

Mother was a Militant

Mother Was a Militant Conservationist

Short Stories on 50 years of Vagabonding, Rock Climbing,

Kayaking, Advocacy, Nursing and Love

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## **Introduction**

They want authentic? These memoirs are authentic. What lessons can be gleaned from a These short stories of advocacy, from finding out one's mother was referred to as a "militant conservationist", that the FBI and law enforcement of the 60's had the camp one spent many a day under active surveillance and the fact that because ones parents founded an Audubon Society they were considered "RED's" (as in communists)? By chance I stumbled upon these facts after looking up one's parents on an internet database of old newspaper articles. Well false news being what it is I asked parents and others who knew my parents was any of what I was reading was true. Some said yes, some said no and some said well they weren't comfortable discussing what took place. Poking the system some more and before the old timers died off it seems news articles are true. This book elaborates on such issues and facts.

The following book is broken down into nine stories. Each story appreciates a short story and lessons learned. Each Story opens with a real-life story, that leads to other factual stories interspersed w lessons on what happens when one questions, confronts and challenges the system. These are stories of the foundation of today's environmental movement that are not widely acknowledged. Some of the writing may make the reader uncomfortable and so if it does then so be it. Broadly the book covers lessons of life of 50 plus years of vagabonding, climbing, kayaking, activism and but of course Nursing.

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### **Story Four of Ten: Young Conservative Chicken Plucker**

Summer of 1993. Dang blast it the Dwight D, Eisenhower People to People Emergency Medical Care Delegation to the Arctic above Norway, Sweden and Finland has been cancelled. Not enough participants. I call the PTP program, I know the Finland program is done is it feasible to participate in another program? Voice on the other end of the telephone says there is a Canadian Pre-Hospital Emergency Care to Russia and Eastern Europe that you can be slotted into. However (a voice dripping w don't bother you won't be able too) you need to have your Russian visa and paperwork ready in less than a month. I think that sounds like a doable problem to address. Mad scramble to get everything ready. Less than a month later and walking through Newark Airport meeting a group of Canadian Physicians, Nurses, Paramedics and Pre-Hospital Care Providers. Dr. Murphy who is leading the delegation greets me by saying you're the American we were told we thought to expect. Yep I am the American. My 1<sup>st</sup> international flight. Landing in Berlin we snag a connecting flight to Moscow. As we are flying over the vast expanses of Russia I can't help but think these are where Napoleon and Hitler's army's crossed before being routed out of Russia, that through the clouds on the lands below history had unfolded in dramatic matter and fashion. Landing in Moscow we are greeted by a teenager in uniform holding a machine gun of some type pointing us to go in that direction. More armed troops, out on the street seems like there are tanks and armored military vehicles lining up around the airport and passing us on the highway into the City. Did I mention there is a travel advisory for American's not to go to Russia because of a pending Russian coup? Think I forget to mention that. Thus I find myself in Moscow as the American in a Canadian Emergency Medical Care Delegation in the middle of an armed Russian rebellion.

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First through you aren't nothing in the international poultry trade unless you can toss a 4 pound chicken 40 feet of the length of a normal sized tractor trailer. How do I know? well dang I got close. One early morning Harold the old guy in the live-bird poultry trade had taken me up to Hunt's Point market to help unload 5,000 live birds from a flat-bed trailer. Folks unloading the truck looked me over w suspicion, who are you and what are you doing here? I work with Harold I said. They backed me up on the trailer and said prove it. Well Harold's nowhere to be seen, though his cigar smoke is wafting about and calling out is not a good idea. So I mention I know the farms where the birds are loaded. Where the live bird markets in New York City are. What birds being delivered are found. They push me further back on the truck. Then one guy says hey I've seen you up at Rickey's live market. So everyone stops and shake my hand. I oversee the off-loading and weighing. They were trying to be slick. Tried shaving weight w various excuses. Lots of looks when I said, ahh you can't to that Harold warned me. Lots of laughter. After unloading the truck one of the folks says hey have you ever tossed a live chicken? Said I Nope, but if you did I guess you might get it abut 10, maybe 15 feet if your lucky. Ah they scoffed we can toss one the length of the trailer and across the loading platform. I gauge the distance it's about 40-45 feet. No-way I say. The loader says bet I could get one that far, you wager some dollars on it? I sense a scam and call their bluff. They all smile and laugh. As we are settling up, the one person takes a live bird, wraps it a few times and with a flick of the wrist the bird is tossed up across the loading platform. It lands w a thud and takes off running. One of the younger folks present catches it and returns the Rhode Island Red to the cage. No worse for wear. Never could master the wrist snap. Live birds lead to exporting break-bulk and full load shipments of frozen poultry into the Russia and other global poultry market. West Africa was informative as all get out. Live birds, led to eggs which lead to machinery and NJ Agriculture items. Jersey Fresh Blueberry and Cranberry to France to cover the flavor of kangaroo meat for one.

