

# **NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS**

**co-authored by Peter Boffey and Sarah Witman**

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

by Stephen Samuels, Editor-in-Chief, Right Craft Publishing

I came into my present position following the online publication of Sarah Witman's interviews with Peter Boffey at [rightingcraft.com](http://rightingcraft.com) (2021) [available on the author's website ([peterboffey.com](http://peterboffey.com))]. But I have long admired his prose fiction as well as her studies in film and literature, † so when I learned of this project-in-process I quickly approached them about the possibility of my participating in some then unspecified editorial capacity. My subsequent involvement has turned out to be minimal, but a few prefatory remarks may provide helpful orientation to readers landing on the first page of the remarkable if sometimes daunting NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS.

This book stems from a collaboration between two highly qualified writers. Witman's biographical portion assumes an informed yet distanced viewpoint, helping us plot out her subject's variegated life history along more or less recognizable stations. Spinning off from her relatively objective perspective, Boffey's autobiographical NOTES bring his specific, intimate, and idiosyncratic observations to bear upon the chronicled events. Separately and together, these two writers have drawn upon storytelling strategies from both biographical and autobiographical genres, adapting literary conventions to their unique purpose; the co-authors ultimately deliver a highly interdependent account in prose as formal as academic presentation (with footnotes and appendices) and as informal as citations excerpted verbatim from interviews and correspondence. In a peculiar yet effective tag-team performance, their singular and joint voices ring true.

Appended to each of Witman's chapters, Boffey's NOTES constitute the subject's explicit contribution; reading them in tandem with her text suggests the productive, creative tension of an innovative partnership. These two parallel narrative tracks typically intersect, only rarely traveling tangentially or departing from the trajectory of the main story being told, that is, the story of the subject's outer *and* inner life.

In his NOTES, chronology never does assume priority; indeed, narrative time is dethroned in favor of an achronological approach. In any case, a reader can always reset the calendar by referring to the amply annotated chronology (APPENDIX I) where names, action, places, dates—who, what, where, when—are plainly stated, but not why those facts are significant. Some of the longer notes amount to personal essays and enhance our understanding of the internal workings of the subject's mind. Other notes float as intriguing "sidebars" to the main account and, for some readers, may constitute optional reading. However, on the whole, the NOTES do far more than simply supplement the more linear rendition. Contrary to his acquired tastes, preferences, and literary habits, Boffey has tried and largely succeeded in delivering much straight talk. Prompted by Witman's own speculations, in his open-ended musings the author seems to be puzzling out items unearthed by his biographer's clearheaded excavation of dig sites in his personal archeology. As explained in his own Note 8 to Chapter 16 (p.278), his "notetaking" while reading her drafts allowed him to

articulate patterns of thought and to express himself in realms of feeling only discovered (even after prior decades of self-study) while reading her drafts. Among other uses, the author frequently employs notes to question the reliability of his own recorded narration: not simply to question his memory but to wonder if patterns perceived are simply being invented in retrospect.

The temptation may arise to use the NOTES as an index, rendering A MEMOIR OF SORTS into a kind of roman à clef. However, such efforts at detection are rendered trivial by focusing on the more intriguing revelations of *how* an artist creates from raw material. During my own reading of the manuscript, I was struck by salient parallels between elements of the author's life and elements in his published fictions. Neither pure fact nor pure fiction, many elements in his novels derive from the author's operation in realms of "active imagination" as promulgated by Jung; it is a concept to which Boffey explicitly referred in the 2021 RightCrafting interview.

One characteristic example of the author's facility at such composite inventiveness can be found in Volume III of 3NLs (Chapter 8 "DD's FLIGHT," pp.219–223), where he has drawn extensively on his experience in an Oregon cold shed handling long-stem cut roses and holiday-season holly, which work provided the details and much of the atmosphere conveyed in the scene of a salmon packing plant on a working pier in BC Canada. This faculty for mining his memory bank and transposing its riches, *mutatis mutandis*, into fiction and/or a memoir "... of sorts..." strikes me as a treasure trove for readers interested in hunting down origins. Again, such passages confirm the educative value of studying how a creator creates, not the questionable entertainment value of a reader's vicarious living. I have employed brackets e.g. [Ed's note: ....] to point these parallels and cross-references out to the next reader. I have also brought attention to allusions some readers might find obscure or, by the same token, might wish to pursue to their sources. The authors have graciously allowed these and other brief editorial notations to be included in the final publication.

Long before I came on the scene, the authors had agreed upon a consistent format. When Witman quotes directly from their extensive recorded interviews, she employs simple quotation marks if the quote is brief and presented inline; longer citations from the recordings are indented in italicized blocks. A systematic punctuation signals the type of materials being cited (whether book, play, short story, etc.), and dates appear in parentheses after a given title to indicate the original year of a performance, publication, or recorded release. As a matter of diplomacy rather than legalistic concerns, Boffey has elected to abbreviate many personal names; in his FOREWORD, he elaborates upon his reasoning for this decision.

Witman and Boffey have with good cause played off aspects of illeistic and semi-illeistic modes of narration put to brilliant and similarly idiosyncratic use by Henry Adams, Gertrude Stein, Mary H. Austin, and others. Adding yet another dimension, the APPENDICES contain excerpts from historical correspondents: letters received, saved, retrieved, reread, and selected by the subject are included there. The resultant polyphonic rendition of the first thirty-four years of one person's life implies that the subject's identity is a creation compounded from more than one or two voices.

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† Boffey’s self-published fiction includes his standalone novel, *TWO HALF BROTHERS: SEPARATING OUT* (2014) and his multi-volume “novel in six books,” *THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT* (2018-22). See [www.peterboffey.com](http://www.peterboffey.com) for poetry, translations, and essays. Witman’s *BOOKS IN FILM* (2023) collects the best of her essays on film as literature and vice versa. Her critical thinking ranges authoritatively across treatments of Maigret on film and TV; Bertolucci’s film adaptation (1990) of Bowles’ *THE SHELTERING SKY* (1949); the cinematic partnership of filmmaker Alain Tanner and writer John Berger; and the French-language films of Luis Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière. No stranger to creative collaboration, she has recently embarked upon a full-length study of the Ivory-Merchant-Jhabvala filmmaking triumvirate.

## **FOREWORDS: I**

by Peter Boffey, Walnut Creek, 2025

For several years, Ophira Druch, my companion of 44 years and counting, kept asking me to draw up an annotated chronology as a document to which our son and grandson—and any other interested parties—might turn for a verifiable outline of my life. In the process of honoring her request [Ed. note: See APPENDIX I], I repeatedly felt a need to flesh out that skeletal rendering with more information and perhaps some literary flair. Yet, given the notorious pranks of memory and the unreliability of self-reportage I was leery of venturing into a conventional first-person autobiography of dubious value. I was also reluctant to watch my account be swept away by the inclusion of unessential details, revelations of sheer self-absorption, autopsies of disembodied abstraction—reprehensible practices to which I plead guilty, guilty, and guilty.

I suspected that an autobiography would likely result in yet another flawed, myopic self-portrait, but I wondered: what if I were to find some sympathetic writer to tell my story to? Could we together avoid the pitfalls of autobiography by refracting the story of one author’s life through another authorial voice? Might that someone—capable of following some ground rules and willing to do some research in order to make best use of historical references—be capable of composing a reasonably restrained version of my life, that is, a biography with a perspective more balanced than my own rendition would inevitably provide? It occurred to me that LA-based writer Sarah (Sally) Witman might know of a personable and affordable professional who could serve the purpose; it was my good fortune that Sally offered her own services.

Was Sally herself qualified to write my biography? No one better! She had been a delight to work with in 2020 and 2021 when, in her capacity as the Southwest Correspondent for Right Craft Publishing, she conducted two rounds of interviews, the whole of which she subsequently transcribed and published online at [rightingcraft.com](http://rightingcraft.com). I had come to recognize her keen intelligence, and she

had obviously read, understood, and admired my novels. Indeed, by the time I recontacted her in late 2022, she had also digested the poems, translations, and essays posted on my website. In short, no one knew my writing better than she. Even more to the point, because of or perhaps in spite of her thorough familiarity with the works, she was still curious about their geneses in my life and important connections between the art and the life. We settled on her compensation and agreed to proceed with a trial run.

It was only after an extremely rocky start that our many back-and-forth exchanges became the source for her biographical portion of this book. When I received her initial draft of the first chapters, not so much to edit lines or proofread her manuscript as to correct innocent errors of content and clarify continuity, I did challenge her tone and suggest cutting back on some flattering but perhaps too enthusiastic overwriting. I also identified and encouraged her to further emphasize the decisive influences of the popular arts, especially movies and television, and make more references to specific creations and their creators shaping my youngest imaginative life—even then saturated by manmade media.

Portraits of artists—especially self-portraits—typically rely on rendering subjects in particular settings, depicting trappings peculiar to them and often but not always reflective of their times. This convention is especially self-evident within the European-based painterly tradition. For all its eccentricities, *NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS* is just such self-portraiture *with what surrounds* and can be considered a subgenre of memoir. Its overall structure invites the reader to linger over some passages and to skip others of less interest. I haven't labored over the NOTES in order to settle scores or to exact revenge, to argue or to persuade. I have completed them—as with most everything I've written in earnest—in order to understand what I think and feel and, ideally, to communicate that understanding to others in a stimulating, occasionally amusing, way.

When I've wondered about any unnecessary (and perhaps unjustified) injury or offense that might be inflicted upon the living or the dead, I have used an abbreviated form of personal names, protecting the guilty as well as the innocent. Parties who do happen to read these pages and whose names have been abbreviated will know who they are.

As another consequence of closely reading her drafts, I was prompted to consider how the inclusion of shorter and longer excerpts from archived correspondence might add dimensionality to her narration, and she had no objection to my making APPENDICES out of those selections. The presentation of these APPENDICES and my NOTES may lead the reader to greater knowledge but not guarantee greater wisdom, for my discovery and invention of meaning always point toward the forever tantalizing questions: So what? What if? What else?

## FOREWORDS: II

by Sarah Witman, Los Angeles, 2025

After Peter contacted me with his new proposal, we decided that I'd record interviews with him concerning the first ten years of his life, write a draft based on my transcription of those recordings, and see what he thought of my attempt to shape a coherent, meaningful narrative. I knew him to be a ready raconteur, and he had no objections to my recording our conversations until he felt he'd exhausted his childhood recollections. After some pertinent research, I produced a tentative version and submitted my draft of what ultimately turned out to be Chapters 1 and 2.

It did not go well.

Author turned editor, Peter found too many free-floating projections planted on top of and sometimes smothering what I had supposed to be his felt experiences; he judged my insights—although volunteered at what I liked to think was a relatively elevated level of standard-issue popular psychology—tendentious. He chided me for fomenting a precious attitude toward a childhood fraught with enough of its own questionable preciousness and posited that, if not questioned, such a childhood would be vulnerable to wholesale dismissal as the byproduct of mere elitist privilege. Peter argued that my role as chronicler called for detachment, not indulgence. He perceived that I had mounted a façade of facetious mock-heroics; worse (for a connoisseur of irony bordering on sarcasm), he didn't think I'd done a very good job maintaining that façade! Probably I had been posturing, maybe out of an unconscious wish to disarm critics—or simply to seem sophisticated. In any event, he picked up on the arch, affected tone I seemed to have adopted, one that he himself was accustomed to resorting to in his own literary outings. He knew well that such pretense could be off-putting to even the most sympathetic readers.

All this negative criticism was applied to my written treatment of only the first period in the seven decades I'd been hired to bring to life on the page! Game over, I said to myself; better to abort my first foray into biography and get back to my career in film history, theory, and criticism. Besides, did he really want to pay for the flailing of a fledgling biographer when he was more than capable of composing his own autobiography? After licking my wounds, I expressed my regrets and withdrew my application for the job—but he would not accept my resignation! He wanted to keep me to stay engaged and to proceed with our plan. Having heard my whining about the travails of having to transcribe the interviews, he gifted me with a model of the latest rechargeable voice recorder, sent me another installment of my monthly stipend, and implored me to go another round at the first material then let him see the revision. I did; he did; and after a month we met in person and agreed: the undoable had been done, undone, redone, and had now been done right!

So, with such trial and much error, we hit upon our working method. Over the next eighteen months, I interviewed him by long distance and in person (when possible), subsequently listening

to the recordings and transcribing crucial passages while working up the next set of chapter drafts which he would then “lightly edit.” Other than requesting that I insert items he’d forgotten to mention, he seemed (surprisingly enough) only to suggest minor changes in my wording in order to achieve more nuanced descriptions. I followed his suggestions, and we went through many such rounds of conversations, transcriptions, drafts, and revisions. As regards helpful research material, I was hardly left shooting in the dark: once we were under way, my subject provided me an annotated chronology (APPENDIX I) and made available the hefty Boffey family album that he himself had assembled—an irreplaceable resource with over 300 labeled photographs.

## **PART ONE: Childhood & Adolescence (1947–65)**

### **CHAPTER 1: New York (1947–56)**

No one knows if or when a bricks-and-mortar monument will be installed at 119 E. 74th Street in New York City where Peter Roy Boffey was born at 5:59 AM or PM (“... I can’t recall....”) on October 13, 1947. The Infirmary & Dispensary of Woman’s Hospital no longer stands, but a faded, barely legible photostat of his Certificate of Birth states his mother’s full maiden name as Nancy Ellen Hayes, 23 years of age and his father as David Mills Boffey, aged 27, Copy Writer, Advertising business. Parents’ usual residence: 14 Beachwood Rd., Hartsdale NY (Westchester County). William B. Sackett, MD; Mayor William O’Dwyer; Acting Registrar of Records Otto R. Pirdema, MD; and Commissioner of Health Harry S. Mustard, MD—all signatories authorize that he was in fact born, and that father, mother, and child are white (“... so it must have been so.”).

“Pete’s” brother David Barnes, older by 28 months, was living in the family’s Hartsdale residence located 21 miles north of midtown Manhattan, but Peter doesn’t remember Hartsdale either. He does possess a photograph of his mother standing at the leased (or rented) house’s front door in March 1948 and another of her exiting from the family Chevrolet, a classic 1946 or ’47 “woody” station wagon parked in snow. The house looks new, its recently built status accentuated by the immature landscaping exposed in bare winter. Sometime prior to the birth of his younger brother Daniel Howard on April 8, 1949, the Boffey family moved into its own home-to-own at 3 Lake Drive in Pleasantville, ten miles farther north along the Harlem Division line of the NY Central RR and an equal distance between the Taconic State and Sawmill River Parkways. As pictured in 1949, the Pleasantville house on Oppermans Pond (now officially re-christened Pleasant Lake in Oppermans Pond Park) shows re-roofing in progress. Peter recalls a brown, party-line telephone on the wall before it was changed out for a pair of black, private-line rotary dial phones upstairs and down, but he confesses that brown phone might be made-up in memory. Absolutely true and not to be neglected in any account of the earliest phase of this boy’s life is mention of his first great love: a light brown beagle named Dickens.

During this period he did not give a second thought to the source of his middle name, that is, Roy E. Carr, his father's half-brother older by some 20 years; in 1975, the central character in our story would become permanently estranged from this "Uncle Roy." There are other matters young Pete was not aware of. For instance, his mother's mother Nola K. Barnes had died ten days after the birth of his mother's first child Barnes and been buried in Ferncliff Cemetery, Hartsdale.

Upon reflection, "Dave" and "Button's" second son's first reliable memory is of bursting into an upstairs room (as 18 month-old boys do) where he was forcefully hushed by his mother, who sat in a chair with a baby wrapped in her arms: she resumed rocking the strange being and singing sotto voce "O Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling..." Peter recalls assessing the interloper and seeing his own former crib set up against the wall, and he claims he can still feel the oddness of the whole situation. Whatever was going on? he thought, if not in so many words. Have I been supplanted? What had happened to "Sweetest little fella, / everybody knows, / don't know what to call him, / but he's mighty like a rose..."—the lullaby that traitorous woman used to sing so softly to him alone.

In the course of this biography, much will be chronicled about his mother, father, and brothers; more about Uncle Roy; less about Dickens the family dog; and just a bit about his adoptive paternal grandfather Fred Boffey whom he met only once.<sup>1</sup> He knows almost nothing about his mother's older sister, Harriet Flo Turner (b.1920, d.?). Aunt Holly was a relative by blood yet went missing from his life. It was Janet Muir MacRae (b.1893 Superior WI, d.1983 Shelton WA) who played the role of an active aunt, and many other roles, in our protagonist's life.

He has long since forgiven Janet MacRae's initial observation, reported to him years after the fact, that when she visited the maternity ward to view the second born son of "Mills" (what she always called his father), what she saw held up on the other side of the protective glass looked to her like a skinny plunked chicken with huge blue eyes popping out of its head. To counterbalance this account, Peter insisted upon drawing attention to the photograph of Janet MacRae's arms cradling baby Pete, aged two months. He is wrapped in swaddling clothes in the foreground of his first Christmas tree.

Janet MacRae was an honorary member of the Boffey household, and the three boys always referred to her as Aunt Janet; she had been more or less a mother to their father, who had also called her Aunt Janet. The woman's impact was indelibly etched upon all the Boffey boys, but none so influentially as the middle son, both in his life and in his fiction; later, this impact and influence became ever more decisive as he navigated the world, first in the home then at large.<sup>2</sup>

Peter reports his second retrievable memory as a vague and flooey image of being picked up in a car, most likely driven by his mother, in the driveway of a nursery school—one of those undesignated census places in the remembrances of his earliest childhood. But an incident from our



pilgrim's first day at elementary school replays itself vividly. Windows at the Roselle Avenue School for Boys and Girls in Pleasantville occurred at the level of the sidewalk outside the classroom located toward the rear of the standalone brick building. When it came time for the class's first expedition from that well-lit basement to the playground sited on the far side of Roselle Avenue, the new first-graders were lined up on that sidewalk like perfect little penguins assembled into single file, an arrangement to which Sweet Pete was happy to conform. But just before embarkation he noticed that one of his shoelaces had come loose! Mrs. Bell knelt down before the distressed child and tied the errant lace, solving the insoluble, for he couldn't have done it by himself. <sup>3</sup>

From his 4-year career at Roselle Avenue School, he recalls the carved-in-stone signage of the separate entrances for Boys and Girls, even then no longer being used to segregate the sexes. The creaky, narrow-slatted wooden floors in the upstairs hall. May Day parades performed in outfits (Pierrot, Hopalong Cassidy, the Dutch boy) made by Aunt Janet. And rainy after-school hours Sometimes passed in the home of a schoolmate's grandmother who provided them cookies and milk, jigsaw puzzles, and picture books of dinosaurs and erupting volcanoes. By 2nd or 3rd grade, he was so smitten with the Presidents of the United States studied in class that he memorized the entire lineage from Washington to Eisenhower. When able to recite those names in reverse chronological order, his parents rewarded him with a set of miniature plastic statuettes featuring each head of state and, paired with the General himself, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower.

Grammar school days progressed in a fundamentally Norman Rockwellesque fashion. He can recall terror striking only twice. Once, while beating out another boy to the top of the play yard slide's ladder, their battle royale dislodged the other boy's eyeglasses, causing them to hit the ground and shatter. Pete suffered listening to the victim's wails but worse, the stern stare sent to him by the schoolyard supervisor, who took the injured party under her wing and sent the assumed culprit to sit alone at one end of a teeter-totter. <sup>4</sup>

The other memorable playground incident advanced his education in the paradoxes of crime and punishment. He knows for certain it happened in the 3rd grade because Mrs. Voris (an elder schoolmarm in proverbial granny glasses and coiled, braided gray hair) remains the "eternal 3rd grade teacher" for him. As an adult, the criminal party does not remember the name of his victim, only that she was wearing a skirt and running up the playfield's grassy bank. Fast upon her heels, without malice or forethought, the little rake reached out and lifted up a portion of that skirt, exposing her panties. <sup>5</sup> Peter told me he could never recapture the look she cast back at him. Was she startled? Intrigued? Delighted? Once handwriting exercises had resumed back in the classroom, Mrs. Voris escorted the offended and offender into the hall where, outside the closed door, she invited the violated young woman to redeem her honor. How? By slapping the male predator in the face! Child was encouraged to strike child, for in the early 1950s at the Roselle Avenue School for Boys and Girls corporal punishment was still permissible. How it must have smarted Mrs. Voris when the

young lady nodded No, declining to deliver a single smack! Peter says he has been puzzling ever since over just what such signals sent from sex to sex mean: just what had her playground look followed by her hallway clemency meant? <sup>6</sup>

Another skirmish in precocious culture wars occurred when the Devil was allowed even more free play. The MC family [Ed. note: Regarding the use of initials in lieu of full names, see the subject's comments in his FOREWORD] lived on Woodland Drive in that same protected pocket of Camelot AKA Pleasantville near Oppermans Pond one mile west of the Sawmill River Parkway. MC, his parents' friends, were raising boys and girls, and one of those girls was Pete's age and frequent playmate. On a rainy day at 3 Lake Drive, he and PM were creatively playing "doctor" while standing stark naked beneath a bedsheet. His mother discovered the two 4- or 5-year-olds that way and promptly instructed Adam and Eve to put their fig leaves on before sending the pretty little girl home. Was she even old enough to walk the wet way up the wooded hill on the far side of the pond, or was she driven home, or picked up? Peter can't recall. He swore to his mother that no pencils had been poked anywhere. There were no draconian expulsions from the Garden of Eden, but he didn't need to be told something was wrong with what they had been doing. Liberated from any further consideration on the subject, the innocence and ignorance of those children continued uninformed and, generations later, is no doubt being carried on by other children today.

Before he reached his tenth year, an ongoingly idyllic childhood went well for Princeling Pete (as Peter referred to his younger self). To a great extent, he knew and was meant to know nothing of what was going on outside the privilege of his own thick-walled social bubble. Santa Claus was red-robed and white-skinned—and real, at least until his older brother made Pete peek in upon their parents busy wrapping presents one Christmas Eve. Their house was one of only three on the dead-end gravel drive fronting the little lake outside Pleasantville. To Pete, the post-WWII period hamlet was a small town free of worries and locked doors, and Old Village still retained vestiges of an earlier exurbia only then on the verge of modernizing itself to become a booming suburb of New York City.

All seemed safe and sound in the neck of the woods where the Boffey youngsters were growing up, except for one mean and hungry lion who invariably chased Pete right to the screened back door when he answered his mother or Elizabeth's call to come inside the house for supper. In retrospect, Peter knows that all was not in fact going so well, or so whitely, for others. Elizabeth (no last name known) was Black, and she was the Boffey's maid. She worked in the house week-days, overnighting in a room to herself under the attic's mansard room. Or was she on duty week-ends and off midweek? He didn't recall. Otherwise, she lived someplace else—in Tarrytown-on-Hudson, as far as he knew, no doubt in a house just like his! She was not a governess, a nanny, an au-père, and she was only the boys' baby sitter in a pinch. Elizabeth no-last-name was a servant. She cooked and she cleaned. She picked up after children and adults. She washed dishes and clothes, and scrubbed floors and walls and toilet bowls. When Mr. and Mrs. Boffey weren't home,

Peter remembers her smoking her menthol Kools while ironing clothes, listening to radio stations which were at other times kept mute or not known to exist on the dial. [Ed. note: This precise memory and closely related recollections can be found in Chapter 6 (Verbatim) of Book Five, a chapter excised from Volume III of the printed 3NLs and instead posted on the author's website under the NOVELS dropdown menu at peterboffey.com .]

Exactly when did the Boffeys acquire a Black maid? At some point, the low-ceilinged attic room adjacent to Elizabeth's was fitted out for the middle son, who usually ran loudly up or down the narrow staircase of unpainted wooden steps. On one occasion, his mother heard him running down and gleefully rhyming aloud, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, / Catch a nigger by the toe. / If he hollers, let him go, / Eeny, meeny, miny, moe." She caught him on the landing and hauled him into the master bedroom for a quick lesson in propriety—if not history. Did he know at all what "nigger" meant, she wanted to know. No? In any event, he was made to understand that voicing that N-word was verboten; from then on he was instead to substitute the word "tiger" for "nigger" in the counting-out rhyme.<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth was also de facto first responder to crises in a house with three rambunctious boys spaced approximately two years apart and all under ten years of age. Once, alone in his younger brother's bedroom, Pete became aware that there were two or three feet of spotless snow on the other side of a glass-paned door opening directly onto the roof of an adjacent wing. Unprepared, without boots or coat, without gloves, scarf, or hat, he stepped outside. The newly fallen snow was virginal, the silence silver. His visible breath was voluminous. It was cold. Turning to go back inside, he found the door locked shut. He knocked. No one came. He panicked and banged in wood and glass; shattering a pane, his hand broke through. Shrieks of hysterical pain brought Elizabeth who had him elevate his arm while she ran to a phone. He remembers watching the blood stream down his upwardly held sleeve and feeling its warmth on his skin. He can't recall how he received medical attention, but to this day his left wrist sports a scar the size and shape of a pumpkin seed where the skin flap was sown back ("... a distinguishing field mark any mortician worth his salt would point out to interested parties.").

Other events pricked at that sealed bubble of privilege in which the princeling was being raised. Sometimes colors other than black, white, and red bled in from the outside world—blue, for instance. One evening after his bath, while Mommy was trimming the little guy's toenails, the front doorbell rang, and Daddy called them downstairs where they were invited to sit in the living room with a man in a uniform. Silent-as-gold, the child soon realized that he was the reason for the house call from a representative of the Pleasantville Police. Sweet Pete tried making himself as small as possible in the upholstered armchair as the man in blue narrated how the neighbor nearest to the derelict gas station up on Bedford Road had reported to authorities that two boys had been seen, more than once, submitting that building's roof and peeling off the dilapidated asbestos shingles to throw them as far as they could be winged. The boys may have had no intention to hit the

sporadic traffic down below; luckily, they had not. (“We later discovered that goal could best be accomplished with stone-studded snowballs aimed from an overpass above the Sawmill River Parkway.”) But shooting sharp shingles into the wide open spaces of such genteel though sparsely populated glades as those surrounding Opperman’s Pond was still deemed unseemly in young gentlemen. And upon inspection it had been confirmed that one or two or three, no—ten windowpanes had also been broken out of that abandoned building.

Although he was still of dimensions such that his partially trimmed toenails could be comfortably tucked (feet and all) inside the one-piece pajamas enveloping him, Peter B-as-in-boy-O-double-FF-as-in-Frank-E-Y recalled finally being unable to make himself any smaller in the chair. While the adults discussed the issue, from time to time his mother and father turned toward him and spoke in a tone of voice he didn’t comprehend and had not heard used on him before. Of course, no one bothered teasing out the truth of the matter: that deserted, stand-alone garage by the side of Bedford Road was an irresistible target for boys about five or six years of age, who should be held blameless against the lure of such entrapment! He waited to hear the sentence, which turned out to be some mild form of reparation he couldn’t recall, the financial burden born by his indulgent folks. Once the affair blew over, he and his pal CD did exact some measure of revenge against the informer by picking ripened plums off the volunteer tree they had formerly used as a ladder to scale the temptress roof and pitching that rotten fruit in the direction of that nearest house. The missiles fell short, they ran, and that was that. Years later, Peter’s father confessed that he had been relieved by the episode: up until then his second born had come across as altogether too angelic for any son of his. The gas station incident had confirmed that Sweet Pete was a normal growing boy!

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Between the ages of three and six, with notable exceptions, the boy’s explorations took place near home. The house, the lawn, and Oppermans Pond were the world that, until he could ride a bike, provided ample stimulation and opportunities for an adventurous, mischievous child. But there were more worldly trips to Manhattan when Aunt Janet, who then lived in Tudor City, would take the lad under her guardianship for a special day. Such dates were extraordinary occasions, part of her long-term educational program for this next-in-line Boffey boy. Whether she realized it or not, the program was essentially a perpetuation of her raising his father who had once-upon-a-time been her own “young Mills.”

Peter remembers Aunt Janet escorting him to view the ice skaters on the rink below the terrace beneath the gilded cast-bronze Prometheus at Rockefeller Plaza. His Buster Brown shoes couldn’t have reached the floor when he sat starry-eyed in Radio City Music Hall listening to live performers singing “Today’s the day the teddy bears have their Christmas.” Central Park in fair weather. A plain, simple, thrifty sandwich for lunch at the Horn & Hardart Automat on 42nd St. Then it was off to another Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis movie in Times Square for Pete and Janet, or another movie treatment of American musical masterworks like BRIGADOON, SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS, OKLAHOMA, and CAROUSEL. Eyes and ears wide open, he was exposed

to tunes like “Almost Like Being in Love,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” and “If I Loved You.” Did he begin to suspect that romance included complexities of finer and blurrier shades of meaning than Mrs. Voris could have ever taught him? Was it actually preferable to fraternize with the enemy in order to win the battle of the sexes? In our conversation, Peter underscored that his Aunt Janet was hardly someone who would ever help him decipher the curious codes of that long-running war. He remains grateful that brilliant lyrics by the likes of Oscar Hammerstein II, Alan Jay Lerner, Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, and others were being incised in his malleable heart and mind whether he understood them or not.

Whenever he and his brothers were confined by rain, sleet, or snow in everyday Pleasantville, the usual sibling shenanigans prevailed. Pillow fighting and pestering the family dog. Marking off territories with tents made from sheets and blankets draped over furniture. The perennial jigsaw puzzle on the card table. Roughhousing. When there were no parents on the premises, the boys piled the cushions from the sofa and chairs at the base of the main staircase and dared one another to leap from higher and higher steps. Whoever reached the staircase’s U-shaped landing first and jumped, won. Once, diving for extra points, Pete smashed his forehead against the outside bottom shell of the second-story floor overhead. He remembers waking up on the cushions down below but not just how he had gotten there, for he’d blacked out, the first but not last time in the life of one who grew tall and grew used to knocking his head.

Life was not always so dangerous. When it came her turn as Den Mother, Cub Scout meetings took place under Button Boffey’s roof. For the time being Pete was willing to share her with others. In a flashback during our interview, he suddenly remembered sidling up to his mother where she was seated at a card table watching over the general goings on and whispering to her that he felt badly for his fellow cubs because he felt more favored by her.<sup>8</sup>

On the big holidays, Aunt Janet took occupancy of the guestroom and proceeded to commandeer the kitchen, gracing the festive table with foods foreign to the boys’ quotidian fare and not always appealing to our young squire’s limited palette. At Thanksgiving, cold tomato aspic quivered on his plate beside the dreaded serving of succotash—also left uneaten. Only steaming cornbread with melting butter and heaps of stuffing, smothered in more gravy than could be wholesome for even a growing American boy, redeemed this prelude to dessert, understood by him as the real main course. No taste on his tongue ever excelled Aunt Janet’s pumpkin pie served with storebought vanilla ice cream unless it was her shortbread.<sup>9</sup> There might be turkey with all the trimmings in November and turkey again in December, but on Easter Sunday there were sliced pineapples held by toothpicks stuck into baked ham and, presaging the older gourmand, the boy with the appetite of a puppy and no self-restraint gorged himself on those yellow rings with maraschino cherries plucked out from their centers. Symbolic of fertility, boiled eggs in tinted shells might show up in hidden places all over the house, but milk chocolate bunnies suited him better as symbols of good

taste—in his mouth. These treasures were best consumed post haste or else stashed for safe keeping and his private dining pleasure out of sight from his two brothers.

Aunt Janet was a welcomed houseguest any time of year and always on the boys' birthdays. It was understood that she was family in the functional sense of the word. But what was not a given was the presence on such occasions of another relative, or two, or (“... almost unimaginable....”) three at a time. A photograph Peter shared with me had surprised him with proof that Uncle Roy and his adult daughter Elizabeth Stuart (“Aunt Diz” to the three boys) joined the festivities at least once, and Peter possesses three or four minutes of 8-millimeter home movie stock capturing all of the then living members from the paternal side of his family. The numbers are too contracted to label it an “extended family,” but apparently David, Nancy, the three boys, Aunt Janet, Uncle Roy, and Nana (Mary Leo Boffey, David’s mother and grandson to the three boys) gathered in Pleasantville for Christmas in 1954<sup>10</sup>. Peter contends that Nana’s presence is worth noting, for she was generally remote to their lives. She was remote due to her residence in Tudor City and remote to the boys when she did visit in person, only rarely overnighing in her younger son’s home. Her company changed the casual atmosphere with an unspoken but appreciable call to a higher standard of deportment. He thinks it may have been her long-stemmed cigarette holder, or the spectacles kept dangling around her neck—the better to jump right back into *The New York Times*’ crossword puzzle if she were bored. She gave Pete the impression that she could not be bothered with entertainment for or by the boys.<sup>11</sup>

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The Bedford Presbyterian Church was located on the east side of the Saw Mill River Parkway running through Pleasantville, and attendance at Sunday school and holiday services required that Pete and his brothers be ferried beyond the realms once circumscribed by everyday life at 3 Lake Drive and Roselle Avenue School. After his tricycling apprenticeship, a fat-tired, one-speed, foot-braked, red Schwinn let him roam far from home, often into the Old Village and its outskirts on the far side of the New York Central Railroad’s tracks bisecting Pleasantville. There he discovered that if he were first to wrangle one of the twined newspaper bundles the conductor tossed onto the train platform, and if he managed to deliver the unwieldy bundle to the store called The Corner at the corner of Wheeler Avenue and Manville Road, the man in a smock apron would reward him with his choice of a five-cent candy—no small pay in Pete’s budget at the time. Other boys knew this too, and competition could be keen. In the southwest portion of the village, not a full block from the train station, The Corner was the place for train riders to purchase the newspapers, magazines, smoking supplies, pens, pencils and other accoutrements of a commuting clientele. But more to the point for the boys and girls, there were ice cream sodas at the fountain bar and comic books, and the small shop boasted the best selection of junk candy known to humankind, or at least to the wild-eyed youngsters of Pleasantville. Before getting in line for Saturday matinees at The Rome movie theater around the corner from The Corner, our protagonist proved out a smart shopper. Buttered popcorn was the important thing at The Rome, but Necco Wafers and Milk Duds were sometimes sold out by the time our sweet-toothed cineaste arrived at the theater lobby’s

display case. So he always stopped in first at The Corner for its wider and deeper inventory of sugared treats.

What else took his swift Schwinn “downtown” in that fast-passing epoch? The pet fairs were held there. He once showed off Carrie the Super Canary in her cleaned cage, but she did not sing for the judges, and not a strip of Honorable Mention ribbon remains as a souvenir. What does remain is a snapshot of Northern Westchester’s own wild animal tamer in his best Superman t-shirt, squinting against the sunlight where he stands beside a bird hidden from view in her draped, darkened cage.

One day his forays on the far side of the tracks propelled our hero farther along on his criminal streak. He met up with DZ, and they rode their bikes a block or two so they could hang around beside the car garage until all the mechanics were preoccupied, then one of the boys slipped a quarter into the boxy vending machine: a package of cigarettes dropped into the tray of the gun-metal-gray apparatus—Lucky Strikes, Peter recalled. Undetected, they took off, stashing their bikes in a thicket near DZ’s house and blazing a trail through tall wild weeds to reach a cindered clearing by the railroad tracks. There the two budding rogues lit up, coughed, spit, coughed, then promptly hid their activity from the view of a train engineer who just then happened to be leaning his elbow on the railing of his slow-moving steel locomotive, curious about what was going on alongside the tracks. After the engineer had led his mighty steel steed farther down the tracks, they resumed lighting matches, coughing, feeling nauseous—“... all those pleasures typically associated with one’s first experiences with cigarettes.” The engineer had apparently gotten their number and relayed his observation to the stationmaster who in turn got the number of the office of the sheriff or police: a menacing vehicle pulled over onto the shoulder of the parkway near the boys’ hiding place, and a large man in a badged uniform strode toward the two scamps, frozen on their feet—not a lucky strike! Without any memorable words spoken, their paraphernalia was confiscated, the duo was led to the patrol car and placed in the back seat, both of them paralyzed but trembling. They were driven to the garage where the officer warned the mechanics about doing a better job of policing the unmonitored vending machine, then he dropped the boys off back at Danny’s house. No one saw them exiting the police car nor did the large man in the badged uniform (with a holstered gun!) escort the boys to the front door, where Pete declined to enter the house, running to fetch his bike and taking off hell-bent for home. Having escaped the wrath of God, he never told his parents. He has never forgotten what few words were addressed to him by that sheriff’s deputy or state trooper. Out of sheer tomfoolery, Pete was wearing a plethora of all the free campaign buttons and badges he had found proclaiming I LIKE IKE! They covered the front of his jeans and hung from the sleeves and pockets of his shirt. It must have been 1956, when his mother and father were not only favoring the election of Adlai Stevenson II; his father was actually out distributing “All the way with Adlai!” leaflets for the Democratic candidate running against Dwight D. Eisenhower. Mischievous, contrary, the 8-year-old didn’t sport the regalia out of spite or political persuasion but just because he could! “In short, for no damned good reason at all,” he adds, “like most

people pictured being swept away in imbecilic displays of partisan patriotism on the floors of the nominating conventions shown on TV.” It happened that he was so outfitted when he and his partner in crime were smoked out of their hideout alongside the railroad tracks. “What do you think Eisenhower would think if his grandson was caught smoking cigarettes?” The voice of authority had spoken. Peter recalls no reply.<sup>12</sup>

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Inside the house, the middle son studied how to defend himself, mostly by playing dead, against his older brother’s penchant for smothering him under sofa cushions to within seconds just shy of asphyxiation.<sup>13</sup> But venturing through the front door’s vestibule and out onto the scruffy lawn, there was a free zone where a young boy could learn (“...and had better...”) the rules of fair and foul play. Outside, a society of young male animals awaited, a society which tended toward behaving like the boys and flies on Golding’s deserted island when there were no adults in command. In addition to his brothers and their friends, boys from outside their circles came around. A line was drawn down the lawn’s center and boundaries created on its borders. Teams were drawn up by the older, domineering, self-appointed captains—his own brother belonging in that category. A mere sapling, our home-turf warrior was usually drafted in the third or final round. The teams then competed in an impromptu man-on-man form of warfare they called flag football resulting in bloody noses, sprained fingers, and occasional fistfights, feigned or mercifully brief. Once “Flyin’ Saucers” then “Pluto Platters” (two product names grounded for good by the “Frisbees” brand in 1957) became the rage, more mannerly competition resulted in fewer collisions.

During daylight hours on winter weekends, the frozen pond became a regional destination, drawing so many recreationists that his father paid beer change to some heavy lifters from one of the local taverns to lay down beams of thick, unfinished lumber between the ill-defined edge of the lawn and the equally ill-defined edge of the unpaved lane. The beams established a barrier so that even in its dormant state the grass in front of our house would no longer serve as a popular turnaround or parking lot. Holiday seasons, people from all walks of life vied for the best skating surface. Genteel folk versed in the prints of Currier & Ives and Bewick’s woodblock artistry jostled with town rowdies and a motley collection of hockey players rotating through pick-up matches from dawn to dusk. Barnes was inspired and assisted by their father in throwing a shed up at the front of the browned-out sward, and Pete observed his brother raking in coins from strangers in exchange for the hot chocolate his mother brewed in a vat on the kitchen stove. Dave and Button’s second son marveled at this enterprising spirit, but Pete had yet to grok the profit motive and preferred frolicking on ice and drinking hot chocolate for free. Other winter weekdays, he relished the quietude in and around the snowbound pond, especially when lake ice snapped, crackled, and popped in successive suites and elm tree twigs and branches clattered in gusts of wind—some breaking off and flying any which way.



Regardless the season, Peter fondly remembers spending hours and hours outdoors, sometimes with school chums, more often alone, free to explore the granitic boulders on one hillside of the pond's concave basin that he and his pals for some reason took to calling Darkest Africa. Or he dabbled about in a yard-wide gap of a stonework spillway where water from the pond smoothly overflowed, passing into the culvert running right under Lake Drive. The spillway and culvert preserved a remnant of the impounded creek's original flow. Mosses and frogs still lived there.<sup>14</sup> He tromped about the soggy bog on the other side of the pond where, in a seizure of wanton sadistic vandalism, he once used a stick to whack off the heads from a dozen jack-in-the-pulpits, immediately feeling remorse and wondering why he'd done so.<sup>15</sup> It seems to him that, unless expressly forbidden, he would have been taking Dickens the dog out with him on the trail looping around the lake but, thinking back, he does not remember doing so.

He does remember pilfering two of the clean, white, filter-tip Kent cigarettes offered in miniature silver chalices placed on end and coffee tables throughout the Boffey living room. David Boffey's career in the advertising industry was ever upward, and its relationship to the tobacco industry was always extensive, professional, and personal, even until the very end; it was not a persuasive model of the virtues of the "enlightened self-interest" which, upon being challenged, his father took up as a sort of motto defending the ethos of his advertising commitments.<sup>16</sup> On the occasion in question, the Mad Man's second son had persuaded CD, his closest sidekick, to meet him where the fallen tree crossed the path briefly curving out-of-sight on the far side of Oppermans Pond. Determined to behave manly beyond their years, the tykes were just getting organized, making certain the coast was clear, when an unsuspected and unsuspecting stranger happened upon them lighting up their cigarettes. The kids quaked in their Keds. Could the stranger in civilian attire be a policeman in plainclothes? The man grinned and continued on his circumambulation around the peaceful body of water.

Traveling beyond lawn and pond was not always so hazardous to the boys but it could be. One grizzly scene transpired at the worksite of a new house under construction at the head of Lake Drive when Pete's older brother stuck his hand into an unattended electric cement mixer left Running. Pete was not present but, in its imagined form, the shocking image remains forever visible in his mind's eye. Barnes spent time in the hospital and then time out of school with a bandaged hand. Penalties for straying too far from their property's boundaries were not limited to himself and his siblings. Dickens was subject to the severe consequences of wandering too far too often, especially when making raids on the chicken coops belonging to a man everyone called the Hermit, a surly old-timer residing on one of several timeworn paths radiating up from the pond. He was a recluse with whom the boys were instructed never to interact. A vestigial holdout against the modern suburbanization of greater Pleasantville, the Hermit kept hens in an old fashioned, dilapidated setup, whether for commerce or personal purpose—no one knew. One day the beagle straggled home with wounds bleeding where barbed wire had been wound tightly about his body from head to pointed white tail—there was no doubt it was the Hermit's handiwork. Dickens was taken

to the vet, and his external wounds eventually healed, but he was never the same. Wary of contact, increasingly hermetic, after biting Dan in the face the family dog was taken back to the vet.

*Or dropped off at the pound. Or deposited wherever progressive parents no longer living on farm or ranch had household pets put down out of the children's purview.*

The house's back door was rarely if ever locked.<sup>17</sup> Once he'd learned to swim, the lake itself could be included in his principality of free play. He could drift there in the Dandy-P-Bar, a wooden kit boat basement-built by his father who christened it in honor of his three sons. In that vessel or the family's canoe, he would row or paddle close to mallards in cattails, snapping turtles on logs, and those poisonous "water moccasins" which may in fact have been common watersnakes. He didn't really want to swim with snakes anyway. The pond's center was shallow enough that he could hold his nose and drop straight down to touch bottom, but it got colder there, and the mucky stuff into which his bare feet squished was too big an unknown; he preferred to paddle, or row, or just build waterworks on the one tiny sandy beach.

In his lofty attic, he fell off to sleep to the spring bullfrogs' call and response or the summer choir of crickets en masse. Throughout summer, he waited out the occasional thunderstorm at the picture window and once with his own eyes witnessed a deafening, blinding bolt of lightning split the largest lakeshore elm lengthwise, half of it crashing down to alter the landscape of his playground-pond forever. In fall, he saw the influx of non-resident ducks dropping down for an hour or a day then lifting off again. In the dead of winter, he gathered with others observing heroes come to the aid of skaters fallen through ice or skaters fallen on the ice and not getting up. People would run to the Boffey house to use the telephone, then he gathered with others waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

In addition to pledging the Allegiance at the start of every school day and saluting the ceremonial raising of Stars and Stripes up the flagpole, fundamental American patriotism was further instilled during the family's spring trips to Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, and Washington DC. Closer to home, there were Thanksgiving Day family ambles down the original Sleepy Hollow Lane to the Headless Horseman Bridge (or a good runner-up) only six miles from home. Or a visit to Washington Irving's historic home, Sunnyside. Or a tour of John Jay's museum house and grounds around the Fourth of July. Homelife itself was not without its informal patriotism too. Before TV sets became more widespread, the whole family and sometimes neighbors gathered ensemble on Sunday evenings in front of the miniature screen embedded in the den's bulky console to watch the Ed Sullivan Show and Disneyland and other specials. Peter remembers crying tears when Billy Graham administered salvation to the masses on the miniscule flickering gray screen. Peter gave the Davy Crockett series special mention as influential upon the middle son's later Westering.<sup>18</sup>

In a less patriotic vein, Sweet Pete bestowed real kisses on the bluish screen whenever Annette Funicello stood out in front of the other Mouseketeers. More explicitly patriotic, in October 1957

he stood on the lawn with the Boffeys, scanning the night sky with the rest of the United States populace in search of that Soviet Sputnik I, the evil Kremlin's star circulating our globe seven times daily in blatant violation of extraterrestrial space "which we of course presumed to be governed by pax Americana." Unable to do much but feel some vague fear of imminent extinction whenever spotting that little Communist light traversing the sky, he cheered for the USA to win the space race and threw his real energy into protecting the home front by rooting for the Dodgers to win the pennant—in the mid-1950s a much better bet than the nation's winning the space race.

Upstairs, under the blankets after bedtime, clutching close his first portable transistor radio, Pete pictured the Brooklyn Bums taking on the competition. Pinned or taped to the ceiling above his bed, a set of nine official black-and-white portraits slanted overhead. He studied every feature of their faces and pictured their postures as they came to bat: Jackie Robinson, Jim Gilliam, Pee Wee Reese, Gil Hodges, Roy Campanella—winners all! The Yankees owned Micky Mantle. The Giants, Willie Mays. But who owned Duke Snider? Pete the winner owned Duke Snider—or felt like he did! He only got to see his baseball gods play Ebetts Field once but he still felt he owned them all. Whenever they beat the Giants, he felt he owed them everything.

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His father's considerable income and his mother's status as a "homemaker with domestic help" afforded the boys changes of scenery between the school years. Summertime vacations on Cape Cod started in 1953 and fell into a pattern: Dave saw Button and the boys settled into some rented quarters then went back to work in midtown Manhattan, returning on weekends to relax and recreate en famille. Their mother sometimes paired up with her peers and their children so she wouldn't end up merely playing house and lifeguard away from home.<sup>19</sup>

As early as 1953, Barnes had found his summer home away from home at a traditional New England summer camp for boys in Fairlee VT. In all, he would end spending 56 years of his life at Camp Lanakila, first as camper then counselor then assistant director until finally, for 24 years, he served as its director. In summer 1955, the parents attempted to have Pete hitch a ride on their firstborn's positive experience at Lanakila; their hypothesis proved dead wrong. Indeed, Peter states, if any of his parents' experiments in his upbringing can be said to have failed miserably, this one did. Pete spent the second week of his first extended time away from home in sick bay with an easily diagnosable ailment—homesickness. When his father visited the two boys in the Upper Connecticut River Valley on Parents Day, the younger camper sat on a venerable New England stonewall and wept, begging to be taken home rather than forced to finish out his Sentence—"No fearless Lanakila Viking was I!" His father heard him out but expressed the dilemma: Dave Boffey was bivouacked at the Yale Club while Pete's Mom and Mrs. MC were shepherding a gaggle of teenaged girls through Europe. Aunt Janet had been recruited to tend to his younger brother left alone in Pleasantville. For his father all this added up to one insurmountable obstacle to staging any rescue mission, although it hadn't seemed like such an insurmountable obstacle to

his second son. Couldn't Aunt Janet handle two Boffey boys at a time? Surely their surrogate mother could take on as many Boffey boys as assigned to her—she was always good for that. Or was it simply deemed sage for Pete to toughen up? In any case, he was left to his own devices in a community where his older brother was always off dealing with his own pressing matters.

The novice camper survived to tell the tale, but he did not thrive along the shores of the lake where “Captain Morey and his steamboat” had once made joyful waves for others—not for him. He will never forget the glorious day of his release when his mother and father arrived at the White River Junction railway station and loaded the boys and their dirty laundry into the family wagon. Whatever it was, the meal taken at some roadside tavern was the best Pete's ever eaten—he was on the way home.

Camp was not his first time at a considerable distance from home, but it was his first time without a guardian angel on hand. In 1952, his mother and a friend took Pete and her son (whose name he has forgotten) on a road trip to visit his mother's older sister (Pete's Aunt Holly) and her son in Florida. Besides a snapshot of the boys mugging for the camera on some beach, no souvenirs remain except his recollection of an early sign of his poetic, romantic tendencies. Doris Day was the four-year-old's not-so-secret fairy tale goddess of the day. On the drive southward, the two mothers encouraged him to make her an out-of-season Valentine Card. He recalls how pleased the women in the front seat were when he passed them his homemade greeting card in which he had penned I Love You within a hand-drawn heart, and decorated the outside of the folded paper was his illustration of a skunk! The mothers promised to put it in the mail and assured him that Mrs. Day would be thrilled to receive it. In retrospect, Peter insisted on qualifying this account: Doris Day was not (after Dickens the dog) the second true love of his life—"just a crush, a summer fling."

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In terms of his early life's special events of outsized significance, none can excel his cross-country car trip with Aunt Janet in the summer of 1954.<sup>20</sup> Peter regrets he severely neglected her lovingly assembled photo album of that adventure. Annotated on their reverse sides and captioned on the white borders below or in white crayon script on the heavy black paper stock, dozens of black-and-white photographs were once held in place by black triangular corner mounts. Carelessly abused in his youth, all but four pictures from the collection are lost forever. “See the USA in your Chevrolet,” Dinah Shore sang on her Chevy Show. “America is asking you to call!” Janet MacRae had heard the call and bought a 1953, two-toned blue, 4-door Chevy sedan. Others had heeded Dinah's appeal to make life “completer in a Chevy” or at least to get themselves inexpensively transported westward from the East Coast: besides her adoptive son or nephew (Peter wonders how she introduced her six-year-old traveling partner to others), the car owner carried a married couple to some intermediate destination in the Midwest or Upper Great Plains. Peter remembers them as a pale, white, mid- to late-aged pair just as plain as a pale, white, mid- to late-aged couple in 1954 could be; they looked like the relatives from his mother's side of the family from Indiana,

who can be seen in pictures surviving in photo albums which have fared better. The balding man wore wire-framed eyeglasses, a suit, and a broad tie that didn't reach his belt cinched well above his waistline. The woman wore horn-rimmed glasses and sported a dress with a jacket. She always carried a purse. She always wore a hat. Together in the back seat they emanated Protestant probity. He wonders if they ever spoke up or at all. They must have concurred with every stop made for lunch or fuel or bodily necessities, even if the last likely meant more pit stops than needed by those two paying passengers—if just the right number for the growing boy.

“I'll never pee in bed again, Aunt Janet!” Peter recalls the fair-haired, blue-eyed little fellow proclaimed after a mishap at the first motor lodge. And he never did, at least for the duration of that cross-country trip. Janet's budget and hereditary Scottish frugality meant that they shared a bed (queen-size or king, he couldn't recall) at every economy motel along the way. Upon arriving at their ultimate destination in Shelton WA, she never tired of telling the MacRae family how her latest Boffey boy, in his fitful falling off to sleep, had regularly kicked her like a colt. He doesn't remember kicking her, but he does recall how hard it was for him to go to sleep while it was still light outside those motel rooms. But Janet MacRae liked to get a jump on each day's driving, and whoever had plotted out the itinerary, whether Aunt Janet alone or an agent of AAA, had scheduled reservations so that by late afternoon the blue Chevy was pulling into another motel's lot and parking there for the night. Early supper, taken at a diner within walking distance, was over by five or five-thirty. The great plain people retired to their room as the equally odd couple retired to theirs. After his bath, early to bed; after breakfast at the diner, an early start on the road.

It must have been a daily relief to the entire traveling party when the restless boy's naptime arrived after lunch. If not truly naps, those quiet times were strictly enforced, and he was made to curl on his side on the front bench seat. He could never sleep and could never resist reaching out with his fingers to fiddle with the equally spaced vertical bars making up one horizontal, chrome-plated panel running across the dashboard. The panel looked of a solid piece, until one pushed the bottom of one section and an ashtray tilted open—that was magical! It was not like those grandiose false bookcases in libraries on TV shows, where hidden buttons were pressed or the right book could be used as a lever so that the bookcase slid aside to reveal some cattle baron's office with a refrigerator-size safe. Or a gangster's den with molls and cigars and big bottles of booze. Or the laboratory of a mad scientist. But it was still mesmerizing, no matter how many times he opened, closed, and opened again the secret ashtray never soiled by use. Aunt Janet didn't smoke. Before taking hold of the steering wheel, Aunt Janet put on white gloves—always.

The driver's paramilitary control of the expedition seems to have relaxed once her double fare was offloaded before heading over the Rockies. Our subject insists that this personal opening of the West was momentous to a New York City suburbanite boy. In the last, more touristic leg of their journey, Aunt Janet used her Brownie in earnest, at least as evidenced by what little remains of the addicted shutterbug's album bequeathed to our protagonist. The four extant snapshots are as

follows: (a) Pete shown sitting at the base of a monument sign at the Hoover Dam; (b) Pete held close to the side of a Native American wearing a feathered headdress, an older man whose mien suggests that he hung around the porch of the Glacier Lodge, Montana, on a regular basis, expressly for the purpose of being photographed with little white boys, and got paid for doing so; (c) Pete standing beside the Shelton property's pond, wearing shorts and a t-shirt, holding the chain to a Jersey milk cow pasturing in grass near a copse of trees; Aunt Janet's resident brother John stands in braces and a wide-brimmed straw hat in the midground; in the deep background, John's second daughter Mary (now the last living purveyor of the family shortbread) can be seen but not clearly.<sup>21</sup> Aunt Janet must have provided Button Boffey with assurances that her charge would attend church services sometime during the summer, for the fourth image (d) shows Pete decked out in his Sunday best. He wears shined shoes, ironed white slacks, a white shirt left wide open at the collar with outsized lapels spread atop the dark blazer. On the crown of his head squarely sits a U.S. Navy "Dixie cup." His hair is combed off his forehead and shows a sunlit glow.

