

BEFORE

May 1973. I was twenty years old.

I hadn't seen or heard from my father in eleven years.

My dad had found out from relatives that I was heading from Seattle to college in Missouri. I agreed to stop in Denver to spend a day and night before heading east.

During our day together I noticed my father sneaking sidelong glances at me as I drove us to his apartment. We had met at his parents' house near Greeley Colorado that morning. The only conversation was about the weather, and grandma's famous meatballs. I was nervous about what to expect that evening when it was just the two of us.

As I settled on his couch, my dad set an old, black suitcase-sized trunk on the coffee table in front of me.

"I've been keeping this for you. It belonged to your great uncle Dick."

I tried to speak but couldn't think of any words.

Uncle Dick was my mother's uncle and a legend in our family. I'd heard stories about this 'real Indiana Jones' character since grade school. Tales about Uncle Dick, also known as Richard D'Orsay, an adventurer who searched for Inca treasure in Ecuador.

My reunion with my dad just took a mysterious detour.

Why he kept this old trunk and never sent it to my mom is also a mystery. Maybe he felt this trunk might help us bond again. Memories of my childhood flooded in.

I flashed on a memory as a four-year-old. Dad said, "Someone special wanted you to have these." I saw a fixed-blade hunting knife reflecting light on my parents' kitchen table. There was a round metal canteen with red and green striped fabric sides and a screw cap. My dad gently took the knife. I never saw it again. The canteen hung around for a while but disappeared in a pile of castaways.

Sitting with this open trunk, I glanced at my dad. We shared a look of wonder and excitement. He knew Uncle Dick the "Explorer." I was about to be initiated into the legend. We were totally in synch. Sacred ancestral objects were about to speak.

I pulled out my great uncle's cigarette case from the trunk. It had a silver dragon on it. My dad and I began a new journey of love and connection with ancient accounts of daring deeds.

At that moment in my father's living room in 1973, we were both under the spell of a man neither of us knew. A ghost who lived a life we could hardly imagine. Would the contents of this trunk tell his story? I recalled how being an adventurer was once an actual job description. Here I was starting out on my own adventure, solo, driving across the country to become an actor.

I needed courage and inspiration. It might be in this trunk. I understood this was why my father kept it for me. He was middle-aged and struggling with his own demons. He needed to make amends and start being there for his only son.

While sitting on my dad's couch All I could think about was that my uncle's blood also ran through my veins. I rifled through the trunk, scanned notes, peered at photos of him in jungle and mountain kit. A newspaper clipping stuck out between the papers. It was a letter to the editor of Esquire Magazine from Dick about living in the Andes mountains for weeks and almost going mad following an ancient "guide" written by a Spaniard named Valverde to a lost Inca treasure.

I knew nothing about the origins of the Valverde Treasure but now my imagination was fired up. I wanted to read everything but there was a problem. I was heading east in less than twenty-four hours. My college dorm was no place for precious family heirlooms and possible treasure maps, so I picked out some photos, the bas-ass silver dragon cigarette case, Dick's membership card to a New York City speakeasy, and sketches jungle huts. There was just enough room in my suitcase. I piled the remaining papers, handwritten field notes, and maps with Spanish place names were gently piled on the coffee table. The trunk itself was unsalvageable.

I boxed the crumbling pile of paper into two cardboard boxes and wrapped them in brown postal paper. After addressing them to my mom in Seattle, I put them in the backseat of my VW bug parked in the alley behind Dad's apartment.

When I returned to my car, I glanced in the back seat. It was empty! A passing thief thought the boxes might contain something of value. Perhaps my uncle had marked the spot where the treasure could be found in his maps and field notes, but it was cursed to never be revealed. I would not let this go.

I completed my theater degree, moved to New York, and worked on and off as an actor for ten years before giving up that dream. I settled into the exploding computer industry. My great uncle Dick's search for treasure faded from my mind.

Un 2004, Dick's nephew, my uncle Frank Dorsay's passing revealed a treasure trove of Dick's letters to his brother Elmer. It included Dick's own summary of his search treasure. Then in 2023, Dick's niece, my mother died leaving behind photos of Dick in Ecuador.

The possibility for a book about Richard D'Orsay, one of a short list of daring men who searched for Valverde's treasure, looked possible again.

