



FOR BOOK CLUBS

and the otherwise curious

POCKETFUL OF POSEYS

by Thomas Reed

I'm a former English professor, and I've spent thousands of lively hours discussing all sorts of novels, poems, and plays with rooms full of smart readers. These days, it's especially exciting to think of people out there getting together to talk about *Pocketful of Poseys*. In case you belong to a book club or reading group that has chosen my novel, I've gathered some information to enhance your experience, including **background to the featured locations**, **suggestions for food and drink** should your group gather in person, some **recipes**, and, most importantly, **questions to get your conversations started**. Some prompts might seem residually "professorial" (hard to shed old habits!) but others are meant to tease out the same kind of personal reactions I experienced in writing about Cinnie Posey and her family. I hope they tweak some new thoughts about her and her story and, most of all, lead to some fun discussion.

I do miss the classroom, and I'd dearly love to be there with you as you talk about *Pocketful*. I'm more than happy to consider a Zoom get-together with you and your group and—if time and geography allow—even join you for a face-to-face reading, signing, and chat. Please get in touch with questions, comments, reading/signing requests, and/or any insights or anecdotes you'd like to share.

You can reach me at Tom@ThomasReedAuthor.com.

— Tom Reed

Posey Family Travel Locations

I've been asked more than once how I chose the locations for *Pocketful of Poseys*.

To be honest, I wanted all the global destinations to be scenically spectacular so that the blockbuster movie made by Greta Gerwig or Sharon Horgan would be beautiful to look at. There were other reasons at play, though. I'll take a few moments to share them with you.

CAUTION: There may be some plot spoilers below, so be careful about reading this before you've read the book!

Hanover, New Hampshire

You'll remember from my Acknowledgments that Cinny was inspired by my wonderful mother-in-law, Claudia Stuart Grant. Claudia exited bravely and selflessly from life, very much in Cinny's mode, at a retirement community in Pennsylvania. I decided to put Cinny at Hanover Hills for a couple of reasons. First, it's in the same town as Dartmouth College, which I thought would be a perfect place for Frank to work. Once he retired, it made perfect sense that the couple would want to keep living in a town that is, in many ways, like Oberlin, where they'd met and founded that infamous co-op. Second, Hanover is just down the road from Camp Pemigewassett, the summer boys' camp my grandfather and his two best friends founded in 1908 and that my family is still involved in running. In fact, loving New Hampshire and the Upper Connecticut Valley, my wife Dottie and I have our name in at Kendal at

Hanover, a Quaker retirement community just up the river from Dartmouth. Whether or not our last request for our own children is to sprinkle our ashes all the heck over the place, it just felt right to put Cinny in a version of Kendal.

The only problem was that the fictional Hanover Hills turned out to have some very quirky policies and residents that the very real Kendal most assuredly does not. So, especially as I imagined myself in my dotage entrusting my care to people and an institution that I might be thought of as having made fun—or light—of, I had to insert a kind of disclaimer stating that Hanover Hills was NOT that other, Quaker-affiliated community up the road. This writing business can be more complicated than you think!

New Zealand

The Reed family (my wife Dottie, daughter Abby [then 13], and son Dan [then 9], and I) arrived in Christchurch for my sabbatical leave from Dickinson College mere days before 9/11. I'll never forget the ambivalence we felt being on the opposite side of the globe from the falling towers. Over and against our gratitude for feeling safe was our worry for family and loved ones back home and a curious but powerful feeling of guilt at not sharing in the collective peril and national resolve. Owing to global restrictions on travel, we saw no other Americans for months. As a result, we were the only Yankees in town, and we were welcomed all the more warmly by the Kiwis, many of whom remain our closest friends.



After 9/11, "The Chalice" in Christchurch became a central spot for flowers, notes, and other expressions of support for the USA.

