

CHAPTER ONE

It is November 3, a crisp fall day in the advanced year of 2000. My feelings are quietly uncontainable. I am taking the bus to New York City, Port Authority. In consequence of many facts and mild contusions, I await the bus. The Peter Pan bus comes from Vermont, point of origin St. Albans, a part of the world with no particular fame, even in mellifluous-sounding Vermont. I am leaving a day early for a flight to Portugal tomorrow, making time for my younger brother, a New York appraiser.

The Second Congregational church in Greenfield, Massachusetts is the bus stop. It is right next to the city hall. The bus is due at 11 A.M. My EMS backpack is royally stuffed, including felt-tipped pens, notebooks. There are three of us. If you drove by you would think vagrants have switched park benches from Main Street.

Much lies in the background. I am a born minimalist, also “a generalist,” a tag I don’t mind. Whether in avoidance of, or in search of details, style and order are relative to a plan. The conjurer doesn’t have to believe that unconventional choices of what to do in life, and how to classify or arrange the columns, is necessarily a pejorative thing; more likely the doubt relates to some other definition, possibly by malicious intent. A more humble statement would be to say that I have squandered my opportunities and occasionally suffer the blues.

A high school principal, at the one of many schools where I have substitute-taught, in the road map of my desultory teaching career, hit me with a question I would almost term “snide.” “Where have you done most of your teaching?” he asked.

“I’ve taught everywhere,” I said, half bragging. The interchange was lost in more important doings. I realized then, as I realize now, that what proscribes a successful life that marks you a stable and trustworthy citizen, is working with your peers, or perchance, finding their level of politics, and not veering from it; that, and being around for the holidays.

Waiting for the bus to New York City is my career choice. I say that guilt-free. Two others wait with me, a husband and wife on their way to Pennsylvania to apprentice to a guitar maker. There are stories everywhere.

I forgot to mention that I am also carrying, “hand carrying” I’ll term it in a permissible redundancy, an 11 by 14 inch-matted photograph in a plastic shopping bag. It is of a Portuguese couple in their wedding suits. Story there, too. A few days earlier, a guy named Pedro (connection here, too) heard that I was swinging through his part of Portugal, asked me if I would drop the picture off in his village. I said that I would. I took pride in the responsibility, not sure why.

There is not much more in the way of preliminaries. Greenfield, Massachusetts, I will add, projects a reality like Worcester or Fitchburg, places you leave in order to seize greater, flashier versions of life. The breakdown of images starts with the glum hedges, trimmed fastidiously to conjure up people eating supper at the same time and watching hours and hours of television.

I don’t mean to paint a picture so claustrophobic of a place so decent, so, so . . . anonymous. Why a spot seems to have had its oxygen siphoned away is in the eye of the beholder. The out-of-towners have given it new life. There is a food co-op here. People have been to California. In slightly greater terms, only a few miles away, lies Vermont, and another parable. Why people need paychecks and what life goals should be is different in Vermont, just as it is different in Portugal, where less is more. Just to the south, there is the Amherst-

Deerfield-Northampton triangle, trendy towns, thousands upon thousands of young people with their hats twisted to the backs of their heads, joggers, power walkers, colleges, body piercing, and pasta restaurants. Greenfield, through no fault of its own, has caught it on the chin; a vertebrae of boredom, suburban side streets off long Federal Street that feeds in from Interstate Route 91. Whatever Greenfield means, it still has a movie theatre. I haven't checked, but it is probably the only remaining downtown movie theatre in the world.

Suddenly, only three minutes late, the bus arrives. I strain to interpret the regalia on the outside of the bus: Peter Pan, Captain Hook, and babies, babies everywhere, babies sticking their heads out of clouds, heads of babies, strutting babies, babies enlarged, increased, or diminished, depending on the bus, and you see Peter Pan buses everywhere these days. Peter Pan Bus Lines, before I get to my story, leaves a very pleasant image of very happy bus drivers, blacks and whites, middle class drivers, smoking their cigarettes outside the bus terminal in downtown Springfield, Massachusetts. *This time, thanks be, I am not going back to Fort Dix, New Jersey.*

The bus continues downhill, dips beneath a railroad bridge. We are headed past Cheapside, literally, on the other side of the tracks. "Cheapside" and here I quote from The Greenfield Recorder, "is named after its river port counterpart in London. The north bank of the Deerfield River became a noisy, thriving wharf and warehouse area after 1802 when the completion of canals and locks around the falls at South Hadley Falls allowed river boats as far upriver as this point."

