

On my relationship with Marlene Sockol

Dear Jamie and Steve

I don't envy your job of trying to write up a manuscript for a 6 hour feature movie from my book. The book builds on my slideshow and therefore is mainly concentrating on the black/white relationship although some personal letters with background stories were added to the book. But many of the most important people who helped shape my life in such a way that I ended up as a vagabond are not even mentioned in the book.

However, it might help you make a better script if you at least know a bit about these influential background persons – especially when they involve love since good TV-drama usually builds on some good love stories ☺ In the book I write only about my love affairs with a couple of black women and my ex-wife plus the white millionaire daughter of the Schlitz family (page 252, who later committed suicide, so this is a person we have to be a little careful with in the movie).

My lifelong continuing relationship to the black women mentioned in the book, Mary (page 106), Marilyn (181), Leslie (207 top) and Annie, my ex-wife (271) I will show you and talk about in my lecture “On saying yes to those we shun”.

That lecture is also very much about *our role* – those of us more fortunate or better-off people in society – in reaching out as their “saving angles” to the less fortunate.

I usually begin with my own “saving angles”, those people who in a loving and constructive way helped me out of my immature radical youth anger.

I will here tell you the story of two white women who changed my life. The strange thing is that I have never really thanked them for it in my book and show. Right from the beginning the media quickly built up an image (easily adopted also as my own self image) of a person who had somehow totally on his own created what they called “a master piece”. This is dangerous, for by neglecting the human forces behind any artistic creation and how we are all a product of the people around us, hero worshipping all too easily results which in turn instills in the audience a sense of powerlessness to change conditions – counterproductive to the whole idea in A.P. of demanding social change. I have over the years been analyzed over and over again - especially by American media - *how* and *why* I did what I did. For years I was too busy just spreading my message to ask myself these questions, but I have in old age had more time to reflect on which people actually

motivated me. So if any movies are made about American Pictures I think it is important somehow to include the story of the people who more than anybody caused it all. Here is my interpretation of their creative force behind the eventual success of American Pictures.

1: Mrs. Godfrey

She was my “mom” on the farm in Canada, who with her own youthful leftist radicalism, but now disillusioned idealism was the first one to make me deeply question my revolutionary romanticism. It was her influence more than anyone’s which suddenly made me turn around when in 1972 (after my sad breakup with Marly Sockol below) I tried to join the guerrillas in the mountains of Guatemala.

Margaret Godfrey is now dead, but from my 60 year birthday you can see my thanks to her and Charles Godfrey, who had flown in from Canada, 90 years old:

<http://www.american-pictures.com/video/party-60/jacobstale-2.htm>

The full Godfrey story I will send you later (when time permits) as well as how it all started with their daughter, Kristen, helping me to paint over my father’s church with political slogans the night before Easter. With the help of her, her brothers and her 96-year old father I think I could even reconstruct some of the long dialogues we had about the (un)wisdom of (violent) revolution which could inspire you to write a similar dialogue in the manuscript, if you need such a beginning.

<http://www.american-pictures.com/gallery/friends/Godfrey.htm>

2. Marly Sockol (today Marlene Mills)

Since Marlene (or Marly) is right now coming to Denmark to be interviewed for the Danish documentary which is being made about my life, I will start with her. She is one of the few (at least eloquent and thoughtful) remaining witnesses to my early youth in America and we have asked her to try to give an honest account of how she saw me in my most radical days. She is today a recently retired psychotherapist, who got her early training by being both my best and my worst critic ☺ She is coming to Denmark by the end of June and if my story about her below inspires you in any way, she would be extremely pleased to have a meeting with you, Jamie and Steve.

I don’t know what artistic direction your movie will take, but if you need a good love story to tie it

all together with and if you need to add a bit of humor to spice up an otherwise perhaps too sad movie (at least for the taste of American audiences), I have added some of the more funny moments from our relationship which I remember. When Marly reads this I am sure she can add a lot more with her much better memory and ability to remember my silly sides which I myself have long ago eagerly tried to suppress from memory ☺ Otherwise this is mostly a Google machine translation from Danish of one of my yearly 40-80 page long Christmas letter to old friends:

<http://www.american-pictures.com/dansk/jacob/julebrev/jul96-1.htm>. Here is what I wrote about Marly, when she in 1996 came to Denmark to celebrate our "silver anniversary" with my wife and me. Our 25 year anniversary happened exactly on the date of that night in 1971 when we met each other in the rain in Montreal standing in line outside a club.

