



# The Beginning of Something

by Andrew Rusnak

*I am no Marlow. As a kid I didn't dream of boats steaming up rivers like snakes to test my soul in the Heart of Darkness. I wanted to be a man of science, a man of numbers and equations. But after college I did follow Marlow up that river.* – Carr Kizzier

Late in the afternoon, over Memorial Day weekend, 1987, West Point cadet Carr Kizzier picked up the phone to call his father. He hadn't yet made the decision that would both radically change the direction of his life and forever alter the relationship with the man who used to pick him up on weekends so the two could buddy up on the couch and watch classic war movies, or build vintage model fighter planes.

Almost a year earlier, right before he was scheduled to report for plebe summer, ripe from a week-long, high school graduation blow-out with friends in Puerto Vallarta, he'd met his father in New York City and they drove the 60 miles to the United States Military Academy on the west bank of the Hudson River.

"I didn't realize how scared I was," Kizzier said of his first day. "I was psyched, but I couldn't eat for a couple days. My nerves were shot. I was terrified. When you're inducted, you have these scary dudes yelling in your face. It's humiliating, it's supposed to be. They strip you down and

they give you this gym uniform, with knee-high black dress socks and black dress shoes. By the end of the day, they want you to march around the parade ground in front of your parents, who just dropped you off. They're trying to strip you of your identity."

The grounds of West Point were relatively deserted that Memorial Day weekend as most plebes, yucks, cows, and firsties (freshman to seniors) were off on a three-day pass. Kizzier stayed behind, pulling guard duty, and he wasn't particularly happy about it. Despite the exhilaration of plebe summer and the months that followed, craving the physical challenge of being first through the obstacle course, quarterbacking the intramural football team, and relishing the gritty camaraderie of like-minded scholar-jocks from all over the country donning crisp, gray dress in the post-Vietnam, re-spirited, pro-soldier Reagan era, Kizzier's inchoate, late adolescent sensibilities were starting to add up differently than expected.

“My dad was a salesman,” Kizzier continues. “He was good at obscuring the truth, exaggerating things. He also was very authoritarian, but he was mainly a salesman. He had that kind of personality, people liked being around him. He was very charismatic.”

Kizzier, a month earlier during plebe-parent week, had hinted to his mom of his growing disappointment in the military life he faced. He didn't particularly like the hazing, or the brutal lack of sympathy required to enervate future commissioned officers. In fact, he refused to participate in the one-hour-a-year fete when roles get reversed and plebes retaliate for all the compromising and shameful displays of torment delivered by upperclassmen.

But he'd kept it all from his father. Certain paternal biases, however, would continue to linger: the necessity of a college degree, the commitment to math and engineering—testaments to the influence of the suburban Littleton, Colorado neighborhood where he grew up, a relaxed, racially and ethnically homogenized culture heavily populated with white collar Lockheed Martin professionals and their children.

“My parents divorced when I was in the second grade,” Kizzier said, welling up a little. “I'm sure my self esteem took a hit, but I wasn't really aware of it. My dad wasn't home much. He travelled for work most of the time anyway, so I was used to not having him around.”

Dennis Kizzier took an engineering degree in 1962 from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. He landed in Gulf Port, Mississippi working at the John C. Stennis Space Center as a mechanical engineer on NASA's Mercury program, the first for human space flight. In what Carr thinks was a set-up date, he met Ann Carr who worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. Ann took degrees in English and Math in 1963 from the University of Southern

Mississippi in Hattiesburg. On July 13, 1968, they had their first child, Carr, named after his mother's family. Younger sister Kelley was born four-and-a-half years later. The older Kizzier took an engineering job with Lockheed Martin and soon moved the family to Littleton, 10 miles outside Denver, where, Carr says, his mom cried for a year because there were no trees.

“I really didn't know what I was going to do when I called my father from West Point,” Kizzier said. “I think I actually wanted him to talk me into staying. When I mentioned I was thinking of leaving, he immediately started yelling and screaming that I'm not a quitter and I wasn't leaving.”

Angry and impassioned by a new-found independence that he would, without much exception, come to celebrate in indulgent, avant-garde, and reformist ways, he hung up the phone and submitted his resignation. It took about a week to process out of West Point with an honorable discharge. After a summer landscaping gig back in Littleton, Kizzier enrolled that fall semester as an aerospace engineering student at the University of Colorado (CU).

