



JUST ABOVE THE LIGHT SWITCH BY THE DOOR TO THE studio where I work, I often place a photograph—pinning it to the wall with a red pushpin. When, in a magazine or a newspaper, I find a particularly arresting picture—a visual image that provokes my mind—I tear it out and put it by the light switch so that I see it and consider it as I come and go. Something to inspire me or confront me. For most of the month of March 1990, three photographs were pinned there by the light switch together.

A small one, in color, showed a middle-aged man doing some carpentry. Wearing aged leather hightop

work shoes, blue jeans, flannel shirt, sweat-stained red baseball cap, and around his waist, a well-used nail apron. He is working about eight feet off the ground, straddling a wall header while he nails it to the corner post. He's framing a house, and by the look on his face and the way he holds the hammer, it is clear that he not only knows what he is doing, but is intent on doing it right and well. You see carpenters every day doing this common task—nailing wood to wood with hammer and nail and muscle and blood and sinew and brain. Men who say, when asked, "Well, I'm in construction work." I like looking at this picture—bright blue sky, new wood, an ancient trade—something very honest and positive going on.

The second picture by the light switch was a grainy black-and-white news photo from the morning paper earlier in the month. Showing a middle-aged man, in a short-sleeved, sweat-stained khaki shirt. The man is smiling a great smile. And the other people in the picture are also smiling. The occasion is the conclusion of an election—an honest election—held in powder-keg conditions in a Central American country. Nobody was killed during the elections, and the losers accepted the results, leading to a major change in government. The man in the shirtsleeves was there risking his credibility and brains and skills—even his life—to help bring about the impossible. He was

there on his own, representing only himself and his concerns, without compensation other than the wages of conscience.

The third picture by the light switch shows a man in white shirt and tie. He is not smiling. The look on his face is a combination of vexation and determination. He has come once again to meetings in the Middle East to get enemies to talk to one another face to face. Not on behalf of his government or any government—not on behalf of any organization. On behalf of peace and justice. An agent of progress in human affairs.

It's the same man in each of these pictures by the light switch. And he is truly in the construction business. Giving of his time and life to build houses for poor people, to build an atmosphere wherein free elections can take place, to build structures of peace in one of the oldest and harshest arenas of conflict in human history.

The man's name is Carter. Used to raise peanuts in Georgia. Had a government job once. Carpenter now. And teacher. And when the historians settle up accounts on the twentieth century someday, his name will shine. He may not be in the list of great presidents—it is too soon to say. But it is not too soon to say that he is the finest ex-president in our century, and maybe ever.

Each night as I finished my work and paused at the

switch, I looked at the three pictures. *Gallant* is the word that comes to mind—high-spirited, courageous. He knows how to lose—for he has lost big. Forces beyond his control may have made him the wrong man for the wrong job at the wrong time. Still, he lost as few men have.

He might have tucked his tail between his legs and spent the rest of his life sorting his papers and fishing and playing golf. Others who have had his government job have done as little. But *to lose* and *to be a loser* are very different matters. Besides, he still had work to do. Tasks he accepts because of who he is and not because of any office he may or may not hold. He is proof that there is no limit to the amount of good a man may do if he does not worry about who gets the credit.

He is not one of those who gained the whole world and lost his own soul.

His example is not lost upon me.

Thanks to that man.

To him, the noble prize.