

ROUTE 3

What I saw on the road through New Jersey.

BY IAN FRAZIER

Between me in a New Jersey suburb and New York City, fifteen-some miles to the east, runs a highway called Route 3. For many bus and car commuters, it is essentially the only direct road from here (and other suburbs) to there. To say that billions of vehicles use it daily is an exaggeration, traffic experts will tell you. People have written songs

another ridge near the Hudson River, and joins an artery bringing an accumulation of traffic down the spinning drain into the Lincoln Tunnel and, at the other end, the vast retort of Manhattan.

An eastbound traveller on Route 3 sometimes has the serrated skyline of midtown straight ahead. At certain times of the year during the morning commute,

descending to Newark Airport. Along much of the road on either side, the landscape is as ordinary as ordinary America can be: conventioners' hotels and discount stores and fast-food restaurants and office complexes and Home Depot and Best Buy and Ethan Allen, most of the buildings long and low, distributed in the spread-out style of American highway architecture. And then suddenly, just before the Lincoln Tunnel, that ordinariness ends, and you're in jostling, close-up surroundings about to become New York. At no other entry to the city is the transition between it and everyday, anywhere U.S.A. so quick.

I usually travel to and from the city by bus. The one I take to go home leaves from the fourth floor of the Port Au-



At the foot of the driveway that leads to the Holy Face Monastery, beside Route 3, is a statue of Jesus, his arms raised as if in benediction.

about the fabled Route 66, and the phrase "New Jersey Turnpike" has a metrical neatness that fits it into certain rock-and-roll tunes; but as far as I know nobody has sung about Route 3. Its unavoidable, traffic-packed, un-alluring, grimly life-like quality defeats the lyric impulse, probably. Route 3 starts on the low north-south New Jersey ridges where many suburbs are, crosses the miles-wide swamp that developers started referring to as the Meadowlands some years ago, rises to

the sun comes up right behind the city; the shadows of the buildings theoretically stretch the whole length of the highway, and slide backward gradually, like tide. When the road reaches the Meadowlands, the sky opens out, with the tall light poles of the Giants Stadium parking lot receding to a remote vanishing point and the pools of swamp water perfectly reflecting the reeds along their edges, the radio towers, the clouds, and the intricate undersides of cautious airplanes

thority Bus Terminal. Most bus commuters sensibly occupy themselves with newspapers, laptops, CD players, and so on. I always try to get a window seat and then look at the scenery. If this were a ride at an amusement park, I would pay to go on it. The bus comes out of the terminal on a high ramp above Tenth Avenue. For just a moment you can see clear down Tenth, a deep ravine usually filled at the bottom with taxicabs. From the ramp, the bus descends into the tun-

nel, either straight or in a loop, depending on traffic and time of day. Once in the tunnel, it can be there forever. Brake lights on vehicles ahead reflect on the bus ceiling and tint people's faces. During an evening rush hour, my son and I observed a foot sticking up from the narrow electric tram cart that runs on a track along the tunnel wall. The foot had on a work boot and the shin was wearing work pants. We decided that it must belong to a tunnel worker who was out of sight down in the cart taking a nap.

When the bus leaves the tunnel, it is in Weehawken, New Jersey. It climbs the elevated spiral of highway that people call the helix, and then for a mile or so there's a complicated section of road where traffic bound in different direc-



of the traffic. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

tions sorts itself out. Then the bus turns northwest onto Route 3. At this point, it is in Secaucus. A newspaper story some years ago said that state police had seized about a ton and a quarter of cocaine in a truck just as it left a warehouse in Secaucus off Route 3. I'm not sure which warehouse it was, but I have some likely ones in mind. Route 3 in Secaucus is where the transition to ordinary America occurs; prominent on your right are two large signs that say "Royal Motel."

What fixed the Royal Motel in my mind, and what makes me glad, somehow, every time I pass it, was a story that appeared in the *News* in 2000. The story said that one morning, at 2:13 A.M., New York City police arrested a woman for soliciting prostitution at the corner of Tenth Avenue and Forty-sixth Street. The woman gave her name as Tacoma Hopps. The police handcuffed her, put her in the back of a Ford minivan they were using to transport suspects, and left her there while they went to make another arrest. Tacoma Hopps squeezed her hands through the handcuffs, got in the van's driver seat, and sped off downtown. Before the police, suddenly left afoot, could radio ahead to stop her, she had driven to the tunnel and through it. She then left the vehicle in Secaucus and began walking along Route 3, barefoot and carrying a green duffelbag. Secaucus police spotted her. In the duffelbag were two bulletproof vests, a pistol clip containing twenty-five hollow-point bullets, and a New York City Police radio, parking permit, and vehicle keys. When the New York police arrested her, she had given her home address as the Royal Motel. When the Secaucus police arrested her, that was apparently where she was going.

