



In the Evil Day: Violence Comes to One Small Town

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On the afternoon of August 19, 1997, John Harrigan—owner and publisher of the News and Sentinel newspaper in Colebrook, New Hampshire—arrived at his building to find the woman he loved lying dead in the parking lot. Lawyer Vickie Bunnell had been shot and killed by a local carpenter wielding an assault rifle. By then, three more people were already dead or dying. More mayhem was to ensue in an afternoon of plot twists too improbable for a novel. The roots of the incident stretch back twenty-five years, with tendrils deep in the history of New England's North Country. These bloody events shocked America and made headlines across the world. Hundreds of local citizens became unwilling players in the drama—friends and colleagues of the dead, men and women who were themselves real or potential targets, along with their neighbors in law enforcement—but the town and its inhabitants were never passive victims. From the first shot fired that day, they remained courageously determined to survive. This is the story of that town, those people, and that day. *In the Evil Day* is a moving portrait of small-town life and familiar characters forever changed by sudden violence.

In the Evil Day: Violence Comes to One Small Town Details

Date : Published September 1st 2015 by ForeEdge (first published August 22nd 2015)

ISBN : 9781611687156

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Format : Hardcover 336 pages

Genre : Crime, True Crime, Nonfiction, Thriller

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Kamalendu Nath says

A remarkable, exhaustive narration of a mini-carnage and chaos centered around the town of Colebrook (North Country - New Hampshire) that spills over across the river in Vermont, on Tuesday, August 19, 1997. It is a very well-researched, meandering telling of true happenings with backgrounds that occasionally spirals out, as a tale in a tale in a tale and so on, sometimes makes keeping with the flow difficult.

Initially you are led through a dozen or so of characters, some of which can be grasped (troopers Les Lord, Scott Phillips and few other; weekly newspaper sentinel owner John Harrigan and few employees; Bunnell family etc.) but later it is an avalanche. Another way to put it mildly, it's like film-clips from the Living Dead: bodies popping up left and right as the Carl Drega, the main antagonist, saga unfolds – unlike in the beginning, it goes haywire (names and roles of all possible types of enforcement agents; various strata of towns' people: all in acts – several towns; etc.) with tales of many, many characters (who's who – what – where – etc.) and you are better off let go and just enjoy the ride! That way you can take in the chaos, the ethos and the mayhem and feel, in part, a witness to the unfolding terror. Confusion all around involving various town-full of people! Although, most 'violence came to one small town' it did spill over in a surrounding larger area (also I don't believe 'The Day' can be 'Evil' or 'Benevolent').

The photographs are nice but a map or a sketch of the towns mentioned (Colebrook, NH and surround) would have been helpful for people who have little knowledge of the North Country (Columbia, NH; Brunswick Springs, Bloomfield, Guildhall all in Vermont etc.) to better relate to the narration. Also lacking is the 62-year old Carl Drega's early life (mentioned a bit of brother & sister) to provide likely insight into the premeditated violence by one who was intelligent, meticulous and a great carpenter to be caught in a brewing grudge stemming from a simmering victimization complex (paranoia, delusion, vengeful). The narration is wonderful in providing the flavor of a libertarian way of life in small towns but also pointing out the danger of a continuous leniency on flaunting the law, no matter how minor. It's real ironic as the moto of life: "...how hungry we are for love, how we yearn to lay aside our armor and put trust in one another. –pg. 272" (as a part of Karen Harrigan's thought) though mostly idyllic can also bear a darker side.

The book felt drawn out and sections later in Part Three added little to the incredible story of the unexpected August 1997 human tragedies in the North Country of NH. The conclusion of Drega saga tragedy and its resolution would have sufficed as the story beyond 1998 did little to further enlighten this tragedy. However, it did touch upon, what I consider to be a universal (also a current theme) – definition of truth. No matter how egregious or anti-social act(s) one may perform it'll always have followers. May be Drega was a hero (considered by his sister and many outsiders) is a darker side in us wherein one may exult in rebellion against authority (omitting consequences of the action taken). As stated earlier, the character development is excellent on victims and numerous individuals around the tragedy except for the culprit (figuring cause is always helpful in preventive action of a possible, similar repeat performance).

Jan Rice says

This story was well told. I enjoyed how the author explained the relationships of each of the people who played a part and broke everything down so the reader can understand what the issues and story lines were. I felt that a map of the area would have been very helpful in picturing the places referenced in the town. I

know NH but I don't know the North Country that well so I was able to picture some of the towns talked about (Concord for example) but other readers who don't know NH may not be able to picture any of it.