We go by a car dealership, an oil company, a scrap metal yard, and rickety apartment buildings. The quality of life in Cheapside, I'd guess, is on par with standard housing in Portugal. Not so bad, depending . . . I have a soft spot for three-deckers, having lived in one ten years. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1970s. Beer, cigarettes, Harvard Square, poking around bookstores. The review takes me back to

drinking much larger quantities of beer in the U.S. Army. It takes me back to the early 1950s, Hi Lo tunes on a summer breeze, a factory worker with his legs on the railing and sipping watery Rheingold. I can smell the sun in the white sheets hanging before a hill of sumac trees, a time long before Peter Max sheets and The Yellow Submarine in the 1960s.

The narrative isn't directly personal, yet I count myself as a child of the 1950s. There are many stories. Part is the migration pattern from north to south. Young families tumble out of the voids of Canada. They get married. The husband, in his own language, confides, once the buddy-system kicks in for staying above life's deep waters, that his wife is a bitch, totally *insensitivo* in her pin curlers, talking filth, but very sexy on Friday nights, and they have their own version of "the Friday night fights." The woman puts wooden clothespins, two or three at a time, in her mouth, and she looks very nice doing that, pins in her mouth. She smokes Hit Parade cigarettes. Leaves lipstick stains half way up the filters. Cheapside is within walking distance of the Five & Dime. By hot-rod, it is twenty minutes from the Polish bars and the strip joint at the Whatley Inn. A trunk line runs along a ridge. Side roads double back into Greenfield or lead circuitously to Montague or Turners Falls.

Jump ahead two decades and loins of love have mixed again. Driveways are littered with Big Wheels, plastic tricycles from the 1970s, the kind that children raced along the sidewalk and into the street. Out back are candy cane swing sets. A late model Oldsmobile sits in a driveway. I concentrate on the way the car looks like slabs of metal riveted together, square lights, a long trunk, tires: nothing looks rhythmic or planned. Terrible color, outside-in technology.

At the "Entering Deerfield" sign, elm trees pop out in groomed meadows. Goalposts evoke a goalie kicking the ball the length of the field. Deerfield Academy was known at Williston Academy as The Big Green. One of America's most

prestigious prep schools lies in splendid seclusion beyond those elms. Writer-poet, Conrad Aiken, described colonial Deerfield as “the beautiful ghost.” In the fall of 1958, I was captain of the Midget soccer team, eighth and lowest of Williston Academy’s soccer teams. Deerfield was supposed to be unbeatable. I walked the bus and said “Don’t worry.” Late in the game, an easy roller came towards our goalie. It couldn’t have rolled any slower. The ball dribbled between his legs. We lost 1-0.

The bus continues along Routes 5 and 10, a calcified realm of smug facades and smells of candle manufacturing. I’d rather smell a pickle factory. At least pickles are organic. We go by Channing L. Bete, where pamphlets are written to give basic advice to the increasing numbers of people without education or patience, life lessons, like how not to get pregnant, how not to catch AIDS, how to care for dogs and cats, how to be kind, how to be nice. The cartoon figures all look like Casper the Friendly Ghost, little round heads and great big eyes, words in little balloons over the cartoons. We go by antiques dealers and extra-long porches to indicate extra-long traditions. To our east are potato, onion, and asparagus farms or what is left of them.

For another moment, to drag in another frustrating piece of nostalgia, I was obsessing about pole-vaulting when I should have been studying. Billy Dalto, childhood friend, showed up at the dorm one Friday night. The dorm master shouted for me to get back into my room. It was a terrible moment. I think back with sympathy and understanding now. I formed my sense of humor at Williston Academy, and there would come a day to share memories with classmates I abandoned half way to a diploma. A run-in with one of Williston’s dour old guard teachers spelled the end of my days as a preppie, and began my brief dalliance as an aloof (but not troubled) teenager at Northampton High School. I’m talking 1961 . . . happiest in the weight room of

the Northampton YMCA and hanging around with Hector and Felix, my Puerto Rican friends. There would come a time, when all the accumulated embarrassment had drained away, in which I would hear that I had been the one. I was the guy to envy, supposedly the head of a sex club, going out with Smithies, having intellectual conversations down on Green Street, watching filthy European movies. My classmates were under the impression that there were profound things on my mind. Couldn't have been further from the truth. I doubted myself and had a terrible time with girls, though that is not what I hear decades later. The summer of 1962, I spent in Guanajuato, Mexico, living with a Mexican family. I danced the twist. At the Friday night dances at St. Michael's High School in Northampton, the girls sang along with Dion . . . "*She GOES DOWN with other guys!*" From my nervy Puerto Rican friends on Pleasant Street, I picked up a few words of Spanish.

