



The Marion (Ohio) Star Interview with Vincent Nicolosi

March 2010:

This is the first book you've written?

This is the first I have published under the name with which I was born, the first I care to claim. Even up to the end, as work on this book drew to an end, I thought of using a pseudonym. At last though, I will say that I personally like IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME. It is Vincent Nicolosi's novel, the culmination of some of my fascinations with, and musings over, the town and places where I was born and raised, and some of the stories and legends with which I grew up - and so IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME bears my name.

How long have you been writing?

I would like to say that I have been writing for as long as I can remember, but that would not be quite true. I will say that, very early on, when I was in grade school at St. Marys, my grandmother gave me a fountain pen, which I came to love. Sometimes I wrote with that pen just for the sake of feeling its smooth nib flowing across the page. That was the seed of my first interest.

What inspired you to write it [IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME]?

President and Mrs. Harding and their story always fascinated me - the Memorial too, and of course Marion. Back in those days, in the mid 20th century, one could still find Indian arrowheads while working in the garden. I know that for a fact, as I found more than one. And the ancient buckeye tree in our neighbor's backyard, in Mrs. Bacon's yard, was surely primeval. Thus the past was everywhere present: Indian lore, pioneer lore, Harding lore - and the lore inherent in the land. These things were still palpable back then and I possessed youthful interests in

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*each, and in antiquity, both aboriginal and classical. In Marion we had it all - the area called Indian Mounds was far more extensive then, before development encroached. I was also interested in classical architecture and stone - as in marble and granite - and the edifices built with them; we had that too, in the Memorial. Thus in Marion I had various links to the elaborate and mysterious world of the past, to the fertile world of history. And more specifically, my grandmother told me about Mr. and Mrs. Harding and the people of that era, the people she remembered. My mom knew Carrie Phillips - not well, I do not think, but they knew each other. Mrs. Phillips lived on Mt. Vernon Avenue, near the Catholic high school. As with so many others, I knew even before Francis Russell arrived in town that Mrs. Phillips had been a "special friend" of Mr. Harding's, though I am sure that I did not read between the lines and discern the quality of that friendship. And I can assure you that my devout Catholic mother did not speak of such things to her children. What inspired me to write *IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME? My life in Marion - and the lives of others, those alive during my time and those who had already passed from the scene.**

What led you to make the events of President Harding's life and rumors about him the centerpiece of the book?

Again, it was all such a good story - a story into which I was born, a story waiting to be told. I told it as best I could.

Throughout the novel you sprinkle Marion locations and entities, why?

Because that's where the story takes place!!? Marion, Ohio, northern Marion County and the Catawba Peninsula of Lake Erie. Rich soil in more ways than one.

Do you have a favorite place in Marion? What is it and why?

Well, you must understand that I have not been to Marion for many years, and I have not lived there for decades; thus I do not know Marion as it is now. But I can tell you some of my favorite places from back then. Not just one, but also a sort of montage of locales dear to me. I simply liked being downtown. When I was a child my mom used to take my little sister and me "window shopping" - so I liked going and being in the center of Marion, and then walking home, down those limestone

sidewalks, beneath the trees. We walked a lot then; that's how you really see a town, by getting out and walking. If you really, really want to see Paris, for instance, skip the cabs and Metro and walk. Or Marion - walk. I believe this book would be very different indeed if I had not been so prone to wandering, adventuring, to seeing.

Also my father owned the Riviera, a restaurant at 142 South Main Street. The building had this little niche in the front, outside with some shrubs planted - nothing special, but it was there. I liked sitting on the little ledge of that place and watching the world go by on Main Street. I knew everyone and they knew me, or so it seems now, looking back; there were lots of folks to say hello to, walking by of a summer afternoon on Main Street.

It may sound odd in terms of being a "favorite place," and I suppose it was uncommon even then, but I also liked the railroad tracks and walking along them with my friends and my little sister; the tracks, of course, linked the town and the faraway. The ties and rails were right there at your feet, stretching into the horizon and far, far beyond. I also liked the stillness of the tracks and then the roaring excitement when a train passed by.

