CHILDHOOD

SOUTH HADLEY, HOLYOKE, FLINT AND MOUNT MORRIS · 1943–1961

On Kerosene Stoves, Gravel Pits, Twisters and Such

How much can come
And much can go,
And yet abide the world!
EMILY DICKINSON

In the autumn of 1949 South Hadley, Massachusetts, was still the sort of place a guidebook could describe without irony. The Federal Writers' Project had called it, a dozen years before, "a farming and college community on the Connecticut River below the low foothills of the Holyoke range," a town of "shaded streets, broad lawns, and quiet homes," whose farms sent "milk and butter for near-by manufacturing districts." The guide's chapter on it was titled "Milk, Butter, and Ideas," the ideas being supplied by Mount Holyoke College, founded in 1837 and the oldest of the leading women's colleges of New England. Its "leading industry continues to be paper-making, on a moderate scale, but farming is a close second," the guide went on; the Irish had come in the 1840s, the French Canadians after them for the mills, "and there are smaller colonies of German and Polish descent." Daniel's mother's family, the Krugs, were of the German colony. The town's early history had been livelier. Its first minister, dismissed by his congregation, simply declined to notice, and "eventually had to be forcibly ejected from the pulpit with a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, to prevent him from praying en route." By 1950 South Hadley held 10,145 people, half again as many as ten years before, and it would grow by half again before 1960.

Across the river lay Holyoke, a mill city of 54,661 that had stopped growing. Its paper mills, which made "high-grade writing paper, the principal support of the town," had given it the name of "The Paper City," and its people, the same guide reported, were one-third Irish, with French Canadians enough to make it "an outstanding Catholic center," Poles "ten per cent of the inhabitants," and the rest "of English, Scotch, German, Italian, Greek, Scandinavian, or Jewish origin." The city's favorite story was about its dam.

The first one, finished in 1848, gave way the same day, and the disaster was reported to the owners in Boston by a series of telegrams, the last of which read, "Your old dam's gone to hell by way of Willimansett." The guide is careful to say only that this "is said to have been" how it went. The dam of 1949 was a sturdier one, and on August 22 of that year the Holyoke Water Power Company began digging beside it for a new power station, which came on line two years later.

Daniel St. John was five. He had been born on November 13, 1943, in Flint, Michigan, as he always understood it, while his father was away at the war; he was two before he first saw him, and after a spell in California near his grandfather St. John, the family had come back to Massachusetts "when I was three years old, three, four years old." The chapters before this one tell those years. Now they were "living part with my grandmother," in South Hadley, in the household of his mother's parents, William and Elizabeth Krug.

The Krugs had been, in Daniel's words, "probably the wealthiest people in South Hadley," with "all the prime land right at the crossroads and acres of land going right down to the river." There was a little sister by then, three years younger than he was. And there was his father, John, who had come home from France a member of the Communist Party, "very in love with the Russians," as Daniel put it, and sure, as the party was, that the workers "had to take over the state just like they did in Russia."



OUR HOUSE BURNED DOWN (ILLUSTRATION)

The party had firm views on more than wages. "One of the things of the left-wingers in this country," Daniel explained, "was being for equal treatment of Negroes... and there were many of the young Negroes became communistic because of their, you know, their experience with racism. And, you know, they just needed something, right?" His father's friends were that kind of left-winger, and so, before long, were the people the family turned to when everything they owned went up in smoke.

In the autumn of 1949, Daniel was in the first grade. The family had moved out of his grandparents' house into "this little place down the street," as he described it, "some property with an old unfinished building on it." He was young for his class. "I was five and I didn't become six until November 13th. So I was kind of a young first grader. But I could read quite well then anyway... For some reason, reading very early." The new place did not last the season. "First month of my being in school, our house burned down," he said. The cause, as he told it, was the family's cheap old kerosene stove. "And we were left homeless."

No report of the fire has been found. The valley's daily papers for that autumn are not to be had online, and the town's fire reports for 1949 sit in a printed annual report on a library shelf in South Hadley, waiting for someone to go and look. What is certain is where the family went next. "We moved into Holyoke," Daniel said, "with these fellow communist couple. They were Jewish communists." The wife of the house had just come back from a concert.

