

## The Researcher as Detective

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When I went into this line of work I was running away from home. I didn't know that learning how to conduct research and write ethnographic narratives would "lay down a path in walking"<sup>1</sup> that eventually would lead me back full circle to the place, to the moment, to the reason I ran away in the first place.

Nor did I realize that my graduate training in rhetoric and communication theory (with a little interpersonal and small group on the side) would help me develop not only the "equipment for living"<sup>2</sup> but also the observational and analytical skill set necessary to become a self-proclaimed organizational detective.

My life was not yet this book, but the pages in this mystery were already being written in my soul.

That I was becoming an organizational detective didn't occur to me until my reading of Raymond Chandler novels morphed into my reading of organizational cultures in the mid-1980s and I began to see that cultural knowledge was less of a "problem" to be solved through traditional social science methods and more of a

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<sup>1</sup> Verela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, K. (1964). *Perspectives by Incongruity*. Hyman, S. (ed). Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

*mystery* that, for me, had to be engaged personally, interpretively, and narratively.<sup>3</sup>

I knew something about mysteries. And not just from reading them. I had grown up as the son of a minor character in one of the greatest mysteries of espionage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Motives are shorthand terms for situations, right?<sup>4</sup>

But that mystery—the mystery of my father that I had unlocked with a safe deposit key in a bank in rural Maryland, was, I thought, *past*. My parents were both dead and our family secret had died with them. As an only child, I thought I had moved on.

I should have taken to heart one of the great truths of mysteries: *Be careful what you think about the past. Especially when you think it is behind you.* As that grand old southern gentleman and fellow mystery writer William Faulkner once expressed it: “The past isn’t over, it’s not even *past*.”

But at the time, I thought it was.

More pages in the book I didn’t yet know I was writing, turned.

While I was discovering my voice as a novice narrative ethnographer who was trying to write about the mystery of organizational cultures, then rock n roll,<sup>5</sup> then spiritual communities,<sup>6</sup> and so on, I believed I had buried the mysteries of my past in the graves of my parents. If I still lived with an incomplete narrative inheritance, so what?

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<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration, please see Goodall, H. L. (1989). *Casing a Promised Land: The Autobiography of an Organizational Detective as Cultural Ethnographer*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, K. (1954). *Permanence and Change: Anatomy of a Purpose*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>5</sup> Goodall, H. L. (1991). *Living in the Rock n Roll Mystery: Reading Context, Self, and Others as Clues*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Goodall, H. L. (1996). *Divine Signs: Connecting Spirit to Communities*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

I had my life to get on with. I had a job. A wife. Things to do. Bills to pay.  
More pages turned.

Every couple of years I reread the *The Great Gatsby*, and then, after awhile, I stopped doing that. I knew nothing more about it and its relationship to my father than I knew when I first inherited it and its place in his diary. *Gatsby* was, even without my personal scholarly contributions to understanding its role in the history of espionage, a fine American novel. Perhaps, I thought, it should remain just that.

Pages turned.

And then, suddenly, the cold war was over. I only wished my father had lived to see it. It was him I thought about when the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, and it was his life I thought about when Mikhail Gorbachev, with the flourish of his official pen, ended the Soviet Union on Christmas Day, 1991.

Pages turned.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CIA itself was a little more than a relic of a by-gone era and had been so reduced in size and power that it barely functioned as a global intelligence machine. Even when Agency analysts presented the newly elected Republican President and Secretary of State with well-documented evidence of imminent threats by known terrorists, well, as we have all learned, those opinions were simply ignored.

But I didn't know that on September 11, 2001.

Nor did I know that just because my father's cold war was past didn't mean that for me it was *over*.

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A second lesson I've learned about detective work is that you can run away from the truth for a long time—in my case about 25 years—but eventually you'll run into the one person you cannot lie to, and then the gig is up.

In my case, that one person was our son, Nic, who, following the tragic events of 9/11 kept asking me questions about my father, my mother, and my childhood. He was 12 and, with the world suddenly coming to grips with the idea of global terrorism, the truth was very important to him. To me, too. Listening to myself try to answer his questions, much to my horror, I realized that I was passing along to him the same half-truths and large omissions that I had grown up with, injecting him with same toxic secrets and incomplete narratives that poisoned my relationship to my own father.