Having made this trip a number of times, usually taking the Boston-New York shuttle to Newark International, I am aware that as you progress along a tangent, especially one that crosses an ocean, you will find that your thoughts, like your body, can't be in two places. If they are, you run into problems, what starts out as a certain untraceable absent-mindedness, like being "troubled" without knowing what is troubling you. You get into mental incoherence before the clinical diagnosis of being actually crazy. You can't be in two places at once without your attention splitting, first, to your ability to pay attention. If it gets deep, this sort of vacuous existence deserves the honorable name of *saudade*, that maddening but (nowadays) oft-mentioned (supposed) peculiarity of the Portuguese (or Brazilian) idea being that you are where you are, but you entertain the notion of being elsewhere, usually, where you came from, or in some future state where all your problems are solved. A place, in other words, that doesn't exist.

Moody is different. As of yet, I haven't had an attack of *saudade* and am probably denied it. I am not Portuguese. However, I am subject to debilitating bouts of loneliness without knowing how to change. Musing on the last few days, I backtrack, not to alarm my cats. I went upstairs for a pair socks. My plan is to pack gradually and not be hurried. I am a disorganized person, but prepared for trips, I am good at.

On sunny afternoons, my bedroom is flooded in light. My cat is Belly Belly, a long-haired gray female, and long-haired gray cats are melancholy cats. Belly Belly knows what is on my mind before I do. One of my socks is under her head, part of clothes I never manage to fold and put away. My days of ironing are long gone. Very gradually, I pull the sock away. Belly Belly raises her head. She stares at me. Belly Belly knows I am leaving. I'd love to stay, but I need to go to Portugal and be there for some indeterminate length of time.

Easing through and mentally preparing myself for a travel day, I isolate a shirt, a pair of pants, and two pairs of socks. Of late, I have enjoyed small epiphanies, like writing an article on the Portuguese of Ludlow, Massachusetts, and having it published in *Mundo Português*, a Portuguese magazine. The editor suggested that if I were going to go to Portugal, why not bring my camera? In previous trips, and in other decades, I had never totted a camera.

So it is, I have a soft spot for Massachusetts, which suits me better than Vermont or Maine, and I have discovered that the Portuguese are not all that far from Petersham, where I live in the north middle of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Looking back, it was only a few hours ago that I made my getaway while avoiding eye contact with my cats.

What else I want to say is that I quit high school. I am not proud of this by any means, but having joined the U.S. Army on January 14, 1963 I was out of the Army three years later and back in empty Northampton. These now qualify as old lost days when a boy could enlist and take the train from

Northampton's train station and get your picture in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. That was all I wanted . . . for Nancy Gazzillo to see my picture in the paper, and to miss me. My enlistment choice was to be sent to West Germany. Being in the swale of the latter day Cold War, I got my enlistment choice, and I spent my twenty-first birthday in the red light district of Barcelona, Spain — Las Ramblas.

By four in the afternoon, I am off the 'A' train and hoofing up West 16th Street. That night, my younger brother, John and I eat at a cozy Greenwich Village restaurant. Our meal runs to \$80 before my brother's prodigious tip. Next morning, I got to dwell on a bust of my great-grandmother, Julie Bryant Paine, in my brother's hallway. She died in 1902 of a malady perfectly curable today. The bust was among my grandmother's effects. It was gained at her death in 1991. The Bryants were a suitable match for the Paines. My Uncle Charlie translated a biography of a John de Brienne, a distant ancestor. Bryant blood, as Charlie put it, got bluer and bluer further back in time. The Bryants trace their heritage to the year 990 before "losing the thread." Nice . . . chillingly so. The figure was an adventurer in the Second Crusade, a time of easy legitimacy. He called himself "King of Jerusalem and Emperor of Constantinople" (1204-1237). At age 80, he married Princess Berengaria of Seville. I have a few drops of Spanish blood. I can speak Spanish. I am looking for this princess.

