

December 28, 1986

Is There Such a Thing as An Ordinary Day?

(A challenge/plea from Gene Weingarten, The Washington Post)

I am writing a book about a single day in American history, a date I chose at random by drawing numbers out of a hat. My working thesis is that life is an endless, fascinating drama, and that if one digs deeply enough into any single day – the basic, irreducible unit of human existence – one will come up with a rich and textured story with interlacing, universal themes. The publisher is Penguin, and the book (tentatively titled “One Day”) is scheduled for release in 2016. That’s my random day, above. It’s the Sunday between Christmas and New Years in the year of Challenger and Chernobyl. To help build this book, I’m hoping to borrow your skills, your experience, your resources, your intuition . . . and your generosity.

So far, I’ve found many interesting, dramatic events from December 28th, 1986: lurid murders, celebrity deaths (John D. MacDonald, for example), devastating accidents, advances in technology, and so forth. But mostly these have been matters that somehow found their way into the news or other easily searchable public records, or turns up in a Google hit when searching the date. What I am seeking now are more elusive stories, harder-to-find events and anecdotes from private lives that had intense meaning or resonance within those lives, or were portentous of larger events to come. Or other sorts of events – within the business world, or in the military, for example – that didn’t make the news.

So, what, in particular, would be of value? Someone celebrating her 12th birthday on that day would be of no particular interest to me. But someone who celebrated her 12th birthday on that day, got her first microscope as a present, and would go on to become a successful cancer researcher very possibly. The book will be anchored on The Day, but will have the advantage of being able to be contextualized, by looking forward (and backward) in time. One of the best stories I have so far – and one of the few that takes place on a very private scale – involves a mid-30s couple who met on that day, while on dates with other people. The following day, they had their first date. The day after that, they announced to a room full of people that they were engaged. The day after that, they moved in together. A stunning, stupid tale of impetuosity except they’re still married and adorably in love. I am asking you for help in finding good stories, in whatever way you can. In return, I can offer you public gratitude: acknowledgement of your efforts in my book, and publicity for the good work you do.

Please communicate with me (all correspondence will be treated as private and privileged) at gene.weingarten@washpost.com, or by phone at [240-994-2362](tel:240-994-2362).