I didn't want to risk that happening to me with Nic.

The old storyline stopped here. I decided that, if nothing else, I owed my own son the truth. Or, at least as much of the truth as I could learn. Recognizing that his "need to know" freed *me* to find out lifted a great shadowy burden from me. Perspective by incongruity: My son gave me the permission I needed to tell the truth to *myself*. The child was, indeed, the father to the man.

Now I just needed to *find* the truth.

And to do that I need to go back home.

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In this detective task, which consumed the next three, nearly four years of my life, I was assisted by my wife Sandra and also by Nic. It became our shared family research project. As with any research effort, we began with what we knew (or, as it turns out, what I *thought* I knew) and fitted those bits of knowledge, of memory, and of reading to an historical timeline.

There were essentially three lost narrative pieces to this historical puzzle and they were buried somewhere in the past. First, we needed to find out about my father's early life, from his birth on October 17, 1922 in Huntington, West Virginia until he went off to World War II as a radio operator on a B-17. All I had in the way of empirical evidence of that period was my father's high school yearbook and the few memorable things he had told me, but it was a start. In the yearbook were names, faces, photographs of his town, and hand-written good wishes from his closest friends.

*(Allow me to pause here and explain why I didn't have much in the way of empirical evidence to work with to reconstruct my father's life. Following the death of my mother in 1984, our house was robbed while it sat empty and for sale. I learned that a moving truck had parked in the driveway and that the thieves had taken everything—and I do mean everything—right down to the floors. The truck had no logo. The neighbors told me later they thought I had ordered the house cleaned out because it was for sale and the truck belonged to an independent agency. My lawyer—the curious Mr. Hovermale—told me that it had been a professional job. What he didn't tell me was that the organization responsible for the theft had a pattern of these professional jobs and that he, in fact, had ordered it. But that was long before I found out that the lawyer who*

*had been my father's friend was actually neither a lawyer nor his friend. Nor mine. What they wanted was the diary. Bottom line is that I have very little in the way of anything from my parents' lives.)*

Back to my story. The task of reconstructing my father's life was greatly enhanced when we located a distant relative, Betty Hastings Adkins, who not only remembered my father and his family, but also put us in touch with other relatives, including the family historian and genealogist, Dr. David Goodall.

We took a road trip to Huntington and interviewed Betty, who also provided the names and contact information for people who no longer lived in Huntington but who had been close friends of my father's. We also tried to make phone contact with my father's niece, whom, to our great surprise, refused, in very strong language, to talk to us after we explained what we were doing. That surprising response and seeming dead-end, caused, as we would later learn, by a family secret dating back to my father's return from the war and the fractured relationship he had with his sister, actually opened up our inquiry in new areas. What *did* go wrong when he returned from the war? I had been told a couple of different versions of this story, but there was a lot I knew I wasn't being told and that was what interested me.

The second part of the missing storyline required us to find out everything we could about those war years. I knew very little about my father's war because he rarely mentioned it. But I did remember, all too clearly, his nightmares. I did have his decorations, which my mother had made me take with me when I took my first teaching position. He had earned an air medal with two oak leaf clusters and a purple heart, a series of campaign ribbons, plus a Presidential Unit

Citation. But here, too, were some contradictory stories that had collided over the years: Was his plane shot down behind enemy lines? Was he a prisoner of war? Why did his leather bomber jacket, the one stained dark by his blood, carry a Russian inscription?

I didn't know. But I did know that with a copy of his death certificate and social security number, I could, as next of kin, request his service records. So I did.

But it was Sandra who made the big find.

There exist on the Internet complete histories of every air campaign and bomber group that served in World War II, complete with flight records and the names of crew. By diligently tracking his unit, she was able to locate the names of every man he served with, and she tried to reach every one of them. There was one still living: Ansil Miller, who had flown with my father on all 16 of his combat missions. That find turned into the most memorable interview I've ever had and I tell about it in the book. Ansil also provided me with photographs of my father that I had never seen to go along with the stories I'd never heard.