*A year before he died, Carr sent his father a coffee mug for Christmas. It had a dove on it, an offering of peace and affirmation.*

Dennis Kizzier never spoke to his son again. He died two years later from complications due to alcoholism. He'd just turned 48, the same age his son will turn several weeks after this interview.

“My dad loved me,” Kizzier said during the interview. The forcefulness of this declaration hints at mutable and ambiguous attempts at resolution. A year before he died, Carr sent his father a coffee mug for Christmas. It had a dove on it, an offering of peace and affirmation.

With the doors open, some faculty offices on college campuses seem to work like vacuums, sucking in passersby from the hallway. In the Arts and Humanities Hall on the Essex campus of the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) where he's been teaching since 2004, Kizzier's office banks adjacent to a row of generous windows that more than accommodate the crisp morning light that also seems to guide students and faculty colleagues into AHUM 212.

The main attraction, aside from Kizzier himself, always willing to help a student scratch out a thesis, flush out the logic in a short story, or lineup MLA format on a research paper, is . . . well, Kizzier's desk. Take heed cluttered minds, rest easy all ye non-anal-retentive Type B's, jump the carousel all you Dionysian, right-brain worshippers, you are in good company. Albert Einstein, who celebrated imagination above knowledge, is often credited with the agile excuse, echoed in offices across America whenever the boss strolls by, that a clean desk is the sign of a sick mind.

If this is true, Kizzier and his desk, which might make good fodder for a lyrical ballad by Coleridge, should win a national excellence in behavioral health award. Imagine taking all the words on this page and allowing time and entropy to do the work of the second law of thermodynamics, rearranging them at random so that disorder and chance prevail. Left is that surreal "gawk" moment, especially after Kizzier's stint at West Point and a year of white-collar bed making.

There are, however, some saving literary if eclectic features ("themes" might be stretching it). Copy paper boxes, stuffed with contents from the last move some four years prior, sit at loose angles on the floor leaving no room anywhere for feet. There's a natural, unbroken transition of scattered paper stacks from the top of the desk to the floor: interoffice envelopes, fliers for U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera's visit to CCBC,

brochures for the 2016 creative writing forum featuring Juliet Howard, Mahogany Brown, and Niki Herd, a roll of masking tape, a litter of sticky notes, a knee-deep bundle of David Sedaris' essay *Full House*.

It all starts to make sense as the mass reaches higher altitudes: an Elvis Presley clock (Elvis in a purple jacket swiveling his hips) is stuck on 7:45, a poorly taxidermied raven voraciously eyes loosely arranged shelves of *The Best American Essays*, Hemingway's short stories, and reads like *Gaza Mom*, by Laila El-Haddad and William Matthews' collected poems, *Search Party*. Despite the clutter, Kizzier has an inherent appreciation for space—personal, ethereal, implicit space.

"I'm a perfectionist," Carr said. Even he appears a little uncomfortable in his own doing. After a while, more like restlessness. Complexity, especially of the more recondite persuasion, often leads to paradox, but also to process and refinement. Photos of various trail treks (there's a well-frequented family cabin near Franconia Notch in the White Mountains of New Hampshire)—the delighted expressions of Carr, daughter Finley, and wife Liz look over the office from the upper shelves and spread a sense of warm clarity and approval over it all.

No one knows where parental influence, good or bad, ends and the personal interest and responsibility of the child begins, a mash of variables, sweet overlaps that defy quantification.

**Father:** authoritative aerospace engineer, the embodiment of the post-WWII pragmatic world, who once chewed his son out, like so many fathers of his generation, for missing a routine, little league fly ball, who usurped most sit-down, model plane projects.

"He was a 'This is what you need to do' kind of father," Kizzier, who ended up a two-sport letterman at Littleton High and senior-year captain of the Lions' baseball team, said. "I bought into it, I bought into West Point. The

cadets looked sharp in the brochures and my dad talked it up. The Military Academy was hard to get into and I was looking to build my self esteem. It was prestigious for suburban Denver.”

**Mother:** magnanimous, tolerant, supportive, eventually careered as a HUD Multifamily Division Director in New Orleans. She understood where all “this” might be headed and trusted her son to figure out—many times from opportunities she would surreptitiously plant along the way—his own interests and what would eventually make him happy, those reserved, lettered, cultivated self-discoveries that didn’t need a tangible measure.

