

FROM TIME TO TIME

Introduction

"Working on anything interesting?" Andrew Wyeth asked me politely, his clear blue eyes zeroing in on me. It was a question he probably asked every visiting artist.

There was something naturally authoritative, even charismatic, about his manner, his expression momentarily stern like a school headmaster, his face sun-reddened and leathery and as craggy as the coastal granite of Maine just outside the window.

Without thinking I answered, " I sure am. But I'm not going to tell you!"

Wyeth laughed out loud and patted me on the shoulder.

"Well, I'm working on something interesting too, and I'm not going to tell you either!"

We both laughed, delighted at our mutual impertinence.

By a series of odd coincidences it just so happened that my meeting with Andrew Wyeth was taking place on the Fourth of July. As a guest of Texas friends Mark and Cina Forgason I had been enjoying Maine at one of Cina's family cottages on the mainland miles away at Deaver's Point. We had known each other for nearly fifteen years, and shared a mutual interest in birds, natural history and conservation causes. I have many special memories of Thanksgiving hunting parties at another of Cina's family places the fabled King Ranch.

Cina, nee' Caroline Alexander, had yankee roots as well, having been brought up in the Delaware Valley country where she came to know the Wyeth family and many other interesting

inhabitants of the Chadd's Ford area. From the time I first knew Cina she had wanted me to meet Jamie Wyeth and his wife Phyllis. They too had been guests at the King Ranch over the years. Cina, however, especially wanted me to meet them in Maine. Though I appeared to respond with enthusiasm, I always had strange misgivings which I found difficult to explain even to myself. I did nothing to encourage the idea.

Then last Spring I ran into Cina at a Peregrine Fund meeting at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. She told me that one of the cottages at Deaver's Point would be available in July, and would I like to go? It was almost certain that we would be visiting Jamie and Phyllis and perhaps we might even get a chance to see Andrew and Betsy Wyeth as well.

When I impulsively said "yes" it was mostly because I wanted to see the coast of Maine again, perhaps even to revisit the seaside summer home of Austin friends at Prout's Neck near Portland on land once owned by Winslow Homer. Out their bay window were the very rocks and waves of Eastern Point that had helped make Homer famous. Several of Scott's and my best paintings were hanging there.

On the morning of July 1st a plane carrying Mark and Cina, their two-year old son James, Mark's mom Joyce, a frisky new golden lab and a venerable corgi named "Caddie" landed at Fort Worth's Meacham Field and carried me away to the north. In anticipation of a possible July 4th visit with the Wyeths I had packed a special portfolio case with some quite interesting and special incunabula having to do with the American and the French Revolutions.

After an overnight stop in New York which allowed me most of the next day for visiting galleries and museums, especially the New York Historical Society to see their incomparable collection of Audubons, we flew on to Rockland Maine. By late afternoon we were at Deaver's Point. Our cottage could not have

been more charming. Nothing fancy though. The main part of the house was built in 1795 and like most of Maine's old houses had been added on to by later generations. Outside were old stone walls and white picket fences, ferns hiding beneath pine trees planted long ago. The peonies, lilacs and antique roses gave the most wonderful odor. To the east and west lay inlets accented with the white of pleasure boats tethered to moorings and by the dayglow floats of lobster traps.

I was assigned a small bedroom upstairs which caught the evening breezes wonderfully. Since no one else was on the second floor, it became my studio. After I had unpacked my clothes and put up my painting equipment, I opened the portfolio case to review what I had so hurriedly assembled to show the Wyeths. The first thing I pulled out was a yellowed piece of paper folded into an envelope. As I opened it, out fell a slightly faded ornament of silk and paper. On the envelope in brown ink was inscribed "French National Cockade 1794". It was the fateful year of Robespierre's fall from power and the end of the "Great Terror".

Then came the documents. The first was a 1794 communication from the infamous Committee of Public Safety boldly signed on the back by Barrere, Carnot and others. Almost hidden among these signatures Robespierre's own name was signed in a tiny script which seemed to bely the great power he held. There was another sheet of light blue paper with official seals stamped on it. It was a 1792 decree of the National Assembly concerning Louis XVI's personal guard now that the king and his queen Marie Antoinette were virtual prisoners of the Paris Commune in the Tuileries Palace. It bore the firm signature of the fiery orator Georges Jacques Danton who was to become Robespierre, "The Incorruptible's," bitterest rival and would go to the guillotine for it.

Beneath these papers lay a draft for money from the King's

Civil List signed by Louis XVI and by his loyal comptroller Laporte, who would be one of the first to die on Dr. Guillotine's new killing machine. It bore the date February 21st 1792, the very day that Marie Antoinette's lover Axel Von Fersen took his leave from the queen for the last time. It was Von Fersen who had financed and engineered the royal family's nearly successful escape to Varennes in June of 1791. And the king himself had exactly eleven months remaining from this day before his own appointment with the scaffold.

Marie Antoinette was here as well. Beneath Louis's Civil List document was a large beautifully inscribed official declaration appointing a master chef to the staff of Versailles signed by the queen and countersigned by important palace administrators. The date was the 27th of March 1787, not long after the infamous affair of the necklace had fatally tarnished the monarchy. It was also in the midst of the worsening financial crises that would soon force the king to recall the Estates General for the first time since 1614, an act that would precipitate the Revolution. It is well known that at this time the young 31 year old queen poignantly tried to bring about household economies by personally managing the staff at Versailles. Though she saved nearly a million livres, it was but a pittance compared to expenses, and she made many enemies among some of her most ardent supporters when she deprived them of their palace sinecures. There is an artlessness to the young queen's signature here amidst all the elegant script that is truly touching.

Along with these French documents I had packed an exquisite portrait miniature and a small embroidered waistcoat. The portrait depicted the "Incorruptible's" younger brother, the pleasure-loving Augustin Robespierre. Both brothers would fall from power on 9 Thermidore (27 July 1794) and face the guillotine together the following day thus bringing an end to the Great

Terror. The waistcoat once belonged to Jean Paul Marat, the loathsome firebrand of the Paris poor. He stood only five feet one inch tall! He would be famously assassinated in his bathtub on July 13, 1793 by Charlotte Corday. This very vest must have been somewhere nearby in the simple room where he lived and wrote his scurrilous newspaper articles.

Marat who was a doctor of medicine had been reduced to abject poverty by his revolutionary views and a volatile eccentric nature which prevented personal friendships. He even prided himself on his poverty as he championed the poor of the increasingly powerful Paris Commune. It is interesting to note that there are seemingly incongruous little touches of aristocratic elegance in the garment's simple embroidery of now tarnished silver thread with a few remaining sequins.