(Let me briefly try to get the chronology right. I had worked on the farm in Canada all of 1970 and then got an invitation by an American woman, Ann Ruffner, an employee in Dr. Godfrey's office in Toronto, to spend New Year with her family near St. Louis. I hitchhiked down there with the idea afterwards to continue down through the Southern states to Guatemala to fight my revolution :-)
But all the young people I met in St. Louis warned me against hitchhiking through the South – “they shoot long haired hitchhikers there” – so afterwards I hitchhiked back up to Canada. The irony of trying to join a violent revolution in Guatemala, but being too scared to hitchhike through the relative safe American South didn't even strike me at the time in my naïve revolutionary romanticism ☺

I wanted instead to hitchhike via the safer route across Canada (in 3-6 feet deep snow) and then through California go down to Guatemala. However, in San Francisco I was robbed at gunpoint by 3 young black gang members and something else much worse also happened on the first day (which I will tell you about in my “On saying yes” lecture, it is not in the book for good reasons). It really shook me up, but right away made me interested in the black anger I perceived all around me and instinctively sympathized with. At the same time all the young anti-war activists I met in SF and Berkeley convinced me that I had to go to the big anti-war demonstrations in Washington in the end of April 1971 and I got a ride with some of them all the way to Detroit. And so my journey to Guatemala was again sidetracked.

In Detroit I ended up staying with the 3 black student mentioned in the “Easter in Detroit” letter (page 183). I drove with some of their friends to Washington and again got sidetracked through love and semi-revolutionary demonstrations trying to “shut down the government” (all of which was

both more fun and less dangerous than joining the real revolution in Latin America :-)

Afterwards I hitchhiked through Baltimore, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh up to Detroit to again stay with the black students, one of whom wanted to go with me down to join the guerrilla in Guatemala. However, he first had to finish some university exams so I decided to wait for him up in Canada, where I wanted to observe the revolution in Quebec at close hand. The previous October the Front de libération du Québec had kidnapped Pierre La Porte and everybody believed that Quebec would secede through a violent revolution. Well, again I got more involved in love than revolution ...by meeting Marly in Montreal in September 1971).

In our chat in that Montreal nightclub I mentioned to Marly that I had the Danish record in high jumping for youth. Eagerly trying to measure up with the well educated, intellectual Marly I didn't have too many other credentials to boast with at the time ☺ In her anthropology studies in NYU she was right then specializing in baboons, so when I told her about my strong legs (athletic experts had concluded that if I learned the right technique whereby my centre of gravity would come 30 cm under the crossbar instead of 50 cm above I had promising potential for the world record) Marly saw an opening excuse for inviting me home, "I really would like to study your legs closer up", even though she didn't even have her own home in Montreal, but had traveled up there to stay with a guy she knew (in her mind a potential boyfriend, as I remember it). After we spent our first night in his house she didn't feel so welcome there any more and I was not difficult to persuade into hitchhiking out of the revolutionary quack mire in Montreal up to Quebec City. Here we were allowed to stay in the city jail, where we actually didn't make it out of our iron bunk bed for most of a week, so busy was she "studying my legs." (This was also a new Canadian turn for me, for during the whole long year I had worked on the farm in Canada I had not been able to find a single Canadian girlfriend and actually felt so lonesome that I had written home to two old Danish girlfriends, I had long given up on, hoping that at least one of them would come over and stay with me. That is called Canadian desperation).

However, the seductive American women like Marly soon changed all of that and Marly became one of my first and certainly most influential American girlfriends. She persuaded me to move in with her in New York, but first we hitchhiked down to her childhood home in Brookline, MA – the very Jewish suburb of Boston. For Marly was also the first to introduce me to the Jewish world. In my rural Danish upbringing I had never known a Jew nor even learned any anti-Semitic thinking from my surroundings – uncultured as I was. ☺

One unfortunate aspect of this rural background was my West Jutland *Jante Law* tendency to say compliments in negative form. If you fall in love with a girl, where I came from, you would say “You’re not the worst I have met,” and she would be thrilled. But although in America I soon learned that this only caused hurt feelings there, in my clumsiness and shyness I was too stuck in my learned patterns. So in a loving moment when I tried, but couldn’t say these for me so foreign words to Marly, “You are beautiful, I love you,” I instead all of a sudden burst out: “You look like my grandmother just before she died!” Yet, to my great surprise Marly laughed and kept joking about it long after. It was the first time I experienced it and it is wrong to generalize from a strong individual like Marly, but over the years I learned just how much I felt in harmony and at home among American Jews and their teasing humor.

At the time America seemed incredibly rich compared to Denmark, so when I saw the wealthy home she grew up in I was so impressed that I took the staged photo of her in her parents bed on page 70 (top left) in my book. “Wow, you live like a Hollywood star,” I exclaimed. Since then, when over the years I returned, I could see that it was only an upper-middleclass home.