There I am in Russia, a coup unfolding. Every where the delegation goes the first question that seems to surface is where is the American? I am concerned enough to say something to Canadians. No problem keep you mouth shut and here's a Canadian flag lapel pin. Anyone asks tell 'em you Canadian. That makes logical sense. First night I Moscow is over the top wicked cool. Sitting in dark, smokey bar, sitting w a Canadian, an English gentlemen and some others. There in a Russian bar discussing Kipling as a coup unfolds and Russian woman wander about. This is in 1993 before the system is corrupted. I just knew this was the place to be and all is good w the world. During the stay in Moscow was standing around some Canadians. This old wizened Russian comes up, beckons w his finger and hand, follow me. He speaks no English and our Russia equally poor. 4 or 5 of us follow him down into the Moscow subway system. He keeps motioning w his hand follow me. His old gray beard flowing as his hunched back supports a man w purpose. We follow around the entire Moscow subway system and its various stations bespoken of architectural beauty. The crowds on the street are growing, military personal are having an obvious presence. We continue site visits around Moscow, learn about feldshers (field doctors, akin to one step above a Physician Assistant in the USA). Russia's emergency medical care system (EMCS) was something to behold. We are told over 60% of patients are treated at home by feldshers, that the dispatch system was integrated w the care of emergency patients. As we leave sites throughout the City we realize the intensity is growing. We spend an evening at the Bolshoi. Rebellion and ballet go hand and hand.

Crowds are pressing deeper, we head over to Red Square. There are no guards on Lenin's Tomb. There are however piles and piles of burning timber all over the Square. The bells of Saint Basil's Cathedral are ringing out. There is a full size orchestra playing open air symphony patriotic tunes

written by Rustakovch and others as the crowds keep growing. The delegation leader cautions us we may have to beat feet on a fairly rapid manner so stay alert. There is obvious tension in the air. Folks keep asking where is the American? Me ? No not me, I'm Canadian you know. We discuss should we scamper through the police and military cordon around the Russia White House...calmer heads prevail and much to some our regrets we do not. We do of course witness a cavalry charge across the square that scatters opposition forces. Oh its getting wickedly delightful. Here it is my first overseas trip and all this taking place. Last night in Moscow we attend dinner in a building we are told is 400 years old. It's a huge cavernous building made of timbers. We are sitting in the middle of a huge open room. Multiple tiers run from floor to ceiling. Smoked filled, yelling and hooting and hollering taking place. Vodka, caviar and crackers are everywhere. Yelling intensifies among those presents and it seems ripe for something unknown. Turns out as we were told that different factions come to this building historically before a coup and engage in a raucous, loud discourse of different opinions and arguments. Of for sure its wonderfully delicious to experience. We do however leave and in doing so encounter the small fact the entire building and block is lined w armored personal carriers and tanks. Their sweet smelling exhausts adding to the music. Time to get out of dodge. We make it the airport the next day and have to literally fight our way through the crowds as everyone it seems is fleeing Moscow. A quick bathroom stop. There a few swarthy looking leather coated types are encountered. They have on the counter a full-size brick of what appears to be hashish. They look at me, I at them, I point to the bathroom stall, I have to go. I make it clear I see nothing. They make it clear I am intruding. Am joined by another Canadian. He realizes real quick there is an issue. Not sure how but we attend to the bathroom and flee quick like a bunny. That is not our affair. We make to the plane and head East towards Eastern Europe.

