

the fifties about the thirty-two University of California professors fired for not signing anticommunist loyalty oaths.

My mother died in '38, my sister in '45. One daughter lives in Paris now with the grandchildren, the other two are singletons in L.A. When my wife passed away of the cancer in 1960, I retired to Del Rey, Florida. Eight years I've been here now.

In my senior residence we have the shuffleboard, we have B'nai B'rith. The big sport is playing bumper cars in our Lincoln Continentals to nab the spot closest to the entrance of the restaurant in time for the early bird special. I like watching The Smothers Brothers, I listen to Aretha Franklin on my record player, and I send money to plant trees in Israel in the names of all my dead relatives. But mostly, I finally have time to look back, turn it all over in my mind—cogitate, so to speak.

For example, I wonder what Houdini would have thought about World War II, about the six million of our people who never escaped. Or what Mrs. Winchester would have to say about the millions killed by the M1 produced by the very same Winchester corporation. Imagine how crowded that séance room would be now, how endless that mansion.

As far as I know, Houdini only returned to the Winchester Spirit House one more time, after Sarah Winchester died in her sleep. In 1924 Houdini got himself invited on a tour of the mansion at midnight, but nothing happened—at least that's what he told the newspapers. In the article he sounded bitter. Houdini himself died in 1926 of a burst appendix. His last request, so they say, was to order out for Farmer's Chop Suey.

That last request makes me wonder about my own mother, and the mysteries of mothers in general. How did she conjure that endless love for me? What would it be like to be in that séance room, so the Widow Winchester could bring my mother to me, and my sister, and my darling wife, even if just for thirty-three minutes.

But so far I've had no ghostly visitations from my beloveds. Even Houdini and Mrs. Winchester have been silent.

Still, no one was silent back then. What energy we had! What verve! I thought we were so different—I searching for the truth, they trying to escape it. But the truth is,

we're all the same: me, Houdini, Mrs. Winchester—even these young people I see on television, burning their draft cards and their bras and dancing like meshugas to that meshuga music.

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the twentieth century! Take a seat. You will observe such wonders! Mercurial escapes, absurd and endless construction, utopian dreams, outrageous savagery! Wait, we still have some tricks up our sleeve.

Please, don't go.

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Westloaf, 2013
mixed media, 11 x 14 in



courtesy the artist