Address

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YES, THIS IS ABOUT the idea of address. So I'm addressing myself. But I'm also writing about an address book. How do you end up with an accidentally archival object? How does a thing, kept and not thrown away for many years, acquire the essence of past-ness? And what if you realize that this very object holds a clue to a family secret? These questions are personal. They must be chewed on by the mind. There's an interiority to them. And yet, they drift outward, like wind ruffling the pages of an open magazine.

The object in particular that now feels magical in my hands? Small as a deck of cards? Palm-sized, fragile, with Bible-thin pages? Inside is a list of where my grandfather was stationed as a pilot during the Second World War. That in itself isn't spectacular. Well, not at first glance. However, this address book contains the only records I have that locate my grandfather during the War. The only records that name his bomb wing number. His sister scrawled this information in her looped handwriting, embossing it into the paper, so many years ago.

I think about how addresses are codes for where the body sleeps, has slept. Where you've laid your head down and trusted the night enough to close your eyes. Where you open your eyes and do what the day asks of you. The homeless do not have the privilege of an address. And our society doesn't address them as people. Mostly unseen, they sleep in liminal spaces, blankets and tents and tarps, and sometimes cars, in shadows they've made for themselves within a system that prioritizes the 99 percent, the wealthiest, the corporations. LG-

BTQIA2S+ youth, veterans, BIPOC individuals, people living with a mental illness: no address book marks their presence, where they close their eyes and dream.

Your address is a privilege. I'm addressing you now. I'm also addressing myself.

Why hadn't someone thrown my great-aunt's address book in the trash many years ago? A dusty, out of date book like quickly becomes clutter, doesn't it?

For some reason, my grandfather hid it among his things while working as an electrician after the War and then, after my grandmother died and my stepgrandmother sold his pilot uniform, this little booklet managed to survive. It lived in a box, a drawer, a pocket, tucked away somewhere for years & years & years.

My grandfather saved it and gave this address book to my mother before he died when he also gave her the photo album with cacti printed on the cover that contained an unauthorized copy of the atomic cloud spreading over Nagasaki. And, I would realize later, photos of him posing with his bomb wing's jeep in the desert (in Alamogordo, New Mexico, "White Sands" as he would call it, after I matched his addresses in the album with his photos). For years, I thought the tiny address book existed as a symbol of his sister's love for her brother and his love for her, as this book is etched with her thick and looped handwriting. You might keep a memento of someone you care about—a card they sent you, a book with their name inscribed on the cover, a note tucked into an envelope. The handwriting itself indicating presence, bringing you closer to the hand that touched the world.

But I was wrong. The book meant something more.

So now I must go back to the address book and account for its roles in the world: ordinary and dusty clutter, archival object, index of a person who lived, record of places where loved ones and friends lived, including my grandfather during the War (which he had the privilege of surviving). And also, this small book offers a glimmer of light through the redaction that is my grandfather's military history. That ties him to the story of the atomic bomb and its horrors.

First, this address book isn't exactly an address book. Instead, it's a repur-

posed 1942 leather daily planner that my great-aunt turned into an address book. The dates inside it that could hold calendar appointments instead record addresses of her family and friends. Her husband's name, not hers, glimmers, embossed on the cover.

The delicate cover contains the words The Employer's Group in gold script, stamped into the leather with a logo of an owl and a crescent moon—a symbol of wisdom. And below: The Service that Satisfies. What service? I don't know. This trinket was likely a gift that my great uncle never used. My great aunt carefully wrote the address of "Mom" in North Bergen, N.J. And someone by the name of "Titty Rabinowitz" (?) in West Los Angeles. And then, pages of addresses for my grandfather.

How this little album with the crumbling spine and loose pages came to my mother feels miraculous. The tiny book survived the first purge, when my grandfather's second wife donated my grandfather's pilot uniform, as I mentioned. And the second purge, as I think if it, when a cousin pilfered my grandfather's ring with a tiny bomb replica on it—which I haven't been able to find anything about, anywhere—the morning after the funeral. The ring had appeared in a box, previously unseen, that came out of the crawl space of my grandfather's house. More cousins wore my grandfather's gold watches on their wrists to the wake. And wore them home. And then someone, or a couple someones, picked a handful of photos out of the war album my grandmother had given to my mother, and that my mother left on the counter. Darkened squares appeared in the paper in the where my grandfather's face was. No one asked to take them; the photos and the ring disappeared when the group of cousins left at dawn before anyone else was awake.