> *And she had just been to this concert and the concert was given by Paul Robeson, who was a black American communist. He was an opera star... A very famous opera star. And he was also a very famous football player. But he was at a benefit. He was doing a concert and these right wingers attacked them, attacked the goers of the concert. And the police stood by and they, anyway, the lady of the house, I think it was her name was Nina, had her leg broken.*

The concert that fits, to the week, was at Peekskill, New York. Paul Robeson was a bass-baritone who had sung "Ol' Man River" in *Show Boat* and played Othello, and before that an All-American end at Rutgers in 1917 and 1918 who went on to play professional football for Akron and Milwaukee. He was also, loudly, a man of the left. His benefit concert for the Civil Rights Congress, set for August 27, 1949, never began. Before Robeson arrived, a mob attacked the audience with baseball bats and rocks, a cross burned on the hillside, and he was lynched in effigy. "Our objective

was to prevent the Paul Robeson concert," said the commander of Peekskill's American Legion post, "and I think our objective was reached."

They tried again on Sunday, September 4, on an old golf course nearby, and about twenty thousand people came. Robeson sang without trouble. It was the leaving that went wrong. The cars and buses were steered onto roads where veterans and their families stood waiting with rocks, a gauntlet miles long. The Associated Press reported the next morning that "at least eight autos and an empty bus were overturned, and an auto was set afire," and that "glass splinters were so thick on some spots of road that it looked as if a sleet storm had hit."

Eugene Bullard, a decorated veteran of the First World War and the first Black American to fly in combat, was knocked down and beaten by a crowd that included state and local policemen, and the beating was caught on film. More than 140 people were hurt, by most counts, as the police stood by; fifty-four were treated in hospitals. One car held Pete Seeger, with his wife and infant children, and Woody Guthrie, who pinned a shirt over the inside of the window against the rocks.

"Wouldn't you know it," the singer Lee Hays remembered, "Woody pinned up a red shirt." Within days a sticker turned up, reportedly plastered on the buses and cars, that put the matter plainly: "Communism is Treason. Behind Communism Stands the Jew!"

Two weeks later a reader wrote to the *Guardian*, a Black weekly in Boston, about what he had heard on the Monday after the concert "from the lips of a group of people from Holyoke who had driven down to Peekskill to hear that greatest of American baritones in concert." Their car, "containing women as well as men, had been halted by state troopers, overturned in front of their eyes by young hoodlums," and the party attacked. "They all wore bandages and splints when I spoke to them," he wrote. The letter names nobody, and no record says whether Nina was in that car. But there was a carload of people from Holyoke at Peekskill, and they came home in splints.

Robeson had called the first attack "no mere local incident." "It's pretty clear who uses force and violence," he told the press in New York, and he asked Governor Dewey and the Department of Justice to investigate. Dewey refused to meet the three hundred people who went to Albany to protest, and blamed the communists; the grand jury he called for, when it reported the next June, largely cleared the local authorities.

By Christmas, Robeson, the novelist Howard Fast, the Civil Rights Congress and twenty-five of the injured were suing the state, the county and two veterans' organizations, a suit that was eventually dismissed. More than eighty of Robeson's concert dates were cancelled in the months that followed, and the State Department took away his passport. The football player and the singer had become, in the newspapers, chiefly a red.

In Massachusetts the protest came quickly. On the Saturday after the second concert a crowd met at Frederick Douglass Square in Boston to hear speakers, among them a young NAACP lawyer from New York, Louis Maples, who had been at Peekskill himself and been hurt. "Hoodlums attacked men, women and children alike on their way home from the Robeson concert," he told them, "but police made no arrests." Roy Wilkins of the NAACP said that Dewey, by blaming Robeson's followers before his own grand jury had sat, had "prejudged" the case. A month later Robeson sang to more than seventeen thousand people at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles. Twenty-two hundred policemen surrounded the park, and nothing happened at all.

"And we moved in with them in the fall of that year," Daniel said. "And they were terrified because of, you know, having been exposed to all this, you know, first they were Jewish, they were subject to anti-Semitism. Then they were communists or reds, right?" With their own house gone, the St. Johns stayed partly with Nina's family in Holyoke and partly, as Daniel put it, "at this other place." By the spring the Krugs had them back.

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In the spring of 1950, Daniel was six and back in his grandparents' house in South Hadley. On April 19 a census taker came to the door and wrote them all down, seven in the house: William Krug, fifty-six; his wife, Elizabeth, who had been born in Virginia; his sister Eleanor, a quiller in

a woolen mill; their son Frederick, twenty-one; their daughter, Daniel's mother, twenty-nine, who was packing greeting cards forty hours a week; and her two children. Daniel's father was not in the house.

