

# Village Voices

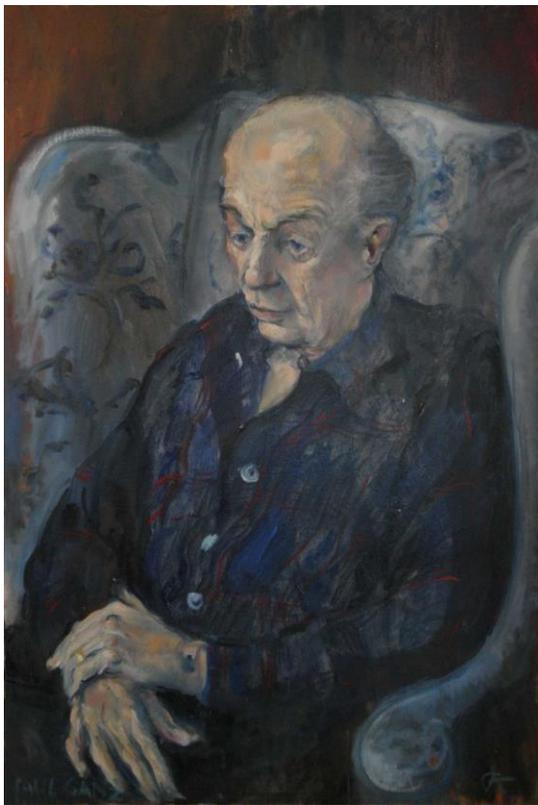
In Our Own Words

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## MY FRIEND PAUL

by Gaby Kopelman



A portrait of my friend Paul Ganz that I painted in the '70s hangs in my bedroom. His slight frame sunk into the depth of my wing chair, he sits there looking rather woebegone, a scraggly man in his sixties, dressed in a plaid flannel shirt undoubtedly his father's, dead these forty years. New clothes? "Gaby, you know me!

I go comparison shopping for string beans up and down Madison Avenue!"

Unfortunately, nothing in this portrait conveys Paul's sharp intelligence, his bright, combative nature, or his immediate interest in anything new, whether in literature or art. Paul was the biggest fan Becket ever had and the most steadfast. One of the first paintings he ever owned was a Rauschenberg, bought from Leo Castelli for \$400. When his interest switched to the Italian Baroque and he sold it back to Castelli for \$1,000, Paul thought he'd made the deal of a lifetime.

Paul's central interest was Italian 17th-century painting, and around him he collected a small, devoted coterie of art historians and curators, "art-hystericals," as he called us. I remember one afternoon in the early '80s, just a few days after Arthur Koestler and his much younger wife had committed double suicide. We were sitting around the table, as usual munching Paul's wife's delicious baked goods, while he held forth:

"Koestler was right! Nothing wrong with double suicide!" Paul's voice was

always surprisingly strong for one so frail. With his pallor, his bald cranium, and that scrawny neck sticking out of an oversized shirt, Paul looked like one of the several St. Jeromes decorating the premises.

“Oh, I agree,” his wife quavers from the other end of the table. Eulah, now in her eighties, has aged as people do in the movies; a dense network of wrinkles covers the face of a Garbo.

“Why, I ask you?” Chin out, Paul looks from one to the other, ready for a good, scrappy fight. “You tell me—why the hell *should* she have lived on?”

None of us is over fifty, and wild protests erupt all around the table: “Koestler’s wife was only fifty-six!” “Odious man, dragging her with him just because he himself was old and sick!” “Egotist!” “Lousy writer, anyway!”

“Well, you couldn’t be more wrong!” Paul yells above the din. “Anyway, now that I have my book from England, I’m all set. All I dread is the walk to the medicine cabinet!”

We all know of Paul’s efforts to obtain literature from the Hemlock Society, banned in the U.S., that tells all about committing suicide successfully. He’s been very vocal about this—thirteen years younger than Eulah, Paul lives in terror of being left, as he sees it. But we scream him down: “The Koestler

woman was young!” “Not a comparable case!”

“Oh, age doesn’t matter,” Eulah says quietly, handing around the fruit tarts.

I search her eyes. “Really, Eulah? Honest?”

“Yes, really.” Eulah’s voice is mild as always, her slight Texas drawl gentling even the firmest statements. “If Paul goes, I’d just see no reason to go on.”