Quail Island was, from the beginning, one of our favorite spots for a Saturday or Sunday outing. We'd drive out to Lyttelton, hop on the Black Cat, and ride out to the island for a half day of walking and exploring. Ivon Skelton's solitary grave was always a poignant spot for us, so far away from home ourselves but, unlike him, secure in each other's company. When we visited Samoa that March, I may or may not have taken a flower or two from his picket-fenced plot back to his home island, hoping (if I did) to reunite him with his family through the nitrogen cycle. Our other staple at Quail Island was a picnic overlooking the Ships' Graveyard: always deli meat, rounds of BabyBel cheese, Cheds crackers, Home Wheat biscuits, Dairy Milk chocolate, and tiny splits of Lindauer Classic Brut. The Posey's menu is distinctly similar, save for the bubbly. I killed that darling when an editor at Beaufort told me she thought there was too much alcohol in the book!



My first glimpse of Quail Island in 2001



Ivon Skelton's solitary grave on Quail Island



Our favorite picnic spot overlooking Ships' Graveyard, along with photographic proof of our traditional fare, including Lindauer Classic Brut, of course.



My family, after hiking the Milford Track

Singapore

Like Grace, Dottie softened the pain of our leaving New Zealand by arranging a two-week westbound family vacation in the Spring of 2002. Singapore was on the way, so we stopped for a once-in-a-lifetime visit to Clarke Quay, Orchard Street, and the world-class zoo. Little did we know that Abby would return a few years after college to teach at the Stamford American International School. I knew as she was leaving that a Singapore Sling at Raffles would be de rigeur for her settling in, so I remember slipping her twenty dollars or so to cover one for her and a companion. She wrote back to say the drink had been lovely though the \$20 hadn't remotely covered the tab. Nor did it the next spring when Dottie and I flew over to visit Abby and went to the Long Bar to sample the classic cocktail and accompanying peanuts. Jack's balking at the price obviously echoes my own, but I'm pretty sure I concealed my horror more successfully than he did. It was a bucket list kind of thing.



Our introduction to Singapore Slings with accompanying peanuts

Thailand

Dottie and I had loaned Abby several thousand dollars to get her over the multiple hurdles of establishing a Singapore bank account, and she chose to repay us by planning and paying for a trip with her to Thailand. We'd travelled extensively as a family for decades, but to arrive at a point where your daughter not only makes the reservations but also picks up the tab is truly extraordinary. Our progress through immigration at the Krabi Airport was less taxing than Brian's, but the taxi ride to the pier was just as sweltering—and I admit I shared Jack's misgivings about inadequate exits from ferryboat cabins; I crossed the Andaman on deck while Dottie and Abby lolled in air-conditioned comfort. We did stay at the Paradise Resort in Ko Phi Phi and, while our trip via long-tail boat out to Phi Phi Lei was in the daytime under a brilliant sun, the beauty of that remote lagoon stuck in my head in ways I could never have guessed would come back to me in the way that it did.



2014 - Traditional long-tail boat with Phi Phi Lei in the background.

Rome

Rome was on Dottie's palliative itinerary for sad leavers of New Zealand, as it was on Grace's, and our daily routine was precisely Grace's as well. I'd thought, when I was first planning *Pocketful*, that a great, made-for-cinema setting for an awkward public sprinkling of ashes would be the Piazza San Marco in Venice. But then we're told to write what



Piazza San Pietro

we know, and I knew Rome and St. Peter's not only from a year I'd spent there in boarding school as a fifteen-year-old but also from my father's first sabbatical leave from Brown University in the spring of 1954. I was six then, and we lived for a month in a pensione at the top of the Via Veneto, right next to the Porta Pinciana. I learned to ride a bicycle in the Borghese Gardens, and there's no question that the family riding the rented bikes through the dappled sunlight as Grace reads Cinnie's instructions for Rome is me, along with my mother, father, and sister, peddling happily through a seventy-year time warp.

What else? Chelsea and Sage's upsetting contretemps with vulgar Italian slang echoes a few gaffes I was guilty of as a fifteen-year-old trying to flirt with Italian girls and being laughed at in the process. And it's just possible that Sage's bold assertion that she will go out and fellate every homeless Italian man she can find if Ella divulges any of her childish "cutisms" is the complete inverse of my great embarrassment when, that same year, I was walking with my mother and father and a pair of flamboyant streetwalkers shimmied by in their fishnet stockings and six-inch heels. All I can say is that, when Sage said what she did, that was the very street on which I imagined the outrageous deed possibly being done. Funny how sexuality raising its head can be so jarring in a family setting, either for one generation or the other.