Marat might be wearing this waistcoat as he is carried victoriously on the shoulders of the people from his trial at the Palace of Justice in Boilly's famous 1794 painting "The Triumph of Marat". His assassination of course inspired what is arguably the greatest French painting of the Revolution and for that matter the entire 18th century, Jacques Louis David's "Death of Marat". As I unfolded the vest and placed it on my bed I hoped that the Wyeths would be as thrilled as Scott and I were by these "living" fragments of the past. I was much more certain that they would be interested in the next items in my portfolio.

As for the American Revolution to be celebrated in a few days I had brought an autograph letter written in 1789 from India by Lord Cornwallis whose defeat at Yorktown, Virginia in 1783 by George Washington and his French allies eventually brought an end to the revolution. I also had a rare letter, note really, written and signed by King George III. It was written on July 22nd 1789 from the seaside town of Weymouth where the the king was convalescing from his most severe attack

of "madness". In this note composed just eight days after the fall of the Bastille the king gives his permission for Mr. Eden, the British ambassador to Spain, to return to England because of the impending revolution in France. The note was accompanied by another portrait miniature of King George done in the 1780's by Richard Collins, one of the the king's official artists by royal appointment.

Another royal artifact ironically folded with Marat's vest was a beautiful and sumptuous rose-red satin waistcoat, lined with silver and gold lace, once belonging to George III. It was given by the King to his persoanl physician Dr. Pepys in gratitude for his help during his famous illness of 1787-88.

Finally, at the bottom of the pile, and included almost as an afterthought, was a beautiful pair of lady's kid gloves with gauntlets delicately embroidered in silver and gold. They really had a wonderful story to tell, and it's a love story. These are betrothal gloves, a gift from Henrietta Maria of France to the future Charles I of England to commemorate their marriage by proxy in 1625. Years later, in 1648, at the end of the English Civil War and as a prisoner of Oliver Cromwell and Parliament, King Charles gave these gloves to the daughter of his jailer at Hurst Castle. The King was being taken to London where he would be tried for treason and executed. Charles must have had no illusions about his fate inspite of the optimism he apparently showed his captors, for I can not otherwise believe that he would have given away these gloves which he must have carried as a keepsake on all his military campaigns.

Although the monarchy would be re-established in 1660, the death of Charles I in 1649 was a truly revolutionary event. Whenever I look at these gloves I remember that during his last days of confinement before his own execution on January 21, 1793 Louis XVI read and re-read his own copy of the life and martyrdom of Charles Ist.

It was a little before noon on a bright blue and perfectly calm Maine 4th of July day that found our two-car caravan descending to the docks of Tennant's Harbor. Only then did Cina who was driving look toward me. She had an expression on her face that was more guilty than apologetic, and she wouldn't look me directly in the eye.

"I'm afraid we're not going to see Andy and Betsy today," she said.

I was having such a good time that her news was really only a minor disappointment. Besides I just knew that Jamie and Phyllis Wyeth would enjoy the portfolio of goodies I had packed for this day.

As we pulled into the parking area I could see Phyllis dockside sitting in her wheelchair. Captain Jamie was puttering around inside his big black and shiny mahogany cabin cruiser christened "Dreadnought". Two teenage girls, the Dreadnought's crew, emerged from the cabin and came over to help us with our gear such as it was. As we unpacked we introduced ourselves. I had my camera already with me but I was so interested in talking to Phyllis that I completely forgot my portfolio. The Dreadnought's huge engine rumbled as it idled and spread diesel exhaust fumes in our direction. The noise was so loud that we all had to shout. I heard Cina yell to one of the girls to fetch my portfolio from the car.

I looked up. Suddenly Jamie Wyeth was there with his hand extended in greeting. He introduced himself. I introduced myself. On hearing my name he looked surprized. "Oh yes, the bird book! Wonderful." he said. I had forgotten that Cina had sent him a copy. As the girl carrying my portfolio passed by, Jamie reached over and gently took it from her. He put the strap on his shoulder and motioned for us all to embark.

Seeing Jamie Wyeth carrying my portfolio instantly made me think of one of the most enjoyable letters Scott wrote to

me in the early sixties during our college years when I was at Tulane and he was a lonely student at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Scott was particularly close to Academy teacher John McCoy. They both shared a deep love of watercolor, a medium that occupied a secondary status at the school. John was Andrew Wyeth's brother-in-law. He was older than Andy by a few years and was an important influence on Wyeth's early development as a watercolorist.

John arranged for Scott to show his work to Wyeth one March afternoon at Andy's old Chadd's Ford studio. He dropped Scott off not far from the house and drove away, leaving him nervous and feeling abandoned. There were some people standing near the studio. One of them came forward. It was Jamie Wyeth. He was about eighteen years old at the time. He greeted Scott warmly, asked if he could carry his portfolio and apologized for his father's absence. Andy was off in the hills drawing somewhere nearby. I remember Scott telling me how mature and sophisticated Jamie was.

Thirty minutes later Andy finally appeared striding down the hill with his aquabee sketchbook in hand. He took off his heavy green corduroy coat, threw it on the grass and tossed his sketchbook on top of it. Scott told me that he was a bit embarrassed at his own nervousness. He certainly had not felt this way when he had met another of his artistic heroes Thomas Hart Benton and was given only forty-five minutes to draw his portrait.

That trip with John McCoy out to Chadd's Ford was the only time that Scott ever met Andrew Wyeth face to face. Among his most vivid recollections of that afternoon were his conversations with Willard Snowden over glasses of cheap wine and with other studio habitues who over the years appeared in both Andy's and Jamie's paintings. Scott and I have not talked much about our academy experiences for many years, but when Jamie Wyeth picked

up my portfolio dockside there at Tenant's Harbor I instantly remembered Scott's account of forty years ago.

With great skill our Captain Jamie maneuvered Dreadnought out of its slip passed moored pleasure boats and bobbing dinghis toward the sea. It seemed strange to me that there were so few people around on the nearby shores considering that it was the Fourth of July. As we passed the harbor's mouth Phyllis who was sitting next to me at the stern pointed out sites on the mainland and a nearby island that were part of her and Jamie's world. But she didn't have to. As we rumbled by toward open water I recognized the lighthouse, bell tower and a dozen other subjects that I had seen in books of Wyeth art, both father and son and I think grandpa N.C. Wyeth as well.

Once out of the harbor we headed south toward a distant spec of an island. The air became chilly. Somebody from the cabin began handing out comfortable jackets with Dreadnought written on them. Bloody Marys followed. All in all the cruiser Dreadnought had eleven of us aboard with plenty of room to spare. Because of engine noise, conversations across the deck were difficult. This gave me the perfect opportunity to talk to Phyllis Wyeth next to me. She had a vigorous quality about her in spite of the fact that she had a cold at the time. She told me how she had come to know our friend Cina, talked too of her days in the hospital recovering from the near fatal car accident that had put her in a wheel chair for life. She radiated a certain toughness that I had seen before in people who have endured a great deal of physical pain and like many such people she also had an excellent sense of humor.