Finally, the third part of the missing storyline caused us to chart my father's work life from his entry into government service after the war until his retirement, at age 47 and on full medical disability, in 1969. In this last stage of this timeline research, I was most interested in three questions, each one of them critical to our lives when I was growing up. Those questions were:

- How did my father go from being a Contact Officer for the Veterans Administration in Beckley, West Virginia to Vice Consul for the United States in Rome, Italy in the space a couple of months in 1955?
- What happened to my father in Berlin in 1960 that caused our family to be suddenly uprooted from our flat in London and reassigned to Cheyenne, Wyoming only a few short weeks later? What was the event in Berlin that destroyed my father's career?
- What happened in July of 1963 that caused my father, along with my mother, to return to Washington, supposedly for a reassignment overseas, but instead led to a sudden downward spiral into depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and attempted suicide?

There were, of course, many other questions. Some were inscribed on my heart and required a level of honesty with myself, *about* myself, which I had never managed previously. I was not always the good son. Particularly later, after college, when I saw the train wreck my parents' ruined lives had become and still did nothing much to try to stop it. I was in some ugly ways, *complicit* with their demise. That, too, was part of this story and, no matter how painful, would have to be told.

I had signed on for the truth. Anything less would be dishonorable.

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Other questions emerged from the research process, when, just as any detective knows, one damned thing leads to another and certain patterns take shape.

One of the patterns that took shape early on was the pattern of deceit that the government enacted when I made my initial requests for his records and files. In a very entertaining sequence of letters with one Kathryn I. Dyer at the CIA, who begrudgingly admitted a “voluntary relationship” between the Agency and my father after having previously denied his existence, then denied having denied his existence.

When I pushed back against the “voluntary relationship” angle I was informed by Ms. Dyer’s boss, the chief FOIA Compliance Officer for the CIA, that they would answer no more questions about my father. I was, of course, free to appeal this decision but I should know that the man writing the letter was also the appeals officer.

But the CIA wasn’t the only government agency that made a hash of my requests for information. The Defense Department, the Veterans Administration, and the State Department all claimed, at least initially, that all of my father’s records had been destroyed in the fire that conveniently burnt through the government archives in St. Louis in 1973. I didn’t believe them. I knew the fire was real, but no paperwork in this government is ever done with multiple copies being distributed elsewhere.

So we took a trip to St. Louis and Sandra investigated this claim. Her research led to a helpful and clearly overworked bureaucrat who confirmed that the fire did indeed destroy those records, but added that since my father

had retired in 1969, a copy of his file had been transferred to the Civilian Records Office. "And where might that be?" Sandra inquired.

"Not too far from here," was the reply. We were given directions and within the hour had the full file. I nearly wept. Two years of stalling and yet through persistence and a little luck, I held in my hands the complete government file on my father.

Or so I thought.

We had come to St. Louis for two purposes, one of which was to investigate the claims of destroyed records due to a fire and the other was so I could present a guest lecture at St. Louis University. Our host was Kathleen Farrell, a seasoned researcher familiar with government archives. When we showed her the file she made us aware of what would become a most interesting hand-written instruction at the bottom of several pages in the file: *Put in the dummy file.*

"The dummy file?" Sandra asked.

"God bless the overworked government censor," Kathleen replied.

I had read enough spy novels to know the term. "My God," I replied. "She's right! This isn't his true file, this is his *legend*." A "legend," for those of you who may not be familiar with the term, is the "cover story" for a clandestine agent. It contains elements of the truth, but not the whole truth. What I had acquired was proof positive of his CIA cover, which is what I then used in my correspondence with the Agency to get them to admit the "voluntary relationship."

Voluntary, indeed. My father's relationship to the Agency lasted from September of 1947 to January 1969. During that time he had many postings, usually for the Veterans Administration or the State Department, although there is some evidence of a tie to Air Force Intelligence and the White House. I'll give one example. My father and the CIA Station Chief in Rome, William Colby, turned the Italian elections in 1956 by running a counter-espionage operation that included payoffs to priests and labor organizers. This adventure, recalled fondly by Colby in his memoirs, landed Colby a promotion to Saigon as the man in charge of CIA operations there prior to the Vietnam war. His service there would lead to his being named Director of the CIA and to become the man who disclosed "the family jewels" to the Church Commission.