The bright white sailor cap had been bestowed upon him by the MacRae family son "Johnny" who had enlisted during the Korean War. No 8mm home movie clip or Brownie snapshots document the exact moment of his arrival home on leave, but Peter can still feel the mounting excitement as the clan gathered that day in the clearing where their new house was still only half-built but had become inhabitable. All watched and waved as the man came striding in from the mailbox where the Greyhound bus had dropped him on the highway in Shelton WA. Dwarfed by Douglas fir trees to either side of the gravel driveway, Johnny grew larger as he walked than ran the corridor to at last be swarmed in the cries and arms of mother, father, sisters, and even his bona fide Aunt Janet visiting home was there to greet him. And there was a Boffey boy, Pete, who was eventually swept up into the sailor's arms, hoisted and held at arm's length high above the cheering crowd; on the down sweep, Johnny plunked his white cap onto the young squirt's head and there it stayed.<sup>22</sup>

The return trip to New York is the heroic highlight of this phase in our bildungsroman: Pete made his way back to the East Coast by plane and train—all by himself. His name was pinned to his jacket. He was belted into his airplane seat with a familial couple seated nearby watching over him. Successive stewardesses were solicitous of his needs and desires. When time came to change planes in a major metropolitan airport, he was assigned to someone or other who watched over him until, hours later, he had arrived and departed from LaGuardia Airport under the wing of yet another someone or other acting in loco parentis. Everyone seemed informed of his destination. He was shepherded through Grand Central Station and put on the right train of the NY Central's Harlem Division line. Who had made all these arrangements, Aunt Janet? Were some if not all of his serial handers monetarily remunerated in advance? Peter volunteered to me that sometimes it feels as if no one from that former era is left alive to tell us how Aunt Janet could be so assured of his wellbeing<sup>23</sup>

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After making things as difficult as possible for his 4th grade teacher, Mr. Rouse, all the big fishes in the little pond that was Roselle Avenue School entered the 5th grade's big pond at Bedford Road School and were promptly rightsized as little fishes again. Or was it only Pete who was transferred and rightsized? He doesn't know. Just when he was learning how to look for real trouble while going to and from Roselle Avenue on his own, this daily removal to the other side of downtown Pleasantville meant farewell, for the time being, to adventurous daily bike rides and hello to organized carpools with one or another mother at the wheel. He remembers only two incidents of note from half a year at Bedford School. In arts and crafts class, he accidentally stabbed himself in the thigh with a sharp point. Too ashamed to ask for help, he bit his lips and asked to go to the bathroom where he applied copious amounts of toilet paper to prevent the leaking hole from visibly staining his pants with blood. His other memory is less visceral, combining the pure glee of a boy on the brink of his tenth birthday—without clouds on the horizon—with only one slight twist of disconcerting confusion.

Ten days shy of his son's birthday, his father invited him to Game 2 of the World Series pitting the Milwaukee Braves versus the New York Yankees. Despite his pledged allegiance to the Brooklyn Dodgers, the Bums had announced they were leaving for the West Coast and Pete agreed to go. A World Series game? Unalloyed joy! His parents held him back from attending school that October 3rd, and he recalls being the sole youngster in a block of seats that, for all he knows, his father's employer or one of their clients had booked for the entire series. In any case, his father seemed to know every other man seated around them or, for that matter, throughout the stadium, as fathers often seem to do. Although exclusively a fan of National League teams up until then, any healthy boy his age knew in his own private mix of facts and fantasies that an American League pitcher, Bob Grim, threw the meanest fast ball in the business. The thrill of all baseball games past was surpassed when, in the bottom of the eighth, Yankee reliever Grim came on. Pete took his eyes off Hank Aaron's every move at the plate or in the outfield and fixed his attention on the mound—a long way down and away from where they sat. Grim threw fast. Grim threw straight. It looked grim for the Braves, but it was ecstasy for Pete. Who won the game? Who cares now? He had witnessed the fastest straight ball in the universe—that was something!

But the next day it was a novel experience in the school office when he turned in his mother's note to the effect that the student had been kept home sick. Reading it, the secretary shook her head. "Why did she have to do that?" she said as if to herself before lifting her eyes and looking straight at him. "Why did she have to write that when we all know you went to the ballgame?" she added, putting the paper aside and effectively dismissing him to go to his classroom. Did the young scholar comprehend the implications of the question? No. Did he hear her voice's weird tone of contempt spiced with pity or did he just imagine that later? Was World Series fever forever extinguished? For him, no. Had he done something wrong? Had his mother? His father? Was the blame in skipping school or delivering the fraudulent excuse note or both? It was not the last time, our

subject assured me, while growing up that he would taste a bitter admixture of guilt and shame laced through with pure confusion.

Other than this initiation into a morally ambivalent world where the possibility of general unfairness began to take shape, life went swimmingly along its way. His father would bring his marketing research home, soliciting responses from his wife and children. Once he brought a sheet of tablets sealed in foil about the size and shape of the Bromo Seltzer tablets “as seen on TV.” He plopped the tablets into glasses of water and had the boys deliver their verdicts, asking them to describe the sensation with whatever words came to mind. “They taste like Kool-Aide!” one brother said. “They’re fun!” said another. Pete said, “They’re fizzy!” and that was how the popular effervescent drink tablet got its name.<sup>24</sup> As well as swizzle sticks from bars and lounges ad infinitum, his dad kept bringing home promotional gizmos from his business trips. Most prized of all was a red, enameled, die-cast music box designed like a miniature Coca Cola vending machine. It fit in the palm of Pete’s hand. Long before Don Draper heard his jingle on an Hawaiian retreat, the toy’s lid opened and its metal teeth plucked a steel comb cylinder, the prongs producing a jingle about “the clear, crisp taste of Coke.” His father was always dispensing some pocket-sized novelties to the boys, but Peter wonders now exactly what advertising campaign was the occasion for the ballpoint pens with the pinup girls inside. When the pens were held right side up, or maybe it was upside down, the scantily clad girls were revealed to be floating in a translucent liquid within the narrow chamber of the pen’s shaft—a curious business.<sup>25</sup>

On the whole everything seemed to be right, nothing wrong. But one afternoon he did have to wonder why his mother was alone, sitting in the rocker at the window of his parents’ bedroom. Passing the open doorway, he caught a glimpse of her stilling there, staring out at the pond across the way, crying. He did not get that part at all. She may or may not have been holding her BIBLE in her lap.<sup>26</sup>

## **NOTES to Chapter 1: 1947-57**

1. p8 My father’s mother married thrice, taking on each of her husbands’ surnames in turn: Carr, Rowden, Boffey. My father’s biological father was named Gustavus Adolphus Rowden (1880-1939); about him I know nothing except the location of his burial site 87 in the San Francisco Presidio’s National Cemetery. Sometime before 1935, Frederick George Boffey legally adopted my father (b. July 28, 1920, d. May 19, 1975) and the boy’s last name changed to David Mills Rowden. I met Fred Boffey—my nominal paternal grandfather—only once when, separate from my brothers, my father took me to visit the man bedridden in the sunroom of his Brielle NJ home. I was outfitted in a brand-new tie and jacket proper to a four- or five-year-old good boy. When introduced, I volunteered that there were seahorses on my new tie. My father gently encouraged me to step closer and speak louder because the man in the hospital bed could neither hear me nor see my seahorses from afar. I was shortly thereafter dismissed from duty and left to sit still in the next room, a well-appointed, superannuated Victorian salon, where the home nurse in attendance



appeared with a small plate of cookies and a glass of milk—just for me! My father conducted a conversation with women I later heard referred to as Aunt Ida and Aunt Gertrude.

That was the sole time I encountered the phantom figure of my step-grandfather. The man had never spoken to me, and by then he could not speak. Other than thirty seconds of home-movie footage and three still photographs, I have no Frederick Boffey memorabilia in my possession. In “News of Social Activities in New York and East Jersey” printed in an August 1931 edition of *The New York Times*, it was apparently deemed newsworthy that “dinner hosts at the weekly dinner dance at the Bayside Yacht Club were Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Boffey of New York.”

2. p8 Janet Muir MacRae’s everlasting presence in my life was the primary impetus behind my creation of the Janet McLoughlin character in *THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT, A NOVEL IN SIX BOOKS* [Ed. note: This novels appeared in four volumes, 2018-2022, and in this document is referred to as **3NLs**]. As with many fictionalized models, necessary changes were made, and Janet McLoughlin ought not to be construed as simply a modified version of even a fractal of Janet MacRae: their personal habits could hardly be more different. However, what they do share in common, at least in my configuration of the person and the personage, are their racial and geographical backgrounds, their dated language usages, their vintage tastes in fashion styles and popular culture, and their extremely codependent relationships with their respective employers (Mary Leo Boffey for Janet MacRae; Mary Leo Belcano for Janet McLoughlin in **3NLs**); both also exhibit complex relationships with their employers’ sons (David Mills Boffey in life; Mills Belcano in **3NLs**).

3. p9 Was I ever again to feel so singled out for special treatment and not reprobation? I’m still able to access the private frisson occasioned by the divine intervention when—embodying the Pioneer Mother—Mrs. Bell tied my shoelace for me! I had expected to be shamed, for that moment was obviously exactly when to stand as picture-perfect as an American Morgan horse at showtime, displaying standards of excellence and conformation. I was instead blessed by her service and courtesy. Seven decades later, Mrs. Bell survives for me as the prototype of beneficence in person and fantasy—one hard act for any woman to follow!

4. p9 But I didn’t teeter-totter on that seesaw; I sank into a funk, for I had meant no harm whatsoever. Where was Mrs. Bell when I needed her most? Unfairly blamed, I can still feel my frustration during this early intimation of righteous indignation, a prescient sign of an enduring strain that evolved into something of a complex or a least a personality trait. The same sheer wrongness of being perceived without justification as a bad person can flummox me to this day.

5. p9 Try as I may, I cannot call up the color of the skirt or the color and condition of the panties, and I cite this lapse in my memory as proof I wasn’t a pervert, at least not congenitally. When years later I read *THE SOUND & FURY*, I was struck by noticing that a similar sighting of panties,

although under different circumstances, was pivotal to the action. I wouldn't alter Faulkner's plot point at all, but as editor I would—at risk of sounding plebian to the literati—consider re-ordering that novel's chapters, reversing the sequence of his presentation. I do know something about the perils of making one's writing unnecessarily inaccessible.

6. p10 Now that complicated communications between the many genders and non-genders have been WOKEN to death, we can condemn to Hell that little boy in his skirt-chasing debut, and the lengths to which he has failed to tease out the message with absolute clarity! There's no telling how poor Mrs. Voris would be faring nowadays; perhaps she was traumatized forever, too. I doubt she had even begun wrapping the graying coils of her 19th-century brain around the sophisticated manner in which that more modern-woman-to-be had managed to act out her own confusion, first telling on me—a playground miscreant—then refusing to administer justice in the hall. In the 2020s, everything about such matters has now been made “perfectly clear” (as Nixon presaged his biggest lies). But even in the 21st century aren't such mixed messages sent and received at some stage in the life of most red-blooded boys and girls? It does me no good to disguise myself in some semblance of emasculated faux feminism, claiming to be asexually out of the fray, or to flip back to the other side of the coin, shrugging it all off by cheekily smirking *Cherchez la femme*. Long before the current mutilation of the English language by devolution into new standards of awkward, unwieldy, imprecise, and highly prescribed and proscribed pronouns, a name for the general topic of ambivalent interactions between genders was once covered by an all-purpose rubric: “The Battles of the Sexes.” Were those seemingly simpler times for boys to grow into manhood or perhaps more simpleminded ones? They certainly left a legacy of witty, hilarious, and thought-provoking movies!

7. p11 Perhaps I did recognize the racial but not sense the racist part of our social arrangement. I can still recapture the total silence that dwelled in that house's interior once I'd received my correction and been dismissed. How long was it before I dared to go back upstairs again, let alone to use the attic bathroom which I shared with the steady, parttime occupant on the top floor—the Black *tigress* herself? Little did I realize that I was being involuntarily and irrevocably home-schooled in the Academy of Liberal WASP Guilt, with much continuing education lying in ambush ahead.

Although worn-out by now, the ramifications of that facilely applied label and its pivotal role in my life will no doubt receive more attention as this tale un-wags, but I don't want to let my use of such a loaded expression pass without commentary now. The concept does deserve mention even at this relatively early stage of this boy's life and S. Witman's narrative account of it, for it is no academic matter to me. Or perhaps it merits attention especially at this early stage because I have had to play catchup all my life. The Liberal Guilt syndrome had been long identified before I saw light of day; for one particular example, read the Partisan Review's January-February 1947 issue containing Robert Warshow's brief, laser-like review entitled “Melancholy to the End” [Ed. note:

This essay has been published as “E.B. White and *The New Yorker*” in THE IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE (1962)]. That brilliant exposé of the perfect fit between a periodical as a cultural arena for politically disengaged snobbism and its “liberal middle-class reader” appeared while I wasn’t yet even embryonic. It’s notable that Warshow hit the bull’s eye without even a critique of the classy (sic) advertisements in the magazine, which would be my own default plan of attack. How little did I know! Which begs the question of how much I know now!

When I read Doctorow’s THE BOOK OF DANIEL (1971), for another example, the gravity of the white problem in my life—not the Negro problem, as Baldwin teaches us, not the Negro question—became crystal clear and pertinent to any reconstitution of my education. In that novel’s Part 1, the family attends the Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill, where the riots transpired from August 27–September 4, 1949. “Go back to Russia, you dirty Commies! Dirty kikes!” Documentary footage shows white rioters yelling such niceties at the liberal concertgoers, pelting their vehicles with rocks, burning crosses, and hanging Robeson—Freedom Fighter of the Arts—in effigy. Other personal injuries and property damage ensued. This was Northern Westchester County not the Deep South. Less than two years of age, I wasn’t there, and my parents weren’t there, but Peekskill is only sixteen miles from Pleasantville.

8. p13 What my mother made of that maneuver will never be known, but it can be hoped she laughed off whatever ploy the wily pretender had been trying to pull off.

9. p13 The recipe for the middle Boffey boy’s own “madeleine moments” is baked right into the dozen or so thick cookies stamped with a spring of holly or a pair of bells, a pyramidal fir tree or the profile of a Scottish Terrier, which to this day, around Christmastime, I receive from Aunt Janet’s true blood relative (Mary MacRae Koon) a tin decorated in tartan pattern with shortbread layered between wax paper inside.

10. p13 The elusive history, legends, and myths about the life of my paternal grandmother Mary Leo were the wellspring from which I drew when creating another character in **3NLs**. Although a major character in Janet MacRae’s life, and an important player in Jan McLoughlin’s story, Mary Belcanto is a relatively minor character in the novel. Mary Leo did own and in some capacity operate a Belcano (sic) Cosmetic Company.

11. p13 My general and inarticulate impression of her detachment was borne out when I later learned that our Nana had been none too fond of her daughter-in-law, nor my mother of her. Decades after her three grandsons had sprung from the shredded remains of the natal nest and begun lives on their own, I was not especially surprised to learn that in a demented state of mind the woman had notified three different police desks in three different municipalities, informing them that each of the Boffey boys had been kidnapped. About the same time, she ran through her Tudor City apartment building crying FIRE! A revealing pair of false alarms!

12. p16 I felt beyond redemption. In picaresque fashion, I had taken another step down the Hall of Shame. Once more my essentially nefarious and evil nature was being exposed! Although I may joke about it now, a virulent strain of juvenile delinquency was incubating, and my extreme vulnerability to shaming has lived on for decades, along with plenty of unconscious re-acting out.

13. p16 Ever so jolly and jokey-jokey can I be! Yet this motif remains a recurrent nightmare from which I still periodically awake, panting for air.

14. p17 One day this hapless young specimen of *Homo sapiens americanus* stood surveying the pond's outlet, perhaps daring himself to leap the gap of the spillway again—a feat which I had tried and failed, seriously skinning my chin and shins. But I noticed something odd about the milk-caramel sucker passing back and forth between my lips. Upon inspection, I found a dragonfly, looking a lot like a piece of the fossil record, freshly impressed against the sticky surface of my Sugar Daddy. In another time and clime, I might have been trained to relish eating the thing for protein, but I instead removed the flattened dragonfly with my fingertips before plunging the nickel's worth of sugar back into my mouth.

15. p17 Not ten years after that incident, upon obtaining my first B-B gun I aimed at and shot dead a sparrow from a branch—beginner's luck for me, if not the sparrow. Again, right away, I tasted an emotionally acidic reflux and asked myself why I had killed a little bird.

16. p17 My father's connections with the American tobacco industry through advertising were multiple, and my brothers and I grew up in a house where cigarette brand name recognition was not by happenstance. Mention of the large tobacco companies was a regular part of adult supper-time table-talk. Liggett & Myers, Lorillard, Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, Brown & Williamson—the companies' names still come to mind without my even trying. Whenever cigarette ads came on TV—especially my father's ads—we boys were to hush or leave the room, and the TV set's volume was turned up. From its inception, my father engaged in the industry's campaign to whitewash scientific evidence detrimental to tobacco product sales; that's how I learned from my father the meaning of "enlightened self-interest." He was on the committee that concocted the first Surgeon General's Warning printed on the side of the cigarette pack, a warning not conceived out of concern for public health but as a way to ward off the stiffer sort of draconian governmental warnings which did eventually become widespread. Responding to the relentless increase of undeniable proof that smoking was bad for your health, for example, my father was on the "creative team" that crafted the 1960s Lark cigarette campaign around the health benefits of the charcoal filter which harked back to his prior work on the Kent account. According to Anne Landman with the American Lung Association of Colorado, "The technique used in the marketing of Lark through hospitals and the medical profession was exactly similar to that used in the marketing of Kent in 1952." In his essay "Pavilion in the Rain," reprinted in *SINGERS AND THE SONG* (1987), Gene

Lees convincingly argues that the tobacco companies and their advertising agencies consciously sought out the impressionable young by sponsoring the hugely popular radio network broadcasts of the big bands in the 1930s and 40s and catalogues the campaign to use music broadcasts to addict young listeners. Ms. Landman's 1998 research ("KENT—The Safer Cigarette Myth" found on [www.tobaccofreedom.org](http://www.tobaccofreedom.org).) further revealed that several months before the release of the Surgeon General's 1964 "Report on Smoking and Health," Liggett & Myers' marketing campaign was directed at creating the rumor that medical scientists endorsed Lark as the safest cigarette. David Mills Boffey smoked multiple packs of cigarettes a day and drank too much, too often all his life—that was not enlightened self-interest.

Is it any wonder that while watching "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," the July 19, 2007 premiere of TV's MAD MEN series, I felt literally nauseous? In one of that opening episode's famous passages, the Sterling Cooper advertising firm execs meet with the Lucky Strike tobacco company execs; the negotiation revolves around concocting a new campaign to counter the Reader's Digest's widely read report that smoking will lead to illness, including lung cancer. I tuned in for zero episodes after that, for this was all too close to home and neither entertaining nor educational to me. Smart people who didn't know of my past encouraged me to get with it, not to be so snotty about great television. But why bother? I was a son of an original Mad Man, who, to the headhunters' delight, had risen through the ranks, starting out as a cub writer at the Newell-Emmett Company in 1944, creating his first television commercials in 1948, and working successively at Geyer, Newell & Ganger; Lennen & Newell; MacCann-Erikson; J. Walter Thompson; Ted Bates; and Masius, Wynne-Williams, Street & Finney. And he was one of the Mad Men who lived and died as a result of excessive nicotine, booze, and that industry's relentless pressure to perform. Why would I want to devalue what little was left of any positive memories of my dad I could manage to preserve—for the glamour and recreation?

17. p18 Until late adolescence, the Yankee lad of whom S. Witman speaks hadn't a clue as to the extraordinary good luck of being reared in that secure pocket of Northern Westchester County. One telling truth is that I had no idea that the natural surroundings which offered me such rich bounty weren't accessible to all children everywhere! Hardly wilderness, the wooded hills had been serially inhabited by humans long before the colonists arrived and boasted a documented record of being put to various uses during the centuries after the Europeans did arrive. Still, even for such a happy and unawares boy—one certainly not cognizant or concerned about property rights or lines, let alone cultural genocide or social inequalities—the land around his house was an extraordinary estate. Only later did Liberal Guilt and clearer thinking begin leaking and finally sinking the ship of his juvenile fantasies.

18. p18 The 1954-1955 "made-for-TV" exploits of Fess Parker's "King of the Wild Frontier" grabbed my attention at an especially impressionable age, and the effect of watching TV and movie Westerns has been incalculable ever after. While this may be a common enough phenomenon

among members of the TV-baby generation (and Davy Crockett's frontier may actually have extended only as far West as the Alamo), in my own lifespan I can trace an enduring passion for the outdoors west of the Rockies to countless hours absorbed in that era's standard TV and Hollywood fare. By age 10, one of my princely pleasures was to have the television set to myself for a few hours and there, with a Pyrex cooking bowl full of mixed candies from my secret stash, to surrender myself in a sugar-fueled orgy while watching GUNSMOKE, LAWMAN, SUGARFOOT, MAVERICK, CHEYENNE, BONANZA, HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL—this and a more complete list would be recognizable to many of my peers! The first film I ever saw in a movie theater was HIGH NOON, whose Puritanical high stakes drama hit home half a century before I came across Robert Warshaw's essay, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner" (1962). Long before delving into "cinema" and intellectual approaches such as Gary J. Hausladen's "Where the Cowboy Rides Away: Mythic Places for Western Film" (2003), the little television screen was the intimate theater for my own human growth and development, where I studied what it would look like to be a real man—and a real woman. Forty years later, when I began road sales in earnest throughout Central and Northern California and into Western Nevada, I began to appreciate how deep-rooted and irradicable was the thrill of simply being in landscapes where those Westerns had indeed been fabricated for the silver screen. Those spaces and certain faces and paces can still make me shiver, stirring up a childlike joy. I'll deflect attention from my own puerility by mentioning Krishnamurti's late-life penchant for watching the John Ford films, purportedly to marvel at the landscapes!

19. p19 Vacations and other summer surprises, like almonds and marshmallows in the chocolate of Rocky Road ice cream, grew to be part of the givens to which I felt entitled. As far as I knew, they were everybody's norm. Didn't summer vacations occur as part and parcel of the unanalyzed forward movement of everybody's childhood? Sure, they did. They just happened and rightly so!

20. p20 Geologists debate the significance of gradual compared to cataclysmic changes contributing to any geological record of land formations. Along with the sheer novelty of it all, that trip out West opened my mind in a way that has proved as profoundly formative as any other influence—the arts, psychoanalysis, the natural world, hallucinogens—in my imaginative life. Call it disruption or disturbance, this Western landscape was something new, and the long-term effects of experiencing it were those of an erupting volcano or an earthquake and the incremental influence of long-drawn-out, slow-but-sure erosive forces.

21. p22 This picture could hang in place of pride in any gallery or museum exhibiting pure Americana, perhaps labeled folk art or artwork of the naïf. Produced from negative film, it cannot strictly speaking be called an original work of art free from all mechanical reproduction, yet its unique quality calls for a special exception to Walter Benjamin's argument. Agee, Szarkowski, Sontag—informed about the context and themes of this biography—would have what to say about the aura of this 3½- X 5-inch mid-20th century miniature pastoral, as evocative of other times and climes as a painting by Corot or any other member of the Barbizon School.

22. p22 Had Pete ever felt more welcome anywhere else so far from home? Has Peter ever since? Perhaps, but this was a second homecoming against which all others would measure up to and fail, for Johnny was, at the time, too young to realize that he was effectively reiterating the welcome once extended to my father when, twenty-eight years earlier in 1926, my dad's "Aunt Janet" had brought "Mills," aged 6, to the MacRae's original homestead, where the MacRaes were living on and working their combination ranch, orchard, farm and, always, the logging operation. Even deeper in the background to my introduction into the Pacific Northwest and Mills' first visit lies the fact that my father had been born on July 27, 1920, on Bainbridge Island in the Puget Sound just forty miles north of Shelton.

23. p24 Regarding that return trip as well as many other episodes, I have to wonder how much of this recollected narrative is true and how much apocryphal? Remembrance of things past, untethered from detailed evidence, beyond verification—must always remain questionable. Were times so different then? Absolutely. Were people different from today? In essence, maybe not so much. In any event, my safe passage was entrusted to relative strangers during the transit coast-to-coast, a true rite of passage in the sixth summer of my life—and almost unimaginable today. What can be known for certain is that when that coach car pulled in at the Pleasantville station, the unchaperoned voyager did not wait—he could not wait!—for the conductor to finish placing the portable step box but recklessly leapt from the deck and raced into his mother's and his father's arms.

24. p24 At least according to the family legend. Information on Wikipedia attributes the naming rights to others, but I like to stick to my version. My close friend Paddy Morrissey got a kick out of once introducing me to strangers as "the man who named Fizzies!" Some claim to fame! His remark elicited a silent lack of any recognition. He named *what...?*

25. p24 Dated 1956, a professional photograph shows our parents seated in a lounge aboard the RMS Queen Mary. In order to make this vacation possible for Dave and Button, Aunt Janet must have stayed onboard at 3 Lake Drive. Intriguing to three Boffey boys was a poster-size print which our mother and father brought back from their trip to Europe and framed. The colorful, hand-illustrated map of France, which would be considered a vintage popular travel poster now, playfully filled every square centimeter of the Hexagon with skillful depictions of monuments, landmarks, and the names of people and places. Besides the satirical busts of historical figures like Victor Hugo or agricultural products like bunches of grapes in Burgundy, along with all the de rigueur touristic clichés, the artist managed to sneak in naughty treats for closely prying boys' eyes. Of course, lovers kissed along the Seine; even at the tender age of nine or ten that much was understood. But what I didn't understand is why the map showed a fountain hewn from stone with a cherubic boy pee-peeing into space somewhere in the North of France! Or what about the representation of Cannes in the South, with a woman clad only in a teeny weeny bikini bottom—two pointed tits indicated by two black dots? Was that really allowed?

26. p24 Was this my first inkling that Mother was an Other who deserved her private space? But what if that meant she could exclude even me from her privacy? I had no way to frame these questions let alone to answer them. I slipped away on tiptoes so as not to be detected. If there was even a hint of trouble in paradise, why look for more?

## CHAPTER 2: California (1957–62)

After the McCann-Erickson advertising agency hired David M. Boffey in New York and sent him to its San Francisco office,<sup>1</sup> the family's coast-to-coast transit was made painless by vacationing in Mexico—a high-end expedient allowing the moving van time to transport their belongings across the continent. Falling into obvious tourist traps and traveling down well-worn tracks “south of the border” amounted to purely fantastical fun for a spoiled ten-year-old Yank who, sixty-five years later, couldn't recollect a single farewell from his Pleasantville pals or any self-conscious leave-takings of persons or places in New York City. How could he have experienced anxiety about missing aspects of his life up to that date? He didn't yet know enough to worry about it at the time and couldn't recall any large implications about the move out West registering in his consciousness. It was only during our interviews that he realized how people, places, and situations large and small associated with those two locations had been stored deeply in his personal memory bank.

In one sense, Pete had learned that what he took for granted could be taken away. Dickens had been excised from his boy's life and replaced by Carrie the Super Canary! Annette Funicello had supplanted Doris Day! The lesson learned? “First great love” was an acquired and transferable skill. Even those Brooklyn Bums and New York Giants had left the East Coast for Western climes, proof that greatness itself was transportable. In any case, he was far too busy with all that was new and nothing that was old. What could have pierced the protective shield of his privileged condition as a blitheful, blissful ignoramus absorbed in what was then the here-and-now? He had his mother and father and brothers. What was there to worry about? Didn't they all still call him Pete?

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He remembers the shallow surfaces of that Mexican interlude.<sup>2</sup> The Boffeys flew to Mexico City where a car owner cum tour guide was engaged for the duration. To the best of his memory, nothing but delights and distractions followed. The Floating Gardens of Xochimilco. The Teotihuacan Pyramids, where, this many years later, he still recalls being taken aback by a native hanger-on blantly laughing at the sight of the three preposterously prosperous preteen gringos in their new, oversized sombreros. Cuernavaca...? What did those *tres hermanos* have to do with Cuernavaca? No recollection, except the name of the place. In Mexico City, there was the obligatory bullfight to attend.<sup>3</sup> In Tasco, each of the boys was fitted with a finger ring of low quality silver. The middle son soon lost his while playing in the shoreline waves of Acapulco Bay. There an earthquake rattled the hotel rooms long enough for all tenants to issue from their rooms in various states of nighttime



attire and stand about in distress. Pete was dragged out of bed and stood with the rest of the family while—some guests crying out—the *tremblores* continued off and on.

One scenario from the Mexican interlude came back to him in crystal-clear focus, “as real as one of my Dad’s slice-of-life commercials made for TV.” One evening at a coastal restaurant with a spectacular piece of entertainment on the menu, the norteamericanos were being treated like royalty, naturally. Diners were enjoying their after-supper treats when, at a vague distance across a great gorge, lights came up and theatrical preliminaries began in some ceremony performed at an outdoor altar colorfully spot-lit for the occasion. After too much delay for any ten-year-old, the man in the robe, whose genuflections and other movements were an indecipherable pantomime for Pete and his brothers, at last disrobed, stepped to the cliff’s edge, crossed himself one last time, and promptly dove into the air, head pointing toward the dark waters of the churning sea grotto below. The flying diver’s fate was for an awfully long time unknown, but after a beleaguered use of searchlights and great general silence, his bobbing body was finally spotted—arms waving victoriously over his head. The announcer’s auditory relief was part of the package. But what impressed our young hombre was how that same diver (“... or someone looking a lot like him!”) could all too soon be found stationed in the doorway by which customers exited the establishment. So the show was not yet over: still in swim briefs, soaking wet with saltwater (“... or else, if a stand-in, recently hosed down...”), this larger-than-life individual leaned against the doorjamb with wads of Yankee dollars wound around his fingers in a bravado display of the bankroll make possible by his having cheated death one more time. Yankee tourists got the idea. Anyway, Dave Boffey got it and paid up.

Another memory *hecho en Mexico* survived being swept into the dust bin from the cutting-room floor. Waiting in the airport prior to boarding the flight for California, the huddled Boffeys drew in close to hear Nancy whisper that she had spotted a famous bullfighter cum movie star and his entourage standing nearby. My research suggests it may have been Jaime Bravo, but all Pete saw was a slick-haired man dressed in trim civilian clothes. “And Pete didn’t see what the big deal was.” But looking back, Peter could conjure up an unusual intensity in his mother’s long, lingering look, which made no sense at all to him—at the time. Even now he asks if she was admiring his fame as a torero, his status as a movie star, his renown as a lady-killer at large, or all three? <sup>4</sup>

His only recollection from their arrival in the San Francisco Bay Area takes the form a fog-horn ostinato which would become commonplace in the lives of the new Coastal Californian residents. The Boffeys were spending their first night at a Marin County motel located a mile across the Corte Madera Marsh from San Quentin Point and its State Prison. Lights out, Pete lay trembling, for he somehow just knew that those low, long, persistent sounds from invisible horns could mean only one thing: obviously, prisoners had escaped and were at that very moment hiding between the cars in the motel parking lot! What an awful menace to greet them on a foggy winter night! With inmates lurking just the other side of the floor-to-ceiling plate-glass wall, Peter wonders how he

was ever able to fall off to sleep in their new home state? He thinks now some mysterious and sinister force was merely readying him for Hitchcock.

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At 8 Oak Avenue, Belvedere Island, the princeling got another room all his own. He did, however, have to share a bathroom with his older brother who, whenever he felt like it, barged through on his way to the upstairs. This house was no Dutch Colonial Revival, but a contemporary, two-level piece of Northern Californian “architecture” built around coast live oaks on a steep lot. There were no storm shutters, no cellar, and no garage. Trunks of those oak trees emerged at odd angles from redwood decking, and their gnarled branches reached out over a flat, graveled carport’s roof. He can’t recall when it first came to him that in wintertime snow apparently never fell on those oaks, but rain did.

The East Coast and the West. Westchester County and New York City. Marin County and San Francisco. The suburbs and the cities. Although his father now commuted by car instead of train, the pattern would prevail. Peter learned later that his mother struggled with the first wholesale change of venue yet made a grand, good-faith effort to adapt to her new milieu. Instant presto, re-enter Aunt Janet, who was by then residing at 999 Bush Street in SF. <sup>5</sup> Although the woman provided household services too numerous to cite and omnipresent values too elusive to pinpoint, Peter refused to refer to the never-married Janet MacRae as a “family retainer.” Her comings and goings were plainly of benefit to all parties, including herself. The boys took her for granted, and Button Boffey got from her a large part of the assistance she badly needed settling into the Belvedere house. This relocation and a subsequent uprooting from the West transplanting her back to the East took a lot out of his mother, sometimes more than she could bear. The toll upon her would become more apparent until it culminated in her mental and emotional crack-up in full sight.

Things fell into place quickly enough—at least for Pete. His older brother attended the private Marin Country Day School. His younger brother was enrolled in neighboring Belvedere School. Pete started the school year *en medias re* at Reed Elementary, the public school located on Tiburon Boulevard. After some preliminaries, his mother handed him over to the principal or vice-principal or office secretary who personally walked him down the utilitarian colonnade outside the row of classrooms, inducting him into Mr. Hall’s 5th grade class.

All he remembered from those first days was his befriending of two classmates, a pair of twins who, it turned out, lived only two or three houses up from 8 Oak Avenue. In no time, the trio was bicycling back and forth to school and pursuing mischief on the so called “islands” of Belvedere and Corinthian. Their territory encompassed the piers and docks of the Tiburon Peninsula’s be-yachted coves and the flat, sea-level streets of Belvedere’s recently developed lagoon. They soon became renown little terrorists at the tony shopping center, The Boardwalk, where they used clothespins and rubber bands to contrive handheld devices with a capacity to launch “strike-

anywhere” wooden matchsticks. Those matchheads flashed alive upon contact with concrete, rocks, exposed steel—they tried any dry surface they found, so their experiments naturally enough ignited the merchants’ legitimate alarm that the wooden shopping arcade might also go up in a burst of flames! The boys’ parents were notified, and the boys were chastised—but not mortified.

The layout of residential ownership on Belvedere and Corinthian “islands” differed from the wide-open spaces where boys could roam freely in the larger parcels of the Northern Westchester landscapes where he had grown up. Except for relict estates and expansive spreads connecting Tiburon Peninsula’s isolated residences to Paradise Drive, the houses out West (what little he first knew of it) seemed built chockablock compared to those back East (what little he had known of it). Of course, this congestion didn’t stop the boys from tearing around the territory as unfettered brats will do, getting away with whatever they could get away with, acting as if they owned the whole place and rarely meeting anyone to contest them.

When Pete copied the twins by taking on his first job as a bicycle delivery boy for the *Marin Independent Journal*, he was forced to learn Belvedere Island’s byways and shortcuts in a hurry. Between three and four in the afternoon, Mr. Flanagan dropped off the evening edition of the newspaper in separately twined sections at a turnout where two sinuous roads intersected. Old Mr. Flanagan was remembered for contributing bits of wisdom during Pete’s introduction to the working man’s world. “Keep your eyes opened and your zipper zipped,” was one tidbit, delivered as Mr. Flanagan replaced a plastic tipped cigar between his rotten teeth and hit the accelerator pedal of his loud, deteriorating station wagon, smoke coughing out his mouth and its exhaust pipe. The boys had to assemble the newspaper sections in the right order, secure the folded papers inside rubber bands, stack them in grimy, ink-stained canvas saddle bags, and take off on their separate routes—separate but not equal, Pete found out on his first day. Whether worn over his head or spanning the handlebars, his overstuffed bags kept spilling. He couldn’t manage to pedal up that first hill; he didn’t even have the strength to push the freighted bike up. In tears, he went downhill and home to share his shame and woe. In what our subject calls “a pretty good imitation of Mrs. Bell,” his mother proceeded to help him load his bike and newspaper bags into the family Chevrolet wagon and drove him uphill. Rescued, he went on the prescribed route, doing what newspaper boys on bikes do: knocking over potted plants and pedaling away from barking, snapping dogs. At some of those addresses, he regularly exercised his throwing arm by aiming the paper from deep center field to home base and raced away without ever knowing where that day’s *Independent Journal* had ended up.

Part of the job was ringing doorbells and dispensing perforated receipts in exchange for monthly subscription fees paid in cash, usually coins. Over time, he faced off against some imposing frontages and confronted the sourest of visages there too. Although he met some proverbial little old ladies offering him cookies and candies, he also encountered some individual customers who stiffed him on the spot, never responding to his repeated appeals. “That was behavior I’d never

met up with before.” Mr. Flanagan may not have been a stellar model of either business acumen or Protestant self-presentation, but Peter said this for him: the man took charge of all delinquent accounts and relieved his lads of responsibility for the bad behavior of wealthy cheapskates.<sup>6</sup>

Had the transcontinental displacement left any discernable scars on our protagonist’s psyche? None that he knew of. What was most important, after all? The SF Giants had become his new team—that was important! In an extraordinary about-face, he lost track of the Dodgers who were somewhere down in a place people called LA, and he began rooting for his former heroes’ archrivals. What was the trade-off for this turncoat’s shameful switch of allegiance? He now owned Willie Mays—at least he felt like he owned Willie Mays.<sup>7</sup> The greatest all-around ballplayer to date (“... some say of all time...”) was his, until one fateful day in the parking lot at Seal’s Stadium where the transplanted Giants played their first two seasons at the minor league team’s home stadium while Candlestick Park was under construction.

*There Nemesis doled out my punishment. A posse of boys was swarming Mays in his transit from the locker room to his parked pink Thunderbird convertible. There he was, not ten yards away from me, the Say Hey Kid himself, casually signing his way through that pack of mongrels. It was all too much for the bravest of his fans. Timidity overcame me. I hung back and never did get that coveted autograph. Y.A Tittle ruled over at Kesar Stadium; his autograph I obtained. But who cared about getting the signature of a balding quarterback? I never even collected football cards.*

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Summer vacations continued without interruption, and the Boffey boys enjoyed advantages conditioning them to accept the provision of entertainment for their consumption as only natural. The whole pattern of social inequity may have been plain to the hardworking provisioners, yet his relatively privileged position remained inconspicuous to the young, blind, innocent, culture-bound boy. One summer in Yosemite Valley, as eagerly and impatiently as he had awaited that Mexican man’s swan dive into the grotto’s nocturnal depths, he awaited the manmade Firefall’s cascade from Glacier Point. One spring, Dave took the boys *sans mère* to the Giants’ spring training season. Peter lamented that any description derived from his nostalgia for the sacrosanct appeal of that 1959 spring’s Cactus League would pale in the shadow of the 21st century’s glaring, glittering promotional enticements. He guessed that the potential of Big Business’ mind-boggling, sacrilegious exploitation of the sport had not yet hit its first in-the-park home runs with bases loaded. The prepackaged travel deals of today, with accommodations deluxe and baseball paraphernalia galore, with organized behind-the-scenes tours of locker rooms and official baseball autograph signing sessions—by appointment, for a fee—did not, to his knowledge, yet exist.

Pete’s own long-term immersion as a fan of professional baseball had come naturally and was heartfelt. On that Arizona vacation, there was one long, off-day excursion out of Phoenix’ Valley

of the Sun to hit the highlights of the Grand Canyon. He imagined but couldn't swear to another day trip to some gold-mining ghost town. He knows for certain there were burgers, fries, and milkshakes everyday—and libations for the dad. But game times were the thing, when they parked the family car within an infield-flyball's distance from the entrance to the stadium and entered, locating their seats in bleachers a mere yard or two above the Giants' dugout. The playing field itself was probably no larger than the fields at Redwood High School or the College of Marin, yet in recollection's rear view mirror the numbers on the backs of the uniforms were as large or larger than in any mythic movie in his imagination: Willie Mays, 24. Orlando Cepeda, 30. Willie McCovey, 44. Felipe Alou, 23. Jim Davenport, number 12.

He couldn't say if the first practice game they attended took place in Mesa or Scottsdale. Their father shuttled them between ballparks, all some twenty minutes apart, wherever the Giants were scheduled to play. But when his new team took to the field, the God-Man wearing number 24 stopped on the mound and proceeded to pitch to the first batter in the Chicago Cubs' lineup! Everyone applauded the great fun and games, but to Pete it was a diamond-studded revelation equivalent to the moment clouds part to reveal Mount Olympus as Pegasus' hooves graze its peak. Even today, upon consultation, the subject of this biography cannot find a more fitting description: "It was Heaven on Earth!" Although Pete was cowed into silence, his father and older brother found ways to make small talk with players hanging about in the vicinity of the dugout. He strained to hear the indistinct exchanges reaching him from inside the dugout itself, but he dared not speak. There are no autographed baseballs or programs or baseball cards left in his possession, but there are his intangible souvenirs—not for sale.

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Ordinary life unfolded in a youngster's typically unawares one-thing-after-another fashion. *Sunset, the Magazine of Western Living*, supplemented or replaced *The New Yorker* on the coffee table, indicative of a superficially flexible shift in his mother's unshifting sensibility.<sup>8</sup> In hindsight, it seems clear that she was always keen on conforming to fashion, and the move out West did allow the extremely good-looking woman to cultivate "*le look sportif*," which Peter claimed always suited her well. If there were any serious disputes occurring in the marital paradise (and there were), the boys did not know or feel their severity.

Aunt Janet was often in the home, deflecting attention from any troubles brewing, smoothing out rough patches in the boys' interactions, and especially making certain that holidays played out according to Hoyle. Christmas Eve, 1959, when Uncle Roy and his daughter Diz (who was then stricken with the brain cancer which would kill her in March 1960) were visiting Belvedere, Pete moved too briskly in the crowded kitchen and boiling water in the pan held by "Aunt Diz" slopped down his side in a second-degree burn that sent him shrieking to the far end of the house. He came to on the bathroom rug with no idea how he'd gotten there. The next day his father must have traveled out of the way to find a hospital pharmacy dispensing the prescribed antibacterial salve. Pete's brothers brushed off his trauma as another attempt to gain attention, but the adults showed

due concern, and Aunt Diz's apologies, while unnecessary, even embarrassing, touched him. Any special attention and permissions were always appreciated in the sibling contest for Mom and Dad's love; that Christmas Day Pete was pampered.

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On one occasion, their mother drove the three brothers to San Francisco where, suited up in jackets and ties, they rode the elevator to their father's office on some high-up floor or another of the Crown Zellerbach Building, high enough to make pedestrians at the base of its glass curtain wall tower look minuscule down on Market Street, even to a boy who, under Aunt Janet's tutelage, had been to the top of the Empire State Building. All five on their best behavior, the Boffeys dined out at a Japanese restaurant where they sat on black-lacquered wooden benches in deep trenches around a low, black-lacquered table. The beef was delivered in flames, cooked right there at the table with exotic looking tools wielded by Japanese servers in exotic looking outfits. Pockets stuffed with fortune cookies ("... predictions were still all propitious....") the boys were led to the best seats in the house to see and hear the hit musical, FLOWER DRUM SONG. Pete enjoyed most of the numbers even if the context of the plot driving the action escaped him.<sup>9</sup> On another extraordinary evening, Pete went to the city with his parents on his 11th or 12th birthday and, after supper and ice cream cones, they brought him to a record store on Maiden Lane, encouraging him to pick any album he liked as a present to take home. The shopkeeper gladly played a sample, as record store owners used to do, of his choice—a vinyl compilation of broadcasted highlights recorded during the career of the New York Giants. When Pete heard radio legend Russ Hodges declaiming "The Giants win the Pennant! The Giants win the Pennant! The Giants win the Pennant!" as Bobby Thompson rounded the bases on his 3-run homer—"the shot heard round the world"—the birthday boy was sold! It didn't matter to him that the broadcast dated back to October 3, 1951, and the losing team had come from Brooklyn. Easy come, easy go: it was never completely who won or lost, but how you played the game—"or learned to play both sides."

It was one thing to go out on the town with his parents, with or without his brothers. It was another to be Aunt Janet's special weekend guest at 999 Bush Street.<sup>10</sup> Peter couldn't say if his brothers experienced anything like his own high-pitched excitement when it was his turn, but he insisted that for him it was showtime! Her devotion to protocol was extreme, and her devotion to Pete felt unique: the chosen one felt that it was expected of him to be an exemplar of gentlemanliness. A generation prior, Janet MacRae had initiated his father into the ranks of boyhood on the way to young manhood, so she knew what she was about when it came to training a Boffey squire. In the thralls of nostalgia, Peter confessed to a rarified reverence for the woman "although she was merely a human being all too human." During this period of his cultural and social education, still several years ahead of 1967's Summer of Love, Golden Gate Park was fair play, and she indulged him in his favorite Jerry Lewis cornball matinees on Market Street as well as her favorite movies of Esther Williams' diving into bright pools of water during highly synchronized swimming numbers. She took him to the cable car turnaround and from there up Powell to Union Square. They made short-

distance walks up Grant Avenue into Chinatown. Fisherman's Wharf. The Cliff House, Playland, and the SF Zoo. Steinhart Aquarium and the Japanese Tea Garden. Those were proper grounds for the pair to go hunting for good, clean fun on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. North Beach? The Tenderloin? South of Mission? As far as he knew, those areas did not exist: with Aunt Janet as his guide, large swatches of San Francisco were not on the map at all. Then, always, back at the apartment, after eating dinner atop doilies on her tiny dining table, she took him through the paces of personal hygiene, combing and brushing and currying him to the highest standards. It was exhilarating to be in her clutches and a relief to be released from them after returning to Belvedere on Sunday evening.

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Nancy B. was an adman's wife and could be a charming hostess. She was the mother of three boys and their primary caretaker. She was a shopper, a looker, a dresser. Once her magazine-cover interiors were established at 8 Oak Avenue, she branched out on other fronts. She became an active member of the newly built Westminster Presbyterian Church in Strawberry, halfway between Tiburon and Mill Valley, where her lifelong search for deeper meaning found its new foothold. Her sporadic focus on Christian learning found its outlet in seminars at the Theological Seminary on nearby Strawberry Point. Peter is convinced that, together with ongoing psychoanalysis, his mother was again mining multiple channels of a yearning and frustrated religiosity, thwarted at every stage and in every passageway of her life by a profound, foundational self-doubt. This description of her basic misgiving about herself recapitulates his best understanding of the single greatest obstacle which kept his mother from satisfying her deep need for some "peace that passeth understanding."

Her spiritual tribulations had most often to do with the figure of Jesus Christ who had been compellingly introduced into her life by Grandfather Homer H. Adamson, Evangelist.<sup>11</sup> In later conversations with his mother, she frequently emphasized to her son that the preacher man's own unblinking espousal of the Biblical Savior had become a recurring preoccupation for her, although her reckoning with the historical, archetypal, literary, and cinematographic character of Jesus Christ was laden with complications—except during her periods of extreme duress. Peter posits that his maternal, Protestant family's identification with the brazen Jewish rabbi of the New Testament was a contributing factor to his placing himself smackdab within the stresses and strains of the Jewish State of Israel in the 1980s.

In his telling, his mother fought valiantly against irrational depressions in her semi-successful effort to keep body and soul together and her marriage intact. It is still disconcerting to the grown son to contemplate just how mindless of his mother's needs he was as a boy (and, he made clear, for several decades after boyhood). Peter possesses the onionskin carbon copies of a half-dozen short papers his mother wrote while taking evening classes at the seminary. He now has no way to confirm his best guess that those classes, her piano lessons, and her free-form artwork (in sketchpads Pete once discovered while snooping in her bedroom closet) were all elements in a season of Jungian analysis of uncertain duration or efficacy. Pete also took beginning piano from

his mother's instructor who, after Pete's one and only year of lessons, included him in a Sunday afternoon's student recital. For the sake of everyone concerned, the teacher had simplified the musical notation of the most challenging bars in a "Prelude" by Chopin, yet he introduced Pete's performance of that piece (following a highly abridged notation) as a model of "mind over matter." Peter interprets his teacher's use of that popular phrase to suggest that the boy's piano skills were not so great but his heart was in it.

Dave Boffey's participation in church life seems to have been dutiful at best. He brought the Boffey boys to Strawberry on Sundays and sat with the congregants during the worship service "...while the business-like minister apparently made deals with the Divine on their behalf." At least once, Peter recollected, his father was invited to lead one of his classes in a watered-down Protestant equivalent of Catholic Catechism studies or Jewish preparations for Bar Mitzvah. Pete felt embarrassed sitting in that circle of folding chairs where his own dad led some discussion of something or other while the preteen girls in class gaped and giggled in the presence of the tall, handsome, well-spoken Mr. Boffey. Peter asked me how anyone would feel with Don Draper as his father and Sunday School teacher too? Pete felt more comfortable when he would come across his father outside in the portico smoking cigarettes with CB, and he could bum a peppermint Life Saver off his dad—the same way his father bummed another "gasper" off CB. Maybe the fathers were just waiting to drive their respective families home. Maybe they were waiting for their wives to finish some business arrangements, for Nancy Boffey sang in the choir and MB played the piano organ. The two women became lifelong although mostly long distance friends.

One of his regular Sunday School teachers closed out a year by privately giving him a slim, hard-cover book dealing with the deeper meaning of joining the church. He couldn't recall its title or author, and he doesn't know if she gave all her students the same book; he thinks not. In it she inscribed a dedication to the effect that it had been a joy to have him in her class and she looked forward to witnessing his future, volunteering that how he handled his great sensitivity would become his measure as a man. He never did join the church in any official way, but he does remember being touched by her gift, causing him to muse upon the message implied in her inscription. Was he destined to hear some special calling? Was he under observation while being expected to respond? Were there others observing his progress too?

The church also housed secular activities. A low-ceiled social hall adjacent to the sanctuary could be cleared of furniture for the youth group's dances when the building became the matrix for sexual awakenings as well, at least for one growing boy. The only dance he remembered attending was itself underattended, and his mother was one of the chaperones. Of course, he was spiffed out for the occasion and thinks he'd probably put extra wax on the cornice of his crew cut. He could still picture Mlle. M. as she looked in that brightly lit room, wearing low pumps and a stiff, full-skirted pink dress "... like a medieval suit of armor with a double-pointed breastplate. But somehow its stiff fabric had a shining, changeable surface." Were her nails polished pink too? A set of chrome



braces nested inside her mouth. He was not enthralled with the girl, but she had a “reputation” and the twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy was driven to find out. When the lights were slightly dimmed and Johnny Mathis crooned from the portable record player, a slow dance began. Pete contrived a way to press his pelvis right up against Mlle. M.’s pelvis so that, no doubt about it, she would feel his erection through all the armor and petticoat—and she did! (“Mrs. Voris, vindicated, must have bolted upright in her grave!”) Mlle. M. drew back and looked her dance partner in the eyes as if to say, Not so fast!—so she did know a thing or two! As they resumed the fox trot or box step or whatever all-purpose moves they had been taught in Reed School’s gym, she held him at ever greater distance until the music ended. He either excused himself like Aunt Janet’s little gentleman or simply slinked off to investigate curious matters in the boys’ room where, locking himself in a stall, he confirmed that strange things had indeed come to pass in his underwear: a clear, sticky stuff. The first time he was alone with his older brother, Pete was laughed at and set straight, probably with all the refined language and savoir-faire that all fifteen-year-old older brothers display when it comes to addressing younger brothers about sexual relations with “the opposite sex”—that is, none.

Barnes graduated from the day school in Marin and spent his freshman and sophomore years of secondary school boarding at the Menlo School for Boys on the SF Peninsula. Peter thinks Dave and Button may have considered it the West Coast equivalent of prep school back East. In any case, whether for further grooming or curtailing misconduct, Barnes was lodged there, so of course his adult education was far in advance of his two younger brothers. That became obvious when he toted home a bag of nudist colony magazines which their mother discovered in his hiding place, promptly trashing the lot. Meanwhile, Pete’s own sex education accelerated on a more scientific track. While babysitting at a neighbor’s house, he ran across two volumes of the KINSEY REPORTS (1948, 1953) on sexual behavior in the human male and in the human female. For a spell, in a spell, his speed reading skills took quantum leaps and bounds. He took the babysitting job whenever offered—and not for the two bits paid to provide the sleeping child the best care he could; prior to discovering the KINSEY REPORTS, that care had consisted of his watching TV while the toddler slept. Our subject recalled this time in his life as a period of pimples, blushing, a breaking voice, and unsolicited erections. Pete’s first gratuitous exposure to “girlie magazines” came in a stacked pile he ran across in the barbershop bathroom before he could purchase or make good use of them.

In the summer of 1959, he joined the twins at the Armstrong’s Cloverleaf Ranch for Boys located off Old Redwood Highway in Sonoma County. Inhaling the summer scents of sages and mints, he learned to ride a tired elder trail horse named Mike and got other whiffs of the cowboy way of life in Old Santa Rosa. Cattle ranching was already outmoded there or at least falling by the wayside in what would slowly but surely develop into the North Bay’s version of metropolitan San Jose. He especially remembered the show-and-tell gathering at the start of the brief summer camp session, when another camper with a funnily accented English shared the tokens of Brigitte Bardot

he had managed to bring with him all the way from his natal France; Pete and his pals found the young teen's unctuous exposition of Bardotisme risible, "... but his photographs were nothing to laugh about." He likes to think his transition to puberty had a certain *je ne sais quoi* that most other American boys didn't experience.

The bunkhouse on the defunct working ranch was a spacious, well-appointed structure built to house the new cash calves—rich kids from the cities and suburbs, even from *la France!* The afternoon Nancy Boffey picked up the campers after their allotted two weeks, Pete was the sole camper left in that faux barn, where one of the cowhands cum counselors was showing the greenhorn how to sweep a floor without raising so much dust. The young instructor had just toweled off after a shower and was wearing only jeans—no top, no shoes. Nancy walked in and the two of them stopped in their tracks: his mother and her cowboy, that is. Pete sensed something and Peter compared it to witnessing a scene with the likes of Sam Shepherd meeting Jessica Lange in a stable or Joanne Woodward encountering Paul Newman in a corral—the two of them locking eyes, ready to knock horns and wrestle each other down to the ground (or floor or bunk) right there and then. The erotic tension was palpable to the new teen, already befuddled and mystified by his own sensations, like the ones he felt when looking at the Armstrong family daughter serving lunch to campers in the mess hall. Our junior Bronco Buster wasn't capable of figuring it all out right then but thinks now that, if he or some responsible adult weren't present, and circumstances had been right, there might have been some doesy-doein' or even rodeoin' between that adult twosome right then and there. "The idea had certainly occurred to the two of them!" First there was the Mexican bullfighter, now this California cowboy. He joked that the universe was conspiring to torment the hapless victim of "hormones and hard-ons."

Yet Peter insisted that his twelfth and thirteen years weren't all about sex. There was other sport. For instance, one Saturday afternoon he and a few too many of his friends (boys and girls) were in somebody's dinghy, sailing the little vessel without supervision out on San Francisco Bay. They weren't too worried when they found themselves becalmed, except that the tide did seem to be dragging the craft out through the Golden Gate on the other side of which was the Pacific Ocean. A larger motorboat skippered by a smarter seaman was worried enough by what he observed that he changed his course in order to tow the hapless mariners to a pier in Sausalito. After tying up, all six or eight or ten of the quietened kids traipsed up the narrow dock, walked across the outdoor deck, and straggled through the main dining room of a tiki-bar-restaurant. Peter wonders now what the clientele thought and imagines that the management was not amused. He also speculates on how the scamps would have fared if the Coast Guard had come across them first: too few life jackets, too many people, no one aboard with a clue about what to do.

In ever changing combinations, Pete and the twins ran together on land as well, taking turns stealing cigarettes from their parents' coat pockets and pocketbooks, and pilfering thimbles of odorless vodka from their liquor cabinets. In the hills above Tiburon town, mixing the alcohol with orange

juice in mason jars, the pirates imitated the adults by drinking too much for their own good and smoking tobacco, heedless of the threats to health and the real possibilities of grassfires.

