GRANDFATHER KRUG

HOLYOKE, SOUTH HADLEY AND THE ROAD TO OLD LYME · 1894–1967

On Omens, Preachers, Ice Cream and Such

They had been taught by the Bible and the preachers that the world was surely going to be burned up sometime, and they did not know but it might be then.

SOPHIE E. EASTMAN, IN OLD SOUTH HADLEY

In the year he was born, Holyoke was the Paper City. It was, as the state's guidebook later put it, "a manufacturing city lying between the Connecticut River and Mount Tom," "built around the numerous power canals that cut across the city," and through the last years of the century its mills made something like four-fifths of all the writing paper in the United States. Daniel put the figure at over ninety per cent, and the town would not have argued with him. Holyoke had nearly 36,000 people in 1890 and would have 45,712 by 1900, and almost half of them had been born somewhere else: Ireland, Quebec, Poland and Germany. The Germans worked the woollen mills of South Holyoke, kept a Turn Hall with a gymnasium in Springdale where children "from three years old and upwards receive physical training," and in 1894 built themselves a new Reformed church. A history of the city published the next year counted them, a little primly, among the "thrifty, industrious Germans," and noted a "large unchurched mass" of the same nation still to be reached in Holyoke, Willimansett and South Hadley Falls.

The river itself was being rebuilt while he was in the cradle. Holyoke's first dam, of 1848, had been swept away on the day it was finished, and the agent's telegram to his directors in Boston is said to have read, "Your old dam's gone to hell by way of Willimansett." Its wooden successor had been for a time the second-largest dam in the country.

In 1895 work began on a granite one between Holyoke and South Hadley Falls, and to lift the stones the builders strung what was claimed as the longest-span cableway in the world, sixteen hundred and fifty feet across the river. The last stone was laid on January 5, 1900, at a cost the *Springfield Republican* put at "$1,000,000, more or less." It was still there, holding, when William was an old man.

Into this city, at the end of 1893 or the start of 1894, William Burnham Krug was born. The census of 1900 gives December 1893; the family, and Daniel, said 1894. He was the son of Wilhelm Krug, a German from the old country who had come to America in the 1870s, and of Agnes Maria Burnham, the daughter of the whaler, soldier and paper-mill foreman Erasthus Burnham, whose chapter comes before this one.

He had his German father's first name and his grandfather's surname for a middle one, and in time he would be "my grandfather" to Daniel, and "Grandfather Krug" to the family. "Had only an eighth grade education," Daniel said. "He was the only son in the family. His father was a very hardworking German guy that spent a lot of time down in Holyoke in the city. And so he was exposed a lot to his mother's religion stuff."

The religion came with a great deal else. His mother's mother was Mary Devine, the Glasgow woman the family believed could see the future, and from her, Daniel said, the boy picked up "a lot of superstitions." He was terribly afraid of black cats. If one crossed in front of him he had to undo it, and one of his remedies was to "steal a dish rag from his neighbor's line and then go and bury it somewhere. He thought that would be a remedy against the evil spirits or whatever."

Owls were worse. "If an owl came in the house, then that means somebody's dead," and there had been some talk of an owl when his mother died. "One thing after another," Daniel said, "his

whole life seemed to be geared to this fear of... violating these kind of superstitions he'd gotten from his Scotch grandmother."

None of this was strange to the valley. South Hadley's own historian, writing in 1912, recorded that for more than a century the whippoorwills of Mount Holyoke came down to the settlement, "but if the plaintive note of this bird was heard over a house wherein a sick person lay, the case was considered hopeless." The town's first settler had been buried with his feet to the east so that he would rise facing Christ at the Resurrection. In Scotland, a Glasgow folklorist wrote in 1879, a wart could be cured by rubbing it "with a piece of stolen bacon." The borrowed dishrag, in other words, had company on both sides of the ocean.

The valley had remedies of its own. A beetle in the walls that made "a curious little drumming sound with its head" was called the death watch, and the sick who heard it "felt sure that death was near"; the cure was a rhyme, "The omen is broken, the danger is over." Bees had to be told when someone in the family died, or they might take offence and go back to the woods on Mount Holyoke. A long wick in an unsnuffed candle was a "winding sheet." A boy who grew up near the Falls at the turn of the century had a good deal to keep track of.