Upon landing I am asked is there anything I would like to see. Myself and some others say sure we

would like to visit the Tatra Mountains. We are told be at the hotel lobby in the morning. Next day we are driven to a Hungarian military base. The sentry is some kid half asleep. We drive up to a building where we are entertained by Hungarian troops. Alcohol flows freely. Next thing I know and sitting on a bucket in the nose cone of a Russian Military Mi-8T 909 helicopter. Myself and the others switch off from sitting on the bucket. There we go flying across the Hungarian country side, the view spectacular. We land somewhere near the Hungarian Border high in the mountains. Lots of discussions and visits w Hungarian Rescue Association and Alpine Rescue folks. Am asked when I get back to the States can I inquire about a woman's husband who went to Yosemite climbing and did not return. Am sad to say my report on the issue was nor favorable for he and a friend had died climbing. Back to the military base where we launched. Alcohol and feast is laid out for us. Lots of merriment. I get tired and head back to the bus. Fall asleep, more like pass out. Wake up being shaken by an American Colonel in full dress saying who the hell are you and what are you doing here? I provide an explanation. He seems to believe me, in all reality what could he say. That night listening to gypsy music in a underground pub along the Danube River, thinking here is world invasions have taken place going back hundreds of years. That here to the North sits the Great Bend of the Danube River. Purchased a tape of gypsy music. Turns out it was blank. If your going to be taken, being taken by gypsy's is a good way to go. Went for this crazy rail ride out to the Country in the middle of the night. Wound up stopping at some little old rail station asking directions on how do I get back to Budapest. Was received like a Martian. They provided a cup of coffee, directed back to tram and headed back. Course nothing is easy. At one of the other stops a gang of skin heads hops on board. There is them and me on the train. We engage in some banter, neither side knowing what the other is saying. Past Cespal Island and its industrialized past the train runs. Get back to Budapest where the skinheads bide farewell. Well its not over until the fat lady sings and the Czech Republic awaits. We gather from news sources that outright violence and armed fighting is taking place in Moscow and their is some sort of issue w American troops down in Somalia.

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Its vague. Last day in Hungary I encounter the issue w the American doctor.

Landing in Prague I get a feeling that this is the City of heritage and history. More visits to EMCS facility and emergency wards. Visit a few different cultural sites. I break away from the group to spend a few minutes in silence before the Saints Cyril and Methodius Cathedral and pay homage to those Czech National heroes who killed Hitler's henchman Heydrich. The scale and scope of the reality of what takes place is further driven home that oppressed factions are rioting to maintain democracy. I stand at Prague Square and realize here to did others arise against tyranny. We have a few visits to different EMCS facilities in and about Prague. Flying back to the USA I come upon this article in National Geographic Traveler Magazine on the movement of fresh, potable water in oil tankers from South Carolina. I also realize that getting into exports is a good time as Russian's know less about exports and trade that I know, at that time.

Landing at Newark Airport am greeted w headlines of an American troop being dragged through the streets of Somalia. At customs the lady in front of me is giving customs a way hard time. They walk her away. I am laughing when I get to the table. Customs guy is ready to rip into me. What's so funny? I look at him and say I just came from Moscow and filled him in on some of the things encountered. I said that lady before has an issue she should count her blessings. He stamped my passport and said welcome back to the USA.

After graduating from Northern Arizona University snagged a US Commerce Department Eco-Links grant. Back and forth to Washington DC, taking Acela, not really enthused by so called rapid train times. Expensive as all get out. Purpose of an eco-links grant was to help American companies form business partnerships in Russia and the Newly Independent States. Grant was to research the shipped