This enthusiasm for misbehavior carried Pete and his two favorite pals too far when they started overturning the sawhorse barricades warning motorists of road construction dangers and lobbing the flaming smudge pots used for that same purpose into the waters of Belvedere Cove. An aggrieved citizen must have notified the authorities. On the afternoon of one Christmas Eve Day the boys and heads of their respective families were invited to visit the Belvedere police station—that very PM. It was getting dark by the time the two officers had finished interviewing the 12-year-old culprits in separate chambers. <sup>12</sup> Duly reprimanded, everyone went home, and the trio was grounded for a week, after which a grand pow wow with both families took place. Peter concedes that the police strategy had worked. Christmas celebrations had been muted, and the whole episode put a chill on his camaraderie with the twins. When the threesome got back together, they never played as recklessly or as freely with one another again.

The parents hoped it was the end of dealing with their boys' unbridled impulsivity, but early in the New Year, the two families received a summons from a department within California's juvenile justice system. On a humorless weekday in a serious governmental building in San Rafael, a Black gentleman dressed in plainclothes held the closed hearing. In a mild and genteel manner he solicited information and offered the boys airtime for any further statements. The charges against the lads were not so serious as to warrant action by the Youth Authority, he said, but Belvedere's best and brightest budding juvenile delinquents would be placed on yearlong probation in the State of California. Plainly, next time the consequences could be far worse—real time spent “upstairs” or in a real correctional facility “... as seen on TV.” Children and parents were encouraged to cultivate organized activities in order to structure the youths' excessive free time more productively. <sup>13</sup>

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During Youth Probation, bad behavior took other forms. Ever entrepreneurs, the new career criminals would mount their bikes (stripped down to basics, playing cards detached from the spokes to maximize stealth) to prowl the lanes of the Belvedere Lagoon on the lookout for roll-up garage doors left open by unwary residents. From across the street, they cased the interiors for any freezers or fridges then goaded one another into dashing over, snatching soft drinks or ice cream, and dashing away from yet another heist. Peter wondered how many homeowners stared into their appliances, scratching their heads over inexplicably missing inventory.

Riding along Beach Road and coming upon an unattended boat sitting below the seawall atop slippery shingles in Belvedere Cove's low tide was another offer they could not refuse. They concluded the skiff had been abandoned and left there—expressly for their use. Stashing their bikes beneath stilted structures, the pirates commandeered the craft and set out to sea but never got that far. Meaningful action was close at hand where litters of what the boys called “baby sand sharks”

became visible in shallow water. Angling the oars just so, with enough of a wallop one could crack the shark pups' backs. Peter regrets his own one senseless kill and blocks out any memory of how many helpless victims the twins bagged that day.<sup>14</sup>

State of California or no State of California, their capers were not over. One of the twins would finish his paper route first and usually join Pete on his longer circuit around Belvedere island. At one compound in the vicinity of Peninsula Point, with its mansion hidden in a tree-clad grove, they discovered that the owner's private service elevator gate had been left unlocked at street level. Pete normally shoved the *Independent Journal* into its designated tube and took off, but with another daredevil by his side, they took a joyride up and down the elevator's track running parallel to the steep staircase. They were not confronted by the mansion's residents or employees, so they went up and down again then took off.

His paper route included the newly constructed house of actor Sterling Hayden whose 1960 remarriage had just then become big public news. Newspaper delivery to the address was suspended; no one was ever home. The criminals of opportunity trespassed at leisure on the grounds, daring one another to jump into the rectilinear pool framed by festooned pergolas on all four sides. Rumors were that the actor was something of a scofflaw himself, so they felt justified in going for a swim but he didn't remember anyone ever actually diving in.

But Pete didn't get away with everything. His parents realized he was smoking their cigarettes on the sly and, regardless the wisdom of their decision, granted him permission to smoke—but only at home. He burned through their preferred brands, but outside the home he lit up his own packs of Camels to show how tough he was (or wasn't), and procured his own Raleighs, (for the collectible, redeemable coupons). Was it illegal for a minor under eighteen to access tobacco products in 1960? Yes. Was it easy? Yes. The authority vested in his parents by God and the State of California became more and more questionable.

A glimmer of death intruded when his dog Holly's distemper turned the canine against Pete and everyone else in the family, not to mention the nocturnal raccoons raiding the garbage cans. Pete and everyone else turned against the dog, and Holly was euthanized or, euphemistically, "taken to the vet." But mesmerizing facts of life not death more often cropped up. Right up there on the silver screen in 1958, he had seen Kim Novak going through her fashion changes in *VERTIGO*, the whole of her easily imaginable naked body slipping out from between those white bed sheets into a very red robe! That had been news to him, taking centerstage in daydreams laced through with a slight fear of something like falling. Two years later, his curiosity was aroused when Janet Leigh changed from an industrial strength white bra into an industrial strength black one. And that changeout had come even before "the shower scene" with her flesh wet and her blood running in water! Now that was clearly something else altogether! After seeing *PSYCHO*, the 12-year-old

took fewer, shorter showers. “I left the plastic curtain open and rushed through my infrequent ablutions.”

A highly ambiguous episode transpired when a young man took to trawling the Belvedere boys’ territory in his Fairlane sedan. When RF finally stopped to talk to the beardless tykes on bikes, it seemed inevitable—they were so used to seeing him driving around. In no time, Pete and the twins were riding in his car, being treated to loops speeding around the Tiburon Peninsula on Paradise Drive and trips to open spaces as far away as the Marin Headlands and Mount Tamalpais, always far from the madding crowd—or any crowd all. Given a little more time, the boys were in the back seat assuming positions corresponding to RF’s instructions about what happens during sex—“We had asked, after all!” Although these intimate theatrical rehearsals were conducted while fully clothed, Peter remembers how RF’s face would flush and break out into a beaded sweat. The guy could not resist encouraging them to ask their parents to allow him to take them on an overnight stay at some undesignated location—his treat! Upon learning a small part of what their children had been doing with the absolute stranger (“We never mentioned the Kama Sutra exercises.”), the parents intervened with a swift, decisive, collective NO; the next time that man accosted them, they were to inform them immediately. Weeks later, Peter found out that the Belvedere Police had not needed any physical description or vehicular license plate number: they knew who RF was—confirming the parents’ worst fears. The last time that Fairlane sedan came cruising down Beach Road, the boys had drawn their own conclusions, yelling “QUEER! QUEER! QUEER!” then ditching their bikes and taking off on foot, running for their lives.

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In the spring of 1961, Pete learned he wouldn’t be joining John Reed’s latest batch of 8th graders enrolling at Redwood High School. Instead, he received his marching orders as a recruit into the ranks of the incoming freshman class at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco. Barnes was also slated to transfer from the Menlo Park boarding school that fall in order to attend the “private school with public purpose” in SF.

That summer Dave Boffey moved out of the house in Belvedere, taking an apartment in SF. There was no family meeting, no formal announcement, no clarification of what it all meant. It just happened: his mother and father lived apart. As Nancy Boffey began operating fulltime as the sole adult in the reduced household at 8 Oak Avenue, Peter assumes that she relied heavily on her friends, her church community, and professional therapeutic assistance to get her through the crisis. But he admitted that he was not exactly paying close attention to his mother’s needs or on the watch for subtle or more serious signs of distress in her life. In any case, their father had not been around much on weekdays so not much changed in his everyday life. Certain men did start visiting for cocktails in her living room or on the outdoor deck, but he doesn’t believe she carried on any stopgap romances or affairs with anyone—definitely not with any one of them.<sup>15</sup>

His mother's friendship with parttime author Margaret C. Bridgman blossomed. Pete was lucky to be brought along to Jim and Peggy Bridgman's rustic summer vacation ranch house built to their specifications in Mendocino County somewhere back in the hills between Cloverdale and the mouth of the Navarro River. There he got more direct doses of the primitive California countryside and more exposure to a lifestyle reckoning with rattlesnakes and ticks, noisy generators and kerosene lamps, and water rationing as the creek ran dry. There were lazy siestas on long hot afternoons and crazily starred night skies. He told me a story—and didn't know if it were true—of how he would sit bareback on an old swayback horse who simply stood there doing nothing in the singed summer grass. <sup>16</sup>

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Peter pointed out one positive side effect of his parents' Bay Area separation: it seemed to set his father off on a concerted campaign to increase his participation in the lives of his sons, which for Pete meant more quality time spent with his dad. That summer, with his older brother and two other boys, he enjoyed a camping trip in the High Sierra organized by the two fathers who had wisely hired a professional guide to lead the excursion. One prank proved memorable: Barnes and his peer hid heavy stones in the young brothers' packs, and the cause of the extra weight was only apprehended a good ways farther up the trail. That winter, his dad took Barnes and Pete to Squaw Valley for a weekend of skiing, but the fun was called off when their father hurt his ankle. Barnes drove them back to the Bay Area while the erstwhile head of the fractured family, lower leg in a plaster cast, nursed a pint, snapping over his shoulder for Pete in the backseat to silence his inane singing of silly songs.

Saturday outings without his brothers meant the most to Pete, for then he felt that his dad loved him and seemed to like him too, despite his misconduct. <sup>17</sup> Dave Boffey, one of the advertising industry's legion of "creatives," would bring him along to expensive studio recording sessions in San Francisco where union performers nailed down radio jingles. They once paid a casual visit on some serious business to the Nob Hill residence of a successful commercial musician who was blind. Pete was struck by the man's modest, dignified demeanor and awed by his navigation of the apartment's tasty furnishings and accoutrements. While the man hammered out tunes to another batch of his father's advertising ditties, the boy was hypnotized by how the blind man's fingers seemed to see the piano keys. Peter remembered being so touched by the kind, gracious host and the respectful interaction between the two adults that shivers ran up his spine and tears came to his eyes. He swore to me that he remembers the exact moment when he turned toward the picture window to hide his tears and found himself facing one side of Coit Tower, seemingly larger than life, curving itself away. On the way to some other Saturday engagement, he remembered walking up Columbus Avenue and being drawn to loud, live music emanating from the open doors of a club. He slowed to a halt but his father briskly hurried them along, leaving it clear that a daytime jazz scene in the North Beach neighborhood was not for his son to see or to hear.

One spring Saturday, his father fetched Pete and the family station wagon for a trip to the outskirts of Glen Ellen in exurban Sonoma County. Peter believes that his father may have been investigating the possibilities of buying into some restoration scheme involving a cluster of empty cabins whose owners were looking for investors. Pete didn't know what was at stake, but Peter wonders if his father wasn't essentially looking for a rural *pied à terre* to serve for his own retreats and as a site for recreating with the three boys—and others. Except for an elderly caretaker, the place was devoid of human inhabitants. An indistinct memory exists of a screened porch where, it was pointed out to him, Jack London had sat and written novels—“...or had it been Robert Louis Severson penning short stories? Peter swears he's not making up that part but doesn't see how it could have really happened. He remembered how the caretaker, obligated to show the premises off to visitors, seemed distinctly put out by his father's request for something serious to drink. The old man took a long time in another location on the property, gathering and preparing the necessary ingredients. Stationed at a rickety table, my father quickly downed the cocktail and asked for a second, and the man became visibly angry. Confused and embarrassed, Pete left the building.

Outside, the California jays were jawing and the blue oaks leafing out. The manzanitas' little apples were still hard and green, and the iron-red soil seemed color-coordinated with the fragrance of the sunlit scene. He insisted that he has not, for picturesque effect, fabricated these sensual highlights of an oakwood-chaparral landscape reminiscent, even then, of Cloverdale Ranch or the Bridgman's nonworking ranch located one county to the north. Did he wonder then, as he wondered now, why his own mother and father hadn't managed to make something equivalent to the Bridgman's summer retreat and a working marriage out of their equally troubled alliance? Nothing ever came of the property investigation but, on their way out, on a straight stretch of the gently sloping dirt road banked by Sonoma fieldstone walls, his father invited his passenger to drive, not just to sit close enough to put his hands on the steering wheel but to take the driver's seat, to accelerate, to steer, to brake—to drive the car! The journey may have lasted all of one hundred yards, but the experience endeared a father to a 14-year-old boy forever.

His father's move into San Francisco and their attendance at Lick-Wilmerding High School on Ocean Avenue accentuated the differences he experienced between urban life and life in the suburbs, especially the select suburbs on the Tiburon Peninsula. With Barnes licensed to drive, they used the family wagon to commute back and forth, yet on some weeks of that school year the two older Boffey boys went one way on a Monday, and it wasn't until Friday afternoon that they went back to Belvedere. Those weekday nights were spent at the apartment a block from Park Presidio Boulevard, where Dave Boffey hung his hat but manifestly failed to make a home.

Pocket money was never wanting, and the boys were never abused as they learned how to fend for themselves in terms of getting suppers together or breakfasts ready before school; aged sixteen and fourteen, they were hardly refined gourmets. But in the aftermath of the separation, his dad's drinking visibly drowned out much else besides his work. Barnes may harbor other memories, but

Peter sadly recollected witnessing their father drunk or almost there by every evening's end if not before. Sometimes mumbling, sometimes even stumbling, he often came in late, greeting them with false cheer (“... instead of the real cheer he obviously couldn't feel...”) as if every night were New Year's Eve. Pete was patently alarmed when his father, thoroughly intoxicated, once confounded his two sons' identities and insisted on calling them by the wrong names. One morning he shook his father awake from the couch where he'd passed out the night before. “Where am I?” he muttered. “Where am I?” This individual was clearly not the fearless leader of Christian youth at the Westminster Presbyterian Church, and his downward spiral did not help build the sensitive boy's self-confidence. Peter doesn't recall if his father's face had become bloated yet, as it would later, but he could make a quick sketch of the man's worsening posture, “... the chest concave, the belly pouched...” for that was the shape our subject himself assumed in much of adolescence and later.

*Ultimately, bodily revelations brought on by psychedelics in the 70s altered my sense of myself, my posture, my physique. In the 90s, my deep engagement with the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education generated another quantum leap in how I learned to hold himself in stillness, in movement, and out of pain—but that's for a later chapter in this story.*

Lick-Wilmerding High presented Pete with academic challenges for the first time in his life. Except for a recurring pair of Ns (“Needs improvement”) in handwriting and spelling, and an irritating N for “Gets along well with others,” he had always received straight As on report cards, grades 5–8. But at the tuition-free secondary school (which would in time indeed charge tuition as it morphed into a co-ed, college-preparatory institution with competitive admission standards) he was only one among a hundred smart or smarter freshmen boys, and the prince did not appreciate the contest in self-discipline. Instead of applying himself to scholarly pursuits and wholesome athletics, he doubled down on his default response to authority by hooking up with the trouble-makers, ever ready to outdo one another in ridiculous, flagrant rebellion. “Why? Why!? WHY!?” his mother cried out as she flopped face down on the sofa and sobbed upon his return home upon the last day of the school year. He had been the only sucker to accept the widely whispered dare to pour sugar into the gas tank of the sports car belonging to the boring math teacher and study hall monitor. Pete felt like a heel for having hurt his mother, and like a dope for having been the one idiot to pull the senseless stunt. Someone had snitched on him too! <sup>18</sup> Looking back after more than sixty years, he can still feel like a witless fool, for now it is all too clear that, on the brink of the Boffey parents' next experimental phase of marriage, on that last day of school he had merely been acting out his own general anxiety and made his mother's worse. The woman surely did not need more shocks to compound the seismic disruptions in her own personal existence.

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Often, upon exiting his father's SF apartment, Pete observed a handful of people he had been given to understand were undesirable “beatniks” gathered in the turnout at the intersection of California and Park Presidio, at that time a favored staging area for hitchhiking: that urban thoroughfare led



right onto the Golden Gate Bridge and Highways 1 and 101 to Sausalito, Mill Valley, Bolinas, Cloverdale, Hopland, and points farther north. The lure of joining those “undesirables” was undeniable.

*And it wasn't the last time in my life I'd project all my escapist fantasies onto groups of people whose rebellions did not seem undesirable to me; they seemed noble and savage!*

The subject of our biography was starting to crave ways to avoid having to travel farther according to the parents' grand plan, or at least to avoid being judged with a moral compass that was rapidly losing any sense of True North. Peter would one day understand that their father had inherited an unreliable road map to growing up during his own young manhood, and Pete was beginning to feel weird about the flawed blueprint being passed on to him.

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Father: You know about condoms, right?

Son: You mean rubbers? Yeah....

Father: Do you know what they're for, how to use them?

Son: Yeah ... I guess....

Father: Well, then, be sure you do.

Dave Boffey must have known there was at the very least “heavy petting” going on between Pete and his first steady girlfriend. Why else would he have brought up birth control? We may call that a crash course in sexual education. Or excessively permissive parenting. Or questionable “problem solving”—man to man. The parents of both young teens would have been relieved had they known that ancient prohibitions still kept the maiden's chastity intact.

After school, while her parents were at work, they often went to her house. Once, going too far if not all the way proved all too far for her mother who happened to come home early and discover the two 14-year-olds side by side on the living room sofa—her daughter *sans brassière*. Laws were laid down: they were forbidden to meet. But what really put the kibosh on their liaisons, which indeed grew dangerous, was the surprise news that Boffey husband and Boffey wife had miraculously reunited—the family was moving East! Late spring, a meeting had been convened and the announcement made: that summer the Boffeys would be packing up and heading back East. That meant many things to our main subject but especially a rupture from his girlfriend, arguably the first true love of his life.

*And what better way to prevent the impregnation of a California female teen than by installing her male partner in a grade-B boarding school in good old New England three thousand miles away, which is what happened next in my increasingly dissociative days and nights—no question mark about it.*

## NOTES to Chapter 2: 1957-62

1. p32 I was later to learn from my father that McCann-Erickson had transferred him expressly to straighten out systemic, dysfunctional dynamics in the SF office; Dad shared that he had fingered none other than H.R. Haldeman—prefiguring his infamy in the Watergate scandal fifteen years later—as the chief source of the advertising agency’s internal woes in San Francisco.

2. p32 Did I meet a single Mexican individual outside of workers in the hospitality trade? Of course not. Flashing forward ten years to 1967, I shake my head at a self-centered college student’s strident rebellion against his parents and pretty much everything they stood for, or that seemed to stand for them. My poor mom, in particular, had to put up with my cruelly delivered critiques of her defense of the tourism industry, within which she became ever more professionally entrenched. To me, her argument in favor of the supposed benefits of cultural exchange, mutually enjoyed by those served and those serving, represented an iteration of that self-serving philosophy of “enlightened self-interest” which I had heard from my father in defense of advertising—often enough in one of his attacks upon the popular and influential *HIDDEN PERSUADERS* (1957) by Vance Packard. I made sweeping condemnations of her alignment at the highest end—at least in terms of expenses paid out—of international luxury travel, which I labeled as the epitome of a patently unfair, international, classist setup.

During my college years, my mother’s career at the Donald L. Fergusson Tour Company hadn’t even reached its zenith, when she was ultimately charged with ensuring the safety, comfort, and entertainment of the extremely well-heeled clientele traveling on the company’s leased cruise ships, as well as heading up its tours on land. I had watched and laughed at antics on the *Gale Storm Show* on TV, but any promotion of the positive value of meaningful “cultural exchanges” between Ferguson’s highly select and wealthy population at leisure and that other population at work was a brand of cant I couldn’t listen to then and can’t now, not without cringing. Perhaps what also got to me was that I sensed she was carving out a career for herself entirely other than motherhood! That must have grated on me for years before I became aware just how far she would take that alternative to homemaking during the last third of her life. I wish now I had not then vented my sophomoric rage so narrowly upon that one person—the most important in my life. Since my thirties, I’ve put a more precise surgical blade to work on this subject in my fiction: viz. Katie Lowrie perusing Jan McLoughlin’s photographic memorabilia [Ed. note: **3NLs**, Vol. III, Book Five, Chapter 1, Note 4, pp. 403-9].

3. p32 This outing on our touristic itinerary offered me an early business education in the profitable practice of overselling seats, whether for concerts, plane flights, or bullfights. I observed the enormous standing room crowds in the arena and learned from my father how stakeholders regularly anticipated that once the first bull’s blood was spilled in the ring—turning dirt into mud—and most certainly once the first killing was brought to its gory conclusion, a considerable number of squeamishly stomached gringas along with their husbands and children would stage a mass

walkout—no money back. But there was more blood and gore in store for those ticketholders who had been patiently standing as well as those who had paid for cheaper seats and who all moved to occupy the vacancies. House rules: overselling seats assured greater net gains. My father explained all that as customary practice: more “enlightened self-interest,” I suppose.

4. p33 This moment represents one of my earliest intimations of an erotic charge in my mother’s life. It was as if she were evaluating an object’s assets—in effect, fantasy shopping—and that gaze in her eyes remains with me as evidence of her sexual energy, evidence of which I was forced to grapple with for years.

5. p34 Janet MacRae’s residence at 999 Bush St. has been elaborately reimagined and reconstructed in **3NLs**, *mutatis mutandis*, while portraying Jan McLoughlin’s circumstances at 999 Zelkova Street, Apt. 203. [Ed. note: This is a key location in the novel, providing the mise-en-scène for the two “Bookends” framing Volumes I and II as well as where key action takes place in Chapters 2, 5, 7, and 9 in Book Four as well as Chapter 1 (“Jan’s Estate”) in Book Five.]

6. p36 Upon hearing my complaint about the weight of my payload, Mr. Flanagan immediately reduced the volume by cutting off a third of my accounts and pasting them onto another boy’s route. I still remember forty-three as the number of papers I had to make good on delivering in a timely fashion, but I won’t trivialize this as a piddling quantity. There were challenging inclinations in that terrain and serious distances between the wealthier residences in one of the wealthiest residential zip codes (when zip codes came into use) out West if not in the whole USA. Until after-school sports practice trumped the value of earning some pocket change, I was all-in, my growing biceps and calves and lungs at the service of the *Independent Journal*, distributing Free Speech in the Free World via that now largely outdated medium of newspapers delivered right to the home.

7. p36 And not like a slave or gladiator but as a living god!

8. p37 The addition of the “popular” *Sunset* to her glossy periodical pile is symbolic enough in and of itself, for it represents an even greater elevation of non-intellectual values in the mix of my mother’s fashion magazines, most of which went unread and were month after month thrown away. *The New Yorker*’s blatant intellectuality was not the most useful coinage in the West Coast circles in which my parents now traded. *Sunset*’s blatant hedonism bought its own distinctive “taste” to consumerism while endorsing the power of purchasing and eschewing deep thought.

9. p38 The 1960 national touring production of FLOWER DRUM SONG brought me a sort of unexamined civic pride, which I happily embraced without a second thought. By the time San Francisco’s very own BEACH BLANKET BABYLON musical revue began in 1974, I was more circumspect, but even now the mention of Rice-a-Roni™, “The San Francisco Treat,” has secret sentimental meaning for me: to the best of my understanding, my father was never given credit for

creating that tagline for the nationally broadcast lyrics of that hugely successful advertising campaign. Again, legend and history have a fight and legend wins.

10. p38 Overnights in her apartment and excursions in her San Francisco are no faded mental or sentimental tattoos. Throughout **3NLs**, the extensive treatment of Jan McLoughlin's guidance of young Mills is a composite elaboration of stories heard or imagined to have been heard, photographic memorabilia, and my own memories, those fabulated and those recaptured and released as fiction.

11. p39 Any attempt to comprehend my mother's complex personality and personality complexes will come up short without identifying her paternal grandfather, the evangelist Homer Howard Adamson, as the most significant and influential figure in her psychic life. Prototypical and archetypal, H.H. Adamson looms large in her pantheon of father substitutes, and I never once heard him included in her catalogue of those men who had failed her. [Ed. note: Not incidentally, this theme of the relative successes and failures of fathers and father surrogates is explored extensively in **3NLs'** portrayal of fathers, husbands, and sons—all gone missing in the three key women's lives; Katie Lowrie, in particular, must grapple with this bitter legacy.]

H.H. Adamson was born in Lawrence County KY on November 10, 1870; he married Flora M. Krutsinger in Ellettsville IN on March 9, 1892, and was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, Bloomington IN, May 1940. Three written documents concerning him survive in the family archives: (1) a poster cordially inviting the public to a series of his EVANGELISTIC MEETINGS; (2) an article appearing on p.85 in an issue of "Gospel Advocate" (January 25, 1940) with a detailed outline of his sermon entitled "The Bedrock of Salvation." Printed alongside the outline, several paragraphs portray him as one who had "begun my obedience to the gospel at eighteen and began trying to preach at twenty....;" and (3) a eulogy written by E. P. Watson appearing on p.379 in the July 8, 1944 issue of "Gospel Advocate." H.H. Adamson wrote that "my work as a minister of the divine word has carried me into eighteen States, and I have held protracted meetings in fourteen.... Thousands have been influenced for good under my teaching...." My mother (Nancy Ellen nee Hayes Barnes Boffey), the second-born daughter of the evangelical minister's third-born daughter, counted herself as blessed to be one among those thousands.

In assignments associated with her guided soul-searching at the Theological Seminary on Strawberry Point, she wrote searing passages in autobiographical accounts of her psychological and spiritual crises, sentences reading as if she were citing—chapter and verse—the text from one of her grandfather's sermon; she is sometimes moved to channel his proclamations of an absolutist Christian faith almost verbatim yet without plagiarism.

By contrast, to my knowledge no written information exists concerning my maternal grandmother, Nola Kathryn Adamson, the third child of Homer and Flora Adamson. She was born January 6,

1899; married December 5, 1918; died July 27, 1945. Other than those dates inscribed in the Family Records pages of my mother's BIBLE, Nola appears in less than a dozen surviving photographs. To her lasting credit and my perennial admiration, my mother graced the remainder of my adult life with a highly conscious, considerate, and dignified conclusion to her own life, but she did somehow manage to die without ever having answered a single one of my inquiries about her own mother which, at various junctions in my life, I had posed. Her responses always amounted to lowering her eyes and shaking her head along with all but inaudible mumblings. Mystification, obfuscation, evasion—call it by any name, but such a consistent response (or lack of one) indicates serious trauma and suggests profound shame. Of what? I will never know and can only guess.

She likewise shared with me no information about her biological father, Glenn Hayden Hayes (b. June 14, 1891). I don't know at what stage he left Nola and the two girls. I have only two photographs and some impersonal third-party information from the May 22, 1955, issue of the *Journal Gazette* (Matton IL), where its "Rural Views" section devotes a full-page feature to the "Hayes Bros. Gen'l. Mdse." store in Kemp, "... only a wide place on a Douglas County road, three miles west of Hindsboro, a little beyond hollering distance of Tuscola, the county seat, and still farther from the line between Indiana and Illinois." Grading and distributing eggs were the store's main distinctions in an apparently competitive field. On October 19, 1983, in its renamed "Lifestyles" section, the same *Journal Gazette* offers another article about the "Mystique of Kemp General Store." 87 years old, Carter Hayes is pictured with arms folded, hardly at work; his younger brother, Glenn—my mother's father—is not mentioned by name.

These news articles are cited for readers who might be intrigued to know how "the hen that lays a fresh egg" made its way into my evocation of historical Cliffport's general store in **3NLs**. Of course, Cliffport is a fictive composite of Davenport, Swanton, and similar locales along Central Coastal California, historical towns with ghosts *and* people living in them; with all the necessary changes made, the Egg Capital of Douglas County became the Egg Capital of North County Santa Cruz. [Ed. note: See "Bookends I and II," especially pp. xxiv–xxv, in Vol. I, **3NLs**.]

12. p43 In hindsight, with more direct experience in such formal disciplinary matters, I have to conclude that the local constabulary's decision to convene that encounter at that particular hour on that particular day was not due to the exigencies of law enforcement but as an expression of the peace officers' personal resentment about belonging to a class of civil servants who had— even on Christmas Eve—to work for the rich and nouveau riche of Belvedere. I recall my interrogator's repeated insinuation that, if I didn't come clean with the whole truth—presumably, a narrative of innumerable, unspeakable, illegal acts—I might have to spend time "upstairs." Older now, a more seasoned repeat offender, I can distinctly recollect that policeman's amateur rendition of Spencer Tracy as a mean cop: without turning his head, he jerked his thumb over his shoulder to point out the staircase leading "upstairs," suggesting extreme unpleasantness—perhaps torture?—awaiting me if I lied, even by omission. In fact, it may have just been a broom closet at the top of the

staircase or a loft where office supplies were stored, but the possibilities scared the hell out of me. I came clean: yes, we'd bombarded the bay with those oil-burning pots. The filthy, round torches smoked upon contact, sizzled, then sank from sight. Why? For the fun of it, why else? I don't know what rudimentary techniques the other officer employed to wrest the ugly truth from my partners in crime. I'm making light of the situation but throwing smudge pots into SF Bay and overturning traffic barricades were no joke. It should be clear that none of us had yet to recognize, pronounce, or spell the word environment; as for public safety—those were terms in some hypocritical adult vocabulary, not ours.

13. p43 Leaving the meeting, I overheard the man quietly tell my father, "I think they're just bored." At the time, his aside struck me as a generous and accurate assessment; now I wonder if it wasn't also a conscious or unconscious attempt by the savvy social worker to allow the delinquent parents an opportunity to get the message *and* save face. In any event, for me it effectively put a kinder face on all authority, because I knew he was right: we were bored, and almost nobody was there to stop us from stirring up some excitement. When I further consider that man's off-the-record comment, I sense that a form of charade may also have been involved: the man knew we were spoiled brats and that sheer boredom was a major source of our callow insouciance. But even at that embryonic stage of my analytical thinking, I think I apprehended the Black man's unspoken implication that our behavior outside acceptable boundaries was both a reflection of kids-who-have-it-all entitlement and a version, scaled down, of the *ennui de vivre* demonstrated by the parents, restless arrivistes who had "arrived." Hadn't the phenomena of Peyton Place become a common representation of widespread cultural malaise? The entire episode managed to sour relations between the boys and the two families; a certain innocence was lost, which is not to say I was done with my own individual re-acting out against authority.

14. p44 I've since concluded that our "sand sharks" were in fact leopard sharks and learned that the two are in entirely different families. So called sand sharks do not inhabit the eastern Pacific Ocean, but so called leopard sharks are native to California's coastline and were once historically abundant exactly where we hunted the waters surrounding Belvedere Island and *La Punta del Tiburón* (Shark Point).

15. p45 Belvedere's sought-after interior designer came around; a summer theatre impresario from Sonoma dropped by; a travel agent; a jilted lover of the designer or the impresario or the travel agent: men without women, all gay but not outré. I had no idea that it was the beginning of a pattern which would play out for the rest of her life as younger gay men became her companions—and ultimately her work partners—of choice. It was a worrisome development for this adolescent and under certain circumstances the source of not a little awkwardness and confusion in the years to follow. Whenever tempted to use the shorthand and typically pejorative expression "fag hag" to communicate this persistent feature of my mother's social life, I restrain myself, for no one could ever accuse Button Boffey of looking like a hag! "Don't be hard on your mother,"

Aunt Janet counseled me from her own hospice bed. “She was just too good looking for her own good, and vain.”

16. p46 Margaret Bridgman authored a novel entitled LOVE IS A PLACE (1953). Published by Funk & Wagnalls, it received a brief but favorable review in *Harper’s Magazine*. From the dust jacket: “Margaret Bridgman is a San Francisco housewife who lives with her husband and three children on Corinthian Island which looks out across a magnificent panorama of the Bay area.” Sound familiar? In the author’s account on the flyleaf, she says: “As long as the institution of marriage is here to stay—and it looks as though it is—it seemed like a good idea to take a close look at it and show what can be done with it.” The story revolves around a pair’s marital discord, a pair of their extra-marital affairs, and the pair’s reconciliation in conflictual union. She’s a housewife; he’s an advertising man. Over the span of my life, I’ve re-read all or parts of this book for obvious reasons: their mutual ambivalence might have been describing the on-and-off-and-on-again nature of my own parent’s marriage.

Another reason I can still overlook its fairly conventional prose, its plain and predictable narrative structure, and its mundane detailing: the author does convey the rural and rustic setting of a specific place, one which she re-imagined in her fiction much the way I reimagine it in my memory. Naturally, I value LOVE IS A PLACE for sentimental reasons, and her evocation of that rural Mendocino County location in fiction is by now hopelessly confounded with my own memories of experiencing it as a preteen.

Now add this to the mix of fact and fiction: by 1974, Button Boffey was married to Jack Bridgman! The union between the hobby rancher (a McCann-Erikson employee by day) and the attractive divorcee took place after Peggy Bridgman’s death from cancer and long after Dave Boffey had remarried in December, 1967. My nominal stepfather’s role in my life was minimal, at best, except to exacerbate my conflicted feelings toward my mother and to enhance my alienation from my father and his ilk, as I then painted them all with a broad brush. That second marriage did not pan out gold and also ended in divorce after a couple of years.

Yet another uncanny fact: one of the protagonist’s daughters in LOVE IS A PLACE is named “Button,” yet the novel was composed and published before Peggy and my mother had ever met!

17. p46 My father and I loved each other as best we could, yet for decades I maligned him to others and harbored doubts about his affection for me. The single greatest regret of my entire life is that my father never lived long enough—that *we* never lived long enough—for us to explore our differences and find forgiveness wherever possible. By the time I was ready and might have been capable of better understanding—in short, by the time I’d turned forty and was raising my own son—Dad had been dead a dozen years. We never had a chance to reconcile, and I will mourn that lost opportunity for as long as I live.

18. p48 Readers of the 3NLs' Books Five and Six will not fail to recognize the parallels between the author's juvenile delinquency and the fictional David Duncan Lowry's bad behavior. However, Katie's son gets stuck in adolescence and stays stuck there or worse; I like to think that this biography's subject got unstuck, if belatedly—through grace, luck, and hard work—and was able to grow farther inward, outward and, perhaps, upward along his way.

### **CHAPTER 3: Massachusetts (1962–5)**

J. Walter Thompson's generals had summoned David M. Boffey back to Madison Avenue or, more exactly, to the Graybar Building at 420 Lexington Avenue, at that time billing itself as "the largest office tower in the world." To Pete, taking leave of California was an opportunity to escape without getting caught violating Probation, a concern which became acute in the aftermath of his "stupid exeunt stunt" at Lick-Wilmerding High School; the incident was never reported to law enforcement—another lucky strike for Pete! Leaving the West Coast with his first broken heart also meant wondering what, a second time around, life back East might entail.

Early summer, he found out that he and Barnes would be attending a New England boarding school at the start of their sophomore and senior years, respectively. He doesn't recall being surprised by this prospect since he had known that his father had graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy before going on to Yale University. It seemed the natural course of events for sons to follow father's suit at a similar if not identical institution of secondary education. But enrolling at Williston Academy (Easthampton MA) required summer reading of four books in advance—that was a novelty for young Pete, and the list of recommended and approved titles read to him like a foreign language. Until then, besides the BIBLE, the only literary non-juvenilia he had ever encountered had been mandated for his special SF high school's entire freshman class: Hugh Walpole's FORTITUDE (1913) and Lytton Strachey's THE EMINENT VICTORIANS (1918).<sup>1</sup> He chose his four titles to fulfill the Williston requirement, and his father brought him paperback editions home from NYC.<sup>2</sup>

Remembering his reading of those four books, Peter spoke almost wistfully. DIGGING UP THE PAST (1930) by Sir Leonard Woolley introduced him to archeology and archeologists, and the excavation of town sites and gravesites—that interested him, "... that there were people who even did such things." Alan Paton's CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY (1948) focused on Africa, Southern Africa, South Africa; he had no prior notions about that geography or its politics, or what apartheid could be, or how that word was pronounced, but he related to the author's humanistic *cri de cœur*—even if he had yet to notice the rising cry for civil rights closer to home. During a family vacation in Jackson Hole WY, he tackled THE RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD REICH: A HISTORY OF NAZI GERMANY (1960) by William L. Shirer, but if his father hadn't been on hand to guide him through its basic terms, dates, and place names, Pete would never have soldiered through to the end.<sup>3</sup> He fondly cited his father's interpretative service as a brief interlude of



intellectual camaraderie between them and confessed to me that he may even have prided himself on that connection which seemingly differentiated him from his brothers. But the speculations and ideological issues of Shirer's bestseller were way out of his league, and he retained little but a realization that History apparently hadn't started with Dickens the dog or Mrs. Bell. Slouching on the sofa watching TV war movies or lying on the living room rug listening to VICTORY AT SEA (1954) had brought the young teen closer to any realities of war than any long, fat, best-selling book in small-print without any pictures could.

His fourth and last book, Somerset Maugham's THE MOON AND SIXPENCE (1919), was the first treatment of Paul Gauguin that he'd ever run across, but it would not be the last. Over the following sixty years, he would wrestle with multiple variants on the theme of that man as a stellar example of the *artiste*—equally creative and destructive. In autobiography and biographies; in fiction, film, and theater; in museum exhibits and in catalogs raisonnés and *déraisonnés*—our subject fell under the spell of Gauguin as the magnificent misfit. THE MOON AND SIXPENCE sounded the opening salvo in what would become a lifetime of reading, writing, coming to terms, and not coming to terms with other such specimens of major mismatches between the individual and society. [Ed. note: Not by chance, we suspect, the alienated, compulsive, gifted, temperamental, and over-sexed younger half-brother in **2HBs** is an artist named Paul.]

For a Californian aged fifteen, on the brink of induction into a traditional college preparatory boarding school in Western Massachusetts, the Parisian painter going native in Polynesia had an irresistible lure. Williston Academy was in some measure modeled along the lines of the military academy where David Mills (aged nine) had been sent,<sup>4</sup> its rules, regulations, curriculum, and culture comprehensively designed to finish off the confirmation of candidates who should aspire to achievements far loftier than merely acquiring higher education. Yet Maugham's liberal treatment of Gauguin showed Pete that an individual could act on his convictions without calculating or caring for the consequences. Archetype, prototype, stereotype—Gauguin figured as *the type* of free spirit who updated Pete's childish Peter Pan ideal and prefigured his subsequent infatuation with Dylan Thomas and then his sacred pact (“... beyond blood, beyond words...”) with Stephen Dedalus. But coming before the Welshman or the Irishman, it was a fictional American, Holden Caulfield, who took center stage starring in the main role of Rebel—with and without a cause, with and without socially redeeming values, with and without the trappings and affectations of any avantgarde *artiste*. But it was THE MOON AND SIXPENCE that cracked open the seal on Pete's imaginings of what elements of childhood he might be able to carry into adulthood, and he still wonders how the official guardians of Williston's mainstream culture had ever allowed that title on the recommended reading list. If it had been put there as a cautionary tale, for his part Pete missed the point.

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During our exchanges, Peter periodically displayed surprise upon recalling episodes long forgotten, even marveling that some incidents remained accessible in memory. Reassembling pieces of

the Boffeys' cross-country car trip in the summer of 1962, for instance, was a shocker; his recollections were few, short, and saddening. Was there even any pretending that their transit from West Coast to East was meant to double as a vacation? There may have been a stop at Mount Rushmore, he thought, but that was all he could retrieve in the way of recreation. His mother sat in the front passenger seat of the station wagon—mostly silent, periodically crying. At the end of each cheerless day, they checked into a motel where she stayed in her room while their father and the boys found something to eat. Somewhere in the Plain States, between fields of corn and fields of wheat, Pete heard a thud. His father pulled the car to the shoulder of the highway and told Barnes to join him. Out the rear window, Pete saw a dog lying in broad daylight in the middle of the road—dead. He waited with his younger brother and mother in the car. “What did he say?” his mother asked her husband reclaiming the driver's seat while taking a cigarette from one of the packs above the visor (one regular, one menthol) before restarting the engine. “He wouldn't take any amount of money.” At the next stop, his father asked Barnes to take the steering wheel, his mother moved to the back seat, and they drove on.<sup>5</sup> In another Plains State or maybe the same, probably after having been badgered and bedeviled by his older brother, Dan turned and spat in Pete's face—going far beyond a playground scuffle, this was Pete's first experience of pure spite directed right at him. For the balance of the trip the three brothers remained seated far apart.

Re-entering Northern Westchester, the Boffeys were returning to familiar terrain, familiar houses and shrubs and trees, familiar open spaces; even so called Day House in Bedford Hills, where lease arrangements had been made, was familiar. With its white clapboard siding, black shutters, and gable-roof with dormers, the Colonial Revival building resembled their former house at 3 Lake Drive, except that the Day House itself was altogether grander, larger, and emptier, and the grounds extended for acres and acres out back. And they knew no one in the neighborhood of those wildly expansive lots. One day, in the lane leading to former carriage house, almost by mistake Pete met Mrs. and Mr. Day. He was later given to understand that in order to convert the main house into revenue, the old lady and her elderly son had taken up residence in the former servants quarters. No one could tell him how long ago the owners had made that move. When the Bekins van showed up and its men prepared to offload the Boffeys' movable property, the foreman waited for Mrs. Boffey to instruct him where to put what. She broke down and Mr. Boffey beelined out on the Harlem Division railroad line, removing her from the scene. Peter remembers their father doing his best to get the belongings distributed to the right rooms on the right floors. Aunt Janet was notified and came to the rescue post haste.

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That, of course, was not Pete's first automobile ride across the surface of the USA. But at the end of 1953's westbound “motor trip” with Aunt Janet he had been treated as a special guest within a family supplemental and agreeably alternate to his own. While the Shelton MacRae clan was surely not without its own internal conflicts (with which Pete had not to deal), it evidenced a tangible continuity binding generations in everyday working relationships with the weather, their animals,

their land, and with one another. But in terms of clarifying cardinal directions and as a vehicle for shoring up his self-confidence, 1962's coast-to-coast journey proved to be literally and figuratively the opposite. It didn't simply expose gradual, cumulative erosion; it was a cataclysmic disaster, baring fundamental schisms in the past and future life of his natal family.

Nothing had prepared him for the profound estrangement of all parties one from another which became apparent during and after the move. During the California years, he thinks he may have had sensed the wear and tear on his parents' Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers marriage, its romantic playbook fraying, disappointing each of them, unsustainable. But the rending of that fantastical fabric hadn't taken place right before his eyes, and outright hostility between the brothers had been occasional, assimilable, the stresses and strains of sibling rivalry ultimately overcome.

Late summer, Pete set up his new base camp in another new top floor room with what few personal trappings he had brought with him, and with Aunt Janet's help his mother kept herself together long enough to outfit the two older boys with their new prep school wardrobes. Then their parents installed him and his older brother in Williston Academy located three hours to the north, where the school's administrators, faculty, and staff automatically called him Peter rather than Pete. <sup>6</sup>

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6:40 1st bell: wake-up #1

6:50 2nd bell: wake-up #2

6:55 3rd bell: call to breakfast

7:00 Breakfast prayer & BREAKFAST

7:25 4th bell: room inspection

7:35 5th bell: chapel service

8:00 6th bell: 1st class

8:45 7th bell: 2nd class

9:25 8th bell: morning break

9:40 9th bell: 3rd class

10:25 10th bell: 4th class

11:10 11th bell: 5<sup>th</sup> class

11:50: 12<sup>th</sup> bell: call to lunch

Noon LUNCH

12:30 free time

1:10 13th bell: athletics or approved extracurricular activities

5:05 14th bell: study hall or study in dorm

5:55 15th bell: call to supper

6:00 SUPPER

6:55 16th bell: retire to rooms

7:00 17th bell: quiet time or approved extracurricular activities

8:50 18th bell: prepare for bed  
9:10 19th bell: prepare for lights out  
9:15 LIGHTS OUT

Six decades since this timetable deformed a more organic childhood, Peter recited it to me from memory. He admits it might be five or ten minutes off here and there—although students were not allowed to be. Its regimentation obviously seeped into his brain, and he wondered how he didn't wind up in the infirmary while finding his sea legs during the first days of this soul-crushing, 19-bell, 5-days-a-week schedule. A quick study, he learned how to make the weekday clock seem to speed up or slow down, but the maverick in him still feels the basic insult to his system—a seasickness occasioned by this enforced timekeeping during the first semester of his sophomore year.

Little by little he learned the ropes as any conscript new to landlocked naval service would—“...hellish dumb bell by hellish dumb bell.” Initially, there were a schoolboy's bag of tricks used to avoid having the inner workings of his mind—which was by then thoroughly moonstruck by South Sea Islands fantasies—detected. In the dining hall, the students were assigned to different tables on a weekly basis; during breakfast prayer, he gauged the varying attitudes displayed by the teachers at the table heads, especially noting their relative tolerance toward any lackluster performance of the student servers, who daily rotated waiting on the table. Some teachers insisted on diligence; others allowed some slack. When it came his turn to serve, he behaved accordingly; no student servers were ever perfect at their dining hall duties—nor would he be! At Chapel, he bowed his head, mouthing the words without praying and training himself not to yawn or smirk while the Reverend delivered his sermonette du jour, the Dean made announcements, and Headmaster Stevens released his imperious baritone upon faculty and student body alike. God help the young scholar apprehended not lifting his face and at least moving his lips to the lyrics of “O Jerusalem” or “O Williston”—whatever was the chosen hymn of the day.<sup>7</sup>

In public he took pains to give all appearances of compliance while entertaining a second, private, inner life, which only later would prove irrepressible and reveal itself to all as blatantly not conforming to standard expectations. It was plainly of value to put on a good show before the strictest faculty members in order to avoid being penalized, that is, sent to the cold, unadorned, mediaevalsque study hall where the proctor sat on a stool planted upon a dais and surveyed the miscreants below. If he behaved at the dining table, ate quickly, asked properly to be dismissed, and promptly made his bed, he could gain a bit of free time alone, which was a smarter tactic than malingering before showing up late for scheduled appointments or being tardy for rollcall at competitive athletics. But he did contrive ways to postpone his dreaded return to the locker room after daily sports, reducing the time spent in the heat of those dreaded sessions in the shower room when the upperclassmen and varsity athletes put on their grand shows, making big points of differentiating themselves in every way from the mere boys in the lower grades.

How did Peter, before beginning his apprenticeship in the study of Joycean “silence, cunning, and exile,” survive the school’s emphasis on sports? He got the message that competitive athletics was not held up as just one of the avenues to manhood but as the royal road itself. Football, basketball, baseball, of course. Soccer and lacrosse—those were new to him so at least he gave them a try. Swimming and diving. Wrestling. Tennis and squash. Golf, skiing, and cross country—athletics à la carte! Proving proficient at one or more of these organized activities seemed to excuse many a mediocre student from any quest for scholastic excellence or any scholarly accomplishments at all. Proving out a star athlete conferred exemption from many regulations applying to others, and it seemed to Pete that the real superstars were inevitably also dorm floor masters and held leadership positions in the student government and committees steering the community toward Virtue. But what of the subject of this biography, who demonstrated neither an affinity for civic junior achievement nor a Spartan mastery of sports? Often it was simply easier and better to be late for sports or even absent-without-leave and suffer the ignominy of study hall than mutilate his fond memories of innumerable pickup games of football, basketball, and baseball which he had so recently pursued with best friends in California before the organized, paramilitary poisoning of spontaneous pure play.

He did gradually acquire a taste for the solitude and enforced quietude the punitive study hall provided. It was not until his second semester at Williston that he discovered the Dramatic Club, for almost two school years after that he participated in all of its activities, as well as a newly formed experimental Studio Theatre troupe to boot, thus finding a way to enjoy afternoons and evenings either preparing for or performing in plays in lieu of doing committee duty or performing on the playing field.<sup>8</sup>

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How else did our super-sensitive subject survive that first traumatic semester as Indian Summer morphed into autumnal chill? He reported that once the occasional Saturday night movie on campus had been announced midweek, it was a lifesaving buoy to swim toward for the rest of the week.<sup>9</sup> Other times, he recounted, all he had to console him was savoring the anticipation of “8 bells” when sweet Graham Crackers and hot chocolate in paper cups were dispensed to the underclass boys by two aproned ladies from town tending the snack bar. There he stood in the breakroom with the other pupils, nursing the delicacies and, with disdain and envy, watching the faculty men seated around their round tables, drinking coffee from their mugs, fondling their pipes, and smoking brands of his father’s advertised cigarettes.

His older brother was no help. Just as Pete had arrived at the summer camp after Barnes had made his mark there, Peter arrived at boarding school with his older brother an upperclassman with eyes on the exit gate leading to college the next year ahead. Peter meanwhile felt doomed to pass his next three years as one of the Good Ship Williston’s galley slaves. As a senior, Barnes was housed in a cottage on the edge of campus, far from his younger brother’s cell on the ground floor of Memorial Dormitory. Barnes was also a joiner and played varsity football, which helped him get

along. Peter later realized that his brother, too, was simply making do under the pressures upon him, both of them manifesting the underlying, unspoken motto of the dysfunctional Boffey family: “*Sauve qui peut la vie!*” (“Every man for himself!”) <sup>10</sup> While supposedly seeking out his older brother’s company or counsel, Peter’s visits to the senior cottage became more or less his safest opportunities to hunch down behind the woodpile underneath the back porch and there, hidden from view, smoke cigarettes.

Uncle Roy was even less helpful than brother Barnes. One Saturday, the younger of the two Boffey boys at Williston was informed that his relative would arrive the following day at noon. Peter conjectured that Roy E. Carr may have been responding to his half-brother’s appeal, that is, Dave has asked Roy to kindly pay his nephew an avuncular visit for Peter’s mid-October birthday. In any case, the visit had somehow been prearranged and an afternoon off campus sanctioned. Suited up, feeling reduced to ‘Pete’ again, he met his uncle in the visitors’ parking lot and was taken to the restaurant where out-of-town relations customarily dined with their boarding school wards.

It was a picture perfect Sunday afternoon. The restaurant was enviably situated on the western flank of Mount Tom, a prime spot for viewing fall foliage on the lower mountainside and through-out the valley below. The venerable establishment’s décor and service admitted no flaws, no eccentricities, no exceptions to the rules; it must have met the strict standards of the retired naval commanding officer, insurance executive, and “longtime civic leader in Providence, Rhode Island” for they were seated promptly. Yet in no time “Pete” felt so nauseous, feint, and feverish that their meal order was scratched, and the entire outing scrubbed. Given the sudden onset of illness, there was nothing for the older man (who, Peter added, never seems in memory a more distant relative than right then and there) to do but drive his charge back to campus and drop the boy off in the lot, encouraging him to go to bed or visit the infirmary. While there is no telling exactly what the temporary guardian had concluded about the substandard performance of Seaman Recruit Boffey and no way of knowing what if anything he reported to the boy’s father, we can guess. In his dorm room, the ephemeral psychosomatic ailments mysteriously disappeared, and Peter came back to life. To Pete and/or Peter, Uncle Roy had through no fault of his own been absolutely no help at all. <sup>11</sup> Thanksgiving break seemed eons away, he remembered, and Parents Weekend a slim hope to hang onto.

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There were his fellow students—all new acquaintances. Maybe making new friends might help! He took a particular liking to another Williston newcomer named NB. Having been raised in the American colony of oil company executives in greater Caracas, Venezuela, NB was fluent in Spanish and English. Even then Peter recognized that the boy carried himself like one self-important individual, somehow always dressing better than the rest of them and distinguishing himself through the use of a sophisticated bilingual vocabulary. He was the first self-styled dandy Peter had ever met, and our main protagonist confessed to me that he was intrigued by the type, if only because the polyglottal teenager was in fact more experienced in the more meaningful ways of the

world, or so he had Peter convinced. After Thanksgiving break, they joined forces and jointly petitioned the Dean of Students for a change of roommates, arguing their right to cultivate a greater camaraderie with each other than either of them could muster with the “incompatible” roommates assigned to them at the start of the school year. The Dean passed the matter on to the Headmaster who sent word that he had considered the merits of their petition and decided that they should wait to see if the supposed differences from their respective roommates weren’t really just a question of unfamiliarity. After the longer winter break including Christmas and New Year’s, they reiterated their petition; action was again postponed. Peter concluded that changing partners might have helped but would be impossible. But then Headmaster Stevens was never ever any help at all.<sup>12</sup>

But other new friends were. Knowing I was transcribing our interview and writing this chapter, my subject contacted me to confess that he felt ashamed for having neglected mention of his true friends from that period, people he looks back upon fondly even if they’d long ago lost touch. Reconsidering, he attributed his failure to single them out as partially a conscious decision based on delicacy of feeling for individuals (if they were alive) and for their descendants, and partially as an unconscious example of his own narcissistic tendencies. In other words, he argued that his omission was another case of sage discernment combined with inconsideration of others. He wanted me to find a way to at least allude to the enduring values of such relationships, to signify to those half-dozen individuals who, if they were ever reading this section of the biography, would know who they are and, he hopes, allow him to beg their pardons.

While I thought that he was being too hard on himself and assured him that the war zone of adolescence and post-adolescence usually generates considerable collateral damage among most teenagers, he emphasized that even though “egotist” had been a popular derogatory term in exactly that era, his enduring self-centeredness still nagged at him. This emotionally charged plaint was painful to listen to, but a beneficial side effect was his introducing me to “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,” a late masterpiece by William Carlos Williams; in the course of our exchange on this problematic issue, he recited from memory six lines which, he posited, demonstrate Williams’ remorse about a similar dilemma:

We had our children,  
rivals in the general onslaught.  
I put them aside  
though I cared for them  
as well any man  
could care for his children  
according to my lights.

I asked for clarification. He suggested I substitute the word “friends” in place of “children,” encouraging me to read the whole poem or at least its Book I and the Coda, which he called the crown jewel in Williams’ oeuvre and as “distinguished a lyrical utterance of love and affirmation

of imagination as ever made in the American English language.” Of course, I found the poem and gained a better sense of Peter’s genuine remorse. I also knew that in bare-branched Massachusetts, three thousand miles from California, he pined for his Californian girlfriend all fall long, writing her long, horny love letters with drawings penciled in the margins—naive images of young, ideally breasted females naked from the waist up. Looking back, he thinks of those “spontaneous ejaculations” as prurient fantasies après Gauguin; it was still years before he would see Paul Delvaux’ nudes and semi-nudes (“really prurient...?”) to which his own doodling bore a generic resemblance.<sup>13</sup>

Did the two brothers away at boarding school hear from “Dad,” the working adman temporarily resident at the Yale Club? In the college application process, Peter assumes that Barnes must have been in communication with their father but doesn’t recall any direct contact himself. “Mom,” inpatient at Four Winds Hospital (Katonah NY) when not outpatient in Bedford Hills, managed to type and mail him short notes. Both parents attended Parents Weekend, watching Barnes play football and taking the two boys out to eat. Good intentions were alive; outward forms were still intact; it was the content within that had shattered—“like a whole roll of Dad’s peppermint Life Savers crushed while still packed side by side inside their tight, silvery foil.”