As for interior places, I greatly loved the upper floors of the Courthouse. What an extravagant and monumental place that was. And what an outrageous crime that it was destroyed. When I was paperboy for the Star, I picked up my bundle on the ground floor. Sometimes the papers arrived late, or I arrived early (sometimes making a point of doing so), and I would ascend to the upper floors of the Courthouse, to that vast and shadowy rotunda, always so quiet, like a church in midday. That was a good place for a boy to dream and aspire. I believe my friends loved it too. We spoke in whispers there. I suppose we took the place for granted, a form of beauty so immense and solid and sacrosanct that one assumed it would always be there. I wrote a letter about its destruction to the Star in September or October of, I think, 1999. My brother still chides me every now and then about being harsh or heavy handed toward those who destroyed the place, the vandals, but I would stand by anything I said. I loved that place, and now it's gone forever; the crime remains indefensible - and so far as I know, the criminals went unpunished. How ironic is that? To think, the Courthouse's interior,

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including the courtrooms – destroyed, and the criminals never even brought to justice. Heaven only knows where the police and sheriff were – and how such an atrocity was allowed to happen. Historically it is invading armies, enemies, which bring about such punitive cultural destruction for the humiliation and demoralization of the populous. With the destruction of the Courthouse interior, presumably, the enemies were homegrown.

On the proverbial happier note, most assuredly, the Palace Theatre was also a favorite, a great and beloved place. Fortunately, the Palace abides. Sometimes I visit its website and remember some of the many, many movies that we saw there. My sister recently mentioned that she would like for us to fly in some weekend and meet up for a visit. Seeing the Palace Theatre of our childhood would be the raison d'etre, the magnet compelling us homeward.

Did you always intend to write a fictional piece or did it begin as a work of nonfiction?

*Fiction – absolutely. Far more effective for the conjuring of ghosts, for capturing the essence of eras and events – as we've seen since the time of Homer. What's more, you still get to use the facts of nonfiction. Obviously film directors – and audiences – have known this for a very long time, and so a movie like Terrance Malick's *The Thin Red Line* may be far more compelling and possibly illuminating than a documentary on the Battle of Guadalcanal, or a recreation of the sinking of the Titanic can, in the right cinematic hands, be rather lifelike, as we saw a few years back – the reality of those historical events enhanced by fictionalization. Most any kind of supportive details work beautifully in fiction, at least in theory and possibility. But using fiction in nonfiction is a bit frowned upon.*

What did your research for the book entail?

Much of it, simply the reading I'd done through a lifetime. Some of it, I stumbled upon early on and incorporated later. For instance, Lieutenant-General von Freytag-Loringhoven's book "Deductions from the World War" found its way into the novel, the Great War chapter, simply because I'd read it some time before and the fellow's book

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*resurrected itself in my thoughts and, I guess, decided that it wanted to have a supporting role, so to speak, in the novel - and so it sort of elbowed its way in, Prussian style, and inspired its own role. I also love great research libraries, and so *IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME* gave me an excuse to haunt the Rose Reading Room of the New York Public Library, the Columbia University libraries and the Library of Congress, among others. My problem is that I cannot be satisfied with finding just a single fact or gleaning a useful detail, I seem to undertake total immersion in a topic, learning far more than I need to know, but I find that such immersion informs the story in subtle ways. And it's quite fun.*

What was the most challenging aspect of writing the book?

Breathing life into the early manifestations of characters before they came into their own; once they were drawing breathes, they engendered the tale with the mythic reality of their presence - their lives and thoughts and actions. Also it was a great challenge to weave and control all of the varied threads that became the vast tapestry of this story.

What do you want readers to gain from reading your novel?

I did not write the novel for didactic purposes, doubtless if I had, I would have ruined it. Thus I guess what I would like for readers to gain is worthwhile enjoyment from what I hope is a good read. But I would also like them to gain the realization that Warren G. Harding, maligned for years after his death, was a better President than so many historians and biographers have led us to believe. I am not sure how so very many of them missed the facts.