Nevertheless, her parents were to our relief right then in their second home in Florida which gave us plenty of space for her continuing “leg research” and one day she to my amazement and joy said: “My parents plan to live in Florida when they retire, so they will give us this house when we get married.” Wow, I thought, with my low self esteem as the black sheep who had been thrown out of high school and in my parents’ opinion had neither education nor future, now all my guilt problems toward my family were resolved. So I wrote home to my parents saying that they should stop worrying, for now I had found the girl of my life. This was one reason my parents later loved Marly so much, that she *voluntarily* had taken over their own problems and worries of bringing me up ☺

That our honeymoon was soon over I got to feel soon after when we arrived in New York and moved into her tiny tenement flat on the corner of 1st St and Second Ave on the at that time still poor Lower East Side. We shared it with her annoying room mate, who always flirted with me and approved of my “well hung” status when I showered in the bathtub in the kitchen. My English was still so bad that I didn’t understand why they both laughed at the word “well hung”. Marly was not intent on studying all day in university “just to support a penniless bum”, so she insisted that I had to work. Today I feel I must have been very faithful or obedient toward her, for in that way I ended up getting the only job I ever had in the five years of traveling. No other woman could later force me to work. If they did try, I would immediately walk out to the freedom of the highways.

But Marly had persuasive authority and knew the woman who owned the folk music club [“The gas light” in the Village](#), since she had once written an essay for her, which she got an A for. So she called the woman up and said: “Hey, you owe me something for that A, you have to hire this Danish bum I have staying with me – even though he is an illegal alien.” The woman had no choice and after taking a quick look at me and my breaded beard she felt she could only use me outside – as a drag man. After all, those were the hippie days were such a beard “worked”. Today it would not have gotten me hired in most places and this also became to be the last real or “honest” job I had in my life. I had to stand shouting all night on McDougal St “Free admission to night” which in my still revolutionary mood I quickly changed to “Free admission and all political prisoners” since countless black revolutionaries were in prison at that time. With my heavy Danish accent people found it quite charming. That I could get away with such politicizing without getting fired says something about the anti-establishment mood under Nixon. I was closer to getting fired by throwing Bob Dylan out one night since it was also my job not to let poor looking Puerto Ricans inside and in my race profiling mind he looked like one. Dylan was usually “blowing in the wind” in [Folk City](#) around the corner. Later I got promotion and ran the whole place by myself. So I had to introduce the different musicians, usually there would be two alternating - a well known name and a not so known upcoming musician. But for me they were all equally unknown, so the owner every night gave me their names on paper. Still, more than once I got the two names mixed up and was booed out by the audience when I introduced “Let’s give a warm hand to Jose Feliciano.....” and it was a totally unknown person standing on stage. It was not until I one day walked into a record store and saw the albums of all those friends I had now made in this primitive dark small club that I realized HOW famous many of them actually were. Since I was also making the coffee I would be hanging out for a whole week at a time in the kitchen behind stage with people such as [Jose Feliciano](#), [Cat Stevens](#) or [Yusuf Islam](#) (whose song [Where do the children play](#) I therefore later almost used in the children-under-highways section of my show in which all the music is chosen on the basis of some kind of personal connection I had to it), [James Taylor](#) (thus I was really glad to see him as the official entertainer at Obama’s 2nd inauguration) and [Phil Ochs](#), one of whose songs I later used in my show. But the one I got closest to – spiritually and physically - was blues musician [Bonnie Raitt](#) who was inspired by and alternated every night with the delta blues singer [Mississippi Fred McDowell](#). Fred died a couple of months later, but also inspired me profoundly with his stories every night about picking cotton in Mississippi – so much in fact that I can say with certainty that he was the reason I four years later hitchhiked to the delta to see if his descriptions from his youth

were still true in the 1970's – and in the process ended up in bed with the black pimp Ed in the story on page 127 “because I couldn't choose between his prostitutes”.

His legacy was also the reason I recently took Danish rightwing politician [Søren Pind to hitchhike with me on Highway 61 through the Mississippi delta](#) – the main route of oppressed southern blacks escaping North - and was filmed with him right in the spot where Bessie Smith was killed as seen towards the end here ([my long story to Søren Pind about all this was unfortunately cut out](#)).