Switzerland

My first trip to Grindelwald was in March of 1976, when I was a graduate student at Oxford. I was an avid skier, and I managed to convince my girlfriend that a trip to the Bernese Oberland would be just the thing. She, like Cinny, would have preferred to spend a week or two at Club Med, but she sportingly went along. Sadly—for her and ultimately



for our relationship—she hated skiing as much as Cinny did. We were slated to stay at the Hotel Bellary for ten days. She left after six, insisting that I stay the full term and, unintentionally I'm sure, making me feel all the more guilty as a result. Maybe Jack re-wooing Grace with that Cartier Santos is some sort of decades-later vicarious gesture of penance. In any case, she had very much enjoyed the day off we took from downhill torture

to ride the train up to the Jungfrauoch.

Surely that underpins Cinny's request to

have some ashes scattered up there—albeit in a ratio that suggests Frank loved the whole business far more than she did.



Hotel Bellary

Two bits of information to add. After my girlfriend headed back to Oxford, I spent a delightful day on the slopes below the Eiger with an old friend of the family, a seventy-six-year-old-woman who was accompanied by her regular skiing companion, a man named Adolph Rubi. He was in his late seventies too and had been a professional mountain guide all his life. He was actually one of the men back in 1936 who emerged from the railroad tunnel on the Eiger north face to try to rescue Toni Kurz as a dangled there from his rope. It's impossible for me to remember being in



Jungfrauoch

Grindelwald and skiing with Herr Rubi that day without thinking of that tragic event, which accordingly found its way into the book. The second bit involves a watch that must have fallen out of my pocket while I was riding on a T-bar on the Mannlichen. I assumed I'd never see it again, but I left my Oxford address with the lift attendant just in case. Back in Oxford at the end of May, after all the snow had melted on the ski runs, I received a little package in the Jesus College porters' lodge. It had Swiss stamps on it. Inside was my Tissot. The Swiss aren't just good at making the things. They're great at keeping them working for their owners. My watch scene in the book is a little tribute to their care and honesty.

England

I could go on and on about Oxford, one of my favorite spots on earth. I spent a year there on a Fulbright fellowship in 1975-76 and went back for a sabbatical year in 1984-85. (Let me add that one of my quiet joys in life is that our son Dan has already spent one summer there as part of his Breadloaf Master's program at Middlebury and has another one coming up.) The Old Parsonage was always a little rich for my blood, but I remember walking by it any number of evenings and thinking how much fun it would be to stay there. One of the obvious benefits of making up stories is that you get to do all sorts of stuff you could never afford to do in real life. Punting on the Thames, though, was well within my means, and I recall many happy spring afternoons when my friends and I would neglect our studies, buy some wine, cheese, and bread, and head down to Magdalen Bridge for a little "messaging about in boats," as Ratty would say.

I was fortunate that one of my friends from the UVA graduate program in English literature was a Rhodes Scholar who was in his second year when I arrived. It was he who first filled me in about Parson's Pleasure, it was he who first showed me Shelley's memorial in University College, and it was he who clued me in that the best place in town to dance and generally carry on was The Stage Club. He claimed to be working on an "Oxford novel" that year and told me, with a twinkle, that one of the characters was based on me. I never asked, but I'm sure my fictional alter ego would have been a nice and bright but straight and impossibly naïve young American whose eyes are opened, with some shock and consternation, to the lingering Oxonian demimonde of Oscar Wilde. I don't think he ever finished the book. It's fun to think, though, that he at least made it into this appendix of mine.



New Jersey

Dottie and I know the riverside Jersey City Hyatt House well, having stayed there multiple times when visiting our Dan, who teaches and chairs the English Department at nearby Newark Academy. (Both he and Abby teach English. Genetic?) Grace, Jack, and Chelsea's visit to the disappointing, beer-challenged "upscale gastropub" is totally based on Tom, Dottie, and Dan's visit to the same venue. I should say my family always makes fun of me for loving Welsh Rarebit, a food I favored at numerous Howard Johnson restaurants when I was a kid. "What?," they exclaim. "That's just, like, melted Velveeta on toast. Ew!" I soldier on as fathers must, but I also have to say that, when I sign on for taking flak from my loved ones over my pedestrian taste, I want it to be good. When, as in Jack's case, the sauce is more reminiscent of rhinitis than of true Cardiff cuisine, it's simply not worth the substantial grief.