It was only after I had been talking to Phyllis for several minutes that I noticed something moving under her voluminous dress. It was a little fuzzy dog, whose breed I don't recall, but I remember that it was fancy. It had its own little compartment under Phyllis's wheelchair seat and never ventured

out while we were on the boat. I'm sure it will seem odd, but it made me think of Mary Queen of Scots. After the ceremonies of her execution were over, her captors discovered that she had ascended the scaffold and endured the headsman's axe with her little pet dog hidden beneath her pettycoats. And here was I drinking a bloody Mary!

'Hey, artist! you're missing some great painting subjects!" It was Mark calling down at me from the upper deck. He and son James were topside and wanted company.

Mark was right. The view was fantastic. The distant island that seemed to be our destination was closer now but still a long way off. As I took my seat I asked him if he knew anything about the island.

"That's Monhegan Island," he shouted.

Monhegan Island? It never occurred to me that we would be going there. Perhaps no place in the state of Maine has inspired more painters over the last hundred and fifty years. Everybody has painted there. Jamie and Phyllis have a home there in a house that once had belonged to Rockwell Kent. I was embarrassed that it never occurred to me that we might be near Monhegan. Scott and I even had several books on the island in our library. This trip was turning out to be not just an extraordinary venture into Wyeth country, with some Wyeths no less; It was quite literally in the wake of Homer, Kent, Henri, Hopper, Bellows, Marin and so many others, all who were profoundly connected to this part of the world as well. These were artists for whom Scott and I had the most profound respect. And our books were also full of the works of dozens of other Maine artists, whose names I never heard of, but who created splendid art in this area.

After a few minutes topside, Mark and son James decided to go below for a little warmth. Alone now and trying to keep my contact lense from falling out from the wind, I sat back

and watched as Monhegan began to reveal its north shore. No houses or signs of human habitation as I recall. Only granite cliffs topped with dark forest growth. We passed several flocks of King Eiders and elegant black Scoters riding the gentle swells to starboard. Few Gulls though. Occasionally a small flock of ravens flew by - island hopping I guess. I remembered that this hard coast and Labrador far to the north had caused John James Audubon so much trouble in the 1830's as he made his last great efforts to secure specimens for his "Birds of America".

I couldn't help but appreciate the surrealistic situation that I presently found myself in, cruising off the coast of Maine on Jamie Wyeth's boat. I thought about the historic documents and the wonderful waistcoats packed in my portfolio in the hold below. I wished that Scott was here, for in a way this day was the culmination of something both he and I had set in motion in 1974 that would connect us forever in a small way to the Wyeths and the Wyeth myth.

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I don't remember who thought of it first. I think it was I. We had just received literally a bale of eighteenth century costumes which we had purchased at Sotheby's. Historical clothing then was not as expensive as it is today nor as rare. As part of these sales certain lots were offered containing ten or more gentleman's coats. These garments were often much "distressed" as they say in the trade, but were fun to restore. I learned a great deal as I mended tears, and reattached linings, sleeves and dangling buttons. And while our collection boasted many examples of 18th century clothing in mint condition, it was often the damaged ones worn by the vicissitudes of time that Scott and I liked the most. They showed their age. Scott loved applying his considerable skills to recreate missing buttons,

many of them with complicated designs of embroidery and sequins. It was truly miraculous how well he could imitate them with nothing more than Elmer's Wood Filler, cardboard, bits of aluminum and illusionistic painting effects.

While we were engaged in one of our restoring binges it occurred to me that Andrew Wyeth's collection of historical costumes was mostly of reproductions inherited from his father and from Howard Pyle his father's teacher. It was Pyle's Chadd's Ford school for illustrators that had lured N.C. Wyeth from Massachusetts to the valley of the Brandywine in the first place.

I was just finishing a much distressed French gentleman's jacket dating from the Revolution when I thought how neat it would be to send Wyeth some real clothing of the 18th century right out of the blue, no strings attached.. Scott jumped on the idea. Let's send Betsy and Andy a complete ensemble, Jacket, shirt, waistcoat, breeches, some reproduction stockings that were actually ballet tights. We had a lady's open robe for Betsy, the only article of womens' clothing in our collection. Scott had two pairs of reproduction shoes made for him at Williamsburg, but his shoe size was much too small for Andy's big flat feet.

Scott and I became so enthusiastic about the idea that in the end we sent the Wyeths the robe and four 18th century jackets with accessories. That French coat of green and tan striped silk with a high stand-up collar that I had just restored was included. There was also a jacket of pink ribbed silk and one of dark blue velvet richly embroidered with sprays of oakleaves and acorns in white and ice-blue silk thread. Both were in excellent condition as was the fourth coat, of patterned brown broadcloth of the 1770's. This brown coat was probably English, but it had an austere American look about it that gave me an idea. If I told Wyeth in the letter I was writing to

accompany our package that it came from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, he just might paint a picture of it.

I delighted in the idea that all these goodies would be arriving in Chadd's Ford by complete surprize. As we packed the box, I also couldn't help comparing our eccentric little project to one of those satellites that scientists were sending into the unknown outer regions of the solar system. We had absolutely no idea if anything would come of it. It had been ten years since Scott's visit with Andrew Wyeth. In that decade I had graduated from Tulane and wasted a year at the University of Texas Law School before going on to the Pennsylvania Academy in the Fall of 1966. Scott had been given a show at the Fort Worth Art Museum, known at the time as the Art Center and he had joined Valley House Gallery in Dallas where he had two phenomenally successful shows. Though he had ceased his formal studies at the school, Scott decided to go back to Philadelphia with me to help me learn the ropes.

Not long after I arrived at the academy a huge retrospective of Andrew Wyeth's art debuted in the school's galleries. Thousands came to see it. I had the good fortune to take a private tour of the exhibit with John McCoy who had retired from the academy but came in occasionally to offer critiques of students' work. There were only three of us. John, myself, and an eccentric but talented artist friend Steven Theodore Pakyz. John knew the circumstances behind the creation of practically every painting on display, and our session was profoundly illuminating.

Later, during the final days of the show, I was filing through the rooms with hundreds of others when I heard a high pitched voice declare "I painted that one in Erie, Pennsylvannia!"

It was Andrew Wyeth. He was standing pretty much by himself in the center of the gallery talking to somebody in the crowd.