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In the summer of 1903 William was nine, and the family, or some branch of it, was already over the river in South Hadley. On July 30 the town held a parade for its hundred and fiftieth birthday. A night of heavy rain and "a very brilliant display of lightning" gave way to a morning that "broke clear," and by ten "there were thousands of people assembled along the streets." Float number 11, from the German Turn and Singing Society of the Falls, was a full-rigged ship carrying two young women dressed as Columbia and Germania, side by side.

Float number 14, from the Christian Endeavor Society, carried among its girls a Hattie Krug. In 1912 the town's historian, Sophie Eastman, describing a road laid out in 1722, located it for her readers as running "from the Krug Homestead to Smith's Ferry."

The boy left school, as Daniel told it, after the eighth grade. That was common. A former governor of Massachusetts wrote in 1910 that the schools now issued "age and schooling certificates for children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen years who wish to work," and that it was still possible to keep a child for ten hours a day at "the dreary, monotonous feeding of machines." William would later make a point of not feeding any. All Daniel heard in his youth, he said, was his grandfather saying "you don't want to work in these filthy factories," because "the people there use foul language and they drink and they gamble." Daniel went and worked in them anyway: "I work there myself, paper mills."

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In the spring of 1917, when America went to war with Germany, William was twenty-three and newly married. His wife was Elizabeth Cofer, a Virginian three or four years younger than he, from Midlothian, as Daniel remembered it; she had married at twenty. The first draft registration, on June 5, 1917, took every man from twenty-one to thirty, and he would have stood in that line. But his name is in neither of the war books his

THE KRUG FAMILY AT WAR

Wilhelm Friedrich Krug (c.1854–1938) = Agnes Maria Burnham (1862–1930)
daughter of Erasthus Burnham, 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, 1864–65

William Burnham Krug (1893/94–1967) = Elizabeth Cofer, of Virginia (b. c.1897)
First World War: did not serve. "Veteran: No," 1930 census

William Madison, "Madison" (b. c.1917)	Agnes, "Ag" (b. c.1918) = Mike Greenberg	E. Janet (b. 1920) = John St. John	Stephen C., "Steve" (b. c.1921)	Daniel Burnham, "Dan" (c.1922–2014)	Frederick P. (b. 1928)
Army; machine gunner at Anzio, per Daniel. No record yet	*Mike: in the war, per Daniel; service unknown*	*John: Army Air Forces, 1942–45 (his chapter)*	*WWII veteran, 1950 census; a cook, Daniel thought*	*Merchant ships, eleven trips, per Daniel. No record yet*	*Too young to serve*

and so to Daniel

towns published afterwards, and in 1930, when the census asked every man whether he had served, the answer written against his name was "No."

It was not a comfortable time to be a German in Holyoke. In December 1917 a syndicated column headed "German Papers Here Spread Poison" singled out the city's German weekly, the *Neu England Rundschau*. The city's own war book, published in 1919, was dedicated "to the men who preferred death, than life enslaved by the Hun." On the Fourth of July 1918 Holyoke held a parade "in which every nationality in the city was represented — a truly All-American parade," and the Germans, evidently, marched as Americans.

"After the First World War," Daniel said, "there was a lot of anti-German sentiment. And that's what caused the German town to kind of break up because there was a lot of bad press about the Huns and their atrocities and so forth. People didn't want to advertise they were Germans."

In the winter of 1920 the census taker found two William Krugs in South Hadley, side by side. The elder, sixty-five, born in Germany, owned his house with a mortgage on it; the younger, twenty-six, rented, and gave his work as "Laborer, Farm." He and Elizabeth had two children by then, William, who would be called by his middle name, Madison, and Agnes. A third, E. Janet, was born later that year, after the census taker had gone: she would be Daniel's mother. Stephen followed in 1921, Daniel, called Dan, a year or so after, and, last, Frederick in 1928.

The family had land, a great deal of it by South Hadley's standards. "They had all the prime land right at the crossroads and acres of land going right down to the river," Daniel said. "We had orchards and six houses that my great-grandfather had made." For a time they lived in "a 12-bedroom brick house with a swimming pool." It was the German, Wilhelm, who had made the money, and in Daniel's account it was the son who lost it.