My father also earned a promotion to Vice Consul for the United States to the Court of St. James, where he began investigating one Harold Adrian "Kim" Philby, a Cambridge man who, while working covertly for the Soviets, had created the training program for British spies during World War II and then, following the war, trained Americans in counter-espionage for the newly created CIA. Philby trained a lot of men, including one named James Jesus Angleton, who also became his close friend. Of course, this was all before Philby was supposedly dismissed from MI-6 for his suspected clandestine relationship, and probable help, getting two other Cambridge commies, Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean, out of the country and into the Soviet Union, where they were then declared heroes of the revolution.

My father first met Philby during the Suez crisis in 1956. They got drunk together and swapped lies. My father recorded the event in his dairy. It was not the last time I would find Philby's name there. In fact, it became my father's obsession, despite being told by Angleton to leave it alone.

My father never left it alone.

And Angleton never forgave him for it.

It is no understatement to point out that my father's career did not parallel Colby's.

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The third lesson about detective work is that *everything is connected*; the clues are always *there* in the relationships between and among persons. Of course this is a lesson that any student of systems theories also acquires, but my appreciation for the principle is not at all theoretical. I have lived it.

In the aftermath of 9/11 it has become clear that we are all historical subjects.<sup>7</sup> You, me, and everyone else. Believe me, no one gets out of this global social movement made by the collision of violent extremists and rampant globalization and oil dependence and secrecy and corrupt governments unscathed. But the larger truth is that we have always been historical subjects even though most of us seldom think of ourselves in that way.

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<sup>7</sup> Goodall, H. L. (2002). Fieldnotes from our war zone: Living in America during the aftermath of September Eleventh. *Qualitative Inquiry* 8: 74-89.

So it was then that I began to put the clues of my father's life into historical perspective. It occurred to me that our personal narratives are also historical narratives. I remembered Bill Colby. He was my "uncle" Bill. Stuart Symington, who chaired the Senate Committee on Intelligence, stayed at our house in Cheyenne and we grilled steaks in the backyard. Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, who instructed my mother to always call me by my Christian name, Harold rather than my nickname Buddy. The actress Abby Lane, who may have commissioned my portrait from Leonard Creco, unless it was Gloria Swanson, which is where that trail ends. I remembered also Frank Rizzo, Police Commissioner and later legendary Mayor of Philadelphia, who could have indicted me on charges of inciting a riot when I was in high school but for my father, who was then probably spying for the White House on anti-war groups that included me, working a deal to let me finish school, albeit in another state.

So many names unspoken for so long. So many relationships interrupted, now gone. So much history lost, the high cost of national secrets and of secrecy in the families that keep them.

And then there was the secrecy that surrounded my mother.

My *mother*. Naomi May Alexander Saylor Goodall. This story was her story too. I learned from our research that she had sacrificed so much for my father's career, including her true identity and the parts of her brain that were neutralized by shock treatments when she couldn't take it anymore. And that was before the *really* hard parts of her life kicked in.

Mothers in most mysteries are protectors of secrets in the family, and my mother was certainly no exception to this rule. Naomi protected my father's

secrets all the way to her grave. In one of the last conversations I had with her, while she lay dying in a Maryland hospital of stomach cancer, she said this to me: "One day you'll understand why I could never tell you more, and you'll tell the truth."

What did *that* mean? Secrecy was our familial bond, but that she expected *me* to break our code of silence?

I have told myself since I started this project that is what she meant.

Confession, they say, is good for the soul.

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Research into the mysteries of human communication is always a process of reading codes and deciphering meaning. So, too, is the artful work of being a detective. Words are clues that must be interpreted according to some analytic schema, some greater text, or pattern, or what my father used to call "the larger aesthetic."

For my father and for my mother, that larger aesthetic was the cold war. It was the struggle between Good and Evil under the constant threat of a nuclear annihilation. America, for them, was a beautiful idea and democracy, together with free market capitalism, would save the world from the specter of Communist domination. They were liberal Republicans. The secrecy and fear that defined us as a family, and as cold war culture, was part of our sacrifice for the greater goal of defeating a common enemy. So deep was my father's commitment that the

only thing he made me promise when I went away to college in the fall of 1970 is that I wouldn't become a Communist.