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contrary to the young boy’s longing for heroes  
and the young man’s need for answers.*

“Whatever you want to do, I’ll support you one hundred percent, that’s my mom,” Carr said, now Associate Professor of English at CCBC where he teaches composition, film, creative writing, and an occasional class in the American short story. Kizzier, a writer and filmmaker, believed from grade school through Euclid Junior High to Littleton High and West Point, to his eventual entry into the University of Colorado in the fall of 1987, that “my strongest fields were math and science. Between my junior and senior years of high school, I spent a week at West Point. I remember we carved a wing out of balsa and put it in a wind tunnel to test its aerodynamic efficiency. At that point I knew what I wanted to do.”

Kizzier gets the split, the split from his parent’s personalities, one dominant one way, one dominant another, the disoriented psyche, how allegiance filters from the conscious to the unconscious and back again, how cozy linearity and continuance become victims of the war between perception and emotion, how Mr.

Telk, Carr’s second grade teacher, saw the quiet affliction manifest itself in his young student’s self portraits, which got smaller and smaller and smaller, and how Steinbeck, in *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*, wrote, “No wonder, then, that in physics the symbol of oscillation . . . is fundamental and primitive and ubiquitous, turning up in every equation.”

Much later, in the basement of his mom’s house, Kizzier found an old box with some of his dad’s stuff and was surprised when he pulled out transcripts from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and saw a bunch of D grades. His father wasn’t such a great student after all, contrary to the young boy’s longing for heroes and the young man’s need for answers.

An apparition appears, hides, reappears years later. The haunting, the fear that it will forever be those ephemeral and discordant voices. But the solid, core group of steady friends Kizzier nurtured since second grade, they are still his close friends today. He wasn’t a complete loner. A lot happened in the second grade, events rip at the spirit the same time they fill it, like on a quantum level, one singular event can be both cause-and-effect, and there’s no real reason for the timing of decay.

“I wasn’t the popular kid, I didn’t date a cheerleader, I wasn’t in a circle, I was shy with girls,” Kizzier said. “I also grew up in a home where, in the living room, I remember the book shelves, the spines of my mother’s college text books. Henrik Ibsen and Eugene O’Neil, I remember dramatists. We had a complete set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. I loved to thumb through the pages. I didn’t know it at the time, but my mom went way out of her way, to extreme lengths, to present my sister and I with opportunities. Anything that I expressed interest in, my mom was there to encourage me and find a way for me to sign up for a class or something.”

The divided self expands, context swells, transitions drown, become desperate, free-association offers relief, confusion is dismissed *and* invited, the need for integration, the need for individuation.

**Father:** that 1968 Mercury Cougar XR7 with loud pipes he gave his son, vintage American muscle, hard to drive, but loud enough to buy Carr admission to Colfax Ave. in Denver, the strip where, in high school, he cruised for girls and, occasionally, goosed it off the line.

**Mother:** the young adolescent son discovered he needed that time, the antithesis of entropy, that time to retreat from the green lawns of suburban Littleton, chuck his baseball glove on the living room chair, pick up a book or a record and recharge alone in his room. Even though it wasn't "cool to be an artsy kid in suburban 1980s," and he didn't yet consider himself strong enough to throw down "I don't care if you don't like it," and he no longer thinks of himself as an introvert, balances shift and this more subjective time would soon be his life's refuge.

*A "man of science?" Yes, but always a romantic man of science, or a romantic man of romantic science.*

"I have both sides of it now," Kizzier said, in another easy attempt to be honest with himself. "With my daughter it's like anything she wants to do, it's fine with me. And sometimes it's like, no, no, no. She has to do this. It's like I'll tell her I don't care what you do as long as you play a team sport. It can be one of your choosing. She played baseball, which kind of surprised me. I'm her coach, the other day I ended up yelling at her for no real reason and didn't realize it. I'm sure I'm like my father in a lot of ways."

Engineering has its time, a rhythm, an excited, autocratic pulse: read the blueprint,

scrutinize the specs, find the application, imagine the intricate parts or process, how can they be reconceived, how might they fail? Literature has a flow too, a long meditation before coming up for air, the gentle tossing of "why" and "what" and "how," and sometimes walking away without clarity. It's always an interpretive process, and those who practice it, like it that way. Aside from the culturally inflicted, either-or propositions, there aren't many cognitive distinctions between practicing literature and practicing engineering, only a little more insignificant this than that. Steinbeck adds in *Sea of Cortez*, ". . . [Y]et the impulse which drives a man to poetry will send another man into the tide pools and force him to try and report on what he finds there." The truest exception might be each discipline's relationship with uncertainty. Much of science and technology today, to its detriment, is stuck on reductionist autopilot, whereas the literati embrace and celebrate the absence of definitive answers.