deport, poultry/kangaroo meat trade and water related health issues in Far East Russia. Well my Russian is poor, figured Russians in Vladivostok would not know Spanish so could compromise on English to communicate. After a 18 plus hours flight, being introduced to Siberians cooking on a stove on the floor of the plane. When in Russia be Russian. Flying above the wide Sibearn steepes and forests, playing Neil Young, Dylan and John Prime on a balalaika with some Russians. Ingest copious amounts of vodka and land in the Far East of Russia. Greeted by Russian folks I answer in flawless Camden New Jersey street Spanish all smug and American arrogant. Reality smacked quick. They responded in classic flawless Spanish. WTF? Turns out Vladivostok is home to the Russian-Cuban institute and is one of the few Ports of the world where Cuban vessels call on a regular basis. Nothing like embarrassing ones-self right up front. We shortly there after switched to English/Russian. Hauling into the City I inquire seems like we are driving against traffic and running traffic lights. Ah Ruskla tweaks my brain what have I gotten myself into. Driver laughs, everyone starts laughing. Say them democracy means freedom and freedom means no laws so we drive where we drive. Makes logical sense and so this sets the tone. Ah lets drive down to the Tumen River on the Russian-North Korean border, lets visit the lesbian karaoke bar and sing Bob Dylan, lets check-out the nature reserve up North of the City and much more. There I am sitting in a banya slapping self w birch/aspen boughs w the local Governor. We swim about the local lake. Sit down at a wonderful outside feast. Me, from Mount Holly w all these Russians. Before leaving I had been briefed by US Commerce staff if you sit down w Russians you can decline the first drink without upsetting the honor of the offer but if you accept the first drink you are in for the long haul.

Little international competition takes up. Trading shot for shot Russians are drinking the crazy American under the table. They know it, I know it, I feel it. Well before that happens I switch out rather surreptitiously a full bottle of vodka w water. Last round is placed before me. I smile take the

switched bottle, lean back and guzzle it empty. It's splashing all over the place. My face and clothes are covered with "vodka" (water). I remain sitting. Russian lady pulls a knife, holds it against my throat laughing hysterically she thinks I am going down. Governor looks at me, takes a full bottle of vodka, chugs it down and collapses on the table. Make a long story short spent the rest of that wonderful day there in Far East Russia, in the land on the Siberian tiger, among people of the earth and the soul of Russia. We kept the passed out Russian covered w a blanket as the sun set and evening came upon the quaking, yellow hued aspens. Of for sure we discussed all sorts of things but rather in a good way and as is proper among friends. Its getting late, we carry the Governor to his car and I notice everyone is laughing. Ok makes sense. Heading back to the port we stop and get ice cream at a small booth located along the quay, sit down and have fresh caught braised octopus done on an iron skillet on a fishing boat and wind up back at the Governor's house. He remains kind of sombulant. I am informed and the body guard agrees that because I stayed upright it is now my responsibility to get the governor into his house. Ok, a few folks help w that. Ah I got it. His wife is ready to rip him apart and lacking that venue I become the target of her ire. How dare we bring the man home like this. Who is responsible? All eyes turn to me. Who me....

Next day am handing out blown glass globes from New Jersey's Wheaton village to the Governor and exchanging pleasantries. I tell him I suckered him w the vodka the night before. He seems really angry and stalks out...I look around, people aren't saying a word, avoiding eye contact. He comes back in a few hours w these beautiful hand-carved Far Eastern items as a gift. Say his wife asked would I accept them. For sure I take to the Russian way of thinking and mindset. I make a courtesy call to the American consulate only to be told I can come in but not the Russians. Ok, so I don't go in. Pompous attitudes are not helpful. Am getting interviewed on Russian television extolling the wonders and benefits of American-Russian people to people discourse. Every time I talked a bull-dozer would start-

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up. Seems as much as everyone wanted to hear me talk it was better to just be seen and thus the Russians were able to dub in other words for my own. Hey in Russia do as the Russian do.

Got up deep in the Russian National Park and visited the Russian nature club. As beautiful as Russian women are nothing but nothing beats the beauty of crisp fall days out among the aspen rioting in glorious colors and explosions of multi-hued mists dancing among clouds so wispy. Yes and that is a statue of Lenin. Ah Ruskla you beckon me forward.

Russians and I visit the maritime institute. Yakking away in Russian I am positioned to be standing up next to a group of Americans. They are bashing the locals for all sorts of reasons. I rework where I am standing w the Russians. Hey that looks like a group of Russian naval personal standing inside the Steller Walrus exhibit w the stuffed walrus. Commanding officer is taking the photo. I tap him on the shoulder, gesture join the crew I will take the picture. My Russian friends give a nod. He crosses into the exhibit and they get a full crew photo. Behind me I hear the Americans who are from the consulate going on about Russians not respecting the exhibits and other moronic comments. I never let on I was from New Jersey.

