What follows is sample #3 from a five-part series of opening sections of *Turkeyfoot*; for more information, contact:

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Happy Reading!
“...Iowa is not a chunk of Midwest cut out by arbitrary lines from the enormous map of farmland that extends interminably through twelve states. It is a unit of consciousness, and it has a culture of its own. It exists in a way that Pennsylvania or New York do not. It is a state in the way that, say, Norway is a nation.”

— Philadelphia-born Iowa historian Laurence Lafore in Iowa, a Celebration

Introducing the Topography

Much of the year I live in Thüringen, in the middle of Germany. My adopted home was once the westernmost province of the communist-ruled East. Now, I’m just as quickly in Berlin via high-speed train as I am in Munich or Frankfurt—and just as quickly amongst my Thrams relatives in Brandenburg, along the Polish border, as I am among my Lui[c]k ones near Stuttgart, not far from the French one. Although the Berlin Wall fell three decades ago, and Germany’s two halves have been reunited for almost 30 years, it amazes me how relatively little the two sets of Germans know about each other—and how what they think they “know” is often fragmented and flawed.

As an Iowan, I know this dynamic too well: I come from “Flyoverland” and countless times have endured the ignorance and arrogance of my East- and West-coast compatriots, who have taken those of us from the Heartland for granted far too long—at their own peril and real costs. Although Iowans endorsed Obama twice, we voted for Trump in droves, angry and eager to be finally heard. While coastal elites engineered global trade, offshored most manufacturing jobs and used mid-continent farmers as political pawns, we in the center unraveled—and still suffer.

In 2016, I ran for public office, seeking a platform from which to critique the systems that both blind and bind us. Assuming I would never win, I was the “un-candidate candidate,” a maverick from the prairie as native yet odd as the tall “Turkeyfoot” greenswards that once covered the Great Plains. An exceptional, unwieldy and concurrently stunning grass, Turkeyfoot is a noble form of life—even more special because of its distinctiveness and rarity in a vast, diverse world.
a sward of “Big Bluestem” prairie grass, known for its three-pronged seed heads as “Turkeyfoot:” It is a perennial warm-season bunchgrass that blooms in summer and seeds in fall. It grows in dense stands that can out-compete other plant species and grow until disturbance interrupts their spread.

Now, in 2019, I am writing about that campaign and my concerns which fueled it, to serve as a roadmap as well as warning to the many ascending stars hoping to illuminate our nation’s way forward. As my writing progressed, I realized I needed to broaden its scope as my campaign led me to better understand the things that divide us. That led me to consider our divisions, both on the individual and the national level, and to question how those divisions might be overcome.

A fellow refugee from what once was an intact and proud Middle America, my friend Marcellus (from Iowa City but living in Berlin) reviewed an early draft of this book. Despite our shared Midwestern roots, he warned “Why you using Iowa as your setting? You’re whittling away any marketable audience: Your tome will appeal only to gay-Quaker farmboys from Iowa!” My urbanized, globalized pal resists realizing that in the pages to come, our Iowa is a stand-in for Anywhere Rural USA. With some sand, cows and Native Americans, it could be New Mexico; add water, palms and baying hounds, it would be a bayou in Louisiana or the Southeast’s Tidewater. Venture beyond Seattle, you’ll find Des Moines; west of Portland, Oregon, lie the Hills of Iowa. Outside of booming Boston’s endless Exurbia, rural New England’s social ills resemble our own.
a 2008 topographic map of Iowa showing the Hawkeye State’s 99 counties and major waterways

Beyond the poetic qualities of focusing on a waning Iowa, are practical ones: If we are to “lock in” carbon on a scale large enough to mitigate the most extreme effects of global warming, that project won’t take place primarily in cities but rather in rural areas; only actions like Restorative Agriculture, reforestation and similar efforts will make an adequate difference, soon enough. We cannot reinvent our world if we do not include land outside city limits: Doing so is requisite. As Kansas native-son Dwight Eisenhower said, “Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America.”

The relatives with whom I again find myself at war also are stand-ins: While they likely will take what I’m about to reveal about our broken family as familial treason, our misery could be that of many millions of American families, as the core of our feud is about values and experiences. Textbook irreconcilable differences continue to tear us apart. If “liberal” city folk wish to finally comprehend “What’s wrong out in the Heartland,” they need first to truly understand—and care about—those of us who populate and love rural America. There is no “country” separate from those of us in the country. A nation consists of communities, which consist of families; familial micro-systems mirror macro- ones: To heal a nation, we must heal its families and their homes. What better place to begin both our autopsy as well as our rebirth than in America’s Heartland?
Upper-Midwest literary figure Hamlin Garland called Iowa “the Middle Border.” One-time Iowa State University writing instructor Michael Martone says in *Iowa, a Celebration* that “On one level, we sense that somewhere within the borders of Iowa, the East ends and the West begins. The Middle Border also implies that Iowa is the setting for transformation and change, even while it embraces stability and calm. The Middle Border (like all borders) divides even while it connects.” Perhaps here, then, lie the roots of a new national understanding—our homecoming.

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An E-book version is also available on: www.Amazon.com  
For more information go to: www.TRACES.org
Turkeyfoot

about this book:

An eccentric gay-Quaker historian living in Germany decides on a quixotic whim—for deeply idealistic and quasi-spiritual reasons—to run for the US Senate in his native Iowa. To his consternation, he soon finds himself hip-deep in the moral quicksand of Midwestern Trumpism. Unexpectedly, he discovers that his Trump-drunk relatives embody the very electorate he has to woo. This story tells how this onetime farmboy got into this swamp, how he escaped, and how other residents of Trump Nation—if they truly care about our country and the larger world—might punch their way out of political paper bags as well. This book—two tomes woven into one, each uniquely pertinent to this historical moment—provides all Americans (as well as other mortals beyond our shores) a way out. Book One explores the cynical, two-party electoral system that both feeds and embodies the social-political deadlock our country faces; Book Two concludes with fifteen strategies for how to bridge the chasms that currently divide us. Combined, they outline how to rediscover compassion for each other at a juncture in our national and global history when either we find each other again or we all will be lost, together, forever.

about its author:

Michael Luick-Thrams (Ph.D. in 1997, Humboldt Universität in Berlin) directs two non-profit educational organizations, the TRACES Center for History and Culture in Iowa (founded 2001; www.TRACES.org) and Spuren in Germany (2011). Single, he divides his time between Iowa and Germany, where his two Hausmates consist of a goofy Swabian professor of religious history and a stuffed-toy Spaniel, Sparky.

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