

SEPTEMBER 2001/*Between Friends* Part (2) Two

By John Alexander & Laurence Wilson

WHY WE LIKE IT: *911 introduced a new 'Age of Anxiety' and changed the comfort zone of the USA (and by extension the globe) forever. What follows is an absorbing account of the events seen through the correspondence of two friends. Because their communication is through email you might call it something like 'virtual belles-lettres'—an updated spawn of the Romantic epistolary. The letters between the two close friends, one in NYC and one in Toronto, begins on the day of destruction and last until Nov. 29. Numerous exchanges detail the events immediately following the attacks and there are human stories that touch us deeply—a man who fell 70 stories only to break both legs—most others were not so lucky. A penetrating CNF account of both the physical and emotional havoc suffered by New Yorkers and empathized by a world shaken to its boots. The style leans towards the dramatic and 'Between Friends' could just as easily be read as a theatrical script—there is starkness to the whole thing that is not far from the bare stage. This is a serial submission. Part One was published in Issue5 and is available in the archives. (Spacing and format is authors' own.)*

December 6, 2001- Thursday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hi Laurence:

Hope that all is good.

I heard there was a minimum of 900 cars under the WTC and something like 8,000 gallons of Freon for the air-conditioning.

They are “strongly encouraging” people to simply take the cars as a total loss and not try to rehab them.

John

December 10, 2001- Monday- Toronto- 8:42 PM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...hope all's well...sorry I haven't connected for a while...

...here's a thought you can pass along!

A Canadian Joke

They have pledged 2 of their biggest battle ships, 20,600 ground troops, and 6 fighter jets.

After the exchange rate, the Americans ended up with 220 Mounties, 1 canoe, and a bunch of flying squirrels.

...regards, John

December 25, 2001- Tuesday- Queens- Very Early Morning-

John Alexander wrote:

Hey, Laurence!
Merry Christmas!
John

December 25, 2001- Tuesday- Toronto- 10:48 AM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

Hello, John!...thanks so much fro your email today and for your Merry Christmas!...Happy Holidays to you and yours too!

...how profound the change in our lives has been as a result of the 11th?...many families today won't be able to think of Christmas the way they had before the loss of loved ones...I hope everyone takes time today to reflect on those lost and who aren't here to share in the magic of this day...

...John, on a less somber note...my son Phillip gave me a book, "How to Be Canadian"...it's a roarr!...subjects include: how to find Canada on a map; how to talk

like a Canadian; how to waste time like a Canadian; how to drink like a Canadian; how the Canadian Government works and more!:))

...John, may the upcoming palindromic year bring you health and happiness...and may you forever remember the good times when Sam Cooke, Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Bo Diddley and others of their ilk ruled!...regards, Laurence

December 31, 2001- Monday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hi Laurence!
Happy New Year!
Wishing everyone there the best,
John

January 1, 2002- Tuesday- Toronto-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

Hello everyone!... hope you are all having a grrreat
Holiday Season!

... thought you'd be interested in the comments of a
good ol' boy from
Serbia... regards, Laurence

A great Orthodox Christian saint of the 20th
Century, Bishop Nikolai

Velimirovic of Serbia, who survived the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, writes: "Do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil. The evil of your neighbour is sufficient. If you return him evil for evil, you double the amount of evil in the world; but if you do not return him evil, he may yet burn out his evil through repentance and you will then have lessened the evil in the world by your patience and forgiveness."

January 17, 2002- Thursday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Laurence!

This is bordering on crazy shit; almost as crazy as the rumors that Osama is hiding out in Utah!

Better yet, there was a cartoon in the paper that said that the BEST place for Osama to hide out would be at airport, check-in security."

John

P.S.:

Hey, when you get the disposable cash, you need to come down here; my goal while in NYC is that when I finally leave- assuming it is alive (by the way, there are somewhere around 9 fire trucks that drive up and down city streets looking for dirty bombs- yes,

radioactivity- to defuse. They drive around with sensors looking to see- and I understand that it is easily detectable- if they can find the dirty bombs), anyway, my goal before I leave is to have seen ALL of NYC; kind of like, been there, done that;
Laurence, this place is EXTREMELY strange; went to new parts, today- almost surreal;
John

February 26, 2002- Tuesday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Laurence!

(This is all written in the spirit of 'correct me if I'm wrong,' but...)

It seems that pig-farming in Canada has made the news around here; what was it, some "fucking" pig farmer in B.C. has killed at least 30 women- if not another 50!- and buried them in the pig shit on his "phuckin'" pig farm?!

Great news among the stories from Kabul, Kashmir, the U.N. and Ground Zero!