Before my natural timidity intervened, I walked over and introduced myself and mentioned that I was a student of John McCoy which was not exactly true. At hearing this his cordial but rather public smile really lighted up. I also told him that my twin brother, also an artist, had been brought out by John to his Chadd's Ford studio a couple of years ago - on the day he broke his ankle in a motor scooter accident. Just as Wyeth's eyes flashed a glimmer of recognition a hand was thrust between us to shake his hand and then another and another as an admiring crowd began to gather around us. I can't remember what I said to him as I stepped back and took my leave, but I doubt he heard me anyway. That was my one encounter with Andrew Wyeth. Scott and I spent the rest of the 1966 school year living together, and drawing and painting together at Nellie McCardle's strange but cozy rooming house in West Collingswood, New Jersey.

The day before driving home for the Christmas holidays, we had one last adventure. On a cold and rainy December morning Scott took a bus to New York City. I drove the Caprice south to Hancock's Bridge. Scott's destination was the customs office to pick up our first 18th century costume purchase which had just arrived from Mayorcas Ltd. of London. My errand was to retrieve on loan from the state of New Jersey a wonderful caped coachman's coat circa 1790 to 1820 which Scott had discovered the year before hanging in the attic of the Hancock House Museum. The attic, if I remember correctly, had been the sight of a horrible massacre of American prisoners by British and Hessian soldiers in 1778. You could still see the bayonet holes in the floor.

After the holidays Scott remained home and I took a plane back to Philly. I missed him terribly and began to realize that, for the kind of painting that I really wanted to do, Scott and not the Academy was going to be my best teacher. Yet it was a time of war as Vietnam was really heating up, and I did not

want to lose my student deferment. I probably would have stayed at least another year but I had an irresistible opportunity to go on a Tiger hunt to India with our boyhood friend Tom Loffland. For economic reasons I was going along as a non-hunting companion. Actually Scott was supposed to, but a major project forced him to cancel at the last moment and I took his place so as not to ruin Tom's plans. I thought a trip to India was worth risking the draft. I thought a little differently when I returned from India and had a close encounter with Selective Service but thankfully was not drafted. After that crises was happily resolved, I felt no pressure to return to the Academy. My brief study there was over without regrets and with many special memories.

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It was about 8:30 in the evening when the telephone rang. I hardly heard it. I remember that Scott and I were listening to a new record of a Handel opera, and the door to the kitchen where the nearest telephone was located was shut. As an aria ended the faint sound of the telephone brought us abruptly back to the twentieth century. A week or ten days had passed since we had launched our package in the direction of Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania. Scott and I were so busy at that time that neither one of us had given much thought to our gift, and we didn't have high expectations anyway.

"Hello?" I said.

"Scott? Is that you?" a high pitched voice asked. "This is Andy Wyeth!"

I was taken completely by surprise. Before I could tell him who I was, Wyeth exclaimed "We are just overwhelmed with your gift!"

A woman's voice cut in. "They are all so beautiful. The

dress simply wonderful. It is so tiny it must be a child's dress, yes?"

Both Andy and I spoke at the same time. "They were tiny people," we said. We laughed together. I asked them when did they get the package?"

"Three days ago," Betsy said. "Andy hasn't been the same since the box arrived. He loves everything but those ballet tights and the wonderful white shirt! He's been running around Chadd's Ford for the last couple of days dressed like Hamlet. Everybody here knows about your splendid gift.

Andy cut in. "Yes, fantastic! How can we ever repay you?"

"We would simply love to see you paint them some day," I said, surprized at my boldness.

"Have no doubts," he said. "When I do them I'll send you a study. Your whole house will be filled with Wyeths!"

"This is a pure gift, plain and simple. Our reward will come if we see them someday in one of your catalogues." I lied.

Andy's voice turned more businesslike. "Scott, I can't get over the poloroids of you dressed in the costumes. They really fit you,"

"You look as if you stepped right out of the age," said Betsy.

It was only then that I introduced myself as Stuart. We all laughed. I told them not to be embarrassed, that Scott and I have been called by each other's names forever. "Even our mother does it," I said." I added that the photos they were talking about were indeed of brother Scott.

Wyeth continued, "About the poloroids, "I loved those buckled shoes. Are they original too?"

"No," I said. "They were made for us at Williamsburg a couple of years ago."

I don't recall exactly what Wyeth said next, but he strongly hinted that he would be delighted to have the shoes as well.

After Scott realized what was going on and who I was talking to, he went to the back bedroom and got on the phone. When he heard what Andy said, he joined in and introduced himself. It must have made our conversation even more confusing, since Scott and I sounded almost exactly alike on the telephone.

"Andy," Scott said. "I've seen your feet. They are way too big for those shoes. You would look like Cinderella's ugly step-sister trying to get into them!" We all laughed. I think Andy liked the image.

"Do you think that Williamsburg might make a pair for me?"

"I don't really know. Perhaps not. The cobbler there told us that they only made shoes for museums and similar public institutions. He was so impressed, however, when we showed him some of our costumes that he volunteered to make a couple of pairs on the sly."

"Don't you think the name Andrew Wyeth would carry some weight?" Wyeth asked plaintively.

"I have no idea," said Scott. "But at least we can ask. Then Scott had an inspiration. "Why don't you send me a drawing of your feet with left and right outlines and a side profile. The cobbler will need the information if he agrees to make the shoes."

"I'll send it tomorrow!"

We all talked for a few more minutes. Scott asked how John and Ann McCoy were doing and to pass on our solicitations. Andy asked how Ronald Thomason a mutual artist friend from Fort Worth was doing. Then amid more thankyou's and expressions of gratitude and surprise we said our goodbye's. Scott did add one last request. He asked for the return of the polaroids as soon as Andy was through with them. That evening we talked late into the night about what had just happened. We hardly paid any attention as the new records of the Handel opera played on.

The next day Scott spent half the morning searching for the phone number of the Williamsburg shoemaker who had the wonderful last name of Hawk. I think Seth was his first name. Two days passed before he finally got Master Hawk on the phone, and by that time Andy's drawing had arrived in a manila envelope wonderfully calligraphed by the artist. The drawing it held showed both feet outlined and a side profile as requested. At the bottom of the page Wyeth pencilled in big block letters "A WYETH'S FEET". Below this he wrote in longhand "As you can see, I have a big understanding" (a yankee expression for flat feet!). Finally, evidently at a later time, he inscribed in ink, "I am still overcome with your gift".

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Scott told Hawk what he needed and that the shoes were being made for Andrew Wyeth.

"Who's Andrew Wyeth?" Hawk asked.

