 without fries. At the table next to us, a white student from Columbia University was saying to his friends, "Anyone who doesn't agree with Obama and is now for Trump should be killed. The right should just shut up. Anyone who takes money from the government but doesn't believe in Obama should be put to death."

One of the other students (they were young) said, "I'm just so sick of the right. They should all be killed."

The guy was eating a vegetarian hamburger, and dipping it in ketchup, wetting the corner of it, like a French Revolutionary tasting blood.

Across the street on 112th is the old Labyrinth Books which is now Book Culture, because the original Labyrinth Books moved to Princeton. I bought the following books:

Introducing Kant, by Christopher Kul-Want and Andrzej

Klimowksi, which claims on page 1 that Kant is post-religious, and that he “embraces change and human fallibility.” What a misreading. I enjoyed misreadings, but wondered about the brain of the misreader.

Fermat’s Last Theorem, by Amir Aczel, which is an account of Andrew Wiles’ breakthrough in terms of solving the obscure theory x to the n th power – y to the n th power = z to the n th has no whole number solution when n is greater than 2. It takes us back to mathematical developments in Babylon that help to explain the action in Princeton on June 23, 1993, when Wiles wrote out the answers for several hours explaining how he had finally solved the theorem which no one had been able to solve for three hundred years. True, but simplistic.

On Liberal Revolution, by Piero Gobetti, which are the writings of an Italian revolutionary theorist who died at age 25. This book argues that the Soviet Marxists had a liberal side, “Trotsky counters the abstractions of the Slavic intelligentsia, from Radischev to Tolstoy, by proclaiming a liberal vision of history for the first time in Russia” (page 1). Trotsky’s suppression of the Cromstadt revolt shows where his liberal theory (if any) led: a revoltingly autocratic, and genocidal tyranny toward dissent. More than ever I had to get Falstaff to the Statue of Liberty. Everything in the book was FALSE. I had to prepare Falstaff for such rubbish if it was the last thing I did. All around us, the Russian Revolution was about to be unleashed all over again.

We walked into the enormous St. John the Divine cathedral on Mari’s suggestion at the corner of Morningside and 112th. It is bigger and yet as beautiful as Notre Dame de Paris. Lovely high stained glass windows, choir practice, vaulted ceilings.

Mari said, “I can believe in God again.”

Falstaff said, “This place is spooky, Dad.”

We held hands and looked up the eighty feet at the blackened ceiling.

“Why don’t we go to the Statue of Liberty?” I suggested, testing the water. To my surprise, there were no real objections. A half hour later we were on the Statue of Liberty ferry leaving from Battery Park.

“Joseph, why are we doing this?” Mari asked.

“Falstaff needs to understand and support American liberty,” I said.

The ferry pushed through the choppy sea and Mari went to the bathroom.

“Joseph, I threw up,” she said. “We have to get back to land.”

“We can’t go back until the tour is over,” I said. “We can’t get the ferry to just turn around. Falstaff, the Constitution says that everyone is equal. At the end of this afternoon, you will be able to explain equality.”

“Dad, does the Statue of Liberty move or play with children? What’s there to do there? I don’t want to be on this boat.”

Falstaff pouted in the silence.

We got out. The Statue was gigantic. It had been given to America by a committee of Frenchmen in the late 1800s under the direction of a French scholar of the American constitution—Edouard Laboulaye. Mari asked me why we were looking at it.

“This was given to America by French Republicans.”

“It’s ugly,” Mari said.

Falstaff ran away through the crowd.

"It's boring," Falstaff screamed.

I grabbed him around the middle and walked him toward Lady Liberty.

"Under whose authority have you run from Liberty, young man?" I screamed.

"Under my authority, DAD!"

I spanked him.

Mari screamed, "No spanking! It is against the law in Finland to strike a child!"

"We're in America," I said, but very softly.

I set Falstaff down and he ran to his mother and glowered.

"Get back here, young man! This is the most important symbol of America! This is the GODDESS of liberty!"

The seaspray from the bay contacted the bronze and turned it green. I thought of capitalism, I thought of the Constitution as a blueprint, of the French scholar of the American constitution, Edouard Laboulaye, and about whether spanking was yet legal. I googled. The statute in New York State said that you could spank the butt but not leave a mark that lasted more than twenty-four hours. In New Jersey, I couldn't find the statute. Liberty Island was split between New Jersey and New York. Where was the dotted line? Had I broken a law? Was I insane to have hit my child, because he didn't support freedom? I thought of Christianity since Moses and how it wasn't about freedom, but about following God through the Sinai, and then Christ, and how the notion of freedom made next to no sense in a Christian context, but yet had been used by the Puritans, but yet, God did Lord it over us, making us follow His Commands. "Spare the rod, spoil the child," said Proverbs. The American Revolution grew out of the

inalienable rights articulated by John Locke, which included the right to vote. It was hell to have so many ideas going through my mind, and yet not have them line up.

“I vote to go shopping,” Mari said.

“I vote to go with Mommy,” Falstaff said, “and to avoid Dad.”

“This is a drag,” Dali said.

“You’re outvoted,” Mari said to me.

I thought of freedom as a legal norm that America had sought to defend, and that it had ended up as freedom to shop. How could I take back the rights of a father, without stepping all over the new rights? This would take reflection.

I looked up at the 300-ft. statue which had the sculptor’s wife’s face, but the body of his mistress. Huddled masses yearned to go shopping. We got on the next ferry and went back to our car, and said goodbye to Dali, who got into a cab and left. He had business, he said.

We drove home the Palisades Parkway up through Harriman, the bypass of the toll booths at the juncture with Route 17, the Idler Pulley still grumbling, and got over the Downsville Mountain just as a rainstorm began which left puddles at the end of our driveway. While the child and wife went in the house, I sat in the car and went once more through my ideas and tried to sweep up the clutter, and pick up. I cried because I had hit Falstaff, and alienated him. What had come over me? Then I tried to clean the car of candy wrappers and brochures and all the other detritus, while pocketing the whopping parking fine: which had been the state’s way of spanking me.

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