I let it go. There are two grown daughters, but their existence seems not to be pertinent to the discussion at hand. From above, the saints look down. The Ganzes are fervid fans of the Italian Baroque, and the walls of their cavernous apartment are covered by 17th-century paintings. The collection has long ago exceeded the wall space. In the dining room where we are sitting, two Salvator Rosa landscapes board up the windows. In the living room beyond, a large, horizontal Ciro Ferri “Hagaar and Ishmael,” at least twelve feet across, shuts out the view of Park Avenue. There is not a clear window in the place. In the several bathrooms, paintings fill the shower stalls.

After tea comes the obligatory tour of the collection. We trudge through the darkened rooms redolent with mothballs, led by Paul carrying a spotlight from which trails a sixty-foot extension cord. The more obscure the painter, the more agonizing the subject matter, the longer and more lovingly the spotlight lingers. Neither Eulah nor Paul

has ever been known to flinch at the sight of blood, whether dripping from a crown of thorns or spurting from wounds from arrows, nails or knouts. As long as it's all safely contained within the picture plane, of course.

Every painting has its story. "Remember, Eulah, how that Mafioso on the Via Babuino tried to screw us on this one?" And just as inevitably, one painting calls to mind another. "Sweetie, do you remember where we saw that other early Palma Giovane? That lovely decapitation?"

And Sweetie always remembers. "Oh, yes. In '58, in the church outside of Vicenza, hanging kind of high in the third chapel to the right . . . near that sacristy with that Tintoretto Madonna—"

"Oh, yeah, that Tintoretto that was sorta like a sketch that belonged to that Principessa, the one with the big tits, who lived near that church with the Padre Pozzo ceiling . . ." And to the delight of their guests, the Ganzes are off and running down memory lane.

At the end of our visit, as the elevator closed, we caught a last glimpse of them. Arm in arm, they stood swaying in the doorway, waving good-bye. My friends were getting older, and I remember being afraid.

Like all happily marrieds, my friend Paul, loved to recall the day he first

met Eulah. Texas-born, Eulah was then a woman over thirty. Looking like the young Greta Garbo and with an IQ probably near Einstein's, Eulah was the office manager of Prince Matchabelli, a perfume company owned by Paul's father. One day he asked Eulah to arrange a lunch, so that his son could meet some of the company officers and perhaps get a taste of the business. The lunch was arranged, and at the appointed time, Eulah looked out at the waiting-room, but the only one there was this scrawny kid in a tee-shirt, obviously some sort of delivery boy. Well, that was Paul.

Eulah later recalled that at lunch, when everyone ordered martinis, Paul asked for a glass of milk. Obviously more must have taken place between that sophisticated woman and that skinny twenty-year-old. But, as Paul told it, it was all very simple—that evening he waited till she was through with work and took her home. Silently, they walked into the lobby of her house, silently they waited for the elevator. Once arrived at Eulah's front door, Eulah gestured for him to enter, and he never left.

His family had been outraged, especially his mother. "Marry her? That adventuress? All she's after is your money! You poor fool, don't you see that?" She'd pounded away at that, day after day, while his father hid behind his newspaper praying for peace. But Paul had fought like a tiger, and after many stormy years he'd prevailed. By that

time Eulah, thirteen years older than Paul, had been too old to have children. So shortly after they'd married, they'd adopted two girls.

But Paul never did get a taste for business. His father was barely cold in his grave when Paul sold his part of the family business to his brother Victor. It was a great relief. As he put it, at least now he didn't have to face the f\*\*\*ing world until the turmoil of the day had died down and all the "normals," as Paul liked to refer to his fellow citizens, were tucked in their beds. "What's the use of those games, anyway?" he'd ask, eyes blazing, hoping for an argument. Didn't they realize they were just treading water? The absurdity of it!

Paul had always liked the night. And he liked bargains. Trekking up and down New York's deserted avenues, wrapped in one of his late father's overcoats (two sizes too large for him and redolent of mothballs), Paul always kept a sharp lookout for any usable rubbish left at the curb. He loved to tell of the time that some shirts, accompanied by wild curses, came hurtling down through the night. "Absolutely brand new! Silk shirts!! Some still in their packages!" Looking up he saw the open window. "Some broad up there was throwing this guy out of her house, and, boy, was she pissed! Flinging out shirts, shoes, all classy stuff!"

