What follows is sample #4 from a five-part series of opening sections of *Turkeyfoot*; for more information, contact:

staff@TRACES.org.

Happy Reading!
“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”


What is Our BIG Problem?

When, in 2016, I announced my running for the US Senate from Iowa, I had not been born the day before; I brought a slew of experiences that guided me as I waded into the political foray:

Thursday, July 4th, 1985—summer in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

The room buzzed with anticipation. Our Chicago-born tour guide looked at us, her American college-student charges, for signs of unease. Seeing none, she nodded to the stout Ukrainian kindergarten teacher, already beaming with pride, to proceed. She, in turn, opened a door to the right of a wall-tall painted portrait of Vladimir Lenin, who looked down upon the unfolding scene with an approving, fatherly smile as some dozen to twenty kids marched into the room.

The image of Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov Lenin that hung in that Ukrainian kindergarten; a poster touting “Гордись Советский Пионер Твоя Страна СССР: Be a Proud Soviet Pioneer of Your Country, the USSR”
Both genders wore Party-red kerchiefs around their little necks. The girls’ hair boasted ribbons atop their heads that looked like satellite antennae; the boys wore white sleeveless undershirts. All had donned indigo-blue shorts and bright-red tennies. They looked smart, but their nifty outfits paled compared to the perfectly timed and executed dances and calisthenics they then performed for us. I, for one, left that demonstration of Soviet-style pedagogy deeply impressed by those tykes’ ability to set aside their own egos and move in flawless unison, as a fluid body.

“Our kids could never be able to pull off such concerted choreography” I remember noting. “We’re too individualistic, too welded to our own rigid ideas of how we think a gig should go down—too unwilling to listen to others without feeling offended by differing opinions. We are too busy doing our own, isolated thing to accomplish much of real greatness as a group.” For over half a decade, I touted what I had seen that morning in Kyiv as an example of how “Not everything behind the Wall is rotten.” I thought it accentuated America’s failure to generate enough citizens capable of acting effectively as a whole, in concert, to reach shared goals.

While I was never an apologist for a People’s Republic of Anything, I did strive during the Reagan years to build bridges between my country and those we said we were poised to blow to smithereens—just as the Soviet Union, in turn, promised to annihilate the United States. In the name of forging grassroots links in an era both government heads and peace activists deemed “MAD—mutual assured destruction,” in a world of then more than 50,000 nuclear weapons, I ventured onto “enemy soil.” I visited the Soviet Union twice (in 1982 and 1985; I toured post-Soviet Russia in 1994) and Cuba once; I sojourned in Vietnam for a month in 1998.

Each time I slipped behind what Winston Churchill had coined an “Iron Curtain” in a speech he gave in Iowa’s southerly neighbor, Missouri, I felt as if I’d landed on Mars. There were no private businesses or independent craftspeople. There was no for-profit advertising, no TV spots or billboards, scarcely any buildings with fresh coats of paint, and endless mostly-empty store shelves. The people bearing the dull weight of “dictatorship by the proletariat” seemed not only drably dressed, but as if their souls were gray and frayed, too.

Then, at the end of each such trip, I quietly returned to the capitalist West and oddly felt, at least initially, as out of place “at home” as I had “over there.” Slipping between systems entailed such psychological disconnects that both took on surrealistic undertones for me. The distance that I gained by exposure to diametrically opposing systems helped me see both with new eyes.

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To order Turkeyfoot as a paperback, contact: staff@TRACES.org
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For more information go to: www.TRACES.org
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.

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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