

PREFACE

Even though it is based on actual events in my life, this biomythography and pseudo-picaresque novel should be read as a constructed reality populated by invented characters. And yet, I am telling *a* truth in these pages about my Italian American cultural experience growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, it would be wise for me to advise those who prefer reading about moral exemplar protagonists operating in a world better than our own to turn back now. This book accurately portrays hate speech; reactionary political and religious beliefs, and physical, sexual, and psychological violence. That I leaven the book with humor might well make it an even less palatable read for some, because one person's insightful political satire is another's exercise in poor taste. All this begs the question: Why would I linger upon depictions of evil, when it has been the effort of so many of the heroes of our time to redress all that is reprehensible in our culture? Hopefully, in depicting certain forms of evil, I have not inadvertently romanticized or advocated for everything that I am trying to oppose in the writing of this book. I am forever frustrated that Oliver Stone wanted to bury Gordon Gekko, not praise him, and yet *Wall Street* is the favorite film of many business majors *for all the wrong reasons*. Ultimately, I believe in wisdom, compassion, and rebirth, all of which are impossible to strive for without a willingness to face reality and wrestle with difficult truths.

I began work on this project because I have come upon middle age during a trying period in American history. Indeed, I write these words quarantined in my house during the Covid-19 outbreak and the George Floyd protests of the summer of 2020. Had I written it in under different circumstances, this may have been a very different book. I feel as if America has reached a crossroads, as has my own life. I do not pretend to have any answers, but I am in a reflective mood, looking back on my personal history, struggling to understand myself and my country.

As one of my favorite authors wrote:

Midway along the journey of our life

I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
for I had wandered off from the straight path.

How hard it is to tell what it was like,
this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn
(the thought of it brings back all my old fears),

a bitter place! Death could scarce be bitterer.
But if I would show the good that came of it
I must talk about things other than the good.

MARC DiPAOLO

July 4, 2020