That my father and my mother became increasingly disillusioned with our government, disillusioned with the abuses of power, the lies to the American people, the cult of secrecy and cronyism that defined the political landscape, was also part of the story. My father's increasing paranoia accompanied by his belief that someone in the government was trying to kill him was always punctuated by his repeating the line from his favorite novel, "Gatsby turns out all right in the end."

It was coded communication but I didn't know that at the time.

In the end, what he knew, the secrets he kept, remained with him despite his wrestling with the possibility of releasing them. His untimely death may have been caused by his willingness to testify before the Church Committee, like his old mentor, Bill Colby. Colby died mysteriously, too. A boating accident, middle of the night, his dinner still on the plate in the kitchen, his body found days after the area had been thoroughly searched.

Angleton, a three pack a day smoker of Virginia Slims, died of lung cancer. On his deathbed he apologized for having made so many mistakes, ruined so many lives, been responsible for so many deaths.

One of those lives he ruined I believe, was my father.

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Detectives play an ironic role in the stories we tell. We are narrators as well as characters, and the story that is finally written is as much dependent upon the relationship between those two roles as it is on piecing together the empirical facts that provide the skeletal bones of the storyline. It is the narrator who provides the *post-facto* voice of experience while it is the character who struggles for meaning *in vivo*, and the tensions between those two ways of knowing, and of being, shape the richness and complexity of the resulting tale.

I set out to find the truth of what happened to my father, what happened to our family, and why the events of our cold war lives together seemed so very strange. Part of my quest is captured in the voice of the guy standing before you today, a voice of experience, a voice of some confidence, created out of all that I have learned and thought about, and written about, while completing this project.

But the other part of my quest is embodied in the inarticulate thoughts, the halting actions, the worries, the fears, the anxious sense-making of a young boy coming of age in a family that kept secrets about itself from each other that were in turn secrets kept from the American people about our government, and our history, that were unknown to all of us for a long, long time. I learned in the writing of this book that every act of national character, or lack of it, is mirrored in every act of character, or lack of it, in our families and our communities.

I also learned other things.

“At the onset of this project I believed that writing about my father and mother would bring me closer to them. I believe it has. I also thought that researching their lives and trying to answer the confounding questions of my

childhood and adolescence would clear up my lifelong confusion about them. I believe writing this story has partially done that, although now there are newer questions now and deeper mysteries that remain unresolved. And, at the beginning of this project I thought that by the time I reached the end of it, I would have finally learned something profound about the truth of their experiences. If not the whole truth and nothing but, then at least something wise enough to serve as the final resting place for their story and their contributions to how we understand the legacy of the cold war.

Having reached that ending place, I find myself once again with the story that my father passed on to me when he left me that old worn copy of *The Great Gatsby* thirty years ago. I find myself at the beginning again, only differently this time. When I consider the story in that great novel against the life of my father and mother, I realize it was *me* who wanted there to be a connection. It was me who read into my father's diary entry about his use of the novel as a codebook a larger meaning—a larger aesthetic—about the place of that fine story in his own well-examined, if troubled, life. I was, as Umberto Eco somewhere says, *completing* the story by reading it this way.

Now I read that connection differently.

I think there were times when I was guilty of substituting or maybe just confusing the characters in a story with the real life of the author. In the novel, *Gatsby* turns out all right in the end because Nick Carraway says he does, but the author of the actual life that inspired his character—F. Scott Fitzgerald—had no such luck in his own lifetime. His was a sad ragged alcoholic exit and he was only to achieve the fame he sought in life ten years or so after his death. Similarly, we

are led to believe that Daisy continued her charmed, flawed existence as a character in a larger story while we know that the model for that character, Zelda Fitzgerald, never attained the artistic success she so desperately sought, ended her days in a mental hospital, and died tragically in a fire.