Where he was that April, the census does not say. The sheet itself was sealed by law for seventy-two years and opened to the public only in 2022, and it is the only record of the family that these years have so far yielded.

As Daniel told it, his father had decided, "and I think he was advised by his comrades that the best thing for him to do was to... go to Flint, Michigan and be involved with the labor because he was from that area and his father had worked in the Buick plant in the 30s so he knew the working people. He was a white guy and a working class kind of guy. So he would be very good as a union leader." On another day he put it more simply: "The Communist Party suggested that people ... would go to places where they could be accepted by workers or people. And since he was from Flint, Michigan, and his family had worked in the automobile factories, that we should go there."

The party had had its eye on Flint for some time. At a meeting of its Michigan state committee in Detroit in August 1946, an FBI informant later reported, one of the party's leaders "pointed out that Flint was the main concentration camp under the current organizing drive of the Communist Party." In the party's vocabulary a concentration was simply a place where effort was to be concentrated, and the phrase meant nothing worse, though it is hard to imagine a less fortunate way of putting it a year after the war. At the same meeting a man from Flint explained that no collections had been made there "because of bad weather and poor work," and a second assured the room that Flint "was the best of the three towns."

The party's own papers, which turned up in a congressional hearing in 1954, say much the same. A resolution of the Michigan party "on concentration" put it bluntly: "Flint is the key to moving the General Motors division of the UAW, the division which Reuther heads, and therefore the key to striking a powerful blow against social democracy. Whatever develops in Flint has great influence on the entire UAW." It said what was to be done about it, too: "Many comrades would be encouraged to volunteer to change their jobs to seek employment in large auto plants."

To that end the party sent in what it called colonizers. "The word 'colonizer' was used quite frequently at that time," an informant testified, "and at that time it meant people who were sent by the Communist Party from other cities, principally New York." They were even told which plant to apply to, "because they wouldn't want all the Communists, for instance, to work at Buick as Chevrolet needed a few, too, as did Fisher and AC."

For their first three months in the shop, until their seniority was safe, they "were the epitome of good behavior," and Flint got fewer of them than the party wanted, "much to the chagrin of the Communist organizers because many of the colonizers were so used to the big city life in New York that they rather liked Detroit because it seemed more like home." The newcomers had another weakness, which was that nobody knew them, and so the party paired them with local people.

The same witness, who had joined the Flint party for the FBI in September 1949, was kept on, he said, "because I was a native Flintite," so that "the Flint people could give them directions as to the environment in Flint." In Flint the party was organized by plant, with a club at AC-Fisher, at Buick, at Chevrolet and at Fisher Body, and one community club, which had nine members. John St. John was no New Yorker. He was, as his son said, "from that area."

"So we went there when I was... six years old," Daniel said. "I never finished the first grade. Anyway, that's another story."

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In the summer of 1950, the family was living on the edge of Flint, in "this town of Mount Morris," as Daniel called it. The state's WPA guide had dismissed Mount Morris in a sentence: it "is virtually a suburb of Flint. Its working population is employed mainly in the industrial plants there." It had 2,890 people in 1950 and was named, like a good many Michigan towns, for the place in New York its founders came from. Flint itself was the real thing.

"Flint makes automobiles for the Nation," the guide said. "Huge factories — long, squat, and seemingly all windows — sprawl throughout the city. The Buick factory is in the north, the mile-long Chevrolet plants and Fisher Body No. 2 Plant in the west, the AC Spark Plug factories in the east." General Motors employed ninety per cent of the city's factory workers. In 1950 Flint had 163,143 people, and by 1960 it would have almost 197,000, the most it ever had; Genesee County as a whole grew by more than a third in the decade.

"On the outskirts," the guide added, "far removed from the din of pneumatic hammers and car loadings, are the neatly aligned houses of businessmen and motor-company executives." Mount Morris was the other kind of outskirts. The Buick works, as it happens, had begun on St. John Street, which had nothing to do with the family and is mentioned here only because it is true.

Outside Flint and Mount Morris lay the gravel pits. Genesee County dug sand and gravel in those years, most of it for concrete and for the roads the boom was building, and the old pits filled with water. "When I was six," Daniel said, "we would go to the gravel pit... It was in Genesee County. It was outside of Flint, outside of Mount Morris to these gravel pits. And we'd go swimming there and fishing." There, one day, his father taught him to swim, by a method that was quick, if nothing else.