Teresa says

If you can manage to get thru the first 150 pages the story gets more interesting after that. First part was extremely boring.

Shannon says

I could not get through this book. I wanted to enjoy it, but it was confusing and all over the place. One minute there's a story line going and then suddenly I am reading about some random historical event in NH. I finally just gave up.

Sue Coleman says

Well written account of tragedy in a small NH town. I knew about the horrible shootings but not what led to them.

Squeegee says

This book was very well researched and gave a very fair account of what happened on that day. There were a few discrepancies in details not immediately concerning the events that took place, but overall, it was spot on. Not easy to read, but as a member of the community where this happened and having one of the victims as a friend, I'm glad it was written without sensationalism and with dignity to those involved.

Heather says

Fascinating, but sad look at a horrifying incident across several small towns in northern New Hampshire in August 1997. Seven people shot, four of them dead, this book remembers the events, and aftermath, of a day that changed the lives of many. Starts slowly, but picks up pace.

Bob Walenski says

The BOOK was meticulously researched, well written and compelling to read. The STORY was HORRID! We're living in an age of schools being shot up, our innocent children being slaughtered in large numbers, people getting mowed down as they walk the street and explosions of nail-filled, homemade bombs routine. So how awful can a story about 4 adults, killed in cold blood in a small, out of the way town be so bad??? Twenty Years ago Carl Drega let his anger and frustration boil over into action. He was clearly sick to begin

with, and never sought help or relief, just let that anger and hurt fester and simmer inside unchecked. There's little doubt that losing his wife accelerated a process already well under way. He had been building bombs, stockpiling guns and ammo and fuel and fertilizer, subconsciously planning his revenge, just not knowing for sure when.

Scott Phillips and Les Lord wore badges and Vickie Bunnell was a 45 year old judge and Dennis Joos an editor on a small local newspaper. All were mercilessly murdered in the prime of life by a disgruntled, narcissistic, old codgersmart only in his cunning and evil. He was a time bomb.

The media naturally recycled this story for its 20th anniversary last August. Most of the locals in Colebrook, NH didn't want to talk about it any longer. They had moved on, learned to live with the pain and loss, and felt revisiting it too painful and worthless.

So read this book if you dare. It will haunt you like all the unexplained murders around us. It's another brick in the wall of the endless examples of mental sickness around us all the time.

Cyndy Hakansson says

I'm a resident of Coos County, and the five star rating is because reading this book brought up such strong and varied emotions for me, with pride in the North Country being the most important feeling and the one that remains. As many North Country people do, I remember where I was and what I was doing on that day, and my worry and wondering about the safety of my own friends and family.

This book was able to look back and intertwine an objective timeline of events with the souls and spirits of many of the folks who lived this day as well as those whose earthly lives were ended on this day. I will admit that I only skimmed the passages regarding the possible thoughts and feelings of the man whose hatred was the basis for these events.

The few possible inconsistencies regarding very minor details were dwarfed by the obvious attention to the feelings of people and the objectivity the author demonstrates in the telling of this complex series of events. Especially if you're from 'here', this book is a must read, but don't expect to remain unaffected by it.

Although I'm quite familiar with all of the key locations central to the events of that day, I feel drawn to go to them again and remember

Gavin says

On August 19, 1997 an anti-government, assault-rifle wielding murderer, filled with anger and bent on a twisted mission of revenge, took the lives of four good people in the small town of Colebrook New Hampshire. He went on to seriously injure three others before he was killed by police officers in a shoot out deep in the woods of northern New England. His victims were two New Hampshire State Troopers-Scott Phillips and Leslie Lord, a local Attorney and Judge-Victoria (Vickie) Bunnell, and a courageous editor of a local newspaper-Dennis Joos, who lost his life trying to disarm the madman.

As a police officer at the time, I was deeply disturbed that someone could be so savage in his violence toward others and so hateful of those who wore the uniform of law enforcement. As a reader, I wondered what author would write the definitive version of these events and present them in a way that was both factual, yet respectful of the victims and community. Now eighteen years later, Richard Adams Carey has produced just such a book.