Mississippi Fred Mc'Dowell's moving accounts of southern oppression literally threw Bonnie Raitt and me in the arms of each other and inspired our later artistic/political lives. She was two years younger than me and for me she somehow felt very “homely” by reminding me of the country girls in my rural Western Jutland. So for a short time it got really hot between us. Sadly/luckily because of my faithfulness to Marly our relationship was not allowed to develop, and today, where she is a double Grammy winner my wife often teases me whenever Bonnie Raitt is on Danish TV, "Well, there is certainly one of your old girlfriends who have completely forgotten about you!" Yes, but at least I can proudly claim that “it was me who helped launch her career!” For I introduced her on that small stage where a Newsweek reporter discovered her and blew her name up to such fame ...that she in the process – and through years of struggling with alcoholism - forgot all about me ☺

And that was also good, for my relationship with Marly developed so quickly and positively, that we were both sure it would end in marriage. That is not to say that there were no other female distractions. From my first days in America I had been totally taken by the beauty of black women and had already stayed with some during my travels such as Waltdenia Lewis in Chicago mentioned in the Introduction on page 5. But with their proud resistance toward white men during those “black is beautiful” days, I had not yet had any black girlfriend. Like Bonnie Raitt I felt emotionally drawn towards the black struggle and therefore romanticized these somehow inapproachable black women. Especially I loved their new proud afro hair styles and therefore constantly – also when I walked with Marly on the streets – turned around to get a glimpse of them over my shoulder. This inability to be “present” in our own relationship really annoyed Marly. So much that she one day bought an afro wig and started wearing it when we walked in the streets: “Will you please now start paying some attention to me?” she said with her usual teasing humor.

Marly is extremely intelligent and possessed a peculiar and at the time absolutely necessary ability

from above to criticize my escapist and not very well thought through leftist ideas. And most important, she did it in such a constructive way that I did not become defensive. No doubt because these ideas also attracted her since they were so much a part of that strong leftist, idealist tradition which I in the years since have worked so much with in my relationship with American Jews. As much as she felt attracted to those sides of me as much did she criticize them from her deep psychological insight which later made her switch from being doctor in New York to become a psychotherapist in SF. That she felt attracted to me exactly because of my leftist ideas I can see from her later life. For when I was invited to her later weddings or relationships I saw how they were with men even more fanatical leftists than me. Her first husband, Gary, a Jewish doctor and good friend of mine, is a good case in point. Shortly after their wedding in 1974 he went underground in order to blow up Rockefeller buildings. Marly and I had at most only flirtingly *talked* about bombing the Chase Manhattan building in our neighborhood on the day of Che Guevara's death. Here it is important again to remember the time frame: the genocide in Vietnam had reached 3 million murdered people and Nixon had just expanded the war into a similar bloodbath in Cambodia and Laos. Much of America's youth had therefore gone underground to actively resist. After the Vietnam War these violent youthful emotions had somehow lessened and Marly's next boyfriend Michael was far more peaceful, but in my view (since she had in the meantime successfully changed me) he was a fanatic Marxist labor organizer.

My relationship with Marly was therefore always ambivalent on my part - marked by the dilemma best expressed by my author/teacher who had influenced me in Folk High School, Erik Knudsen, in his poetry collection "The flower and the sword", which I carried with me as the only book in my packsack during all the vagabond years: should I throw myself entirely into the struggle - or should I throw myself entirely into a flowering marriage which would no doubt make me happier, safer and give me greater abundance than I could ever hope for again? Although I perceived Marly as somewhat philosophically exalted above it all, she actively - or at least with loving empathy - went with me to all the political meetings and demonstrations (eagerly [photographing my fanaticism](#)). Or – to give an illustrating example – she would sit patiently in the darkness during the Vietnam and revolutionary movies we went to, knitting a sweater for me made in the Vietnamese National Liberation Front's beautiful colors which I still wear to this day. 9 years later, when my son was born in 1980, Marly knitted a similar baby-size sweater for him and sent over for his christening: <http://www.american-pictures.com/gallery/family-1-children/Jacob.Daniel.Vietcong.htm>

There are many other things I don't mention in my book about this, my revolutionary period. But – all depending on what you choose to emphasize in your movie script – I think you should know about some of them, such as this one.

Just before Christmas 1971 we found cheap flights to London for only 50 dollars. So since we were pretty sure that we would get married, it made a lot of sense to make a surprise visit home for Christmas to present for my parents “my coming wife.” I had another reason which I did not at first tell Marly about. I needed her as a carrier of the many Vietnam books I had during my stay with her in New York stolen from various bookstores in order to give to the Danish Vietnam movement in which I had previously been a board member along with our later popular Danish prime minister, Anker Jørgensen. ([Years later at my 60-year birthday party I made this speech for him thanking him for being the first Western prime minister who dared to stand up against America's Vietnam genocide.](#))