> *And I did not know how to swim. And so he just said, oh, this is the way you swim. He threw me in there. And I just went down. And I thought I was dead, you know. Then he fished me out. He said, well, better learn how to swim.*

In the autumn of 1950, Daniel was in the second grade in Mount Morris, where he would stay through the sixth, and his father was working in the foundry. "He worked in the automobile factory in the foundry," Daniel said, and he became a union steward. Which plant it was, Daniel did not say, and no record of it has been found. Buick, where John's own father had worked in the 1930s, had a gray iron foundry on the north side of the city, nearest to Mount Morris; but so did others, and the foundry is all that is certain.

He had arrived at a good moment, as these things go. In May 1950 General Motors and the United Auto Workers signed a contract to run five years "without any interim reopening." Chrysler's workers, in the same weeks, had settled only after a strike of a hundred days. The GM contract kept the cost-of-living escalator, raised the yearly "improvement factor" from three cents an hour to four, and promised a pension of $100



BETTER LEARN HOW TO SWIM (ILLUSTRATION)

a month at sixty-five after twenty-five years. *Fortune* magazine called it the Treaty of Detroit and said it "made the worker to an amazing degree a middle class member of a middle class society." It was a grand bargain, and a union meeting in Flint, by Daniel's account, was a fairly homely affair.

> *So we would go to these union meetings and they would have donuts and they would play Abbott and Costello movies and have donuts and stuff and then they would decide if they were going to have a strike or how they were going to handle their relationship with General Motors and whatever and then it was not such a bad time. We were very poor, but we went hunting and we did have a dog and we went pheasant hunting and stuff and some social stuff with these friends of his that were like, what you would say, left wingers.*

Abbott and Costello were then the most popular comedy team in America, and during the war they had been the highest-paid entertainers in the world. What they had to do with collective bargaining nobody has recorded. The pheasants were at least plentiful. Michigan's guidebook of 1941 put the yearly kill of cock pheasants at 750,000 and noted that although some 400,000 small-game hunters were licensed each year, "the coveys continue to increase."

A resident's small-game license cost a dollar, the season in the Lower Peninsula ran for less than a fortnight in October, and the limit was two cocks a day and six a season. Sixty pages further on, in its essay on conservation, the same guide gave the annual kill as "in excess of 750,000,000," which is a thousand times as many and suggests that somebody, at some point, stopped counting birds and started counting zeroes.

The left wingers were another matter. "It was all during the McCarthy period," Daniel said, and "there was a heavy movement to stomp out the left wing and the labor... and it was the left wing that actually organized the labor back in the 30s but they got rid of them because of the McCarthyism, anti-communism." Flint was where the organizing had been done. In the winter of 1936–37 its GM workers had sat down in the plants for forty-four days and come out with a union.

Ten years later the union was cleaning house. Walter Reuther won the presidency of the UAW in 1946 and in November 1947 won it again by a landslide, which *Life* called "the biggest setback of all time for the Communists in the American Labor Movement." The Taft–Hartley Act of the same year required every union officer to swear that he was not a communist; within a year some 81,000 of them had signed.

In April 1952 Michigan passed a law of its own, requiring communists to register with the state and defining a communist, with admirable thoroughness, as "a member of the communist party, notwithstanding the fact that he may not pay dues to, or hold a card in, said party." In September 1952 the FBI arrested the leaders of the Michigan party, and six of them, among them a UAW organizer named Nat Ganley, were tried in Detroit under the Smith Act and convicted; the convictions were later overturned.

The other thing the union had to deal with was the South. Between 1940 and 1970 more than five million Black Americans left the South for the cities of the North and West, and white Southerners came too. Flint's work drew them from Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee and the Deep South, Black and white, and the city's Black population, 6,599 in 1940, was 13,906 in 1950 and would be 34,521 by 1960.

"The southern whites were coming north to work in the factories and also the blacks were because there was lots of work there," Daniel said, "and they would be clashing where they're on the job... there was a lot of racism going on there and my father's job was to try to deal with it to get organized people so that you know they would work together for a common cause and forget that they are black and white." The party had put the same thing in its program, in capital letters: among its tasks were "Organizing the fight for peace, Organizing the fight for Negro rights." Its Flint members held their parties at the Royal Gardens on St. John Street, and a witness remembered that a speaker came up from the state committee "to talk on the Negro subject."