I haven't seen the photos since. And asking about the ring would re-open the sutures still dissolving into the flesh of the family.

But notably, no one touched the atomic bomb cloud photo. No one picked it out of its black photo corners and tucked it into a pocket or wallet. Was the mushroom plume hiding in plain sight, part of a backstory that seemed like background scenery? A kind of vague past-ness one might skim over? Or is the atomic cloud too terrible to reckon with to perceive fully? After all, the idea of "the bomb" is so horrifying, the mass death Americans caused in Japan too terrible, that most Americans can't (or won't) reckon with it. Most people also don't realize that the United States military would also throughout much

of the 20th century detonate bomb after bomb after bomb on ourselves—close to 1,000 nuclear explosions— in tests about an hour drive from the Las Vegas Strip.

But back to the addresses. To the object that became an artifact and the most important clue I have. Many times, I've looked at this book and touched the indentations in the paper where the pencil and sometimes pen bit into the loop of a y or a g. I thought about my great aunt, who wrote her social security number on the first page, under her name and her own crossed-out address where she wrote her new address after she moved. She also wrote that she owned a Bulova watch, an object she was proud to have as a first-generation American. Her parents never learned English and spoke Czech at home.

The bomb ring, which came out of hiding the weekend of my grandfather's funeral, makes me wonder about what it was supposed to mean, binding together the pilots who served under the same mission. What mission, exactly? When he died and things came out of his attic, my mother found the ring and gasped, and showed it to my brother who said, I don't want that. I don't think he even touched it, much less slid it over a pinky. My mother set it on the table with the album, thinking that we'd look at it more closely together the next day. And it was gone in the morning. The family that took it—I'm being vague, as I'm already not supposed to be writing about this part of the story—left at 5 AM without having breakfast or saying goodbye. And as I mentioned, we discovered this when we noticed the small, empty squares in the album. Photo corners missing their faces. Empty words trapped in mouths.

These objects, these things, removed from context, had been held in the hand, in the mind, and became infused with the past—or past-ness—and stripped from fact. From origin story. From owner, or perceived owner. Instead of clues, they risk becoming relics.

If one of these relics holds meaning for you, they address you.

You are their audience.

I keep losing the notebook where I write down my ideas and research. Not on my desk. Not on my coffee table. Not in bed, trapped in the sheets (I like to write in bed) or under a pillow. It feels like someone is hiding my progress from

me. But that person is not a ghost but another version of myself.

Focus, I tell myself.

Recently, I saw Mary Magdalene's tooth. Mary Magdalene, disciple of Jesus, who saw him before anyone else after his resurrection. The tooth was at the Met, in a gilded container—a glass egg—and propped up on pedestal.

The tooth looked, well, toothy. The root attached. It had clung to a skull. It was real, as a tooth. It absorbed many prayers and petitions in Tuscany. Now this tooth appears with other objects taken from churches and temples and graves. You can walk through mazes of glass—cases full of cabinets. Chart your course through these objects that may or may not catch your reflection, your hand, your cheek, your hair. A carved face, the grief of having been taken from a sacred system, studied and placed here.

Mary Magdalene's tooth is a tooth.

When I lived in one of my grad school apartments in Maryland, along the on-ramp to a highway, with my boyfriend and our roommate I'll call Matt, my mother called to tell me she lost my grandfather's wedding band. (Missing rings have become a family theme.) The missing bomb ring was on my mind when she called. Later, I would learn that different rings were supposed to go to different children of my grandmother and my grandfather, making the bomb ring's vanishing act all the more frustrating to her. It was unclaimed. And then pocketed.

Anyway, my mother had been given my grandfather's wedding band—from his marriage to my grandmother—after he was buried next to his second wife. The burnished gold ring was a little loose on my mother's finger. Before the wedding band went missing in my apartment, she wore it below another ring that fit more snugly to keep it on her finger. But all the same, the gold circle slipped off at some point when she stopped by my apartment after driving home from the funeral. We couldn't figure out where the ring went.

One afternoon in late November, after I received a collections notice for an

unpaid doctor's bill—I had passed out and needed a heart test, and part of it wasn't covered by insurance, or at least that's how I remember it, but this could have been any number of non-covered lab work orders that the HMO wouldn't touch—I ransacked the common areas of our apartment when everyone was out. (It was rare for Matt not to be on the couch, writing his screenplay.) I searched the kitchen, looking for papers caught between cereal boxes on the counter. I looked in the living room underneath stacks of books. And then I saw a cardboard box that had become a catch-all for incoming mail and clutter. I sighed. We really needed to be more organized. The box was next to the TV. As I reached inside, my fingers brushed against something cold.