A more legitimate search is for the right way to JFK International Airport, now that the train-to-the-plane no longer runs. Brother John counsels for Howard Beach. The train thunders into the 14th Street station where a mixed bag of sweat pants and untied shoelaces awaits. Aboard, a black teenager spies a pasty New Yorker hunched into his sports jacket, a fleshy face stuffed into a New York Giants' wool cap. He sings, "They come in all shapes and sizes." The subway is sprayed in unkind, derisive laughter . . . Jay St/Borough Hall,

Lafayette Ave, Nostrand Ave, Utica Ave, Rockaway, Euclid Ave.

As the subway surfaces, a new breed of passenger comes to replace the deadbeats, spectacular women aflutter in scarves and of every color, skirts above their knees. Their fannies are World Class, like Smith Brothers Lozenges reformed and enlarged. Stiletto fingers terminate in liquid red. Fingers are attached to each perfect hand, those natty black suitcases on wheels. A very nice result of selective breeding, or if not, a beautiful example of evolution.

The airport bus hurtles to JFK International. The driver gets the bus on two wheels. Suitcases shower from their perches and tumble through in the aisles. The night flight to Portugal leaves in early evening like all trans-Atlantic flights. In the Cenozoic, flyers to Portugal are like distant cousins, a social species, drinking, eating, standing and talking, and collapsing.

The Lisbon flight, at six hours, is one hour shorter than to Madrid. I opt for an aisle seat, left side. Stewardesses indulge my request for two bottles of wine. My flights to the Iberian Peninsula of the 1970s included the dream of sitting next to a nymphomaniac. I once gave a girl a copy of Hans Christian Anderson's *Journey to Portugal, 1866*. I once met a woman who said she had made love in the airplane toilet. I once sat beside an AT&T telephone worker sent to Spain to work on Spanish telephones. I once sat beside a sweating Spaniard who took up two seats and complained about not getting enough food. I once sat beside a politician intent on opening a debt collection agency to fleece his countrymen (his business card had a Grand Cayman Islands address).

In general, these days, the flights are dull, the way we like them. There is a Robin Williams movie, a fitful dose, and a sumptuous awakening to light on the horizon. Airbus Continental Flight 1314 descends over the northwest Spain,

Galicia, a continuation of the rugged Portugal. Silvery emanations flash up from dinosaur skin. I am full of the moment. Portuguese flutters linguistically through the cabin. An American is heard to say, "Doesn't look like much, Janice."

We come in over an outlying freeway; cars zip around a cloverleaf. Some years ago, floating in on the dawn, Lisbon swirls up out of deep cut, night-lit streets. You landed in an empty airport. Nothing was open, nothing but poor Cape Verdean women mopping floors. It is light now, and we are landing.

Some mistake the blue oval and a white starry circle of the European Union for the American flag. The Portuguese nationals dip into English. They nudge the befuddled Americans. "You are supposed to be over there . . ."

Portuguese customs inspectors are virile specimens with good jaws and traditional moustaches. Compared to *Barajas*, the Madrid airport, things here at Lisbon-Portela are a pleasant contrast. I recall the Spanish airport police scribbling a note and placing it on a bench for weary passengers, "*No se sienta aquí, está reservada para la policía.*" Do not sit here, it is reserved for the police.

I have packed two changes of clothes, wrapping duds into balls to save space. I keep a razor, washcloth, toothpaste and toothbrush in a baggie. My airport secret is to shave and brush my teeth. My visit to the *casa de banho* . . . *kaza day bahn-yo* . . . comes while the others jostle through customs.

The air is balmy. The sky is clear. Tourist women clomp out. They yell for their husbands to hurry. The sounds of hundreds of suitcases grind over pavement. Stiletto heels go *clippety cloppety, clippety cloppety*. Hondas and VW Jetta taxi cabs are settled in line, and the vehicles are pushed forward by hand; and one by one, the taxis ferret the tourists to expensive hotels while the nationals melt away. The *Aero-bus* sits on the outer curb, far from the cabbies who might discourage it if the bus got too close. The little bus makes its

city loop every half hour. It costs 350 escudos or about \$1.50, a fraction of the cab ride.

Before the Euro, I always kept a few peseta and escudo bills for my next trip. I pay the driver with a leftover 500-escudo bill, and settle into my seat. I direct my first spoken Portuguese to the driver. “*Por que não pões o autocarro lá, ao lado do edificio?*” Why don’t you put the bus beside the building?