Beyond Secaucus, the bus crosses the wide Hackensack River; the fact that there are no other vehicle bridges over the Hackensack for miles upstream and down contributes to Route 3's congestion. West of the river, on the bus's right, you see the Continental Airlines Arena and Giants Stadium. Recently, developers announced that behind the stadium they're going to build a hundred-and-four-acre recreation complex, with indoor ski slopes and a surfing pool, to be called Xanadu. Beyond the stadium is swamp and another big river, the Passaic. Then come hills and houses, and trees instead of reeds. In some places here, the road's shoulders glitter with a boar of trash; in others, the right lane merges almost undetectably with large, vague parking lots around commercial enterprises. One of these is the Tick Tock Diner, a chrome Art Deco structure outlined in four colors of neon and surmounted by clocks. When Sean J. Richard, a labor racketeer associated with New Jersey's DeCavalcante family, heard a while back that he was to meet with

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a capo (alleged) from New York's Lucchese family named Dominic Truscello in a van outside the Tick Tock Diner, Mr. Richard became so frightened that he soon decided to turn state's evidence. His testimony is expected to put a few people in jail.

Across from the Tick Tock, the hundred-and-twenty-seven-acre factory and laboratory compound of Hoffman-La Roche Pharmaceuticals rises in buildings of utopian whiteness, one upon the next. On the top of the highest building is the lighted logo of the company—"Roche," inside a capsule-shaped border. Valium, the company's famous sedative, introduced in 1963, earned a lot of the money that built this Acropolis of pharmaceuticals. Anxiety sufferers of that era probably remember the Valium pill. It was small and round, of a color between yellow and white. On one side a thin, fine score divided the pill into halves; on the other was the word "ROCHE" and beneath it the number 5 (meaning milligrams). A friend who works as a statistician for the company tells me that although the formula for Valium went out of patent a long time ago and cheaper versions exist, the company still sells a lot of it. Evidently, the name and the look of the Roche pill have acquired a magic that transcends chemistry. Leo H. Sternbach, Valium's inventor, is ninety-five years old and lives not far from me. My friend says that when Mr. Sternbach stops by the lab, as he still occasionally does, he is treated like a king.

Past Hoffman-La Roche on the same side of the street, at the top of a hill with a lawn, the Holy Face Monastery sits half out of sight behind trees. At the foot of the driveway, right beside Route 3, the monastery has erected a shrine. It is a statue of Jesus on a white brick pedestal with concrete tablets nearby bearing the Ten Commandments. Jesus' arms are raised as if in benediction of the traffic; the position of one hand is such that a beer can just fits in it, a coincidence that jokesters take advantage of. I have often seen people, usually alone, praying before the shrine in the mornings and later in the day. They stand with heads bared and bowed and hands clasped at their waists, sometimes so deep in prayer that they seem to be in another dimension.

Now the bus turns off Route 3 at the Grove Street, Montclair/Paterson exit. It

proceeds along Grove, stopping occasionally to let passengers out. When it pulls over, the branches of trees along the street brush the bus's top and side. To a suburbanite just come from the city, the scratching of branches and leaves on metal is the sound of being home.

As a grownup, I have lived in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Montana. Now I live in the New Jersey town of Montclair. Recently, a friend who's a rancher in Wyoming sent me a card saying he finds it hard to believe that he has a friend who lives in New Jersey. Sometimes I find it hard to believe I'm here, myself. When I lived in the city, I had the usual New Yorker's disdain for this state. Oddly, though, I was attracted to it, too. I used to come over to Jersey a lot, maybe because it reminded me of Ohio and other places I love in the middle of the country. I like being on the continent, rather than slightly offshore. I get a sense that I'm more connected to it; when there's a big snowstorm, for example, I imagine the snow stretching from here back across the Alleghenies to Ohio in unbroken white. And I like the feeling that I'm near the city but also just out of its range.