At home it meant company. "So we had a lot of black friends and had them over the house," Daniel said. "I'd go to their birthday parties. And thanks to that, I did never become racist. Like

most of the people I knew were racist. Most of the whites anywhere in the North or South, I was not racist."

In the spring of 1953, Daniel was nine and in the fourth grade when the news came from Moscow. Joseph Stalin had a stroke on March 1 and died on the evening of March 5; at his funeral in Moscow four days later at least 109 people were crushed to death in the crowds. Daniel tied what came next for his father to that year. "Stalin died in 1953 when I was 10 years old," he said. "And Khrushchev let be known to the world that Stalin was a bad guy. He committed atrocities. And so it went through the left wing like a shot... And that was something my father had a lot of trouble with because he was a Stalinist."

The American papers had their own view. The day after he died, the Washington *Evening Star* gave Stalin a long obituary that dwelt on the purges, on the rivals who had died in the "treason" trials, and on Trotsky, who had been "assassinated in Mexico by a Communist agent who bashed in his head with a pick-ax while he was working on an uncomplimentary biography of Joseph Stalin." It also explained, with some care, how Stalin's admirers saw all that. "The purges and spies, the concentration camps, regimentation and fear," the paper said, "these, to them, are merely a benign fever burning an old sickness from the body politic."

Daniel's own account of how his father had come to that ran like this: "He had no idea. He thought the Russians must be great. You know, he had worshipped Stalin because Stalin was really defeating the fascists, right? There was no news coming out of there... a lot of people, the left-wing people did not know of the atrocities going on under Stalin. They were idealistic about, you know, socialism."

The full reckoning took a little longer than that. Khrushchev made his speech against Stalin to a closed session of the party congress on February 25, 1956, and the American government released the text that June, when the *New York Times* printed all of it. By 1957 the Communist Party of the United States was down to fewer than ten thousand members, of whom, by one estimate, some fifteen hundred were informants for the FBI. Whenever the arguments began, Daniel heard them.

> *And his friends, his left wing friends were saying to him, John, this guy was not what we thought he was, you know. And it actually set him drinking because he he would go and argue with these people. He loves to talk politics into the night, you know. And I used to hear all this. I was I don't care if I was six years old or seven years. I hear all about Marxism. all about all this stuff. I heard it. I went on the hunting trips. I heard every filthy joke they tell. I was like a confidant and I heard his ideas and he was frustrated because he could not believe that Stalin was that bad and that all of his ideas so it was like the God that failed.*

The God That Failed was a real book, as it happens, published in 1949: six writers, among them Arthur Koestler and Richard Wright, explaining how they had believed in communism and stopped. Daniel's phrase was its title. "And that kind of messed him up," he said of his father.

In the early summer of 1953, Daniel was finishing the fourth grade in Mount Morris. Flint was having a good year; Chevrolet was building the first Corvettes there that summer, three hundred of them, by hand. Then the tornado came. On the afternoon of Monday, June 8, the *Flint Journal* forecast "strong thunderstorms with hail and gusty winds over 50 mph," and at about half past seven the Weather Bureau's severe storms unit put out a bulletin; there was no such thing, yet, as a tornado warning for the public.

At about 8:30 p.m. a tornado touched down in Mount Morris Township, near Webster and Coldwater Roads, and minutes later the Weather Bureau's Flint station logged it in the clipped style of the trade: "unconfirmed Tornado reported 2 mi N Flushing heading ENE possibly hitting Flint." It ran east along Coldwater Road, up to half a mile wide, into Beecher, the crowded neighborhood between Mount Morris and Flint.

At the North Flint Drive-In on Saginaw Street, where the evening's picture was, of all things, *Invasion U.S.A.*, a sixteen-year-old named Charles Rachor looked back over his shoulder as the

screen flickered on and saw "a black funnel cloud stretching from the horizon to the sky." The cars poured out, and at the corner of Saginaw and Coldwater, he remembered, people ignored the light, "smashing into each other like a demolition derby." His friends stopped in front of Beecher High School to watch it come. When it hit, the windshield "disintegrated as if a thousand stones had been thrown at it."

The Weather Bureau's own summary, written up that summer, gave the path in a sentence: the tornado "struck the northern edge of Flint, moving eastward down Coldwater Road with complete destruction." It killed 116 people, 113 of them in Beecher and fifty-four of them children, and injured 867. In twenty families more than one person died, and two men lost their entire families; one of them, a General Motors worker, had been at work when the storm crossed his street. It wrecked 340 houses and struck Beecher High School.