Finally, why the Molly Pitcher rest stop? When I was in graduate school in Charlottesville, I'd drive home to my parents' house in Providence every Thanksgiving and Christmas. More times than I can remember, the weather would be threatening, and I frequently imagined holing up in one of the turnpike's laybys to wait out a blinding snowstorm. The closest I ever came to an actual overnight was the early January I'd interviewed at the MLA convention and set out for Virginia in the face of a nasty weather forecast. I can't remember if I stopped at the Molly Pitcher area to put on chains or grab a burger or just to wait for the salt on the turnpike to do its work, but it was enough to rivet the

place in my mind as a kind of quintessential lowbrow port of refuge. Casting about for a lowbrow spot for Grace and Brian to have begun their earthly journey, I knew as soon as it popped into my head that this was the place. Oh, and I did end up sitting on the hood of a driver talking to his doctor on his cell phone. But that was in Carlisle, PA.



Set The Scene For Your Discussion

Should your book club or reading group decide to set the scene for your discussion of *Pocketful of Poseys* with a nod-to-the-book potluck of sorts, you're in luck. Food and drink make an appearance in most every stop of the Posey family's global journey, some more memorable, perhaps, than others. Below are suggestions—including a few recipes*—to consider.

As you nibble and sip your way through the discussion questions and ensuing conversation, I do hope you'll pause to raise a glass to Cinny's bravery and honesty. After all, she represents our parents—and us, eventually—as we march through life doing the best we can, hopefully making memories and amends, alike, before we leave. Or, as in Cinny's case, after.

Food

Deli meat, rounds of BabyBel cheese, Cheds crackers, HomeWheat biscuits, Dairy Milk chocolate
(Christchurch)

Meatloaf (Hanover)

Peanuts in shells (Singapore)

Tiramisu*

Hit up a vending machine for snacks (Molly Pitcher rest stop)

Drink

Tiny splits of Lindauer Classic Brut, despite my editor (Christchurch)

Singapore Sling* (Singapore)

Non-alcoholic Singapore Sling*

Kono sauvignon blanc (Seattle)

Prosecco (Christchurch)

Lukewarm coffee (Molly Pitcher rest stop)

Recipes

Raffles Hotel Singapore Sling

(<https://www.food.com>; search for “Singapore Sling” to find the recipe and a calculator for several servings.)

Ingredients

1 ½ ounces gin
½ ounce Cherry Heering or any cherry brandy liqueur
¼ ounce Benedictine
¼ ounce Cointreau
1 dash bitters
4 ounces pineapple juice
1/2 ounce lime juice
1/3 ounce Grenadine
sparkling/soda water to top up
garnish with a slice of pineapple and cherry

Instructions

Pour the gin, cherry brandy, Bénédictine, Cointreau, Angosturra Bitters, pineapple juice, lime juice and Grenadine in a cocktail shaker and mix it all up. Or just stir everything together in a jug. Drop about 4 ice cubes in a tall, Collins glass and pour the Sling over. Top with soda water, garnish with the fruit and serve.

Simple Non-Alcoholic Singapore Sling

(superpages.com)

Ingredients

2 oz. orange juice
2 oz. pineapple juice
1 oz. lime juice
club soda
dash of Grenadine
1 maraschino cherry for garnish

Instructions

Fill a highball glass with ice cubes. Add the orange juice, pineapple juice and lime juice into a shaker. Shake the ingredients together for about five seconds. Pour the contents of the shaker into the glass. Fill the glass with club soda and add a dash of grenadine to the glass. Garnish with a maraschino cherry and stir the drink.

The Singapore Sling, widely regarded as the national drink, was first created in 1915 by Raffles bartender Ngiam Tong Boon. Primarily a gin-based cocktail, the Singapore Sling also contains pineapple juice, lime juice, curaçao and Bénédictine. Giving it the pretty pink hue are Grenadine and cherry liqueur. Bartender Ngiam deliberately chose to give the cocktail this rosy colour.