Suburban New Jersey is a bunch of different stuff mixed up like a garage sale. George Washington kept his Army in this area throughout a year of the Revolutionary War; the British held the city, and he wanted to be close to it yet strategically hard for them to get to. His ally the Marquis de Lafayette stayed in a farmhouse on Valley Road in Upper Montclair. A local chapter of the D.A.R. has preserved the farmhouse's flat stone doorstep near the spot where the house was. The memorial, with the stone, a small plaque, and a flagpole, is in a little niche in the town's business district. On one side of the niche is a photo-finishing-and-retouching store, on the other a place called the Backrub Shoppe (recently closed), which offered backrubs lasting from ten minutes up to an hour.

On long walks through suburbs whose names I sometimes can't keep straight—Glen Ridge, Bloomfield, Brookside, Nutley, Passaic, Garfield, Lodi, Hasbrouck Heights, Hackensack, Teaneck, Leonia—I've encountered the New Jersey miscellany up close. Giant oil tanks cluster below expensive houses

PIGEONS AT DAWN

Extraordinary efforts are being made
To hide things from us, my friend.
Some stay up into the wee hours
To search their souls,
Others undress each other in darkened rooms.

The creaky old elevator
Took us down to the icy cellar first
To show us a mop and a bucket
Before it deigned to ascend again
With a sigh of exasperation.

Under the vast, early-dawn sky
The city lay silent before us.
Everything on hold:
Rooftops and water towers,
Clouds and wisps of white smoke.

We must be patient, we told ourselves,
See if the pigeons will coo now
For the one who comes to her window
To feed them angel cake,
All but invisible, but for her slender arm.

—Charles Simic

surrounded by hedges not far from abandoned factories with high brick smokestacks; a Spanish-speaking store that sells live chickens is near a Polish night club off a teeming eight-lane highway; a Greek church on a festival day roasts goats in fifty-five-gallon drums in its parking lot down the road from tall white Presbyterian churches that were built when everything around was countryside. Neighborhoods go from fancy to industrial to shabby without apparent reason, and you can't predict what the next corner will be.

From a car on a highway, though, suburban New Jersey looks so nondescript and ordinary as to be invisible. The eye, in passing, registers not this specific place but a generic likeness that has reproduced itself all across the country. In the Montclair Art Museum is a room of landscape paintings by the artist George Inness, who lived in Montclair from 1885 to 1894. They show the land before it was developed and paved. Inness's winter-gray hilltop tree lines, his ridges sloping underfoot, and his high sky lit by the presence of the ocean over

the horizon are all still here, somewhere among the roads and buildings and wires now obscuring them.

That invisibility may explain, partly, why commuters on the bus don't bother to look out the window: everything there has been seen and reseen and accounted for until it might as well be a blank wall. The only people who regularly look out the bus window are young children. Except during traffic delays, the one time the adult passengers all sit up and stare out en masse is when the bus is driven by a man named Sal. Sal is short and has a boyish (though graying) shock of hair. His movements are more antic than usual for a bus driver. Sal is the only bus driver I know of who seems to notice what's along the road. When he sees something that interests him, he takes up the microphone and announces it to the passengers. Colorful Halloween displays, Christmas lights, a yard full of yellow and purple crocuses, the Goodyear blimp over Giants Stadium—all rate an excited mention by Sal, followed by his usual exclamation: "Oh-boy-oh-boy-oh-boy-oh-boy!"

When the bus gets to the Port Authority and is going up the ramp, Sal always says, "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I'd like to welcome you to the beautiful Caribbean island of Aruba"—or St. Martin, Barbuda, St. Thomas, etc.—"where the temperature is a sunny seventy-eight degrees. Complimentary beverages will be served upon arrival, don't forget to put on your sunblock, and have a happy day! Cha-cha-cha!" Inside the terminal, when he opens the bus door in the line of buses that are disembarking passengers, he says, "Ahh, smell that fresh Caribbean air!"

For a while after September 11th, Sal quit doing his announcements. His bus pulled into the station in silence, with the passengers waiting expectantly but in vain. The loss of Sal's announcements, minor as it was, saddened me out of proportion. Without some silliness, what is life for? Later, though, to general relief, Sal went back to giving what he calls his "spiels."

Although I shouldn't, I often let New Jersey traffic get to me. When I drive here, I am often beeped at for coming to a complete stop at stop signs, not running yellow lights, yielding the right of way at intersections, and following other rules of the road which local practice has discarded. At each beep, I jump and swear. After the relatively easygoing traffic of Montana, New Jersey driving had a predatory fierceness I wasn't ready for. Also, not long after we moved, a man in Englewood was run over and killed in a Starbucks while sitting at a table near the window and working on his laptop. That increased my fears.