My question is a show stopper. Two of them discuss the possibility while four others board, an American newlywed pair and two others of a well-collected and somewhat non-American appearance. Inside of minutes, the bus sails down Boulevard Almirante Gago full into the silvery maw past globs of pastel and beige, reviews that remind of Mexico City and catastrophic distances between envelopes, meals, and friends. Down Avenida Fontes de Melo and around the statue of Marques de Pombal we go. Statue is of the Prime Minister/hero of post-earthquake Lisbon, 1755. Down the grand Avenida de Liberdade . . . off to the left, the Diario de Noticias newspaper building, where you can pour through the want ads all day for free. Our bus, sounding like a popcorn popper, shunts in and out of the special bus lanes. At park benches, a few are hovering in the throes of drink, trying to get extricated from obnoxious drinking companions.

The *aerobus* deposits its one remaining passenger next to the Naval Academy in the Praça do Comercio at 8:30 A.M. on a Saturday.

Lisbon rises in layers, inchoate and dripping in corrugated iron. Television aerials bristle over the seven hills of Lisbon. Rubber soccer balls scud beneath benches, benches for the pooped, people with big stomachs spending decades trudging up and down steep hills. Sometimes I go cross lots, up and over city blocks to Santa Apolónia, the train station, feeling my way along by memory. Along Rua João Evangelista, the port-hugging boulevard, the great estuary of the *Rio Tejo* yawns

open, going on for twenty miles, a mingling of the sea and river that starts innocently in Zaragossa, Spain and comes into a voluminous reality called *o mar de palha*, or sea of wheat, a big blue gash on the lower third of the map of Portugal.

The cab races past freighters, cruise ships, and a replica of the Santa Maria. I have watched coconut shells off-loaded from Indonesia, had a tour of a Russian factory fishing ship. Thanks to terrorism, you may no longer wander the port of Lisbon at will.

At the train station, I'm out in a jiffy and lay on a 100-escudo tip. The guy wishes me a *boa sorte* (good luck). We shake hands. Portuguese camaraderie is great. Lisbon's train station is a study in lacy nineteenth century architecture. Much architecturally and linguistically emanated in France, the going cultural model taking form in lovely moldings and graceful angled arches. Beneath the grand entrance are the large letters. These are real words. They are Portuguese words. This is Portugal. The people in Portugal speak Portuguese. The words are *Horário em vigor*, or, roughly, *hours in vigorous binding strength and in total compliance with absolutely observed laws*. You can muscle your way into meaning without knowing a shred of Portuguese. The looser, the better. Below these wonderful words, hinting at the great *force*, reads *Saidas* and *Chegadas*, Departures and Arrivals. Wonderful words to say.

Trains for Oporto leave at 7 A.M., 8 A.M., and 9 A.M. There are six all the way to 8 P.M. I let my guard down by letting the ticket taker tell me he doesn't take VISA. I hand him a twenty-dollar bill, and he gives me back change in escudos. He neatly disappears as the ticket taker to his left starts snickering. He can't keep the joke to himself. Life is crazy and fun. My scolding comes as grammatically correct. "*Isso não é comportamento muito profissional*," I say. This isn't very professional behavior. He suddenly looks sad. The complaint office person is a woman. She shrugs her shoulders.

There is no way she can enforce rules. There is nothing to do. This is Portugal. Go about your business. Concentrate on something worthwhile. Don't get caught up in this mess, with men walking around and looking at the behinds of their female colleagues.

The beauty of arriving on a Saturday is the avoidance of commuting crowds. Pigeons coo. The morning air is brisk. Open tracks lead into a mesh of electrical lines. Fuel-impregnated odors, pungent and metallic, are getting me high. The mix intoxicates me with whiffs of bread and espresso, overlain by a dimension of joy. Men rock back and forth on their heels, relishing the pulchritude twitching along on the diagonal.

The Lisbon train station is small. In summer, it is clogged with backpackers towering over the smaller Portuguese and using the public floor for bedrest. Five Australian girls, having lost their baggage claim receipt, are denied their luggage. Furious, the biggest girl steps over the divide, to the surprise of the baggage handler, who she pushes aside and commences liberating her suitcases to her comrades. I mention this as a memory clip, the girls to Seville. The only one available was a nineteen-year-old French gal named Edith. Neither of us spoke the other's language, and we got to know each other in Portuguese.

At the present, I have indulged in an espresso and a *pastel de nata*, my favorite Portuguese pastry, a just reward. I feel sublime, very much a success in having taken care of business. Train personnel, of the "CP" national railway, pop out of the *Chefe de Estação*, jiggle coins in their pockets, bathed in the conspiratorial hum. I cannot further describe and so I will glance at the *horário em vigor a partir de 2 de Agosto de 1997*, the *INTERCIDADES Lisboa/Porto/Braga*.