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Peter rapidly acquired the requisite academic skills to get best grades and excel at the head of his classes—except in math. Breezing through classroom and homework assignments, and hastily finishing the periodically administered standardized texts gained him extra time to loaf around Wiliston Pond or slip in and out of the few birch trees which had either been planted on the perimeter of the main campus or were relictual clones.<sup>14</sup>

As the weeks went by, one or two of the forty-minute classroom hours were experienced as islands of fresh interest in a rising sea of alienation. Gaining knowledge in the Reverend Ives’ “BIBLE as Literature” course, that material came easily enough, and the instruction brought new significance to old stories. French language and literature as taught by Colonel Roberson, affectionately known as “Hawkeye” (“... who doesn’t miss a thing!”), became his favorite morning stop. Roberson was a former US Military man with worldwide experience in times of war and peace, and he was notorious for his old-fashioned methodology and no-nonsense pedagogical approach. Gruff, tall, thin, chain-smoking (Camels), with straight gray hair cropped like Samuel Beckett’s, and a deeply chiseled visage preceded by a raptor’s hooknose, the *ancien combattant* believed in conjugating verbs, parsing sentences, drilling ad nauseum, all the while maintaining the class immersed only in French. His passion for disciplining the boys was made plain by his system of penalizing them for blurting out any English words during class—25 cents per offense. Locked behind glass on the school’s general bulletin board located just outside the headmaster’s office, the Colonel posted a typed roster with a tally of how much money each student personally owed him. No one escaped the public shaming, and some boys intentionally produced *faux pas* just to join in that week’s



review of the list (“...fun and games!”) Peter couldn’t remember but believed one did in fact have to pay up to get class credit or maybe just not to be made to feel small, stupid, and miserable. “*El burro sabe mas que tu!*”<sup>15</sup> Colonel Roberson would declare, switching to Spanish, his Camel-breath an inch away from the victim’s face. Peter relished the man’s dramatic flair and the animated theatrics of teaching style, and he did learn French grammar and the declension of its verbs!<sup>16</sup>

TEK, English instructor and Dramatic Club coach, was relatively new to Williston and, for Peter, opened the gates to an appreciation of American literature as a matter of vital, personal importance—for study, for communication, and for self-expression; soon Peter tried his hand at writing instead of merely reading. TEK brought to life even the earliest poets and prose writers of America’s Colonial era, and Peter caught on to an intense value even in the verses of Anne Bradstreet, the poetry of Edward Taylor, and the hell and brimstone sermons such as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards. The subject matter often revolved around issues he had heard addressed weekly from the pulpit at the Westminster Presbyterian Church and was now hearing preached from the pulpit in Williston Chapel every day of the week except Saturday. Reading Washington Irving’s two most popular stories on the page was a welcome treat, for to the young student’s ears the printed language stood up well against Disney’s animations of Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane. Besides, being forced to revisit Sleepy Hollow between the pages of a book felt, for a native son of Hudsonia, like Brer Rabbit’s response to being flung into the briar patch: “Bred en bawn in a brier-patch, Brer Fox; bred en bawn in a brier-patch!”<sup>17</sup>

That first semester in American literary studies, sophomore students were still in the parlor of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s faith and intellect, not yet let loose in the out-of-doors ethos of the other New England Transcendentalists—that would come in 1963, sweeping our leading actor off his feet. Most noteworthy of all, until after the New Year the curriculum fell short of introducing him to Walt Whitman when all heaven and hell broke loose for Peter; TEK’s involvement in that personal springtime upheaval would become crucial.

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Pete had once craved the end of summer camp; now Peter ached for the long winter break, and during that first December in Bedford Hills there was family enough for a reasonable facsimile of Christmas celebrations past. Rationing her shortbread among the boys, tempering hints of moodiness in the adults, “stalwart householder” Aunt Janet was all in. There was a tree; there were lights and ornaments. There was ice on the ground and snow shelved in the boughs of evergreen trees. His mother and father were both staying in the Day House—it was *almost* like home again. While calming his nerves, Peter got back into the habit of pummeling his lungs with tar and nicotine, for he could smoke openly when away from school—who could stop him and on what grounds?

Resettling back East had made it possible for the Boffeys to reconnect with former family friends, families whose heads of household were all NYC captains of industry in their respective fields

(e.g. advertising, publishing, medicine, oil & gas) and whose Northern Westchester spouses were housewives “with domestic help,” women with golf to play. And bridge to play. And shows to see, psychoanalysts to see.... (“That’s all you have to say,” Peter advised me. “They’ll get the idea: ladies of leisure and neuroses.”). And there were children to rear when attention was required. When the offspring of those families got together, they were all years older than before, but it must have looked to their parents like old times. It didn’t feel like old times to Peter—no longer Pete, who needed time on his own without family and friends, without schoolmates and roommates. He needed time alone to brood.

That first Christmas back East he was given a portable record player and took refuge in his upstairs room, mesmerized by the voice, the looks, the lure of Joan Baez, who became larger than his life and life itself. He read and reread the liner notes and lyrics on the covers of her first two Vanguard albums and turned off the lights in his room, surrendering to her sound and conjuring her image in his mind’s eye. There were other albums—the stormy *CARMINA BURANA* of Carl Orf; Stravinsky’s fiery *RITE OF SPRING*; Tchaikovsky’s dramatic piano concertos and Brahms’ sweeping symphonies—music whose intensities and complexities corresponded to the nascent poet’s own inner life awakening to him! <sup>18</sup>

He recalled some eggnog gathering of those adults and their older children. He had begrudgingly tagged along and found himself eavesdropping on a group of well-to-do college kids swapping stories about their having taken a year off to bum around Europe. They had slummed it in Spain, in Portugal, in the Balearic and Canary Islands, carrying nothing but string bags of odds and ends, wearing nothing but shorts, t-shirts, and espadrilles—so it could be done! Without tutelage at Williston, Peter had read *THE SUN ALSO RISES* (1926), missing the inflections in Hemingway’s tone of voice and the author’s devastating critique of a lost generation. Now right before him were people not much older than himself, Americans who had drunk wine from botas, rolled cigarettes, slept on sandy beaches—people who had gone bohemian if not gone as far native as Gauguin had gone. (“But Paul Gauguin be damned! What about Holden Caulfield, my brand new hero?”)

During that winter vacation he came across a copy of *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE* (1951) and read it—religiously. Here was a 16-year-old showing Peter how he too could show others the way to be real! Here was a rebel bearing the banner of Truth against Establishment falsehoods! A non-conformist par excellence! Over the next months he read the rest of Salinger’s published works, that is, all he could get his hands on, not that he understood all their references or half their ironies. At that stage in his life and in his state of mind, understanding ironies and nuances was not crucial—fighting phoniness was! In their complicated engagements and detachments, the Glass family members were people to whom he could relate. But Holden Caulfield was the first to lead the charge; Bob Dylan would have a year or so to wait for Peter to catch up to him next.

At the start of the spring semester in 1963, our heroic anti-hero surveyed Williston Academy's territory and drew a bead on the most promising targets in his campaign against hypocrisy. Like any rebel still overly dependent upon that which he rebels against, not yet capable of fomenting or even prefiguring a genuine revolution, Peter had to start somewhere and got the campus dress code in his crosshairs. The Beatles had yet to invade the USA, and boys' hair length was not yet the definitive battleground it became a year later when the British foursome made its February 1964 TV appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. Yet long before then any preppie carrying a paperback copy of *CATCHER* in his sports coat or trench coat pocket would have been letting his hair grow long—and then some. But there would always be frontlines on which to fight against hypocrisy and phoniness! (“Hadn't Tennessee Williams' Big Daddy shouted it out clearly enough...? ‘MENDACITY!’”)

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January 1963, Peter singlehandedly made his first sorties in what would become a war of attrition between one out-numbered, out-flanked student-warrior and the administration—a war eventually lost by both. First, he wore mismatched socks and a broad, hideous necktie to the dining hall; he was promptly sent back to the dorm without supper. Aged 15, he was not up to a hunger strike, even to shame the Establishment, so he dressed without offense for the next morning's breakfast.

The “code of good grooming” precluded moustaches, beards, lengthy sideburns; anyway, our com-mando was still incapable of growing any appreciable beard or moustache—but he could skip haircuts! He'd heard rumors of an upperclassman who that prior year had taken the administration to the mat on the hair-length rule and been suspended on principle, his and its. Peter took heart from that phantom comrade's bravery and let his hair crest over the tops of his ears. While engaged in these subversive operations, some of his schoolmates expressed their solidarity, as if he were fighting the good fight for them—while they kept their sentiments undetectable to faculty and monitors. But that vicarious virtue was of no use to our novice freedom fighter, and neither he nor Holden Caulfield had any intention of taking bullets for peers more cowardly than himself. He was ordered to get a haircut. He could be expelled over another half-an-inch of hair on his head. Peter decided to keep his hairline trimmed back to a tolerated length while in the militarized zone. Given no moral support of any kind from the flimsy home base 150 miles away, the prospect of being sent home to an ill-defined situation in Bedford Hills was too dear a price to pay even for Holden.

With so many fronts to fight on and so few resources, there's no telling how his solo spring uprising would have resolved if Peter had not come under the spell of 19th century American literature and become active in the Dramatic Club at the same time, this last involvement almost despite the fact that his brother Barnes played the lead in a production of *THE MIKADO* mounted by the joint efforts of Williston's Dramatic Club and the Northampton School for Girls' Mask and Wig Society.

It was TEK who took the fledgling “artist as a young man” under his wing and gradually taught him to fly, for Peter's theatrical and literary developments were now completely under the direction

of the young, unmarried Harvard graduate. Although TEK was not the sole adult responsible for encouraging the budding poet's artistic self-expression, he was Peter's Virgilian guide. Aware of his pupil's receptivity to all the arts, the English teacher and Dramatic Club's faculty coach encouraged him to participate, and Peter at last found a way to channel his unshackled imagination. In poems—"...embarrassingly inadvertent parodies of Dylan Thomas..."—and theater productions he could stage his rebellion in plain sight while remaining on the margins of school society.

That spring, five mornings a week TEK's "Introduction to American Literature (Part Two)" fed the ravenous student meaningful ideas—both in and out of class. As a companion piece to Emerson's "Essay on Self-Reliance," TEK led him to Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience."

*That was highly delicious and nutritious stuff! Along with my fellow students, I digested the bitesize, anodyne portions of Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickenson dished out to us in the textbook anthology but I thought—if not yet in Whitman's exact words—"O if I am to have so much, let me have more!" TEK did serve me more and more until finally Whitman's words became a diet I could live on.*

Out of an excess of escapist glee, Peter took to toting in his blazer's outside pocket his own paperback copy of THE MENTOR BOOK OF MAJOR AMERICAN POEMS (1962) edited with an introduction and notes on the poets by Williams & Honig. Its inclusion of "Song of Myself" confirmed that there was indeed much more to "the good gray poet" than "O Captain! My Captain!" or even "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Trotting out his extracurricular reading at every opportunity, he might as well have been wearing Hester Prynne's scarlet letter on his chest; except for a small circle of friends, most students simply avoided him, their own perceptions still too uninformed even to mock him for the telltale signs of his poetic affliction.

*I was enthralled by Whitman's loose unruly lines and highly variable foot originating in the rhythms of emotions instead of prescribed poetical structures. For all the reasons Pound had initially detested Whitman, I loved him. I felt as if I had woken from a nightmare of dressage lessons and found myself riding an unbridled wild horse across the beach—bareback. I particularly remember one time I was alone in my room reading "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"—often called Whitman's "birth of the poet" poem—for the first time. The call-to-supper bell rang: five minutes to put all else aside, dress properly, proceed to take one's place at one's assigned table in the dining hall, there to hear the prayer then await permission to be seated. This one—me—was too far along in that poem to stop. I couldn't put it aside, not even for food. So I kept reading, not suiting up but even stripping off a layer of outer clothes, sweating, gesturing, declaiming the lines aloud. Alone in the four-story dormitory, I heard and responded to "the musical shuttle" of the mockingbird and the plaintive lament of the "he-bird" and "the low and delicious word death, / And again death, death, death, death,..." // "... laving softly all over,..." until, exhausted, I finally collapsed upon the bed and wept. I'd missed supper and would of course be punished. But experiencing the reminiscences of a Long Island youth—"A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,..." had transported me. THE LEAVES OF GRASS became a sort of New*

*Testament where, like the speaker in Millay's "Renascence," I could reliably say and pray:  
"God, I can push the grass apart / And put my finger on Thy heart!"*<sup>19</sup>

After his solitary, rapturous reading of Whitman, classroom studies of E.A. Robinson, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Frost, and others seemed relatively tame, and scant or no attention was paid to "Western" writers such as Twain, Harte, and Jeffers. All of these were featured in THE MENTOR BOOK where he found Pound, Eliot, and Auden. Of course, there were no Beats on the academic horizon in any direction; it was on his own that he would soon discover the modern echo of Whitman's "barbaric yawp" in Ginsberg's HOWL (1956).

In only his second year at Williston, TEK's dramaturgical endeavors gained considered traction when, as a result of an irregular arrangement between the school and a British diplomat who needed somewhere to park his son in North America for six months, the drama coach's roster of players was graced by a bona fides old Englander, not a new one. Peter has forgotten his name, but not the British public school prince's dashing good looks, authentic Queen's English, and the flair of his fancy footwork up and down the soccer field. Student body and faculty were swept away, and TEK realized he had landed a headliner. How could he resist mounting a Shakespearean play on the humble boards of Williston's auditorium? When would he have another opportunity to use Shakespeare as a vehicle for such a blond-haired preppie sans pareil? HENRY IV, PART I would let shine the real article playing Prince Hal—star of the show! TEK simultaneously sponsored Peter's own debut before footlights by casting him as the monarch, no less, which role turned out to be play-acting indeed. That a 15-year-old American could inaugurate his acting career in such a portentous role does seem unlikely. Peter was tall. His voice, hardly burlled or burnished, had broken. And he could turn heads when he turned on his heels. But he could not effectively impersonate British royalty! TK apparently knew that and amended the production such that the scenes in which King Henry presides (which include the opening and closing passages of the play) were telescoped in their duration and the King's soliloquies recited by a narrator voicing over Peter's pantomime. Draped with enough cloth, with a crown planted on his head and a beard glued to his face, tutored in gestures and posturing, Peter performed more like a Bressonian "model" than a Shakespearean trouper.

Our subject's pantomime and other expedients made the production doable. He doesn't believe the British ringer lost a single line, and the interloper naturally got all fame due, for Prince Hal speaking Received Pronunciation carried the cast and stole the show. What pageantry! What theater! Our native son was new to the game but game to learn more, not so much to play the ham but to understand how plays worked. Bit parts would be okay with him. And he'd found his excuse to be dismissed from afternoons of athletics and evenings studying in his room. Plus, not incidentally, he could interact with members of the opposite sex from the Northampton school—he was curious about all that.

Sanctioned by tradition, there existed a close relationship between the Williston Academy for Boys in Easthampton and the Northampton School for Girls five miles away. Customarily, dances were shared, joint musical events occurred, and theatrical productions were undertaken together. Of course, it was felt necessary to control all encounters between the boys and the girls. This was not merely understood; it was written out: “The School (Williston) does not deem it desirable that students be visited by any unchaperoned girls.” The 1950s handbook from Northampton replied in kind: “Students are forbidden to meet boys at any place not on the campus.” So long as due diligence and vigilance were maintained, it was agreed that dances, concerts, and plays could all benefit from the combined forces of the two institutions. In his own experience, Peter did meet some girls he found suitable for his sexual reveries—all fantasies frustrated in real life.

Dramatics inspired him to join half-a-dozen other Willistonians in starting up a so called Studio Theater with no budget or faculty supervision. The idea seems to have been to study and perform short pieces of an experimental or off-beat nature. He remembers playing the prisoner in Saroyan’s HELLO OUT THERE presented to the community as part of a Saturday evening talent show. The school’s 1963 yearbook, THE LOG, displays a highly staged photograph of the members of this intrepid group of self-serious *comédiens*, one sitting atop a ladder, one leaning against a cardboard Corinthian column, others standing about looking pretentiously artsy. On the floor in front of them all, Peter lies on his side, one leg bent with the knee pointed up, his torso propped on his forearm, his hair perfectly brushed—as long and as thick as the law allowed.<sup>20</sup>

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June busted out all over with a grand release from regimentation but not, for our protagonist, a reprise of the mindless regressions typical of summertimes past. By the time the two older boys finished their first spring terms in Western Massachusetts, the relocation of the Boffey furnishings to a spacious, modernized “carriage house” had been accomplished so that all the three boys had to do was move into their new digs at 35 Harris Road in Katonah. For the middle son, vacations were no longer for frittering away long relaxed days; he immediately followed up his assigned reading of BRAVE NEW WORLD (1932) with a deep, thorough plunge into all the fiction by Aldous Huxley he could find. He never grew passionate about the philosophical arguments posited or the ideological positions taken by the representative characters in these novels of ideas, but he liked the peculiarity of Huxley’s rarified abstraction and expression, and enjoyed absorbing himself in the doings of these charged, glamorous players.

His new bookish preoccupations did not go unnoticed by his brothers who took his detachment from their activities as haughtiness. Peter confessed that it was partially just that: he hid his sensitivity behind a shield of priggish intellectualism. They openly accused him of being a phony and mocked him as a “pseudo-intellectual,” one of the lowest categories in the Boffey family’s unspoken code of self-comportment. Our subject went his way and his brothers went theirs, demonstrating the default recourse to the family’s battlefield cry: *Sauve qui peut la vie!* All three sons were

doing their best, for all three were suffering collateral damages from the impaired parental union, disunion, union, ad nauseum. Were their mother and father living as a couple together or not? The question nagged at Peter throughout his teenaged years and was forever chiseled into the foundational stone of his paradox-riddled identity. He now regrets that, tacked onto the harrowing experiences of the cross-country car trip, the first year back East had not enabled the siblings to draw closer together but instead driven them to maintain wary, mutual distances apart.

Perhaps due to his isolation, definitely desirous of having more spending money in his jeans, Peter got a summer job as the Schwartz egg farm—his first gainful employment; his first “ag” job; and his first extended encounter with Orthodox Jews. The family business was a vestigial operation in rural Mt. Kisco. Although partially modernized, with mechanized conveyor belts running beneath laying hens compressed 24/7 in wire cages, most of its chickens ran loose inside primitive Quonset huts where the waste-saturated sawdust floor would periodically drive the rookie egg collector out the door—reeling on his feet, light-headed, desperate for fresh air. Soon competent at keeping the birds fed and watered and the surfeit of laid eggs carefully stacked, he became a trusted hand and—little did he know—the Schwartz’ latest *Shabbos goy*. On hot Saturday afternoons, the two Schwarz brothers would abandon daily duties in order to retreat with their wives and children beneath the shade of a tree on the field’s edge—reading, resting, praying, napping, noshing. Peter remembers observing them from afar and finding it curious, interesting, even enviable that once a week they could find peace together in such a simple way. This was also the first time in his life that the lily-white lad got dirty and stayed that way all day, getting even dirtier by the hour. Underaged for obtaining a driver’s license, he had to be picked up by his mother, father, or big brother meeting him at an intersection of roads upwind from the farm. Brought home, stinking of chickenshit, he was not let inside the house before shedding his bespattered boots, jeans, and t-shirt in the garage, where he had to hose the clothes down daily before they could be laundered. Only then, stripped down to his underpants, could he go inside to shower and shampoo. At least that summer he did a pretty good job putting the lie to what Vice-President Spiro Agnew later called the “effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet neither methane fumes nor brotherly ridicule dissuaded our protagonist from pursuing his eclectic education. He frequently took the train into Manhattan, sometimes to meet a schoolmate who lived there but just as often, and more to his liking, to go off alone visiting one of New York City’s fabled institutions of the fine arts, which previously had been monuments in someone else’s empire, not his. Now he entered the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, the Frick, feeling for all the world as if they were his! His appetite only grew as his eyes ate up all the treasures served on opulent platters. Guides, docents, and total strangers ought to have taken notice that the whole of the Western tradition of painting and sculpture now belonged to him—but they never did.

During August's *comme il faut* holiday on Nantucket Island, he read more Huxley than he could understand, wrote ersatz haiku in French "I liked to think I understood," and found time to steal Dan's girlfriend away from him right before his younger brother's eyes—"...a fine contribution towards fraternal good feelings!" Upon that girl he let loose his pent-up lust—"almost a match for hers." After sunset on the beach, like sea turtles laying eggs, they scrambled up and down the dunes, their flesh barely contained in bathing suits, their sandy skin sandpaper-rough. He wonders how she preserved her chastity from his amphibian assaults. Later that fall, while off walking in forested Northern Westchester glebe land that he knew from prior solitary promenades, the two of them did "go all the way" in a mutual loss of virginity; apparently his carrying a condom in his wallet had finally convinced her of his eternal love!

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Re-entering Williston as a junior was less traumatizing than entering as a sophomore had been. He had his tactics for survival. He had an established network of accomplices. He felt ready to have his jejune efforts at poetic verse and short story writing printed in the school's literary publication, *The Scribe*. He had his faculty mentor, and dramatics provided the ultimate escape valve. With Prince Hal out of New England, a senior named JEB became the ringleader of the Studio Theater and the secondary school's self-appointed master thespian. After Peter landed a speaking part in MacLeish's *J.B.*, JEB took Peter aside to tutor him in elocution, inducing him to read aloud the sprung rhythms and highbrowed tongue twisters of Gerard Manly Hopkins, then to read them aloud again, then again.

In English class, he was not treated as the teacher's pet, and he doesn't recall being perceived that way by his classmates, but outside of class his education as a young man of arts and letters proceeded by leaps and only just within the bounds of school rules. Out of mutual interest and benefit, he became TEK's unofficial aide in the Dramatics Club, and they made expanded expeditions—nominally on behalf of its productions. Private junkets included visits to the art museum at Williams College, viewing foreign films at the University of Massachusetts, visiting with Emily Dickinson's ghost at her home in Amherst, and perusing some of the Amherst College Library's collection of historically significant publications by long dead New England worthies. TEK enjoyed the teenager's company and in no instance "laid a hand" on him. Whether the bachelor, who was also one of the floor masters in the main dormitory, was repressing or suppressing his own homoerotic tendencies (or, unbeknownst to Peter, expressing them elsewhere) was never an issue. Peter was trusting, willfully unsuspecting, prepared to simply enjoy the privileged daytrips beyond the purview of his peers. They went to hear classical music in Smith College concert halls on Sunday afternoons. One Saturday night, along with two of TEK's friends (two bachelors from Harvard who were a conspicuously "different" pair), they attended a chamber performance of *COSI FAN TUTTI* in Northampton.



In terms of sustaining his extracurricular education at a reasonable pace and within reasonable limits, he thinks now that his mentor might have made one mistake by introducing him to Smith's amenities and its immediate surroundings; before long the restless novice was returning to Northampton on his own. As time went by, alone or with a co-conspirator—definitely *not* with a member of the Williston faculty—he would slip off campus on Saturday afternoons and against all rules hitchhike to Northampton, not only to call on the School for Girls there but also to investigate the coffee houses and bookstores near the college where, with cool jazz piped into the background, people read books, poked at ashtrays, and spoke quietly over espresso drinks. He soon found out that there were indeed some Smithies living in some group houses who, in some cases, didn't really mind all that much if a nervous toy boy hung around them for a while in their spare time. Insinuating himself into the company of these older college girls in the comfort and safety of their living rooms and kitchens, our Cherubino was fawned over, ignored, scolded and, just once or twice, pressed close and kissed goodbye. And he found out there were Northampton townies who would buy a bottle of wine for you if you paid them enough for one of their own. Wine, cigarettes, bookstores, cafés—he was drawn into a celebration of sensations corresponding to his inchoate rebelliousness. He suspects that his own Noble Savage within was cheering these fatal attractions. Something had to give.

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Six days before Thanksgiving, he was walking across campus after lunch when he heard someone cry out from a Memorial Dormitory window, "KENNEDY'S BEEN SHOT!" By the time he reached the hallway, students were huddling around a portable transistor radio as it was confirmed that the President of the United States was dead.

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During the next winter holidays, Peter was pursuing adventure in and out of New York City. In Westchester, other than long, luxurious, lonesome walks in the countryside and obligatory appearances at family gatherings, he had nothing going. In Manhattan, he had school friends with older brothers who lived in apartments. On Morningside Heights they wore worn-down sports coats with suede elbow patches—collars turned up. They were Columbia University students or dropouts; they smoked pipes and joints and discussed Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. And there were the NYU students and hangers-on who lived below Fourteenth Street near Washington Square, collecting jazz albums, going to basket houses in The Village to hear folk music, looking like the uptown bohemians but seedier, more like real Beatniks. ("Maybe a few were even veterans of the first campaign to Ban the Bomb!") Yet in midtown Manhattan there were still townhouses where, if he behaved himself and looked the part, he was welcomed by some coed home from Miss Porter's School or Bryn Mawr. She would take him up the interior elevator to check in with one of her parents on another floor, after which they could check out for a date on the town, mostly silly escapades with stolen kisses and roaming hands. He could still get away with that.

There was one memorable incident with a pedigreed East Sixties townhouse-dwelling blonde who invited him to hear the Modern Jazz Quartet at some toney venue on the same night he had already somehow procured a pair of tickets to hear Eric Dolphy appearing with Gunther Schuller's Third-Stream project Orchestra U.S.A. at City College. Reflecting upon the occasion, Peter shook his head and admitted that, given his overall imposture, he probably deserved neither of those opportunities nor her partnership.

*In some idiotic imitation of a madcap debonair comedy team directed by Capra, Sturges, Cukor, or Lubitsch, I wore a tux and she wore her long racoon coat. At intermission we raced from one performance to the other. Hurrying out of the taxi, I waved off some change being return to me by the cabdriver. "Hey, Sonny Boy!" he called out after me; I stopped, turned, listened. "Here!" the cabbie shouted out, tossing a dime and nickel on the sidewalk. "Go buy yourself a lollypop!" he growled before peeling away. Having gotten my just deserts, I was speechless.*

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By the spring of 1964, as a friend plied him with bebop music albums galore, Peter was swash-buckling his way through what became or had become the basic Beat canon: Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Corso, and any other writer who appeared in the City Lights Pocket Poet Series available at a bookstore near Smith. He got his hands on a copy of NAKED LUNCH (1959) that was circulating among some of the Smithies, laying his eyes on that affront to everything being taught him as correct at the Academy in Easthampton. Then he came upon ON THE ROAD (1957). Aged 17, he was still on daddy's dole, still enrolled in a traditional New England preparatory school, and still under the general guidance of his English teacher; but in his heart of hearts he wanted to be a beatnik. And if too late to be a beatnik, then he wanted to be someone else, someone unfettered by the manacles of hypocrisy and double standards which he was supposed to be adopting for life as he compromised his calling—for what? He had no more faith in the lifestyle he had been groomed for; he aspired to bold alternatives ("... or so I liked to tell himself...") to be enacted on no one's authority but his own. But exactly what were they?

That summer he read all the Kerouac he could dig up and amplified his exploration of aspects of New York City which his parents would have condemned, had they known. Sometimes he could sneak to the rear of the Golden Rail and share pitchers of beer with strangers or split a clandestine sixpack in Central Park. Even if the doors of polite society were still opening for him, in his callow, self-centered pursuit of excitement he rarely held any door open for anyone else. One revealing incident in his own words:

*One night in New York, my friend—the bebop connoisseur—and I were escorting or more exactly being escorted by that same blonde from the East Sixties townhouse. We were rivals on a Canadian-doubles date, and she was wearing that same racoon coat. We went to hear Dizzy Gillespie and James Moody at Birdland's second show, where who should walk out the front door just as we arrived but none other than Mr. John Birks Gillespie. I reeled back*

*on my heels—the man himself! “Wait! Don’t tell me!” the great put-on artist exclaimed, eyes rolling as he gave our gal the once over. “Swarthmore? Bryn Mawr? Barnard?” he rattled off, his smile issuing us inside before he went bop, bop, bopping away on his break between sets.* <sup>22</sup>

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By his own account, by summer’s end Peter was no longer priggish: he was outright obnoxious, careless of whom he offended or alienated, especially his brothers who got tired fast as he piled his Bob Dylan and/or Dylan Thomas affectations on thick. Only his new girlfriend seemed enchanted and spurred him on. FR was a “hell-raising tomboy with, like me, some generalized revenge to exact from all grownups at large.” She came from “a good family” in Central Massachusetts. Given her checkered career in several private girls boarding schools, she recognized a rebel-brother when she met one; they hooked up immediately. When their school schedules and locations kept them apart, they made phone calls and wrote love letters, the last sometimes signed with marks of blood.

With a partner as apt to act on her impulses as he was, he took his cues from FR about what, being his own man, he should do and be. While she egged him on, she was also eager to learn from him whatever those New Directions and Grove Press paperbacks jammed into his coat pockets had to teach. Peter thinks that if he had been more in touch with himself and more responsible in his communications with TEK, he might not have succumbed so completely to an utter codependence with his new soulmate. As he spoke with me of his insensitive handling of the deteriorating relationship with his mentor, he seemed embarrassed by his banal immaturity overall. TEK had always been both a liberating and restraining force on the confused teen, granting his adopted charge generous exceptions to school rules yet keeping headstrong Peter’s highflying kites tethered to the ground. But to Peter the association began to feel strained, and now he saw fit or was compelled to prove his independence by cutting the string. Over long weekends and holidays, the teen couple hitchhiked, got smashed, acted out some pre-scripted version of unsuccessful and insufferable en-fants terribles. They met in Boston and New York, binging on French and British films with their new waves of angry young women and men overlapping on the silver screen. Tom Courtney’s character in the 1962 movie treatment of Alan Sillitoe’s *THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER* (1959) became their benchmark for noble integrity. Throughout his reckless affair, he kept his grades up *and* let his hair hang down. Although they were not entirely isolated from friends and coevals, their *folie à deux* came due for a reckoning with the powers that were as the incorrigible twosome lost control of their lives.

At Williston our volatile hero seems to have diverted his attention from the Dramatics Club to the Literary Society. He was not to make it through the entire schoolyear to graduation, yet in the 1965 yearbook, *THE LOG* shows him pictured with a dozen other disciples of the written word, and he is listed as the president of the society. “While not working on *The Scribe*,” the yearbook states, “club members listened to recordings of such writers as Walt Whitman, Dylan Thomas, e.e.

cummings, and Samuel Beckett with lectures by Reverend Ives on MOBY DICK and the BOOK OF JOB.” Whether or not he had made those selections in his capacity as president, he can’t recall, but clearly there were at least a few sympatico schoolmates on campus. <sup>23</sup>

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During the 1964-65 winter break, Peter saw a production of Albee’s THE ZOO STORY (1959) at the Cherry Lane Theatre in NYC and purchased the script published by Samuel French. Upon his return to Williston in January, he learned that TEK had decided to produce that very play! Peter felt he knew the character Jerry’s perspective intimately, that the part belonged to him. Taking on such a leading role with such long monologues would certainly be his most demanding dramatic commitment to date, but what else did he have to do in the last half of his senior year? TEK held auditions and chose Peter’s closest friend and temporary rival Jory for the main role. Our Sacha Guitry determined right then that he would no longer tread the boards for TEK! He recalls that his mentor made an overture toward reconciliation by offering him the minor part of Peter (sic), the part Peter B. identified *against*; “like a lover spurned” the radical youth wanted none of it and turned away from playing any walk-on or tagalong as TEK’s protegee. Prince Hal was absent from the field a warrior hero; now Prince Peter left the turf—a wounded warrior. <sup>24</sup>

To his regret, he didn’t have the personal wherewithal to stand up at this juncture in his life and to finish his prep school charade by declaring “I quit!” In February, he learned he had (“almost without trying”) earned so called “early admission” to Columbia University, but he was soon suspended from Williston for gross misconduct. After a week, his status at the academy was reinstated [Ed. note: see Note 12 above], yet soon enough he flagrantly violated the terms of his probation. The final expulsion occurred one Monday morning at breakfast. Dean Hepworth stood behind Peter’s chair and, while forcefully squeezing between his fingers and thumb a good pound of the reprobate’s non-bruising flesh (between the spine of his scapula and the S-curve of his clavicle), he invited Peter to join him in the adjacent faculty lounge—immediately. In his own spoken words:

*The jig was finally up. Mr. Hepworth, History Department Head, was obviously no stranger to the silly antics of young men, but he was no tyrant either. We affectionately called him “Heppie” behind his back. Looking me straight in the eyes, Heppie told me he was sorry: my parents had been notified and one of them would be retrieving me from campus later that morning. “I don’t expect all of you to travel straight as arrows,” the Dean confided, still looking me in the eyes. “But I do hate to see any one of you deviate too far.” He seemed genuinely sad that I simply had to go. The housemaster in my senior cottage—Head Coach of varsity football and basketball and only secondarily a teacher of math—was less circumspect. He entered my room as I was gathering my belongings. “So, where’s your hooch, your cigarettes?” he asked, imploring me to come up with the goods. I fetched the evidence, as if any were needed, from my laundry bag and passed it to him. “It’s like you’ve been giving me the finger in my face all along,” he added, plainly aggrieved. “I wish someone had stopped me in my tracks when I was your age.” Considering that I had never fulfilled my potential on any one of his teams, let alone that I had failed to exploit the natural*

*advantage of my height on Willison's intermural basketball court, it actually touches me to remember his approximation of sympathy, however oversimplified; it was real and certainly a welcome alternative to his smacking me one, which was probably also on his mind. He turned and left the room. Whatever personal disappointments were disguised in his parting comment, it strikes me now that he was truly sorry for me as well as sorry for himself, about how his own life was turning out. Only my friend Jory Berkwits came to see me off while I waited in the driveway for my mother to pick me up. A sad, gray day in Easthampton, Mass., and a long, sad, quiet three-hour drive to Katonah with my mother at the wheel—a woman shut down against me and in upon herself.*

### **NOTES to Chapter 3: 1957-62**

1. p56 Two venerable Victorian and Edwardian choices for largely uncontextualized reading by Lick-Wilmerding's 1960 freshmen! The publishing dates alone don't necessarily ensure their dubious efficacy inculcating morals or mores in teenaged boys entering the social mayhem of 1960s USA, but—in the absence of close, guided reading and interpretation—they suggest it. Speaking for myself, I don't recall apprehending a bit of biographer Strachey's wit, and all I have retained from Walpole's novel is its depiction of a brutal boarding school culture in which the novel's youthful character of Peter (sic) suffers as it is shaped. This practice of creating curricula by looking in rearview mirrors while driving ahead is what Henry Adams seems to be griping about—so much and so often—as the main defect in his own formal education and the formal education of his peers. [Ed. note: THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS (1907)]

2. p56 Attentive readers might have noticed the conspicuous absence of books, other than the BIBLE, informing this writer's boyhood. Reading per se was never taken ultra-seriously in our home, certainly not the sort of omnivorous reading which, within a year of my facing off against Williston's academic booklist, would become a demanding ogre (and sometimes an overwhelming one) in my life. Truth be told, like most TV babies, I was initiated into formal presentations of the classics as transmogrified by Disney Studios, Warner Bros., and the like; like any American born *sine nobilitate*, I was raised without an extensive, illustrious family library in which I might dabble with heirloom tomes or ogle titles favored by forebears in my family lineage or canonized by the dominant culture at large. My whole experience of "literature" began not in reading but as entertainment in non-written forms dished out to me along with TV dinners on TV table trays: Uncle Remus, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Alice in Wonderland, Jason and the Argonauts—all "as seen on TV" not read in books!

Alas, no leathern-bound, clothbound, or even paperback copies of PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, ROBINSON CRUSOE, or SINBAD THE SAILOR ever passed through my cleansed or uncleansed childish hands. A new copy of the 14th revised edition of the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA did weigh down a shelf in the Pleasantville house I grew up in. By the 1950s all twenty-four volumes of that magnus opus could be purchased in one fell swoop—

or in installments—nothing like the situation two hundred-plus years prior when to possess that evolving body of knowledge in print required highborn status, generational wealth, or access to elite institutions. Today a credit card and a quick keyboard click should land the contemporary version of that whale right on the screen of one's device of choice! I fondly recall rainy afternoon hours lying on my belly, turning our BRITANNICA's printed pages, inhaling the inky odors arising from its virginal sheets, poking about between pictorial curiosities, picking up mental whatnots from captions. Needless to say, my reading was less than encyclopedic and never proceeded with any planned itinerary through alphabetical entries A through Z.

All of which is not to say that my parents were aliterate or hostile toward literary classics or variant treatments of the heroes, myths, and legends of the Western World. They were educated in the liberal arts. My father graduated from Yale University, class of 1943, where he was a member of Beta Theta Pi Fraternity, Saybrook College, and vice-president of the Yale Dramatic Association; my mother completed two years at Skidmore College and, after having married at age twenty, subsequently regretted not completing more college. As befit most sophisticated couples in Camelot, Dave and Button went to plays, watched Alistair Cooke's OMNIBUS, and read from hard-cover books found lying about the house. But my father's doggedly utilitarian application of the Puritan ethos to intellectual creativity, and my mother's essentially sentimental spirituality combined forces to brook no pretense of highbrow culture—literary, theatrical, scholarly, or otherwise. My own ambivalent attitude toward intellectual pretentiousness may have originated under that household model; I only say "ambivalent" because I am equally averse to dumbing down.

I wasn't a non-reader. Prior to gazing cross-eyed at the serious titles meant to prep Williston's incoming students for preparatory school, I'd read plenty of issues of *Boy's Life* magazine and consumed a fair number of the Hardy Boys adventure tales (before the extensive revisions of the pre-1959 texts were initiated in order to eliminate racial stereotyping and other modernizations were introduced into the post-1959 production of that ever popular serial fiction). My elective juvenile reading had included STOWAWAYS IN PARADISE—TWO BOY ADVENTURERS IN HAWAII (1946) by Don Blanding—a rare hand-me-down from my father's own childhood library—and a standard reissue of TREASURE ISLAND (1911) illustrated by N.C. Wyeth. These sea stories held understandable appeal for an innocent, healthy boy with an appetite for adventure, and in my teens I was drawn to Thor Heyerdahl's KON-TIKI: ACROSS THE PACIFIC BY RAFT (1948); later still I got caught in the whirlpool of Melville's colorfully spun yarns about the oceanic islands. Thanks to my unwitting selection of THE MOON AND SIXPENCE (1919) from Williston Academy's booklist, Maugham's rendering of Paul Gauguin as the fictional Charles Strickland in Tahiti now wound all these links in one chain around my imagination: nobles savages, exotic locales, escape from civilization—anywhere but Easthampton Massachusetts!

3. p56 In the "Society and General News" section of the March 17, 1944, edition of the *Washington (DC) Star* article, the newspaper—for which my father had worked before enlisting in the

Merchant Marines—featured an article about two of its former reporters, Able Bodied Seamen Dave Boffey and Tim Clagett. “2 Star Reporters Tell of 4 Days in Lifeboat After Torpedoing” the headline reads. Our father had never touted himself as a war hero, but we three boys grew up aware that he had had at least one harrowing episode adrift in the Arabian Sea during WWII.

4. p57 David Mills Rowden was sent away to a private boarding school [Ed. note: Most likely the Greenbriar Military School located in Lewisburg, W.Va.] in the fall of 1929. It is distressing for me to look at the four surviving photographs of Cadet Rowden in his starched uniform and Hitler Youth haircut, as if any boyish playfulness is being exorcised from him right before the camera’s eye.

5. p58 My father may have indirectly maimed and injured many people with his insidious promotion of tars and nicotine—and directly contributed to killing himself—but, having inadvertently killed the farmer’s dog, he was not insensitive to the gravity of the situation. [Ed. note: For a fictionalized version of this incident, see end of Chapter 17 in the author’s first novel, TWO HALF BROTHERS, OR SEPARATING OUT.]

6. p59 I must have been ready for the shift and began to think of myself as Peter. I don’t remember exactly when I first pondered upon the essential paradox in my first name. Petros (Greek), Petrus (Latin), Cephas (Aramaic), Selah (Hebrew)—having done more thinking than research on the matter, I can still rattle off these variants and add Pietro, Pedro, Pyotr, and Pierre. At one and the same time, or at differing times, Christ’s prominent disciple’s name has signified to me the solid rock upon which a church could be built and the cleft stone on which debilitating doubts could fall asunder. Attributing my own propensity to self-doubt to my mother’s example—manifest in her quixotic faith and irresolute action—is far from the whole story and does a disservice to her and forces greater than both of us. My conflicted personality derives from impersonal historical precedents, too, and dichotomies were sealed into my given name as I was christened and baptized. It has taken me a lifetime to learn how to embrace rather than run away from the intrinsic distress concurrent with this permanent puzzle.

7. p60 It didn’t escape my observation that Williston’s daily and Sunday chapel rituals were conducted after the manner of pure New England Protestantism, hardly the non-denominational and ecumenical services that the school’s promoters would have had prospective families believe. Of course, my world had been torn apart by discrepancies and, not long after, with deep skepticism finer tuned by my reading of J.D. Salinger, the transparently superficial lip service paid to students “of the Jewish persuasion”—and more importantly, the Jewish donors associated with them—could easily be lumped under one of my all-time favorite categories of derision: sheer hypocrisy.

8. p61 As a child, “Pete” had often slipped in and out of a sturdy, polished, black-enameled rocking chair, sometimes pausing to puzzle over the coat of arms painted on its back top rail. In a shield of so called Yale blue, a gilded book opened to reveal the phrase *Urim and Thummim* in Hebrew letters and, below the opened book, the university’s official motto declaring *Lux et Veritas* in Latin. Whatever else I was being prepared for in Easthampton during that first fall of 1962, I sensed early on that it was not Light and it was definitely not Truth.

In my entry year, Williston Academy vintage-1962 was neither a match for the sort of military school into which my father had been impressed nor anything like an intellectual or cultural mecca among New England’s many fabled prep schools. I caught on that its promoters and defenders would have liked candidate families to think of Williston as “top-drawer” but, according to my observations, it was never in the same league as such legendary schools as Andover, Choate, Deerfield, Hotchkiss, Loomis, and the like—not to neglect mention of my father’s alma mater, Exeter. Old Sam Williston’s stuff was somehow not up to snuff. Even Williston’s much vaunted athletic teams did not compete, as far as I can remember, with any of the top ten prep schools in interscholastic sports but I could be wrong about that. Rightly or wrongly, I long ago glommed onto the notion that in the early 1960s Williston Academy was still a cross between an etiolated theological seminary and a pre-modern organization dedicated to business-style training in upward achievement. I didn’t want any part of either. I can speak with no authority on what that institution has become since my departure in the spring of 1965, six decades ago. I read that in 1971 the Williston Academy for Boys merged with its longtime sister school, the Northampton School for Girls, the two becoming Willison Northampton School.

Pretending to inhabit a social class a notch or more above one’s actual class of origin is an identifying tag of snobbism. In certain English schools, the term SNOB, from *s.nob* (an abbreviated form of *sine nobilitate*), was noted after the names of children of untitled parents and gradually came to mean persons not belonging to the uppermost classes—a population from which Williston’s non-aristocratic student body was definitely not drawn. Growing up as a boy, I had unknowingly picked up an unquestionably and unquestioned snobbish attitude myself, but the implosion of the Boffey nuclear family, most acute just as I was enrolled into boarding school, wiped out any guarantee that protection would be provided me. This was a confusing issue. It turned out that my credentials as a member of a privileged elite had been provisional if not entirely false. It took me many years to understand that the wealth and privilege I had enjoyed as a child were just historical blips, part of widespread elevations of the standard of living and expectations spawned by the post-WWII economic boom in the USA. In my case, starting in the late Sixties, as that game plan came apart for my family up close and my generation at large, it induced—with great labor pains—the birth of a whole new mindset and a preoccupation with new strategies for survival. Genteel snobbery just did not work anymore, although it would take me a lifetime to dispense with its internalized defects. When I was settling in for my rocky two-and-a-half year career at Williston, I was still regarding the rest of humanity from a fundamentally anachronistic snobbish point of view.



9. p61 As if alone in the universe, I could sit in the darkened auditorium fantasizing what life would be like in the Paris of *GIGI* (1958) or in the Old Port of Marseilles with the crowd around *FANNY* (1961) or escaping prep school in a balloon that would take me *AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS* (1956). *THE PINK PANTHER* (1963) somehow made it past the censors booking film rentals for Williston, which enabled me to get lost for eternity in a villa with Princess Dala (played by eye-poppingly pretty-in-pink Claudia Cardinale) and to imagine learning a thing or two between the sheets with the wife of Inspector Clouseau (the older and wiser Capucine). And I do wonder how the international caper *TOPKAPI* (1964), starring Grecian sexpot Melina Mercouri, lipping and dripping sensuality as the nymphomaniacal Elizabeth Lipp, got outside the Puritanical guardrails long enough to be screened at that New England academy for boys without girls.

10. p61 A coat of arms was passed down from Fred Boffey to his adopted son, David Mills Boffey, and is now in possession of his first son, David Barnes Boffey. It proffers this more official family motto: *NEC QU AERERE NEC SPERNERE HONOREM*—“Neither to seek nor to spurn honor.” These words are inscribed on a banner between the name Boughey and an elaborate escutcheon—framed by some decorative foliage—bearing three stags’ heads with antlers surmounted by a medieval knight’s head of armor which is in turn topped by yet another many-pointed stag’s head. All this heraldry is done in metalwork mounted on a slab of wood in the shape of a shield. I have no idea about the authenticity of any part of this piece which, without further information (or revived snobbism), I have to imagine was a specious, made-to-order purchase by someone or other in my step-grandfather’s lineage. May their ghosts forgive me if I’m wrong and spare me any midnight visitations from armed and armored medieval knights or antlered stags!

11. p62 The *NYT* published a 5-paragraph obituary on May 9, 1977, and *NYT* subscribers and their guests should be able to access the piece online or perhaps simply by following the link to <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1978/05/09/110949359.html?pageNumber=42>.

12. p63 I could never warm up to Headmaster Phillips Stevens. I detested his de facto domineering presence in the dining hall, the chapel, or anywhere else he could be witnessed square-jawing off against time, space, and circumstance, publicly espousing or demonstrating a formulaic philosophy of life. I hated his air of self-satisfaction as, straight-legged, he bent from the waist down to snatch up another scrap of paper he’d come across on the campus grounds and, if you were anywhere within earshot, encouraging you to do likewise—cleanliness being next to Godliness, I suppose. The man simply never stood a chance with me. How could he have? He’d come into my life just when I was geared up to project all the unexamined torments of my inner life upon authority figures embodying the status quo—exactly like himself! My father’s fall from grace—in my estimation of it—had set me up against all men, even if they only superficially resembled him, and Phillips Stevens was, like my dad, tall, handsome, and well-groomed—a photogenic product of the Ivy League. The true target of my wrath predated Phillips Stevens’ arrival in my existence but the Headmaster was handy as the man on the scene.

One day we crossed path while walking in opposite directions on the main path across campus. He'd somehow learned that I had declined a nomination to be on the Student Council's governing body and, face to face, he asked me for my reason. "Personal reasons," I replied, defiant. The fair eyes behind those wire-framed glasses revealed that he was taken aback but hardly fazed by my disrespectful response. "Your reputation is your most important thing," he recited and left it at that, continuing on his way. "Your reputation is your most important thing." Holden Caulfield couldn't have asked for better cannon fodder!

How, cultivating an antagonist relationship with the most powerful individual in the community, did I manage to survive as long as I did at that school? In February 1964-5, I was suspended from Williston Academy for repeated infractions of basic rules such as smoking and leaving campus without permission, all the while maintaining straight As. The terms of my re-admission included a week at home when I was to seek pastoral or psychological counseling or both. The suspension penalty period climaxed during a late Sunday afternoon session with the Headmaster and his wife in the Headmaster's House. My repentant mother and father escorted me through an awkward, perfunctory, and fundamentally fatuous exchange in the spotless parlor overseen by an oil portrait of Emily Williston, the founder's wife. Looking much like a Daguerrean portrait herself, Sarah Stevens assured me that she was always available for conversation and comforting, suggesting that I ought to feel free to come by with any buttons for her to sew or socks for her to darn; I still fear she meant it literally. The woman apparently had zero notion of the sort of tea and sympathy I was really hankering for, and no idea whatsoever about my ever-diminishing inventory of socks [Ed. note: See Note 13 below]. Online school lore has it that, over more than two decades at Williston, the Headmaster's wife had been a reliable source of solace, warmth, and empathy for many a scared and homesick boy. Sarah Stevens' motherly love never reached me, and I'm sure Holden would be of the same mind.

March 1965 I was expelled for flagrant violations of more written and nonwritten behavioral codes of conduct: drinking was the worst offense; consorting with rowdy "townies" (even riding their motorcycles) came in second; of course, there was always smoking, and there had even been complaints lodged by Smith College security services identifying me as a likely suspect in several acts of vandalism on its campus.

Flash forward a year later: I was back at the academy wearing a haircut and a tie for a private interview with the Headmaster himself. Meeting the man, apologizing for my younger self, exaggerating any expression of contrition that I did feel (however slightly at the time), in all playing the sage 18-year-old apostate—that posture seemed the most expedient way to enable my entry into a college or university, delayed after a year out of school. I was indeed starving for some of the stimulation that my peers seemed to be getting in various venues of their higher education. Sitting in his sunlit office, man to man, my reputation was, if still tarnished, apparently redeemable enough that we struck a deal—as mature (and immature) men will do: if and when I had

successfully completed two years of college studies in an accredited institution, I would be awarded a secondary school diploma of graduation from Willison Academy, retroactively. I must admit that, considering my affronts, this was a genuinely generous concession on his part. My secondary school career can't have made living his professional life or upholding *his* reputation any easier for the Headmaster, especially since, prior to my expulsion, I had been among a select handful of Williston seniors guaranteed early admission to Columbia University. Such was the tradition-sanctified agreement between the two institutions, a legacy no doubt safeguarded by a cadre of insiders with ricocheting school ties. While not Yale blue-blooded, Columbia was true-blooded enough for all parties concerned, but by the spring of 1966, my "early admissions" or any admission to Columbia at all had been rescinded, and I didn't want to live in New York City anyway.

What I wanted to find was a liberal arts college located within 100 miles of New York City which accepted applicants with only the State Board of Education's approved High School Equivalency Degree. Courteous, beneficent, Phillips Stevens consulted directories on hand and came up with a few colleges that met my requirements. Surveying charts and tables, Bard College—I'd never heard of it—was among them, but he dismissed it out of hand as one of those places "where students and teachers run barefooted across campus chasing butterflies." That quip alone was, of course, all that Holden and I needed: we investigated Bard, got the simulacrum high school diploma, and entered Bard's freshman class in fall 1966. Holden subsequently dropped out, but I stayed on for four straight years, finishing my junior year as valedictorian of my class and my senior year as the John Bard Scholar, 1970.

Some may say that Headmaster Phillips Stevens was an honourable man, that many men like him and Julius Caesar were all honourable men, but the man irked me. As noted above, I was re-acting out against the immediate antecedents in my life. I had, unconsciously, to transfer onto him all my frustrations, disappointments, and anger with my own father. Even after graduation from Bard, I was still alienated from my father, and even today I still hold no high opinion of his stand-in, a Puritanical paragon of conformity. I have never been able to drum up any enthusiasm, so I was blown away when my brother Barnes chose to return to Williston for his 1972 wedding ceremony presided over by the Chaplain in the Phillips Stevens Chapel, Easthampton MA! As at Camp Lanakila, our experiences at Williston Academy were vastly different and at odds—yet both were real. Besides our different temperaments and ages, another contributing factor to our contrasting responses to those two institutions is the difference in our life experiences to that date. Well before being shipped off to Williston for his senior year, my older brother had experienced at least two years at boarding school elsewhere and spent five summers away at summer camp whereas, prior to arrival in Easthampton, my travels far from home had always been in the company and under the protection of my parents or Aunt Janet. Throughout much of our juvenile and adult lives, Barnes and I lived physically and imaginatively wide and far apart; fortunately we lived long enough to reconcile and philosophize over such differences together.

13. p64 Lovelorn, horny, lonely, I took to masturbating into socks then—one after another—threw them away. Since all my socks were either dressy brown or athletic white—as required during all public appearances—I never wanted for a matching pair.

14. p64 All students were expected to run not walk the foot path to and from the school’s athletic fields, a quarter mile route passing through a working class neighborhood. That unmonitored transit afforded me a chance to let others rush on by while I gazed, with mixed emotions, upon the hominess of the yards and the homeliness of the houses and, from a distance, peeped into kitchens and dining tables lit by suspended lamps radiating the glow of Home. In the open spaces along the way, I knew those rocks, grasses, and trees—and the shadows of such rocks and grasses and trees—from the Andrew Wyeth tableaux of pleasanter, freer times in Northern Westchester County. Sighting the chapel’s sharp white steeple above the treetops—symbol of the religious routines I longed no longer wanted to pretend to practice—didn’t actually hurt me and may also have helped relieve my loneliness.

15. p64 “The donkey knows more than you do.”

16. p65 In time, we were reading *L’ÉTRANGER*, *LE MISANTHROPE*, *PHÈDRE*, in French albeit in editions designed for English-speaking secondary school students. Nevertheless, for me these books were gateways to other galaxies of imagination. I think the Colonel knew I got a kick out of his theatricality, too, and I think he liked me. As the school year progressed, he gave pet names to us; when he found out I was involved in the Dramatic Club, with an affectionate scowl and smoke fuming from his nostrils, he christened me Sacha Guitry.

17. p65 From “The Tar Baby” by Joel Chandler Harris.

18. p66 By the late 1950s and early 1960s, youth radio was everywhere on and in the air, and I had been right there among that youth! The repertoires of the Everly Brothers, Elvis, Chuck Berry, and Buddy Holly established the first bridges over a chasm that at least one media-saturated suburban kid would span in the coming years, moving forward, backward, and sideways in pursuit of Country Music, the which he had never even heard live before he started to do some roaming on his own following the expulsion from Williston. Barring my mother’s lullabies, my earliest enduring exposure to anything like a country ballad was probably Dimitri Tomkin’s theme song to the movie *HIGH NOON* (1952) sung by Tex Ritter; that caught my attention, and Tomkin’s title song to *FRIENDLY PERSUASION* (1956) sung by Pat Boone was sublime to my young heart and ears. Listening to Roy Rodgers, the most popular of the singing cowboys, surely left its mark. But Tennessee Ernie Ford and Burl Ives compilations for children were the nearest to Old Timey Music I got for a long time to come. Without knowing it, I first listened to bluegrass on cartoons on TV and at the movies. Luckily, I had lots of time ahead to learn and curiosity to satisfy.

My lifelong receptiveness to most forms of jazz may have begun while listening to my father's albums of the Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller bands. Watching the Tommy Dorsey Show no doubt contributed. Along with random exposure, an informal education began by reading album liner notes, which practice became even more relevant when it came time to devour modern jazz. My parents enjoyed "Frank" or "Ella" at low volume in the background, and my mom nursed a soft spot for the cuter crooners like Perry Como and Andy Williams. I suspect her infatuation may not have been based exclusively on their vocal cords, all the more reason for those fellows to receive raspberries from us three boys if they dared appear on the TV screen when our mother wasn't present in the room. My parents both adored the Broadway hits and, in an era when they still enjoyed doing something together, they put on the dog to attend New York City's big shows with their friends. We stayed at home with the TV and the babysitter and later, when film versions of the Broadway shows came around, if we were old enough and interested we were taken out to the movies.

My promiscuous musical sensibility was conditioned by exposure to the American musical theatre which engendered my abiding awe and admiration of its "popular" fare. Hearing the lyrics and music of the major and minor masterpieces of Broadway in our living room while growing up was fine by the whole family, and I incidentally imbibed the artistry of Irving Berlin, Rodgers & Hart, Rodgers & Hammerstein, the Gershwin's, Lerner & Loewe, Cole Porter—the pantheon frieze of musical genius extends farther than my eye can see or my ear will ever hear. Many passages in William Zinsser's *EASY TO REMEMBER: THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGWRITERS AND THEIR SONGS* (2001) were immediately music to my ears, and I was amazed to discover how many of the tunes and lyrics he explores were familiar to me, how many melodies and rhythms and arrangements could be called up by only a title or the first words of an opening line. Although the lucid writings and easy reading on music and musicians left by Zinsser provided a framework on which to build my historical appreciation of American standards, I have followed none of that author's recommendations in "How To Write A Memoir" (1999)!