New Jersey is the fourth-smallest state in the country and the most densely populated. Especially in areas where traffic is at its worst, room for new roads can't be found. About five and a half million people in New Jersey have driver's licenses, and they drive more than seven million registered vehicles. Traffic planners sometimes mention tepid-sounding solutions like new toll systems to encourage off-peak travel or high-tech ways of alerting drivers to jams.

In fact, the main method for dealing with so many cars in so small a space is the traditional one of ad-hoc free-for-all. A few years ago, in a survey of New Jersey drivers done by the Insurance

Council of New Jersey and the state's AAA, fifty-two per cent said that they are very angry or moderately angry when they drive. About forty per cent admitted that they are likely to curse or make gestures at other drivers, or to use their vehicles to punish them by tailgating, flashing high beams, slowing down to block them in a lane, etc.

The morning rush hour into the city has been getting earlier every year, newspapers say. It used to begin between six o'clock and seven, and now begins between five and six. Nearly a million vehicles cross into Manhattan from various directions every day. The *News* says that if a similar number of vehicles were lined up single file they would stretch from New York City to Los Angeles. And yet no New Jersey highway is among the worst ten places for traffic congestion in the nation, as drivers in Atlanta or Seattle or Los Angeles can testify. To further add to Route 3's averageness, the traffic on it is not much different from traffic anywhere.

Recently, I decided to walk to the city along Route 3. Observing scenery makes me imagine going out in it, and I wanted to see the road other than through glass. From the bus, walking on the shoulder appeared to be possible. Twelve miles from the Grove Street exit to the Lincoln Tunnel did not seem far, and once there I would take the Weehawken ferry, because the tunnel does not have a walkway open to pedestrians. I hadn't been on a long ramble for a while. I put on broken-in shoes and brought a map, in case I had to detour. At about noon of a mild day in late fall, I set out.

From the railing of the Grove Street bridge, Route 3 curved out of sight to the east amid a dwindling succession of multi-armed towers carrying high-tension lines. At this off-peak hour, the road was, as usual, full of cars going fast. I chose the right-hand, eastbound lanes, because that side seemed to have more room. I came down the ramp, along the margin. Of course there was no sidewalk, but neither were there signs forbidding pedestrians. I passed the Holy Face Monastery and shrine. The shoulder was so irregular that I had to keep climbing over the guardrail and back again and tromping through weeds. The traffic

blew by, thrumming with the dull rubber thumps of tires hitting pavement seams.

The earth beside this kind of highway is like no earth that ever was. Neither cultivated nor natural, it's beside-the-point, completely unnoticed, and slightly blurred from being passed so often and so fast. And yet plants still grow in it, luxuriantly—ailanthus, and sumac, and milkweed, and lots of others that know how to accommodate themselves to us. In the swampy parts, the common reed would take over the roadway in a blink if the traffic stopped.

The tangled brush and the reeds collect an omnium-gatherum of trash. I saw broken CDs, hubcaps, coils of wire, patient-consent forms for various acupuncture procedures, pieces of aluminum siding, fragments of chrome, shards of safety glass, Dunkin' Donuts coffee cups, condom wrappers, knocked-over road signs, burned-out highway flares, a highlighter pen, a surgical glove, nameless pieces of discarded rusty machinery, a yellow rain slicker with "Macy's Studio" on the back . . . Scattered through the grass and weeds for miles were large, bright-colored plastic sequins. Oddly, I knew where they had come from. Once, while on the bus, I saw a parade float—probably from the Puerto Rican Day Parade, held in the city—pull up alongside and then speed by. A car must have been towing it, though I don't remember the car. The float was going at least seventy, shimmying and wobbling, banners flapping, and these sequins were blowing off it in handfuls and billowing behind.

Sometimes, walking beside Route 3 got to be too much, owing to the narrowness of the shoulder or the thickness of the undergrowth, and then I would cut over to one or another smaller

road nearby. In the Meadowlands, there are some noplaces you might expect to find in a Florida swamp where the developers have given up; on an access-type road, an eight-story office building of Smith Barney stands all by itself in the reeds. Farther on, Route 3 has the aspect of a parkway, running through expanses of grass that are easy to stroll across. Nothing occupies this short-grass region but occasional Canada geese keeping one eye on the traffic, like bartenders watching a drunk.