"Of recorded tornadoes," the Bureau noted, "this one killed more people in the State than all previous Michigan tornadoes combined." "It was horrible," a retired Chevrolet worker who lived on Coldwater Road told the Associated Press. "It was the most terrible thing I ever saw." The police commissioner of Detroit said the damage was worse than what he had seen in London during the Blitz.

Governor G. Mennen Williams moved his office to Flint and called out the National Guard, and the next day "lines of blood donors more than a block long formed" at the first-aid stations. "Flint was a sorrowful town this morning," the AP reported. It was the deadliest tornado in the state's history, and for fifty-eight years the last in the country to kill more than a hundred people, in a year that had already seen 114 killed at Waco, Texas, that spring.

The first counts were higher still: the next morning's wire had 124 dead in Michigan, and nineteen more from the same storms in Ohio. Daniel's own count was higher than either. "We had a big tornado there," he said. "It went right by us and killed 400 people... it was a very bad tornado." He was right about the first part: it began in the township where the family lived.

The storm was not finished. The Weather Bureau's monthly review traced both days' tornadoes to "a pronounced prefrontal squall line" tied to "a deep Low which moved out of New Mexico, across Lake Superior, and eastward through southeastern Canada," and the same line of weather that had crossed Mount Morris Township on Monday evening reached New England on Tuesday. At 4:25 that afternoon, June 9, a



IT WENT RIGHT BY US (ILLUSTRATION)

tornado formed in the woods near Petersham, Massachusetts, and ran forty-eight miles through Worcester County, killing ninety people by the Bureau's count that year (ninety-four by later ones), hurting nearly thirteen hundred and leaving some ten thousand homeless.

The Bureau called it "the most violent and destructive tornado in New England's history." Forecasters in Boston, using the new warnings for the first time that year, had issued the first severe thunderstorm watch in the state's history. It was, the AP said the next morning, "the worst tornado ever to visit New England," and it had "spent its fury within 30 minutes." "And another tornado went through Worcester," Daniel said, and he counted "another three, 400 people, you know, just in Worcester, Massachusetts."

"And my mother got frightened by it," he said, "so we went back to stay in Massachusetts." When they went, the record cannot say. By the count of his school years, the second through the sixth in Mount Morris, Daniel did not start school in Massachusetts again until the autumn of 1955, two years after the storm; and he himself once dated the Michigan years as "roughly 1954 to five years after that." Perhaps his mother took the children east after the tornado and came back; perhaps the tornado was the reason remembered for a move that came later. The family stayed long enough, at any rate, for what Daniel called the McCarthy committee to reach Flint.

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In the spring of 1954, by the count of his school years, Daniel was in the fifth grade in Mount Morris when the hearings came to town. "All of his friends were being called in by the McCarthy committee," he said, "especially his Jewish friends." It was not, strictly, Senator McCarthy's committee but the House Committee on Un-American Activities, whose Michigan hearings were run by Congressman Kit Clardy, known as Michigan's McCarthy, which was close enough for most purposes.

The committee sat in the Supervisors Room of the Genesee County Courthouse in Flint on May 12, 13 and 14, 1954, with more than thirty witnesses summoned, only one of them friendly. Its chairman, Harold Velde, flew in to open the proceedings and thanked "the good people of Flint." "I have also driven several of the cars that are manufactured here in the great city of Flint and in the city of Detroit," he told them. "I have also had one repossessed."

The UAW, which had spent seven years pushing the communists out, wanted no help from Congress in finishing the job. In a statement over Walter Reuther's signature it said the committee had arrived "for the convenience of Congressman Kit Clardy's campaign for re-election." Most of those called would not answer, and some of them answered back. One young Chevrolet worker told the committee's chairman that he had "contempt for your antilabor record and for the witch-hunting activities that this committee has indulged in, and that goes for Mr. Clardy in spades." "Thank you," said Clardy. "You are welcome," said the witness. "I notice you come to town just before November 11, election day," one hostile witness told Clardy. "You didn't come during the tornado."

The consequences fell on the shop floor. On the day after the hearings closed, several hundred workers at the Buick Dynaflow plant walked one of the named men out to the gates and told him to "keep going"; at Chevrolet another, finding his fellow workers milling around him after lunch, asked for a pass to go home. Clardy called it "a clear indication that the rank and file of labor unions are not sold on Communist propaganda."