"In The Evil Day" is a work of detailed research, journalistic empathy and just a lot of great writing. Mr. Carey brings to life not only the victims of this tragedy, but all of the participants, witnesses, and survivors. He tells the story with a crafted use of past and present tense, voice and points of view. He spent over a dozen years pouring over the official files of all law enforcement agencies involved. More importantly, the author invested tremendous time and effort in getting to know the people of the area and to gain their trust and belief that he would tell the full story of this terrible day.

This is not simply a story of murder or madness. It is more fully a story of courage and survival. I was inspired by the bravery of those who faced down evil on that day, as well as the quiet courage of the Bunnell family who would not allow the deranged actions of one man to destroy their lives. Equally moving is the tenacity of the community to survive and move beyond the hole ripped in their world.

This book is not a happy tome or light read. There were passages that left me tense and agitated. Such is the talent of Mr. Carey that he can convey the action and physical details without resorting to gore and excess. The general reader will appreciate the authors fluid language and the pacing of the story. If you are or have been a police officer, you will have encountered or will be encountering someone like the murderer in these pages. Perhaps not with such tragic results, but representative of a personality type that is increasingly present in our society.

Lauren says

Full disclosure: I grew up in the area described in this book, though I was not living there when the events unfolded. I know or knew many of the people involved or mentioned in the book and knew of most of the others.

I found the book to be an excellent account of the most significant - and horrific - event to happen in northern New Hampshire and Vermont. Such things happen to other people in other places, but that doesn't lessen the impact to those affected. This book takes the reader through the event to the aftermath, where the survivors had to pick up the pieces of their lives.

I found the timeline very confusing, though. The backstories of the major individuals, especially, jumped around from decade to decade seemingly at random and often from individual to individual. It would have helped my comprehension if each person's story was told in its entirety, or at least up to the point where it converged with the story of another person.

I found the narrative of the shootings and subsequent manhunt to be compelling.

The subtitle states that this happened in one small town, and that may be catchier than saying "one small region," which would have been much more accurate.

C.G. Fewston says

In the Evil Day (2015) by Richard Adams Carey stands as a brave testament to the horror witnessed on August 19, 1997 and as a holy monument to those who died far before their time in Colebrook, a sleepy little town in New Hampshire.

Tuesday's violence which ripped into Colebrook's few thousand plus citizens came as unexpected and with

as much desolation as another Tuesday that would arrive four years later. When Susan Harrigan spoke of the incident on that fated August day, her words seemed to bridge one disaster to another, ““Four people out of a town this small?” she said. “Well, you can just run the numbers. That’s like—what?—five thousand people dying in Manhattan on one day. That’s your impact”” (p 278).

With great care and with much commemoration, Carey reminds readers of the spiritual stakes at war in the world as he takes his title for the book from Ephesians 6: ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand’ (p 271).

Sadly the story Carey painstakingly researched for over thirteen years and dedicated to the ‘people of the town of Colebrook’ and to the ‘surrounding North Country’, any flatlander can empathize with the suffering and loss which the author writes with such restrained genius that the reader merely catches a glimpse before the memory of the story ushers it away, and the reader sees some of this in one of the funeral scenes following the tragedy which speak to the love of one community for its beloveds:

‘On Sunday morning, at the Monadnock Congregational Church on Main, there was again an absurd overflow, a thousand inside and three hundred out the front and into the street, where loudspeakers were hung. It had rained Saturday night, but the rain had dwindled to a stop before dawn, and across the river, above and beyond the belfry and steeple, the green whaleback of Monadnock was wreathed in gossamer wisps of fog’ (p 271).

And Carey continues to wind his anodyne and peacemaking enchantments in hopes of helping the reader understand, or to better grasp, the tragedies that befall the kind hearted and gentle meek of the world. One such person is John Harrigan, owner of the News and Sentinel, one of Colebrook’s newspapers and one of the murder scenes which haunts the living in its own way, in its own time. Carey seems to peer in to the lives and souls of those who survived August 19, and speechless we read of mortal truths unfolding from mortal tongues:

‘For now, John was at rest at Bunny’s kitchen table, in the house where Vickie had grown up. Bunny said that he believed—believed all the more so now—that there was something eternal in every human being. He remembered a verse from Romans: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” But he spoke from the bottom of that chasm into which Job was flung.

