

Of course the passageway to hell was envisioned by the ancients as a waterway. The River Styx with its poisonous, fearsome fluid.

The journey across the ocean rocked the stomach with seasickness, my father told me often of his childhood ship crossing. How it tossed until the lighthouse of the Statue of Liberty rose up from the water solid, immobile, above the immigration offices.

No wonder, then, that he took the train the next day with his family to search for the dry stretch of the Midwest. Ironical, of course, to find instead this city clinging to the edge of a lake. To find later that seasick gospel drowning in the waters of baptism.

35 people drown in just one recent summer in the lake's Play Pen. The name deceptive, with its suggestion of a baby's safe enclosure. Yet here, in this protected section of a bay, boats rock, like gentle cradles, while the city's half-naked youth dance and sing and drink on decks, rails, jet skis ... floats. Until one goes under a backing-up boat. And the propellor slices away a woman's ankles.

Boating is the most dangerous form of travel, my brother responds when I send him the headline. Remembering perhaps his own Saturday afternoon boating there on the glinting water. Then the panicking. The sinking. The arms and legs thrashing in the attempted swim strokes neither of us has ever learned. Or so I presume. All he has ever told me is that he almost drowned.

Hey! Hey! the lifeguards call from their rocking boats to the swimmers who have sunk to just a bobbing skull, far, far out from the city beach where sometimes I sit stiff, dry, in the sandy sun. My blanket a healthy distance from the waves. The wave of the lifeguards' arms. Come back! My eyes