The deeds tell a slightly longer story. Between 1922 and 1928 Wilhelm and Agnes themselves sold six lots, the first of them to Agnes's own brother, Owen Burnham, the tobacco grower, and the rest to neighbours who built houses on them. By the summer of 1927 the town's two brickyards had shut down early, and the brickyards, the local paper explained, "have for years been the barometers used by the townspeople to judge the business conditions locally."

On February 11, 1930, the old couple deeded the home place to William and Elizabeth, and within ten weeks Agnes was dead. When the census came round on April 23, three generations were living under one roof on Hadley Street, in a house worth $10,000: Wilhelm, seventy-five and widowed; his daughter Eleanor, thirty; William, thirty-six, still a farm labourer; Elizabeth; and the six children, from Madison, twelve, down to Frederick, not yet two. The census also asked whether the household owned a radio set. It did not.

That year the town needed a school. In February the state building inspector had condemned the old Center school, sixty years in use. In September the town let the contract for a new one at $72,000, and on October 1, 1930, sixteen days later, the Town of South Hadley took a piece of the Krug land by eminent domain. Daniel remembered it as "the late 1920s, the time of the Depression": the Depression, certainly. "The town took that property to build a school there," he said.

"That's where I went to school. That's where my family went to school, right across the street." Three weeks after the taking William and Elizabeth bought land across the road from a neighbour who had bought Krug lots a few years before: "the seven acres and the historic property across the street from the school," which was where Daniel would grow up.

The Depression reached South Hadley early and stayed. In March 1931 a new sewer in the Center, built for $25,000, "brought relief to more than 300 men in South Hadley who were otherwise unemployed," in a town of fewer than seven thousand. The next year the state paid for a new road along Hadley Street, the old road to Hockanum that ran past the Krug place, and it was to be built "by town labor instead of by contract," so that the money stayed in town. In March 1936 the Connecticut rose higher than anyone had seen it, put fifteen thousand people out of their homes in

Springfield, and broke against the granite dam at the Falls without moving it.

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From the new place the family looked straight into a graveyard. "We lived right exactly next to the cemetery," Daniel said. In August 1934 William, Elizabeth and the old man sold most of the acres behind the house to the Evergreen Cemetery Association, and the dead moved in next door. William took an interest in them. "My grandfather made it a practice of keeping track of everybody that was there," Daniel said.

"And he thought, he really thought that he could feel their spirits and so forth. And that they would tell him things and come to him sometimes at night and sometimes appear to him and give him information. Which he passed on to other people sometimes." Once it was the father of a good-looking neighbour, Stiles, who came to him with a message for his daughter, and William went over and delivered it: her father "thought you he thought really you're really a good person." The message was kind, at least. "Everybody thought he was probably thought he was nuts," Daniel said. But "I knew he believed that he actually believed that."

The voices that mattered most to him, though, came from the air. In the 1930s the radio arrived, and with it the evangelists. Charles E. Fuller's *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* went national on the Mutual network in October 1937 and by 1942 had more than ten million listeners, and it was one of many programmes that asked for money at the end. William listened, and he gave. "If there were a chance for him to give money to something," Daniel said, "he would have given family money."

The preachers, as he described them, predicted "when the end of days was going to be by some kind of calculation. And they would get up on the hills and these people would wait for Christ to come out of the sky, you know. And then he didn't come. And somehow that didn't discourage him."

South Hadley had seen it before. In 1843, when William Miller's followers expected the world to end, a South Hadley citizen wrote in a journal, "Everybody was talking about the destruction of the world," and Sophie Eastman, who printed the journal, kept one of the tiny slips of paper handed out in the town that year: it worked the end out from the Book of Daniel and arrived at 1843. Some townspeople, she wrote, "stopped sowing and reaping, gave their lands away, and made their ascension robes," and on summer evenings, "whenever the setting sun went down in a flood of crimson light, people were wont to assemble in the Old Cemetery." Several "sold their farms for a few dollars, and were afterwards compelled to become day laborers."