‘John’s body and soul were bleeding into each other. He wondered what might have been different. He wondered where you have to go, what number you call, what incantation you chant, to sell your soul for a second chance at life—even if you couldn’t change a thing. Just to be there again. “We get to thinking we’re going to live forever,” he said. “Don’t we?”’ (p 252)

If it appears the story is traveling backwards in time, as though attempting to break the laws of reality for a semblance of healing to beckon us once again forward, then friend you are not mistaken, but the illusion is to show by unshowing what Carey sets in motion and, like the hand of God, allows to unfold into one episode after another until the last bullet has been fired and there’s no going back.

Carey, like a humbled prophet high atop a mountain, haunts the reader with his precision to capture the life-and-death moments collapsing into mistakes and regrets and the final reflections these bring to the brave who’ve chased a killer to become almost killed themselves:

‘He turned his head to the right and was amazed to find that Caulder had vanished. Pfeifer decided he must have passed out and woken up after Caulder’s rescue.

‘He wondered how long ago that was and if Caulder had been alive when they took him. He wondered if death could be something so intangible as this—a mere touch on the shoulder, like the brush of a wing, and then just a sneaky lapse in awareness’ (p 221).

The world doesn’t spin backwards, but be patient because Carey holds the camera as he records and the reader watches. Like a Pulitzer-winning photograph which captures more than images and more than words can attest to a single moment in time, Carey challenges the reader to stand and witness the devil incarnate.

‘Karen noted the unruly beard, the blue jeans tucked into his boots, the plaid shirt that was unbuttoned and flapped as he walked, the blue denim shirt he wore beneath it. “He moved gracefully,” she said later. “His face was calm and alert. I thought there might be a trace of a smile on his lips”’ (p 154).

And shortly thereafter...

‘The killer stopped, stared at her husband for that awkward, pregnant moment—the minister and the devil, the temporal world like a bone between them...

‘Afterward the pastor was nearly as shaken by that encounter on the steps, by the rank pitilessness of that gaze, as he was by the events across the street. “God help us in these days of carnage,” he would write at the end of his statement to the Colebrook police, “when man kills without conscience”’ (p 156).

But what truly impresses upon the reader’s mind is Carey’s ability to collate dozens of eye-witness accounts into a seamless fictive dream, no...nightmare. A Pulitzer-contender himself, Carey refuses to shy away from the journalistic complications one finds in a kaleidoscope of jumbled human memory, and the words, however, float off the page as honest and true as any one man can bear to write.

‘Susan Zizza knows her Bible well, and she would find later that her own story and those of other witnesses were like gospel accounts—each true enough from its own perspective, each limited by that perspective and the tricks of grief and memory, all essential to the apprehension of an event that changed everything. She would find that portions of her own memory, her own gospel account, had been erased or rewritten as early as the next morning’ (p 150).

In the end of that evil day and time, looming over Colebrook like the great Monadnock itself, Carey recaptures a sense of order and purpose for John, the survivors and the rest, including the reader who takes it upon herself to absorb and comprehend the incomprehensible events of August 19, 1997 as best as one can, and Carey does this best with an artist’s ease to entertain and appease:

‘At last, without a word, he falls into the grass himself, on his back against Pleistocene granite and its patina of soil, spread-eagled. He lies there goggle-eyed. The clouds wheel overhead like out-bellying sails, like billowing curtains drawn in fond blue hope against the moon and the stars and the lineaments of eternity’ (p 309).

In eternity may the victims—Vickie Bunnell, Dennis Joos, Scott Phillips, and Les Lord—rest in absolute peace within the embrace of a gentler God than the One who holds back annihilation for those who failed to love and now await just punishment for crimes they committed in the evil day.

Adam Bricker says

Thoroughly researched and incredibly detailed, this is an interesting story of small town dynamics and an unstable resident. For me, it took a while to get going and through out the book it was told like a conversation with a person from a small town. I felt like the author aimed to describe people or situations that would set a scene, but then would go off about people and things that didn't lend, and sometimes distracted, from the original thought.

Beverly says

Haunting

This is sadly to say a true story. The author Vividly describes in much detail the events in a small town. Innocents were sacrificed to the rage of a mean spirited mad man. This tale gives one a clear picture of how we all share in our fellow human' s tragedies.

Angela Winters says

In The Evil Day Violence Comes To One Small Town by Richard Adams Carey is the story of Colebrook, NH and its residents on the day that violence broke out. Carl Drega changed this whole area on one fatal day.

This book was very slow. I almost laid it down several times because it took so long to get to the actual story. Once it did, the book improved. I think that the story is good, it was just not told in an interesting way.