Well, I am not so proud today about how I managed to “liberate” all these Vietnam books – very much influenced by both [Jerry Rubin's “Do it”](#) and [Abbie Hoffman's “Steal this book”](#). These two youth rebels had a tremendous impact on America's youth, so don't blame me for being the only crazy “liberator” in the name of revolution at that time ☺ Their “yippie” rebellion appealed to me since I had felt alienated from the heavy and boring Marxism of the European left. (After Abbie Hoffman went underground for many years, they by the way both became my competitors on the college lecture circuit – now as each other's enemies after Jerry Rubin turned conservative working “inside the system”.) It is often forgotten today how democratic the American “fascist state”, as the left called it, actually was during the Vietnam War. Contrary to later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan almost all the knowledge the world had about the Vietnam War came from American media. So there was an endless production of deep critical Vietnam analysis produced in America. All I needed to do – in my penniless state – was to go to the bookstores to get it. I would usually *liberate* one or two books in one bookstore and carry it out hidden on my back under Marly's voluminous Vietcong sweater, then go to the next bookstore and put the books on the counter. “Please, can you just watch my books while I look for some book I couldn't find in the other bookstores?” A little later I would come out with two more, continue to the next bookstore with 4 booksand in less than an afternoon come home with a meter high stack of valuable *free* books. Using the same route every day I thus invented the concept “chain bookstores” long before they invented themselves. I am sad to see how chains like Dalton and Barnes & Noble have since eaten up all my favorite independent bookstores such as the 8th St bookstore, but I guess I was myself very much a reason

for their deaths ☺ I still feel guilty every time I pass 8th St today.

But somehow I didn't feel guilty asking my beloved Marly to help carry all these heavy suitcases full of books home to Denmark - and "don't bring any unnecessary clothes" - when we were hitchhiking from the airport in London all the way through Belgium, Germany up to Copenhagen ☺ Yet, I shall never forget her whining under all that weight and how "liberated" she felt when the two day trip was over.

I was a bit afraid about coming home since I had two years earlier had an angry departure from my father after painting his church over with political slogans the night before his important Easter service after which he kicked me out and drove me straight to the highway (I will write more about that later since I don't think I wrote about that decisive event in my book). So to avoid the risk of my father perhaps not accepting his prodigal son if we came and knocked on the door in his rectory, Marly and I sneaked along the dark houses in the village into the packed village church during the Christmas eve service. I knew that when my father discovered me from the pulpit, he couldn't reject me in front of his congregation. And of course, when he saw that beautiful charming woman I brought with me home he absolutely melted. Just as I had used Marly's charm and ability to converse with everybody when we hitchhiked together to make up for my own shortcomings in such human skills (she hated when I always insisted that she had to sit in the front seat next to the male drivers and entertain them while I slept in the back seat :-), well, I now used her in the same driver's seat role to help loosen up my difficult relationship with my parents at that time.

[And my God did she win over their hearts!](#) She made them for the first time see some hope for their son whose future they had long given up on. My present wife, Vibeke, came to suffer from that for years after when my parents always teasingly told her, "Marly was the best girlfriend Jacob ever brought home." They were certainly right in the sense that without Marly I would not have met Vibeke, as my continuing story here will show.

My parent's enthusiasm for Marly was based on what they saw in her of a much needed rational counterbalance to my own fanatical madness - that is to say, as my only salvation! Yet, Marly revealed some of her own hidden madness in her attempts to get along with mine or to please me. She wanted to see all of Europe during her short two week university vacation. "How?" I asked. "We just hitchhike around," she replied. And thus after a few days of spending Christmas with my parents she talked me into something I at the time thought was crazy, seeing most of Europe - one

country a day – truly American style travelling. But we did it in two weeks with no money – even in cold January and even communist countries; although to my great disappointment we didn't succeed from Hungary to get into the still Russian occupied Czechoslovakia whose anti-soviet rebellion [had caused me to sit in a hunger strike for a week outside the Soviet embassy](#) in Copenhagen 3 years earlier. Unlike much of the European left I had never flirted with Soviet style Communism and experiencing the strong anti-Semitism in Hungary certainly further reduced any illusions I might have had about socialism as a viable solution for the racism I saw in America.

After our two week hitchhiking trip around Europe Marly had to go back to university in New York and begged me to come with her. But I had been invited to a school in Denmark to do a talk about the great youth movement in America illustrated with the only 80 pictures I had taken at that point (so amateurish that almost none of them were good enough later to be included in American Pictures). Since the opposition to the war was growing strongly in Denmark, people hungered for information from the U.S. Suddenly I was seen as some kind of first hand witness and since I was known to have been totally quiet and withdrawn in school to my own amazement I now turned into an enthusiastic public speaker. So I started getting more and more invitations and enjoyed all the attention I got. Americans and Marly had helped build up much of the self esteem which had been crushed in my youth by the [Danish Law of Jante oppression](#). Now I could get higher self esteem - even in Denmark - just by talking about a country without such Jante Law and its rebellion against oppression and authority. Therefore I kept delaying my departure. Marly kept calling me to get me back quickly, and this impressed me a lot since it was very expensive then to telephone from the USA (in two years I had never called my parents). Finally she called and said that I had to come immediately since she was about to fall in love with a Cuban. I knew she was not lying, but kept anyway dragging out my return - more or less unconsciously, I think today. And when I finally came back to New York on April 22nd it was too late. She had met one of Fidel Castro's closest "comrade in arms" and leaders of the Cuban Revolution, Enrique, who had now turned disillusioned and counter-revolutionary, and fallen in love with him. With all the enthusiasm Marly knew I had for Cuba at the time, this was like getting a slap in the abdomen. When they moved together, I was completely knocked out throughout the rest of the year, which was what prompted me to go on the road – homeless, lost and disillusioned and again without a future.