The challenging part of my journey would be crossing the Hackensack River. I had two choices, the westbound bridge or the eastbound bridge. Both are narrow and lack walkways, though they do have little ledges like wide curbs at the sides where a walkway should be. The westbound bridge offered the safety advantage of traffic coming at me rather than from behind; at that proximity to cars, however, it's better not to see. Also, the westbound bridge is a half mile long, and its railing is not high. I whacked through the reeds in the median to the eastbound bridge. It is shorter, because the river here is narrower. Here, at least, the bridge's other side was in sight. I put on the Macy's Studio slicker for increased visibility and started across. Walking on the curb ledge required a one-foot-in-front-of-the-other gait as the trucks and cars went by at sixty-five m.p.h. an arm's length away. I held the gritty railing with my right hand. Below, the brown Hackensack swirled around the wooden pilings of a former bridge. In these narrow confines, the traffic noise was a top-volume roar. After a long several minutes, I made it to the other side.

From there my way became complicated—now on Route 3, now detouring around an impassable part, now backtracking after a shoulder I'd been following dead-ended at a fence. In no-man's regions I sometimes found foot trails leading through the grass, but no clue about who had made them. By sunset, I was walking up a sloping sidewalk in Union City above approach lanes for the tunnel, and going faster than the traffic inbound. I went down to Boulevard East, turned onto a lane under the elevated span, crossed a road running along the river, and sat down to rest on a bench in a little waterfront park. Across the river was a recompense





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for five hours of walking: the city, its lights diffusing in the mist of faint clouds above it, the whole varied sequence of glittering buildings cropped ruler-straight at the bottom by the Hudson's dark waterline.

I walked to the ferry, paid five dollars for a ticket, got on, and in six minutes crossed to the pier at Thirty-eighth Street. At the Port Authority, I caught a six-thirty bus, wedging myself in the very back row among four other middle-aged guys. The one next to me had a high forehead and a loosened tie. He was fooling with his laptop, and as the bus came through the tunnel he put on a DVD of a Bruce Springsteen concert and began to listen to it with earphones. He had it turned up so loud that the rest of us could hear, and he occasionally hummed tone-deafly along. We could have objected—but we were in New Jersey and it was Bruce, after all. The back seat, and the whole bus, with its closed-in, comfortably crowded atmosphere of people going home, seemed without any connection at all to the highway howling inaudibly just outside.

That night, I was shook up and couldn't sleep—as if walking beside so much noise and speed had rearranged my molecules. I thought of the commuter buses nose-to-tail in line for the tunnel, and the mass of idling cars converging. To live by the internal-combustion engine is to live on top of fire; a cyclone of explosions carries us along.

Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton fought their famous duel on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, in the town of Weehawken, two hundred years ago this July. Aside from the construction of the Lincoln Tunnel, the duel is the biggest thing that ever happened in Weehawken or nearby. The town is not large, and the tunnel's toll plaza and approaches take up a lot of it; sometimes as the bus climbs through Weehawken I wonder if the duel site might be close, or even under the wheels. History books say the duel was held "on the Weehawken duelling grounds," which sounds specific. When I called the Weehawken Public Library and asked the librarian if she knew where the site was, she immediately referred me to the town's expert on local history, Edward A. Fleckenstein.

Mr. Fleckenstein lives atop the Weehawken cliff, in a house with a view across the Hudson River and straight down Forty-second Street. He kindly agreed to see me, and met me at the door with his brother George. Both men are taller than average, hale, genial, and formal; though it was a Saturday morning, both had on jackets and ties. Edward is a semi-retired attorney specializing in estates and corporate law, and George used to run the family meatpacking business. Edward is eighty-four and George is eighty-two. Both are bachelors and have lived in this house all their lives.

In a study lined with pictures of their ancestors, Edward and George sketched a time-lapse picture of Weehawken and surroundings. The midtown skyline opposite had only one notable skyscraper, the Paramount Building on Forty-third Street, when they were young boys. By the time they were teen-agers, the Chrysler Building, the Empire State, and Rockefeller Center had all gone up, and midtown looked a lot like it does now. The Lincoln Tunnel came in in 1937; Edward, a boy of sixteen, was among the first to walk through it at the opening ceremony. Heading west from the tunnel, you could not go anyplace very directly, because that way was the swamp, which people called just "the swamp" and not the Meadowlands. Edward remembers looking across the swamp while on a family outing and predicting that one day a road would go straight across it. His words were prophetic; when he was just out of law school, construction started on Route 3. The road was finished across the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers by 1950, and by '51 it was a busy highway with traffic jams.