I had no access to a classical music library at home. My parents didn't subscribe to any symphony or opera series. The classical albums played on our phonograph were standard issues of the time with excellent production values as sound engineering technology galloped ahead. Yet listening even uncritically to perennial favorites doubtless sowed seeds for a rich, enriching lifetime of musical awareness. A copy of Prokofiev's *PETER AND THE WOLF* banged about our family den—how lucky can a kid get?—and like generations of other 20<sup>th</sup>- and, I trust, 21<sup>st</sup>-century children, I can partially trace my musical appreciation to repeatedly playing an educational version of that "symphony fairy tale for children." My own earliest acquaintance with formal or concert music may have been run-of-the-mill but, as with reading, a late start didn't prevent my playing catchup.

I look back upon my mother's small cache of classical music albums—narrow in scope—and recognize they made a formidable impression upon a boy aged 10 through 14. How many times did I

enter the Oak Drive house to find her lying on the living room sofa with her arm flung back over her eyes, the soul of Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Rachmaninov, or Mendelsohn blasting from the speakers and taking her sailing somewhere far away? I knew better than to interrupt her travels and never later asked where the music had transported her when she was in its thrall. There were perhaps only two or three such occasions, but one alone would have been enough to trouble my mind.

From some earlier passage in her own creative explorations, my mother had also preserved a small selection of the original Caedmon Recording SPOKEN WORD series and two or three other dramatic arts recordings. When I discovered them, my primary education in the literary and performing arts took a balletic flying jump! I can't expect my biographer to explain how listening to those voices—John Gielgud delivering Shakespearean soliloquies; Judith Anderson reciting Edna St. Vincent Millay; Robert Frost reading Robert Frost; Dylan Thomas declaiming Dylan Thomas—moved me. I studied the accompanying texts so that the voices, the printed texts, and English language poetry started a comingled forging in the smithy of my soul. In college years and later, I would hear the recorded voices of Joyce, Yeats, Pound, William Carlos Williams, and others; the revelatory potential of the spoken word never again came as so profound a shock to my system as it had when aged 13, but it has never become commonplace.

At this stage in S. Witman's biography, alluding to my belated but authentic engagement with opera would get us too far ahead of ourselves and out of all semblance of chronological order. Plus, I would risk stealing my generous biographer's thunder in advance. But it seems incumbent upon me to share one last reflection about that music's role in my life, a reflection that may serve as a testimonial to my mother's incomparable gift, that is, the gift to me of a dedication to artistic expression, which she herself could never fulfill.

Along with some classical religious recordings, a smattering of arias, duets, and quartets—all the usual chestnuts—were in my parents' musical holdings, but not a single opera proper. Kurt Weil's cabaret-operetta inventions were given airtime, and as reported above, the console was stuffed with major and minor pieces of musical theatre from the works from Gilbert & Sullivan to THE MUSIC MAN, but the historical trajectory leading from them back to European classic opera was not clarified for me until I was fifty years old. For a long while after my mother died in 1998, I discovered that opera and only opera could travel with me to the remotest regions of my grief and there, with consummate skill, help me to navigate the minefields of relentless memories. Richard Strauss, Giuseppe Verdi, and the composers and lyricists of Verismo; Mozart's opera seria—only their concentrations of narrative means and the high pitch, as it were, of their creations in performance could match the intensity of my own emotions. In truth, it was LA BOHÈME that floored me first. I had not at the time been consciously seeking out any further collapse of my capacities to cope with everyday life but almost on a whim had gone to a SF Opera performance of this “beginner's” opera. Although I was seated high up in the peanut gallery, the music brought my feelings down to stage level then drove them into the ground: I was stunned. I listened to recordings

of the opera and watched excerpts from the many historical performances. I purchased CDs and DVDs of the work and willingly lay on Puccini's operating table time and again, letting him perform open heart surgery with the cruel and beautiful instruments of his sound. I did not dabble; I dove and, in the end, came up for air, cured of the immediacy of mourning. Cured of opera? I still had years of that long-distance swimming ahead of me.

Sadly, unluckily, my mother deserves my heartfelt gratitude for introducing me to other arts in which she herself felt so frustrated. Aunt Janet had convoyed me to juvenile Saturday matinees and other lowbrow entertainment at theme parks, but in my early teens it was my mother who took me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the 50th Anniversary Exhibit of the Armory Show, and the Algonquin Theater to see a 1963 production of Eugene O'Neill's *STRANGE INTERLUDE* (1928). That last occasion felt to me, and must have looked to others, like a strange interlude indeed: our deluxe packaged special date included a multi-course private supper served to participating ticketholders during a long intermission in the five-hour, nine-act play. My mother consistently encouraged me to pursue my curiosity about many forms of so called creative expression although she did not always approve of my choices. On summer vacation in 1964, I read aloud to her from Kerouac's *MEXICO CITY BLUES*; Nancy Boffey decidedly disapproved. Regardless the redeeming value of art, the evangelical pastor's granddaughter could only deviate so far from the seemly and sentimental.

19. p.68 Millay's two lines show up in *THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFORT* when, in the afterglow of Elise's ecstatic experience on the promontory opposite Doyle's Junction in California's Costa del Sur, she returns to the resort on Big Sur River. [Ed. note: See end of Chapter 6: Fifth Notebook, Book Three, Vol. II.]

20. p.69 Striking this muted but provocative pose before the camera, I felt no need, desire, or curiosity about the sexual needs of other males: the theatrical arena of my homosexuality was at this time totally unconscious—genuinely latent and repressed! Aged 16, I didn't know enough to tease or please males and only gradually came to understand that I was not so obscure an object of desire for older confirmed bachelors and closeted married men, not to neglect mention of some of my peers. At that time I didn't think twice about evidence that the poetical and especially the theatrical social worlds were saturated—often besotted—with homosexuals, and that's the clearest and least pejorative term for gays from that era I can recall! That stages and backstages were steeped in ambiguous sexuality was of no concern of mine, for I simply did not yet know that I was repressing my own amphibolic tendencies prior to acquiring complicated social skill sets to express and suppress them.

Concerning what we cannot know, i.e. what is unconscious, C.G. Jung has stated, "It really is unconscious!" Yet I remain amazed by the degree to which my self-knowledge in matters bisexual was retarded; pleading innocence as well as ignorance, I truly recall no push toward the males all

around me. I felt the strong pull of sex, yes, but directed to and from the females who were at that time few and far between. Also, my father had been vice-president of the Yale Dramatic Association so, it seemed, there was nothing *louche* about my elective activities in plays and poetry at boarding school.

In what have come to be known as his Visionary Letters—products of a brilliant, overwrought imagination—Arthur Rimbaud, aged 16, spontaneously roughed out the essential duties of the modern avant-gardist. His inspired ravings from Charleville are written as if from an emergency maternal ward where the violent birth of a poet is taking place:

«*JE est un autre. Tant pis pour le bois qui se trouve violon,...*»

“I am an other. Too bad for the wood that finds itself a violin,...”

[to George Izambard, 13 mai 1871]

A poet may not be aware of the power of that genie in the bottle, whose contents he had imbibed before—regardless of the individual’s foreknowledge or reasoning—the bottle is uncorked and the genie released.

«*Car JE est un autre. Si le cuivre s’éveille clarion, il n’y a rien de sa faute.*»

“Because I is an other. If the wakes up a bugle, it’s not its fault.”

[to Paul Demeny, 15 mai 1971]

21. p.71 I later learned that my job on the egg farm had superficial antecedents in the family business of my maternal grandmother’s in-laws in Hemp, Indiana [Ed. note: Discussed in the final two paragraphs of Note 11 in Chapter Two].

22. p.74 I distinctly remember how my friend crossed the palm of Birdland’s maître ‘d’s with silver so that we got good seats, where we ordered and were served cocktails. Although I have read authoritative accounts that the legal drinking age in most states, including New York, was twenty-one at this time, my own recollection—and not just from perverse, wishful, youthful thinking—is that it was eighteen. I recall that exploiting the Connecticut and New York State lines in order to procure and/or consume our beer and wine in the latter state was par for the course.

23. p.75 While hammering out my Chronology [Ed. note: See Appendix I] and again while resurrecting past experiences during interviews with Sarah, I blocked out the fact that my younger brother was also a camper at Cloverleaf that summer of 1959; what’s more, during part my time at Williston, Daniel was also a student boarding there! This is a sad, telling commentary on the cruelty of sibling rivalry gone awry, the egocentricities of youth, and memory’s tricky default defeat by pride. But in the fall of 1963, Barnes had moved on to Middlebury College, and Daniel had transferred into Willison Academy, and the 1964 yearbook pictures him standing in the ranks of the Dramatic Club—I overlooked that, too! Although the 27-month disparity between my older



brother and me could be seen as a factor reinforcing some of our differences, the 18 months between me and my younger brother could conversely be seen as favoring more harmony. Oddly, across the spans of our lifetimes, Barnes not Dan (albeit more proximal in age) proved out the closer brother.

24. p.76 I would like to be able to laugh this entire histrionic episode off, blaming it on my upstart inexperience. Unfortunately, its pattern foreshadows a series of conflictual relations with significant figures upon whom I have unconsciously projected my needs for parental authority and approval, needs impossible for anyone to meet. I could philosophize that all our teachers disappoint us in the end, but really it has been my own craven need for unconditional validation which has repeatedly guaranteed *my* failures, not theirs.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Real Endings (MA/CA/NY, 1965)**

From the outset, we had agreed that Peter was entitled to preview whatever I made of the ample information and intimate confidences he provided during our recorded conversations, and he reserved the right to amend if not exactly veto passages from my working manuscript. Only once did my subject take pains to censure my narration, leaving a voice message concerning my first draft focusing on late spring and summer, 1965. His instructions effectively put me under orders not to beleaguer readers with what he called “the errors of that era.” He said a little bird in his ear had told him, “Those are the parts best left out.” So how was I supposed to proceed? How could I not fit that raw material into the picaresque sequencing of events I had been relying upon to present my understanding of the main storyline—his life and the dynamic relationship between his life and art?

When I read over my draft and my transcription of the relevant interview, I confirmed what I believed was my fairly good grasp on the decisive experiences occurring in the period between his expulsion from secondary school and his acceptance of psychotherapeutic treatment. Would he prefer that I somehow fast-forward my narrative from the moment of his dismissal from Willison to the aftermath of his personal breakdown? I concluded that while reading my treatment he must have become ashamed of his reckless actions in that interlude, embarrassed by his general dereliction and specific libertine indiscretions. But wouldn’t skipping over all that be lying by omission? How could I dance around what he himself deemed the “necessary destruction” of his arrested development culminating in a crackup then a therapeutic relationship that redirected the trajectory of his whole life? What about the full disclosures he had championed so far? Hadn’t they been worthwhile?

Stymied, I phoned him to share my confusion and request clarification about the new protocol. I suggested that censorship would trivialize the project, and too much reticence would only make readers cry out for more attention to missing information. His response was obviously the outcome of serious reflection, and I’ll attempt to recap his viewpoint.<sup>1</sup>

No, he insisted, he wasn't trying to save face, his or anyone else's, but he saw no good use wallowing in what might easily be construed as ashamed self-flagellation or, from another point of view, prideful self-aggrandizement. He wasn't lobbying for "suppression en bloc," he said, but for a sensitive selection of vital details. He reminded me that he had long been disabused of any notion that gentility must be preserved at the expense of truthfulness, but he saw nothing to be gained by too much *verismo*. And he was concerned about being mistaken for a boaster, as if he alone had survived to tell the world how boldly he had defied conventions, how very *maudit* was his youthful lot, how he had carried the blazing torch of Rimbaud's *dérèglement de tous les sens* up and over the barricades against hypocrisy. "*Pourquoi? Épater la bourgeoisie?* Good luck with that one!"<sup>2</sup> Nor was he interested in joining the long line of literary penitents purporting to relate their sorry stories in order to scare off others from the perils of moral degeneracy.<sup>3</sup> He had never evangelized for personal reform or joined AA and was no apostatic convert to organized religion.<sup>4</sup>

Peter closed our call by expressing his hope that I would keep his reasoning in mind as I wrote a second draft. He recognized he was asking me to walk a "narrow ridge"<sup>5</sup> between disclosure and suppression, likening my path to some fine line between trade pornography and a softer eroticism. And, he concluded, there was no need to resort to "artful teasing while teasing out the truth" of what happened and why it matters to our story.

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His formal high school senior year portrait from early March 1965 is a professional photograph in black-and-white, presenting the façade of a young man with a strong jaw, well-trimmed hair parted to one side, and "bedroom eyes." He wears a striped tie, a button-down Oxford shirt, and a tweed sports coat—all part of the mask in what had become a total masquerade. A different disguise worn later that same spring is more revealing of his inner turmoil: the second portrait, a Polaroid snapshot, shows him sporting the same coat but wearing it backwards so that his hands and hooked fingers extend far beyond the cuffs of what became three-quarter sleeves. Having applied a white cosmetic paste to cover his face, his younger brother had used some pitch-black substance to outline his lips and nostrils and fill in the sockets of his eyes. As darkness fell, Peter had then gone out along Harris Road and popped in and out of the roadside shrubbery, attempting to startle any drivers and passengers inside the few cars passing down the quiet residential street. Peter is much more convincing cloaked as this Frankenstein monster than as a 17-year-old Ivy Leaguer bound for Columbia University—an image of the reluctant but compliant preppie he no longer was.

Expelled from Williston Academy in March 1965, too high strung for any of the menial jobs for which he was qualified, he lit off on open-ended vagabondage throughout New York and Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire, and especially the Hampshire Valley of Central-Western Massachusetts he knew best, where he could always crash with friends or acquaintances—old or new. Impromptu, he hitchhiked between the towns and the cities, occasionally engaging in intense yet

casual sex with the strangers who gave him rides—female or male. Reckless, compulsive, careless of consequences, Peter had become aware but was still taking no responsibility for his appeal as sexual prey and his power as sexual predator. It was another lucky strike for him that this wave of extreme experimentation occurred well before the advent of AIDS.

He linked up with a loose confederacy of dropouts and draft dodgers renting a ramshackle farmhouse in South Hadley MA. On weekends, he and FR caged surreptitious rendezvous in the vicinity of the girls boarding school where she was still enrolled. Between times, he hung out at the round tables in the student union cafeteria at U. Mass, smoking rolled cigarettes, drinking coffee, reading LeRoi Jones (sic) and Bob Kaufman. He dressed in a mock turtleneck pullover, blue jeans, desert boots (sans socks)—requisite Beat attire. He worked just long enough at a hardware store to collect a couple of paychecks, all the while waiting for his friend Jory to finish out the school year at Willison so they could embark on a variant of the cross-country road trip to the West Coast fabulated in *ON THE ROAD* (1957). He drank cheap wine and beer. He joined other single young men in the farmhouse consuming copious amounts of cough syrup slopped over white bread. One afternoon, their kick came from inhaling the fumes of aerosol carburetor cleaner fluid sprayed into brown paper bags, the goal being to pass out, fall down, get up, and do it again—if you could. He had become closest to two boys who, having turned eighteen ahead of him, instead of registering for the draft were leaving for Canada and did in fact stay there for good. [Ed. note: See Appendix III.] When the first rent came due, Peter broke from the pick-up band of outsiders.

In essence, he was killing time as best he could and, it seems, himself, while waiting for his friend to finish out the school year.

*Full disclosure: my emotions and my sensations were in control of my decision making at this and other junctures in my adolescent life—not my thinking brain, not my evaluative faculties.*

From New York they got down to Philadelphia to retrieve his friend's bug-eyed, convertible Triumph Spitfire from a storage garage and proceeded to perform their copy-cat rendition of *ON THE ROAD*. During his academic off-season in 1964, he had read and relished that novel as any bright, unstable 16-year-old American boy might be expected to do. The purpose of their California destination? Seeing the Phillies play the Giants at Candlestick Park! After a series of hapless misadventures, they raced back to the East Coast on the fatuous pretense that they had to be there in time to see the Giants replayed the Phillies at Connie Mack Stadium (razed 1976). [Ed. note: see Appendix II]

After what amounted to his third and fourth traversals of the continent by car, Peter was back East, incapable of charting a personal course. There was no Nantucket Island or Cape Cod vacation that summer, either for him or the rest of the Boffeys' fractured nuclear family. Unattached, unhinged, he and FR reconnected and rented an unfurnished, basement studio apartment on "the bad side" of

Beacon Hill. They ran barefoot on the sidewalks. The 17-year-old couple engaged in untutored, amateurish sex without (to his recollection) the experience of affectionate foreplay or fond after-glow. They acquired a beagle (of course) puppy and named it Dylan in honor of two poets (of course). Without a clue how to discipline themselves let alone how to train a dog, within a week they gave their pseudo-baby away to friends of friends who might manage such a pet.

Broke, Peter got a job as a pharmacist's helper at Boston's Beth Israel Medical Center. Nominally an "orderly," he was never allowed anywhere near controlled substances, which prohibition was no doubt to the benefit of all parties—his employer and himself. His duties entailed cleaning up the lab, running errands, promptly delivering drugs on immediate demand, and, less promptly, making two rounds throughout the main hospital per shift, a routine that included dropping off and picking up standard medications and related paraphernalia at nurses' stations located at both ends of the multistoried complex. <sup>6</sup>

July 25th, 1965, Bob Dylan "went electric" at the Newport Folk Festival. Peter, FR, and their frequent sidekick Zack Gould missed that event but spent the long weekend banging around the festival catching other acts in a blooming, buzzing confusion of sensations—Peter either drunk or stoned or both. He recalled that, for him, Ramblin' Jack Eliot, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and the Mississippi Delta bluesmen were big draws, and he remembered "Spider" John Koerner and Tony "Little Sun" Glover appearing without Dave "Snaker" Ray. <sup>7</sup> At night they slept on the beach and each dawn, along with hundreds of other young festivalgoers, they were roused from their bags by law enforcement officers. Their prep school companions in attendance were all destined for college that fall so simply on another summertime lark in Newport. Our couple was on a more serious mission: improvising life day by day—just hanging out.

Back on Beacon Hill, the basement's walls and the rent-due date closed in on the shadow-boxing bohemian wannabes besting each other's misadventures. Peter roamed about the immediate neighborhood in search of places to hang out with others and to listen to albums of the Stones in one "pad," the Beatles in a second, Lou Reed in a third. Squatters were always moving in and out of vacant flats, and Peter recalls one day finding himself alone in one, recoiling from the sight of a pan, a used syringe, a strainer, and an empty 2-ounce bottle of Paregoric on the kitchen counter. He knew he was at risk and got out of that danger zone fast. <sup>8</sup>

Word of their general situation eventually reached FR's justifiably suspicious parents and the girl was summoned home. In response to that enforced separation, Peter determined to show the world that there was no one who could stop him from abusing himself let alone others—if he wanted to! Yet, as if in a conspiracy designed to disabuse him of delusions, it seemed everywhere he turned he was being stopped. The Smith College security guard waved his flashlight to prevent him from driving through the sawhorses barricading vehicular entry to a pedestrian courtyard on campus; that guard didn't manage to stop him, but his license plate number and car model description went

on file with the Northampton police so he had to stay out of that town. A Connecticut State Trooper clocked him driving 100 MPH on the turnpike and stopped him. A truck driver picked him up hitchhiking on the Massachusetts Turnpike, pulled into the next travel plaza, and gave him fifty cents to fetch them two hot coffees from the Howard Johnsons; when Peter came outside the truck was gone and so were his rucksack and his treasured white leather jacket. In t-shirt and desert boots (sans socks), he stood by the onramp as night and snow fell—thumb stuck out.

Everyone did in fact start stopping him at every turn. The Massachusetts State Troopers who hauled the wayward couple from the highway cloverleaf took them to a station and discovered an opened jug of wine in his pack. FR's father was notified, and the officers released the two minors on the doctor's cognizance. Despite their having broken several laws, no charges were lodged but Peter was barred from seeing FR. In Stonington Connecticut, the parttime constable had to be called out to pick him up and take him in—drunk and disorderly. Peter slept it off in the nearest one-cell jailhouse, a one-night stopover, but he became *persona non grata* in that town too. Our protagonist was no longer just playing with fire: he was a wildfire running out of control, aflame, posing serious danger to himself and others—whether he knew it or not.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of summer 1965, wisdom didn't finally stop his freefall: wisdom teeth did—all four were seriously impacted. As a hospital employee, he had access to low-cost clinical care; the cause of his pain was diagnosed and a date for the extraction of all four teeth was set. In atavistic panic, he called to inform his mother and asked her to send him the nominal fee for the dental service. She took the contact information for the clinic, received from its staff a fuller version of the medical state of affairs, and re-contacted him, imploring her son to come to Westchester for the operation and his recovery. Peter agreed, wisely, but first went on one last senseless spree, a New England joyride that included dropping by the Springfield MA address of a retired professional prizefighter someone who knew someone knew. All our subject can retrieve from his memory is that the boxer's crippled hand held out dozens of little white pills and Peter popped four or five or six into his aching mouth. This was *not* enlightened self-interest and precipitated a nightmarish breakdown.

Back in Boston he went sleepless for three days and three nights. With whatever wits he had left, he called his mother again and told her which bus he was taking to New York City. She told him to get himself to the information kiosk in Grand Central Station where, she promised, she or his father would meet him. Peter recalls spotting his father, a head taller than the rest of the crowd walking out from the Graybar Building tunnel. Few if any words were spoken between them while on board the commuter car to Katonah. Peter was benumbed. His father asked if he wanted to talk. Peter nodded No. Stupefied, the son did not know how to talk to the father or what to say.<sup>10</sup>

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At 35 Harris Road, having landed back home with a crash, once he'd recovered from having four molars pulled, our humbled subject went to his parents with his tail between his legs and

announced that he was finally ready to accept their perennial proposal that he see the family psychiatrist, Dr. Kors.<sup>11</sup> Peter wanted me, as his spokesperson at his critical juncture in the chronicle, to emphasize his everlasting gratitude to his parents for their support and to underscore his good fortune that this particular mental health professional proved to be a perspicacious individual. Of course, the good doctor was also well paid, but he displayed “a patience that went beyond the call of duty” and a sophisticated skillset which permitted his patient a shot at a revitalized future.

Although such *Sturm und Drang* has been amply and expertly rendered in the canonical Künstlerromans of Goethe, Hesse, Joyce, and a host of other writers conveying the agonies and ecstasies of growing up—or not—contemporary accounts of young, tortured artists still lure people into movies and books. Peter’s purports to be relieved that his entire college library and all the journals he had kept prior to 1978 were destroyed by water damage while in storage in the basement of a private home; his many tormented entries during his own coming of age were drowned beyond resuscitation and, “with any luck,” forgotten.

While depicting the trajectory of his crucial relationship with Dr. Kors became an unavoidable part of my assignment, Peter felt it would be best for me to avoid the standard lexicon of transference, resistance, and countertransference. He considers his treatment to have been a post-Freudian psychotherapy fundamentally derived but innovatively deviating from traditional psychoanalysis. He encouraged me instead to think and write in terms of the higher and lower points of their actual rapport. He was convinced that a blow-by-blow detailing of every stage in his treatment would be neither educating nor entertaining, but he did concede that recreating the *mise-en-scène* and vignettes from his first visit to the man was essential.

An early October cold snap in metropolitan New York had dropped snow followed by drizzling rain. Any sensible person would have had on coat, scarf, hat, gloves—but 17-year-old Peter was no sensible person. For the occasion, he had revived his old James Dean uniform: a blue jean jacket over a white t-shirt and blue jean pants with cuffs turned up—the outfit all too small for his size. The upstairs room which was at that time serving as the doctor’s home office was accessed by an outside staircase. *Le premier pas es le plus difficile*. The first step is the hardest. Attired in sports coat and tie, Dr. Kors let the newcomer in from the cold and invited him to sit down.

The informal intake proceeded in an unstructured (or so it seemed to the initiate) conversation about the visitor’s presenting symptoms and the host’s terms and conditions of service. The exchange fell far short of any real dialogue. When asked if he had any heroes, Peter took the offensive. He remembered citing lines from both his Dylans and, with great vitriol, spontaneously reciting the tenth verse of “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” from BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME (1965):

For them that must obey authority  
That they do not respect in any degree

Who despise their jobs, their destiny  
Speaking jealously of them that are free  
Do what they do just to be  
Nothing more than something they invest in.

The doctor seemed unfazed by such chutzpah, so before that half-hour was over Peter made sure to recite the thirteenth verse from the same song:

Old lady judges watch people in pairs  
Limited in sex they dare  
To push fake morals, insult and stare  
While money doesn't talk, it swears,  
Obscenity, who really cares,  
Propaganda, all is phony.

The fatherly figure still seemed unimpressed, remarking that not everyone saw it that way or something to that effect. A second meeting was scheduled, and Peter went back the way he'd come in—out into the cold.

Something had happened but his time, like Dylan's very own Mister Jones, it was Peter who didn't know what it was. Confused, cutting across the crusty surface of frozen snow to reach his parked car, he paused, catching hold of a tree's low-hanging bough. His knees buckled, he briefly fainted then, head hanging down, wept, looking back at the upstairs lamplit window, knowing he would return because he had to find out more. The older man with the foreign-accented English hadn't said a hundred words, but his presence had had a profound impact upon the younger man.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of clinical terminology, Peter looks back and sees that his preemptive strike had failed. He had done all the talking yet by listening attentively, Dr. Kors had kindly, gently, effectively called his bluff. Ruminating upon that initial encounter, Peter now recognizes that his wholesale criticism of the American citizenry might have been presented with more subtlety—"... especially if I had been seventy-five not seventeen going on eighteen!" Of course, the diagnosis of a sick society is hardly news and probably never out-of-date, especially as identity fakery has developed into a lucrative free-for-all for careerists depending on deceit in every walk of public life and self-deceit in their own private worlds. Peter wonders now how citing from the autobiography of a proselytizing Thomas Merton (in 1948 writing under his sanctified *nom de guerre*, Father Louis) might have enhanced his private performance before the psychiatrist:

For there can be no doubt that modern society is in a terrible condition, and that its wars and depressions and its slums and all its other evils are principally the fruits of an unjust social system, a system that must be reformed and purified or else replaced.

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Dr. Pieter Kors was born and raised in the Netherlands where, to the best of Peter's knowledge, he earned his medical degree in psychiatry before relocating to the USA. How much more training was required before his being licensed to practice in New York State, or whether he ever acquired American citizenship, Peter doesn't know. By the time Dr. Kors came into Peter's life, he was engaged in some capacity at a child development clinic in Manhattan and perhaps working elsewhere while conducting at least part of his private practice out of his office at home in Northern Westchester County. Their initial encounter had taken place in the first of two houses the Kors family rented while their own dream house was under construction in a clearing on top of a hill in some township within greater Katonah.

At that time, the Dutchman was approximately fifty years of age and radiated "success" in his general demeanor and embonpoint. Once his sessions were shifted to the Kors' newly finished residence, Peter saw just how successful. Inside the modern structure's separate entrance, a spiral staircase led to a landing which served as a modest waiting area. Either of two chairs provided a good look at the large Karp Appel canvas hanging on the wall opposite. In the office proper, a gallery of picture windows gave long-distance views of wooded glades without logging scars or the smoke and steam from noisy mills—forested ridge after ridge with the roofs of half a dozen trophy residences punctuating the panorama. One low, horizontal bookcase ran the length of the picture windows, its top shelf displaying a shining marble Arp or Arp-like abstract sculpture and a selection of polished wooden statutes of African and Australasian provenance. Primitive masks hung between tall bookcases against two other walls. The well-appointed, high-ceilinged room obviously let the cosmopolitan practitioner apply his artful science to a select few in his preferred milieu.

During their second meeting, still in the rented house, Peter had repeated his bravado performance, declaring his individuality and determination not to aid and abet a sick society: he was committed to a non-conformist's life, he made that much plain. Still without overt judgment, Dr. Kors heard him out and, upon rising to their feet at the close of their second face-to-face exchange, proposed that during his next visit Peter might like to try lying on the fabled psychiatric couch. The patient was wary yet intrigued, "... even flattered! This seemed to be more like the real deal, as I indeed found out starting with the next appointed hour." He was to spend dozens if not hundreds of hours semi-reclining on the narrow, firm, thinly upholstered divan without back or arms; a highbacked executive chair was installed for the doctor's comfort at the head of the couch. In response to his client's direct inquiry, the psychiatrist identified himself as a "Freudian existentialist" or an "existential Freudian" (Peter forgets which). Rounding out his presentation as a cultured, European-trained "alienist," Dr. Kors smoked tiny Schimmelpennincks while his young patient talked "... and talked and talked." <sup>13</sup>

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Taking to this modified version of classic psychoanalysis like Narcissus to the reflective surfaces of a stroll garden's calmativ water features, Peter came to organize his time around quasi-religious pilgrimages to the good doctor's hilltop. While holding down a dead-end job as a messenger at the headquarters of the Reader's Digest Association in Chappaqua (contiguous with Katonah), he saw Kors twice a week for nine months then weekly for three months. During his freshman fall semester (1966) at Bard in Annandale-on-Hudson, he made the 65-mile trip down the Taconic State Parkway and back biweekly and, during the college's long winter 1966-67 break, clocked in some extra 50-minute hours.

But just because he was regularly receiving the attention of a non-judgmental listener and trusting the older man with his confidences doesn't mean that Peter knew how to keep all his impulses under control. After three or four sessions, he hear the death knoll for his relationship with FR and, to her utter perplexity and pain, he broke off their doomed *folie à deux* in a brusque and heartless fashion he now regrets, for they had been in love. Nevertheless, the vacuum in his romantic life gradually spurred him on to cultivating situations favorable to other female company. He hooked up with one girl his age from one of the families the Boffey boys had grown up alongside with and, almost incestuously, off their parents' radars these two *enfants terribles* indulged in casual sex. Sometimes he tried targeting more of his younger brother's girlfriends; at other times, like a hungry wolf, he went to parties and tried picking off strays from the general herd. Our 18-year-old would-be Don Juan had no scruples. "A hard-on has no conscience," he stated baldly if semi-apologetically in one of our interviews over the phone.

He wasn't done with his histrionic gestures either. "GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY LIFE!" he recalled yelling at his mother as they crossed paths in the spacious house when he and she were its sole occupants. And he could still act out his anxieties with ridiculous recklessness. During the winter break from Bard, one of his college's schoolmates had stored his yellow Porsche sports car at Harris Road. Peter took it out on a straightaway along the Cross River Reservoir and clocked it at over 120 MPH. But that wasn't enough: He had still to fail the final test as a responsible caretaker of the car, getting so wasted at the end of a date-for-sex encounter that he fell asleep at the wheel while driving her home. The owner of the totaled vehicle was well off enough simply to replace the yellow model 911 ("... or was it a 356...?") with a black one, but the collision with the telephone pole could easily have killed Peter and/or his date. <sup>14</sup>

Besides surviving the crash and being cleared of serious injuries by the neurologist, the saving grace of this incident took the form of a sustained psychoanalytical inquiry into the causes behind such an "accident"—an opportunity for a dive into motivational analysis which the "head doctor" could not pass up and would not let his charge evade. As Peter acquired more skills in such self-study, his swings between mindless action and analytical reflection grew less extreme. He assured me that the learning process did not feel so neat and orderly as, in retrospect, he made it sound. <sup>15</sup>

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His steady job delivering mail and supplies within the Reader's Digest Association's massive Georgian-style brick building on its extensive and ever-expanding country campus off Bedford Road was a stopgap measure at best but afforded him some continuing education. Although any view of the impressionistic landscape and its modern outdoor garden sculptures was not to be had from the windowless messenger center located in the lowest ground floor, original paintings by Monet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Modigliani graced the walls in the editorial wing upstairs. In his capacity as an old fashioned foot messenger, he did get to range about within the 700,000 sq. ft. complex, and some of what he came upon was eye-opening—"... even mind-blowing." He often passed through one department where dozens of robotic typewriters pounded out letters signed by automatic signature machines—"I'd never seen anything like that before!" Mass-marketing of sweepstakes and mail-order products was sustained by bank after bank of women sitting straight up in task chairs while robotically key-punching IBM data cards to be fed into computers whose dimensions filled the entirety of neighboring glass-walled rooms. As he ferried rolling carts with trayfuls of those cards, he made sure to obey the intimidating stenciled instructions: DO NOT FOLD, SPINDLE OR MUTILATE. He did meet "interesting characters" among the messenger corps, facility technicians, and custodial staff, all of whose headquarters operated out of the building's basement. But as soon as he opened his mouth his auditors knew he was not long for running envelopes and toting cartons about at Reader's Digest, and he knew it too. Former friends and acquaintances with whom he kept in touch were all by then attending colleges and universities, and whenever he had occasion to meet with them he found himself the least informed person in the crowd. Without more formal education, he realized he could become a real dolt.

His parents had once again decided on divorce and this time the filing was to prove final. During their spring break in 1966, some of Peter's friends were visiting him in the period when his mother was staking out her claim to the Katonah address as part of the settlement. Once, drink in one hand and cigarette in another, Nancy E. Boffey took a stand on her hearth in her new culottes and commanded him to fetch SS and MA out of his bedroom or she would yank them out of there pronto! Frustrated and humiliated, he did, but this was not the kind of living arrangement under which our restless hero wanted to stay for long; for the time being, he had to.

Reconstructing his memories of this phase in his life, its advantages came to mind. For example, using his leisure time to explore Lower Hudson River Valley places he hadn't known about when growing up, he discovered a one-story Gothic Revival building with fieldstone foundation and walls and a slate-colored, sharply pitched gable roof. In the 1920s, John D. Rockefeller had the Union Church of Pocantico Hills built below his Kykuit estate in the hamlet of Sleepy Hollow [Ed. note: Now part of greater Tarrytown]. Pensive, contrite, in splendid midday-midweek solitude, more than once our pilgrim sat in its pews, contemplating Matisse's rose window and the stained-glass windows by Chagall. Peter claimed that even then he was well aware that an exploitative financial empire and an unjust social system made his beatific moments in this precious milieu possible.

Mixed blessings showered upon him. In search of female company, the caddish youth looked up the girl with whom he had lost his virginity (and she, hers) during a walk in the woods. Welcomed in her parents' home, he enjoyed sophisticated food and conversation at their dinner parties, and the girl's mother developed something of a crush on the sensitive, smart, attractive, poetic, and ("... surprise!") well-mannered young man. He returned the favor, naturally, developing a crush on Mme. X, who ran her household "with domestic help." A devotee of Anaïs Nin, the woman attended Nin's soirees in NYC, and she painted. Her husband was an architect who had built her a private meditation chamber off their salon. Peter once peeked through its closed stained-glass doors and wondered to what, besides her meditations, that aesthetic shrine was dedicated. The lady of the house may have entertained an affair with him—"I certainly entertained an affair with her!"—but it never materialized. "HOLD STILL," she whispered while he sat for his portrait in graphite and watercolor, an excellent piece of work which, in a collaborative endeavor vaguely reminiscent of *THE GRADUATE*, the woman had framed and given to Peter's mother.

Of more lasting importance than any drawing-room flattery and closing-opening-closing doors melodrama in that house ("... for the poor daughter's feelings were naturally hurt...") was the explosion of his awareness of photography. In the family music room, with any one of *LES SIX* composers playing over the background's sound system, Peter was left alone to delve into an appreciable library emphasizing the tradition of art photography, especially the art of French photographers or those heavily influenced by them. During earlier visits to New York City's museums and galleries, he had discerned outlines in the history of photography, and he was somewhat familiar with the legacy of American giants like Stieglitz, Steichen, and Paul Strand. More than once he had been through his copy of *THE FAMILY OF MAN* (1955) and been duly moved. But now, as if for first time, he got eyes full of volumes full of Atget, Cartier-Bresson, and Brassai, and handled folios of fine print reproductions of Kertész' and Man Ray. In a stroke of especially good luck (considering his future), he plowed through the output of the Oakland-based Group f/64 and photographers associated with its membership. He borrowed their copy of *THE DAYBOOKS OF EDWARD WESTON* (Vol. I Mexico, 1961 & Vol. II California, 1966) on extended loan. Weston's clean, direct vision as well as the absolutist and authoritarian airs of his prose, fascinated the chastened Prince who, looking back, testified to a quickened revival of his *élan vital* and a growing desire to live in the light of that photographer's "keener sensibility of such austere, aesthetic grace." Peter believes that his own earliest Western experiences traveling cross-country at age six and later living in the San Francisco Bay Area while aged ten—fourteen had sensitized him, without his knowing it, to the widespread influence of Ansel Adam's Zone System and prepared him for the emergence of Eliot Porter's crystal-clear color compositions. Years on he would discover treasure troves of photographic riches in the Oakland Museum of California and the San Francisco MOMA.

He didn't know what future might fulfill his new need for an orderly, productive life without perpetuating the elitism which had made his own privileges possible. In analysis, he was catching

glimmers of the possibility that there might be other ways to deal with the ingrained attitudes of his snobbish WASPish heritage (“... and my sense of its peculiar companion: low self-esteem...”) than simply repeatedly acting out his Liberal Guilt by reacting against the status quo. He was growing restless to move beyond lamenting the Humpty-Dumpty ruins of his recent past and toward assuming a less reactive ambivalence toward his own background. He swears he knew that a vast network of people had been abused to enable his rarefied upbringing and were still facilitating his reintegration—“... but reintegration into what?”<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 4: 1965

1. p89 I remain chastened by S. Witman’s lucid summary of her thoughts and mine about the dilemma into which I had inadvertently placed her. She challenged me with her impression that I was demanding she leapfrog over my *saison en enfer*, and I was obliged to justify my reservations. In the end, I did clarify what I had in mind: (1) that she not generate any vaguely prurient tone in her text covering those six excruciating yet crucial months in my life, and (2) that she respect my objections against too much colorful writing, which seemed an inevitable plausible temptation during any representation of this period.

If I were running for public office, or applying to guide boy scouts camping in remote locations, or exercising my sacramental duty hearing confessions of young boys in the confession box, or—better yet—in the sacrosanct secrecy of my private chambers—in any of those cases, smoothing over disturbing material in my personal life might be *de rigueur*. Squelching lurid descriptions of my puerile sexual re-acting out would definitely be advisable if I were protecting my fame and fortune as a fabled Olympian trainer of gymnastic girls or an expert equestrian renown for going over and over and one more time, please, the very detailed nuances of sitting a female saddle. Or what if I were a purveyor of certain tangible goods to the rich and famous clients of my financial investment consulting service based in Manhattan? MUM might indeed be the best and most useful word; after all, Victoria’s keepers’ uglier secrets be known if Victoria herself is kept under ultra-tight wraps. Of course, none of the above is my case.

The hugely influential bestseller, THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FAITH (1948) by Thomas Merton, seems to me to suffer from just such lacunae in the narrative. For all his *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, the author expects us to transition from catalogues of his sins (crucial ones left unspecified) to the *fait accompli* of his conversion to arch-traditional Christianity in a distinct form of Roman Catholicism. Such may be evidence enough for some to find that peace that passeth understanding, but his resorting to doctrinal, tautological declarations of faith and—in a sanctimonious young man’s tone of pedantic superiority—while exhorting others to reform puts this reader off. He seems to be avoiding some nitty-gritty issues while doing a superb job of demonstrating his profound and desperate psychological need for an all-embracing

structure such as the one the monastic lifestyle (in his instance an exceptionally idiosyncratic monastic lifestyle) afforded him.

There are too many pitfalls for any biography or autobiography to come out perfectly. We have hagiographies like RABINDRANATH TAGORE: A BIOGRAPHY by K. Kripalani (English version 1962) or E. Blau's memorial compilation dedicated to KRISHNAMURTI: 100 YEARS (1995) and R. Vernon's debunker, STAR IN THE EAST: KRISHNAMURTI: THE INVENTION OF A MESSIAH (2001). C.G. Jung has a bevy of biographers and a corps of detractors such as R. Noll whose THE JUNG CULT: ORIGINS OF A CHARISMAIC MOVEMENT (1994) discredits his disciples' uncritical devotion, explores the machinations of Jung's familial literary executors, and offers a particularly harsh perspective on the dissembling displayed by Aniela Jaffe, editor and, effectively, coauthor of Jung's autobiographical MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS (English version 1963). Lapses and omissions are part of the package in MON DERNIER SOUPIR (1982), the otherwise fascinating "semi-biographie" penned for Buñuel by Jean-Claude Carrière. Sir Walter Scott's JOURNALS, when not painfully moving, is too packed with extroverted, exhaustive details not to become exhausting. William Carlos Williams' AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1951), accurately reflects the cranky man's uneven mix as introvert and extrovert yet bogs down in circumstantial detail and suffers from lax oversight. And all of the above are well worth reading!

An annotated list of other representative specimens, presented in no particular priority, the reading of which has expanded my awareness of the possibilities within the biographical and autobiographical genres: D. Worster's scholarly and impassioned treatments of iconic historical figures of the West: A RIVER RUNNING WEST: THE LIFE OF JOHN WESLEY POWELL (Oxford, 2001) and PASSION FOR NATURE: THE LIFE OF JOHN MUIR (Oxford, 2008); Kim Bancroft's imaginative and flawless editing of LITERARY INDUSTRIES: CHASING A VAINSHING WEST by Hubert Howe Bancroft (abridged edition, Heyday, 2013); Alan Rosenus' GENERAL VALLEJO AND THE ADVENT OF THE AMERICANS: A BIOGRAPHY (Heyday, 1999). In her Klamath trilogy, Louise Wagenknecht has given us an outstanding document of her life in one of the continent's unique regions: WHITE POPLAR, BLACK LOCUST (U. Nebraska Press) 2003; LIGHT ON THE DEVILS: COMING OF AGE ON THE KLAMATH (Oregon State U Press) 2011; SHADOWS ON THE KLAMATH: A WOMAN IN THE WOODS (OSU Press) 2021.

2. p89 Ned Rorem's PARIS DAIRY (1966) and NEW YORK DIARY (1967) enjoyed a *succès à scandale* and provide good examples of the shock value of autobiographical tell-all's. On the other hand, in WITHOUT STOPPING Paul Bowles—one of Rorem's enduring letter correspondent—dodged the bullet of honest disclosure by simply evading any report of a significant portion of his life—homosexual activity. "Without telling...." William Burroughs notoriously quipped after reading Bowles' book.

3. p89 The exemplar: DE PROFUNDIS, Oscar Wilde's long letter composed in prison, 1897, published posthumously in 1905.

4. p89 Robert L. Gale's CHARLES WARREN STODDARD (No. 30 in the Western Writers Series from Bosie State University, 1977) sketches an author whose schizy life and uneven work strike me as the result of an individual short-circuited by his own unresolved religious-secular currents, both of which ran as equals in strength and weakness, resulting in a wash.

5. p90 In my recorded conversation with SW, I had no doubt semi-consciously borrowed this phrase from the title of Maurice Friedman's ENCOUNTER ON THE NARROW RIDGE: A LIFE OF MARTIN BUBER (Paragon House, New York) 1991; my own far-fetched literary Conceit, which Sally next repeats, is far more sensationalistic than the more logical analogy developed by Friedman.

6. p91 One story may illustrate both memory's unreliability and the widespread phenomenon of projection in our experiential lives. Twenty-five years ago, my wife underwent emergency exploratory surgery, that is, they had to open her up to see what was going on. Judged a matter of life or death, surgeons had to identify the exact nature of a dramatic disorder and curb it immediately. In less than three hours, she had been transported from the Emergency Room to Imaging to Admissions, and, without delay, taken to an operating room.

The medical center maintained a small room located between a volunteer desk and a gift shop off the hospital's ground floor lobby. The name on the door—Meditation Chapel—denoted its purpose and hinted at the hushed silence built into its interior, a silence reinforced by dark stained glass windows and spartan wooden chairs with their backs to the walls. Upon a centrally sited lectern, an oversize BIBLE rested open—a resource for petitioners, not preachers. Once surgery was underway, I repaired to this room in anticipation of quiet prayer, whatever form it might take.

A hospital orderly dressed in casual scrubs was the only other person there, and he was using the wall-mounted internal telephone exchange to conduct some business concerning his health insurance benefits. Although he spoke in a quiet voice, his whispering could be clearly heard. In deep need of quietude, I signaled to him that—after all—maybe he should take his secular business matters elsewhere and leave the sacred space to its intended use—in this case by a desperate suppliant. I don't remember speaking aloud; my facial expressions and hand gestures were enough to communicate my message. He replied in kind, that is, without a word, rolling his eyes and, with a free hand, waving me off, summarily dismissing my request. In my mood of acute vulnerability, I didn't challenge the offender but merely left the room, seeking solace and contemplation in the garden outside.

Upon exiting, or shortly thereafter, I recognizing that I could have gotten the name from his badge and lodged a formal complaint about his uncouth, disrespectful behavior. The phone was not put there for employees to use for personal purposes but for a chaplain or pastoral counselor or another authorized party to send or receive communications of urgency: requests for someone's presence; updates on a patient's status; news from surgery—communications of import, whether of lightness or great weight.

Yet consider the following: Thirty-five years prior, in 1965, another hospital employee regularly rushed though the performance of his routine duties as a pharmaceutical attendant so that, if he timed it right, he could catch 30–60 minutes of TV shows at the start and/or at the end of each shift. In those days, TVs were not ubiquitous in public spaces; an available set was located in the waiting room of the maternity ward on the top floor—far from his supervisors in the basement pharmacy. So there he sat, insouciant of others, careless of what effect the television programs might have upon the families in attendance, especially the fathers-to-be, many of them nervous, often distraught, some in the throes of receiving news—of levity or gravitas.

For decades I had fixed upon an impression of that orderly using the Meditation Chapel's phone as the epitome of inhumane insensitivity. Yet, truth be told, I was once the one getting away with whatever I could get away with and waving off other people's needs. Freud codified the mechanism of projection and Jung, of course, amended the code by emphasizing that, as well as pathological, siting in another person or an object external to oneself the difficult and unacceptable parts of one's personality may be normal, even salubrious. There are innumerable occasions when I discover, sometimes to my dismay, that I am unconsciously reacting to my projections in many if not all of my interactions (fantasized or consummated) with particular strangers, acquaintances, friends, and intimates. The practice of self-study at the heart of accomplishing this sort of memoir is affording me ample examples of gaps in memory and illuminations of my particular version of this universal process—for better and worse.

7. p92 For Katie Lowrie's two reports of her own attendance at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival, see pp.12-3, Chapter One: The Letters Exchanged, Book I, **3NLs**. One version occurs in a letter to her closest friend and includes an entreaty: "DON'T CLUE MY MOM INTO ANY OF THIS—I'll write something else to her." The other version—to her mother—is indeed "something else."

8. p92 I have pursued many modes of self-abuse but am somehow still alive, and somehow seem able to remember quite a portion of the past! I vividly recall shrinking back from the sight of those "works." Although I was dying (sic) to escape taking any definitive next steps in my own life and mightily drawn to belong to "my generation"—or even better, the micro-generation just slightly older than my peers—I always declined to inject drugs. I can speak with certainty of the role of a self-preservation instinct, a more universal than particular power than the admittedly life-saving influence of other people's love. I can testify to an impersonal force I can't prove as well as that

personal force deriving first and foremost from my parents. For, despite all their shortcomings, my mother and father had managed to instill in their second son essential germs of self-esteem, some of which withered early but enough of which had proven enduring and portable enough to shore up his “instinctive” resolution to avoid hard drugs. Never mind the perennial fragmentation of their marriage and their failure to fulfill their own expectations for themselves as *pater and mater familias*; their basic love for me has been operative in my life, all my life.

9. p93 The imprudence of my ways can be encapsulated in an incident revealing my foolhardy compulsion to act on impulses and shows a childish ignorance of the natural world. Some teenaged renegades and I came upon a great blue heron standing stock still in a swamp. Rather than assessing the situation as a whole, I waded right in and gathered the creature into my arms. It was large and gangling but not heavy; I carried it back to the parked car. I don’t know how I didn’t get my eye poked out, for that’s the first thing such a bird under duress goes for. In the front seat, with a blanket covering the poor animal—to keep it from stabbing me—we drove toward somebody’s house, where we planned to call the Humane Society to find out how to help the bird. But after death throes, when the beak I was holding through the blanket jerked about at the end of a spasming neck’s thrusts, the heron fell dead in my lap. We buried that bird in the backyard. I later learned that the aged heron was probably just quietly dying a natural death in its natural milieu. Had I forgotten everything I had once observed, absorbed, and learned from Oppermans Pond? Yes. Was I capable only of acting out my fantasies in a world of my own projections? Yes.

10. p93 Although at that point in my life my father was alien from me and in many ways alienated from himself, he was no monster. He did leave work to catch me as I fell, escorting me to Katonah, where his own welcome and marital status was anything but clear. And he did subsequently pay the lion’s share of the cost of my many sessions with Dr. Kors.

11. p93 “Family psychiatrist” may sound like an exaggeration but in our case remains an accurate description. The Boffeys did not enjoy a proprietary relationship with a psychoanalyst at beck and call or—like Father Pirrone in the Fabrizio mansion of *IL GATTOPARDO* (1968)—an analyst all but living under the roof; however stylish the Katonah “carriage house,” it was no aristocratic villa with a resident staff on the premises. Yet the role of one mental health professional was central to our family dynamics, and at one point or another we were all— with the possible exception of my father, whose participation in individual sessions I cannot attest to— therapeutic habitués.

With the advent of psychoanalysis’ popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, supplementing the family physician and minister (or rabbi or priest) with a psychotherapist of some sort became widespread, and full-blown psychiatrists were the gold standard. Analysis, an expensive but expedient mechanical governor, seems to have been called in widely and especially, at least within the prosperous upper middle class, to curb any untoward abnormalities in females when “mother’s little helpers” (pills) or other outlets did not do the trick. I suppose it was fashionably *de rigueur*



for some households and, for others, a form of prophylactic insurance, the premiums paying for a smoothly operating family unit—which ours never was.

By the mid-Sixties, analysis had certainly become a habit for Nancy Boffey and, during a decisive period, proved indispensable to her second son; I count myself lucky to have had recourse to our family “shrink” during critical moments in my early twenties. The doctor rarely but shrewdly framed some of our appointments with forewords or afterwords, yet during our fifty-minute sessions he only occasionally punctuated my ramblings with a poignant utterance. Before I was capable of any truly independent and non-destructive living, I became addicted to this “talk therapy” or, in my case, talk-*and-be-listened-to* therapy.

My older brother saw Dr. Kors for a year or so but later confided that he couldn’t make much use of it and the results were moot. During what I can only label a psychotic break, my younger brother was put under the doctor’s care; just shy of hospitalizing him, Dr. Kors prescribed medications and administered a battery of back-to-back appointments, although I will never know exactly what those sessions consisted of. To the best of my knowledge, my parents took a stab at marital therapy with Dr. Kors; in terms of preserving the union, it proved futile. And on one and only one occasion, all five members of the Boffey family were convened for a summit. Our shaky quintet must have been at some perilous stage in its irreversible dissolution. I recall nothing of the substance of that summit except that communications felt to me flagrantly disjointed; no further attempt to therapize our ensemble was ever made.

12. p95 My recollection of this epiphanous moment is forever embroidered by an auditory hallucination in my head, that is, incessantly hearing James Joyce’s own voice reciting “Tilly” from his *POMES PENYEACH* (1927), especially its closing couplet: “I bleed by the black stream / For my torn bough.” Another memory conflates with that one: sounds retained from my dropped-jaw listening and re-listening to recordings of Billie Holliday singing “Willow Weep for Me.” These associations inextricably underlaid a poem, “Fatigue of Dawn: A Melancholic for Lady Day,” written years later in the wake of divorce from my first wife, which lyric may have caught the elegiac mood. Without premeditation, Joyce and Holliday’s voices—as *I had heard them*—comingled:

Kisswoons  
roses  
silk gauze  
hearthink  
oil voice  
wrap me in a cloak of  
a lifespan grieving  
for all it will never know.  
Time eats us  
the fire licks itself  
to death

wears no face  
whose eyes we can see through.  
Lover I have yet to meet  
forgive the adieu in our first kiss  
I have gone out inside myself  
the black stream bleeds.

13. p96 The fictional character of Pieter Tuelling, a major player in the Fifth and Sixth Books of **3NLs**, derives from lasting impressions of Dr. Kors (and, perhaps equally, from my relationship with Robert O. Barnhart, the dedicatee of Volume III of **3NLs**.) If the implicit image of an elite, aesthetic, highly educated practitioner of a seemingly antiquated “alienism” should need further doctoring, consider that Pieter Kors also pursued his passion for sculpture as a producer, not just a collector. Online and in my mother’s memorabilia, I have discovered photographs of his highly accomplished creations and read documented evidence of his having participated in at least three group exhibits between 1970 and 1978. I haven’t been able to confirm other hints in print that, in addition to metal and stone sculpture, he also worked in hard-edged painting and color constructions.

14. p97 I came to consciousness in an emergency room with my mother at my side. Despite the grade III concussion and minor injuries, I had escaped permanent damage, and, miraculously, my date went unscathed. My father, a professional master of misinformation, shepherded us through a prep session prior to our appearance before the judge in White Plains. I received a conviction for reckless (not drunken) driving. I forget the penalty fees and what restrictions were placed on my driver’s license. Another lucky strike for Pierre, bad actor!

15. p97 In 1993, my older brother published a book elucidating his therapeutic theory and practice: **REINVENTING YOURSELF: A CONTROL THEORY APPROACH TO BECOMING THE PERSON YOU WANT TO BE** by D. Barnes Boffey, Ed.D. (New View Publications, Chapel Hill NC). Although far from any psychoanalytical approach, the book has helped many, including myself, and its guiding metaphor laid out in Chapter 1 (“Repair, Remodel, or Reinvent”) provides a fine analogy to the process in which I was immersed while in a distinctively different sort of treatment with Dr. Kors, one which I have continued by myself—and on and off with others—to his day.

16. p99 I’ve by now lived long enough to discover and/or invent some connections which for any number of reasons would have been—and were—impossible for me to make earlier. In closing S. Witman’s section covering the first twenty years of my life, I’d like to cite one set of connections which I find curious and, as the adage goes, “sobering.”

There was a time, the Fifties through the Sixties, during which Dr. Pieter Kors was riding the same commuter cars of the same commuter trains as David Mills Boffey; they were embarking and disembarking at the same platforms of the same Katonah and Bedford Hills train stations. The

adman's career had propelled him farther and farther northward into the suburbs along the Harlem Division line of the NY Central Railway—what I still think of as The White Flight Special—first to Hartsdale, then to Pleasantville, then up to Katonah. Fundamentally, this was the same trajectory followed by the psychiatrist although, for all I know, he may have catapulted to Northern Westchester directly from NYC.