I realized now how deeply in love I was with Marly and especially how mentally tied I had been to her in my own political insecurity. It was as if in trying to choose between the two I had lost both

the flower and the interest for the sword. I knew I had blown the chance of my life and for a long time had difficulties opening up to new people. In this difficult crisis I gradually found, as you know, my new identity and happiness on the road. My grandmother who in all my years of vagabonding kept writing me letters asking me to come home and in the family tradition become a minister of church actually was my help now. For as she had always said - or predicted - in her typical confirmation speech style: "The goal you'll never reach my son, but in your wanderings you will find your happiness!" In the meeting with my first Jewish infatuation, I had now been condemned myself to the pain of becoming an Ahasuerus - the eternal wandering Jew. When so many of us in old age sit and wonder why life just crumbled in our hands, for my part there is no doubt that it was because I never had the ability - or dared - to give myself all the way - neither to the flower nor the sword - neither to love nor revolution. I wanted to have it all and therefore ended up losing it all - doomed always to stand outside as the spectator - infinitely recording and dissecting - eventually not only others, but also my own navel (as you can see an example of here). The short-term gain of my burning the bridges behind me was no doubt the creation of Am. Pictures. Much art is probably created in pain. When a French film director after my Cannes Film Festival introduction in 1982 wanted to make a screen adaptation of my life with David Carradine in the lead role, I right away imagined a sad love story in which half of the movie would be about my relationship with Marly, and the other half about the pain, it resulted in - my eternal wandering as an outcast in the ghettos. For my psyche that year (the rest of 1972) was clearly something like: when I can't get heaven, I only want hell. Only gradually did that inner pain teach me to love and cultivate that hell by identifying with the pain around me.

As if to further emphasize the break-up between us, Marly that year dressed extremely "bourgeois" - in expensive furs and similar luxury which she knew that I hated. She later admitted that this whole "reaction" was a clumsy attempt to liberate herself from me by going straight to the other extreme - the either-or extremism which I have seen so often in (American) Jews. Nonetheless, less than a year after she finished these Cuban counterrevolutionary activities and tried to resume our relationship. She even proposed that we together hitchhiked down to support Allende's democratic revolution in Chile. This revolutionary attempt to create social justice for the poor was something completely new which we both could only support after having seen the undemocratic nature of communism in Eastern Europe. But here I again burned all bridges behind me by turning down the idea with the explanation that I had now thrown myself fully into a photographic recording of

America's racial oppression. In Chile I certainly could have gotten both love and revolution in one mouthful, for if we had left, we would have been there during the military coup in 1973 and would probably have ended our days along with so many other revolutionaries. In the Santiago stadium we could have had a beautiful death in each other's arms under Pinochet's hail of bullets. But, no, once again, I dared not to give myself to neither love nor revolution and instead put the tail between the legs like a coward choosing the easy ghetto escape instead.

Then in 1974 Marly married the even more revolutionary Gary. It was a classic Jewish wedding with such an abundance of food that my only objection to their marriage was a silent but gigantic poop in the toilet. It was impossible to flush out and ended up blocking for the guests the rest of the day, which no one later could forget me for. Certainly not Marly's father who had to spend hours of his beloved daughter's wedding trying to dig up all the shit of her former gentile boyfriend.

Later – during her marriage with Gary - Marly suggested that we two again hitchhiked together up to Boston to spend the night in her parent's empty house. In a moment of sentimentality she tried to revive our sexual relationship, I sensed - for understandable reasons, since none of us had ever been into such intense and explosive a sexual relationship with anyone before. But again I was afraid to get too close to her – or perhaps childishly just tried to show her that I could now stand on my own feet. So after a wonderful hitchhike and dinner with her in the house, to her surprise and disappointment I suddenly took off and spent the night with a more peripheral girlfriend in Boston, [film critic Helen Linné](#). Since my own temptation admittedly had been great (or perhaps only to tease Marly once again), I have placed them right under each other on the same page 70 in the book - for if I had resumed my relationship with Marly that night, that book probably would never have been made. I had by then long ago learned in the hardships on the highways that by allowing myself to go through a bit of momentary pain I was always rewarded and ended up in heaven.