"I was always a reader," Kizzier said, his conviction now marked. "I loved reading novels. When I was ten years old, I started pulling some of those books off the shelf. I read *The Godfather*. It was so compelling, thrilling, exciting. Very early on there is a graphic sex scene, it wasn't the sex scene per se, this was an adult book, it wasn't a kid's book. My mom was, is an avid reader."

**High School:** Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Tolkien, *The Doors*, Stephen King, the *Dune* series, British New Wave, *Marathon Man*, Robert Ludlum, *U2*.

"And I started writing stories in second grade, that same year with Mr. Telk," Kizzier says, smiling. "I wrote a werewolf story I remember and later, I was in this gifted and talented class and we made an animated, stop motion, *Godzilla* film."

When Kizzier started at CU that fall in the aerospace engineering program, he sensed something had gone missing. Liminality is like

protracted exile from the self. And when he made the comment about being like his father, he laughed. He laughed profusely. It was a warm, contagious, and futile laugh.

“Even though my dad pushed me, I did start to feel like I could break the rules,” he said with more than a trace of confession.

Sister Monica as she was known, an amiable French missionary in the remote Central African Republic (CAR) village of Ouango knocked with a benevolent sense of urgency on the front door of the stationed Peace Corps volunteer’s home. It was June, 1991, the central African woodland savannah was hot and dry. Because of its tin-roof, the bungalow was a trace upscale compared to the thatched-roof huts of most villagers. Sister Monica had just received a radio message from the capitol Bangui, a three-day bus ride away. Elizabeth Chadwick, a Peace Corps volunteer in Kembe, the next village east, had taken ill and was being sent home to the states in an apparent medical emergency evacuation. Ouango was the furthest outpost in the CAR the Peace Corps would send a volunteer, in a country that now ranks 185 out of 187 on the United States Human Development Index.

Out back, in his *paillotte*, a straw-roofed, gazebo-like retreat, Carr Kizzier was catching up on world classics, maybe Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, unwinding after a long day of teaching *sixieme*, *quatrieme*, and *troisieme annee mathematique*, what would be seventh, ninth, and tenth grade math in what was then the French system. Sango and French are the official languages of CAR, which gained its independence from France in 1960.

Now a vagabond odyssey, mellowing, liberal, political sensibilities. A “man of science?” Yes, but always a romantic man of science, or a romantic man of romantic science. An elective in political philosophy at CU surrounded by courses in solid mechanics, gas dynamics, aerospace



Carr Kizzier

structures, offered an appealing contrast between empirical evidence and hard calculations, and the indefinite, somewhat irrational and desultory yearning in a world with ever-expanding boundaries. The verge, now as ally.

“I failed mechanics,” Kizzier said. “It didn’t seem like much of a challenge to me and I didn’t do the work. The course in political philosophy made me think harder than I ever had before. I liked the idea of physics, the application to reality, but the math was boring to me.”

There’s another profuse, warm, and secure laugh.

“So I changed my major to philosophy and took electives in literature.”

Phenomenology, Existentialism, philosophy of literature, Kizzier abandoned the expediency and “pragmatism” of the prescribed life, dropped the material monism of tract-house values, a path so illuminated today for students entering college, the reflection of the “self” only reveals the distracted, cosmetic desires of what has digitally morphed into the commonly demanded norm.

“I wanted to be a philosophy professor. I wanted to get my Ph.D. and teach. I mean my mind is being blown everyday. Being a professor seemed like a really good life to me.”

But, by spring of 1990, Kizzier had taken the advice of his college roommate’s brother and joined Peace Corps. To procrastinate, challenge commitment, was part of the philosopher’s disposition, the stereotyped version anyway. Even though he’d taken a number of upper-level electives, he’d failed to guarantee the transfer of lower level coursework from West Point. He’d already pledged responsibility to Peace Corps, so had to finish his undergrad degree when his voluntary stint in the Central African Republic was over. After intro courses in sociology and psych, he earned his liberal arts degree in philosophy from CU in 1992.