Traffic had always been bad around here, Edward Fleckenstein pointed out. "Before the tunnel, there were long lines of wagons and cars, clear up to the top of the cliff, waiting to get on the ferry to the city," he said. "The tunnel was supposed to take care of that. In those days, we had an ambitious mayor, J. G. Meister, and he was a big booster for the tunnel. He said it would be such an honor for the town. One of the original ideas for the tunnel was for it to emerge on the other side of the next ridge, in Secaucus. And that probably would have been better, in hindsight, because of course it's more open over there and you wouldn't have

the congestion of being confined in these hills. But Mayor Meister and other Weehawken supporters prevailed, and the tunnel came out in Weehawken. They said they would name it the Weehawken Midtown Tunnel, but, once there was the George Washington Bridge, naturally this had to be the Lincoln Tunnel."

Conversation soon turned to the town's other great event, the Burr-Hamilton duel. Referring to photocopies of historical documents, Edward Fleckenstein said where he thought the duelling grounds were, and why he thought so. His brother excused himself to go to church services. Edward said he would show me where



the site was, and he put on his fedora and topcoat and we got in my car. First, we stopped at the Hamilton memorial, a bust on a column at the cliff's edge. Whether Hamilton fired at Burr or deliberately into the air is unclear; he missed, in any event, and Burr's shot hit him in the abdomen. Hamilton knew at once that the wound was mortal. He fell against a large rock; the rock is now next to the column, part of the memorial. Hamilton was rowed back across the river to a friend's house in Greenwich Village, where he said goodbye to his wife and children and died the next day.

The site of the duelling grounds—about a hundred feet south of the end of the cliff, by Mr. Fleckenstein's estimation—takes some effort to visualize. In the car, he directed me to a street under the elevated highway and then onto a cinder lane near the waterfront. This place used to be a bay, he said. A cliff, roughly parallel to the present cliff but not as high, enclosed the bay at one end. There was a gravel beach accessible only by water, and above the beach, at the base of the cliff, a ledge about fifty feet long. Duellers used to row over from the city, pull their boats up on the beach, and fight their duels on the ledge. Construction of a county road levelled the cliff and ledge in 1859, and afterward railroad builders put tracks through. The landfill that buried the bay disguised the spot further.

Mr. Fleckenstein did not want to walk around in the eleven-degree cold and the wind, so after I took him home and thanked him a lot I came back. At

least seventy duels were fought on this spot, he had told me. The combatants came here because duelling was illegal in New York. (New Jersey did not outlaw it until later in the eighteen-hundreds.) Hamilton and Burr were not the only famous duellers. DeWitt Clinton, governor of New York and father of the Erie Canal, fought a John Swartwout here and wounded him in the left leg about

five inches above the ankle on the fifth shot. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the hero of the Battle of Lake Erie ("We have met the enemy, and they are ours"), duelled Captain John Heath, neither man injured; Perry's second in that duel was Commodore

Stephen Decatur ("Our country, right or wrong"), who was himself later killed in a duel in Maryland. Before Burr duelled Hamilton, he fought John Barker Church, Hamilton's brother-in-law, on this ground, neither man injured; and a Burr supporter fought and killed Hamilton's nineteen-year-old son, Philip, three years before the Burr-Hamilton duel. In all, at least thirty-six men died on the Weehawken duelling grounds.

Now the place is a construction site lot for the Lincoln Tunnel. There's an office trailer, a heap of pipe lengths, a portable john, some road-building stone, a chain-link fence, weeds, little orange plastic flags warning of buried cable. The long-ago life-and-death dramas I'd been picturing could not fit here; enterprise and time had painted out the past.

Then I looked across the river. You would have sat in the boat with your second, your pistols in their case on his lap, while someone rowed. For the twenty minutes or half an hour the journey took, you would have wondered, or tried not to wonder, about the condition in which you might come back. The far shore would grow closer, New York would diminish behind. The great city, the river in between, and this shore of scary possibility haven't changed. For questions of honor that we would find trivial or hard to understand, the touchy white men who founded our country sometimes shot each other to death within a thousand feet or so of where the Lincoln Tunnel toll booths are now. ♦

*I called my doctor on the telephone
The lines were open, but there was nobody home
Press 1, press 2, press #, press 3
Why can't somebody just pick up the phone
And talk to me...*

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