Another witness, that November, put it from the other side: "Those people only lost their jobs and were beaten up." A critic of the committee, writing a few years later, went further: men dragged from the plants and beaten, witnesses put out of their homes, families in hiding. The union's own regional director, for his part, told the committee that autumn that the colonizers had never been much of a secret. "They were spotted," he had told a reporter, "because they talked way over the heads of the union man and because they knew nothing of automobile-plant work." Clardy said the hearings had exposed "some 27 colonizers" and that there were seventy-five more to come.

The name St. John does not appear in the printed record of the Flint hearings, no St. John from Flint or Mount Morris appears anywhere

in the committee's volumes on Michigan, and Daniel never said that his father was called. What he said was that his father's friends were. That November, Kit Clardy lost his seat in Congress.

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In the autumn of 1954, by the same count, Daniel was in the sixth grade, his last year in Mount Morris. On November 23 a car came off a Flint assembly line that General Motors reckoned to be the fifty-millionth it had built in the United States, and the company said so in a full-page newspaper advertisement. "Today's a big day in Flint, Michigan," the advertisement began. "No wonder Flint has closed all schools for the day. And crowds line the street to cheer a huge parade honoring the big event." The schools in question were the city's; what Mount Morris did that day, no record found says. General Motors, the advertisement added, had 475,000 employees.

In the spring of 1955 the news from Michigan was medical. On April 12, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, the scientist who had monitored the trials of Jonas Salk's polio vaccine declared it "safe and effective." That June the automobile contract that had run since 1950 came to an end, and the union settled with Ford and then with General Motors on a new one, for three years, which for the first time paid laid-off workers a supplement to their unemployment benefit, up to $25 a week for as long as twenty-six weeks. Things, as Daniel said, "have been changing in Michigan for the automobile workers." In his telling the reason was McCarthyism. That summer the St. Johns, or some of them, went east.

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In the autumn of 1955, Daniel was in the seventh grade in South Hadley. "We ended up in South Hadley when I was in the seventh grade and I was age 11," he said. He would be twelve that November. The valley he came back to had just been flooded. In the middle of August the remains of Hurricane Diane stalled over southern New England, on ground that Hurricane Connie had soaked the week before. The *Springfield Daily News* had forecast that "moderate rains" were "possible."

The storm dropped 19.75 inches of rain on Westfield, Massachusetts, the most from any storm known in New England, and the rivers of the state rose higher than they had in the hurricane of 1938. The Associated Press called it the "worst flood in State's history," with the southern part of the state, "including Springfield, Chicopee, Holyoke and Worcester, most seriously battered." Governor Christian Herter declared a state of emergency, the National Guard and the Army engineers turned out, and most of the roads took three weeks to clear. The Weather Bureau later admitted that it had, in a word, "goofed."

It was a bad summer for children in Massachusetts in another way. On August 11 the state reported sixty-eight new cases of polio, bringing the year's total to 1,106, against 108 by the same date a year before, and its health officials called it, for the first time, an epidemic, "a 'mild epidemic.'" By the first days of September, with 2,274 cases, more than seventy school committees, "faced with mounting parental anxiety over the polio situation," had put off the opening of school, most of them in the eastern part of the state, despite the advice of the state's health officials that postponing it would "have little effect." Whether South Hadley's opened late, no record found says.

South Hadley was growing all the same, toward the fifteen thousand people it would have by 1960, and at Westover Field, over the line in Chicopee, where John had once taught pilots on the Link trainer during the war, the Strategic Air Command had moved in. The Eighth Air Force set up its headquarters there in 1955, and the B-52s came the next year; down the road in Ludlow, from 1954 to 1962, the Air Force kept one of its five storage sites for nuclear weapons, which was not the sort of thing the guidebooks mentioned.

In 1957 the Massachusetts Turnpike opened across the valley. Even the fish were being looked after. In 1955 the president of the Holyoke Water Power Company started work on a fishway at the dam, which in time came to include an elevator to lift fish headed upstream over it.

From about that age, too, Daniel "spent a lot of time with my grandfather Krug," his mother's father, who was by then, in Daniel's words, "basi-

cally not employed" and "had all the time in the world and he was very curious about everything." The two of them rode bicycles "over a hundred miles," down Route 5 to the old family places at South Windsor and Old Lyme in Connecticut, and sold ice cream around the town from a cart pulled by a horse that one of Daniel's uncles had given his grandfather. The old man had a great many stories to tell, and they belong to the chapter about him.