After six weeks of French language training in Zaire, six more weeks of training on the French system of education in Bangui, Kizzier was posted. Acclimating to remote village life was a challenge. He had a kerosene lamp and a camp stove. No electricity or refrigeration, only boiled water was fit to drink. It was the first time he was ever immersed in a culture where he, the white volunteer from the American burbs, was in the minority. He ate termites, caterpillars, bush meat, and a lot of the main staple, peanuts and cassava, which was added to goat meat once a week for stew. It just seemed natural a former West Point cadet would draw the toughest assignment.

“When I first got there, to Ouango, I was under the microscope,” Kizzier said. “I replaced the first Peace Corps volunteer the village ever had. She was French, a native speaker, and had learned the local, tribal dialect. She was close to tribal leaders, dined frequently with the villagers. My landlord expected me to be more social. I sometimes felt trapped.”

It wasn’t uncommon for curious neighbors to stand and look through windows and doors. Kizzier quickly discovered a need for privacy and personal space in a place where socialization equates to physical survival. The irony is that, as a bearer of western culture, he celebrated reflection, pensive contemplation, the process of thought in-and-for-itself. Introversion became his go-to,

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there was still a lot to figure out. He just wasn’t like the convivial volunteer he replaced.

On Valentines Day, 1991, Kizzier heard someone call his name. Past the universal, guttural, velar plosive in a country where English mixed with unfamiliar sounds and in an equatorial region where the diurnal rhythms of the village easily slide into the banality of routine, the simplicity of catching his name amid general workaday thoughts resonated deep inside of what was fast becoming a formative period in his search for an intimate bearing and politically sound foundation.

He was in between classes, taking a break in the faculty office, and turned around to see Liz Chadwick. The two had been dating, Peace Corps style, sending letters by bus, visiting on weekends. That first day, when Kizzier headed to his post for the first time, the two had stayed up all night in Kembe, at Liz’s place, drinking whiskey. Now, this sublime moment, this time when histories knit together, the two are aware of how they feel about each other. Although this chronicle of a love foretold was not written without its passages of disruption, February 14, 1991 is the date inscribed inside Kizzier’s

wedding band. That night they shared a simple cheese fondue dinner packed by Liz and palm wine made by local villagers.

Slave traders, European hegemony, coups, cannibalism, blood diamonds, rape, torture, child soldiers, exploitation of labor, the history of the CAR has never endured a protracted period of stabilization. The DNA of the country is programmed for tumult and avarice.

Jean-Bedel Bokassa, who seized power in a coup in 1966, was reported to have personally overseen the murder of 100 school children when they refused to buy uniforms from one of his wives. The Center for Preventive Action (CPA) reported that in the first three months of 2016, Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) kidnapped close to 250 civilians. Since political and religious sectarian violence broke out in 2013, "around six thousand people have been killed and a quarter of the population has been displaced, with more than four hundred thousand refugees and three hundred thousand internally displaced persons," the CPA said.

President Obama sent military advisors to help run down Kony in 2011. The United Nations, in 2014, inserted a peacekeeping force of 10,000 troops with a mandate to protect civilians, 60 percent of which, it was estimated, lived in extreme poverty. In 2015, 1.5 million Central Africans were on the brink of starvation. The U.S. Embassy in Bangui reopened in 2014 after a two-year hiatus, the third time in the 56-year history of diplomatic relations since independence in 1960 it has had to close and reopen due to violence and insecurity. After one such reopening in 1998, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps did not return.

Once the "Cinderella of the French empire," the Central African Republic, in the north where the population is marginalized, "is now a war zone, with armed bands burning villages, kidnapping children, robbing travellers,

and killing people with impunity," journalist Nicholas Kristof wrote.

Violent outbreaks have vacillated with tenuous periods of peace throughout the country's history. There is certainly something cinematic about a relationship that begins against such a backdrop of instability.

Often, on his way to class, someone, a student or another professor, will catch his eye and he'll stop for a chat, suddenly remember he's running late, and continue in a quick, purposeful stride that can be described as both tight and loose. The amiable Kizzier is the comfortable-not-so-comfortable integration of the metaphysical bidding of days, always thinking, probing, jostling with ideas. He has a memory for facts, like a trained mathematician, numbers, dates, though how he sees the world is more lyrical, more spiritual. Before he connects the dots, he finds reasons why they'd be better off disconnected.