William's own preparations for eternity ran to healthy living. "He had read a lot of stuff about healthy living," Daniel said, "and he thought he would, in the winter, buy one pair of long underwear, one pair of socks, and he would not take them off the entire winter. He would not bathe. Because he thought it would take away his valuable oils, his natural oils that protect him." The results were what one might expect, and Elizabeth gave him a room of his own downstairs. In summer he went barefoot and rode his bicycle.

Meanwhile the land went. After the cemetery sale came another deed in 1936, another in 1939 and another in 1948. The house on Ferry Street was mortgaged in 1942 and again in 1956, both times with Elizabeth's name beside his on the papers. Daniel's account is that "it disappeared in the 30s when he was in control of it. It just disappeared," that he sold properties "actually at a loss. Just to give money to these preachers that were on the radio," and that it went on "until finally, you know, the boys got old enough to throttle him and put him in his place."

What was left was "that last little bit of land that my grandmother lived on, that seven acres and the house there, that she was afraid he would mortgage the house." Whatever the reasons for each sale, and the deeds do not give reasons, the family that had once owned the crossroads ended up with a house and a garden.

In 1938 old Wilhelm died, and that September the great hurricane came up the Connecticut. Its eye followed the river north into Massachusetts, where the wind and water killed ninety-nine people; the river flooded most of Willimansett, across the water from Holyoke; and down at the mouth, in Old Lyme, "beach cottages were flattened or

swept away." Whether the family's place at the shore was among them, nobody has said.

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His politics went the way of his religion. "A very right wing guy," Daniel said. "I would say you would call him a Nazi. He was anti-Semitic. He was racist. He hated immigrants, Italians, anyone, you know." In the thirties he "liked what Hitler was doing." He was not alone. "There was a lot of Nazi sentiment in this country," Daniel said, and there was: the German American Bund, founded in 1936, filled Madison Square Garden with some twenty thousand people in February 1939.

The valley had the other side of the ledger too. A month later Holyoke's National Youth Administration took in three young Germans "fleeing from Nazi persecution" to train alongside seventy local boys. When his daughters married, William objected to both husbands: Agnes married Mike Greenberg, who was Jewish, and Janet married John St. John, who was Irish and Catholic, and "he didn't like Catholics."

The war came to the valley before it came to America. In 1939 the War Department began an air base on the tobacco fields of Chicopee, next door to South Hadley, and named it Westover Field; it was there that Janet would meet John St. John. On the afternoon of December 7, 1941, an Air Corps officer named Curtis LeMay, driving home to Holyoke from a shift at Westover, heard the news of Pearl Harbor break into the broadcast of a football game. That June the paper had carried a smaller item from the Krugs' own street: a man who worked at Mount Holyoke College had dived into the upper college lake and pulled out "Fred Krug, about eight, son of Mr and Mrs William Krug of Hadley street," before he drowned.

Then the war came to America, and his sons went to fight the Germans. "My grandmother had five men in that war," Daniel said. "The three sons, Uncle Dan, Madison, and Uncle Steve. Then she had my father, and she had Ag's husband, who was Mike Greenberg." Madison "ended up in Anzio in Italy as a machine gunner." Dan was "working in the marine ships, 11 different tours, supplying armaments on the shore for D-Day." Steve "had a heart problem. So I think he was a cook or something." John St. John, the son-in-law, served in the Army Air Forces, and his story is told in his own chapter. "I'm not sure what Mike did," Daniel said.

The records so far bear out only part of the list. Stephen C. Krug was counted in Holyoke in 1950, twenty-eight, married, and a veteran of the Second World War; in July 1945 he and his wife, Olive, had bought a house on Hadley Street, a few doors from his parents, for $4,500. For Madison and Dan the papers are still to be found. If Madison was a machine gunner at Anzio, he was in one of the infantry divisions that held the beachhead, where every battalion had a heavy-weapons company of water-cooled .30-calibre machine guns.

The landing was on January 22, 1944; by midnight some 36,000 men were ashore, and then they stayed there for four months, dug into wet ground under German guns. The Army's own history put the corps' combat losses at "about 30,000, including at least 4,400 killed and 18,000 wounded," and as many again went down with sickness and trench foot. Its narrative turns again and again on the machine guns: "Capt. William P. Athas of the heavy weapons company hastily set up four machine guns, and under their protecting fire the riflemen deployed."