The run up the coast will stop at Santarem, Entroncamento, Pombal, Coimbra, Aveiro, Espinho, and the Campanha station at Porto. At Entroncamento, a short

distance from Lisbon, comes the first switch. Sometimes the ticket man will tap an index finger on your wrist and say “*mudança*.” Usually, the Portuguese are Class A help givers, and I have oft been edified, sometimes too late, like on line east to Spain in which the train I just deboarded took a carton of my books to Guarda without me. Train is not *tren* but *comboio*, like “*rollo*” or “*bollo*” or something sounding like “bread.”

Trains slide in a controlled glide, and a hissing and shouting and workers jumping between the cars. The air is pierced by squealing brakes. Blue-suited functionaries exit another *cafeteria*.

Ding, ding, ding. “Coimbra . . . Braga . . . Viana do Castelo . . .”

I have purchased my ticket for *Segunda* for the four-hour train ride to Porto, province of Douro, thence to the Minho. Feeling the perky and warm, I walk to the last track and board *Segunda* to *não fumadores*.

At thirty seconds past 9:05, the train pulls out, and Santa Apolónia station slides away. Trains to the north are the best, the best track, the newest locomotives. Ours pulls strong. Inside of minutes it has slid into *Estação de Oriente*, one of the new Expo 98 stations, gleaming white iron filigree. From this stop comes a bold young woman in a business suit *cum* skirt, clomping in and collapsing across from me, her bared knees coming to within inches of mine. Ah, the guy is getting lucky. As she adjusts herself, four guys across the aisle stop talking.

Females don't automatically seek me out. In my youth I had trouble with my face, a regenerate habit of raising my eyebrows. I am not a good pickup artist. The “line” does not flow easily. I try to look aloof. My boomeranging face went this way and that. At long last, I really don't care if anyone notices me or not. At a point, I know what I am doing. But, no, this Lina gal is bold. Studying to be a lawyer, Lina is

visiting her parents. “Stone Age people,” she calls them, now struggling with her business suit top. Details tumble forth, and as they do, Lina adjust herself on the slippery seat. She is wearing nothing inside her business suit but her birthday suit, no underwear, no bra to keep her jugs from tipping around where I can see a whole other life. My advantages, if unavailable at an earlier point, now seem unassailably possible. Lina gets into confessions. She pushes the theme of Portuguese machos. Her brother beats his wife. Life in the country is a madhouse. I am not like him, I tell her. I am kind and gentle. At 10:20, at Vila Franca de Xira, Lina bustles to her feet. We vow to write. I’m to be her English tutor — *sempre!* Incredulously, I watch her trundle into the arms of her boyfriend, and scamper to a waiting car. Terrible voyeur that I am, I imagine Lina’s boyfriend having her dress off within the hour.

Northbound trains skirt a north-south mound. To the left, the view is blocked. Facing up to life’s treacheries, I opt for right-hand seats, always facing forward. Portugal is small, domino-shaped, and at 35,672 square miles, is 350 miles long and 137 miles wide, like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, in fact, where mega-numbers of Portuguese have translocated. Two important rivers, the Tagus and the Douro, begin in Spain and empty into the Atlantic Ocean in Portugal. There are now over 12 million Portuguese in Portugal. A substantially higher number of tourists visit Portugal each year. Worldwide, depending on how Portuguese ethnicity is qualified, there could easily be 40 million Portuguese or people of Portuguese heritage, plus the consideration of Brazil, and Portuguese being the seventh most widely spoken language.

Portugal is a chimeral world of residual effects, the dusty and the lofty, medieval buildings and converted monasteries, cathedrals, roadside crosses, and ancient ruins of all kinds and categories. These structures cast a peculiar charm in such

a small country, and this charm, or sense of the bygone, ends in a powerful atmosphere that defies the rhetoric to describe it, but which ends up being the most prevalent of all. The physical, geographic, star-heavy Portugal has a way of hitting first-timers as a cockeyed fantasia. Whether you enter it from Spain, or whether you fly in from the United States, or search it out like a German hippie, Portugal is a trapdoor to a private universe, a mystic spin. Everything you see, your mind will obey. The land has been preordained by an astrological missionary, and it refuses definitions as part of the standard classicisms.