Carr and Liz in Africa

At about six-feet, he's solid, fit, with a strong core, the physical legacy of high school athletics not far behind, even though he's given up on pro football. Right around the time his home team Denver Broncos landed QB Payton Manning, he read Steve Almond's, *Against Football: A Reluctant Manifesto* and invited the writer to speak at CCBC as part of the Creative Writing Forum he organizes and manages for the college.



"It's wonderful to work with a colleague so dedicated to integrating creative writing and arts into the life of our college, a college that encourages innovation and collaboration," Professor Kim Jensen said.

A handlebar mustache, reminiscent of Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, sweeps above an easy and ready smile, long brown hair, Merrels, jeans, a long-sleeve, button-down hiking or travel shirt, blue floppy hat, Kizzier is the liberal political conscience of the English Department. Artisan, sage, pathfinder, some archetypes resonate in crowds. On the door to his office is a loud red and black bumper sticker: *There is no Flag Large Enough to Cover the Shame of Killing Innocent People.*

*And his father? Had he lived?  
The great, unanswerable questions fathers  
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great gifts of being.*

While serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Central African Republic, he was assigned a "servant," a man named Dieudonne, meaning "gift from God." He deeply despises any idea of servitude, so justified Dieudonne's job of helping with the laundry, food, and watching over the house during tense political strife with the realization that his helper's standard of living was greatly enhanced via this paid position.

Against football, against right wing zealotry, against servitude, against greed, against elitism, against meat (yes, Kizzier is vegetarian).

"Carr is never threatened by someone's new idea," Professor Heather Harris said. "Even if that new idea challenges the way he is doing some-thing. He wants to hear it and think about it."

And his father? Had he lived? The great, unanswerable questions fathers sometimes leave their sons can become great gifts of being.

"I immediately got down on the floor and covered my head," Kizzier said. The mob had surrounded the Subaru station wagon. The Toyota Land Cruiser, carrying a number of embassy officials, had already separated from the convoy. Windows were breaking, the nurse kept yelling to the driver to just "run them over." Her purse was snatched, the driver's watch sliced from his wrist.

The message was not clear, but Sister Monica, when she knocked on Kizzier's door, told what she knew. Liz was being sent back to the states on medical leave. Kizzier sought out his principal, told him he would be gone from the school a few days. Luckily, there was a bus out that evening, three days to Bangui.

"I was very scared," he said. "I didn't know if she'd even be there, but I found her at the hospital. What a big sense of relief. It wasn't a medical emergency. She'd had a pap smear that came up negative. As a precaution, the Peace Corps sent its volunteers home for treatment."

Under President Andre Kolingba (1981-1993) who usurped power in a bloodless military coup and happened to be from Liz's village of Kembe, the CAR was undergoing a reprieve from extreme brutality, but not bureaucratic corruption. Riots and demonstrations had broken out in the capitol, compounds were broken into, and the general population was dissatisfied with the illusion of reform in a one-party system. Kolingba, a member of the Yakoma people, which only accounted for five percent of the population, awarded the majority of powerful, key government and military positions to his fellow tribesman.

They were on the dirt road to the airport, surrounded by heavy vegetation, tall grass—Carr,

the nurse, an embassy security detail. They had successfully got Liz onto the plane for a midnight flight. On the way to the airport they'd passed a truck full of government troops patrolling the roads around Bangui.

"This was my little *Heart of Darkness* moment," Kizzier said, laughing, brushing it off. "They'd been pulling people out of cars and trucks, and burning the vehicles."

For some reason he thought of the red dust, the mineral laterite, the clay-like soil in the CAR was high in iron oxide, just like back in Mississippi, when Kizzier used to visit his grandparents.

Kizzier remembers yelling at the driver to start the car. As quickly as the mob converged however, they melted into the surrounding brush as the military truck returned.

One day, in passing, Sister Monica noticed a yellowish discoloration in Kizzier's eyes and asked him a battery of questions about his appetite and stool color. Liz had returned to the CAR with a clean bill of health. Kizzier thought for a minute before responding, then noticed he'd eaten very little in the past week.

With what would soon be a diagnosis of the viral liver disease Hepatitis A, along with giardia, a flagellated protozoan intestinal parasite, amoebic dysentery, streptococcal toxic shock, a flurry of rashes and boils on much of his body, and a 105-degree temperature, Kizzier made his way to the hospital in Bangui for treatment and, no longer contagious, three weeks convalescence in a hostel. Close to fully recovered, he decided it was time to leave so resigned his post and was soon on his way back to Denver. Later, the realization he wasn't going to die took on an embarrassing, self-deprecating tone.