There is a funny by note to our great sexual relationship which Marly had often entertained her female friends about. So when she broke up with me several of them stood in line to take over her “Danish lover”. It again says something about the freewheeling times, I think, for Marly had already lined them up for me, such as her roommate Christi and friend Beth Kaplan out in Brooklyn. Beth had eagerly waited for that moment. But never shall I forget our first and only night together. We absolutely couldn't communicate and didn't turn on each other one damn bit. So I escaped back out to the freedom of the highways already early next morning ... a freedom in which I had plenty of possibilities to find someone like Marly again, but never found itand in my deep frustration

instead made American Pictures, which I have been happily married to ever since ☺

And as a tangible result of that joint project with Marly, [my present wife Vibeke](#) a month after the book was published flirtingly came up to me in all her beauty and said: “I have read your fantastic book.” And since her 5 year long fiancée, Ole, whom she lived with at the time, had also been so inspired by my book that he had gone on a hitchhiking trip around America, well, during his American absence I now stole his future wife. Thank you, Marly and [Ole \(who is today also my best friend\)](#)! Ole has in the years since been my curator – choosing and hanging every one of my Danish photo exhibitions. My pictures means a lot to him – the pictures which made him loose his future wife (sadly he never really found another since).

The 1996 anniversary - with reflections to the past.

With all the insights Marly had gained over the years into my deeper psyche she since threw herself with great fervor and deep sympathy into the role of marriage counselor - for my present wife Vibeke :-). We had often stayed with her and her later husband Lew in San Francisco.

Therefore, now both Vibeke and I looked forward to celebrate my 25th anniversary with Marly and I threw everything from me when she came to stay with us in Copenhagen. Marly fully understood my need to be a good host. She is herself one of the best examples of what I love in so many Jewish women – “Jewish motherly love” – [and here I don't mean the negative stereotype](#). Actually, during the years of her marriage to Gary, I continued to hitchhike the 4000 km up from the South to New York at least once a month – often to spend only a short weekend with them – in order to enjoy her motherly care with the best Jewish delicacies, pickles, herrings or bagels with lox and cream cheese. I got so hooked on Marly's bagels that in all the years I have since spent on the lecture circuit I rarely start a day without eating two toasted garlic bagels with cream cheese. In her days I could only get it in the Jewish areas, such as Brookline and New York. But thanks to another Jewish radical activist from Boston, William Rosenberg, who later turned entrepreneur and philanthropist, I can now eat these Brookline style bagels throughout the country in his chain of Dunkin Donuts. After weeks of hunger in the southern ghettos I also enjoyed Marly's juicy NY steaks. “What, you hitchhike 2500 miles up in that cold just for a steak?” my drivers would ask with surprise. “Yeah, but I will be back down here in the heat again in 3 days.” After which the drivers felt so guilty that they themselves invited me on steaks all the way. By then I had thoroughly learned every needed trick to live for free on the road – and make people feel like Good Samaritans in the process. In her motherly caring for me [Marly would even buy identical shirts for me and Gary](#) so as to not

make any one of the two she loved (and both still loves) feel less loved than the other ☺ Although I have never liked checkered shirts I was so moved by this that I kept travelling with this shirt. I was used to people giving me their old laid off clothes and for a while traveled around in a big black and bulky Hassidic Jewish suit given to me by a Hassidic family who picked me up and let me stay with them in Brooklyn. But Marly was the only one in these five vagabond years to actually go out and buy me new clothes. So that checkered shirt I put on at all “fine” occasions, such as two years later, [where I am seen wearing it at Popeye’s funeral here](#). Years later, in 2001, I had my first photo exhibition in Copenhagen to celebrate American Pictures’ 25 year anniversary. Since I didn’t have enough exhibition photos at the time the curator set up some showcases to make a display of how the technology of the show had developed over the years. When this still was not enough to fill out the space he got the idea of making a showcase of various effects from my vagabond years. And so Marly’s checkered shirt and knitted Vietcong sweater ended up on display in a European museum! But the main reason for hitchhiking across America once a month during 1973-75 was not only to see Marly, but to see the latest of the slides I had taken. For of all the people I knew in the United States at that time, I only trusted Marly to store these for me so valuable photos of pain I had started taking that painful year I was in her dog house and couldn’t get to see her.