"And my father stayed back and we didn't see him for a while," Daniel said. When John did come, "it looked like he was trying to get it together. He's starting a painting business. And he was using GI Bill." The G.I. Bill of 1944 had promised veterans a government guarantee on a home loan, with better terms for building new, and by 1952 the Veterans Administration had backed nearly 2.4 million of them.

The bill's schooling benefit ran out in July 1956, by which time 7.8 million of the sixteen million veterans of the war had used it. "He bought us the means of buying a house," Daniel said, "and we had made and bought some property up on not too far South Hadley, but near Amherst. And we built this house." The towns up that way were filling up: Granby, between South Hadley and Amherst, more than doubled in the 1950s, from 1,861 people to 4,221.

"And it looked like things were going to go well," Daniel said. "But he broke his arm."

There was a paper mill in John's story too. At some point he worked in one in Holyoke, and the painter in him found an audience there. "People liked it. They would line up," Daniel said. "They would... bring their families in... while he was doing portraits of people on the paper pulp sheets." Holyoke had been making paper for a hundred years, and it is pleasant to think that some of it, at least once, went to that.

As a teenager Daniel took up gymnastics, and he took it up in the old German way. In lower Holyoke stood the Turn Hall of the Holyoke Turn Verein, which the city's Germans had founded "to provide the German language, German customs and traditions, and particularly German gymnastics with a permanent home." They had built it on South Bridge Street in 1874, partly because the blue laws forbade exercise in public on Sundays, and in 1893 they added land for outdoor gymnastics and a beer garden.

Daniel's German great-grandfather, Wilhelm Krug, had been "heavily into gymnastics" there in his day, as Daniel told it. "I was a member of it," Daniel said. "I would go there and do gymnastics myself when I was a teenager... And they had gymnastic apparatus. And then you had the older men sitting there drinking beer, watching the gymnasts." The Turners are there still.

The valley had its other amusements in those years. On Mount Tom, Mountain Park, built long before as a trolley park by the Holyoke Street Railway, had been bought in 1952 by a family that added a Kiddieland "to attract the young families who were populating the area" and renamed the roller coaster the Mountain Flyer. In the park's Casino a summer company called the Valley Players put on plays, and in 1957 a young actor who had been in its cast from 1951 to 1954, Hal Holbrook, came back to open its season with his one-man show, *Mark Twain Tonight!* In March 1958 Holyoke's St. Patrick's Day parade gave its first award for an outstanding American of Irish parentage to the junior senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy.

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In the summer of 1961, Daniel had just graduated from high school, and he had been accepted at the University of Massachusetts. He was seventeen. Across the river in Holyoke, that January, William Skinner & Sons, which in 1912 had finished the largest silk mill under one roof in the world, had closed and been sold to Indian Head Mills, which turned the old silk works over to rayon. That summer Daniel's father left, for Los Angeles.

"He left the family when I was, I just graduated from high school," Daniel said, "and he just left the family and that was it. You know, he just took off." On another day he put it this way: "Well, he went to Los Angeles. And so it was very upsetting to me, you know, because my family was... You know, separated."

When Daniel tried to explain why his father went, he did not begin with the arm. "My father was like this," he said, and he went back to Flint: to the party that had sent him there "for five

years" because he could be accepted by the workers, and to the way things had been changing in Michigan "for the automobile workers because it was a time of McCarthyism." [[BRIDGE: The rest of it, as Daniel told it, was the arguments into the night, and a god that had failed.]]

That summer, with no money for college, Daniel lied about his age to get a night-shift job in a Holyoke paper mill, and the machines there very nearly took his arm; that story belongs to the next chapter. His father went on painting houses in Los Angeles, and a year later Daniel would go out and work for him at five dollars an hour. Of the years in between, the paper trail is thin. A census line of April 1950 finds a boy of six in his grandfather's house in South Hadley.

A letter to a Boston weekly in September 1949 tells of a carload of people from Holyoke who came home from a Paul Robeson concert in bandages and splints. A tornado's toll, a congressional record of Flint in which his father's name does not appear, and a five-year contract between General Motors and its workers make up most of the rest. The swimming lesson, the donuts and the Abbott and Costello movies, the birthday parties, the hunting trips and the arguments about Stalin are on no record at all. They are Daniel's own. His mother lies in South Hadley now, under the Krug stone, with, as Daniel put it, "three generations of our women."

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Local copies of every source: see `dossiers/childhood-and-south-hadley/SOURCES.csv`.