Despite time's penchant for inconsistency, it slowed down enough in the Central African Republic for the 23-year old Kizzier to gain some currency. Peace Corps had validated that the

unexamined life is not worth living. Even though there was still no clear path forward, even though *it* was still there, somewhere behind him, he could stop looking over his shoulder, no longer in a hurry, more tempered, more sagacious, more resolute, more lyrical.

Kizzier went back to Denver, Chadwick, eventually found her way back to her home state of Connecticut. She visited Carr for a month before he and Greg Porter, a Peace Corps comrade who later would fulfill best man duties at Kizzier's wedding, headed to Seattle, the Pacific Northwest, in a kind of atavistic, early-90s vestige of nomadic hippie wanderlust. Kizzier mowed lawns at a golf course. "There's something about taking a plow and breaking new ground," Ken Kesey, novelist and perennial king of free spirit lifestyles, said. "It gives you energy."



Carr, daughter Finley, and wife Liz

The relationship between Kizzier and Chadwick that started in the more primordial, basic-needs environs of central Africa went into a period of restless hibernation until Liz moved to New Orleans in the spring of 1993 to pursue a Masters in Public Health at Tulane. Kizzier paid her a visit. Each had dated other people during the interim, but the well-being and ardor that came from reconnecting proved permanent. Kizzier returned to Seattle, packed his El Camino and moved to the Big Easy. Every 500 miles,

when the engine misfired, he had to pull out the sparkplugs, clean them with a wire brush, and add a quart of oil. Time was moving a little faster now, but hand- and footholds appeared with each maneuver. The two married in New Orleans in April, 1995.

Charles Bukowski's advice, "Don't get an MFA," and "Really, *don't* get an MFA," didn't grab Kizzier as much as some of the organic poet's other advice, like "Work all the jobs." Kizzier labored for a contractor, doing general renovations, before—inspired by several of his fellow Peace Corps cronies—enrolling in the MFA program at the University of New Orleans.

Writers of a certain ilk, Hemingway, Mailer, even Conrad, visceral writers who lifted their brand of prose to jungle grit and virility, who, especially early in their careers, sought validation at the keyboard through physical endurance and structured machinations, knew there was one more ominous step, that around the corner lurked that desperately lonely and endless obsession of breaking through the cliché of defining the human condition, which, more often than not, included the underlying, naked, often spurious truth about themselves they saw in much of humankind. It's already been a long road for Kizzier, who hated English 101 and 102 at West Point.

Like many of the students he teaches today, he didn't get the value of studying humanities. He wanted to be an engineer, a scientist, even though he first felt the amorphous but powerful longing to express himself in words way back in Mr. Telk's second grade. In the CAR there was a stretch of "bad poetry" inspired by Jim Morrison and, later, a collection of short stories, *Translations*, tales of Americans living in Africa, compiled for his MFA thesis. Most of all perhaps, there was walking through the jungle on a moonless night, stopping, seeing his reflection in the darkness, not knowing. *Is Peace Corps an apology for West Point,*

*or am I becoming my own person? Did my father love me? How does it matter? Am I a closed system? Ineluctable? Rosebud? Entropy?* After he moved to Baltimore, he took classes in filmmaking and photography at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Liz completed her MPH, received a fellowship from the University of Michigan and the couple were hoping to be posted in Latin America. Liz was able to defer her fellowship until her husband finished his MFA, when the two drifted to Mexico in a three-month sojourn to immerse themselves in Latin culture and to inculcate themselves in the velar fricatives of the Spanish language—Guanajuato, Mexico City, San Miguel de Allende. It was all preparation for what they hoped was a life devoted to humanitarian causes south of the border, only USAID, Liz's employer, posted her back to Africa, to Nairobi, Kenya, where the couple lived until the millennium. Carr did some substitute teaching and polished his short story collection. The Kizziers now reside in a vintage 1870 row home in the historic, waterfront, Baltimore City neighborhood of Fells Point, with its worn Belgian-block streets, nautical and immigrant history, and its flair for foodies, pub crawlers, and artists.

In a short story anthology on the shelves in Kizzier's office, the last page of Hemingway's "Indian Camp" is marked, a section of the last sentence carefully underlined in pencil. "In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt sure that he would never die." Kizzier neatly printed under the passage, "Why? After seeing all this?"

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