Following the turn of the century in colonial Singapore, Raffles was the gathering place for the community – and Long Bar was the watering hole. It was common to see gentlemen nursing glasses of gin or whisky. Unfortunately for the ladies, etiquette dictated that they could not consume alcohol in public. So, for the sake of modesty, teas and fruit juices were their beverages of choice.

Ever insightful, Ngiam thus saw a niche in the market and decided to create a cocktail that looks like plain fruit juice but is actually infused with gin and liqueurs. The clever bartender made the beverage pink to give it a feminine flair which, together with the use of clear alcohol, led people to think it was a socially acceptable drink for women. With that, the Singapore Sling was born. Needless to say, it became an instant hit.

— From Raffles.com

Tiramisu

8 servings

Recipe and photo from DominoSugar.com

Ladyfingers soaked in espresso and rum are stacked, spread with Mascarpone and dusted with cocoa in our version of this traditional Italian dessert.

Prep Time: 25 minutes.

Chill Time: At least 4 hours or overnight

Ingredients

3 large Egg yolks

3/4 cup Domino® Golden Sugar

¼ teaspoon Salt

1 ½ cups Heavy whipping cream

8 ounces Mascarpone cheese, at room temperature

½ teaspoon Pure vanilla extract

2 cups Espresso coffee

2 tablespoons Rum (optional)

26 pieces Ladyfingers

¼ cup Cocoa powder



Instructions

In a large heatproof bowl, combine egg yolks, ¼-cup sugar, and salt. Set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Whisk the mixture until the sugar dissolves and the egg yolks turn to a light-pale yellow color. About 5-6 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside. Allow the mixture to cool. Stir occasionally.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whip attachment, whip the cream and the rest of the sugar (1/2-cup) until soft peaks form. Add vanilla and mascarpone cheese and continue whipping at medium speed until stiff peaks form.

Fold the mascarpone mixture with the cool egg yolk mixture until combined and smooth.

In a shallow dish, mix espresso with rum.

Assemble. Dip ladyfingers, one at a time in the coffee mixture. Arrange in a single layer on the bottom of an 8in x 8in x 2in pan. Spread half of the mascarpone cream on top. Dust half of the cocoa powder over it. Repeat process for a second layer of ladyfingers, cream and cocoa.

Refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

Chef's Tip

To make a 3-layer tiramisu, use the same amount of ingredients but use a loaf pan to assemble the cake.

Discussion Questions for *Pocketful of Poseys*

1. We often judge a book by the first paragraphs. *Pocketful of Poseys* opens with Grace, loaded down with her mother's laundry, struggling to open the front door to Cinny's cottage. Do you feel it's an effective first scene?
2. How would you feel if your parent had a debilitating condition and wanted to stop eating and drinking? Would you support their decision?
3. Was it believable to you that Cinny revealed what she did to her children and their families? Were there any revelations that you feel she should not have shared with them?
4. Grace and Brian question Cinny's taking on a new name at Woodstock. Do you feel her doing so is consistent with her resolution to be faithful to Frank? How about her subsequent contact with Matthew?
5. Play the armchair psychologist. Why do you think Grace is so obsessed with grammar? Why do you think Jack is obsessed with all things mechanical?
6. Grace sometimes feels "outside her comfort zone," especially with her mother and Brian. How did the book affect you in terms of your own comfort zone? If you were challenged, did any discomfort give way to any positive feelings?
7. What are your thoughts on the book's structure? Cinny could have told everything up front. Instead, she revealed her life secrets slowly. Did that structure feel natural to the story or was it just how the author crafted the reader's experience? Was the impact on Cinny's family any different because of the chapter-by-chapter revelations?
8. Each character in the novel has passions, strengths, and flaws. With which character do you most identify and why?
9. Did any one scene or location stick with you the most? Why?
10. If you were to give instructions to sprinkle your ashes in different locations that have been most meaningful to you or represent pivotal moments in your life, where might you choose?
11. Do you tend to use humor to avoid serious conversations or situations? What characters in the novel use humor for this purpose? What's an example of it helping the situation? How about a time that it backfires?
12. Did your affection for a character grow over time in a way that surprised you?
13. If *Pocketful of Poseys* were ever made into movie, what actors would you cast for the various characters?