Visiting now in Denmark years later Marly was also herself the perfect guest. She showed genuine enthusiasm for everything I served and showed her of what we hold dear in Denmark. However, on our bicycle ride out to [Christiania \(a hippie Freetown\)](#) things nearly went wrong. Her daughter, Erica, who was not accustomed to riding a bike at home in the hilly San Francisco, in a gust of wind on [Knippel bridge](#) swung suddenly out in front of a fast bus. She was barely an inch from certain death and we were all so shaken that we literally threw ourselves down in front of the altar in the beautiful afternoon light of the King Christian’s Church to thank God. It nearly destroyed the best experience for all my U.S. guests, the trip to Christiania. But the shock was turned to joy when we shortly after got seated in “The Dandelion” to eat hot pancakes with Tania, who is the daughter of another [former girlfriend who influenced my life, Annie Hedvard](#), and still calls me her substitute father. And thus, through Tania's exuberant enthusiasm and narrative ability and own Jewish descent, the still shaken Marly nevertheless managed to get a positive impression of Christiania. Since we all bloom from the extroversion we typically get during holidays away from our daily stress, I now totally fell in love with Marly again and it was a wonderful feeling, which fortunately also Vibeke harbored towards her.

Here my (slightly updated) account from the 1996 Christmas letter ends, but there are many more stories to add from my continuing friendship with Marly.

In 1998 my son, Jacob Daniel, 18 years old, wanted to show his father that he could now stand on his own feet by hitchhiking the same 16.000 km route through the black ghettos which I took him hitchhiking – or “catching cars” as he then called it - when he was 2 years old. Vibeke and I were terribly nervous about his first part of the trip from New York to San Francisco, where we had arranged with Marly to house him. I imagined he would go through all the same abuse from “dirty old men” and “dirty old women” I myself once went through daily, but was not sure he was strong enough to take it – being more than 6 years younger than I had been as a vagabond. So after not hearing from him for a week I e-mailed Marly and said: “You must let him go through a deep psychological observation to see if he has suffered any damage.”

After a few days Marly wrote back: “I have now examined him for a few days. He is absolutely wonderful and I must say that he is far healthier than I remember his father ever was :-)”

Nevertheless, in 2004 Marly sent an open Christmas card to us starting with: “Dear Jacob and Vibeke. I just divorced Lew after 25 years of marriage. Dear Jacob, please come back!”

Then Vibeke looked at me and laughed: “I think you better go back. As your parents always told me “Marly was the best!””

So then I moved back and after a 33 year break up we started up our relationship again ☺

Marly had now started dating on the internet and wanted my approval of the chosen one. So she asked me down to her office to go through files of possible Jewish men. I said about most of them, “No, not him,” after which she immediately tore up the file and trashed it. My few chosen ones were then called in for a personal date so they could meet me. It was all very fun – like we were one family - and now Marly is happily married to a man I can only approve of. But what I really enjoy in her relationship with Burt – contrary to the other men I have previously seen her with – is that it is now him, who takes the wise *aloof* critical psychological position when he sees her “going too much off” into radical politics - as the crazy rebel Marly always was, but managed to hide so well by living it out through even crazier radical men. And now I tend emotionally to be on Burt’s side and it feels absolutely wonderful to finally having matured so much – with Marly’s help – that it is now my turn to help her mature a bit ☺ So I will no doubt continue to come and live with them in their wonderful spacious house in the mountains north of San Franciscotill death do us part.

Well, this is what I remember of my relationship with Marly. I know she remembers far more – especially of all the silly things I have said through our 42 years together. So I will probably have to once more put up with being corrected by her – if you want the full truth about our rewarding life relationship. Not least as seen from the woman’s position or that of a trained psychologist. However, in terms of these two exiting movies (Steve McQueen’s and Copenhagen Film’s) about my white/gentile majority relationship to minorities I also think her perspective coming from that of a Jewish minority would be interesting to explore – even though Marly in good (American) Jewish tradition has also rebelled against such a label – by being a human being first and only.

With eternal love

Jacob Holdt

Here are my photos of Marly over the years – and some of her photos of me from my radical years:

<http://www.american-pictures.com/gallery/friends/Marly.Sockol/index.htm>

From a film perspective I forgot one important detail above although it also meant a lot to me:

It was a (black, gay) film director, [Albert Johnson](#), who first brought American Pictures to America, when he saw it in the Cannes Film Festival in 1981. He made it the opening movie in his San Francisco Film Festival in 1982, where it got long standing ovations afterwards from 1600 sitting and standing spectators in the [Castro Cinema](#) right in the middle of the Castro gay district.

Afterwards it was Marly who threw the big party. It was also the first time I openly thanked her for her contribution in the only credits I had after the 4 hour movie:

“This movie would not have been possible without the encouragement and financial donations I received from: Alice Turak (\$10), John Ray (\$20), Susan Kennedy (\$30), Cary Ridders (\$50), Allan Tunick (15 rolls of film). Special thanks to Eveleen Henry and Marly Sockol for storing my slides and to [Tommy Howard](#) for lending me his old Buick with several tanks of gas.”

As a result of this tremendous first welcome in America I decided to place our first theater for the slide show right there in San Francisco with the help of the gay group “Black and White Men together”. During that first difficult year in American show business Marly gave our group tremendous help in terms of housing and emotional support.