"There you are!" I said out loud, to the box and to the empty room combed with light.

With my pinky finger and thumb, I picked the wedding band up. The gold felt small and thin, though my grandfather's fingers were much larger than mine.

My boyfriend (who would later become my spouse, who I like to call Batman) and I had called off a wedding. We had gotten engaged after dating a short time. Things fell apart. Batman moved out. Matt moved in, as a roommate, a friend-of-a-friend who could pick up the lease. Then my boyfriend moved back in. And we were all roommates. This is complicated and sounds like an episode of a TV show to me now.

Alone that day in the apartment, as I held the wedding ring in my palm—the ring too loose for my fingers—I felt like I had a visit from him, my grandfather. I teared up. I was startled, too, to find myself unexpectedly holding a wedding band after not getting married. Finding the ring felt like I was receiving his blessing, to try again. Or to move on. Or maybe the ring was an admonishment. Or a bit of tough love—which is how I read the memory now. Like someone fucked up! Was it you? (Though he wouldn't say it that way.) For a minute, holding the wedding band was painful. It felt almost hot against my fingertips.

But then I laughed. Out loud.

"You got me!" I said to the empty room. Ever mischievous, my grandfather had played a trick on me, I thought. He'd never been to my apartment. Yes, the ring slipped off my mother's hand. I was going to recycle the box of papers. The ring had been half embedded in the overlapping cardboard flaps that formed

the bottom of the box. If I had been able to pay the bill in the first place, my fingers wouldn't have been digging into the box of paper clutter. Would I have even noticed the glint of gold while decluttering in a hurry, crushing the box and tossing it in the recycling bin? So the ring returned to my mother. After that, she would wear it around her neck on a gold chain.

A ring, a tooth, an address book.

A thing takes on its own life.

It's by chance, really, that some objects enter and stay in your life. Without my great-aunt's address book, I wouldn't have information that my grandfather was stationed in Alamogordo or Carlsbad, NM. I would never have known his bomb wing number, which would be the key that would begin unlocking the door so I could glimpse the truth in the cracks of what I could know. Without the address book, I'd have nothing other than my grandfather's story about being at "White Sands" in Alamogordo and driving a jeep there, getting lost one night in the gypsum dunes. And his story, which he clammed up telling, about begin involved. In the atomic bombing of Japan.

In 1941, my grandfather enlisted before his eighteenth birthday. He trained as a radio operator and mechanic—and would later work as an electrician in New Jersey after the War until he retired. In 1944, my grandfather participated in "brief but intensive schooling" for pilots, bombardiers, and navigators. Here, they would acquire "technical knowledge and skill to become a leader and killer." The officer training manual says this: for that is what we are to become—killers—equipped with the most murderous weapons for killing. I always stop here. The sentence continues, and our characters must meet the test of wielding our weapons with a mental reservation for forging an enduring peace.

I can't understand how my grandfather could be trained to think that he could become a killer—equipped with the most murderous weapons for killing.

The gymnastics of the sentence that ends with peace is so swift and surprising, that I don't know what to say.

Both atomic bombs, total, killed over 200, 000 men, women, and children in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Thomas Handy—Acting Chief of Staff while President Truman and Chief of Staff George Marshall were at the Potsdam Conference—authorized General Spaatz, Commanding General of the United States Strategic Army Air Forces to drop the "first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945 on one of the targets: Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata and Nagasaki."

In his memo on July 25, he also wrote, "Additional bombs will be delivered on the above targets as soon as made ready by the project staff."

Additional bombs. Atomic bombs.

The Atomic Heritage Foundation's description of the second atomic bomb blast also acknowledges multiple bombs: "The decision to use the second bomb was made on August 7, 1945 on Guam. Its use was calculated to indicate that the United States had an endless supply of the new weapon for use against Japan and that the United States would continue to drop atomic bombs on Japan until the country surrendered unconditionally."

About the possibility of a third bomb, Herbert Freis wrote in 1961—in the book that I read and copied by hand in the New York Public Library on 42nd St.—that "because of an unforeseen increase in the rate of production of plutonium, all ingredients and components for the third bomb made for use against Japan were all in hand in the United States by about August 10, and they could have been assembled in Tinian, and the bombs could have been dropped some days before August 20."