"Well, he's maybe the most famous artist in America. He lives in Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania and is very interested in early American history. He has an important collection of 18th century costumes. Your shoes might even end up in one of his paintings and maybe hang one day in the Metropolitan Museum or whatever."

Scott told me that Hawk was really underwhelmed, but even though he had never heard of Wyeth and was not supposed to do work for private individuals, if Scott would vouch for him, he would consider the project.

When told about the drawing we had, Hawk said that it was not enough, that he needed circumference measurements of Wyeth's right foot taken at the ankle and at various intervals from heel to toe.

That evening we called the Wyeths. Andy was much amused that he apparently was not a household name everywhere. I

suggested that perhaps the Williamsburg authorities never let their people escape the eighteenth century. He laughingly agreed. He also agreed to send another drawing. It arrived in a few days and was more artful than the first. All the requested measurements were there. The drawing was signed below: Right Foot A. Wyeth.

Both Scott and I called Seth Hawk every day for a week. No answer. I let another week pass before calling again. This time somebody picked up the phone but it was not our shoemaker. It was a woman's voice, cold and official. I asked for Master Hawk and was told that he no longer worked at Williamsburg. I requested a forwarding address or telephone number. The information was refused. Apparently Master Hawk's departure was not a happy one. Andy Wyeth never did get his shoes. Scott never got his poloroids back, and the silence of years closed around our brief encounter with Betsy and Andrew Wyeth.

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As Dreadnaught neared the seaward side of Monehgan island Jamie slowed to almost an idle and then cut the engine. The water was so calm that no anchor was needed. Jamie's attractive young crew came out of the cabin with plates of lobster rolls and salad. After everybody was served, our captain joined us for lunch. Our conversation was mostly pleasant small talk about mutual acquaintances and friends in Fort Worth where he was given an exhibition at the Amon Carter Museum in 198__.

Jamie mentioned that he remembered visiting a marvelous house with large malachite columns. By coincidence, not only did I know the house he was talking about, but Scott was doing portraits of the owners. We did talk art as well. I mentioned the work of John Koch, a New York City painter of quiet interiors. I thought he was underappreciated inspite of an

important retrospective at the New York Historical Society that my friend Michael Thomas helped to organize couple of years ago. Jamie agreed. He corrected my pronunciation of Koch's name and told me that he owned a number of his paintings. I really didn't know if I was going to enjoy talking to James Wyeth, but I found him accessible, pleasant, sophisticated and possessed of that quiet kind of self-containment that I have seen more often in great musicians.

Now that we were simply floating and on a windless ocean, the sun was getting to me. I took my coat off. As I finished my lobster role I noticed a few rock climbers and artists at their easels atop the nearby cliffs. Monhegan looked pretty wild and empty from where I was sitting. Where was the town?

"We will be going there after we are finished here," Phyllis said.

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Scott and I got a call from the secretary of Dr. Richard Fargo Brown, the charismatic director of the Kimbell Art Museum. I remember that it was on a dark, wet afternoon in November of 1976. He wanted us to come to the board room to take a look at some drawings and prints he was considering for the museum collection.

The door to the room was wide open. As we began to enter, Rick Brown was sitting at the long board table upon which were arranged a number of small pieces of paper.

"Stop!" he commanded.

We halted in the doorway.

"The World is coming to and end," Rick said. "Your spaceship is about to take you to safety and you can only carry three of the twenty artworks on this table with you. Which ones would you chose and tell me why."

Scott and I felt honored to be asked. We had done this several times with Rick. He was a wonderful teacher as well as friend. On the table, as I recall, were two or three Tiepolo etchings, a Rembrandt landscape print, several drawings by Guardi and an absolutely superb drawing of Judith and her maid with the head of Holofernes by Guercino. Scott and I were delighted that our selections matched Rick's and his curator's, though our choice of the Guercino was a no-brainer.

After our session we met in Rick's office for a cold drink and some art gossip. As I sat down I noticed on his desk a new Wyeth catalogue stacked with a bunch of others. It was from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's controversial "Two Worlds of Andrew Wyeth" exhibit which Thomas Hoving had presented in the face of bitter criticism from the modern art community. I casually picked it up and thumbed through it as I talked to Rick. Finally, when I turned to the very last page, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Illustration 128 was a black and white reproduction of a Wyeth Tempera titled "The Quaker". It depicted two 18th century coats. One was of patterned dark wool. The other of striped silk.

They were our coats! Both were hanging from the mantel in Wyeth's old Chadd's Ford studio, the same place Scott had met Wyeth years before. Outside the window was a bleak winter landscape powdered with snow. The illustration of "The Quaker" looked as if it had been included at the last minute. There were no references to the painting in the main body of the catalogue. Scott and I were delighted that Andy had actually done something with our gift. What else may he have painted? I was sorry that we simply could not get to New York to see the show and were left with only our imaginations to visualize what that Tempera might look like in color. For some reason, Scott and I really did not feel comfortable calling the Wyeths about the painting. We had even stopped collecting costumes,

because we has so many, more than we could draw or paint in a lifetime.

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In the early summer of 1980 I decided to go to Asheville, North Carolina to spend a few weeks with our older brother Dr. Peter Gentling and his wife Jasmin. I took my painting equipment along for any landscapes that might interest me. Most of the landscaping I did was actual digging, planting and weeding in Jas and Pete's beautiful hillside gardens overlooking the city of Asheville. I did hand-color a black and white print of a snow goose drawing there which six years later became plate 24 of our elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas".

I stayed with Pete and ^{JAS}Jazz for a month. Some of that time was spent at their seaside beach house where I painted nothing but cloudscapes. Later, toward the end of my vacation, we drove down to Greenville, South Carolina for the day. Jas had heard that there was some kind of Wyeth exhibit in the local art museum.

When we walked into the attractive foyer of the Greenville Museum of Art the first thing I saw was a stack of new Wyeth catalogues. On the cover was a beautiful reproduction of Wyeth's tempera "The Quaker!" While purchasing a couple of catalogues I declared to the bookstore lady in my excitement that my brother and I had given those costumes to the artist. A few minutes later while we were looking at the the actual tempera which by the way measured a generous 36 3/4" by 40 3/8" we were approached by the museum's director, Jack Morris. He seemed quite pleased to see us. The girl in the bookstore had told him about what I had said and he wanted to know more.

"I thought these costumes were part of Wyeth's father's collection or Howard Pyle's. I distinctly remember being told

that," he said.

I recounted our story, our connections with the Pennsylvania Academy and John McCoy. I could see that he wanted to believe me, but he still seemed to have reservations.

"I'm just certain that they told me Howard Pyle was the source," he said.

"I guess Wyeth just forgot how he got them," I said somewhat apologetically.

I asked him to step up close to the picture. I pointed to the striped suit which Wyeth had painted with touching sensitivity.