I don't know why my father passed along *The Great Gatsby* to me. It was the book beneath his diary. *Were* they connected? Was he, as I supposed at the beginning of my quest, giving me permission to research his clandestine life and to use the novel as a codebook for interpreting it? Or was he simply giving me his favorite novel? Or was it something else, perhaps, bequeathing to me an American mythic story about love and friendship to aspire to, or a higher morality tale to live by?

What was I supposed *to do* with *The Great Gatsby*?

I doubt I will ever truly know.

I only know what I have *done* with it. I have used it to craft my own life story. I have lived through the lens of its storyline as a way of knowing about the past, as a way of thinking about the meanings of persons and ideas and things, and, at times, as a way of doing the work I call a career. But those are the things *I've* done with the book. They may or may not ultimately have anything to do with my father's intentions. Or his life. Or my mother's. Perhaps in my desire to use the novel as a codebook for my father's life, I have confused fictional characters with the lives of real people who meant, and who still mean, the world to me.

But I don't think so.

The lessons I've learned, the wisdom I've acquired (if I can be so bold as to call it wisdom), are better framed as a personal interpretation of that series of

words first authored by Fitzgerald then repeated by my father: "Gatsby turns out all right in the end." I read those words now a puzzle given to me to figure out.

I think I have now figured it out.

I understand those words as a reference not only for the larger meaning of the novel, but also for the ongoing larger aesthetic, the mythic struggle between Good and Evil that consumed my father's life and finally destroyed him. I had always heard these words as a moral conclusion about character, a summing up of the meaning, ultimately, of Jay Gatsby's life. But because I have now added something of my own life to figuring out this storyline in relation to my father's clandestine career, I hear the words echoing, lingering, even challenging me in the form of an ongoing question. That question is: *Does Gatsby turn out all right in the end?*

That question brings me squarely into the present. Albeit armed with some historical analogies.<sup>8</sup> Here is what I believe:

If our nation keeps secrets, so too do we learn to justify the secrets *we* keep. If it isn't for national security, it's for personal security. If it's not civil defense, it's a defense of our selves. If our leaders say one thing and do another, well is it any real surprise that we use that excuse of their faults to cover up our own?

An open society, a democratic society, doesn't need to behave this way. Not telling the truth diminishes our stature on the world's stage and sets in place the conditions for abuses of power. So, too, did engendering a culture of fear and

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<sup>8</sup> I elaborate on these points in a series of articles. Please see Goodall, H. L. (2006). Why we must win the war on terror: Communication, narrative, and national security. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12: 30-59; Goodall, H. L. (June, 2006). Absolute secrecy corrupts absolutely. *The Times Higher Education Literary Supplement*; and Goodall, H. L. (in press). Twice betrayed by the truth: A narrative about the cultural similarities between the cold war and the global war on terror. *Cultural Studies---Critical Methodologies*, forthcoming.

heightened anxiety about nuclear war create fallout in nuclear families. We cannot afford *not* to learn from cold war history, or else Santayana's dictum will once again prove true. We cannot lie to other nations and then expect them to believe in us. We cannot enter into wars without a plan for winning the peace. We cannot fuel an already politically divided country with fear of imminent terrorism without paying a much larger cultural, economic, and social price later.

My father was right. America is an idea—a beautiful one. Democracy is an experiment, an ongoing one. Both ideals require telling the truth so that justice at home and abroad isn't blind. Both require reliable information disseminated widely, so that our passionate engagement and active, intelligent participation in the political process aren't rendered victims of power, privilege, and the silent protection of those who have abused their power and flaunted their privilege. Even then, there are no guarantees.

I know there are those who actively plot against us. They must be dealt with as enemies who have attempted to destroy us in the past have always been dealt with. But we must not use the fact of them, and of 9/11, to dishonor the higher principles we must continue to defend. By doing so, we discredit our national character in ways that further embolden our enemies and expand their ability to recruit new volunteers against us. We must work every day for truth, justice, and the beautiful idea of America that shines as brightly as the green light on Daisy Buchanan's shore.

With that light we can offer the world hope, as my father before me did and as I do, that Gatsby and American will turn out all right in the end.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> From Goodall, H. L. (2006). *A need to know: The clandestine history of a CIA family*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.