Back into town, joined a pro-marijuana demonstration, chilled down at the Aurora. Oh Pushkin, carrying words and prose of revolution did she travel from St. Petersburg to Peter the Great Bay spreading the word. Czar is dead, imperial rule is done, Lenin in is charge. Maritime heritage runs deep, am escorted aboard and around some other Russian naval vessels. No photos, that's fine we share a love of the sea, the ocean and of people.

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Ah not to digress but I am there on business. Hence I find myself in an elevator heading to a meeting with the Russian minders to discuss American exports of frozen poultry and lacking that kangaroo meat. Joe Balzano may he also RIP, long standing director of the South Jersey Port Corporation had told me before I left build relationships with the Russians before doing business and stay on your toes as you may be enticed into something where you will not want to be. His warning is starting to flash in my brain. Get off the elevator to be greeted by an armed, rather mean looking surly type. He trucks no BS. Empty's my briefcase, separates me from my Russia minders who says be careful as I am spun away and pushed into a rather large conference room. Am put up against a wall, frisked, my empty briefcase returned and then marched into another room. There at the desk sits a few folks.

Danger close, all my hairs are standing up on end. I think I can vanish and no-one will know squat. Oh these folks aren't happy looking folks at all. My interpreter is marched into the room placed in chair flanked by folks with weapons. She is freaking scared and I tell you I know its not a safe place to be. Gentlemen behind the counter start up the discussion. Volume of poultry and kangaroo meat available? Break bulk, Full loads. What are terms? CIF, EXW, FCA, FAS, FOB? Inco terms, Letter of credits drawn on whose bank, proper. Contracts in English. Can you handle other products and the like? I answer. Tell them on top of the kangaroo meat can supply Jersey fresh cranberry and blueberry so Russians can do like the French and cut the gamey taste of Kangaroo meat with berry's. Head's are nodding as we discuss banking terms. I glance around. My interpreter has been hustled out the room. It is all of sudden very quiet. The Russian at the desk leans forward with steely eyes and says its time we visit the freezer. Just you, no-one else. I noticed on his outstretched hands 3 black dot tattoos on the base of his thumb. Looking around notice others have them.

Balazano's and Al the Conservative Chicken Pluckers words flood my synoptic junctions. Be careful, folks in Russia can make you vanish. I defer on the freezer visit. They insist, I defer. They do more

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than insist as am surrounded by folks w guns. We are going to visit the freezer. No I say I am not going. Man behind the desks leans forwards and whispers a voice that is so loud every warning in my brain jumps out, you are coming w us. He leans further forward, don't you trust us? I shake my head croak out a barely audible "No, matter of fact I am worried on my safety but I feels stupid saying that to you". Russian heads around the room are nodding. No-one is smiling. I feel a hand on my shoulder as I am lifted from my chair, marched out to the elevator and escorted to the front of the building. As I leave am greeted by Russian interpreter and others. A huge sigh of relief among everyone that I returned safely.

We go down to the sea-side promenade and sit and listening to the people sitting about. I see folks playing a guitar. We exchange pleasantries and soon credible renditions of Bob Dylan and Neil Young drift across the beach out into Russia's Pacific. A few more meeting w representatives of the Bank, Port and Far East Shipping. Am interviewed on a radio station. Here it is asked what do I think about my visit. What can I say its is quiet enjoyable, Russian people in the Far East are friendly as can be. We talked about Russian opera and they of Far East Russian folks tales, ah Rusalka. While I was caught in the back seat w a Russian lady, how was I to know she was daughter of the regional internal security force. Lucky we were just talking.

Wind up doing some surveying of water pipelines and visiting the Russian naval base up along the coast. Maps are drawn and locations marked of site characteristics. Walking along the top of a Russian water pipeline am struck that here outside the City and Port is this huge open-air garbage dump all on fire. Russians say we learned about this way from American's. Water borne mortality and morbidity rates are related to such issues.