It was quite a harvest, but just then a

homeless man asleep in the building's alley, woke to all the noise and shuffled out to exercise his *droit de seigneur*. Paul conceded his claim had merit. "It was *his* alley, for God's sake. So what the hell—we went halfies." When Paul got home that night, Eulah, the ever-patient, ever-loving—as always, waiting up for his return—had put the shirts through the washing machine, right then and there. At this point in the tale, Paul's voice goes up two octaves, the eyes gleam in triumph: "By 4 a.m., I had a new wardrobe!"

He and Eulah traveled every summer—Italy, Spain, Greece, any place warm and bright, and where, at least at a casual glance, it seemed as though nobody gave a damn. On their first trip to Europe together, Paul had taken a boy along as a sort of security blanket; the boy had ended up sobbing in Eulah's arms, and Paul had sent him home. Even long after they were married, Paul could never believe that someone as wonderful as Eulah was his forever. And old habits die hard—every once in a while on those midnight outings, Paul would allow himself a brief dip into one of the bathhouses just to see who was doing what to whom and perhaps exchange a bit of art-world gossip. "You'd be surprised whom you meet there," he'd tell me. "Everybody standing around with his little towel."

Their European summers soon turned into shopping trips for Italian 17th-century paintings. Not for the great masters like Caravaggio, but for the

little guys, the minor masters, at the time as little and neglected as Paul had been. Until he'd met Eulah, that is. In those southern summers, Paul would get up in the mornings quite easily and go out into the noisy, sunlit streets with a certain eagerness. But then, back in New York, he'd lapse once again into his nocturnal habits, trekking up and down Park Avenue, usually with his friend Michael Sonnabend, discussing Virgil, Becket and such.

None of Paul's private life was hidden from his friends. Looking back on it, I realize that our friendship had much to do with the Ganzes' loving marriage. If he was good enough to be loved by that saintly, beautiful wife of his, who was I to pull back from Paul's description of his penile implant and similarly unappetizing matters?

When I knew them, Eulah, then in her early eighties, was still hale and hearty, but as time went on, Paul became more and more panicked at the thought of her predeceasing him. It took a terrible toll on him. Sleep was becoming a problem despite, or maybe because of, the many barbiturates he was taking. As I write this, I wonder why I was not more outspoken? Why did I never insist and nag that he stop drugging himself? Because we were in constant touch—who else could I call at midnight, with whatever book I'd been reading, “Hey Paul, just listen

to this!” And, of course, he'd always listen, and his responses, whether enthusiastic or scathing, were always interesting.

There came one day, however, a rainy late afternoon as I remember it, when I phoned the Ganzes, and there was no response. I remember sitting there, holding the telephone and looking out the window at the gray sky, waiting, while the telephone rang and rang . . . But why? If not Paul, then Eulah was always sure to be home at that hour . . .

As it turned out, they were there. Paul had arranged it well, or so they both must have thought. Later that same afternoon, one of their daughters entered the apartment to find Paul's body in the foyer. A few feet away lay Eulah, covered with a blanket, a puzzling detail. She had vomited some of the barbiturate-laced cocoa and so had survived. We were all relieved that she was still there, but the loss of Paul was a terrible blow. For me, he left an empty space, never to be filled.

Even Eulah had to agree that her survival had been a good thing. It gave her particular pleasure that she could now buy the girls their own homes. “You know,” she said to me in that mild voice of hers, when I visited her at the nursing home where she spent her last months, “I never knew there was so much money, I had no idea.” But life no longer held any interest for her. “I just close my eyes and think of Paul,” she told me with a wan, apologetic smile.

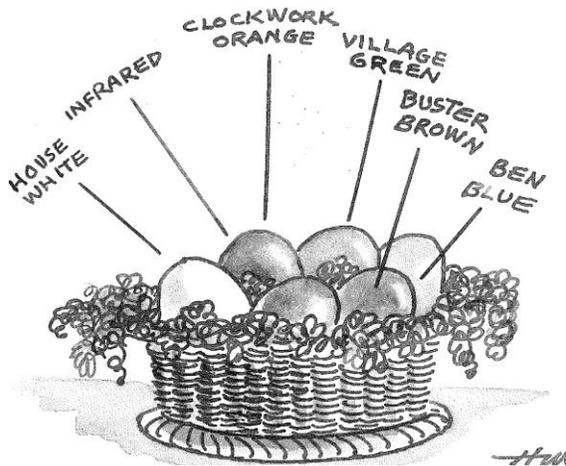
Her death was as quiet and undemanding as Eulah herself. She basically stopped eating.

