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Ten years later...

ASTRIDA STAHNKE

GOING TOO FAR

Lines written on November 11,1989, after the Berlin Wall had fallen and after Dan Rather, the CBS anchorman, standing at the Wall, broke in saying that Mr. *Gorbachev had warned the Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania not to go too far.*

The ruler of the Soviet Union - the marked leader - says:
"Don't go too far!"

But how far is *too far,* I wonder, and who are they who say now, when the Wall is down:
"Don't go too far?"

Was not the Wall put there like an ugly dragon winding
because the governments - both large and small -
had gone too far?
Much too far -
With swastikas, hammers and sickles;
with barbed wires and dogs trained to bare their
teeth at human beings?

They all had gone so far that Truth in grief and shame was
put in chains and licked in basest torture chambers
And lies dressed up in Truth's many-colored veils walked
freely in all the devastated lands until those veils
congealed in hard cement - into a wall that closed the
people in and out.

That was going far too far, it seems.

The people could then go no farther than that Wall, those
fenced checkpoints - cages with caged guards, boys
patrolling the underground like rats...

That is going too far, I thought, riding the streetcar in East
Berlin, watching a small, muzzled cockier spaniel sniff
the closed air...

How far would that muzzled doggie run? Whom would it
bite, poor, frightened, chained creature?
(Where were you, little doggie, when the Wall fell? Did your master take off the muzzle and let you bark one independent, unmuzzled, honest-to-goodness real dog bark?)

* * *

The news broke out again - Fighting in Moldavia - and
again the same warning:
"Don't go too far!"

I hold my breath. I cry out: "To treat people like lunatics and
mad dogs for all those years is far, *too,* far to go!"

/ *shout at the TV:* 'Those steps the dictators took, those denials
and executions and shots the Gestapo and NKVD aimed at
people's foreheads and temples - without a trial - *that* was
too far for civil men to go.
And those more recent shots the guards made from their
towers at young people who swam the Spree to freedom: a
girl 18; a boy 17 - who jumped into the river as for a swim -
the way boys and girls do...

The Spree is very narrow there, and freedom seemed not far at all.
(I measured the distance with one sad glance when I stood at the graves on the West side of the Berlin Wall.)
That was going too far... shooting children.

Also, to build a wall inside of people,
a wall that cut souls and bodies permanently -

That, too, is too far.

And, furthermore, to make those same people celebrate the
genocide with flags and flowers, trumpets and the sound of drums

year after year
year after year
year after year

when all the Christmases are dark and silent and every birth a miracle
is going far, so far that the imagination lags behind...

* * *

And as for my people - the white ones - the Baits - my
nation - who were warned not to go too far - so small, so
helpless, holding hands, with nothing but their poetry and
song and truth - standing in a hand-chain across three little
blood-soaked, polluted, sadly and lovingly reconstructed lands,
lands silent, forgotten, and generally unknown -
fallen between the cracks of the modern world and the super
powers -

Well, how far could they, would they, dare to go?

The swastika and hammer split us all way back in 1939.
Then and eventually - for half a century - the particles have
been falling all over the globe: from Riga to Vladivostok and
New York; from the ice-capped circle to the equator and
below the trade winds.
Each body and soul burst, burned, branded with silence and
not-forgetting...
The hands reaching... air-mail letters flying...

Far, far away from home - as far as death in Siberia;
as far as life in this my free and democratic USA, this
glorious world.

I turn off the TV and say to the silent grayness:
"Some people, certainly, went too far, and had they not, I
would not hear tonight the warning: **"Don't go too far!"**

I write: "To cross the Wall, now that it is down, is not far at all.
It's really such a narrow, crumbling line of lies, a child could throw a stone across it.

Hop scotch...

Moreover, the Spree is such a little river, and the Baltic Sea
seems no bigger than Lake Erie (but less polluted); hence,
the once unreachable side of freedom

is not far at all

unless man goes again too far.

CONGRATULATIONS, LATVIA, ESTONIA, LITHUANIA!!!

In ten short years, you've gone a long, long way....

INDEPENDENTLY

1999 *and into the 21st century .....abs*

November 11,1989