You know what Laurence, there is probably some psychiatric literature that links being a fucking pig farmer- and you have to ask what the fuck does that mean, "pig farmer," anyway?!? I mean, what kind of husbandry is there in just dumping enough fucking slop

to turn these animals into obese fucking pigs? So there has to be literature out there linking pig farming- and it's potential for psychological scaring- and being a pig fucking serial killer! I wonder if the women were all obese? Kinda like Deliverance-North!? If they were obese, before he killed them, maybe the pigs, "Had there way?" Anyway, do you people want that kind of die-eased mentality in your area? Laurence, this is really sick shit coming out of Canada. Hey, forget about "foul" play! This is "pig play in the pig pen!" Picture Peter Mansbridge- "...And tonight on the National, is Canada in danger of becoming awash in a sea of pig shit? Has the government purposely encouraged pig farming in B.C. with the secret knowledge that the country slopes from west to east and that Eastern Canada will get the runoff? That story after Wayne Gretzky's latest tirade- "Why does the hockey world treat us like pig shit? Welcome to the National" more later,
John

March 31, 2002- Sunday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hey, Young Man!
Happy Easter to all!
John

April 1, 2002- Monday- Toronto-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...thanks so much for your Easter greeting!...

All's well here...we missed you in February at our gathering!...
You would have loved it...

Hope you're well?...regards, Laurence

May 6, 2002- Monday- Toronto- 5:50 PM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...long time no hear?...hope all is well...thought you'd enjoy the below story...regards, Laurence

April 26, 2002- "Salute to a Brave and Modest Nation"- Kevin Myers- **The Sunday Telegraph**-

As our country honours the last of its four dead soldiers, we reprint a remarkable tribute to Canada's record of quiet valour in wartime that appeared in the Telegraph, one of Britain's largest circulation newspapers.

---LONDON--- Until the deaths last week of four Canadian soldiers accidentally killed by a U.S. warplane in Afghanistan, probably no one outside their home country had been aware that Canadian troops were deployed in the region. And as always, Canada will now bury its dead just as the rest of the world as always will forget its sacrifice, just as it always forgets nearly everything Canada ever does. It seems that Canada's historic mission is to come to the selfless aid both of its friends and of complete strangers, and then, once the crisis is over, to be well and truly ignored. Canada is the perpetual wallflower that stands on the edge of the hall, waiting for someone to come and ask her for a dance. A fire breaks out, she risks life and limb to rescue her fellow dance-goers, and suffers serious injuries. But when the hall is repaired and the dancing resumes, there is Canada, the wallflower still, while those she once helped glamorously cavort across the floor, blithely neglecting her yet again.

That is the price Canada pays for sharing the North American continent with the United States, and for being a selfless friend of Britain in two global conflicts. For much of the 20th century, Canada was torn in two different directions: It seemed to be part of the old world, yet had an address in the new one, and that divided identity ensured that it never fully got the gratitude it deserved. Yet its purely voluntary contribution to the cause of freedom in two world wars was perhaps the greatest of any democracy.

Almost 10% of Canada's entire population of seven million people served in the armed forces during the First World War, and nearly 60,000 died. The great Allied victories of 1918 were spearheaded by Canadian troops, perhaps the most capable soldiers in the entire British order of battle. Canada was repaid for its enormous sacrifice by downright neglect, its unique contribution to victory being absorbed into the popular memory as somehow or other the work of the "British." The Second World War provided a re-run.

The Canadian navy began the war with a half dozen vessels, and ended up policing nearly half the Atlantic against U-boat attack. More than 120 Canadian warships participated in the Normandy landings, during which 15,000 Canadian soldiers went ashore on D-Day alone. Canada finished the war with the third-largest navy and the fourth-largest air force in the world. The world thanked Canada with the same sublime indifference as it had the previous time. Canadian participation in the war was acknowledged in film only if it was necessary to give an American actor a part in a campaign in which the United States had clearly not participated - -a touching scrupulousness which, of course, Hollywood has since abandoned, as it has any notion of a separate Canadian identity. So it is a general rule that actors and filmmakers arriving in Hollywood keep their nationality - unless, that is, they are Canadian. Thus Mary Pickford, Walter Huston, Donald Sutherland, Michael J. Fox, William Shatner, Norman Jewison, David Cronenberg and Dan Aykroyd have in the popular perception become American, and Christopher Plummer, British. It is as if, in the very act of becoming famous, a Canadian ceases to be Canadian, unless she is Margaret Atwood, who is as unshakably Canadian as a moose, or Celine Dion, for whom Canada has proved quite unable to find any takers. Moreover, Canada is every bit as querulously alert to the achievements of its sons and daughters as the rest of the world is completely unaware of them. The Canadians proudly say of themselves - and are unheard by anyone else - that 1% of the world's population has provided 10% of the world's peacekeeping forces.