Every time I hear of yet another high auction price paid for some once-obscure Baroque artist and I look at that portrait of Paul I painted decades ago, there comes that familiar voice. "Seven hundred thousand for a Schedone!" I hear him screech. "Are they f\*\*\*ing crazy?"

But usually that portrait and I, we just have a quiet little talk, just the two of us.

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## AT PENNSWOOD by Henry Martin



New! Spring colors for Easter eggs and Easter parades.

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## OK MILITARY DUTY by Stan Wright

Back in the 1950s, young guys had to do two years of compulsory military service as a duty to their country. I had deferred my military service for seven years . . . four years for undergraduate work and three years for postgraduate work in architecture. But when I graduated, it did not take the Selective Service System long to catch up with me. I was drafted in February 1957. Like most college graduates who had not opted for ROTC, I left my military career to chance. We were sent to Fort Dix for basic training and then on to Clerk Typist School. It was like a fraternity party learning how to type at taxpayer expense. Choice of assignments post-training was offered. I did not do that well but still got to pick where I wanted to serve.

Of course I picked Europe and thought I would end up in Germany where brother Richard had served his tour of duty. And would you believe, the luck of the draw sent me to Fontainebleau, France, to work in the post Post Office.

It did not take long for me to realize I wanted out of the post office work . . . especially on paydays when all the dependent wives came to buy their money orders for their Sears Roebuck purchases and such. I soon transferred to the Quartermaster Petroleum Pipeline Division. Here I worked mostly with French people. I got to use my

architectural skills. We were building facilities along the pipeline across France using prefabricated units like Quonset Huts or Filloid Units in all sorts of configurations for different uses like dorms, dining halls, recreation, etc. It was fascinating work, and I enjoyed getting to know some of the French people. Claude, for one, was a charming gentleman with a young family. We even became so friendly he invited me to his home for dinner. This was unheard of as most entertaining was done in restaurants. When he asked what I would like, I replied "Horsemeat." I had seen the beautiful horses going to slaughter on my mail pickup trips to Paris. I knew this was a popular dish in France but not usually served in restaurants. It was delicious. You know how the French cook with their seasoning, it could have been filet mignon.

Peacetime army duty in France was a breeze. There were drawbacks, however. The French did not like having us there. They felt like the occupied country. The graffiti said it all: "Yanks Go Home" and "U.S. Get Out." My duties took a small part of my day, so there was lots of free time. I had bought a motor scooter from a departing American student at the school, so I did have a way to get around. I even took it to Paris to go to the opera. It was also a great way to explore the neighborhood. I especially liked visiting châteaux that

were open to the public. The deal was that if they opened two rooms, the owners would get certain tax credits. On Monday when I would report to my French co-workers, they would just scratch their heads and wonder why I wanted to do this. I also was lucky to be able to attend lectures and take a trip to the Loire Valley arranged by the school in the Palace at Fontainebleau. I also met Nadia Boulanger, the head of the Music Department, in addition to the architect in charge of the restoration and preservation of the Palace. He lived in the Palace and had his large architectural office there as well. The behind the scenes tours of the Palace were fascinating. The theater with dust covers over the Louis XIV chairs looked as if it could be quickly readied for a visit from the king.

Another big asset was the USO Center with all sorts of activities, tours and a darkroom. This is where I spent lots of time developing and printing my own black and white photos. The biggest challenge was using one camera and constantly changing from b&w to color film. Tours were day trips or longer like the trip to Scandinavia. Other trips included a jaunt up to Berlin to visit cousin Janet who was studying there. But the big one was when my parents came to visit, and we went to Spain.

Singing in the Chapel Choir was also a good experience. We sang on Sundays at the base, but then on occasion joined with other choirs. The best was doing

the *Messiah* with the choir in Paris.  
Another benefit was the choir parties  
where we could be invited to  
officers' homes. But the biggest  
benefit of all was being able to go to  
the Choir Clinic at Berchtesgaden.  
We went to a few workshops but  
mostly went skiing and sledding.

By 1957, my tour of duty was up. It  
had been a good experience. I had  
learned about myself and had seen  
lots of the significant sites in Europe  
. . . an important part of an architect's  
education. The two years were not a  
waste of time. And those younger  
GIs who could not understand why I  
wanted to go to Europe never knew  
what they had missed.

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## **THE GREEN DIAMOND: A STREAMLINED TRAIN** by Jack Williams

If your home in the late 1930s had  
been near high-speed train tracks  
in a rural village like Chestnut, Illinois,  
you'd know what I mean:

At RR crossings, dual horns blast,  
Trains roar through with flying dust,  
In shaking houses, best china rattles.  
Night guests sleeping, wildly startle;  
Accustomed families...soundly sleep.