If Dan's "marine ships" were merchant ships, his D-Day was the work of feeding a beach that had no harbour. The Allies towed their harbours across the Channel in pieces, sank old merchant ships in lines off the beaches as breakwaters, and then a gale from June 19 to 22 smashed the American one off Omaha. Merchant seamen were not in the armed forces, but they died at a higher rate than any of them: about one in twenty-six who sailed in the war did not come back. Whatever Dan sailed in, he came home. In May 1947 Daniel Burnham Krug, of South Hadley Falls, married Jessie Jane Snow of Westhampton, Daniel's Aunt Jesse, and went up into the hills to farm and make maple syrup.

"Any case," Daniel said, "that kind of redeemed the family because everyone, you know, a little critic of them being German. And here they were fighting the Germans. Her sons were fighting the Germans. So I think she was very proud of the boys." In June 1942 the *Rundschau* closed after fifty-nine years. In its last weeks it

had been printing Churchill. The old man, meanwhile, "was right along with whoever supported Hitler," but by then nobody was listening: "they stopped him from being able to spend the family money," Daniel said. "He just had to keep his place."

In the spring of 1950 the census found William Krug, fifty-six, at home on Ferry Street with "Unable to work" written against his name. Elizabeth was there, and his sister Eleanor, and Frederick, and Janet, twenty-nine, with her two children: Daniel, six, and his little sister. A few houses away lived a man who had bought one of the Krug lots in 1924. Janet's marriage had come apart, and for long stretches of Daniel's boyhood his grandparents' house was home.

"From age 11," Daniel said, "I spent a lot of time with my grandfather Krug." By then the old man was "basically not employed," and "he had all the time in the world and he was very curious about everything. So he liked to ride his bike and he got me to ride with him." Daniel had a bicycle of his own, and his grandfather had a destination. "He so loved those trips to the beach, to the shore," Daniel said, and in the summer he was eleven the two of them rode there: "It was over a hundred miles. We rode on Route 5, you know, about 50 miles to South Windsor where we stayed at his family place there with, you know, his aunt that was still living there, Aunt Edith. And then we got the keys to the old line place and we went another 50 miles down to the" shore at Old Lyme.

There was no interstate yet; Route 5 was the road. South of Springfield it ran between "rolling fields of tobacco dotted here and there by great tobacco sheds painted the dark red shade so popular in rural Connecticut," as the state guidebook described it, past Enfield, home of the Enfield Society for the Detection of Horse Thieves and Robbers, whose members were expected to "keep a swift horse saddled and bridled." There is no record of the society pursuing two bicycles.

At South Windsor the Burnhams had been growing tobacco since Erasthus came home from the war, and Aunt Edith was there to take them in: Edith Simpson Burnham, the widow of his mother's brother Frederick, who was seventy-four at the 1950 census and still in South Windsor.



DOWN ROUTE 5 TO THE SHORE (ILLUSTRATION)

A man over sixty riding a hundred miles was not unheard of in South Hadley. In 1931 the local paper had reported a couple from the Falls, "both more than 60 years of age," back from a four-hundred-mile tour by bicycle.

Old Lyme, the guidebook said, was "an elm-shaded village steeped in seafaring tradition," whose permanent residents were "content to live with their memories." William's memories there went back sixty years. As a boy and a young man he had had some twenty-six years of his grandfather Erasthus, and much of it at the shore: "especially the family, as they got older, they would take their and go down to the Cape, to the Connecticut beach place in Old Lyme." It was from William, at the shore and on the farm, that the whaler's stories came down to Daniel.

The shore Daniel saw had just been knocked about again. On August 31, 1954, Hurricane Carol came ashore on the stretch of coast between Groton and Old Saybrook, Old Lyme's own stretch, and "hundreds of oceanfront cottages were damaged or destroyed" in Connecticut; it was, for the moment, the costliest hurricane in American history. The next July was the reason anyone wanted to be at the shore at all: Hartford sweltered through sixteen days over ninety degrees, a record for the month.

At the shore they fished, and caught something long. "It must have been just five, six feet long," Daniel said. "It's quite edible." Rex, listening, wondered whether there were still eels like that. The Connecticut record for an American eel is fifty-two inches, and South Hadley people had always had doubts about the edible part: when the lampreys came up to the Falls in spring, Eastman wrote, they were "generally despised" as food, "though in towns away from the river they were sometimes valued."