Canadian soldiers in the past half century have been the greatest peacekeepers on Earth – in 39 missions on UN mandates, and six on non-UN peacekeeping duties, from Vietnam to East Timor, from Sinai to Bosnia. Yet the only foreign engagement that has entered the popular non-Canadian imagination was the sorry affair in Somalia, in which out-of-control paratroopers murdered two Somali infiltrators. Their regiment was then disbanded in disgrace – a uniquely Canadian act of self-abasement for which, naturally, the Canadians received no international credit. So who today in the United States knows about the stoic and selfless friendship its northern neighbour has given it in Afghanistan? Rather like Ctrano de Bergerac, Canada repeatedly does honourable things for honourable motives, but instead of being thanked for it, it remains something of a figure of fun. It is the Canadian way, for which Canadians should be proud, yet such honour comes at a high cost.

This week, four more grieving families knew that cost all too tragically well.

May 7, 2002- Tuesday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Dear Laurence:

I hope that all is going well. Yes, long time. Everything here is moving along- sort of rushing down the gorge at the same time.

Yes, thanks for the article; I really do understand what the writer is trying to say; I will respond at greater length in a day or two, but it does seem to echo of something from the U.S. past; and maybe what he is voicing is part of the "Maturation of Nations" that all countries go through;

quickly, for now; it really wasn't that long ago when the U.S. was- and to some degree still is going through the same set of feelings (as a nation); it wasn't that long ago that- I believe his name was- Gordon Sinclair, a Torontonionian, did the radio piece called, I think,

"The Americans," which voiced the same U.S.- we are not appreciated kind of sentiment, but from "North of the Border;"

if there is any plausibility to the "Maturation of Nations" concept, then, we have to look at the British who do their role in the world and don't ever seem to look for thanks; we- the U.S.- still looks for it, though after 9/11- far less; 9/11, I think, propelled us further on the maturational curve; maybe similar to the WWII bombing of London; I'm not sure that the British give a fuck any more- or really have for a long time; it seems that the suicide bombings have done the same to the Israelis; the U.S., again, seems to have gotten there- though, I don't think all the way there, yet, when you see talk about the invasion of Iraq- along with the timetable on the front of the New York Times you start getting the feeling that people in government(s) are not really thinking about who gives a fuck or not; and, yes, somebody in Saudi Arabia did "rattle" the threat of using oil as a weapon, cutting off the oil, but, hell, Laurence, don't forget, at least in Saudi Arabia we don't have to worry about invading the fucking place to make sure the oil keeps flowing- what is it? the U.S.- and I have no doubts the Brits are there too with us- already has 15,000 troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia...

Am I suppose to think- let alone imagine- there is not a contingency plan in place to "secure" Saudi Arabia- please mon cheri...

more later,

John

May 22, 2002- Wednesday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hey Laurence!

I hope that all is well for you and the family.

Just wanted to drop you a line from what I am now calling "The Zone."

To begin, you know life in NYC is stressful enough without the possibility of impending death.

As regards that, I just looked out the window and saw two Apache attack helicopters fly by. They were probably within 60 yards of the building.

Also, a couple of lines from Maureen Dowd's column in today's NYTimes;

"I have no faith in the ability of the U.S. government to keep out terrorists. But I have absolute faith in the ability of New York co-op boards to keep out terrorists.

The FBI has warned apartment managers in NY that the evil-doers might try to get a place, furnish it with explosives and blow up the building.

But first the Qaeda rats would have to find an empty affordable apartment. Then they'd have to get past the withering front line of real estate agents. Finally, they'd have to penetrate the maximum security defenses of Manhattan co-op boards.

There's screening and then there's "screening."

The enemy can dupe the INS to get student visas, but wait until the East Side co-op president starts grilling them about where they went to school, what eating clubs they were in, which dancing class they attended, and whether they would bother the neighbors with any impolite crashes or unesthetic bangs. If Henry van der Luyden of the Ardsthorpe had interrogated Mohamed Atta, that creep would have been screaming for mercy. "Beyond the co-ops boards, however, we're on our apocalyptic own..."

"...INS employees continue to show up for work, exponentially ratcheting up the risks to the American public..."

talk to you later,

John

May 25, 2002- Saturday- Toronto- 3:14 PM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...thanks for your mail of the 22nd from "the Zone"...it's hard for me to fathom the difficulty of not living peacefully and contentedly like you are these days...

...it's no wonder the extra terrestrials have looked at our planet and decided not to communicate with us in response to our many attempts to hook up!

...when are you getting out of there?...regards, Laurence

May 25, 2002- Saturday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hi Laurence:

Strange that you should ask.

I don't know if you've heard, but the Statue of Liberty has face-recognition screening.

I do miss the "old neighborhood" corridor.