+++

The Green Diamond was two-tone  
green,

With large, curved front grille of  
chrome.

Interior decoration, much the same.

Railroad: Illinois Central, from  
Chicago to St. Louis...

And back each day.

This streamliner had but four cars,  
Abutting on **one** set of wheels;  
The shapely cars permanently bound,  
To a large, same-painted, diesel:  
A unitized passenger machine...  
Experimental.

+++

We had an Experimental Grandpa too,  
No formal education beyond grade  
eight,  
Curious about how new things worked,  
Creative to conceive and game to  
take...  
Grandkids on expeditions.

First we drove to nearest city,  
Purpose was to size things up.  
The Engine approached, and rumbled  
by,  
Platform shook us, air brakes popped.  
It frightened me...I didn't cry.

But hardly stopped,  
The Green Diamond gone,  
And we, the wiser,  
Soon at home...**planning**.

Weeks later, so exciting, boarding,  
At nearest city the other way,  
Grandpa, two older sisters and I,  
On facing seats, then bump and sway...  
Our first Green Diamond ride began.

Smoothly accelerating, soon  
speeding,  
Across plowed fields and fields of  
hay,  
Then through our town, we at  
window waving,  
More fields, of corn, but to our  
dismay  
Too soon, next city...detraining.

In the Ford ride back to our town,  
Each kid vied for chance to tell  
Our parents, of that magic ride,  
While Grandpa sat  
In back as well...smiling.

And later, taller to our friends,  
We told our tale of riding.  
How silent and magic-like it'd been,  
A gentle carriage floated through our  
town!...**Wasn't that surprising?**

There's a moral lurking here,  
That I think we kids began to see:  
Unlike the wild beast we thought we  
knew,  
It all depends...on one's point of  
view...It's not fantasy.

+++

Post Script:  
I saw her decades from that day,  
And miles from that prairie,  
At a train museum, on display,  
Now **Famed** for her...**ARTISTRY.**

She's in some museum, still, I wage,  
Poised to fly through towns, 'mid  
swirling dust,

Only slightly scratched, as becomes her  
age,  
And only with...the slightest rust.

Please Google The Green Diamond for  
yourself,  
That two-tone green-chrome Art-Deco  
glory.

It's been fun reliving this from early  
life.

I hope you, too, have enjoyed...  
this story.

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## **THE RAILWAY**

**by Robin Meaker**

Doesn't everybody have a model steam  
railway in their back garden? We did!

But, first things first. My father never  
finished university—he was at McGill  
in Montreal studying architecture in  
1914 when WWI started. He and all the  
brave Canadian boys volunteered to go  
fight for the good of the Empire. A new  
Canadian infantry regiment was  
commissioned called the Princess  
Patricia's because she was Queen  
Victoria's youngest granddaughter and  
their honorary patroness. They were  
called the Princess Pats in Canada.

After being wounded in the trenches,  
Father decided the flying of these new-  
fangled "paper and string" aeroplanes  
was the way to go. According to the  
newspaper accounts preserved by his  
mother in Moosejaw, he became quite  
the ace in the Royal Flying Corps  
(predecessor to the RAF).

He was a practical sort in another way. He had been raised a Methodist, but he noticed that the non-conformist “chapel” sort had to march into town for services every Sunday, whereas the Church of England services were right on base. He switched.

He and his wife, Anne, settled in England. When WWII came along, he was again in the RAF, serving first in Cairo and then in Nairobi. While in Nairobi in 1940, he suffered his first heart attack. His wife and children were very concerned that, because of the war and the Mediterranean’s being an Italian lake, he had to be sent around Africa back to England. There, he was mustered out but continued to serve as his health permitted.

He had never gone back to McGill; he had to get a job to support his widowed mother. Be that as it may, he was a really gifted self-taught engineer.

Having spare time during WWII, he decided to build from scratch a working model steam railway. I recall my mother peeling potatoes at the sink (she did a lot of that during the war) and being told to “stand aside” while Father cooled his latest soldering job in the cold water. The train was big enough to carry my little brother.

**Note from Doug Meaker:** I asked Robin, “Where did your father get the materials to build the train during the war?” Her reply, “Don’t ask.” I didn’t, and, come to think of it, when I was 10 or 12, I didn’t ask how come a lot of good things happened during the war.

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