Of greater irony and even grimmer in its implications, this latter-day realization: when not driving on the Saw Mill River Parkway—taking Exit 39 for Bedford Hills—Bill W., cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, was from 1941-1971 likewise riding those same rails into and out of the same neck of the woods of the same suburbia. In late adulthood, I was saddened to learn that while my mother and father were experiencing the death throes of their tormented marriage in the 1920s Dutch Colonial Revival house within its large lot with shrubbery and trees on Harris Road, Bill and Lois Wilson were leading productive lives, shepherding the AA organization through maturity to self-perpetuation, and she was creating Al-Anon, all the while residing at Stepping Stones, the Wilson's now historic house at 62 Oak Road—as red cardinals fly, about 1,000 feet from 35 Harris Road. One could make much of such antithetical parallelism. A *New Yorker* cartoon might capture the situation's peculiarity but not the poignancy felt later by the adult child born into a saliently alcoholic household.

It shouldn't take a fabulist to summon up the supreme and awful irony of this triad of overlapping circumstances. With remorse, I can conjure up an apocryphal occasion when Bill W. and Dr. Kors are landing their feet squarely on the train platform while David M. Boffey—well along in his day drinking—descends from the bar car, an indeterminate number of sheets to the wind as his soles hit unstable cement.

## **PART TWO: College (Hudson River Valley & NYC, 1966–70)**

### **CHAPTER 5: 1966-7**

Prior to our conversations upon which Part Two is based, Peter clarified that he could only contribute information about a Bard College that *was*. His account would be limited to the late Sixties and concerned itself with life on the campus and its facilities *then* and its student body, faculty, administration, and staff *then* while focusing, of course, upon our main subject's growth and development—*back then*. Whatever Bard has become since 1970, especially since the onset of President Botstein's tenure (1975), he couldn't say.

Listening to his reminiscences about his four formative years at Bard *back then*, his statements echoed those of a hard-dying breed of defenders of liberal arts education *now*. He cites as lifesaving his own lifelong application of the intellectual skills acquired in the domain of critical thinking and, above all, in his own enthusiastic pursuit of the dynamic relations between language and thought in literature. He insists that a basic initiation in the humanities shouldn't be treated as

another decoration in an educated person's collection of personal ornaments but as a foundational perspective on which a productive life can be built, "... just as surely as traditional field work in the natural sciences is not an optional supplement but essential to the development of observational skills...."

Long before he could espouse such ideals, my interviewee reminded me, he was simply navigating the turmoil of the times and surviving the shipwreck of his adolescence as best he could. Immediately prior to taking up residence in the relatively bucolic environs of Annandale-on-Hudson at age 18, he had seen how dangerous the world could be—even without factoring in his own nervous breakdown. Civil rights workers were being persecuted and murdered with impunity. In June 1966 the KKK firebombed targets in Mississippi; that same summer James Meredith was shot there. Public violence and police violence were not confined to the inner cities. In August, Charles Whitman perched on the observation deck of the Main Building tower of the University of Texas in Austin and proceeded to kill by sniper fire 15 people and to injure 31 others. Peter understandably felt relief when taking cover at Bard, and it didn't hurt that his father pledged to pay his way during the academic years ahead so long as he remained in school. No wonder the college's reasons for being and its rhythms of life became the governing principles for the next four years of his life.

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The last scheduled event of Bard's Orientation Weekend in September 1966 was an address to be delivered by a distinguished faculty member. Peter had taken seriously the open invitation to attend and made his way to a long, nondescript structure near the college's gravel parking lot. Sottery Hall (1960) looked more like a utilitarian shed than a lecture hall for distinguished faculty members, but inside the low-ceilinged building he found a full house blooming and buzzing with conversation. Knowing no one, curious about all aspects of his new community, he took one of the few remaining seats as standing room filled to capacity.

Undergraduates seemed to be in attendance, but the audience looked packed with past and present faculty, trustees from the Board, and other Bard illuminati come out in full force to honor one of their own, Heinrich Blücher—legendary educator at Bard and the New School of Social Research in NYC, and spouse of Hannah Arendt. After preliminaries, a short older man in a rumpled suit was introduced; the audience rose en masse; applause began. Not knowing any better, Peter also stood and clapped. While the seasoned philosopher stood beside the lectern (his signature long, thin, dark cigarette in hand when not dangling from his droopy lower lip), the accolade persisted. Only a month prior, Peter had witnessed a display of Beatlemania while the foursome played the briefest of hitlists at second base in Shea Stadium, but he'd never observed sophisticated adults offering a welcome such as this. Plainly, he realized, he was being let in upon the latter stages of an ongoing saga, but at the time he had no referents. The show of appreciation for the silent speaker lasted long enough for Blücher to smoke down one cigarette and, before speaking a word, light up another. Finally, the crowd hushed and sat down.

*"We are under attack."* Dozens of college students and a hundred academic professionals froze in their unfolded metal seats, the soles of their shoes stilled on the rude concrete floor. *"We are under attack,"* he repeated, not in a loud voice but with pronunciations and inflections akin to the expatriate European intellectuals Peter had chanced upon during his adventures and misadventures on Manhattan's Upper West Side and Morningside Heights—not to neglect mention of Dr. Pieter Kors' spoken ESL, excellent and accented.

The topic of his talk was the resurgence of antidemocratic tendencies in the USA exemplified by revelations of the CIA's latest nefarious activities overseas and the FBI's current antics at home. [Ed. note: Blücher elaborated on this theme in spring 1967; viz. "Academic Freedom" recording, [www.bard.edu/blucherfile](http://www.bard.edu/blucherfile).] According to the speaker (and taken as a given since), the malfeasance of those two governmental intelligence agencies included human rights violations, domestic wire-tapping, and multiple covert operations abroad. Against the background of the United States' so called "engagement" in SE Asia, the Vietnam "conflict" had escalated into full-blown warfare waged by air, land, and sea—all too visible on daily TV news. Anti-war protests and so called race riots were on the rise. Blücher's speculations upon a growing fascistic mindset eroding America's democratic institutions, including its intellectual and academic domains, were hardly idle or unwarranted, particularly coming from one who had fled for his life from Nazi Germany in January 1934. The brand new Bardian's attention was galvanized.

While growing up Peter had imbibed the centrist, liberal, Democratic Party ethos of his parents' politics and in his late teens had sensed that those values were indeed under attack by a constituency whose unthinking argument ran along the lines of jingoistic sloganeering like "America—love it or leave it!" His alienation from the US' escalating role in the Vietnam War was now clearly contextualized by this veteran of the Old and New Worlds, who spoke from firsthand experience and as someone who had researched the consequences of anti-intellectualism—and drawn conclusions. Besides his rhetorical silences punctuated by salvos in short sentences, besides the brazen overstatements and oratorical flourishes, Peter was enthralled by the sheer charisma of the man, whose high-flying ideation traveled on coattails showing the wear and tear of Second World War displacements and bearing (to one incoming student from the affluent suburbs) scents of genteel poverty—survived. In short, our young idealist was swept away by the conviction that he had landed in a place where his countercultural tendencies could be cultivated, resistance to the norm was the norm, and free thought was hallowed—right where he belonged, at last.

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Bard College's philosophy of the Sixties was still steeped in John Dewey's principles of progressive education. [Ed. note: To this day the college bestows its own John Dewey Award for Distinguished Public Service as an extension of its vision of "a system of universal learning to support and advance this country's democratic tradition."] In 1964, the college's affinities with other progressive liberal arts college (e.g. Antioch, Bennington, Oberlin) had been formalized in a consortium of ten institutions forming the Union for Research and Experimentation in Higher Education,

later known as the Union of Experimental Colleges and Universities. Prior to his enrollment, Peter had little to no knowledge of Bard's deep history. He certainly didn't know of the 1860 establishment of St. Stephen's College by the John Bard family in association with the Episcopal Church of NYC. Or that St. Stephen's had become an undergraduate School of Columbia University in 1928. Or that in 1934 its name had been changed to honor the founding family. He had no idea that in 1952 Heinrich Blücher, another "displaced person" among that swarm of European émigré artists and intellectuals whose lives had been upended, when not ended, by the Holocaust and WWII, was welcomed at Bard, hired to develop and direct the Common Course, a prescribed and requisite curricular core for all first-year students. Even if Peter had heard vaguely about a relicual legacy of post-*gymnasium* higher education carrying over from the European past, while looking back he admitted that he still wouldn't have been prepared for the impact of Blücher's dramatic presence personally felt.

Salient features of Bard's (and progressive education's) pedagogic approach included a student to faculty ratio low enough to create the conditions for small, seminar-like classes fostering discussion and interaction. Independent and interdisciplinary studies were manifested in the extended winter field break for extramural work or self-directed academic projects, approved in advance by faculty advisors and later evaluated by same. At the close of the sophomore year, a student would be admitted or denied admission to the upper college in an interactive process called Moderation. Mentoring relationships began with one-on-one academic counseling in lower college and continued as tutelage in a junior year student's declared major, culminating in a two-semester senior project under the auspices of one faculty member.

Peter conceded, upon my questioning, that this grand and ideal plan didn't always guarantee the highest caliber of instruction. Although he fondly recollected effective teaching by a bevy of qualified professors and associate professors, he also recited instances when his schooling was below par, if not completely counterproductive and insensitive to his needs. One parttime instructor in a creative writing seminar panned the poetry he submitted and encouraged him to try his hand at fiction; when Peter submitted his prose sample, she panned that piece too, more or less leaving him little reason to continue writing—at least creatively! Another professor of international renown, an authoritative scholar in her field of expertise, told him in private conference that "people from backgrounds such as yours generally don't excel in the arts and letters." "Well, thank you very much!" he would tell her today (he says now). At their next session, currying her favor or at least her acknowledgment of his potential, he voluntarily produced a freshly minted Petrarchan sonnet (his one and only). While admiring his endeavor, she did feel compelled to point out that the "systolic/diastolic" trope had been enlisted to evoke the rhythm of beach waves in poetry composed long before his—and to better effect. ("How learned and considerate of her to tell me so!")

But more often than not, he recalls receiving extraordinary introductions to comparative literature, historiography, and Middle English language & literature from the likes of Professors Walter, Toomey, and Lambert, respectively. In his senior year, he was stimulated by mind-blowing exposures to alchemy and ecology in elective courses designed and executed by Richard Clarke. Peter's

habitual out-of-doors wanderings were channeled into a rudimentary survey of the birds on Bard's extensive mid-Hudson River Valley acreage, a project conducted under the guidance of a young irregular instructor who later matured into Erik Kiviat, PhD, cofounder and longtime executive director of Hudsonia Ltd. [Ed. note: A nonprofit institute for research, education, and technical assistance in the environmental sciences]. But of all his teachers at Bard, poet Robert Kelley made the longest lasting impression and provided the deepest image, knowingly or not engendering one of the most powerful "under-the-influence-of" effects which have periodically thwarted then advanced our subject's individuation as a writer and as a human being.

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History, legend, and myth offer ample evidence of the rebellion, upheavals, and experimentation which was rocking youth culture and society at large. Bard College had been a hotbed of experimental education and a bastion of bohemian living for decades, yet for many of the incoming students in 1966 the opportunities for sowing wild oats proved unsustainable. Peter quickly discerned that it was a great place for education *or* dissipation, and many a new student's career at the college proved untenable. He had acted out or, as he likes to put it, "*reacted out*" against his background, so he moved apart from that population of short-lived newcomers and was not surprised at the rate of student turnover. For him at least, insubordination per se had lost its allure. Instead, he felt affiliations with those students who craved knowledge and thrived in sequestered classrooms and the quiet sanctuary of the library. Like others drawn to and sometimes malingering within the clearly demarcated calendar of the academic year, he grew to appreciate the predictable passages of fall semester, the long winter break, spring semester, the summer vacation. After 18 months out of circulation, he was delighted to find that he had escaped a solitary, cellular existence without structured learning and felt a part of this greater community, even if his own quick adoption of Bard's scholastic ambitions expressed a mindset at variance with many if not all of his fellow students.

We have seen how his personal history left him jettisoned overboard, literally a child of a broken if higher class household. With Dr. Kors, he had begun putting his Humpty Dumpty personality together again but not in any shape or form recognizable from before his falling off the wall. Besides shelter from the larger social storms, he needed a shield against the shrapnel from his family's implosive breakup and protection from his own emotionally imbalanced life. Just as his older brother had latched onto his summer camp and adopted it as an alternative family and dependable homesite, Peter would make of Bard a sort of alternative home away from home. He admits that while he was still cashing in on his father's conditional payroll, he could not expect to resolve dilemmas still carried within, such as the contradiction between his privileged class and race and his flash visions of social equality. Assigning a significant portion of his monthly allowance to the ACLU only highlighted the incongruity of his taking advantage of opportunities premised on a social playing field that was without question tilted in his favor across the board.

At Bard he was not the only post-adolescent misfit of similarly privileged yet troubled provenance, and a portion of other students did pursue the more serious, studious route. From the start, he sought out the college's rich educational resources and applied himself diligently, acquiring an academic prowess for which he was eventually recognized. Considering that his immersion was such a life-changing and life-sustaining experience over the long run, it is remarkable that in over half a century he has only twice been back to Annandale: once to visit the gravesite of Heinrich Blücher and once again to visit the gravesite of Hannah Arendt, whose remains lie side by side in the college's diminutive cemetery. <sup>1</sup>

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Adjusting to his assigned place of residence (a "Dwelling Unit" of several built with Federal Housing Project Funds in 1946) proved to be the most stressful aspect of Peter's first semester. By 1966, after twenty years of hard use, the two-bedroom suites, which once upon a time must have been suitable accommodations for students in pairs or generous if not ideal quarters for married students (with a child or two) attending college on the GI Bill, had become shabby, crowded housing—four undergraduates per suite. With an adjoining kitchenette, the front chamber, formerly a modestly furnished sitting room meant for study and socializing or as a family room, had deteriorated into a makeshift affair with only two mattresses on metal spring beds and a pair of armless wooden chairs.

When Peter and his cellmate moved in, two upper college students were settled in their separate interior bedrooms to either side of the one shared bathroom and shower. Upon entering from outside, that pair and their pals and gals had to pass through the erstwhile parlor, now resembling the inside of a migrant's shack more than a long-term home, and they had to take the same route upon exiting to the outside. The two older students seemed as troubled by that necessity ("... even embarrassed by the whole situation...") as Peter and the other incoming student; they all had to make the best of it.

Sharing the same space and a similar misery, the two newbies did bond and developed a short-lived friendship. <sup>2</sup> Peter nailed a 5' X 8' Mexican tourist blanket <sup>3</sup> to his wall in an attempt to add color and instill a sense of pride of place, or at least "... to stake out my poor campsite." But besides the noise, interruptions, and want of creature comforts, the issue was privacy—or lack of it. His roommate understood when Peter attached sheets to the ceiling to effect a curtain surrounding the exposed island of his bed; the result was unwieldy and made his sense of isolation more acute. <sup>4</sup>

When David and Nancy Boffey visited together that fall ("...making another brave show of a supposedly united married front..."), they saw the conditions in which their second son was constrained. As he broke into tears of distress, they must have wondered where their money was going and if he would survive his first semester in such rundown lodging. <sup>5</sup> Yet it was no use petitioning the administration for alternate housing; the college was hard up for places to put its 600 students, almost all of whom lived on campus, although not all of them in such substandard lodging. Although the 1963 purchase of the 90-acre Ward Manor Estate (1918) to the north of old campus had allowed for housing an expanded student body, the care of existing buildings and construction of



new ones was not yet back into business. A long drought in the college's financial resources had almost eliminated capital improvements and the upkeep needed by those aging facilities. In his junior year, Peter would move into the Annex of that same Ward Manor and in 1969–1970 exploit his seniority by residing in a private room in the Tudor Revival-style mansion itself. In 1966, however, the college only offered him a poor bit of a boot camp for basic training in Arcadia.

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Other than boiling water for instant coffee and storing snacks in the cupboard and beverages in the fridge, no one in Peter's non-fraternal bachelor quartet made much use of the DU's antiquated kitchenette. Preston Hall (1873), in continuous service for almost a century, was the only practical place to get ready-cooked food. Elsewhere on campus there were an uninspiring coffee shop typical of the Fifties and a crummy outbuilding called The Red Balloon that some students made serve as their own offbeat café and sometime nightclub. Several unappealing (to him) eateries lay in the town of Red Hook five miles east, but he had no car. Off the Annandale Triangle, Adolph's "down the road" house served a walloping grilled Hergesheimer. [Ed. note: In Book Six of 3NLs this sandwich is one character's nourishment but not another's; see pp. 388 & 399, Chapter 11, Vol. IV].

It didn't take him long to assess the meal service at the centrally located cafeteria-style refectory, and he perceived a weekday pattern that persisted through the four years he depended upon the place:

*Bard's student body tended to sleep in—en bloc—so at breakfast the hall was by and large deserted. But it got boisterous during lunch hour, by then the young "scholars" were awake and hungry! By suppertime it could be a challenge to find a seat at any of the long, rectilinear tables or the large, round ones—or at least a seat where I felt welcome with some company I enjoyed or peers I could tolerate. So, regardless of how late I'd stayed up the night before, I got into the habit of rising early for breakfast, when the quiet of the virtually empty interior was more delicious to my ears than the food to my tongue. To make up for sleep lost, I'd take a midmorning nap or even go right back to bed on a full stomach! When lunchtime came around, in fair weather I carried my food tray outside where I could eat in peace, sometimes with a kindred soul or two, sometimes alone. A bench, a patch of grass, that was all. I remember once watching skeins of honking Canada Geese flying high overhead like some passage out of SAND COUNTY ALMANAC or Audubon's Missouri and Mississippi River JOURNALS. Phalanx after phalanx with their members rotating in and out of the lead positions... it seemed interminable. Dining al fresco beneath the Hudson River flyway...? That was far better than being inside the dining hall which was pure bedlam with MUDDY WATERS LIVES and other slogans smeared all over the walls in bold strokes of black paint. Or some character standing on your tabletop to declaim his cause like a street busker or soapbox orator. Those dinner hours could be condensed hysteria, a free-for-all freefall into—I don't know what! Like a juvenile detention mess hall without proctors, I imagine. Plus, these children of privilege were sometimes quite rude to the staff, employees drawn from the region who, believe it or not, had to work for a living! I learned to arrange my supper timetable accordingly, fetching and eating my food as soon as the*

*dining hall opened its doors or delaying so that I was one of the last people starting off the meal as the crowd thinned out. Except on weekends and rare occasions, the general idea was to get in there and out as fast as I could.*

The hardness of his own words communicate how disturbing to him the whole situation could be:

*If this cadre of spoiled kids represented a genuine revolutionary vanguard prefiguring some sort of sustainable alternative model of society, I never saw it in that dining hall.*

After the “DU,” the dining hall was plainly the second source of his daily distress.

*... which is not to say I never enjoyed a sociable meal there after I'd become more self-confident overall. From the start it was obvious that my peers sorted themselves into various self-selecting societies. “Churchie’s” sat with “churchies.” Serious, civic-minded history and social studies and psych majors sat with their own kind. The dancers and painters and drama majors congregated. Poets more or less sprinkled themselves about, usually keeping far apart from one another and everyone else. Out of restlessness and curiosity, I ultimately grew comfortable sitting in on various circles and cliques. Sounding strangers out, I suppose. Searching for the spice of life. Probably ravenous for some imaginative, conversational fare instead of the clanging noise and shrill silences in between my own ears. I'm sure I was often seen as obnoxiously indifferent to one and all: Peter the Prig. That's not great to contemplate but probably true. Eventually I think I was perceived as one of the stabler, surviving elders of a volatile, fungible undergraduate population.*

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Granted zero peace in Preston Hall, subject to disruptions in his sleeping quarters at any hour, Peter checked out the rest of central campus for possible havens. It would be several semesters before he would explore all of Bard's hinterlands and the twinned Tivoli Bays—a freshwater intertidal marsh and a tidal swamp running two miles along the eastern bank of the Hudson. But in his early wanderings on foot, he did discover for himself the Saw Kill (a tributary to the river and future site of the Ecology Field Station) and the outlying grounds of the Blithewood Estate with its Georgian Revival-style mansion (bequeathed to the college in 1951). An introductory elective course in Abnormal Psychology (“Go figure!”) took him to the basement classrooms of Tewksbury Hall (1958), a federally-funded, corridor-style residence hall built of concrete and cinder blocks. An elective course called Open Studio caused him to frequent the Proctor Art Center, another utilitarian structure erected (and by now long since replaced) between the olden, golden era of Collegiate Gothic architecture and the platinum gold, stunningly silver building boom of the college's Post-modernist period including its more recent acquisition of Montgomery Place. But before Bard's late 20<sup>th</sup>-century financial resuscitation, the imposing Chapel of Holy Innocents (masonry, 1859), the Hoffman Memorial Library (terra-cotta brick, 1895), and the intimate Bard Hall (wood frame, 1854) were still intact and in use (“... old and venerable...”). The novitiate faithfully followed a well-worn circuit between the other main buildings and, since neither his bedroom nor the dining room offered any opportunity for rest or concentration, he often set himself up in one of the carrels located at the open end of the library's second-floor stacks. Reading, writing, researching, he

enjoyed a calmative view down into the *cella* (naos). The Greek Revival-style temple became his “favorite place of worship.”<sup>6</sup>

Once he'd gotten into the groove of the school's days, weeks, and months, he did occasionally go off campus. That first taxing year, he kept an anxious eye on the student ride board and took rare lifts which got him close enough to Katonah to allow for an occasional session with Dr. Kors followed by a perfunctory overnight stop “at home” before returning to Annandale. On occasion, two miles down River Road below the campus' southern edge, in the fabled hamlet of Barrytown he enjoyed welcome at the home of a former friend from prep school days, where she and her husband (or fiancé?) were renting a funky, lopsided, little house on Barrytown Road. Across the street from them was a fallow field bordering on Sylvania, the John Jay Chapman Estate (1904–5) where, sometime around the period of Saul Bellow's temporary teaching tenure at Bard (1953–4), that author had rented an apartment from the notoriously difficult Chandler Chapman (1901–82). A short stroll downslope led to Dock Road which in turn led to the cul-de-sac giving onto the grounds of Gore Vidal's vacated Edgewater Mansion (1820).<sup>7</sup>

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Afternoons, evenings, weekdays, weekends—throughout the fall of 1966 recorded music blasted from the Gothic arch windows of sturdy buildings with names like Aspinwall, Hegeman, and Albee. Built of rough fieldstone and brick (in 1890, 1924, and 1925, respectively), over the decades their interiors had served as both classrooms and residential halls. Peter wasn't at that time into getting stoned and hanging out on window ledges or in recessed entryways, but he couldn't help hearing the amplified sound (“Who could?”) and listened to the latest tracks from the Rolling Stones, the Doors, the Velvet Underground, Sly and the Family Stone, etc. Within a year the blistering guitar solos and merciless percussion of the Jimi Hendrix Experience ruled the air waves, and the music of these and other bands smashed against the postered walls of smoke-filled rooms inside aptly named Stone Row. Peter felt the Dionysian appeal, more savage and humorless than the earlier sounds of Dylan, Donovan, the Beatles, or Peter, Paul & Mary which had once graced the dorm rooms and common airspace at Williston. The subtler lyrics of Simon & Garfunkel and the lighter tunes of the Lovin' Spoonful were sometimes added to the new mix, but by spring 1967 the psychedelic rock sound of Jefferson Airplane fronted by vocalist Grace Slick and the biting rhythm & blues of Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin hollering all over the microphone were being transported to Bard by students hailing from the West Coast. Like any college kid at the time, Peter couldn't escape the undertow of the brand-new, cool, druggy music ripping up and down old Bard's Elysian Fields.

He recalls that the jukebox at Adolph's seemed to be playing the Four Tops' “I'll Be There” or “California Dreamin'” by the Mamas and the Papas non-stop that year. But that was strictly Peter's impression, for he still kept to the straight and narrow, rarely frequenting the joint, not drinking much, never smoking. The few times he did go “down the road” where “The pump don't work / Cause the vandals took the handle” [Ed. note: lyrics from “Subterranean Homesick Blues”

appearing first on BOB DYLAN: BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME (1965)] on a Friday or Saturday night, he witnessed the classic segregation of town and gown. Townies stood two-to-three deep drinking beer at the rail in the front barroom, where owner and barkeeper Adolph Lampeter kept and sometimes brandished a baseball bat if the local boys got *too* drunk and *too* rowdy. The college crowd meanwhile packed itself into three adjoining rooms on the other side of the wall, where tables and chairs were shoved aside as any semblance of dining gave way to dancing—also drunk and rowdy.

*I can't recall any intermingling or confrontations between the two populations. As far as I know, the blue collared locals and the white, pink, and Nehru-collared Bardians never crossed traditional class lines.*

In the laissez-faire atmosphere on campus, Peter doesn't think he particularly stood out, at least not at first. The non-ironed look was *de rigueur*, and his attire was always casual. Fulfilling his fantasies, his everyday costume resembled what he had once, at his favorite Manhattan haunts, identified as standard-issue Beat: chinos, sports coat, mock turtleneck, desert boots (“... *sans* socks, please....”). Contrary to keeping his hair trimmed, he let it grow and grow—nothing extraordinary for the time and place. In one conversation, he chuckled when recalling that prior to his first visit to campus he had gotten a haircut to make a good first impression at an interview during the college application process.

Looking back, he admitted that he may have seemed “a pretty dull blade” to his contemporaries. He had come to Bard to study and, he realizes now, to retreat from tensions elsewhere in his life and in the world at large; he bets his reclusive, comparatively monkish manner put most students off. But he was still relieved to have at last escaped the social pressures of his boarding school experience. For one, he wasn't yet aware of any formal student clubs at Bard and wasn't concerned about their non-existence or low profile. At Williston the pressure to join and, better yet, to lead clubs of any sort had been intense, even when everyone knew that the widespread ulterior motive was padding the anticipated college application [Ed. note: see PB's treatment of Headmaster Stevens in Note 12, Chapter 3, Part One, especially pp.5–6]. In hindsight, he realized there had indeed been volunteer committees responsible for generating Bard's somewhat informal dances (“... fast becoming extremely informal ‘happenings’....”) in the Old Gym, managing the Red Balloon, and screening art films on campus. In spring he found out about *The Lampeter Muse*, a poetry rag run by student literati. Reading in the archives of the student newspaper, *The Bard Observer*, reveals that there were in fact some twenty clubs and committees vying for their share of student-fee funds dispensed by the student council. *The Lampeter Muse*, for instance, was printed with such funds; records show that in the fall of 1966 its editors requested \$700 and were granted \$350! Were athletics mandatory? The New York State Board of Education must have insisted on some token activity, and he knows there was at least one soccer team playing games at home and away. He knows he didn't suit up for any sports that he can recollect and shied off from any dances. During his entire first year, the prospect of romance was still beyond his capacity to entertain; entering into

intimate relations with members of the opposite or same sex—out of the question. Our young Stephen Dedalus simply wasn't ready to start in on that difficult business again.

In dramatic contrast to the reigning insouciance of the incoming class, Peter's all-work-no-play tenue likely stood out to faculty. Bright, curious, ready to apply himself—what teacher could ask for anything more? And he points out that he was not entirely a stick in the mud; he did attend the presentations and performances of guest artists, both the luminaries who visited from NYC or Boston and those in residence for a semester or two. That November in Bard Hall, poets Robert Creeley and John Wieners read from their works, and he was profoundly impressed that both could make their inner verbal lives audible and, each by different means, engage him. <sup>8</sup>

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After psychotherapy, Bard College was the roadway for the next phase in Peter Boffey's rehabilitation, and its academic agenda was the vehicle for his next round of socialization—"the overt and covert mission underlying any educational institution sanctioned by society." During the post-WWII period, the college had fortified its programs encompassing the social sciences, language and literature, the performing and visual arts—all subject to an interdisciplinary approach geared toward optimizing individualized and independent studies.

The first-year Common Course was designed to provide the framework for a traditional liberal arts education. Starting students were meant to be prepared for subsequent academic pursuits while gaining the skills and knowledge allowing them to practice their individual world citizenship. Subject matter ranged across history, science, philosophy, and politics; its syllabus was organized around a selection of the "great books of the Western Civilization" and writings on them. <sup>9</sup> Such ambitious goals were best achieved through lectures, reading, writing, and small group discussions. The implicit and explicit purpose was the formation of educated persons ("... and hopefully not just dilettantes...") who would become fluent with a rudimentary, multidisciplinary vocabulary drawn from the study of myth, legend, history, faith, belief, ritual, religion, logos, poetics, and science. Our budding scholar was, of course, all for lexicons! For his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in October, he asked his parents for and received their gift of a copy of WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1961). He recounted the thrill felt upon placing the order over the telephone and the delight when paying a visit to the NY, NY vendor (whose name and address he can't recall) to pick up the genuinely weighty tome, a thrill and delight comparable to what he'd felt upon his 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> birthday visit with his mother and father to the record shop in Maiden Lane SF [Ed. note: see p.7, Chapter 2, Part One]. <sup>10</sup>

Spring semester, Peter managed to join the ranks of 20 or so students privileged to sit in Heinrich Blücher's breakout section of seminars pendent to his weekly lectures. Peter confesses that he once again lionized a figure who seemed to him and others larger than life. While he now recognizes the liability of such overdependence, <sup>11</sup> Blücher became and remains for him a model of a thinking man courageous enough to act on the Socratic claim that "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Blücher seemed to practice what he preached, including the possibility that people may never know absolute resolutions of ethical philosophical questions and may pay dearly in social ostracism for sustaining the search. Peter has never claimed to have “studied under” Professor Blücher or even “with” him so much as to have absorbed and admired the man’s presence of mind, his authentic bearing, his extemporaneous speech and wit, and “the genuine Old World charms about him.”<sup>12</sup>

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While surviving fall semester, Peter faced three challenges looming in the two-month field break ahead. The first was how to fulfill the college’s requirement that students perform relevant work or specify a course of individualized study. When that problem was solved by his pledge to write fiction, whether a collection of short stories or a novel, he personally felt that his need and his college’s educational goals were dovetailing nicely; he went to Katonah with his open-ended writing program approved in advance. The second challenge was how to handle the “holidays at home,” where his parents’ marital status was more ambiguous than ever and discord between the brothers was the rule rather than the exception. In our conversation, Peter drew a blank when asked for details about how the “soap opera” played out as the Boffeys celebrated Christmas then rang in the New Year. He suspects but isn’t certain that Aunt Janet may have been called up from the reserves to mitigate collateral damages.

In retrospect, he judged the third challenge as the toughest of all: how was he to manage the growing backlash he felt against four months of his own extremely self-conscious maneuvering through the anomic social culture at Bard? With Dr. Kors within striking distance, he speculated that his eruptive emotional moods during those two winter months must have been moderated by regular sessions, yet he has no recollection of which overarching themes in his inner turmoil were addressed. He stated that the conflict between his longstanding need to belong and his simultaneous need to differentiate himself from his peers “woulda, coulda, shoulda been grist for the mill” in his private treatment, but he has no memory of what actually transpired during that batch of 50-minute hours—until the end of the period.

He did create his first sustained work of fiction, a novella entitled *WHITHER, WHITHER?*<sup>13</sup> and he did navigate his way through the dysfunctional family dynamics. But the loss of psychological equilibrium in the wake of his absence from Bard converged with other forces to overpower his will. One night he got drunk, made loveless love to his hapless date, and passed out at the wheel of the Porsche 911 entrusted to him for the duration of the winter field break. He came to consciousness in an emergency room with his mother at his side. Despite a grade III concussion and minor injuries, he escaped permanent damage and, miraculously, his date went unscathed.

In lieu of driving cross country to his family home in Southern California, schoolmate Stephen Keller had stored his yellow sports car with his fellow Bardian. Even before the accident, as an irresponsible caretaker and reckless driver, Peter had taken the Porsche out on the nearest straightaway and clocked it at over 120 MPH on Cross River Reservoir Road. Apparently that wasn’t

enough. The subsequent collision with the telephone pole could easily have killed Peter and/or his date. His father, “by profession a master of misinformation,” shepherded the two youngsters through a prep session prior to their appearance before a judge in White Plains. He forgets the penalty fees or if restrictions were placed on his driver’s license. Somehow or other he merely received a conviction for reckless (not drunken) driving—“another very lucky strike for bad actor Pierre!”

Dr. Kors seized the opportunity to steer his charge toward a chilling consideration: that the car crash had been no “accident” at all. Peter assured me that the learning process did not feel so neat and orderly as, in retrospect, it may sound, but the skillful therapist helped his patient see for himself that, having abandoned all self-control and self-respect, he had unwittingly created the conditions for the crash with an outcome just shy of suicide and vehicular manslaughter.<sup>14</sup>

Stitches removed, cleared of serious injuries by the neurologist, Peter aborted his pursuit of beating a delusional retreat to the Zen Center<sup>15</sup> and went back to Bard a chastened human being—at least temporarily. In the interview providing the information for this sobering account, he declared that as a result of the incident he did acquire more skills in self-study, and his swings between mindless reaction and analytical reflection did grow less extreme.

The Spring semester seems to have triggered renewed diligence as he continued in the Common Course and parallel studies. At the end of the school year,<sup>16</sup> he joined his parents and his younger brother on a weekend expedition “of dubious integrity”—attending his brother Barnes’ graduation from Middlebury College in Vermont. “How long could the nuclear family go on behaving as if it hadn’t already imploded many times over?”

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The author of *WHITHER, WHITHER?* pointed out that the title of his embarrassing and revealing fictional debut also applied to his state of mind in June 1967: Where to pass ten weeks before he could get himself back into the bubble that was *his* Bard? By default, he would be welcome to room and board in Katonah, but there he would live under the same roof with his mother again, and he was wary of any confusing and retarding effects she might have on his evolving identity as a young adult. His father, no longer welcome at 35 Harris Road, was out of the picture. By choice or coercion, his younger brother had landed a job washing dishes at a summer camp in Maine. Having graduated from Middlebury, his older brother was happily surrendering himself to the Vermont camp, his adoptive home away from or in lieu of home.<sup>17</sup> Peter enjoyed no social relations with his local contemporaries and little or none with his coequals who, when not away at schools or whiling away their summers on extended all-expenses-paid vacations, bided their time re-inhabiting the well-heeled exurban communities in Northern Westchester County. He was back to square one—*whither?*

The Bard College campus occupied lands once or still belonging to 19<sup>th</sup>-century estates along the east bank of the Hudson River, all with a view of the Catskill Mountains across that wide waterway.

In 1990, the entireties of Annandale, Barrytown, Rhinecliff, and the Village of Tivoli were designated as National Landmarks within a National Historic Landmark District in the Mid-Hudson River Valley. But back in 1967, Peter was only dimly aware<sup>18</sup> that so many grand estates ran almost contiguously from Hyde Park to Tivoli and that a good portion of those properties were not in such good shape as Blithewood, Edgewater, and Ward Manor—or standing on solid financial ground. He doesn't know when he became conscious of Tivoli, the northernmost town in Dutchess County, but he reconstructs its image as a double row of boarded-up storefronts on Broadway. The only going concerns he recalls were a general store and a saloon with pool tables. Largely vacant residences, once notable “great houses” in their time, were deteriorating in plain sight, and there was no visible influence of the progressive college three miles to the south: no coffee bean roastery, no craft beer brewery, no Mexican eatery, no art galleries, no boutiques. Were its historic hotels even in operation? There were nowhere near the thousand residents of today nor any VILLAGE OF TIVOLI PATTERN BOOK, adopted by the town's Board of Trustees in 2010 in order to identify and codify the enduring features of the settlement's layout and architecture bypassed by more modern times. In the 1960s, the preservation, restoration, and upgrading which has been sweeping throughout the Mid-Hudson River Valley in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century was not yet in swing or, in Tivoli, even in the batter's on-deck circle.

The Rose Hill Estate, on Rose Hill Lane west of Tivoli town proper, was graced with a Tuscan-style villa built in 1843. By 1924, after multiple owners and many uses, the Rose Hill *Farm* had become a rural function of Yonker's Leake and Watts Orphan House, serving its constituents with vocational training and as a summer camp. Three years prior to Peter's arrival at the same address in 1967, Dorothy Day (1899–1980) had purchased what remained of the original estate in order to start another in a series of her intentional communities embodying the principles of the Catholic Worker Movement (CWM) which she and Peter Maurin (1877–1949) had co-founded in 1933.

While traipsing about Lower Manhattan, our pilgrim had read (“... or more likely rifled through...”) editions of *The Catholic Worker*—a tabloid-size newspaper, always “A Penny A Copy”—more than once. He'd passed the CW soup kitchen on 175 Chrystie Street “by sheer luck never having to stand in the breadline.” So he did have some notion of the movement's radical philosophy of Christian anarchism and its controversial non-violent approach to war and promotion of a redistribution of wealth (“... Jesus Christ's charity unequivocally translated into proactive social justice...”). When Dorothy Day acquired the orphanage in so called upstate New York, it wasn't a working farm and, according to her vision, a chapel and a library needed to be built there, but she saw promise in its rundown structures—the 19<sup>th</sup>-century mansion, the carriage house and tower, the no-frills dormitory for orphans—and its 87 acres as a matrix became her fifth attempt to manifest a utopian dream of living off the land. She acquired the property title and declared the grand plan: to make Rose Hill another CW House of Hospitality, a working farm, a folk school; the new home for the newspaper's production, a place for silent retreats, a center for peace conferences. (For my treatment of the CWF at Tivoli, I have relied on Dorothy Day's own published writings and those of Sally Dwyer-McNulty, Marist College, Poughkeepsie NY, including “The



Catholic Worker Farm in Tivoli: A View into the Past” available at <http://ruralwomensstudies.wordpress.com>.<sup>19</sup>

Dorothy Day’s noble undertaking had inadvertently solved Peter’s dilemma; he commandeered a car (“... a big old clunker Buick or Oldsmobile or other...”) which his older brother had stashed in Katonah and, with a sleeping bag and a rucksack stuffed with books, made the familiar 70-mile drive back up to Northern Dutchess County. He doesn’t recall any intake procedure beyond offering a few words to some self-appointed spokesperson about his readiness and willingness to serve the community in exchange for basic accommodations and humble fare. Looking back, he only halfway chuckles, wondering whether he was there to help—on the farm, in the garden, on the press, in the kitchen, wherever help was needed—or more to be helped. As he hunkered down in one of the cots in the austere dormitory which had served orphans in the past, he imagines he may have *felt* like an orphan himself but recognizes now that he was essentially a privileged private college kid slumming it offseason—“with an earnest idealist’s twist, perhaps.”

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Except for the sensational sunsets, his new surroundings offered no afterglow from the heydays of the Gilded Age when owners and guests were transported by train, carriage, or motorcar to their entertainment, rest, and recreation at Rose Hill and similar outlying destinations. The physical infrastructure was in disrepair, and the newly arrived summer volunteer could discover no farm or garden or even a central organizing body to keep day-to-day tasks running smoothly. Depending on the date, the population on site could range from one to five dozen, and the dorm hall went almost empty unless a conference forced the visiting NYC radicals to make do with the spartan quarters of their sleepaway summer camp. Peter remembers helping set up for one or two of those weekend conferences on draft resistance (“... not evasion...!”) or non-violent action. Midweek discussion groups (“... poorly attended...”) focused on the Georgist single-tax proposal and the history of agrarian socialism. Evenings of poetry and folk singing transpired. But it took Dorothy Day’s presence to draw a crowd into the living room cum gathering hall of the old mansion.

Peter’s rearview and numerous published historical assessments agree that the plain if sad truth is that a small cadre of competent volunteers couldn’t compensate for the lack of material contribution or labor from the collection of needy social misfits, including the mentally disturbed, who took asylum at the farm—which was not a farm. According to the spirit and letter of the CWM’s Houses of Hospitality policies, no transient was turned away on condition she or he swore off drinking for the duration of their stay and required no special medical attention.<sup>20</sup> With no one assigning him jobs, Peter swept floors, cut vegetables, washed dishes and windows, and used his brother’s car to make runs to Red Hook for community supplies. He reports quietly questioning if he had “conveyed himself out of the frying pan and into the fire,” trading Annandale’s anomie for Tivoli’s.

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During our conversations covering that summer, Peter caught a second wind while recalling the then permanent citizens at the CWF. Occupying one suite of rooms downstairs in the large main house: the Corbin family—Rita, main artist for the *CW*; her husband, Marty, its editor (1964–73); and their children. Another suite was home to Hélène Alexanderovna Iswolsky (1896–1973), a Russian émigré of noble descent who had created a body of literature including translations and her own writings concerning the Catholic Church(es) and modern Russia. Peter thinks that during her stayovers Dorothy Day kept an office and sleeping quarters in another set of adjoining rooms. Upstairs, a gallery of private apartments housed a steady but changeable cast of Catholic clergymen, each of whom seemed somehow to have had a falling out with their respective orders or were in some way reconsidering their clerical careers and vows.

A man everyone called Farmer John lived somewhere in that building or elsewhere on the grounds, but Peter remembers him best holding court while seated in a weathered Adirondack chair located on the old villa's covered porch. He seemed like an irascible curmudgeon, barely hiding his contempt for the “shirkers” who, as he once vocally denounced one “freeloader,” had no skills to offer and “could never make a living off the land.” Research informed me that John Filliger (b.?-d.1982) was one of Dorothy Day's longest lasting and closest allies and had been the main food producer at various CWM farms since the late 1930s, putting into practice the back-to-the-land ethos that was part of the movement's foundational beliefs. Farmer John's preferred target seemed to be one Reginald Highhill<sup>21</sup> who was making the CWF his home, sharing in the common fare and sleeping in the austere dorm (1966–1969). Reginald sported an untrimmed red beard on his face, a broken straw hat or cloche of handmade felt on his head, and outfitted himself in elements of lumberjack and court jester combined with Far Eastern fakir. From wherever he had come, the able-bodied 36-year-old had arrived with his tool box and tool belt but was frustrated because he wanted badly to work at something big and serious: he wasn't just a handyman. While lying on his cot on muggy afternoons, Peter often listened to Reginald complain about the ill treatment he was receiving from Farmer John who, he insisted, would not let him get any meaningful building projects started, especially in the non-existent farm and garden. Reginald would also regale his captive and willing audience (of one) with earnest renditions of his dubious free-thinker's philosophy of life including the word-saving virtues of an ideal land-value tax. I came across an online post purporting that “Reggie worked as a beekeeper, he planted 1000 pine trees on a steep side of Rose Hill, played the piano, and built summer camp cabins for children from Harlem.” (From Facebook/ManversHistorical/posts: Tyrone Ontario History 16 Mei 2022) Peter finds this statement suspect, given that he saw no evidence of these accomplishments in any stage of progress that summer.<sup>22</sup>

Another Catholic worker in the movement from its inception, Stanley Vishnewski occupied the tower amid the machines and supplies of his newspaper printing operation and a plethora of archival materials. He was one of the CWM's durable intellectuals and became its primary historian as well as a friend of its resident and visiting families. Another long term, whose name is lost to the rememberer, deserves mention for the lifestyle he led, which harkened back to the Middle Ages (“... or perhaps in this case better called the Dark Ages...”). This anchorite lived in a chamber,

half-hut half-cave, which he had dug out of an earthen bank. Peter rarely saw this uncanny individual known to surface only to attend services in the little chapel. He wore rags and a wooden cross weighing down the neck of his emaciated frame. That summer while on a bicycle pilgrimage he was struck dead by a moving vehicle and left by the side of a road; subsequent rumors had it that he had maintained some kind of hook in his skin so as to keep the mortal flesh in pain upon any physical movement.<sup>23</sup>

[Ed. note: Elisabeth Lowrie's "Fourth Notebook" in **3NLs** contains a minor character named Sergei, "the immigrant Russian groundsman whose own humble abode was several hundred yards from the house...." This mute, viewed by the teenaged Elise as a "true Russian peasant," may be PB's fabulation upon his experience with the religious recluse in Tivoli. See especially p.64–5, Chapter 4, Book Three, Vol. II.]<sup>24</sup>

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In his quick sketches and longer ruminations upon the memorable people from his brief residence at the CWF, Marguerite Frances "Peggy" Cowley (née Baird) stands out. Although he came to know her last of all, she made the deepest impression upon a highly impressionable youth. Annexed to the kitchen pantry, a space seemed to have been converted from a screened porch once dedicated to the storage and processing of food stuffs into an isolated room, glazed and insulated. Peter doesn't recall seeing its inhabitant ever leave that room or even leave her bed, which explains why he didn't meet her earlier or even know of her existence virtually sealed off in that room out of view, "... surrounded by her beloved cats, her books, her flowers, and of course her friends..." (Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *The Catholic Worker*, October 1970).<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Day refers to her as *Peggy Baird*, and their rapport dated back to 1917 when activist/journalist Day and painter/activist Baird were picketing the White House. After the two suffragists were arrested and became cellmates for two weeks in Washington DC, their friendship grew while they lived *la vie bohème* in New York City and then became near neighbors on Staten Island in the Twenties. In his heartfelt testimonial, Peter called her *Peggy Cowley* because her connections to Malcolm Cowley (1898–1989) struck him as paramount in importance. When he also learned of her relationship to Hart Crane (1899–1932), he was blown away.

Peggy Cowley was seriously ill and had moved to the CWF as a last resort in 1965. In 1967, sequestered in the cluttered room reeking of urine and cigarette smoke, he found her frail, unkempt, practicing little or no personal hygiene. Her thirsty, throaty voice rasped between coughing spells. When, without forewarning, he had happened upon her, hidden away in such squalor, her face was a worn palimpsest of many lives lived; he looked into her eyes and became fascinated. When she asked him to light her a cigarette, he did. When she begged him to fetch her a pint of hooch on his next trip to town, he did. And when one day she asked him to pass the phone piece into her bony hands—holding it wobbly next to her ear—and then had him dial up Malcolm Cowley's private residence in Connecticut, he did, bowled over by her implicit credentials. Had she actually been married to one of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century's preeminent literary Americans? Yes, and they had separated

and divorced in 1931. But had Hart Crane really “fallen in love” with her (as he wrote on February 17, 1932)? Yes, he had, and they were traveling back to New York together when the poet committed suicide by jumping from the steamship *Orizaba* into the Gulf of Mexico; she’d seen him go overboard.

In way over his head trying to make meaningful conversation with the invalided lady, he still voluntarily checked in on her. He could empty her ashtray. He could open a can of cat food and a window. When she had the stamina, he could read aloud snippets from his copy of *ULYSSES* which, by her request, he left on loan beside her bed.<sup>26</sup> But he didn’t concern himself with reducing the shabbiness in which she lived; he claims he simply did not think about it or know how to begin lessening the filth or inconveniences. At some point, an experienced nurse who was volunteering one weekend at the farm was duly horrified, and she took it upon herself to overhaul Peggy’s setup. She got rid of soiled clothing and bedding and disinfected the surfaces in the room. She bathed her patient and got her into clean bedclothes. Maybe she reviewed her medications. In the process of delivering a strong dose of tough, practical love (“performed in ‘deeds not words’”—the preferred manner of those radical Christians”), she inadvertently shamed Peter for his incompetence as a provisioner of care.<sup>27</sup>

[Ed. note: Readers at all familiar with **3NLs** will instantly recognize the parallels between Peggy Cowley, bedbound in Tivoli, and the character of Janet McLoughlin, embedded in her SF apartment, which *mise-en-scène* plays such a crucial role in *BOOK TWO*, *BOOK FOUR*, and “Chapter 1: Jan’s Estate” in *BOOK FIVE*.]

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One evening he became aware that a politically-motivated action was in the offing. On the coming Saturday a brand new U.S. Post Office building was to have its grand opening in Red Hook, and a New York State Senator known as a loud hawk on Vietnam was slated to preside over the ceremony. Other notables would be in attendance to celebrate and probably plenty of law enforcement officers would be on hand too, by personal choice if not in the line of duty. The plan of the peace activists was simple: to distribute a pamphlet protesting the war while mingling with the crowd. No confrontations, no demonstrations, no violence. Peter held the keys to a car that could carry six protestors including himself. Of course he’d drive! He wanted to participate. He was dying to belong. Regardless of the blanket rejection anticipated from the crowd, never mind the futility of the gesture: he wanted to express his antipathy toward the cumulative travesty and tragedy of the American involvement in the Vietnam War.

On Saturday “the dirty, no-good, half-dozen peaceniks” did offer their fliers to the annoyance of the crowd, few of whom accepted them. As the ceremony tapered off, with Peter back at the wheel, they realized they were being closely followed by a police car, and as they crossed the marked boundary line of the zoned municipality, the rotating light on the car’s roof came on. Pulled over, Peter produced his driver’s license but couldn’t find any proof of insurance or a registration

document in the glove compartment of his brother's car. He was ordered to step out, placed under arrest, handcuffed, and with no great delicacy shoved into the rear seat of the sheriff deputy's patrol car. One of his comrades showed a valid driver's license so was allowed to drive the passengers to Tivoli and instructed to leave the car parked there until further notice. Peter was driven to a smallish house marooned in a large lawn on the outskirts of some obscure undesignated census place in Northern Dutchess County. There the office escorted his prisoner to the back door where a man in civilian clothes greeted them as they entered the kitchen. The officer stood back as if to say, "Got you one, Judge." The householder brought some code manuals and preprinted forms from a neighboring room and sat at the kitchen table with the offender standing before him—still handcuffed.<sup>28</sup> Bail was set far above Peter's means to pay cash on the barrelhead, and he was led off to Poughkeepsie.<sup>29</sup>

"Let that man go! He's innocent! Let that man go!" rang out the chorus of voices greeting him from the open windows of the County Jail as he was conducted down the sidewalk to be booked and locked up. Although they had no idea why Peter was joining their ranks behind bars, the sarcastic inmates kept calling out, even chanting in a parody of the peace protestors of the day. He made his one granted phone call (to his mother) and, after that, cannot recall a detail from his one-night incarceration. "But I don't think I spent much time soul-searching about that vehicular code violation."

Sunday morning, he spotted Nancy Boffey standing back against a wall in the jailhouse's front office, scowling at the surfeit of armed, uniformed men. She'd paid his bail and produced documents verifying the ownership and street-legal status of Barnes' car. It turned out that the paperwork had arrived in Katonah's summer mail but, with Barnes away at camp, been set aside—including the updated license tag, the absence of which had initiated the deputy's ruse.

*I do seem to recall that the jailers were taking their bureaucratic time and then some to process my release. I imagine my mother was put off by the whole episode, both my troublemaking and the unsavory face of the Catholic Worker Farm which she got a look at when dropping me back on Rose Hill. But I bet she was mostly miffed by the vulgar treatment dished out to her while I was still in custody. Impolite, inconsiderate, unimpressed by her haircut and the cut of her summer wear—these people were below her contempt. She never chided me for protesting the war but also never sang my praises. I was still disrupting her life, but the fact remains: she did come to my rescue and paid the bail forfeiture so I was free to go. I suppose having raised three sons for so long, she wasn't completely thrown for a loop. And at the time she had bigger fish to fry, like the final divorce. She probably knew she was on the brink of getting out of the marriage business and, to a large extent, the business of parenting too.*

At the next informal gathering in the main house, with Dorothy Day leading the discussion per usual, Peter was sitting across the room when she singled him out and acknowledged his good work, condemning the travesty of his arrest and detention. His retort was that he had in fact been

driving the car illegally so there was at least some justification for the traffic stop, but she cut him off, saying any blatant miscarriage of justice needed to be called out for what it was.

*I think I recognized the fatuous tone of my own argument which she promptly poopooed. As someone who had been shot at in an assassination attempt and harbored a long “criminal record” for participating in nonviolent political demonstrations, she spoke with authority. I was probably secretly rejoicing that she was including me among the righteous and privately sensing that I had for once slain the dragon of Liberal Guilt. Too bad that’s one Hydra-headed monster and I’ve turned out to be no Hercules.*

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Peter’s mother traveled south of the US border to obtain a Mexican divorce at a no-fault hearing (August 31, 1967) which didn’t require both spouses to be present. Meanwhile, his father paid a Saturday visit to his second son, having taken advantage of one of many pieces of real property lost in the settlement to his soon-to-be-former wife: in contrast to Barnes’ older car parked with the ragabash of other dirty vehicles on a bare patch near the “villa,” Nancy Boffey’s red, new-model, convertible sedan looked luxurious—and out of place.

Peter had neglected unnecessary communications with his father for years. In retrospect, he expressed appreciation for the man’s outreach that weekend, especially given the affront implicit in his son’s choice of summer residence at, of all places, the CWF. Peter reasons that his father might have wanted to be the first to announce the impending finality of the marriage, or to made a gesture of goodwill in hopes of warding off any further estrangement between the two of them. “Or maybe he was just desperately lonely.” After a cursory tour of the “campus,” including a peek into the unadorned dormitory originally designed for housing young male orphans (“... which must have made my dad cringe within....”), they went for a walk on the lane sloping toward the Hudson where the railroad tracks ran at river’s level. Peter couldn’t recall what they talked about but assumes that any conversation would have been conducted in a muted register. He wonders if his father made mention of the British woman who was soon to become his second wife. Had David Boffey even met Jane Cotton yet? Did he divulge that within a month he would be named a vice-president and creative supervisor at Ted Bates & Co. INC? Did he know it by then? <sup>30</sup> When the lunch bell clanged, they turned and headed back—“Saved by the bell, I thought, far too prematurely!”

The hotel-ware plates and bowls were heavy, hard-used, no longer exactly white. Assorted flatware came from miscellaneous origins. Plain drinking glasses were filled with water from crazed ceramic pitchers. But Dave Boffey had sat in humble mess halls before, and that CWF dining room couldn’t have been more artless than the canteens aboard the vessels he had shipped out on while in the Merchant Marines. Dorothy Day was on the premises that weekend and instead of taking one of the spots available among friends and followers, who always welcomed her company, she chose the empty place beside my father sitting opposite me. After Grace was said, the ladled soup

and forked potatoes were passed down the long tables, the bread was broken, and the threesome began to eat along with the other two dozen diners in the room.

Our main subject can never know for sure, but while reanimating the past he sensed that Dorothy Day may by then have come to view his summer residence as the lark of a worthy but youngish fellow traveler whose moral and political principles were basically aligned with the CWM but still needed further testing. He had earned one stripe by going to jail, but having seem so many youngsters pass time in the movement before moving onto less radical spheres of activity, she likely took his personal engagement lightly. She had certainly never seen him at any of the farm's Catholic chapel's daily services. Peter confesses that she would have been justified pegging him as another spoiled lost soul in a materialistic and hedonistic society in freefall, a youth without any solid ground of doctrinal belief or religious ritual to land upon.

Who spoke first? What did they speak of—at first? Small talk never lasted long with the matriarch of Rose Hill and, in the recorded interview, Peter speculated that even before electing to join him and his guest, Dorothy Day may have planned to convert that run-of-the-mill lunch hour into a trial by fire for him and, by extension, for David Mills Boffey. Once she'd gotten a bead on the nature of the visitor's professional career, her curiosity about his character was sated. Dorothy Day wasted little time expressing her contempt for advertising as an industry, advertising as a work culture, and advertising as an engine in the American economy and way of life. More than twenty years her junior, my father kept his face down and ate the food.