The impending doom thing is- honestly getting very old; maybe if I weren't as aware of the possibilities, maybe it could be easier- but it's not;

you see, being in Queens- on Long Island- kinda limits you; (by the way, I will never live on a fucking island, again!), there are a fucking tons of people here; Queens alone has 2.25 million people; there are not a lot of fucking ways out of here; Throgs Neck Bridge; Whitestone Bridge; Triboro Birdge; Queensboro Bridge- and then you get into the Brooklyn based bridges of which there are probably 4-5 as well as another 2 million

people; and, most of the Brooklyn based bridges take you in Manhattan, the other the Verrazano- takes you onto another fucking island;
we're planning to get an inflatable boat, and a battery driven pump;
head to Pa. on a road trip, maybe a weapon; the critical goal would be to get back on the mainland;
however, on the other side, there is a certain degree of security being on an island; it might be tough to get a car bomb into Manhattan;
Laurence, I'm almost finished here; we've re-tooled the game plan so that as soon- literally- as the critical variables are in place- we are out of here- no matter what;
I won't deny it; there is a degree of living on the edge going on around here; but, it's not like an amusement park where you can go home at the end of the day; here, the amusement continues, even as you sleep- or try to;
John

July 11, 2002- Thursday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Laurence!
Are you still alive?
John

July 11, 2002- Thursday- Toronto- 7:54 PM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...thanks for connecting on the 10th...I'm still alive but living the good life!...yeah, right...

...so, I'm between the intensity of juggling balls and the comatose-type times at the beach I'm fine tuning my schizoid behaviour!

...it's summer and the livin' is easy...trying to get a book-a-week in from the likes of James Patterson, Stuart Woods, Jeffery Deaver, et al...

...do you have a trip to Kahnahda on the horizon?...

...connect when you can...it's always grrreat to hear from you...
regards, Laurence

September 10, 2002- Tuesday- Queens-

John Alexander wrote:

Hey Laurence!

I hope that all is good for you!

Yes, once again, last night, I heard the fighter planes. We will see what tomorrow brings.

Talk to you soon.

John

September 11, 2002- Wednesday- Toronto- 8:32 AM-

Laurence Wilson wrote:

John, hello!...thanks for you email yesterday on this the eve of when, a year ago, we began to trade mail on the single most calamitous event of our time!

...whew!...I can hardly believe a year has passed since we first began that exchange...it was such a tragic, angst-evoking time...it was grrreat to have you on the other end of the pipeline while I floated my feelings, thoughts and impressions through space to you...ventilating is the first step toward healing...and for sure the ability to send and receive the thoughts of that time were helpful and enabling...my understandings and ability to maintain some semblance of perspective was greatly aided by your fresh, new news and insights from the front!

...regards, Laurence

P.S....John, are there still places in N.Y. where people have posted pictures of their missing loved ones?

END

AUTHORS' NOTE:

(1) "What inspired your submission?" At the moment- on the afternoon of 9-11-01, I just decided to send an email to my friend. The fact that it took off and endured wasn't planned at all. Just like the deer, it just happened. Actually, it wasn't until it got to the 10th anniversary did it "come to me" to re-process the emails. The most important thing was that I never deleted them. Just had to go back.

(2) "What issues, themes, did you want to explore?" Nothing planned. Just relay to my friend in T.O. the scope, depth and gravity not only of day-today life but, also, of all that I set out to experience."

(3) Stylistic and literary influences?" Hard to say. It varies based on the genre. It's even harder to say when you're talking about a genre- in 2001- the email, where I- we- were "talking" but without uttering a discernible sound.

I don't know.

That's about it.

Again, it wasn't planned. It just happened, just like the deer.

Best,

John

P.S.: Here's an anecdote from my T.O. partying days- A bunch of us are partying along Front Street. I say, "You know, it's late, I've got to get going back."

They say, "Why? It's only 1 AM"

To which I respond.

"No, it's 1 AM here in T.O. In Bflo, it's 3:30 AM because that's what time its going to be when I get there."

AUTHORS' BIO:

John Alexander has “wandered” portions of North America for a good portion of his life. Thus, when asked once- “Where did you grow up”- his answer was that different aspects of him “grew up” in the different places that he has lived.

These places include- Chicago, Concord and Knoxville, Tennessee, Erieau, Ontario, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, New York, Athens and Milledgeville, Georgia, Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and in Queens.

Recently. after spending years in New York City, John Alexander has temporarily relocated to the hamlet of Getzville, New York. He lives- and writes- there in the company of his two favorite pets, “Bunny” and “Roma.”

Most recently, John Alexander has appeared in Clockwise Cat (5), Ygdrasil (Cd), Syndic Literary Journal, The Bitchin’ Kitsch, Danse Macabre du Jour (2), Straightjackets Magazine, and Hackwriters: The International Writers Magazine (U.K.). He also co-authored the online novel, entitled, “A Vow of Silence.” It can be found at- www.avowofsilence.net

Laurence Wilson is an enigmatic and passionately private person who has proudly called Ontario home since birth. He wants only to be recognized as part of a history making dialogue/document during an equally history making event.