Eleven geographic regions in Portugal are split into 18 political districts. The average Portuguese, if there could ever be such, tends not to pay much attention to regions outside his or her own. To anyone with intent to learn about Portugal, the job can be pleasantly overwhelming.

Defining Portugal has been the task of geographers, anthropologists, historians, and art historians. The effort is naturally selective. One of the challenges is to paint a clear picture of Portugal, more than pinning down a series of historical events, or memorizing dates. Portuguese history, ignored in most lexicons, is defiantly complex. Its ambassadorial enmeshing with England is most significant. The marketing of port wine tells a lot about the inferior and slightly opportunistic way much of Portugal is perceived, depending on the viewing party. The British presence in the city of Porto has increased Portugal's chameleon-like character.

To me, this Portugal of "trace influences," as I continue to call it, is the result of deeds and policies that once helped Portugal solidify its ancient borders. Long and tedious battles bespoke the failure of intricate family alliances, "inherited privilege," chance, intrigue, violence; a savvy language, equivocal realities, half-truths at every rotten corner, these were the subjective realities that lie beneath the boring transcription of Afonso's, Alfonso's, and more Afonso's and

Alfonso's, trading names, trading promises, nothing very magnanimous until the time of King Dinis; a man-to-man world with crafted, handmade equipment. Portugal, like the name itself, was a small and clarion resonance. Trust was *all*, like it is today, and like today, values were torn apart by the most visible members of society, the richest, the nobility, the churchmen, the many kings, the most greedy. The formal "pre-democratic" versions of Portugal have long disappeared, and are only traceable in the "genetic" makeup of "inherited character." Pride is a vague word, ill-used today by Portuguese ex-patriot newspapers. Better, the Portuguese have inherited an unzipped reality, the aftereffects of a world empire, parodied by the French, and other nations, soon after it was complete. Anything like a coherent economic policy never existed. It is more proper to read Portuguese history in terms of inertia, the long slow swing of influences and aftereffects to come into being, and the greater number of individuals without a clear view of what their actions meant. You veer from the myopic to the grand, without a sustained transcription of conversations. No wonder so few know anything about the world's most important "reality" country. To get to the next most significant phase, Portugal as Europe's first country, but as a carcass of the world generator of world discoveries, colonialism, and all the rest, has left the Portuguese people in a peculiar opacity. Within these dimensions, the matter of concerning who the Portuguese think they are, when so many other people and nations seem to accomplish the job of making money better, leaves a hazy delta. The Portuguese people are a flowing river.

Basins open up to heavenly slants of agriculture. The Beira Litoral comes into view, an ant moving up a wrinkle. I settle into my musings. Portugal is an Atlantic country, not a Mediterranean country. The transition is from palms and succulents to pines and oaks, from almond trees and chestnuts to an upland wilderness. Wildflowers burst into eclectic

arrangements. Surfaces accordion and buckle. Storage depots and supply *armazems* flow by the tracks. I see flotillas of truck cabs and delivery vans in storage lots. What you see from a train in Portugal relates to expansion and greater numbers, and, for me anyhow, it sends an ominous signal to the brain.

The corpus of Portugal was once the northwestern nubbin of Africa, Antarctica, and Australia, and part of the proto-continent, Pangaea. This mass came into a docking with Laurentia, earliest North America. Portugal, the leading edge, might have fit what is now the American state of Georgia, though could have been seamless with Vermont, too. Pangaea broke up about 200 million years ago. This rift continues at the rate of one inch a year. This ancient seafloor waves sea oats on bedrock sandstone, shale and limestone. Rounding a bend in Pereira, a seven-car freight whips by in a voluminous *snap*, yanking our train sideways by the exploding air. These “near misses” are frequent, and accompanied by a deafening hoot. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the train engineers play games with each other, or enjoy scaring passengers. At village train-crossings, matrons hold tattered red flags while bicycles and motorbikes, riders’ feet on the pavement, jaw with drivers, car doors open. Rail sidings are rife with construction projects in limbo: bags of sand, mounds of bricks, concrete railroad ties; piles of supplies near decrepit freight cars baking away in the sun. Faded nomenclature lists tonnage. All is eaten by wind, rain, and sun.

My terms undergo a shrinkage once in the presence of ruins. I need to loosen and restructure my analogies. The patina of modern Portugal starts crumbling. You glimpse down a street and see flying vowels and swooning diphthongs: *cabeleireiros*, a barbershop . . . *cah-bu-lay-aray-ross*. *Piscina*, *igreja*, *hotel*, *bomberos*, swimming pool, church, hotel, fire department.

