

EPILOGUE

*Thank you for my Freedom, Damien!
And Happy Graduation Day!*

The following article appeared on the front page of *The Livingston County News* on May 25, 1997.

*Beloved Bear Statue Feared Stolen
from Historic Geneseo Fountain*

By Marsha Keller

Emmeline the bear has disappeared from her perch atop the light pole of the water fountain on Main Street.

Geneseo Police Chief Rick Bogosian said the statue disappeared sometime between 2 and 4 a.m. Police have made no suspects known to the press yet.

Residents of the village of Geneseo were distressed to wake up to the news that the beloved bear had gone missing. Eyes red with crying, Maude Montalbano, a lifelong resident of Geneseo, talked of how Emmeline had been a friend to her and her family all their lives. "That bear is Geneseo. We can't believe it's gone. I'm praying for her quick and safe return."

Built in 1888, the bear and the fountain have been the centerpiece of Geneseo village since the Grover Cleveland Administration. The bear is named after Emmeline Austin Wadsworth, honoring a beloved member of the Wadsworths, a prominent local family.

If the original Emmeline is not recovered, local historical societies have exact measurements of the bear and illustrations of its design. This means a replica may be constructed to replace the original. The police, however, say this will not be necessary. "We will find Emmeline, and we will find the one who stole her," Bogosian vowed.

According to Bogosian, the thief presumably used an acetylene torch to burn the bronze statuette free of the light pole it "clutched." Mysteriously, the torch left no visible scarring on the pole itself. Authorities remain unclear how the bear could have been removed while leaving behind

a seemingly untouched pole surface. Bogosian refused to comment on this phenomenon.

The timing of the theft has inspired some to offer up supernatural explanations for Emmeline's disappearance last night, of all nights. Lifelong Geneseo resident and SUNY Geneseo graduate Joe Ferrero said, "Yesterday was graduation. A virgin must have finally graduated from Geneseo. I can't believe the legend is true! I always thought it was just a joke."

According to Dr. Leland Valancourt, a history professor at SUNY Geneseo, local folklore contends that the bear will only leave its perch on the fountain and run away if an undergraduate earns a bachelor's degree without becoming sexually experienced first. "It's total nonsense, of course," said Valancourt. "An excuse for students to pressure one another into an intimacy they are not emotionally prepared to experience yet. While I do not, personally, believe Emmeline came to life, I do think there is some connection between graduation yesterday and the bear disappearing overnight. This legend is being slyly referenced for as-yet-unknown reasons. I believe this is either a fraternity prank, or the thief is an eccentric with a bizarre sense of humor."

Sonny Verde, proprietor of Sonny's Music, claims to have been the only eyewitness on Main Street at 2:37 am. According to Verde, he had just completed an inventory of his music and locked up his store, when he witnessed an incredible event: Emmeline shook herself awake, released her grip from the lamppost, and jumped down onto the street. Verde said, "It was the most amazing thing I ever saw! Then she opened her mouth and spoke. She said something like, 'Thank you for my Freedom! And Happy Graduation Day!' I think she thanked a specific student by name, but I didn't catch it. Then she ran straight past me, down the street, whooping and laughing. Right before she disappeared into the woods at the end of the street, she yelled, 'Freedom!' one more time, and she laughed joyously up at the stars."