As James Robenalt states in praise of your book on the back cover he worries it may promote additional mythology about President Harding. Do you think it will? And how do you feel about that?

I was and am grateful for Mr. Robenalt's comment, and Jim and I have developed a lively if intermittent email sort of friendship, which I greatly value and enjoy. Personally, I think he's a really great guy - and I am sure he's a brilliant attorney; I can tell. That said, even on the day he sent that quote, I wondered exactly what he meant, exactly what he had in mind - not that I do not have a profound appreciation for myths, which are basically the articulation of a culture's dreams. I am simply

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not sure what particular myths, directly having to do with the President, that I may have added. Recounted, yes, indeed, most, if not all of them. (I tried - they're all so fascinating.) But added? The adulterous affairs are well known; the poison rumor existed, why, the novel even cites exact page numbers where historians mention this issue in their books; the mixed blood thing... well, just Google that one... I simply do not know what myths I may have added to the roll of myths that exist regarding Mr. Harding. I didn't make any up; at least I do not think I did. Nor did I ask Jim what he meant, simply because I did not want to appear quarrelsome or ungrateful, but frankly, I did not really understand that point; and mind you, I don't need to. One way or another, it's a great quote, and I am grateful.

Just as you suggest in your novel, people in Marion feel differently than non-residents about Harding. Do you feel your book appeals primarily to Marion residents? Why or why not?

*I most certainly did not write the book primarily for Marion residents; I do not even know all that many any more. I wrote the novel for a universal audience, for people everywhere who like to read about this great and complex world in which we live, whether the particular milieu is local or half a world away. Already I have received a charming comment from a writer I greatly admire in England - a winner of the Man Booker Prize, no less - who said he was ninety some pages into *IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME*, and was emailing me his congratulations. (I do not think it is kosher to use his name here to promote my book; the email was meant for personal consumption, I believe - and some of us, I guess, are old school.) Anyway, I believe the story, the ambitions and motivations that propel it, exceed the limits of place and time - as any good story must in order to succeed, and by succeed, I mean endure - to inhabit the world beyond its own time and place.*

Do you plan to write another book?

*Others plan for Vincent Nicolosi to write another book, but as for me... not sure. I am constantly writing, but then again, I am constantly engaged in lots and lots of enterprises. I suspect that, if I do write another book, then the book will appear under a pseudonym, one that will free the writer from issues and expectations generated by *IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME*.*

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What will its subject be?

It would almost certainly take place in Europe.

Who are your parents (both still living?)?

My parents were Ralph Michael Nicolosi and Sylvia Smith Nicolosi; my father died in 1968, my mother in 1994. Both lived in Marion all of their lives, though my mother traveled a lot in the last decades of her life.

Brothers and sisters? Any currently living in Marion area?

I still have cousins living in Marion and in central Ohio, as well as elsewhere, of course.

As for my siblings, my brother Gregory, the eldest of the children born to our parents, left Marion to go to college in about 1961; my sister Anita, four years my junior, left in the early 1970s for the same reason. Jerome, the second born of my siblings, headed for college in the mid '60s; Jerry died in '98.

During what time period did you live here? Did you graduate from a Marion-area high school? Which one?

I graduated from Marion Harding High School, Class of 1969.

When did you leave Marion and what were the circumstances that took you away?

I left Marion in the fall of 1971, after attending OSUM. Then I headed for Ohio State; after Columbus, I headed for a string of distant elsewheres and have lived, thus far, to tell the tale. I never lived in Marion again, though I returned a couple of times a year, until my mother passed from the scene.

What are you doing to promote the book?

Responding to your questions - and making all kinds of useful suggestions to the marketing people about how to market a novel by an author who, thus far, has politely declined public participation in that very endeavor.

Any plans to visit Marion for a book signing or any other promotional event?

No. And on that note I'll say thanks - and sayonara.

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