I come to be surrounded by three women. One speaks a happy broken English. She announces that she has relatives in Newark, New Jersey. Hey, wow! We'll work on that for a while. Across from me and to the woman's left sits a peasant woman who is enlivened by the mindless babble. Not otherwise would she have gotten so close to an American. At the window is a pretty Angolan *preta*. There comes a moment when all turns to gibberish. There is too much *na minha cabeça*, meaning "in my head." The non-English speaker hears "too much" and thinks "*tomates*." The American says he has got tomatoes in his head. Ha! "*Tens tomates na cabeça?*" Have I got tomatoes in my head? *Sim*. Yes. Ha, ha, ha!

Then the ladies depart. The Angolan and I have been eyeing each other. Nothing will happen. My vision is restored to the minimalist silence outside, in particular, the carpet of grape tendrils hovering ten or fifteen feet off everywhere I see. Each end is wired up by human hands, all represents manual labor, a beautiful sight, and a good rebuttal to the message of America since the issues of *Ladies' Home Journal* counseled that the essence of life was pouring cleansers down the drain and eating food out of cans will "save you time."

The ladies peel away and my EMS backpack takes a slide. One remaining from across the aisle takes Lina's seat. He sheepishly tells me that he is a Lisbon policeman. Policemen have little authority in Portugal. So he says. I can see his reflection in the window. I suppose he can see mine. This forced intimacy does not cause us embarrassment. The fellow is heading home to Viana do Castelo, a lace and linen center on the Atlantic coast. Viana do Castelo represents one of few cultural centers where there are real book stores and people actually read. I recall riding trains in that direction, through Espinho and Miramar, little seaside resorts, a mass of tents and tassels waving. These were the best beaches in Portugal, haunts of the French, the Belgians, and the Portuguese themselves.

After four hours, the train rounds a corner. The hill bound city of Oporto, the ancient Phoenician city of Portus Cale, looms over the Rio Douro. It is 3:15 P.M. and foggy. My 1927 edition of *A Wayfarer in Portugal* contains this beautiful passage:

The first view of Porto is nearly the best. Although it lies a scant three miles from the ocean, there is no hint whatever of the sea. You're high in the precipitous bluffs of a narrow and crooked river, facing a bluff precisely similar just across the yellow current, on the steep face of which is literally its rising tiers of houses so wedged together that it seems incredible there can be any streets, or even alleys, between them. The river lies two hundred feet beneath, and toy craft (ed: "vaguarias") can be seen floating on it. An open space far below on the waterfront seems to be alive with crawling figures — insects, one might almost believe, though one knows them for men and yellow oxen. Close at hand, the yawning chasm of the valley in one giant bound, is perhaps the world's most wonderful bridge — at least in some respects. It consists of a single arch of steel, hundred feet in span. . . . This view of Porto, coming as it does without warning when the train swings into the outlying suburbs where port wine is kind is incomparably fine.

In fact, there are two bridges, the road bridge Maria Pia and the Dom Louis I, the railroad bridge. Both are designs of Monseur Eiffel the Frenchman, before he built the Eiffel Tower. On March 27, 1809, Napoleon and his troops entering the Peninsula by way of Galicia, rode into a panic-

stricken population, cutting and slashing. Eighteen thousand Portuguese drowned in the river or were run through by the sword. You can do no better for appreciating the infernal meddling and international chicanery to which Portugal has been subjected, than to read about The Peninsular Wars of the early 1800s. Well through the 1930s, oxen still drew supplies from the river into the city. The lumbering beasts wore elaborately carved boards, the *canga* over their shoulders. Their big wooden wheels made a hideous squeak. Old travel books loved these slow, sleepy scenes. Myself, I come up short on Porto, having only changed buses and trains here. Porto and Lisbon are natural competitors; each city is a separate springboard for international commerce.

At Porto's *campanhã* station, the Braga train is quivering at the ready. It is great to see the species alive. Calls are baiting and impolite. A few women seem pleasantly under attack, huddling their shoulders in trying to protect themselves from roguish language.

Once underway, Trofa comes next, then Nine (*Nee-nuh*), a little station in pale blue tile. The engine fights the terraced hill. Now there are seven, a teenage couple busily foraging each other, and two girls who lean out the windows to entice a boy on a motorcycle. They stick out their tongues. The boy, jazzing the throttle, takes his left hand off the clutch, and points at his crotch.