The bicycle was not his only way down. Years later Aunt Jesse told Daniel that Aunt Edith used to come up from South Windsor into the 1950s, and that the family, who had cars, "used to often drive my grandfather down to Old Lyme because he would beg them. They had cars. They'd take them down there and take them to the shore. And shut him up."



THE ICE-CREAM HORSE (ILLUSTRATION)

At home he had schemes. "He had all kinds of clever ways to try to make a few cents," Daniel said. "My uncle was buying and selling horses, so he gave my grandfather this old horse, and he got a job with the ice cream company. We would ride the horse with a freezer in the back, and we would ring the bell and sell the ice cream, and then the kids would jump on and would sneak the ice cream, and we would eat it."

The horse was old and had digestive troubles. "These ladies would be walking up the street. And there was all these jokes. And they would say, William, was that you? That was the poor old devil of a horse." In 1935 Friendly's in Springfield had been selling double-dip cones for a nickel; there is no record of what the horse brought in.

"He never got much spending money," Daniel said. So the two of them looked under the swings at the school across the way "to see if there was any kids that dropped some money in the sand. We would find it." The grandfather also wrote little slips of paper: "He would write on these little slips these Christian messages like, Jesus is coming. Are you ready? He would throw them around uptown." A hundred and twelve years after South Hadley's Millerites passed out theirs, the police took a less patient view.

They would pick him up, bring him home and tell Elizabeth that they were going to have to fine him for littering: "If you don't control him there, he's littering the town with these." Did the boy know it was all a bit much? "Oh yeah, I spent a lot of time with him," Daniel said. "And I knew that it was crazy, but I liked the attention."

In 1967 William Krug was seventy-three, and Daniel was in Berkeley with Regina and their first son, Alex, a baby of seven or eight months. Regina went east with the baby to visit the grandparents. While she was there William struck his ankle against the porch "and gotten the kind of a deep injury," Daniel said, "and it was swelling. And, you know, they kept saying, you've got to go to the doctor." He would not go. "He was terrified of doctors," Daniel said, and he had a reason.

His good friend Bill Buckout, across the street, had gone to the doctor for something and "ended up with both of his legs being amputated," and worked on in the garage without them. Every time he saw him, William said he was never going to a doctor; they would be sure to cut off something. "And so he let it get so bad. That finally, you know, he was getting some internal infection and even some something like leukemia that they had that he got in since they had to bring him to the doctor." A year earlier Medicare had begun to pay hospital bills for every man his age in America. "He died before his time," Daniel said, "because he was afraid of doctors."

Daniel was not there. "I'm not sure if they had to amputate his leg, but he just died in probably not a very nice way," he said. "And the only thing I saw him is like my grandmother took his shoes, these big clumpy shoes that he wore and planted flowers in them so they're outside, you know, they were outside being used for something." His verdict on the man was not soft. "He was pretty much a worthless husband," he said, who had "sold all these properties left to him by his father and pissed away, you know, what could have, you know, made everybody, you know, pretty comfortable. And all my uncles only made it to the sixth or eighth grade, but they could just as well have gone to Amherst College and been like their, you know, an educated person like their grandfather was."

The valley he left was not the one he was born in. Holyoke had lost one industrial job in every two since 1955. The old Germania woollen mill, which had brought the Germans to South Holyoke a hundred years before, had closed in 1964, and its worker housing was a parking lot. South Hadley, a town of fewer than five thousand in his boyhood, had nearly fifteen thousand by 1960. Of the five men in the war, Dan lived longest.

He farmed and made maple products in Westhampton, served on the town's historical commission, and kept the old German's silver medal, which Daniel had given him; the town named a committee after his sugarbush. He died in April 2014, "shortly after his 90 birthday," as the town report put it. William Burnham Krug is buried in South Hadley with his father, Wilhelm, under the same stone as three generations of the family's

women, among them Daniel's grandmother and mother.

"I can go down 10 miles to South Hadley," Daniel said, "and I can take a picture of the gravestone." The graveyard next door, which his grandfather had watched over for thirty years, was the one place in the story where nobody, in the end, had to sell anything.

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