The 316th bomb wing, which my grandfather was part of, was overseen by the commander that chose the site of the Trinity explosion in New Mexico. This bomb wing was then quickly moved to the Pacific—the earliest bomb group of this bomb wing arrived on Okinawa on August 8th, the day before the Nagasaki bomb dropped. Another record I discovered states that they began arriving on the 6th of August, the day of the Hiroshima bombing.

The US military dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, but this was the result of a quick change of plans. Major Charles Sweeney, pilot of Boxcar, was supposed to drop the bomb on the city of Kokura and tried three times to get visibility through smoke from wildfires and thick clouds.

My grandfather told me when I was a child that he was there that day and part of the mission. I remember him telling us this in my brother's bedroom, where my grandfather had been looking at my brother's model planes and talking about flying real planes. Later, when I was a young adult, before he died, he said the same thing. I was there. I was interviewed to do it. I wasn't picked, but I was part of the mission. Based on his sister's address book, he was interviewed for the mission as he said he was at the Lincoln Air Force base in Nebraska. He "wasn't chosen" for the core fleet. But he wound up in New Mexico, connected with the Trinity atomic blast—the bomb which had the same core as the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. He was in the Pacific Theatre when the Bockscar team dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. And my grandfather's exact role is still classified.

"We flew so high the radar can't detect you," he'd said once, and then clammed up, refusing to say more. My brother remembers my grandfather talking about being a decoy plane. My grandfather would get angry if he said too much. He'd stand up and walk away in the middle of a question.

Japanese antiaircraft fire approached right during "the third bomb run," or the third time Sweeney tried to drop the bomb with the plutonium core on the city of Kokura. So, the plan changed—quickly—and the planes on the mission peeled away from one city and flew to another. As the Atomic Heritage Foundation reports, "Running low on fuel, the crew aboard Bockscar decided to head for the secondary target, Nagasaki."

I was interested to read in the note about the possibility of a third bomb that Truman specifically commanded General Spaatz that "no third drop should be made unless specific authorization was sent to him."
What was or wasn't decided about the second bombing? The quick call that showered a city in nuclear fallout and instant death?

In addition to what I've found, I've also read that the 316th bomb wing arrived "too late to participate in combat." And yet, this isn't true. They arrived before the war ended. They started arriving just before the atomic bombings. And yet they were connected with the plutonium bomb exploded in the desert of New Mexico, the bomb that then the very same day assigned them to the Pacific Theater. Among all of the flight rosters I've been able to locate at the library on 42nd St., I've yet to find my grandfather's information in any book. It's simply not there. I've studied the rhetoric of the Manhattan Project coverups, and often the denial of anything occurring when something did in fact occur is the way the lie is crafted. The redaction is a deletion and a negation.

Specifically, I cannot find information about where my grandfather's bomb wing was stationed between June 1945 and August 5, 1945. July 16, in New Mexico, the Trinity bomb exploded. August 6th, in Japan, the first atomic bomb exploded.

Here I am, holding a crumbling address book, that exists by chance, or maybe this was my grandfather's way of saying he wanted to pass along some hints at the truth. His bomb group, his addresses, proof he was at the same air base where interviews for the 508th composite group (that he was not part of)

which officially dropped both atomic bombs. But he was there. And what he did, exactly, or what he was supposed to do or could have done, has remained a secret.

What would it mean to see an atomic explosion and also know that it would be dropped on citizens? What would it mean to fly above the cities decimated by the force of the blast, by the fires, by the fallout?

On the back of one of his photographs that he sent home to his parents, my grandfather wrote, "Send me home, I've seen enough." Who was he addressing? God?

Standing under the Shinto gate at Okinawa, in another photograph, he looks haunted. Lost. Send me home. I've seen enough. Sometimes, later in life, he would pause and look off, far away, even though his eyes could quickly glint with humor as he returned to himself. But I've never seen such a look of horror on his face as I saw in the photo.

Or so I thought. But then again, I recognized his expression, a quick darkness appearing like a shadow in the water and then vanishing as suddenly as it arrived.

The past's secrets address the present. The self looks inward at the self. At you and then away from you.

I'm addressing you now.

No matter what story you might tell, or not tell, your secrets don't disappear within yourself.

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