After spending all day walking about the Port, visiting and mingling w Russians, accosted by Russian

women wanting to exchange rubles for American dollars. I pass on this along w other offers. I fall asleep that night dreaming of a softness, of Russians fighting tyranny and riots on the street, am exhausted but a fine way to dream and slumber. Am awoken by massive loud pounding hammering away at the door before it is flung open. Hotel room floods w Russian uniformed and plain clothes security agents. They are going through all my stuff, am thrust onto a chair. The one gentleman who has been with me for the best part of the stay and has not said anything now converses in flawless English, We don't believe your American, prove it". I don't have a passport as it was taken and held upon my arrival. My documents from the US Commerce Department are tossed aside.

I attempt to respond, they are not having it at all. I take my wallet, inside a photo of me and my sisters. I say family in USA. They aren't buying that either. Room has been ransacked. Questions coming back into my face all w the same thread. Prove you are American. After a few the entire group get up and leave. I sit there shaking, what the heck is going on. A few hours go by. A knock on the door. Its me Russian "friend". Your stay is over we are here to escort you from the City. Your flight leaves shortly. He waits until I am packed as we leave the hotel we are joined by some others. My ticket which is not for a flight out on that date and time is honored as I am whisked through boarding.

It is only later do I find out that an American has been arrested for spying, passing nuclear submarine information, earlier that day to someone. By weird chance I happened to be in the building in the next room when such activity had supposedly taken place so I am told. Course the Russian planning map of Far East Russia is buried deep in my belongings. It "accidentally" found its way there.

Flying back to Moscow join a crew from a Russian chemical tanker. The vessel's master extends an invite to join them flying and staying in Moscow. How can one refuse. Ah Moscow has sure changed since my last visit. A few days go by. Am at the airport getting ready to fly out. Tanker crew and I are

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standing around talking. We are rudely interrupted by some American's. They say to us all, we are missionary's here to spread the word of Christ to you heathen and ungodly Russians. Somehow they focus on me. Russian tanker crew is stone-faced. I look at these Americans and answer in English I am from New Jersey and don't take kindly to your sad ass attempts of conversion. They are shocked and walk away followed by our laughter. One last round of vodka and back to the United States. Customs this time has issues with my Russians topographic, planning maps and naval charts that are marked up. Takes some explaining to do before am back on American soil.

Like to conclude this section with an international incident that took place. I was in Budapest on a Sunday morning looking to get 500 copies of material for the Hungarian Alpine Club. I ask at the front desk. They direct me to the business center which they open for me to get copies. Lady behind the counter says make yourself comfortable it will take some time. OK. I snag a seat and sat reading the Hungarian newspaper. There is an article about the Danube River barrage. Good stuff and way to pass a Sunday morning. A group of Hungarians come into the center, they are friends of the lady behind the counter. Folks are smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee and having a fun time. All sudden the doors kicks open and a lady walk in. She immediately in English starts berating the lady behind the counter and others about being shiftless, worthless Hungarians and the like. I pull my paper up, am highly embarrassed. Then comes the icing on the cake, she directs a huge volume of negative comments at me thinking I am Hungarian. She states I am the President of the Medical organization holding its conference in this hotel. That it's disgrace I am dressed like a slob. Right I am going out climbing. She marches to the desk put her copies down which run off. Before she leaves she directs further stupid comments at me. I get my copies and leave. I am deeply embarrassed. When I get back to the US I send a letter via snail mail to the hotel corporate offices. I thanked the staff for their help and apologized for the actions of that lady saying not all people are

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like that. A few weeks go by. I get what I believe is the typical corporate response thanking me for my letter that has been forwarded to Budapest, that if I ever needed anything from the hotel chain to refer to the letter.

Jump forward a few years. Am in San Francisco w the Northern Arizona University Model United Nation club. We students are participating. Seems the hotel has lost the University's reservation so now the group plus the advisor do not have a place to stay. Voices are being raised. I ask to speak to the manager. I tell him about the letter and issue from Budapest. Figured what the heck, it might be helpful. He excuses himself, comes back in a few minutes. Mr. Anderson we will be glad to get the reservation issue resolved. Which they did. He pulled me aside away from others and said yes my name was on file in the hotel because of the Budapest incident. Note to self if act like a fool in foreign country that will most likely come back to bite you on the ass. Respect always anchors people to people discourse.



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