"Much of this coat was in tatters when it arrived from London. I removed what was left of the lower lining, sewed the right sleeve back on at the shoulder, and repaired the cuffs. To stiffen the high standing collar whose buckram lining had probably wilted generations ago I inserted two strips of cardboard. You can actually see that while the coat is limp the collar is firm."

Morris asked me to hand him one of my catalogues. He turned to plate four and read the commentary out loud:

"Wyeth likes contrasts - the bitter cold visible through the window and the general feeling of the interior warmth of his studio fireplace; the glow of the sunlight reflected on the floor and the glaring brightness of the light reflected on the snow outside; two coats, one simple, sturdy - a Quaker coat - shows us its back, the other more elegant, of silk brocade is facing outward, open. 'That's a Quaker coat that actually came from Lancaster, the dark coat which is very simple and made of homespun weave. The other one probably was made in France and sent over for some American.'

Two coats, passed down from Howard Pyle to N.C. Wyeth, are said to represent two sides of Wyeth's nature."

As he finished reading Morris looked me directly in the eyes, in a good natured way, but waiting for me to say something.

"My brother and I have some poloroids of both costumes. I think we even have some of Scott wearing the dark coat," I declared hoping that my diffidence didn't show and trying to remember if those photos were in the group of poloroids that Andy never returned. "Hoping to excite Wyeth to paint a picture, it was I who lied about the Lancaster, Pennsylvania origin of the dark coat. You can see that it inspired the tempera's title of 'The Quaker'. It was strange that Wyeth remembered that the coat came from Lancaster, but not how he got it."

Morris asked me if I would send him copies of the photos, but I never did. Later, he left the museum in the wake, I think, of some sort of controversy over the museum's ownership of the Wyeth paintings. The collection, with "The Quaker" included was sold with all or many works going to a Japanese corporation. After the Japanese economy tanked, our tempera along with many of the Greenville Museum's former Wyeths eventually found their way to Sotheby's. Nineteen works were auctioned on November 30, 2000. The auction house produced a lovely catalogue which included not only a fold-out illustration of "The Quaker" but also a reproduction of the watercolor study for the tempera.

Of course the catalogue cited Howard Pyle's collection as the source of the costumes. It was hard to believe that it would somehow diminish the Wyeth aura for people to know that one of his most handsome temperas was inspired by an eccentric gift from a couple of crazy artists in Fort Worth, Texas. Sometime in the 1980's Triton Press came out with a collotype

print of "The Quaker" framed like the original. It is somewhere in our attic.

From 1978 to 1986 the painting of birds and the publication of our 47 pound elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas" increasingly dominated our time. When the folio finally debuted in the late summer of 1986 to, I'm not too modest to say, wonderful reviews, Scott and I sent a copy to Betsy and Andy. They called us again, overwhelmed again. Our conversation was just like our talks in the old days. The Wyeths even extended another invitation to visit, but we never did. Fifteen more years went by till 2001 with the publication of the trade edition of our bird book by the University of Texas press, a copy of which we sent to Betsy and Andy. Sometime during those years we saw our blue velvet coat in another one of Andy's catalogues. It was hanging from a doorway in N.C.'s studio in a watercolor titled "French Connection".

That Blue coat even became a part of Jamie Wyeth's world. He is wearing it in a photograph of him with his father who is dressed in an authentic 1812 American naval uniform. The photo appears in the catalogue accompanying the exhibit "An American Vision: Three Generations of Wyeth Art (1987)". Jamie also painted a girl wearing the coat in a mysterious 1995 oil titled "Other Voices."

Scott's and my last contact with the Wyeths was with our gift of the new trade edition of our "Of Birds and Texas" mentioned above. They sent us a recent catalogue about the African Americans who peopled Wyeth's world. Its title deeply touched us, for in a way we liked to think they meant the same message for Scott and me as well. It was called "Andrew Wyeth, Close Friends" Betsy and Andy inscribed the book and included a delightful letter. Although we did not talk directly after that My friend Cina would let me know now and then how Betsy and Andy were doing. Both of them were not exactly spring

chickens. I was delighted to hear that inspite of some medical problems Andy was painting practically everyday. And I had heard that Betsy was busy preparing a catalogue raisonne of Andy's life's work.

Not wanting to be left off the list of suscribers I called the Brandywine River Museum last May and talked to the curator. She was a delightful lady who didn't know who Scott and I were but did know of our elephant folio which she told me still sits under the long table at the Mill, the Wyeths' Chadd's Ford home. She really didn't have much information about the catalogue raissonne. I told the her that I was tempted to call the Wyeths but that since such catalogues are usually done after the death of the artist, it might be a rather delicate subject to bring up. She agreed and we both laughed at the predicament.

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Dreadnought's engine growled back to life. We began to move slowly forward, still heading south and paralleling Monhegan's shoreline which began to reveal a house or two. Above us and almost lost among the rocks were several more painters at their easels, and as we rounded a promontory to starboard a few small boats appeared heading in our direction almost as if they were coming to greet us. Soon there were even more boats as I could see that we were heading toward a harbor, Monhegan's famous landing painted a zillion times by just about everybody. Phyllis pointed out the house built by Rockwell Kent which now belonged to her and Jamie.

The Dreadnaught slowed to only a knot or two as we entered the harbour. It was such a calm day that we seemed to glide by the docking area. To our left and thus to port lay the barren shoreline of Manana island (pronounced like "banana" without a hint of spanish). It appeared uninhabited with the exception of a forlorn wooden house of strange design now abandoned and yielding to the elements. To starboard was Monhegan's well-known old hotel rising above dockside buildings almost too quaint and picturesque.

I had no clue about what Jamie and Phyllis had in store for us next, but it was soon obvious that we were not going make a landing as Dreadnought slowly began turning toward the open sea. As the engine speeded up and was about to put an end to any conversation, I leaned toward Phyllis. Before I could say anything, she shouted, "We're going out to see Betsy and Andy."

It was easy to see why Jamie Wyeth had christened his boat "Dreadnought." As we headed out to sea he really stepped on the gas. With that powerful bully engine, with sea spray shooting high starboard and port, the calm waters seemed to offer no

resistance. We were unstoppable. In a half-hour an island appeared off to our right. As we got closer it became two islands separated by a narrow waterway. There were docking areas and buildings on both sides of the channel. Both shores were rocky and almost treeless for some distance from the water. The open ground made me think of Labrador. It was even tundra-like. There was forest though, but not far enough away to seem unthreatening, an unbroken line of black and green, mysterious, creepy, even under the bright summer sunlight of Maine. There really was something of the frontier outpost about this place, as if it had just been carved out of the wilderness.

