



Sandra Newman

The Only Good Thing Anyone Has Ever Done
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0. A Few Notes on *the only good thing anyone has ever done*

1.) Genesis of the report form employed in the novel.

In 1999, as I was beginning concentrated work on the only good thing anyone has ever done, I had a day job as a temporary secretary in a London firm of industrial spies. Their business was investigating incidents of companies producing, for instance, counterfeit Nike sneakers. So I would receive audiocassettes from the field, from some operative who had flown out undercover to Bulgaria, posing as an unscrupulous tennis shoe merchant. These would run, roughly:

- "1. Arrived at the StarBrite factory on the outskirts of Sofia at 3 PM.
- 1.1 I was met by Mr Iliescu, the CEO of StarBrite shoes.
- 1.2 He led me on a tour of the premises, where I saw the shoes in question.

2. The factory comprises three buildings..."

Because I wanted to do my own writing in my free time at work, I began to put my manuscript into this report form, so that if anyone happened to walk in while I was writing, they would glance at the computer screen and think that I was doing my work. I then discovered that using the report form solved a lot of my narrative problems and was a useful way of rethinking the paragraph, and in general, the way information is organized, concentrated and diluted in a narrative.

2.) Source of blackjack material.

One day in 1993, I was leafing through the job section of *Loot*, (a classified ads paper) when I spotted an ad reading "Professional gambler's assistant wanted. 120 pounds a week plus 5% of net, international travel." I phoned, expecting a scam, but the ad turned out to be genuine. It had been placed by a professional blackjack player who had been in the business 15-odd years, and regularly recruited teams to travel around with him playing casino blackjack with his money. His players got full training in card counting and ace tracking systems for beating the game, which, incidentally, are simple enough that nine out of 10 people can learn them with a few weeks' concentrated effort.

When I was playing with him, the team were all young women (he was a man in his 60s). During the seven-odd months I played, we travelled to Atlantic City, Mississippi, Holland, Malaysia, and Kathmandu, and won a total of \$250,000. The psychodramas involved were unbelievable, as we lived at close quarters and within a few days of the trip commencing, everyone on the team detested the boss, who equally resented us. He, as might be imagined, made passes at each of his employees in turn. When turned down, he suffered a mid-life crisis and took out his bitterness by firing people arbitrarily, accusing people of stealing, staging fantastic scenes in which he accused everyone of ingratitude, and in general carrying on like a poor man's Caligula.

3.) Adoption themes in the book.

I am an adopted child myself: given up for adoption at birth, I knew nothing about my real parents until I was 25. Then my biological father hired a private detective to track me down. I met my father and mother for the first time then.

Curiously, my father is a novelist and poet like myself, with four published books. My mother and I both did bachelor's degrees in Russian. As my adopted parents have both passed away, and I have spent more and more time with my biological parents, they now have assumed the role of parents in my life. I refer to them as my mother and father.