AFTER:

In May of 1973, I hadn't seen or heard from my father in eleven years. I was twenty, heading from where I'd grown up in Seattle to college in Missouri.

My dad had heard from relatives that I'd be making this drive. He asked me to stop in Denver to spend one day and night with him before I finished my drive east.

The morning of my day with my dad, we met at his parents' house near Greeley, Colorado. From there, I drove us to his apartment [x miles or minutes] away in [neighborhood of Denver? Or general area of Denver]. The only conversation was about the weather and grandma's famous meatballs. He snuck sidelong glances at me as I drove. I was nervous about the day: what we'd do, what we'd talk about, and how we'd navigate the long evening ahead at his place, just the two of us.

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I wondered why my dad was the one to possess this trunk, why he had never sent it to my mother, and why he had kept it for me. I suspected he felt this trunk could help us bond again. I resisted that, and yet, memories of my childhood flooded in.

I'd been four years old when I saw the glint of a fixed-blade hunting knife beside a round metal canteen with red and green striped fabric sides on my parents' kitchen table. Dad had said,

“Someone special wanted you to have these,” just before he took the knife. I never saw it again. The canteen hung around for longer, but disappeared in an eventual pile of castaways.

Sitting with this open trunk, I glanced at my dad. We shared a look of wonder and excitement. He’d known Uncle Dick, the explorer. I was about to be initiated into the legend. Ancestral objects that had been sacred to my family were about to speak, revealing daring stories of [give a few teasers here]. My resistance to my father lessened. At that moment in his living room in 1973, we were both under the spell of a man neither of us knew. A ghost who lived a life we could hardly imagine.

I pulled out my great uncle’s silver cigarette case. It had a silver dragon on it.

I wondered if the contents of this trunk would tell his story, and I recalled how being an adventurer was once an actual job description. Here I was, starting out on my own adventure, driving solo across the country to become an actor, a career with prospects as poor as adventurer.

I needed courage and inspiration. I hoped to find it in that trunk. I understood this was the reason my father kept it for me. He was middle-aged and struggling with his own demons. He needed to make amends and start being there for his only son. For him, the handing over of the trunk was such a gesture, an offering, and also an ask for forgiveness.

While sitting on my dad’s couch all I could think about was how my uncle’s blood also ran through my veins. I rifled through the trunk, perused notes he’d written, and peered at photos of him in jungle and mountain kit. A newspaper clipping stuck out between the papers. It was a letter Dick had written to the editor of *Esquire Magazine* about living in the Andes mountains for weeks and almost going mad as he followed a __hundred-year-old guide to a lost Inca treasure, the guide’s author, a Spaniard named Valverde.

I knew nothing about the origins of the Valverde Treasure but Dick's artifacts fired up my imagination. I wanted to read everything, but there was a problem. I was heading east in less than twenty-four hours. My college dorm was no place for precious family heirlooms and possible treasure maps, so I picked out some photos, the bad-ass silver dragon cigarette case, Dick's membership card to a New York City speakeasy, and sketches of jungle huts. There was just enough room in my suitcase for these few small things. I piled the remaining papers, handwritten field notes, and maps with Spanish place names on the coffee table. The trunk itself was unsalvageable.

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When I returned to my car, I glanced in the back seat. It was empty! A passing thief must have thought the boxes contained something of value.

I'd later learn the Valverde treasure is said to be cursed and as such, is unfindable. I have wondered, over the years, whether my uncle, in his maps and field notes, might have marked the spot where the treasure could be found, and if so, whether it was the curse that caused those boxes to be stolen. I would not let this go.

I completed my theater degree, moved to New York, and worked on and off as an actor for ten years before giving up that dream. I settled into the exploding computer industry. For most of my life, my great uncle Dick's search for treasure faded from my mind.

And then, in 2004, Dick's nephew, my uncle Frank Dorsay, passed away, and in his belongings, we uncovered a treasure trove of Dick's letters to his brother Elmer. These letters

included Dick's own summary of his search for treasure. In 2023, Dick's niece, my mother, died, leaving behind photos of Dick in Ecuador.

It was enough. Finally, the harrowing and heartbreaking story of Richard D'Orsay, one of a short list of daring men who searched for Valverde's treasure, could be known.

TRACK CHANGE COPY

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