

SOUND OF SILENCE »

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› MAY 01, 2013

AMERICAN AIRLINES WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE



FUNNY GIRL

Known for making you laugh,

ISLA FISHER

is about to get serious

GUTEN TAG, DÜSSELDORF

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ONE GOOD TURN

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(pg. 12)



Owl Eyes

THERE'S A HOUSE on Chautauqua Lake in the southwestern corner of New York state that is of very modest presentation. The lake, on the other hand, is quite striking. Gentle ripples on deep blue water set the pastoral scene of a rural New York haven, a country backdrop that is decidedly American.

For there, set among the 500-year-old maple and oak and willow trees, and in and around the generations of houses, is a true bastion of Americana. Chautauqua Lake has served as an artistic and literary muse since the 18th century and, on a more contemporary level, served as my childhood muse once upon a summer.

Chautauqua, a Seneca Indian word that translates to “bag tied in the middle,” is a natural lake that is 17 miles long and two miles wide. The area was settled in the 1700s, and there are several houses from the late 18th and early 19th centuries that still back up to the lake. There are also more than a few stately Victorian mansions, as well as those constructed in the Victorian style. But there's a house on Chautauqua

Lake that is of very modest presentation, yet it is of tremendous significance to me.

The house is a classic 1950s bungalow with gray siding and large bay windows, which allow untrammelled views of the lake but whose tint thwarts any attempts to look inside. From afar, the house on Bemus Point is of the garden variety, sitting on a grassy knoll surrounded by giant maple trees. It is neither striking nor significant, and its wooden dock is weather-beaten and worn. But the mysterious green light that beat like a heart against the cool evening calm left me pacified on the one hand, and longing on the other.

Culled from a long-ago memory and with a nod to some sort of cosmic serendipity, that house, which I only saw one time on one summer night from aboard a boat in 1989 — and only for a few brief minutes — is what I instantly thought about when I read our cover story on Isla Fisher (page 44). I love her acting, and I'm fascinated by her marriage to one of my favorite actors, Sacha Baron Cohen. But this cover story immediately took me back in time to an August night on Chautauqua Lake in 1989. That's because Fisher is about to play one of the more tormented and tragic characters in American literature — that of Myrtle Wilson in *The Great Gatsby*.

Long before I could understand the symbolism and subtle commentary author F. Scott Fitzgerald intended with his timely allegory of 1920s America, there was *The Great Gatsby*, the love story that I was assigned to read that summer. As a 13-year-old on that boat, just learning about girls and feeling awkward and intimidated around them — and having my first crush on a girl at the same time — I could relate to literature's great Jay Gatsby better than anyone else in my world. Here was Gatsby, a farm boy from rural North Dakota who went off to fight in World War I and who was the quintessential self-made man — Fitzgerald's living embodiment of the American Dream. But

Gatsby was utterly unhappy, because while he had everything a man could want, his love for Daisy Buchanan was a love unrequited. And he loved her with such passion — his desire for her was such that he moved to West Egg, just across the lake from her on East Egg, so he could be close. He threw lavish parties that were open to everyone but that he seldom attended. Yet he threw them in hopes that she'd hear the music, hear the laughter, see the lights, and attend. He threw them with the hope that his love from yesteryear would come back to him, as it were.

But she couldn't. So Gatsby did what every 13-year-old boy can relate to: He stayed up until the wee hours and observed the mysterious green light on the end of her dock from afar. The green light cathartically comforted him because to see it was to know she was close.

This issue of *American Way* has a recurring theme: longing. A longing for speaking out while in pursuit of silence (page 52); a longing for dangerous speeds in a civilized setting (page 34); and a longing to have someone advocate for you when you need them to the most (page 40).

It's springtime on Chautauqua Lake, and crowds are descending in droves. Here in Texas, I'm now a 36-year-old man who's been together with his Daisy Buchanan for a decade and a half. And yet I can still empathize with the 13-year-old kids on Chautauqua Lake, trying to extract a semblance of enjoyment on the water while reaching out in the dark to their own mysterious green lights.


ADAM PITLUK
Editor

THE EYES HAVE IT: The eyes of Eckleburg are upon you.



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