As we entered the channel Dreadnought gave several loud blasts of its horn. I could see a small figure emerge from the buildings on the portside island walking rather carefully down to the dock. It was Betsy Wyeth. As we came about and eased along dockside, our pretty highschool crew were ready with ropes in hand. Captain Jamie brought Dreadnought to a perfect landing. As the girls were securing the boat, Jamie emerged from the cabin to help them. Betsy arrived and stood at the head of the landing ramp waving greetings to everybody. That's when I noticed another figure coming toward us. It was Andrew Wyeth walking with a cane, his hair white and shining in the sunlight even at a distance.

For the first time it began to dawn on me just what was happening. Here I was about to come face to face with Betsy Wyeth for the first time, and Andrew Wyeth for the second time in thirty-eight years! I had not been nervous when I met Phyllis and Jamie, but now I was much more uptight than I thought I⁺ would be, not unlike the time Scott and I first met President Bush at his Crawford ranch. To suddenly see the president standing there after all the negotiations and talk that had taken place to set up such a meeting - well, it was an out of body experience. All the Wyeths were gracious people of

course, but as a fellow painter, a painter of realism in the so-called Brandywine tradition I felt that it was especially important for me to observe a few subtle rules of artistic protocol. I did not want to make any mistakes. Although this trip was meant by Mark and Cina as a treat for me, thank heavens I was but one person in a party of eleven Dreadnought passengers. Also, today just happened to be Mark Forgason's birthday.

Jamie checked and tightened one of Dreadnought's tether lines as Betsy and Andy looked down from the landing. Over the noise of everybody's talking and laughter I heard Jamie mention my name to his father. Andy looked over at me.

"Where's your brother?" he shouted.

That was exactly the same thing President Bush first asked me when my friend Nancy Ferguson and I were honored with a private dinner with the Bushes at the White House on the eve of his second State of the Union speech. Scott had stayed home. I told Wyeth that Scott could not tear himself away from a particularly difficult painting. It was the same thing I had told the president. I know the president didn't believe me, and Wyeth acted as if he hadn't heard my answer.

At lunch I had told Jamie about our gift of the 18th century costumes to his father in the early 1970's, a gift that included the blue velvet coat that Jamie had depicted in his own painting "Other Voices." He seemed genuinely surprized. Until that moment he had associated us only with our bird book.

Now, as we prepared to disembark, I heard Jamie say something to his father about the costumes.

"Yes, I know," Andy said.

Phyllis was the first passenger off the boat, on her own special gang plank. After hugs and handshakes we walked together up to the main house which was all weathered and grey and minimal with the exception of a recently added wing sporting a facade of fresh unpainted wooden siding. Someone asked about it and

Betsy answered with obvious pride that the new wing was really an 18th century one room school house. In fact it was the room depicted in Andy's tempera "Witching Hour" and was even the subject of some of his earliest watercolor efforts.

Jamie tapped me on the shoulder. "Where's your portfolio?" He sent one of the pretty girls back to the boat to get it. She caught up with us just as we entered the house by the back door. We stopped in the kitchen. Refreshments were offered. Everybody was talking. It was like a party. The up and coming presidential election and a probable second term for Bush was much discussed. Cina and Betsy stood by the sink catching up on mutual Chad's Ford friends. Andy asked me what I thought about George Bush as a person.

We were interrupted by Jamie who had my portfolio in hand. "May I take a look?" Andy wanted to see too. We adjourned to the nearby living room. The House was extremely simple inside, almost zen-like, the windows stark and uncurtained. The effect was austere but exquisitely done, calm and peaceful. We sat by the fireplace. Over the mantel was hung a single wooden oar. Henry Teel's I thought though I never got a chance to ask. On the living room's shell white walls were three or four of Andy's watercolors and a Tempera but I never got to look at them closely. As soon as I opened my portfolio of revolutionary goodies and began pulling out Marat's and George III's waistcoats and the documents, everything became excitement and confusion. It was like bargain day at Macy's.

Andy shouted toward the kitchen. "Betsy? Come here. You have got to see this!"

She and Cina and the others joined us. I thought Betsy might be interested in the Marie Antoinette document from Versailles, but somebody snatched it from my hand before I could give it to her. Andy became fixated on the letter from Lord Cornwallis whose defeat at Yorktown would eventually end the

American Revolution and gain for us the independence that we were celebrating on this day. As he read the letter he spoke the words but only to himself.

Others were reading out loud as well, both in English and in French. Off to the side I could see Mark's mother Joyce moving around us taking pictures with her digital camera. I was grateful. I had my old Pentax with me, but I was simply too occupied to even request permission to photograph. It seemed everyone had a good question to ask and that they were all asking me at once. It was almost like one of Scott's and my art openings. Betsy cornered me with one interesting question and then another. I noticed that Andy and Jamie had gathered around my portfolio and were pulling out the gicleé prints of our paintings.

Jamie had taken off the dark blue vest that he had worn on the boat and was now sporting the royal red waistcoat of King George III. I would have given anything to hear what they were saying. They both were talking quietly to themselves. Just as I finished with Betsy, Andy looked over at me, a generous smile on his face. He was holding a print of one of Scott's paintings of an intricately embroidered 18th century costume titled "French Silk".

"I can't believe the detail! He said. "It's simply marvelous!"

I snapped back, "You wouldn't put that in writing would you?"

Andy and Jamie were impressed by the quality of our giclees and surprised to know that they had been done in Fort Worth. I took my leave of Betsy and joined them. By now our little party was thinning out as, one by one, people followed Cina and her son out to explore the island.

I searched through my portfolio and pulled out Scott's painting of President Bush sitting among the limestone rocks

at his Crawford ranch. Betsy leaned over to see.

"Splendid," she said.

Andy and Jamie had good things to say about it as well. Jamie then pulled out the print of my Day of the Dead still life. It didn't surprise me that father and son liked that picture. Though it is tinged with irony and a certain morbid degree of surrealism that to me is very Mexican, I knew they would be intrigued by the Halloweenish witchy feeling of the painting. Betsy liked it too but had become interested in the doeskin gloves that had once been the keepsake of Charles I. They lay on the table nearby along with the French revolutionary cockade. It was then that Wyeth, suddenly becoming serious, asked me if I was currently working on anything interesting.

All in all, my Fourth of July show-and-tell offering was the complete success I had hoped it would be. I became so absorbed in talking to the Wyeths that I was surprised to see that we were the only ones left in the room. Somehow our conversation got around to tricorne hats and how rare they were. I think I mentioned that it had taken Scott and me more than thirty years to find an authentic one for our own collection.