*I guess my dad also got her number right away and realized it was useless to argue. But it was not easy to witness his sheepish silence while in that public space she privately eviscerated him, already an unhappy 47-year-old with a resemblance to one of T.S. Eliot's "Hollow Men" even if he wasn't at that moment wearing the gray flannel suit uniform to boot.... It felt like Fate. Channeled through this one firebrand with the deceptively harmless look of a grandmotherly schoolmarm, the Furies descended upon my father, poor him, without an alcoholic drink or two or three to prop him up—a rare occasion! The contrasts between them couldn't have been more stark. She with her moral rectitude, her almost fanatical literalism, her life of voluntary poverty; he with his lip service and equivocations, his clever manipulations of signs and symbols, his life of rotten affluence. She with her authoritative integrity of person; he with his personality tuned to conform within his crowd. As she chewed up his code of values and spat it out, denouncing the hypocrisies of the proverbial Advertising Man's premises and practices, I was still seated opposite the pair of them, but I felt pressed in between, squeezed by all the conflicts between them and the corresponding dichotomies within me. How could I help not feel that the sins of the father were by extension mine too? If he spoke at all, I don't remember. I don't think so or not much. He knew better, probably having gathered that Dorothy Day would not be gainsaid, especially in her own House of Hospitality. And at that point in his life he may have already had his fill of being defeated by another outspoken women whose withering criticism was also in many ways right on.*

\*

By May 1975 his father would resolve the problems of his existence—by ending it. And Dorothy Day’s vision of utopian living would never materialize in Tivoli: the CWF closed and the property sold in 1978. But in early September 1967, our protagonist must have been relieved when summer was over. He’d proven to others and himself that, by design or de facto, he could wean himself off depending upon Dr. Kors. He’d performed a concrete action manifesting his antipathy to the American War in SE Asia. Now he could resume his sheltered life back at Bard.

*But was I ever glad to be returning downriver to Annandale-on-Hudson! All may not have been order and beauty there, but I could retreat into a forest of symbols that often spoke to me in confused but somehow meaningful and perfumed words.*

*“There are scents as fresh as infant flesh,  
Sweet as oboes, meadow green,  
—And others corrupt, rich, and triumphant.  
Having the expansiveness of infinite things,  
Like amber, musk, benzoin, and incense,  
Scents that sing the transport of the senses and the mind.”*<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 5

1. p111 In this chapter my biographer seems to have adopted a psychologist’s penchant for motivational analysis much like the one I had taken up as a navigational tool just before my arrival at Bard! I must have shared more of my ambivalent feelings toward my fellow students at Bard than I recall disclosing on the recordings. My only excuse is that, after the catastrophic crisis of my secondary school experience, my reserved attitude toward the unrulier opportunities at Bard seemed the only way for me to stay the course of reform on what I and no doubt others perceived as a straightened pathway toward full maturity. My parents, Dr. Kors, and I all viewed traditional higher education at the unconventional liberal arts college as my best route to productive adulthood. How true and false that deduction would turn out to be! Not so false about my self-controlled deportment while at the college per se but no so true about the trajectory of my future life: I was far from having done sowing my own wild oats in disarray—as future years would attest!

The temptation to describe late-Sixties Bard in a montage of wildly kaleidoscopic journalese is a liability to which, to her credit, SW has not succumbed; she has done a praiseworthy job characterizing—not caricaturing—the time *when* and the place *where* my college career transpired. It would be hard to exaggerate the social mayhem of the Sixties, and Bard’s small community was a microcosm of that maelstrom. It was not just Bard’s reputation as a river of non-conformity collecting multiple tributaries of young, off-center, creative characters; it was not just that for many new students it was their first time away from home, living in dorms and dorm-like settings with no one acting in loco parentis. To get a keener sense of the edgy situation of those times in that place, one must add drugs to the mix—a recipe proving calamitous for many.



Marijuana was smoked widely—definitely inhaled. Acid was dropped. An itemization of all the other mind-altering substances and stupefiers in use would make a heady list. In my senior year, Lady Heroin herself became a scourge for one minor cast of characters at Bard, and a square mile of country campus within two hours of NYC was simply too tempting a venue for many questers and jesters not to space out in, under, around, and through. On fall and spring weekends, the grounds and surrounds were populated by as many non-Bardians as enrolled students, come 100 miles up the Hudson River by invitation—and some on their own initiative—“to trip the light fantastic,” that is, to dance the hallucinogenic *danse du jour*. Roundtrips from NYC for one- and two-night stands in Dutchess County were common. March 4, 1968, Timothy Leary dropped by from the Hitchcock Estate in Millbrook twenty miles away, and I happened to be among the hundred or so who spontaneously gathered about the rear stairwell landing where he held court outside Albee Hall where I was living at the time. Leary exhorted us right then and there—straight from the horse’s mouth—“to turn on, tune in, and drop out,” under penalty of an awful soul-death, I suppose, if we didn’t comply. Allen Ginsberg spent at least one weekend on and around the place. I suspect neither of them was an official guest of any academic department or the administrative offices of President Reamer Kline!

The psychedelic revolution—not to neglect mention of its cousin, the burgeoning human potential movement—commonly valued sensation over thinking and feeling at the expense of evaluation. Antithetical to the training in disciplined reasoning and thoughtful reflection which I craved and found at Bard, a strain of virulent anti-intellectualism did for a time set up camp there; as near as I can tell, about the time I left (1970), it was no longer ruling the roost, having decamped for greener and/or grayer pastures.

It would take me a year or so before I gained enough equilibrium to be outgoing (if never extrovertist) with others and another year or two before I became outspoken—for better and worse. SW has synthesized the facts and feelings of my collegiate debut as well or better than I ever could, then or now, and she has not put undue emphasis on any one aspect of Bard, either as a genteel bohemia for the self-indulgent, a playground for hippies deluxe, or a pastoral reprieve for at least one introvert in search of peace, quiet, and direction.

2. p112 My roommate was a New Yorker who came to Bard expressly to study under cellist Luis Garcia-Renart. He was smallish in stature, both from my own tallish viewpoint and in proportion to his instrument of choice: the double bass. A psychiatrist’s son, *for whatever reasons* he had elected to master the one member of the Violin family that was in all dimensions larger than he was! Early on in our first school year, I accompanied him across campus to his weekly private lesson with Maestro “Luis” and, out of camaraderie, helped him to bear his outsize cross—just the once.

Thrown together by chance, stuck in the same sorry circumstances, we were another two freshmen on campus who did some palling about and got along well enough in our sorry circumstances. I remember one Saturday when we were woken early, learning that our presence was required post

haste at some address in Poughkeepsie: if we didn't want to be chucked into the pool of immediately eligible draftees in the new lottery system, we had to provide some document from the college, to fill out some Selective Service forms in person, and to take some standardized tests, all of which would establish that we were enrolled fulltime in an accredited college, qualifying for temporary deferment from induction—as long as our legitimate student status was maintained. Why we received such short notice about such official business, I can't recall. The trip seemed like a worthy cause but how to get to Poughkeepsie quick?

We had noticed that a student next door regularly parked a yellow Porsche 911 in the main campus lot visible from our DU. We knocked, entered, and found him asleep in bed. Puzzled then nonplussed, he passed us the keys, rolled over, and, presumably, went back to sleep. We borrowed the sportscar for the duration and returned it—non-nicked (that time), and that was how I first met Stephen Kessler, with whom I have since shared a sporadic literary correspondence and a curiously star-crossed friendship based on consensual understanding. And that was the first but not last time I drove his Porsche [Ed. note: See p12, Part Two].

I believe it was the following academic year, during the built-up to his performance for Moderation, that my erstwhile roommate cracked. We were living in different dorms by then, infrequently crossing paths on campus, when I learned that he had freaked out in some socially unacceptable manner (details of which was never disclosed to me). In the event, he had been removed or removed himself from Annandale-on-Hudson. The assistant dean for student affairs called me to her office for a non-incriminatory interview: Did I know what might have provoked the episode? (I did not.) Did I know if my former roommate habitually used drugs? (No, I didn't.) Adding to the body count, he never returned to continue his education at Bard.

3. p112 I had snagged that heavy, boldly hued, woolen blanket from the family coffers at some point long after its initial acquisition during the Mexican holiday in 1957 [Ed. note: See pp.1–2, Chapter 2, Part I]. No doubt the product of some industrial looms dedicated to the touristic marketplace, the dramatic geometric design of its images exploited familiar Meso-American patterns and symbols. I still carry it in my camper van—now frazzled, faded, threadbare—and throw it across the ground tarp to soften the bed or drape it over the tent's top to ward off any impending dry chill.

4. p112 I only gradually learned that several notable residents in the adjacent DUs were afflicted by the Muses of Lyric Poetry as badly or worse than I would ever be. As I recall it, perhaps accurately, Stephen Kessler (1947– ) slept in a unit next door while Robert Kelly (1935– ) lived on the other side frequented by an intriguing coterie including Thomas Meyer (1947– ). None of these writers needs my trumpeting now to herald their accomplishments before or since then, and nothing immediately came of their proximity. For my part, I observed these neighbors carefully and kept my own counsel, as young and insecure poets are wont to do.

5. p112 In my commitment to self-reform, I had sworn off tobacco, but as I pled my case of lonely exile—and my parents did hear me out—like father, like son, I begged a cigarette or two off Dad or perhaps, off Mom—like mother, like son.

6. p112 In spite or because of its historical roots in the Episcopal Church, I never attended services at Bard's Chapel of the Holy Innocents, yet its dirt floor basement became one place where I could sit still, unobserved and undisturbed. Since the building was left unlocked at all hours, I took to letting myself in, managing by some side staircase or another to go below deck. As long as I didn't bang my head on pipes or run into posts or trip over the many hazards in place, I was home free, for there I could cultivate my new, semi-informed, highly idiosyncratic practice of a seated meditation that I loosely called *zazen*. About half of the dozen or so times that I did pull off a session there, my roommate—always high strung, usually cynical—tagged along, probably more curious about the oddity of it all than in any determination to follow in A. Huxley footsteps—and Blake's before his—"to cleanse the doors of perception and see things as they really are...." without drugs. On one occasion—hilarious in retrospect—our self-styled sitting session was interrupted by a pair of workmen from Buildings and Grounds navigating the crawlspace on some errand concerning the physical plant. After stopping and—still stooped over—staring at the weird goings-on, they turned and left. My partner had flinched and turned his head but, ever vigilant against ephemeral, outside phenomena, I had valiantly sat on. I can imagine what the men reported to their supervisor and their exchanges with colleagues on staff!

Sometime that fall, an upper college student with her own meditation practice found out about my endeavor and informed me that Roshi Philip Kapleau, who had been ordained to teach in 1965 then left Japan to found the Zen Center of Rochester NY in 1966, would soon be visiting the college. I can't recall how we discovered our common interest in the esoteric subject of the Sōtō-Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism for little did I know that Richard B. Clarke (1933–2013), Associate Professor of Biology (1964–72), was then embarking upon formal study under Roshi Kapleau; Clarke must have been responsible for sponsoring the Roshi's 1966 visit to Annandale. Richard Clarke ultimately left Bard to found the Living Dharma Center in Shadow Springs NY as an auxiliary to Rochester, which in turn split off on its own in various iterations in various locations.

In anticipation of the Roshi's visit, I consumed his book, *THE THREE PILLARS OF ZEN* (1963), and doubled down on my private practice. That text became and apparently remains seminal in the elucidation of Zen Buddhism to generations of serious students in the Western World. The three pillars: Teaching, Practice, Enlightenment. I might in those days have been called humorless but never not earnest! I don't recall more than twenty Bardians attending the master's evening talk and not ten partaking of the sitting session conducted the next day. I do remember that as we turned our faces to Albee Social's walls and our backs to one another, I strained to sit as ramrod straight of spine as I could manage. In the course of his rounds, the Roshi only once touched my left shoulder, gently. I reasoned then that it was his signal to me that I was on the right track; now I think he may have simply been telling me to relax a little bit.

My long-term approach-avoidance relationship with all formal religious doctrine and ritual has been complicated. During the ensuing winter break of 1966-67, swept out into a turbulent sea by a rip tide of conflicts about whether or not to continue in academia, I went so far as to draft a letter to Roshi Kapleau, inquiring about the possibility of my starting a residency at the Zen Center of Rochester, probably in response to the tensions that persisted at home and in lieu of returning to Bard where another set of tensions had begun to accrue. The strongest currents dissipated before I sent the letter, releasing me to re-enroll come spring—that season of my life a serial soap opera non-pareil!

I can't pinpoint my first engagement with Zen Buddhism in any of its manners or forms. I suspect I'd read Alan Watts' *BEAT ZEN, SQUARE ZEN, AND ZEN* (1959) before attending Bard; after all, I'd always chowed down on pretty much whatever City Lights Books served up! I wasn't aware that mine was only the tiniest curl in the many waves of Westerners seduced by this species of Oriental (sic) spirituality, appropriated and remodeled according to our needs and desires. The appeal of committing myself to formal religious rituals and practices has, like an insistent leitmotif, resounded on and off since my teens. Tellingly, during that first winter holiday spent at the Day House in 1963-4, my parents once took me aside and, with the door to the family den closed, asked me if I wasn't holding—perhaps too closely to my vest—a secret yearning to take a path leading to life as a clergyman of some sort. They were interested, concerned, and—I firmly believe—relieved to learn that it really hadn't crossed my mind, at least not consciously. Until the encounter with Roshi Kapleau, it indeed hadn't crossed my mind but, as irony would have it, since then the lure of some sort of strict, contemplative lifestyle has never entirely faded away. I was strongly drawn to the figure of Gary Snyder (1930–), for instance, as a poet and as a model of alternative manhood, and my understanding of his Zen training in Japan only sealed the deal on my initial infatuation. The photography of Thomas Merton (1915–68) had caught my eye before Merton's writing did; then his monastic life as Father Louis only confirmed the allure of a unique man of arts and letters—and religion. Philip Whalen was another Zen acolyte with a poet's cover story or vice versa; Willam Everson drew me in more than Brother Antonius but they were, essentially, one person to me. Although I was never to take the pledge (or fatal leap, depending on one's interpretation) in any religious order, after having gone underground for decades, *zazen's* peculiar beguilement re-surfaced when I dedicated a good part of my waking hours to “just sitting” as an enlistee in Russell Delman's Embodied Life Mentorship Program (2010-14).

I don't like to think of myself as languishing in underachievement at the bases of those three pillars—especially Enlightenment! Yet, after a lifetime of “soul searching,” and not a little self-analysis, plus a belated reading of William James' *VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE* (1902), I have concluded that I am most authentic when copping to what Dostoevsky called “the thirst to believe”—in *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* (1880), I think—*yet refraining from drinking just anything in any amount to quench that thirst*. The title of Richard Clarke's poetry book *FEVER AND THE COLD EYE* (1966) captures the rewards of clearheadedly identifying

dualities and suggests the heightened awareness made possible by embracing dichotomies without undue distress.

At some stage in my collegiate experimentation with *zazen*, Dr. Kors, who may have viewed my preoccupation as yet more juvenile folly but never disclosed same, mildly let me know that an enforced quiescence seemed to him a reasonable way for me to be dealing with my anger. *What? What anger?* That notion struck me as almost sacrilegious at the time. Yet my taking recourse to the structured ritual of *zazen* and tending to my mindset as an American albeit Eastern-ized religious searcher did indeed have resemblances to puritanical aspects of the Reformed Protestant ethos to which I was heir. The good doctor was onto me! I was reverting to type, for Calvinistic Presbyterian virtues include maintaining sobriety, self-censure, a non-demonstrative demeanor, discipline—in brief, full-court suppression! It wasn't by chance that I happened to have been attracted to eradicating the troubling disquiet in my mind through meditation.

7. p115 From 1950–1969 Gore Vidal owned the Greek Temple-style abode and its grounds a stone's throw from the Hudson, but he had vacated the premises and put it up for sale in 1964, so in 1966 we could poke about the property with impunity. Saul Bellow purportedly wrote his novel *HENDERSON THE RAIN KING* (1959) while teaching at Bard, the main character fashioned after the large-than-life Chapman.

8. p117 As head of the Literature Club—doubtless with the assistance of Robert Kelly—Tom Meyer brought to Bard a series of notable poets who gave public readings on campus. Readings I attended in person during my 1966–70 season at Bard included, in order of recollection, those of Creeley and Wieners, Robert Duncan, Clayton Eshleman, Theodore Enslin, Paul Blackburn, Anne Waldman, Robert Bly, Jonathan Williams, Diane Wakoski, as well as Kelly himself.

[Ed. notes: Of these, recordings of Paul Blackburn (1968) and Robey Kelly (multiple occasions) can be heard at [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/poetry\\_at\\_bard/index.html](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/poetry_at_bard/index.html). Many more presenters in the later John Ashbery Poetry Series (1995–2007) can also be heard there.]

While I was enrolled, undergraduate wordsmiths who have since made significant contributions to the greater poetic community include but are by no means limited to above-mentioned Stephen Kessler and Thomas Meyer, as well as Steven “Kush” Kushner, Pierre Joris, and Norman Weinstein. As for student poets budding and blossoming after my time at Bard, I cannot say. However, the list of artistic “somebodies” in the arts and letters who, over the decades, earned gainful employment while teaching at Bard is renowned. During my undergraduate years, there were long-termers Robert Kelly (1961– ), Luis Garcia-Renart (1962–2020), Irma Brandeis (1955–72), and Harvey Fife (1952–1969). Before my time, Theodore Weiss had presided in place (1948–66), and Ralph Ellison had taken a briefer turn (1958–61). Equally celebrated in Bard lore, a battery of one-year superstars such as Mary McCarthy (1946–7), Saul Bellow (1953–4), and Dwight Macdonald (1958–59) predated my attendance; Robert Coover taught during my freshman year (1966–67).

Since my four-year run, many famous headliners have sojourned in Annandale-on-Hudson for shorter and longer durations: some are certified celebs; some are the faculty members' personal faves; some cut their figures in Fashion's Fortunate 500—I don't really know who or when or why and didn't get around much anymore—then or now.

9. p117 Name dropping may seem something of a parlor game played throughout this “memoir of sorts” and never more frequently than in evocations of Bard in the late 1960s (see note 8 above). So, if I haven't by now earned celebrity status *by association*, the following catalog with the titles and/or authors to which, as a freshman, I was exposed may at least win me notoriety. The ethnic extraction of the authors of the cited works are not entirely Eurocentric—but many are, and most are products of the Northern Hemisphere. Is there one woman author or person of color named? Not that I can see. So be it, or at least *so was it back then*. I count myself lucky to have been granted access to this canonical collection and would caution today's cultural warriors against turning—at great peril—the cannon of all previous history and historiography upon others and themselves—whether out of innocence, ignorance, revenge, or a lust for power.

I earmark each item (presented in a-bibliographic format) according to my best sense that a given work or parts of it was presented in either the Common Course (CC), Western History (WH), or Comparative Literature (CL). Those three courses were so integrated that entertaining the overlapping significances between them was inevitable and encouraged. If nothing else, let this inventory be a tribute to the resilience of the human brain, for without recourse to researching the record online, the titles of these writings come back to me spontaneously—recollected in tranquility—despite a fair amount of substance abuse in different forms and flavors over a considerable number of intervening years:

- THE OLD TESTAMENT (The Dartmouth Bible, Second edition), CL
- THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH, CL
- THE BHAGAVAD-GITA, CC
- ANTIGONE, Sophocles, CC
- THE BIRDS, Aristophanes CL
- THE DIVINE COMEDY, Dante, CL
- THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE & FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE [i.e. selections from or an abridged version of same], Gibbons, WH
- LEVIATHAN, Hobbes, WH
- TAO TE CHING, Lao Tzu, CC
- HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR, Thucydides, WH
- HISTORIES, Tacitus, WH
- SYMBOL, MYTH, AND CULTURE: ESSAYS AND LECTURES, Ernst Cassirer, CC
- THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, Thomas Kuhn, CC
- REPUBLIC, Plato CC
- FAUST, Goethe, CL

- PLUTARCH'S LIVES, WH
- THE PRINCE, Machiavelli, WH
- THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY, Boethius, CC
- SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD, Alfred North Whitehead, CC

10. p117 I don't know the name of the Manhattan establishment where we went to pick up the purchase. I do remember being guided to a room with a counter dedicated to special orders and a more commercial, wholesale trade. The ceilings were high. The long, wide, wooden counter was weathered but smoothed by long use. Off to the side, a spool of twine, a pair of scissors, and a roll of butcher paper in a dispenser with a built-in blade were attached atop a sheet of zinc, ready for wrapping parcels. A gentleman in a button-down shirt—his bowtie set well above the top rim of his seamed smock—served us with *politesse*. I've never been to England, but I feel I have—at least just that once. What I would identify as a thoroughly British ambiance seemed a throwback to earlier times or a stage set for a scene in an episode of some BBC TV mini-series. I can easily populate my fantasy recollection of that setting with any one of Smiley's people on naughty errands in secret stacks, or Michael Caine, or Peter O'Toole. Perhaps Sir John Gielgud. Or how about Anthony Hopkins? Dirk Bogarde? Central casting would have a field day with too many choices of the type. David Niven might be over the top, certainly overqualified, but what the heck—let him audition, too, if he'll deign to do.

11. p117 I'll decline apostatizing any of my most influential Teachers or apologizing for the dedication and overdependence I was unconsciously compelled to project onto them over and again. I could—in best Presbyterian tradition—chastise myself for my immaturities at every turn but why, when other than myself at any given moment, who else could I have been? Thomas Kelley (Williston Academy, from 1963–); Dr. Pieter Kors (from 1965–); Robert Kelly (Bard College, from 1968–), Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais (in absentia, from 1998–); Russell Delman (from 2000–). In each case, I was reiterating the rhythmic pattern of some intrinsic need: first, to submerge myself in another personage and *his* worldview—to find the measure of *his* wisdom and perhaps to mimic it—then to re-surface on my own, sailing at sea again in my fortified craft. Having latterly reconciled in heart and mind with my father and in living person with my older brother, I don't expect to be throwing myself under the influence of another *faux père* any time soon. A lifetime of such conflicted devotions should suffice. Yet I am grateful to each in manifold ways, and forgiving of my younger selves—needs must be, or else shoot myself for the sheer stupidity!

I am also grateful to a handful of men I consider closest friends; our long-term relationships have survived lapses and reunions, *contretemps* and reconciliations. Sadly, I can attribute some of the interpersonal crises to my shadowy attempts to foist my own neuroses on them! Fortunately, we have usually made amends, although I have often had to rightsize my own expectations in some challenging *pas de deux*—who leads? who follows? now? when?—for the relationship to survive at all. My recurrent need to merge with and re-emerge from influential Jewish *women* is another story, which no doubt cries out to be, and must be, and will be told.

[Ed. note: The redemption, or not, of conflict-habituated relationships is central to the first novel, **2HBs**, and an insistent theme throughout **3NLs**. Of special interest, see Elise Lowrie's uncharacteristically literary conceit in the "Seventh Notebook" (**3NLs**, Chapter 10, Book Three, Vol. II, p. 215 ff.)]

12. p117 One afternoon I intercepted Blücher on his habitual, contemplative, constitutional stroll repeated back and forth between Ludlow Hall and the Hoffman Library. I'd often noticed that he seemed to be using his slow philosopher's pace as a kind of open office hour when students could speak with him one-on-one without appointments or formalities. He almost always walked alone, always appeared to be deep in thought, and—without exception—was always smoking one of his cigarettes.

I had been assuming it was only a matter of time before I would be called—lottery or no lottery—for my physical as a prelude to induction in the US Army. In anticipation of an inevitable confrontation with the Selective Service, I had given much thought to petitioning for a hearing before my draft board and taking a stand as a conscientious objector; I fully expected to be granted exemption from the military and assigned to some alternative service. However, given my acute awareness of the rise to power of anti-Semites in Nazi Germany—made sharper by Blücher's talks (and later augmented by the full-blown recognition of the utter absurdity, even willful blindness, of Gandhi's position vis à vis the systematic extermination of European Jewry people before and during WWII)—I was conflicted about my pacifistic reasoning and wondered what a public thinker of his stature and a private person with his personal history would say. Could he help me clarify my options? I summoned up my courage and approached.

[Ed note: see Maurice Friedman's **ENCOUNTER ON THE NARROW RIDGE: A LIFE OF MARTIN BUBER** (1991) for Buber's April 1939 letter addressed to "Mahatma" in which he "took to task the man he admired more than any living person in public life." (p.254) See *ibid* pp.213-14. regarding Gandhi's advice to the Jews.]

Perhaps recognizing me from his seminars, perhaps not, the professor nodded acknowledgement and kept walking; walking alongside him, I spoke my piece. I remember him treating my basic entreaty—What did he think I ought to do?—with one response for which he finally stopped and looked me in the face: Did I know what my answer would be if and when the draft board posed this hypothetical question: Someone is holding a pistol to your mother's head and counting ten before pulling the trigger; you are holding a loaded pistol in your hand—what would you do? Usually a man of many well-chosen words, Heinrich Blücher had in a Socratic manner answered my question with one of his own and, after a few well-chosen words, resumed walking, leaving me to answer the question for myself.

13. p118 Has fictionalized narcissism ever been so transparently or tritely contrived? The anachronistic title indicates the thinnest of plots concerning a pretentious protagonist's wandering over his late-in-his-teens terrain. He's a sensitive and angry young man named Chapel, doubtlessly



dubbed thus to signal to all—unbeknownst to the author—the utter preciousness of the whole account! My main character could have been a cross between Goethe’s young Werther and Richard Fariña’s Gnosso Pappadopoulos [Ed. note: *THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER* (1774) and *BEEN DOWN SO LONG IT LOOKS LIKE UP TO ME* (1966)]. Writing the novella may have had some therapeutic value; then again it may not have. My biographer has never read the manuscript and, if it still exists somewhere, she never will while I walk the earth. An unmitigated literary disaster!

14. p119 I don’t believe I ever shared with the psychiatrist the ending of my novella when the tormented hero dies in the crash of a car or a motorcycle (I can’t remember which). I suppose it would have been too embarrassing to disclose this corroborating, self-incriminating evidence of the self-destructive forces that could and did partially overpower me. After all, I wanted badly to be a model patient, too!

Driving his new black Porche 911—replacing the non-salvageable yellow one—Stephen K. came back East and, prior to our return to Bard, spent a night or two in Katonah. He read the manuscript and was mercifully, graciously reserved about making any open judgments upon the fledgling effort. How was *WHITHER, WHITHER?* received when I surrendered it to my faculty advisor? To the best of my recollection, my second reader was similarly reticent, likely viewing it as a specimen of belated juvenilia and deciding that the less said, the better for all concerned.

15. p119 Which would have meant almost total self-destruction, given the timing and the reactionary bent of my underlying motivations (See Note 6 above).

16. p119 While incorporating commentary into this document, I find myself comparing this “memoir of sorts” to a chess game in which the pursuit of Truth is one Queen and pursuit of Beauty the other. But that suggests a competitive quid pro quo in which SW and I represent either black or white (or white or black)—and it’s not so. A better analogy might be a tennis court whose low-slung net’s spacious openings allow for all balls hit, lobbed, swatted back, and otherwise hit again to pass from one side of the court to the other in a playful volley of ideas. I only hope that no one reading this text closely will think of its co-creators as Beauty *or* the Beast, for I know I might not fare well in that assessment!

When I wonder if in our taped interviews and these Notes I may have been painting late Sixties Bard with too broad a brush, I hear the Rolling Stones’ *PAINT IT BLACK* being broadcast from Stone Row! So I repeat my disclaimer: I am not attempting to conjure up the college except during one of its many phases between an earlier period pre-WWII and a later revival under the baton of President Botstein, which periods pre- and postdate my firsthand experiences from 1966–70. Definitely heady times, they were perhaps neither the best nor the worst of times in the history of the college, but they were undeniably troubling times mirroring troubles in society at large. May the checks and balances built into this biography-autobiography tone down any of my own overstatements.

By the same token, at instances I wonder if SW is putting undue emphasis on the mission, goals, and strategies of the institution, espousing the official party story. Yet those professed ideals did chime with my own, echoing the residual values inculcated during my upbringing. For four years, Bard's buildings and grounds, as well as its ideals and mores, didn't simply surround me; they permeated me. I recall an exchange made in the dining hall during my senior year. Somehow a transfer student and I found ourselves seated across from each other and we spoke. "You look like you've been at Bard for four years," he quipped, directing toward me his general contempt for what he had thus far observed all around him. I don't know how long he lasted at the college. I do know that for four years I belonged in that place, and that place belonged in me. And to think that it wasn't even until my sophomore and junior years that I discovered the fuller extent of the campus' natural world—the Bard lands with their meadows and their woods and the wildlife of the painterly Hudson under its cinematic sunset views.

17. p119 Barnes and I were only briefly housemates in Katonah that summer when my older brother took an authorized leave from his counseling responsibilities at camp in order to pursue an all-expenses-paid tryout for the Pittsburgh Steelers professional football team. In his senior year at Middlebury College, at 6'7" his bulky frame had made him a force on the varsity's first line of defense; scouts had seen serious potential. At the time I was repulsed by the sport and appalled to witness his brutalizing workouts conducted in the backyard while he conditioned himself for the big tryout. After three days with the Steelers' recruits, Barnes stopped in on his way back to Vermont: "I had learned all I needed to know," the 23-year-old had written in a diary of the 3-day trial by fire. "I don't want to play pro ball. I want to teach. I want to raise a family. I want to be at camp." It was many decades later that I read his detailed log of those 72 hours and was humbled by his impressive consciousness—almost prescience—of the priorities in which he would ultimately succeed beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

18. p119 Dimly is as dimly was!

19. p119 Why did I first visit the Catholic Worker Farm? Was it to hear a publicized talk or attend a poetry reading? My anti-war sentiments could easily have drawn me to this nursery of resistance. I had no idea that the summer of 1967 would be only the first of my real-life experiments in intentional communal living and voluntary poverty.

20. p121 I admit to experiencing a perverse pleasure in the dorm when sharing the company of a changing parade of down-and-out characters who struck me as old-fashioned hobos and, experienced novella-ist that I was, I imbued them with a certain picturesque charm! I grew to spot these visitors who were strictly on the take, using the CWF as a way station on their indeterminate itineraries: a place where a meal, a cot, a change of clothes—all distributed without charge—could be had before they found their way back down to the New York Central Railroad tracks that ran right along the river at the bottom of Rose Hill Lane's gravel drive. During my short stay, a few "draft dodgers"—whose individual circumstances meant they had to make their way to Canada surreptitiously—stopped in, finding food, shelter, and comradeship before resuming their solitary routes

to exile. Meeting them, my student deferment let me luxuriate in the Liberal Guilt in which, early in life, I had been well-schooled.

21. p122 The one and only one Reginald Highhill!

22. p122 I could be wrong. Whatever I may have said into her recording device may have been woefully un- or underinformed. After all, wasn't I only a transient there myself? I do know that, under the circumstances, I would never have been bandying about terms like "shirker" or "free-loader" back then, although Farmer John did.

23. p123 It makes for a good, gruesome anecdote, like some mortification-of-the-flesh story lifted out of THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV—but who knows how true?

24. p123 There must have been hard-core members/servants of the Christian community living at Tivoli with whom I never interacted, probably never met. These were the ones who kept out of sight and the daily fray but managed to keep the wheels turning in the kitchen and the laundry, not to omit mention of those who regularly fed feature articles to and maintained columns in the *CW*. There may have been legitimate activities on acreage farther from the central area which I never witnessed; perhaps there were genuine agricultural projects being initiated out there "on the land."

25. p123 I am heartened to confirm once again how thoroughly SW has done her homework; to Dorothy Day's list, I myself would have to add "and her Pall Malls."

26. p124 Another curious aside: In the October 1970 obituary, Dorothy Day wrote that "[Peggy] did not go in for 'spiritual reading.' One was much more apt to find James Joyce's ULYSSES, a detective story, or some poetry in her hands." I still own that selfsame copy of Random House's New Edition (1961) of ULYSSES and confess to cherishing the telltale cigarette burn that graces the front—near the spine—of its clothbound cover. It wasn't there before I lent the book to Peggy.

27. p124 If accused of elderly abuse, would I be found innocent in a fair trial or perhaps merely judged incompetent and ignorant at the time and released on someone or other's cognizance? My 19-year-old naivety had blinded me to the full extent of the human being suffering right before my eyes. Had I ever been face-to-face—without a protective shield—with such a blend of penury, illness, and old age? I must have been pained to observe her abandoned to her own devices and the inadequate care of others. Yet instead of tending to the woman's needs for comfort and cleanliness or getting others better qualified than I was to do so, I came and went, enthralled by her legacy, appalled by her condition, overlooking her pain.

First and foremost I experienced that woman as a symbolic type: she was *my* noble wounded woman, *my* warrior fallen in the battlefields of poetry, painting, and politics. Even now in this self-critique I may be reducing Peggy to an image, a figure, a prototype of this and an archetype of that, a figment of a stereotypical literary imagination that never goes on vacation. My lackluster response to the wretchedness of the entire situation reflects a chronic self-centeredness, too, with

which I am blessed for the better and cursed for the worse. Peggy was a person then and, if I can honestly honor her memory, remains a person to me even now. She may have knowingly suffered my insouciance. Perhaps she was as smitten with me as I with her! Was I to her just the latest in a long history of adoring suitors—another puppy dog or kitten to be tolerated like the rest?

A propensity to glamorize was part of my immature, compulsive overthinking. Let go out of control, such Romanticization could become a house of mirrors mirroring mirrors ad infinitum—a funhouse not helpful to anyone! In my interactions with Peggy Cowley, by emotionally distancing myself in a self-indulgent typology I kept my experience at least twice removed, a self-defensive measure for a vulnerable young man. I think the recurrent stylization at play in the films of Alain Resnais—evident throughout his oeuvre but writ large in narrative outings such as *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD* (1959), *STAVISKY* (1974), and *MÉLO* (1986)—represents a more conscious mode of active imagination, and became a model toward which I aspired and in my case learned to label “creative writing.”

28. p125 The Justice of the Peace threw the book at me just as hard as he could, and at some point in this fandango I figured out the ploy. Apparently none of the protestors’ behavior at the post office had been illegal enough to warrant arrest but driving a vehicle with an expired registration—that cried out for the guillotine! Executing a routine roadside check outside the Town of Red Hook itself, the County Sheriff enabled the Justice of the Peace to wield his gavel of petty-mindedness with the full blunt of county and state violations regarding New York State vehicular code violations.

29. p125 Imagine if my skin had been other than white or my accent other than standard American English.

30. p126 The career change was printed up on the “People” page of the *New York Times* (September 13, 1967) p.58. I distinctly remember my mother later insinuating that the departure from J. Walter Thompson had not been her former husband’s choice, that his drinking problem—in an industry that kept its fleet afloat on problematic drinking—had sunk his future prospects at JWT. Was it a sideways move or a demotion? I’ll never know, but par for the course my mother had managed to sow seeds of doubt without disclosing any details or responding to my further inquiries. She was good at that sort of destructive behavior, her habitual way of impugning fault then stonewalling any pursuit of the case i.e. her mother’s history and her sister’s story.

31. p128 Those six lines from Baudelaire’s sonnet “*Correspondances*” (1857) are preceded by these eight:

Nature is a temple where living pillars  
Sometimes let loose confusing words;  
Man passes through forests of symbols  
Observing him with familiar looks.

Like distant echoes mingling  
Into a deep and shadowy whole,  
Vast as the darkness and the light,  
Scents, colors, and sounds respond.

## CHAPTER 6: 1967–68

His settling back in at Bard that fall went “under-noticed at best.”

*No one wove circles round me thrice. In Tivoli I had fed on neither honey-dew nor drunk the milk of Paradise. But I was much relieved to be back in my future alma mater's arms.*

His lodging situation improved. Leaving behind the dreaded “Dwelling Unit,” he inhabited his own room in Albee Hall. He had a window that opened and closed and his own door opening into or closing upon a central space in the three-room suite. Once upon a time, that middle chamber must have been a salon/study area for a pair of suitemates but, as with the “DU” it had been converted into yet another place to house a student in the ongoing crunch on campus. “Now I was the intruder passing in and out of someone else’s bedroom!” Whenever Peter did his laundry in Stone Row next door, the Jimi Hendrix Experience was making purple haze out of smoke clouding the basement while Donald Fagan and Walter Becker and a changing cast of characters seemed to be striking poses in some tableau of The Poker Game. Chevy Chase was there too, and here, and everywhere, busy winning friends and influencing people. But those Bardians who went on to become so rich and so famous were unaware of the return student starting out on his second year, and Peter shuddered while conveying to me just how sophomoric he really was. During his first year, he had distanced himself from personal relationships. At the start of his second year he was still too self-conscious to carry himself in and out of intimacies with genuine self-confidence. Casting about for an all-purpose persona whose artificial and/or artifactual mask would fit the contours of his natural face, jejune affectations like smoking a tobacco pipe instead of cigarettes and using a fountain pen instead of a ballpoint proved “mercifully” short lived.

By the end of fall semester, sophomores customarily had to decide upon their dominant course of studies within the broader program of the liberal arts, and by the end of the following spring a degree of proficiency in that major had to be demonstrated in order to begin one’s junior year in the upper college. Peter chose literature over psychology. He confessed on tape that during that period his concept of the latter was mostly a projection of his own narcissistic preoccupations written large upon a discipline whose subsets he had yet to discern. Except for aspects of clinical psychology pertinent to his own psychotherapy (“... and my psychologizing pretty much everything else problematical that came my way....”), he was not inspired by any notion of conducting research in experimental psychology or pursuing an academic career as a professor of historical psychology. Reading and writing about literature, on the other hand, was intrinsically engaging, and picking up a set of skills in analytical literary criticism seemed crucial and came easily enough.

He assumes that it was sometime that fall he began keeping a private journal and thinks it may have struck him as an appropriate or even requisite activity for a young man steeping himself in arts and letters—"a wannabe don of Annandale and beyond." Unlike pipe and fountain pen, the journaling turned out to be no ephemeral pretense, and by his own account it has evolved into a lifelong and at times lifesaving enterprise. Peter has preserved almost seventy standard-issue, wide-ruled, 100-sheet schoolchildren's composition books measuring 9 X 7 inches, but the first extant journal dates from 1978. The earliest batch from college years proved non-salvageable after water damage, and the next lot went missing owing to some highly peripatetic years.

His journaling practice has served various functions over the decades: as a secret diary, as a scrap-book, as a safe haven for his rants and ravings. He has unsystematically collected citations there, usually the words of writers whose literary aphorisms, opinions, and sayings moved him or just caught his ear and seemed worth squirreling away. These commonplace books caught and held onto quips overheard, quick sketches, short scenes observed, and undeveloped vignettes—occasional and incidental in nature. Their pages eventually became blank slates for drafting and re-drafting outlines of literary projects and essays struggling towards his better understanding of artists and works of art.

*At the time of their entries into the journals, the quotations always seem of enough importance—whether of gravitas or levity—to merit sustained and repeat attention. I've copied many lengthy ones longhand, a method I still practice for its pacing of thought and its enforcement of concentration. I think others must do this too, when wanting to apprehend the meaning of another person's written words. But perhaps most consistently and insistently of all, the journals have been that quiet space where I've recorded my dreaming and meditated upon its meanings. Revisiting the journals and those dreams offers its own rewards—and perils. "People who keep journals have life twice." [Ed. note: Jessamyn West, American author (1902-84)] People who have nightmares have nightmares twice.*

Whether viewed as entertainment, education, or merely a grab bag of curiosities, he maintains a proprietary interest in the journals and has not allowed me to handle them, although he himself has periodically drawn on these "private" papers for this "memoir of sorts."

*Out of respect for friends, acquaintances, and family (living and dead), I plan always to keep this material under wraps. That way I can spare all parties examples of my more outdated ravings and rants, most of which are simply not suitable for public ear or eye.*

\*

Besides knuckling down to his studies and flirting with a coed or two, Peter wrote and rewrote poems—short, lyrical, oblique [Ed. note: See the first five poems in **THE BOOK KEEPS CHANGES** under POEMS on the author's website [www.peterboffey.com](http://www.peterboffey.com)]. For the first time in his life, he braved airing them in a reading. He forgets how it came about, but he and Thomas Meyer and maybe one other fledgling like himself initiated a gathering under the roof of Aspinwall Hall—a simple, lowkey event in which audience reception and attendance would be understated

at best. Peter read some of his sparse, lean pieces, and Tom (“... always farther along than I’ve ever been in all matters poetical...”) was reading from his work when Steven Kushner and a couple of his fellow raiders crashed into the room and disrupted the affair. Peter took offense at the insensitive antics and left in protest. The following day, Kush sought him out and apologized, explaining the higher purpose of his aggressive gesture as some latter-day Dadaistic aesthetic in action, all of it meant in good fun. <sup>1</sup>

*Bard has always been lousy with poets. Famous, infamous, non-remembered—poets at Bard certainly pre- and postdated my short four years there. The best known would be longtime faculty members Anthony Hecht (at Bard 1952–55; 1962–66), John Ashbery (at Bard 1990–2008), Bradford Morrow (at Bard since 1990), and Robert Kelly (at Bard since 1961). Kessler had edited The Lampeter Muse (1967–1968) before Norman Weinstein took the baton (1968–69); upon his graduation, Weinstein passed it to me (1969–70); and on my way out I passed the torch to Bruce McClelland (1970–71). In 1968, Stephen Kessler graduated, but Kush stayed on the scene, never shying off from public campus performances of his poetics.*

[Ed. note: Steven Samuel Kushner, widely known as Kush, is founder and sole proprietor of Cloudhouse (“Whitman breathes here”), a unique living museum and archive of 20<sup>th</sup> c. American poetry which has functioned as a center for audio-visual recording, poetry readings, poets-arts performances and installations, and a space housing literary history collectibles. While serving as the poet-driven curator’s private living space, Cloudhouse has enjoyed lengthy residences in Manhattan and San Francisco and is currently inhabiting the Mid-Hudson River Valley some twenty miles up the road from Annandale.]

\*

Peter’s appetite for knowledge about divergent schools of psychology represented by Freud, Jung, and the third-stream Humanists remained alive and well, but his hunger for the language of literature proved insatiable. For his second winter field break, he was granted permission to take a crash course in the theories of literary criticism still dominating American letters at the time. His advisor helped him develop a syllabus of basic readings in the so called New Criticism so that he could gain a basic understanding of their approach, purportedly more scientific and formalistic than Romantic.

As the holidays neared, the three Boffey boys were invited on short notice to attend their father’s sudden wedding:

Bedford Village, NY, Dec. 22—Mrs. Jane G. Cotton, daughter of the late G.V. Cotton of London, was married this afternoon to David M. Boffey, son of Mrs. Frederick George Boffey of New York and the late Mr. Boffey. The Rev. Thomas A. Hughart performed the ceremony in the Bedford Presbyterian Church. The bridegroom is a vice president of Ted

Bates & Co., the advertising agency. Both he and his wife have been previously married and divorced. [*NY Times*, Saturday, December 23, 1967, p.13]

The newlyweds may have been thrilled to have pulled off this coup (“... and almost in Nancy Boffey’s backyard!”), but the second son’s enduring memory is of an awful incident at the reception. Barnes, Peter, and Dan<sup>2</sup> were called aside for a closed-door conference with their father and new stepmother. Practical matters about the new marrieds’ living situation merited illumination, but when the boys broached needling questions—questions crying out for clarification—about their father’s financial support, all civil discourse unraveled as the new Mrs. Boffey bolted from the room, weeping operatically.

Peter related how his father’s speedy resumption of a marital contract cast a spooky shadow over Christmas festivities at 35 Harris Road that year. Aunt Janet shuttled back and forth between Christmas trees, torn between her loyalties to “Mills” and her devotion to his three boys. In the New Year, once she had returned to NYC and Peter’s younger brother had gone back to Ithaca College, Nancy Boffey was Queen Bee of a semi-empty house. Barnes was staying on in Katonah while teaching in the public school district, and Peter was academically in residence.

*At the apex of my superficial, snobbish roleplaying, in the middle of my second year, I appropriated a bar cart and made of it a rolling station for my winter’s reading project. Besides supplies for making notes, I remember that library on wheels included:*

- WEBSTER’S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1961)
- Blackmur’s FORM AND VALUE IN MODERN POETRY (1952)
- Ransom’s NEW CRITICISM (1941)
- Richard’s MEANING OF MEANING (1923) and PRACTICAL CRITICISM (1929)
- Empson’s SEVEN TYPES OF AMBIGUITY (3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition, 1953)
- T.S. Eliot’s SACRED WOOD (1920)

*And just to balance the collective weight of those—or throw them off altogether—I plowed through ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS IN POETRY: PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN IMAGINATION (1934) by Maud Bodkin.*

*What an unsufferable sophomoric bore I had become.*

Relocating in Annandale toward the end of February, armed to the teeth with his newly acquired theories of New Criticism and whatever conventional wisdom he’d picked up and held onto without a second thought (“... and was prepared to parrot like the 20-year-old disciple of an academic approach I was....”), Peter tackled his preparations for the Moderation process with nothing but earnestness, choosing as his focus “Human Suffering in OEDIPUS REX”—a subject light and airy NOT! But it seems too harsh to portray him as an entirely humorless undergrad; he did again avail himself of regular events airlifted to the mid-Hudson River Valley’s cultural island. He never missed a live poetry reading brought to Bard courtesy of Meyer and/or Kelly, or a live musical



performance, or a film in Sottery Hall shown for the general community or, better yet, a rarity snuck in for private screening by a small, select, informal band of *cinéastes* following Steven Horvath and Peter Minichiello's informed leadership.

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JAN 30: Tet Offensive puts the lie to US gov't propaganda.

FEB 7: AP quotes US Army major in Vietnam: "It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it."

APRIL 4: MLK, Jr. assassinated.

PRAGUE SPRING.

*PARIS MAI.*

JUNE 4: RFK assassinated.

This sampling of the historical timeline suggests why *Smithsonian Magazine* dubbed 1968 "The Year That Shattered America." A critical mass of citizens from all walks of life began to protest, especially TV babies who had cut their milk-teeth on passive consumption, taking to the streets en masse, fangs bared. Peter wore a new Pentax 35mm SLR camera around his neck and joined a rally in Poughkeepsie and a march in Manhattan. So called street photography was all the rage. Like most baby boomers, he'd been suckled on *LIFE* magazine photojournalism then on his own initiative followed the black-and-white still photography produced by artists associated with Magnum and Aperture. Photo-essays by Eugene Smith, Pirkle Jones, and Bresson were now as compelling to him as the historical output of the Group f/64 photographs had once been (and would continue to be). His photographic antennae were oriented in divergent directions, the classic and the avant-garde, and he wanted to use the camera's lens to document the drama of the seismic social disruptions but from an individualistic point of view. Photography provided one way for him to stay engaged yet keep his distance from the onslaught of information coming in from any direction he turned and threatening to swamp him. Looking back, he summarized his foray into photography as "a brief and only somewhat successful marriage of his public political and private aesthetic sensibilities."<sup>3</sup>

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As the spring wound up then down then out, Peter's mother was ruling the roost on the nominal home front, having negotiated a lump sum alimony payment and taken full possession of the "carriage house" property. She was also making herself indispensable at Donald L. Ferguson Tours, both in its Katonah home office and on her first trips working for the company at sea and on land. [Ed. note: See p.47, Note 2, Chapter 2, Part One in *3NLs* for more about the multiple impacts of her post-divorce career in the hospitality industry.] Plus, enjoying her new freedom, Nancy Ellen Boffey had been dating, which became clear when Peter showed up at 35 Harris Road at semester's end in June without a summer plan.

Within a week he was boarding a plane bound for Europe. It happened swiftly. The main man courting his mother's favors ("... and presumably winning them...") was an executive on the sales

side of the private jet business who wanted Peter out of the way ASAP. Procuring a ticket on Icelandic Airlines, the pioneer of low-cost travel, would promptly put the middle Boffey boy 4,000 miles away. Peter accepted the gift. On his way to JFK Airport, he spent his one and only night ever in his father and stepmother's high-rise apartment in midtown Manhattan where, to facilitate the summer vacation, David Boffey offered to advance him several hundred dollars, which he had previously planned to present upon his son's eventual graduation. Peter accepted the gift. With his journal and the latest edition of *EUROPE ON \$5 A DAY* in his knapsack, with only the thinnest of sleeping bags, a few toiletries, and one change of clothes, he took off—"with no letters of introduction from anyone even remotely related to Henry Adams, alas." <sup>4</sup>

He confessed that during the first week after disembarking at the Luxembourg Airport, he was as likely to find himself waking up in the shrubbery of a well-kempt public garden, where uniformed schoolgirls were being led down crushed granite paths "... *à la Madeline*....;" or in an overgrown vacant field outside a mountain village, where an elderly man with a cane walked his barking dog on a leash; or in some stranger's bed. Still without a plan, by his own account he reverted to a pattern of drinking, smoking, and reckless encounters "... without knowing who was prey and who was predator..." <sup>5</sup> In Amsterdam he discovered the many benefits of visiting American Express offices abroad. He'd left home without any credit card, but he found out that a traveler in or out of distress could avail themselves of services at any AMEXCO like buying or cashing traveler's checks, exchanging currency, and buying travel tickets. And our nomad came to rely upon the ability to get mail, or at least check for it, at their General Delivery windows, to transmit telegrams, and to make long distance calls from phone booths banked up against the walls. From Amsterdam he sent out two or three feelers to the leads he'd received when rushing out of New York on the wing.

Awaiting responses (none ever came), he walked around Amsterdam, hanging out in cafés and bars. In one of them he met a woman named Dorothy who took him to her attic room where her boyfriend nearly caught them in flagrante delicto. "Skip" was a restless young Hollander stuck working his way up in the shipping industry with zero desire to rise through those ranks. He was also stuck in conflicting relationships with two young women and, it became clear, more inclined toward Maria, less toward Dorothy, who seemed openminded about the whole situation of the twentysomethings. The young Dutchman occupied a cottage on a train line carrying commuters in and out of city center, and the ever adaptable traveler was invited to stay there for a while. Peter accepted the offer. He later figured that Skip, intrigued by a footloose American, must have reckoned that offloading Dorothy onto the visitor might approximate a solution, if only temporarily, to his romantic entanglements.

By day, Skip went to work. Peter slept in, rose at leisure, and eventually made his way to the city where museums large and small provided him eyefuls of the art which to this day remains some of his favorite. In that time, one could drop in to view Rembrandts, Vermeers, Hals, and Van Goghs without advanced reservations or timed entries; he made multiple visits. Spontaneously entering alone into quieter galleries in his casual student-traveler attire, he remembers docents and guards

treating him as a suspect casing the joints for future or maybe immediate opportunistic burglaries. By evening, the quartet drank too much Heineken and smoked too many cigarettes. One night they reveled in a subterranean Haarlem club and ran half-naked on the beach at Zandvoort. Peter remembers harboring a fancy for Maria, which must have shown, accelerating the end of the finely balanced arrangement. But before Skip's juggling act fell apart, his host took Peter to meet his mother and father on the obligatory Sunday visit to the family tulip farm. The older man obviously doubted the value of the young American's presence, however passing, in his son's life.

*For a while I found myself sitting alone in the parlor with this stout, sun-burnished man with large, hard-worked hands. I remember the absolutely sullen silence with which whatever nonsense I spouted was met, and with good reason, and not just because his English was slight. [Ed. note: This scene fuels the deep background and specific memories of Pieter Tuelling, major character in Books Five & Six of 3NLs, passim.]*

With news from TB at AMEXCO, having worn out his welcome and usefulness in the foursome's edgy affair, Peter left for an address in Germany where his former secondary schoolmate was supposed to be spending time.

The rest of his summer played out in a similar fashion, "... my itinerary determined by sheer self-centered opportunism." World-renowned museums and parks in big cities provided unsupervised continuing education; bars, bistros, and hitchhiking provided chance encounters of luck—both good and bad.

*Given the vacuum of any overriding purpose, I suppose I regressed to my earlier teenage ways of coping. For better and worse I chased down a few former friends and references. I occasionally located them too and threw myself onto their mercy, sometimes receiving it. Nothing to write home about with any truthfulness or pride.*

\*

"*Das Trampen auf der Autobahn ist verboten!*" He was eventually apprehended by a humorless representative of the *Motorradpolizist* dressed in an outfit even more intimidating than those worn by the motorcyclists Peter knew from Cocteau's ORPHÉE (1950). Neither spoke the language of the other, but the *Offizier* had no difficulty communicating that the passport-bearing American was to get off the highway, which strong suggestion Peter obeyed until the *Polizist* was well out of sight. At his destination in rural SW Germany, Peter learned that his friend had been there and gone. The landlady spoke no English; neither did her husband who shrugged and returned to making coffins in his workshop downstairs. She sat him down by the upstairs window and served fresh strawberries and cream, which he relished while gazing out upon the tidy village square as she dug up TB's forwarding address and wrote it out for him.

Summertime's vagabond appeared unannounced at the apartment building located in a small burg becoming a suburb about midway between Zurich and Rapperswil on the northern shore of the

Zürichsee. TB was staying with JEB, another Williston grad, who was sojourning in Switzerland to evade conscription back home. JEB's Swiss girlfriend held the rental agreement to the studio apartment; so began another provisional quartet but of a different sort. During the days, when she went to her office job, the three males made desultory excursions in the area. On weekends, under the softening influence of her feminine presence, the party made daytrips together: to a mountain meadow for a picnic; to a Biergarten in Rapperswil; and, per usual, on the mandatory Sunday visit to her family house in Schaffhausen, where her father worked as an executive manager in a chocolate factory nearby ("... and naturally enough looked askance at all three of his daughter's companions..."). Uninformed and uninvited, the Americans went to call on Jung's Bolingen Tower thirty kilometers away, where they wisely heeded the fencing and private property signage and left—"... none the wiser..." Evenings, one or two of them would walk to the local beer house to refill several brown ceramic-stoppered glass liter-size bottles. On a couple of occasions, after lights out, Peter and TB adjourned to the bathroom for sloppy, nocturnal trysts of unhappy sex.

Peter and his main host JEB had never got on well in Easthampton MA and didn't get along in Switzerland now, and this last sexual complication only deepened the wedge between them.<sup>6</sup> Instead of hanging around the apartment, Peter took to visiting the city of Zurich solo. There he loitered on Linderhof Hill where earnest contestants moved life-size chess pieces on a giant chess board in surreal, open-aired competitions. And wandered through public spaces with room to fantasize about the defunct Cabaret Voltaire, an historical hotspot of Dadaism. And rode Tram #6 to the end of line in order to visit Joyce's gravesite in the Fluntern Cemetery in Zürichberg. There were bookstores where he bought British editions of Joyce's *POMES PENYEACH* (1966) and Beckett's *POEMS IN ENGLISH* (1961) and the *SELECTED CANTOS OF EZRA POUND* (1967), volumes slim enough to fit into his lightweight travel pack. He also picked up a paperback edition of Jung's *MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS* (1963)—the first of at least three copies he would over the years exhaust through usage then replace. Roaming about Old Town, he felt himself rocked against his will in the cradle of Calvinism. Sitting by Lake Zurich, his contemplations re-dipped him in the baptismal waters of his own Protestant past. Contemplating black swans on Lake Zurich, reading from Beckett, Joyce, Pound and Jung, he grew restless and ravenous for further experience. One day he abruptly left the others to their *menage à trois*—a move he imagines was welcomed by his host, his hostess, and his partner in the dark.