Andy leaned forward and with an air of mystery whispered, "I've got one here in the house, a hat that Robert Montgomery, the actor, gave me many years ago."

"Are you sure it's not a movie prop?"

"I don't think so. It really looks old to me. Montgomery told me that it's even in its original wooden box."

Wyeth stood up from the couch and motioned for me to follow him. We walked back into the recently added room. I recognized the place immediately from several Wyeth paintings. And it was now easy to see that the room had once been part of an old school. The whitewashed walls were enhanced by a high wainscote of the kind of wonderfully wide boards of darkened wood that only ornamented early American structures. Here and there the

wainscoting revealed the old graffiti carvings of wayward and long forgotten students, their math problems, initials and even what looked like a geometry lesson or two.

There at the back of the room, on top of a bench curiously attached to the wall was an unpainted triangular wooden box with no lid. It was there all by itself. At first glance I could see that its contents looked very old indeed. Before I could ask, Wyeth gave me permission to pick it up.

"What do you think?" he said.

I could hardly believe it, but I was holding an old and once elegant beaver tricorne. A real one. Absolutely 18th century. The beaver fur now almost completely worn away. I was pleased that it did not have a generic look about it which defied accurate dating. The hat simply had to date from the 1770's - and it looked military. Wyeth was delighted and appeared relieved when he heard my verdict. He wanted to go tell Betsy. As he was leaving the room I asked him if I could photograph the hat for my costume files.

"Yes, go right ahead!" he said as he disappeared.

I photographed the hat both in and out of the box and from various angles, moving it around to catch the narrow shafts of afternoon sunlight filtering into the room. I finished just as Andy and Betsy returned. Betsy had a look of eager anticipation on her face. Without being asked, I picked up the hat and began my appraisal and why I thought the way I did. My hosts, quite satisfied, beamed at each other, especially when I told them that the hat might date from the American Revolution.

Andy reached out and took the tricorne from my hands. He fiddled with it to determine what was the front and what was the back and then put it on my head. He stepped back and scrutinized me for a moment with his clear blue eyes, his expression professional and devoid of humor. Then his face

brightened impishly.

"Do you want me to put it on?" he said.

Before I could say anything he took the hat off my head and put it on his. It was a great portrait opportunity! Just then I remembered my camera on the nearby table. For some reason I thought Betsy might not like the idea, but before I could overcome my natural diffidence to make a request, Wyeth looked me in the eye.

"Would you like to take my picture?" he said.

Not daring to look at Betsy who was really famous for being Andrew Wyeth's guard dog, I said nothing but reached over and picked up my ~~old~~ Pentax.

"I would be honored!" I said.

I stepped back and raised my camera.

"No, not here!" he said with mock disdain. "Over here." He walked across the room and stood against the white wall with its two windows staring out toward the channel. With his back to me he then slowly began to turn around to his left, turning his head and looking over his shoulder. His expression was absolutely malevolent. He was totally absorbed in some role. He was not Andrew Wyeth. Instantly I thought of Blind Pew or Captain Billy Bones at the Benbow Inn. It was really creepy. It was shamanistic. It really was witchcraft.

As soon as my shutter clicked Andy started smiling. Then he laughed out loud. He didn't give me another chance to shoot him at a distance. As he walked toward me he stopped and let me take four more pictures for close-ups, but Captain Billy Bones was gone. It was Andrew Wyeth that I photographed. My opportunity was all over in less than thirty seconds. I had no idea what I had gotten. The room was dark and I have never been a technically proficient photographer. Now that I think about it, I remember Betsy Wyeth looking bemused and actually making helpful suggestions while I was frantically trying to

adjust my light meter. I also recall having the distinct feeling that I had just collaborated with the Wyeths to create something that might turn out to be very special indeed!

I turned to Andy. "If the photos are any good, would you mind if Scott or I painted your portrait?"

"I would be honored and flattered," he said.

The three of us sat down at a long table, the one in Andy's painting "Witching Hour." The Wyeths were curious about what I thought of some old shoes they had. One of them had been found in a chimney. Two others were actually worn by Betsy when she posed as Christina Olsen in "Christina's World" arguably Andrew Wyeth's most famous painting.

They were fascinated when I told them that the placement of shoes in chimneys was an old English custom whose meaning has been lost to us. Some think the superstition dates from Saxon or even Celtic times. Scott and I even had an early Tudor shoe discovered years ago in a London chimney. I added that sometimes even live chickens were walled up during chimney construction. Andy and Betsy were glad to learn their old shoes were probably 18th century, but possibly modified and worn into the 19th century as well.

Just then Jamie came into the room and took a seat with us at the table. He was no longer wearing King George's silk waistcoat. We all sat there and talked and laughed as the light of a late summer afternoon began to slant across the room. I remember that Betsy wanted to know more about the delicate doeskin gloves I had brought with me. Their condition was so good that she simply could not believe they were made in 1625.

For the first time since I had set foot on the island I really felt comfortable. Here was I sitting in this strangely familiar room with Betsy, Andrew and Jamie Wyeth just shooting the breeze and feeling like I was actually in a Wyeth painting. The frenzy of our show-and-tell session was over. And I was

hopeful about the rare and wonderful opportunity fate had just given me to photograph Andrew Wyeth's portrait. I am not a superstitious person except about some things too silly to mention, but I could not help but feel that it really was a cosmic kind of fate that today happened to be the fourth of July and Wyeth had just posed for me wearing a three-cornered hat possibly worn during the American Revolution. If only those few photos were good enough, a really important American portrait might come of them.

To the best of my knowledge I have never seen a portrait of Andrew Wyeth that was not painted by an intimate family member. To have this remarkable opportunity was indeed a special gift, payback perhaps for the present of 18th century clothing that Scott and I had sent to Chadd's Ford so many years ago. For the poetically inclined, among whom I include my brother and myself, it would seem all too obvious that a unique kind of circle was now complete.

Dreadnought's horn startled us out of our conversational reverie. It was time to go. We took our time walking down to the dock. Everybody was on board when we arrived. They had paper plates in their hands with, not birthday cake, but birthday rhubarb pie, a treat in honor of Mark's natal day. Betsy, Jamie and Andy and I stood dockside for a few more minutes with our plates of pie. We all sang Happy Birthday to Mark while Mark took a few last photos. Then Captain Jamie and I climbed aboard. The engine soon drowned out our farewells. Tethers were loosed and Dreadnought was soon heading toward the open sea. I looked behind us perhaps to fix one last image of the Wyeths in my mind, but our boat was moving faster than I thought. Andy and Betsy were only tiny figures moving up the path back to the house. I really couldn't tell who was who. Then suddenly, and just for a moment, I saw a bright flash of white hair in the clean afternoon light.

August Gentling
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