\*

Toward nightfall, the hitchhiker got a lift in a miniature, 2-door Fiat sedan driven by an off-duty Italian truckdriver in a hurry to get to Northern Italy in order to pick up a load—or at least that was the rider's understanding. They shared no common language. Peter's Italian was limited to the names and titles of famous painters and sculptors, famous authors and directors of famous books and famous movies, none of which fame elicited a single response of recognition from the other man. Even Dante Alighieri's name, however poorly Peter pronounced it, rang no bells. After much sign language, the driver made it clear that he was exhausted and had picked up the *autostoppista* in hopes that the hitchhiker would be able to take over the steering wheel while he slept. Peter

showed him his New York State driver's license; the man shook his head No. So they sat in silence, resigned to a long, foggy, precarious transit over the St. Gotthard Pass. At some point Peter came to as the car skidded to a stop, barely missing the broad side of a cow which had materialized in the middle of the drizzling darkness. The driver swore and pulled over at the next roadside inn to recharge with a couple of shots of something alcoholic. In grainy dawn light hours later, Peter picked out the exit sign for Padua and, remembering having read about its Botanical Garden and Giotto's 14<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes, saw it reason enough to be let off on the shoulder of the highway and watch the lights of the trucker driver's miniscule automobile disappear.

Soon a member of the multitude of the lower-income travelers touring Venice, he checked into a youth hostel and did what others of his ilk did, taking *vaporettos* over bodies of water, crossing footbridges over canals, gawking in St. Mark's Square, touring the cathedral—barely scraping the scintillant surface while visiting other landmarks in the legendary “city of lust.” In Rome, traditional “city of envy,” he wound up following suit but did manage to make contact with a Catholic sister who resided in a modest boarding house almost literally on the border of Vatican City. What he expected to achieve by meeting her was not clear to either one. He'd received her name and the number of the *pensione* from an Irish friend of the Boffey family in New York. From her window he could see the pigeons rising above the dome, banking there, and descending to Saint Peter's Square below. After tea and courtesy, he went off on his own again.

Renewing his search for some friendly hospitality and affordable accommodations other than the Roman youth hostel, he pursued another credible lead proffered by his stepmother who had provided him with contact information for one of her longtime bosom buddies, a Britisher who had taken up permanent residence there, making a career of freelance English language tutoring and translating. His prospective hostess had even been notified in advance that the young man might show up. They rendezvoused at some public address in Trastevere, where she preceded to lead him though the district like a puppy barely off the leash. As an insider, she took him to a chapel with frescoes not as grandiose or well-known as those in the Villa Farnesina or the Basilica of Santa Maria—all the more special for being lesser known. His conversation is embroidered by laughter as Peter recollected the faces of the citizenry with their expressions of shock, amusement, and contempt for the brazen older woman and her young gigolo in tow, the pair finally sitting at one of the trattorias spilling out into the street with one long table covered by butcher paper on which red wine was set out and generous platters of food dispensed. He finally got around to proposing that he sleep at her place—on a couch, on the floor, in a chair, it didn't matter to him, and received a firm NON.

*She was just young enough, her cleavage just ample enough. She may have detected a whiff of evil intent—which I will neither admit nor deny! However disappointed, anointed by the olive oil and carafes of holy wine that seemed to keep refilling themselves miraculously along with the food spilling off our plates. She made me a list of the plazas and fountains and palazzos I simply must visit during my stay. I said goodbye, we parted amiably enough. Arrivederci!*

He did make the requisite visits to those historic sites but, having found that all the roads that led him to Rome had led him to a dead end (“... basically, not being taken care of by someone...!”), he soon got himself to Florence, fabled “city of greed.”

After his living quarters in Venice and Rome, he was in no mood for more of the *concentrazione* of agitations to be found in another crowded youth hostel but he had no other addresses or ready alternatives. The escapism of pure tourism saved his few days in Florence as the riches of the city’s artistic treasures stimulated the gluttonous aesthete. He let himself be transported by the sites, and at every turn a new Renaissance fantasy fed his insatiable appetite. Once, missing curfew, he found himself locked out of the hostel so returned to the café where he’d left a pair of graduate students, “... two pretty boys from Princeton who had befriended me at the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa—no kidding!” Try as he may to persuade them, they could not allow him to sleep in their hotel room but, sympathetic to the younger traveler, they proposed a solution. If he borrowed one of their tickets for the next morning’s departing train, he would most likely be allowed to pass the night in the station, upon demand showing the *polize* the proof of his legitimacy. Peter accepted the solution. They entrusted a ticket to him and, after a sleepless night on a hard bench, he returned it to their hotel desk at dawn and decided to leave the city. Back at the hostel by daybreak, he retrieved his belongings and checked out without a clue how best to get out of town. “Then it happened.” [Ed. note: A sentence at a decisive moment in Dante’s LA VITA NUOVA].

The author, verbatim:

*I was tromping down a tree-lined side street in earliest morning when a Vespa pulled to the curb. The young woman straddling it asked if I wanted a lift to city center. She wore a soft top tucked into a wide belt atop a billowy summer skirt. Brunette hair, brown eyes, white teeth, lips.... If she’d introduced herself as Claudia Cardinale’s twin sister I’d have believed her! I got on and—completely turned on—held on to her hips of all things! I gathered from her words tossed back over flowing waves that she worked as an instructor in English at the Berlitz school and as a free-lance translator from her native Italian. And would I like to stop for a cappuccino...? Would I like...?!? I’m not making this up either, I swear it.*

*When she parked the scooter on a bridge over the Arno, I confessed that I wasn’t exactly sure what a cappuccino was. She laughed and took me into a teeny bar, ordering for both of us, needless to say. As a rule I wasn’t even drinking coffee those days—too many jitters for one already high-strung lad. The first espresso, in fact the only espresso I had drunk before then, had been years prior at another teeny outlet, but it was a Puerto Rican food stall on one of those narrow elliptical islands that used to sit in the middle of Upper Broadway—I don’t know if they still do. Out of curiosity I had tried a simple espresso there for thirty or forty or fifty cents and was shocked by the minute quantity in the tiny cup. I downed it—dense, bitter, intense, the way I like coffee today.*

*I'd read in translation Dante's NEW LIFE (1294) and THE DIVINE COMEDY (1472), but this was no comedy for me. I don't think we were on the Ponte Santa Trinità or its replica, but she was my Beatrice in the flesh and my Virgil all rolled up into one! But of course she wouldn't succumb to my pleading to take me with her that day on her trip to spend a week at the family summer residence in the countryside. Of course she didn't take my crush on her—or hers on me—seriously! She was a twenty-three- or twenty-four- or twenty-five-year-old coquette. I was an oversexed twenty-year-old. So who was the cat and who the canary? Psychoanalysis to the rescue? Forgetaboutit!*

*She looked at me with those moist brown eyes and said, "Mi scusi..." I grabbed my pack and followed her outside. I don't remember actually falling to the pavement on my knees or uttering per favore prego please prego please let me come along!—but I well may have. How I longed for her to put me back on that scooter with my hands on her hips again and let her lead me to eternal perdition if it meant a single spell of luxe, calme, et volupté with the likes of her! She mounted the Vespa, coaxed it off its kickstand with one espadrille, and rode off smiling, waving—Ciao!—leaving me standing on a bridge over the Arno on a beautiful sunlit morning in the middle of August—with a bad case of the jitters indeed.<sup>7</sup>*

When I tried to measure how serious was Peter's reference to LA VITA NUOVA, he laughed, confessing that I shouldn't make that chance encounter into too elaborate a conceit. "Besides, you should know by now that half of what comes out of my mouth is meant ironically—the better half."

\*

Peter can't remember how he got to Paris but he recalls knowing it would be the last stop on his less than grand tour. He was tired and tired of traveling light, compensating for the books he'd acquired along the way by cannibalizing Frommer's bulky EUROPE ON 5\$ A DAY, extracting the portion on the City of Light and chucking the rest concerning places he'd been and places he wouldn't be going. His budget allowed him to splurge on a couple of nights in the garret of a small, nondescript hotel off la Place da la Contrescarpe, where he dealt with his first bidet and shared the WC down the hall. He described the establishment as if it hadn't been deep-cleaned since Agnès Varda filmed L'OPÉRA RUE MOUFFE (1958) on the street below, but its Latin Quarter location and lore suited his fancy and fantasies. Another former Willistonian, who had been his roommate at the time of Peter's expulsion, was staying in a suite of rooms with his parents and brother at the Hôtel Ritz Paris. Peter visited him there once and noticed the difference between their accommodations.

He may not have asked himself why the Parisian metropolis felt familiar but now suspects that his general sense of déjà vu was due to thorough preconditioning. Since well before he could remember, he'd been steeped in French-influenced ideas of civilization—in its cinema, literature, arts, fashion. He says that while growing up he may as well have been systematically "brainwashed" to believe in some inherent superiority to most if not all things French. He'd been prepared to explore

the capital of France and, as a New Yorker, “quick to out-pique the Parisians when it came to speaking some French.” [Ed. note: France and particularly Paris are settings of significance in **2HBs** in the timeframe including the months of May and August 1968].

The Métro was easier to comprehend and navigate than the subways of NYC. Visiting the Louvre, the Musée de l’Orangerie, and the Cimetière du Père-Lachaise all came as second nature. He haunted the Jardin des Plantes, the Tuileries, and the Trocadero, where he became an habitué at Henri Langlois’ Cinémathèque Française, then sited in a lower section of the Palais de Chaillot.<sup>8</sup> Economies were such that he had to retreat to the youth hostel off the Place d’Italie, which proved to be as hostile to his preferences as the others had. Once or twice he stayed out so late that he was once or twice again locked out for the night. He now wonders if he missed the curfew willfully so that he’d be forced to walk the streets of nighttime Paris without being able to recite exactly who had preceded him in centuries past but aware that he was following myriad invisible tracks.

In June the Poor People’s March on Washington DC had transpired. August 8<sup>th</sup> Nixon was nominated as the Republican Party’s presidential candidate at the National Convention in Miami. August 28<sup>th</sup> the world watched on TV as the Chicago police went on a rampage against peaceful demonstrators at the Democratic National Convention. But none of these events hit the traveler like Russia’s August 20<sup>th</sup> invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was front page news throughout the Western World, but it was especially poignant for Peter because he happened to be in Paris—only 1,000 kilometers west of Prague and, although a generation had passed since the Nazis likewise came from the East to occupy their capital and country, the French citizenry seemed to express a collective and spontaneous solidarity with the victims of such a bald powerplay. Peter experienced a palpable sorrow throughout the city. The extensive coverage in the press only confirmed the ideological travesty of brute force. True to type, he found it a good excuse to dive into his newly purchased copy of *LES POÈTES MAUDITS* (1884) by Verlaine while drinking far too many glasses of *vin ordinaire*, smoking far too much black tobacco, and far too many times “... toasting Arthur Rimbaud—*le grand malade, le grande criminal, le grand maudit—et le suprême Savant!*” [Ed. note: French phrases from Rimbaud’s “Visionary Letters” in May 1871]

One day he crossed paths with yet another Bardian hanging out on Boule’ Miche. Unaware of calendar deadlines, Peter was startled to learn that Bard’s fall semester was to begin in less than a week. This news rushed him to AMEXCO where a battery of telegram exchanges finally reassured him that a return plane ticket would be readied and waiting for him in a special drawer of the Icelandic Airlines office at the airport in Brussels—it was the best his mother’s Captain of Industry could do on such short notice. Peter wondered then and still wonders what would have happened if Nancy Boffey’s beau had cut out on her or been cut out midsummer. Would the Bardian have been stranded in Europe without funds to get back in time for the start of the new school year? Rethinking the episode, he puzzles how he’d ever left the US on a one-way ticket in the first place? Had his mother’s suitor imagined that Son Number Two could be transplanted abroad in perpetuity? One last leg of hitchhiking and public transit brought him through Belgium without incident.



In the airport he followed a labyrinthine bureaucratic route to obtain his ticket back to NY, NY and kept it close at hand while passing another night on another hard bench.

\*

Reflecting upon his first European excursion, in our conversation I referred Peter to an old story-line that placed his own travel tales in a meaningful framework at least for me. The premise: an individual immediately identifiable as a stranger, a visitor, or a guest enters into an established, ongoing situation and, directly or indirectly, becomes an agent of change—then departs. Knowingly or unknowingly, he or she acts as a catalyst setting in motion an unsettling process, unanticipated by all parties, which results in some sort of revelation, reconciliation, destruction, or redemption. This theme had framed my own writings about Akira Kurosawa's YOJIMBO (1961), Clint Eastwood's HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER (1973), Satyajit Ray's last masterpiece AGANTUK (THE STRANGER) (1991), and other movies. But Peter protested that those particular comparisons "inflated the glory of [his] own embarrassingly picaresque affair."<sup>9</sup>

Re-entrenched at Bard, he shaved off the threads of the meager, sophomoric beard he had let grow and dropped the killing cigarette smoking habit he'd acquired. He insists that he never boasted about having "done Europe" to anyone. "Better said, Europe had done me." But under pressure he admitted to me some realizations of note. He'd noticed for himself broad differences in national temperaments affecting individuals. He'd turned journaling into a steady habit. He'd drafted and redrafted poems [Ed. note: See "Words," "Seed," and "After Beckett's *Quatre Poèmes*" in **THE BOOK KEEPS CHANGES** on website]. He'd gotten hold of several UK editions of paperbacks otherwise not available in the USA. And he had basked in a Benjaminian aura of hundreds of iconic sculptures, oil paintings, prints, drawings—all presented in settings evoking auras all their own.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 6

1. p143 Fifty-six years later and I'm still not laughing.
2. p143 Erstwhile co-captains of the eponymous "Dandy-P-Bar" rowboat on Oppermann Pond! [Ed. note: See p.11, Chapter One, Part I for background]
3. p145 I am grateful to an upper classman, Alan Rosenbaum, an accomplished photographer who took an interest in my project, tutoring me in the basics of shooting, editing, developing, and printing my pictures. I never went beyond learning the rudiments of that technology but he meanwhile helped to educate me in the use of my eyes.
4. p146 Off I went on a premature *wanderjahr* condensed under the circumstances into two months! Yet another hapless American vagabond imagining myself the hero of some original story while really just playing out a comedic version of a recognizable rite of passage for many a naïve young Yank. What was my mother thinking? What was my father thinking? I can imagine what my mother's suitor was thinking but what was I thinking, letting myself be shunted across the

Atlantic on an open-ended summer adventure without a clue what exactly to do once there? I did carry a few names of friends of friends I might look up, but essentially I left home with a couple of hundred dollars and without a plan. My education about contemporary Europe was loaded with clichéd preconceptions based on a motley collection of impressions largely harvested from current cinema and literature of the long-dead. Thanks to Colonel Roberson at Williston and Professor Julius Rosenberg at Bard, I was at least able to read and write some French—but could I really speak any? I learned.

5. p146 I had by then read Ferlinghetti's Paris novel, *HER* (1960), which starts off, "I was bearing a white phallus through the wood of the world, I was looking for a place to plunge it, a place to surrender it." If I remember correctly, in another passage the author pictures himself/the protagonist walking about Paris like "a prick with ears." That image suggests a good portion of my own turn as a peripatetic 20-year-old male in Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and, especially, Paris France.

6. p148 When I returned to the States, I received a hate letter in which, in no uncertain terms, JEB accused me of being a homosexual *without even knowing it*. In a way he was right. I hadn't begun to comprehend my own *bisexuality*, which would have been a more elegant and accurate way for him to put it, and me, in proper perspective. At the time I was simply unawares and promiscuously polymorphous. Some people cannot tolerate ambiguities, period. I seem to have a relatively high tolerance and can differentiate ambiguity from dissembling, as I can differentiate amphibology from obfuscation. I can also identify lying, in myself and others, and don't like it.

The Dutch Dokter and I had, oddly enough, skirted the homosexual issue. I now assume that he had deemed me insufficiently prepared to face questions raised by my bisexual "proclivities." I'm sure he knew enough of my extracurricular activities and the side benefits of my "hitchhiking" as a preferred mode of self-transportation. But a confused sexual identity was of course part and parcel of my identity crisis overall. Dr. Kors' familiarity with the underlying issues became evident later during my confrontation with the draft. But I'm getting too far ahead in Sally's story.

7. p151 I was a horny schoolboy in Italy; she was cover-girl gorgeous. Indeed, my susceptibility to conventional feminine charm devices had been spiced by the plethora of women's high-style fashion magazines by which I had been surrounded as a young boy. Nancy Boffey would not stand for a single copy of *Playboy* under her roof, but the issues of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* piled up on the coffee tables and end tables and kitchen room dining table ad infinitum. I was disarmed by my Beatrice's "feminine artillery" (Stendhal) and a sucker for her playful prowess. However perverse and monstrous this confession may sound, however politically incorrect it may be by today's standards, I cop to it and my conditioning. Let someone somewhere, or everyone everywhere, cry FOUL

8. p152 I wasn't the only Bardian who felt *chez soi* in Paris. Lounging in my seat in the Cinémathèque, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Peter Minichiello—in my estimation, Bard College's one-

man *cinémathèque*—was sitting right behind me. I had been silently suffering through a screening of *UNA VOCA UMANA* (1948), Rossellini's adaptation of Cocteau's 1930 play *LA VOIX HUMAINE*, and I signaled that he and I ought to scam without waiting for the end. But he refused to budge, so I soldiered through Anna Magnani's excruciating monologue in order to speak with him afterward. (This is only further evidence that his knowledge of the art and history of cinema was always more thorough and advanced than mine!) The next day or so we arranged to meet and got ourselves out to the Bois de Boulogne, where we enjoyed each other's company while splitting a bottle of high-quality burgundy gifted me by a Parisian I had met at a café on the Contrescarpe.

That man had been enough amused by me to invite me to supper *chez lui* where, along with his wife, I met his younger sister-in-law visiting from Martinique. As he drove around night-lit Pigalle in his expensive Italian convertible with the top down—cheered by the sidewalk's swarm of loiterers and tourists on questionable missions—the sister-in-law was seated on my lap. I was high high high! I could have been Chet Baker being driven down Hollywood Boulevard or Paul Belmondo parading on the Champs Élysées! Marcello Mastroianni in Roma? Absolutely! Gene Kelly hoofing it in Gai Paree? In Brigadoon—no, no Brigadoon. That would be too wholesome. How about Montgomery Clift when he smiled? Yes, he was neurotic enough.

Besides assessing the younger sister's considerable charms up-close, I also realized that I was again being of service in squaring out a trio into a quartet. But this foursome had no further development, alas, and the soiree came to its end. Before I left to catch the Métro back to Place Monge, he went to his cellar and brought up the bottle I was to give to my father upon my return to the States. Needless to say, it never made it that far—“... travelin' light....”

9. p153 A film perhaps more apt to characterize the *non-catalytic* aspect of my experiences might be Francesco Rosi's 1979 *chef d'oeuvre* *CHRIST STOPPED AT EBOLI*, an adaptation of Carlo Levi's memoir (1945) of the same name, wherein the protagonist enters an hermetic social order then exits, *leaving that society unchanged*. It seems silly to make more of my summer fugue than it was. I certainly never presented a complete version of any one of the thousand heroic faces [Ed. note: *THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES* (1949) by Joseph Campbell]. I never went anywhere someone a lot like me had never gone before, and a narrow slice of Central Western Europe provided enough challenges to my maintaining any poise and equilibrium. I hadn't ventured into Eastern Europe or set foot on the Iberian Peninsula. I hadn't visited Scandinavia or even the British Isles. I had noticed some “personality types” distinguishing the people of one region from another, but instead of recognizing those characteristics as the indications of societies where generations of people had been raised and were still being raised under conditions differing significantly from one another and my own, I inhabited the North American viewpoint—without necessarily filling out the full-blown stereotype of the Ugly American. In essence, I had gone where the general culture was much like my own.

It took another *non-Grand Tour* over a wider geographical range in 1975—and several more decades of maturation—for me to begin reckoning with my inordinate fascination with French

language, literature, film, and art. I had been laboring under the erroneous notion that Frenchifying my person and imagination was in some important way a stand against my own reprehensible background as a culturally inferior American. I didn't realize this delusion until later. Shame had wormed its way into my heart and brain so deeply that I was driven to kid myself into believing that pursuing things foreign was equivalent to digging up my WASPish roots and planting myself as some guileless, guiltless somebody else. I chose France and the French—*hélas!* Later in my life it would be Israel—*Oy vavoy!*—which in my case was only jumping from the frying pan into the flames. In every case, in France, Israel, on the Mohawk Reservation, the heart transplants took but the organism kicked out the new brains.

10. p153 Much of the time I ended simply wandering about on three legs in the big cities, half that time lost, a liability to others and myself. Along the way I did survive my self-destructive tendencies while encountering that spectrum of humanity one meets on the open road: the kind, the cruel, the indifferent. The whole trip lasted nine weeks at the most. Of no small value, I had successfully steered clear of my natal family. I don't know if I wondered then but I do ask myself now: where o where had my *vita contemplativa* so suddenly gone, rudely and at times crudely supplanted by such an overactive *vita activa*? So much for sophomore delving into the Sophoclean tragedy of human suffering! Perhaps that first-year college advisor had been on to something when she warned me that people from my background don't usually amount to much—at least in arts and letters. Perhaps....

## CHAPTER 7: 1968-69

In 1928 an annex was built as two-story attachment to the original Tudor Revival mansion of Ward Manor. To either side of its plain, curvaceous, L-shaped corridors, paired single dormitory rooms shared common bathrooms between them.<sup>1</sup> The metal-frame spring bed, the simplest of writing tables, a straight-backed schoolhouse chair—all suited Peter's return to the structured sanctuary of his undergraduate life. The new location 1/4<sup>th</sup> mile north on Annandale Road meant that he had to organize his days around one or two leisurely walks to and from the dining hall, classrooms, and other destinations on main campus, and the Hoffman Library again became his *pied à terre*. As a bonus of this junior year lodging, the Annex provided an easy point of departure from which to explore beyond the boundaries of the defunct country estate, walking overland to the north and west, passing through wooded uplands into deserted Cruger's Village or down dirt roads to Cruger's Island or along trails and railroad tracks bordering the tidal marshland of North Tivoli Bay. Overall he welcomed the Ward Estate's remove from main campus and he could always close the doors to his chamber. But even in that remote solitude he had to endure hearing Terrence "Boona" Boylan (1969), his neighbor across the hall, playing and replaying his debut album ALIAS BOONA (1968)—ad nauseum.

On central campus the air was also full of the sounds of the ever-burgeoning Sixties' music scene. Seven minutes of HEY JUDE looped round and round ad infinitum. Steeley Dan was incubating in and out of the public eye and ear. Five miles across the river and through the woods, members

of The Band were rumored to be headquartered in the big pink house in West Saugerties, presumably riding high on their own debut studio album *MUSIC FROM BIG PINK* (1968). Musicians who were “somebodies” often blew through pastoral Annandale-on-Hudson making their presence known—to our subject’s wary eye the one looking more wasted than the next. He remembers witnessing albino blues/rock band leader Johnny Winter taking one glance at Stone Row and splitting the scene. With limbs as thin as pool cues, Tim Buckley [Ed. note: Guitarist-songwriter-singer, 1947–75] hung out for a time in the rec room of the old gym—“... in one condition of chronic self-abuse or another.” On another note, Billy Steinberg [Ed. note: Inducted into the American Songwriters Hall of Fame, 2011] hailed Peter as one of the student body’s lyrical poets and coaxed him into lending an ear to Laura Nyro’s debut album *ELI AND THE THIRTEENTH CONFESSION* (1968), ultimately failing to lure him into an appreciation of her skills and charms; the music didn’t click for the reserved seminarian.<sup>2</sup> On rare trips “down the road,” our relatively stiff upper classman observed his collegemates dance to “Dance to the Music” by Sly and the Family Stone, a new favorite on Adolph’s jukebox.

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That fall Robert Kelly [Ed. note: Poet, novelist, editor, translator, small-press publisher, reviewer; teaching at Bard since 1961] offered an introductory course surveying pre-Romantic period European literature. Peter can’t summon up all the book titles of the English-language syllabus, but he recalls it included various versions and portions of *BEOWULF*, *THE SONG OF ROLAND*, *CANTERBURY TALES*, Shakespeare’s *SONNETS*, and Goethe’s *FAUST*. This was our pilgrim’s first encounter with the man who “all too soon became the new sun in whose gravitational field “[Peter] circulated, utterly dependent in that orbit.” It was also his first encounter with the man’s somewhat pretentious (“... even portentous...”) spoken accent which “seemed acquired if not affected to [Peter’s] more standard American ear.”<sup>3</sup> And last but not least, it was our protagonist’s first chance to witness the associate professor’s bad habit of playing hooky from his own classes! When it came Peter’s turn to present an introduction to Middle English lyric poetry to his peers, for instance, Kelly went absent without leave; Thomas Meyer spontaneously assisted in making possible a reasonable facsimile of an educational session.

“But when Kelly was present, he was *present*,” Peter insisted for the record, and our main character was so swept away by his teacher’s knowledge that he read all Kelly’s work he could find and ferreted out Kelly’s editorial selection of contributors to *A CONTROVERSY OF POETS* (1965) [Ed. note: An anthology of poems by living poets co-edited by Robert Kelly and Paris Leary]. As a published and publishing poet, the man represented an exemplary practitioner, not some wannabe café bohemian hanging out behind a smokescreen of tobacco and cannabis or another academic versifier surmounting the lectern behind a barricade of The Great Tradition. Kelly impressed his acolyte in arts and letters as an authentic activist laboring to construct an aesthetic cathedral every bit as complex and enduring and, over time, collectively built as the medieval structures Henry Adams had described and revered [Ed. note: *MONT-SAINT-MICHEL AND CHARTRES* (1904)].

Peter meanwhile realized that contemporary history was happening elsewhere: October 21<sup>st</sup> a massacre of student-led protestors took place in Mexico City; October 31<sup>st</sup> LBJ declared an immediate halt to all air, naval, and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam; a week later, Nixon won the Presidency, and the war in SE Asia would go on and on. He can't picture anything special about his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, but as he came into his majority he remembers seeing the first posters made from photographs taken during Apollo 8's orbit of the Moon, especially the Earthrise image which prompted a sea change in the widespread perception of our planetary existence and has remained an iconic and inspirational afterimage for him and others ever since:

### NASA LENSES

grind us to an ancient time  
the Earth is round no doubts about  
its blue green O  
circling in on it  
from the other side of clouds  
we are in the aqua swirling now

[1968/1973]

\*

That fall the youngest of the Boffey brothers, Daniel, having transferred into Bard from Ithaca College, disappeared. When his inexplicable absence became worrying to multiple parties, it was brought to Peter's attention, and he was interviewed by the dean of students: he had no information to offer. Within four or five days, the call came in from Virginia ("...or another mid-Atlantic state....") where Dan had been stopped by police while walking across a bridge wearing nothing but blue jeans (no shirt, no shoes) and carrying no identification (no wallet, no money) on his person—nothing. Somehow, somewhere, someone had connected the dots identifying the incarcerated mute youth as the minor who'd gone missing from New York State, and appropriate authorities were notified. When the mother and her two older sons drove down the coast to retrieve Dan from the jail cell where he was being detained, the youngest Boffey *spoke not once* upon his release, nor did he utter one word to them on the all-night, non-stop, return drive to Westchester County where, after dropping Barnes and Peter off in Bedford Hills, Nancy Boffey promptly placed her son in the able hands of Dr. Pieter Kors, family shrink. <sup>4</sup>

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As of New Year 1969, the Bard College Office of Records listed Peter's home address as 333 E. 41<sup>st</sup> St. NY, NY, and that was where official correspondence was sent, including the financials. Yet he recalls overnighting only once in his father and stepmother's new Tudor City nest bordering the neighborhoods of Turtle Bay and Murray Hill. His father soon made or suffered another change of employment: *David Boffey named senior vice president at Masius, Wayne-Williams, Street-Finney, Inc.* [from "People" NYTIMES, Feb. 13, 1969 (p.76)] Without any family discussion or other

evidence, Peter sensed that his father's star role in the sphere of bigtime advertising was experiencing an irreversible decline.

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Peter elected to study Willam Butler Yeats' oeuvre as his 1968–69 winter project and took advantage of the Katonah house's availability while the residence was still in his mother's possession—come spring it was going up for sale. Given that his father had a new wife, a new job, and a new address; given that Nancy Boffey's commitment to her growing career was lifting her ever higher up in the luxury travel industry, literally transporting her farther and farther away from anything resembling a maternal nest—it seems no wonder that their second son turned toward his journaling where, by his own account, the pages documented a torturous preoccupation with scorched-earth self-inquiry and often embittered observations of others. Looking back, he admitted that (“... with exaggerated, self-centered self-caricature....”) he felt abandoned by his father and betrayed by his mother, with no recourse but to re-connect with Dr. Kors when he found himself in the throes of what he experienced as a spiritual and artistic emergency expressing itself in insomnia and constant, irreconcilable conflicts with his brothers who were also staying in the house in the absence of *in loco parentis*. Dr. Kors identified an inability to deal with free-floating hostility (toward himself and others) as the main feature of his crisis and prescribed medicine to calm his patient's down. The psychiatrist's response seemed inadequate, disappointing the 21-year-old in his quest after Truth. Peter declined the tranquilizers and vowed never to see the doctor again, figuring that rather than de-sanctifying breakdown as a mental health disruption to be quelled, it was nobler in the mind to ride out the storm and stress with full awareness for the “... ever promising breakthrough....”

*By then my independence from Dr. Kors was too fully formed to unquestionably re-admit myself to his caretaking, but my dependence on Kelly was not yet formed enough to realign all my loyalties there. I have to shake my head when I look at the predicament in which I floundered. But I was still so young and oh so horny. A cross between Goethe's Werther without Charlotte, Dante's Dante without Beatrice, Strauss' Quin-quin without Bichette, Mozart's Cherubino without a Countess or anything else wearing a skirt—this was to be a winter of my personal discontent!*

Under the circumstances, it seems understandable that his WBY study might be uneven at best. He thoroughly explored the lyrical poetry and found its music, imagery, and prosody appreciable precursors to the wilder, more experimental Dylan Thomas' work with which he was infatuated. Without obeisance to any New Criticism, upon which he had focused his attention so intently the prior winter, he followed leads in secondary sources in order to place the hallmark poems within the context of Irish history and the arch of WBY's life: “A Prayer for My Daughter,” “The Second Coming,” “Among School Children,” “Under Ben Bulbin,” “Easter 1916,” “Lapis Lazuli,” “Sailing to Byzantium,” “Byzantium”—these were poems he came to know and love. Without yet reading Ellman's comparative essays on Yeats, Wilde, Joyce, and Beckett [Ed. note: FOUR DUBLINERS, a collection of essays based on lectures delivered by Richard Ellman at the Library of

Congress in 1982–83 was published only in 1987], he sensed WBY’s role in the gradual movement away from Romanticism toward Modernism.

Upon his return to Annandale, he submitted his non-scholarly report to his advisor, Professor Andrews Wanning, who rightly remonstrated his charge for having slighted and/or ignored the great poet’s narrative and dramatic verse and having paid scant attention to *A VISION* (1925). Duly faulted, Peter’s project passed but he knew it was not his best academic work. Still, he wasn’t used to coming up short for his professors and only later admitted to himself that he had been too distracted in his personal life to take a fuller measure of a figure as complex as Yeats, let alone *A VISION: AN EXPLANATION OF LIFE FOUNDED UPON THE WRITINGS OF GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS AND UPON CERTAIN THEORIES ATTRIBUTED TO KUSTA BEN LUKA*. As he stated, “I had no idea where to begin with that one!” Our aspiring master of the literary arts had a harder time forgiving himself than his advisor did, to whom the notion of taking on all of WBY in such an autodidactic fashion must have seemed a preposterous proposition in the first place. <sup>5</sup>

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In the spring semester of his junior year, the English major enrolled in Kelly’s “Pound and the Post-Poundians” course and became aware of the embarrassment of riches to which this teacher held the keys. Over the next three months, he sloughed off the skin of any historical, academic, and supposedly scientific poetics he had inherited and cast off any outworn doubts about the value of his own participation as a producer, not just a consumer and evaluator, of poetry—or at least his potential to become a producer. We know he felt a need to replace the broken models of manhood provided by his father and older brother—enter Robert Kelly. Here was someone who didn’t just theorize but also practiced and “publicked” his work; someone who could speak authoritatively of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky; someone with professional and perhaps personal relations with Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Paul Blackburn, as well as half of the sixty poets anthologized in *A CONTROVERSY OF POETS*. <sup>6</sup>

Of the twenty or so students initially enrolled in the course, Peter remembers maybe a dozen who remained semi-active and half that many who were completely engaged, with seniors Norman Weinstein and Thomas Meyer the most knowledgeable stars in the firmament. <sup>7</sup> As the semester progressed, text after text proved huge challenges and stimulants to approach and to assimilate:

- Pound: *THE CANTOS* (1–95) (1969)
- Zukofsky: “A” [1–12 (1966) and/or 13–21 (1969)]
- WCW: *PATERSON* (1963)
- Olson: *THE MAXIMUS POEMS* (1960)
- Duncan: *BENDING THE BOW* (1968) and *ROOTS & BRANCHES* (1969)
- Blackburn: *THE CITIES* (1967) <sup>8</sup>



Pound's ideographic technique; WCW's mosaic/mobile construction; poetic line and line breaks based on breath as espoused in Olson's essay "Projective Verse" (1950)—as far as Peter was then and is now still concerned, they were vital pursuits of what Pound called "gathering a live tradition from the air." None struck the Bardian as particularly relevant to the achievement of non-violent communications between civic and political entities or to the urgently important application of natural sciences to a threatened environment, but he gave credence to Williams' teaching that liveliness and precision of language, whether on the page or spoken aloud, were indeed relevant to the crisis in the body politique. Peter would later adopt WCW's testimonial in as holy writ:

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,  
I come, my sweet,  
to sing to you!  
My heart rouses  
thinking to bring you news  
of something  
that concerns you  
and concerns many men. Look at  
what passes for the new.  
You will not find it there but in  
despised poems.  
It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.  
Hear me out  
For I too am concerned  
and every man  
who wants to die at peace in his bed  
besides.

[“Asphodel, That Greeny Flower” Book I (1955)]

Kelly raised questions about current and future possibilities or impossibilities of creating “the English-language long poem” which was the backbone of his innovative course. He articulated the want of a critical lexicon for the appreciation of the new body of 20<sup>th</sup>-century “compositions by field,” and he chastised the disrespectful vocabulary of a literary establishment without a processual approach to that new work that often took its own unfolding as a key theme.<sup>9</sup>

His teacher apparently didn't suffer fools gladly and seemed to Peter “to care about his students almost as much as he cared about the *ars poetica*.” To pass the course, each of them had to read the work of a living poet other than one already under academic investigation and write up a paper.

In retrospect, Peter views this straightforward “send-them-off-on-their-own” strategy an example of Kelly’s pedagogic approach, i.e. he cared enough about the individual student’s growth and development to step out of the limelight, leaving students to perform on stages of their own discovery and invention. Peter chose Theodore Enslin (1925–2011) whose fame, outside the realm of an extremely limited community of little magazines and small press publications, was faint to non-existent. The “sequences” and “long workings” of Enslin’s experimental FORMS seemed to hinge upon a total commitment to the issues of structure and process Kelly’s course was bringing to the fore. And the man’s *melopæia* combined with his distance from fashions and the academy all stirred Peter’s curiosity. Student sensed there must be much worthwhile learning there; teacher agreed.<sup>10</sup>

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“They must bust in early May / Orders from the D.A.” [Ed. note: From Dylan’s “Subterranean Homesick Blues, BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME, 1965]. In the wee early hours of April 6<sup>th</sup> 1969, thirty-six Dutchess County deputies serving under Sheriff Lawrence M. Quinlin and acting on the authority of Assistant D.A. George Battle Gordon Liddy (later convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and illegal wiretapping for his role in the Nixon’s administration’s 1972 Watergate scandal) descended upon four Bard College dormitories and made forty-four arrests for possession of drugs and the intention to sell drugs. Steely Dan’s “My Old School” (1973) immortalized the event. Since Peter’s only bad habit at the time was getting high on WCW’s “variable foot” and Olson’s BREATH LINES, his own experience of the police raid on “longhairs” was strictly observational (“...for a change...”): he gathered with onlookers outside Ward Manor and its Annex while their evacuated interiors were thoroughly searched and the culprits led away. He wondered, in retrospect, if the deputies had opened any of the books lying about his room they might not have arrested him too—or liked to—for free thinking.

Student campus politics were as fractious as usual or more so and, as Tim Robbins would assert here and there throughout EVEN COWGIRLS GET THE BLUES (1976), “The international situation was desperate, as usual.” But Peter was jazzed by his new poetic charge (“I had something to belong to!”) and virtually unfazed by the students boldly striking classes at Bard or US forces covertly striking targets in Cambodia. His peculiar self-absorption was at times even rewarded. He passively accepted his nomination as Valedictorian of the incoming senior class and, without understanding much of what it all meant, donned the ceremonial academic gown for that part of the Commencement proceedings transpiring in the venerable Chapel of the Holy Innocents.

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Any attention to his academic achievements-in-progress meant nothing compared to Peter’s need to be reassured that he would be taken on as Robert Kelly’s advisee for his senior project. In the last week of the spring semester, he more or less begged Kelly to act as his mentor during the upcoming school year. The man remained non-committal, asking what, pray tell, Peter’s project

would be about. Peter wanted to dive deeper into the works of one of the great 19<sup>th</sup>-century American writers and thought it might be Whitman or Melville, maybe even a study comparing and contrasting the two. Kelly replied that Peter ought to make his decision and get back to him in the fall, off-handedly mentioning CLAREL, a book-length poem by Melville, which was still an understudied opus and a virtually unknown entity to students of American literature—Peter might look into that one.

He had his marching orders for the summer of 1969—to come up with a proposal of mutual interest to Robert Kelly and himself. But he needed a place to stay (the Westchester address was out) and pocket money. His younger brother was occupying the second bedroom in their mother's new apartment in Bedford Hills, and lodging chez Dave and Jane was out of the question: their Tudor City apartment was not spacious enough to accommodate him and anyway the invitation was never extended. A rent-share vacancy in the city came up so he lugged his essential books and minimalistic wardrobe to the Upper West Side and settled in, more or less camping out with other college-aged strangers. A classified ad led him to gainful employment tending a spin-art counter in Greenwich Village, where he soon took charge of the tiny shop afternoons and evenings, keeping squirt bottles of water-soluble acrylic paint full while securing thin, pliable, rectangular sheets of vinyl plastic to metal platforms inside vats the size and shape of smallish clothes washing machines. With the flip of a switch, he caused the mounted sheets to spin so that the customers could shoot, drip, blob, and otherwise dispense the cheap, glossy, primary colors in the execution of their masterpieces.

This setup off Bleeker or MacDougal Street was decidedly more Melvillian than Whitmanesque. Clientele consisted of sailors; urban youngsters; performing musicians on break, welfare, drugs—or all three; pickpockets; nickel and dime dealers of Mary Jane; and other lost souls astray in Lower Manhattan, as well as the occasional hapless family from out of town acting as if a stop in the arcade-like row of shabby storefronts was what “The Village” was really all about. Everyone smoked cigarettes. Many openly carried opened cans and bottles of beer. The truly debonair *artists* created their tours de force with only one hand, in the other a slice of pizza or a cigarette (or both), their arms wrapped around their girls. Under flickering fluorescent lights, inside the U-shaped countertop, in paint-spattered tee-shirt and jeans Peter manned his shifts with music blaring. The entire enterprise was ludicrous and, like everyone else, the owner knew it. Once or twice a day, at first tipsy then wobbly, he'd drop in from the bar next door to collect bills from the till. At evening's end (by then flat-out drunk) he'd pay his employee in cash and close up shop, except on Fridays and Saturdays when Peter left the man to manage the mayhem and beat his retreat to the Upper West Side where he occasionally played share-a-bed with one of the semi-furnished flat's other provisional campers.

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Summer passed with no semblance of childhood's vacation idyls. The Stonewall Riots kicked off the era of gay rights movement activism with a vengeance. The Manson Family did what they did

best on their little spree out in Hollywood. “The international situation was desperate, as usual.” One Saturday afternoon, his customers and the usual gawkers began mentioning the closure of the New York State Thruway due to excessive traffic en route to a big music festival upstate. Some of them had been turned back and ventured to Lower Manhattan to seek out alternate weekend diversion started swapping stories. So Peter was not the only one to miss out on Woodstock: due to scheduling conflicts, Joni Mitchell, creator of the festival’s unofficial anthem (1970), hadn’t made it either.

Another landmark event transpired at 10:56 PM EDT on July 21<sup>st</sup> when the American populace watched Neil Armstrong take a giant step for mankind.

*But that giant step for mankind was not the night’s highlight for me. I was milling about with thousands of others on the Great Lawn where—in a carnival atmosphere—real-time footage was being projected onto giant screens set up throughout in Central Park. “It’s a black man!” a black man cried out, his voice shattering the sudden silence as the astronaut emerged from the space capsule. Then, as the booted feet went down the ladder rungs, the refrain was picked up here and there, far away and wide apart, by likeminded individuals—“It’s a black man! It’s a black man!”—until drowned out by the general cheers. After that brazen jest, one man’s small step onto the surface of the Moon was anti-climactic. I, for one, have always savored the wit and wisdom of that mock commentary.*

At the northern pole of his citified existence, Peter spent mornings in bed with all the Melville and Whitman texts he had never read and learned that the sheer volume of historical literary criticism on “the good gray poet” exceeded all the words ever written on any other single American author—with Herman Melville in close second place. He had followed Kelly’s suggestion, equipping himself with a specially ordered copy of CLAREL edited by Walter E. Bezanson (Vol. 13 in THE COMPLETE WORKS (Hendricks House, NY, 1960). Dipping into the editor’s 117-page “Introduction,” scanning his 93-page “Explanatory Notes,” and finally soldiering through the four-part poem’s 150 Cantos consisting of more than 18,000 lines of irregularly rhyming iambic tetrameter, Peter realized that here was a whale of a study project and literary weight worth hefting—a sure bet to win a coveted spot within Kelly’s fiefdom in Annandale. Given his limited resources and limited access to great libraries, Peter could find no other studies of the poem other than a lone book review by Newton Arnold (*The Hudson Review*, Vol XIV, No.2, Spring 1961) and Bezanson’s own unpublished 1943 dissertation at Yale, “Herman Melville’s *Clarel*.” Melville’s Holy Land project had been panned and ignored by the literary establishment of his time and later; despite sporadic articles and attention paid in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Peter felt that the book still cried out for a serious, original response.

CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND was written during Melville’s twenty-year tenure as Inspector Number 75 on the docks and in the offices of the New York Custom House at 55 Wall Street. Regardless of debates about his state of mind and emotional

disposition, the position itself granted him an ongoing acquaintance with and detailed views of all manner of 19<sup>th</sup>-century humankind passing through the Port of NY, NY. In retrospect, Peter wondered if his own summer spent on the subway shuttling by day and night up and down “the insular isle of the Manhattoes” (HM) while witnessing a full display of 20<sup>th</sup>-century humanity exerted an influence upon his decision to tackle CLAREL. Ever the incorrigible ironist, in conversation he suggested that the seedy ambiance of the spin-art job alone had probably “tipped the scales in favor of Herman over Walt.”

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The week he was due to pack up his stuff and return 100 miles north for his senior year at Bard, he took his dirty clothes to the nearest laundromat near Broadway and W. 100<sup>th</sup> St, a four- or five-machine affair where he found himself navigating the narrow space with a nubile young woman who showed no hesitation about interacting with him and every inclination to respond positively to his overtures. Their shameless flirtation heated up. He had no phone number to offer but she gave him hers, and his follow-up call netted him an invitation to dinner at the place where she was staying. He went. He spent the night. In the morning she left for her temp office job. His **ALBA** followed:

Fall of your hair

raining in the courtyard

the idea of parting

curtain of hair

scent

the dead are put in rows and call these streets Manhattan

[1970]

Within a year Peter Roy Boffey and Jill Cecile Bergman would be married in her hometown of Portland, Oregon—Peter’s newly adopted state.

## NOTES to Chapter 7

1. p156 Pierre Joris—poet, translator, editor, teacher—inhabited the communicating cell, but we didn’t speak to each other much or spent any real time together. He was one year ahead of me at Bard and ran with a different crowd or, perhaps better said, maintained an active social life, whereas I had little or none to speak of. Had I known better, I might have learned a thing or two from Pierre and his eclectic, cosmopolitan capacities as a reader and writer, but I didn’t.

2. p157 I wasn’t tone deaf or closeminded so much as guarded from such emotive transparency. I also wasn’t yet able to differentiate Nyro from other contemporary songwriters and singers—my

loss! Billy moved on from Bard and produced hugely popular hits performed by the biggest names in show business. I may have missed a valuable encounter with him, too, and now I can't even boast that I really knew him when!

3. p157 I still wonder about the studied elocution of what sounded to me like pseudo-British inflections and enunciations. Was he taught that the correct manner of the educated American was a Mid-Atlantic or Transatlantic accent, supposed to convey a certain distinction as flaunted by celebrities in sophisticated British and Hollywood movies of the 1930s and 1940s? By 1968 such a notion was obsolete and certainly seemed elitist, although that didn't bother me—at that time!

4. p158 Dan's crack-up remains something of a mystery to me although that glamorous descriptor of a profound psychotic break seems fatuous. At the time of his transfer to Bard, I had assumed that despite the poor record of my own experience at the summer camp (where my older brother had known such success and I, such misery), my parents had been attempting a parallel but hopefully more beneficial maneuver by appending Dan's college career to my ongoing corrective and basically positive experience at Bard. But as Barnes had been no great big brother to me at *his* summer camp, I was no great big brother to Dan at *my* college: the transplant obviously never took. In later years, although we never spoke about the episode per se, when I did pursue answers in a roundabout way, Dan claimed that he had enrolled at Bard on his own initiative, essentially following his girlfriend from Ithaca. Whether it was friction in their relationship and/or my parents' miscalculation *redux* about how to raise siblings, whether he had been psychedelically dosed and never knew it, or dosed himself and knew, I'll never know. In any event, since my younger brother and I remained estranged for the last six years of his life—mutually incommunicado—the less said superficially and the fewer speculations cavalierly cast about concerning this pivotal event in his life and the life of the entire Boffey family, the better.

5. p160 And I wouldn't know how or care to re-begin dealing intelligently with A VISION now either. My failure to digest it almost sixty years ago might be ascribed more to enduring temperamental traits than to the temporary preoccupations in that period of my life. I wasn't able to entertain belief in *any* "explanation of life" with *any* insinuations of a deterministic and operative Telos. Simply put by Louis Zukosky in "Henry Adams: A Criticism in Autobiography": "Adams had not the faith which makes of its thoughts a system to be put forward as a text." [Ed. note: Excerpted from PREPOSITIONS: THE COLLECTED CRITICAL ESSAYS OF LOUIS ZUKOSKY, p.111]. Yeats' principle(s)—whether the Great Memory, Anima Mundi, or The Record—confused me far more than C.G. Jung's comparable and equally problematic alignment of his historical Alchemy with his ahistorical Archetype ever has, before or since. I couldn't find my bearings in the complicated elaboration of such an esoteric philosophical system, and my math skills remain rotten. Without faith in let alone comprehension of Yeats' VISION, the lyrical poems had sent me soaring. I loved them for their *melopœia* and *phanopœia* but probably missed some of their *logopœia* and never really caught onto to their essentially mystical background ideation expounded in A VISION.

[Ed. note: The importance of these three categorical terms in PB's evolving critical vocabulary warrants citation from their source, i.e. Ezra Pound's essay "How To Read," first published in 1929:

That is to say, there are three 'kinds of poetry':

*Melopœia*, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.

*Phanopœia*, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination.

*Logopœia*, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we *expect* to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play...

Re-printed in "Part One: The Art of Poetry" re-published in LITERARY ESSAYS OF EZRA POUND, New Directions (1968) p.25.]

Perhaps it was a characterological shortcoming that disabled me from tackling grand, long imaginative works of *nonfiction* as such an early age, although I was subsequently able to do so and count Scott's JOURNAL, Browne's biography of Darwin, and Henry Adams' EDUCATION as typical of treasured, later-in-life discoveries. By the same token, in that era, my senior thesis was based on a critical reading of what was then the longest—and possibly the least read—poem in American literature, Melville's CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND (1876). But I can't claim to have ever read much of FINNEGAN'S WAKE and, more to the point: Do I ever return to the long poems of Pound and the Post-Poundians? All of them, never; most, no; some, yes, on a regular basis with deeper delight and—I like to think—greater comprehension every time.

6. p160 Not to neglect mention of the forty other poets (listed in Kelly's "Postscript II") "...whose work, for one reason or circumstance or another, has not been included.... Enough to suggest that for the roster [that follows] an anthology of comparable merit could have been derived." (p. 567)

7. p160 On one occasion I recall Norman Weinstein, a fellow student who was then editor of *The Lampeter Muse* and an intellectual far better versed than I was in any knowledge of modern and contemporary poetry and poetics, rather brazenly asking if Kelly thought that the late Sixties at Bard compared favorably—I suppose he meant in terms of talent, fecundity, potential—with the inordinately influential situation at the defunct Black Mountain College (1933–57). Kelly brushed off any calibration, and it seemed to me that he found matters at hand too pressing to be judged, like show horses, according to their confirmation to set standards. But Kelly also brushed off underinformed admirers like me. I remember one time he was annoyed by my remark about the immorality of dutifully paying taxes into the war chest enabling America's Vietnam War—"What have *I* to do with taxes?" he superciliously quipped—before discourteously commenting that sometimes, like Tom Meyer, I could be so "immature."

8. p160 The lion's share of these books were published by New Directions and Grove/Evergreen Press, as were most of the other titles which made up the rest of my assigned and/or elective reading that spring:

Pound: SELECTED POEMS (1957)  
ABC OF READING (1960)  
GUIDE TO KULCHUR (1968)  
LITERARY ESSAYS (1968)  
WCW: IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN (1956)  
PICTURES FROM BRUEGHEL AND OTHER POEMS (1962)  
SELECTED POEMS (1968)  
Olson: CALL ME ISHMAEL (1947)  
LETTER FOR MELVILLE (1951)  
THE DISTANCES (1960)

A pair of anthologies—A CONTROVERSY OF POETS (1965) and Donald Allen's NEW AMERICAN POETRY (1960)—became my go-to sources for the variety and richness of their editors' selections; the poets' own "Statements on Poetics" (NEW AMERICAN POETRY); the co-editors' "Postscripts I & II (CONTROVERSY); and the extensive biographical and bibliographical information in both books.

9. p161 "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT." To read this dictum (from Creeley's June 5<sup>th</sup> 1958 letter to Olson) within the context of the latter's manifesto ("Projective Verse") forces one to contemplate the prominence within the new poetics of what is basically an old, long-lived, and oft-expressed idea. In a typically milder manner, Theodore Enslin (1925–2011) pronounced that "... the form is determined by the content, the whole thing." [Ed. note: More about Enslin follows in this Chapter 7.] Now admitted to and given pride of place in any consideration of the most valuable assets of the poem itself were the processes of its creation, as if one were writing on and reading from a scroll that was unfurling; the creative tension between the spontaneous statement and the reconfigured statement became a new and meaningful dynamic, furthering the modernist severance from obedience to prescribed forms while fomenting more experimental forms to "make it new."

10. p162 I was equally tempted to target Robert Creeley's poetry, but I wasn't able to identify any single "long-form" poem in his published work to date which would have qualified for a critical reading within the context of the post-Poundians. PIECES (1969) might have been a contender but had yet to appear; it might be argued—if somewhat facetiously—that his novel THE ISLAND (1963) was a long poem without line breaks. In the event, Enslin's extreme remove from the mainstream fed my fantasies of some pure artistic lifestyle worthy of emulation. We enjoyed an exchange of letters then drifted apart without ever having met face to face. [Ed. note: See APPENDIX III]



## CHAPTER 8: 1969–70

The interior of the low-ceilinged 3<sup>rd</sup>-floor wing of Ward Manor into which Peter moved for his senior year seemed to be an inelegant relic of cramped servant or dormitory lodgings added on after the mansion's initial construction (1918). With transom windows over their doors, five single rooms off a narrow hallway shared a common bathroom, so he again found himself sleeping under the sloping ceiling of a gable roof, not unlike his first childhood room in Pleasantville or his upstairs room during the Boffey family's residence in the Day House in Katonah (1963–64). The single steel casement dormer window was operated by a creaky handle, opening onto a view of meadows, trees, and skies above the Hudson River with the Catskills sometimes visible to the west. This small, simple loft met his needs for studious retreat—and the two new lovers' trysts.

Having salvaged an older model station wagon abandoned by all parties during the dispersal of property following his parents' final divorce, he now had a vehicle for personal use; in the months to come, he would drive that irreparable Ford Fairlane to its death. The car was not trustworthy enough to make roundtrips to NYC in order to ferry Jill to and from Annandale back to NYC, but he could rely on it to pick her up on Friday evenings at the Mission-Spanish Revival-style Rhinecliff Train Station (1914) ten miles away and drop her back off there on Sunday afternoons so she could, for the time being, keep her temp job in the city. The station itself was in disrepair. Its brick and stone still stood sturdily on the slate bluff above the river, but its interior wood needed more than polishing and its arched windows needed more than cleaning to admit a fuller amount of natural light and dramatic view [Ed. note: <https://www.greatamericanstations.com/stations/rhinecliff-ny-rhi/>].

*But Jill herself was all radiance in my eyes. Eighteen years old, zaftig, Zumhaben! And completely swept off her feet by her plumed prince in youthful prime. When she alighted on that station's island platform for the first time and waltzed my way...? If "Musetta's Aria" had burst from her lips, I wouldn't have been surprised. I know "Rodolfo's Aria"—or its equivalent—was bursting within me. My only partially naïve seductress made her first appearance in Dutchess County decked out like a Russian ingénue, and I shuttled her directly to my private aerie where my own priority—and hers—was undressing ASAP! She soon learned that dressing down not up was all the mode at Bard in 1969.*

Four years his junior, after finishing high school in SW Portland Oregon, Jill had somehow convinced her parents to let her spend the summer under the guardianship of her older brother who was attending Columbia U. After falling in lusty love at summer's end, she somehow further persuaded her folks that, since her temp position had been offered to her on a more permanent basis, they should permit her to stay on at least until the winter holidays. No mention was made of her new catch, the well-bred Eastern college boy who reciprocally adored her—heart, mind, body, and soul.

Jill's warm, attentive, unconditional affection was a timely antidote to the chill left in the aftermath of Peter's natal family's implosion. If his mother's unwavering devotion to her three sons had

never been a given or constant, now all bets were plainly off: Nancy Boffey's self-involvement was evident and amply confirmed. Jill's secular American Judaism posed no barrier to their affair but was a large part of the draw.<sup>1</sup> She was not his first Jewish intimate, although she would become his first (but not his last) Jewish wife. When their union was no longer charged by courtship, their different expectations for marriage and a future life together resulted in divorce. In 1974 they would release each other, "mercifully" *sans enfants* and, except for a radio on top of the refrigerator in their leased married student housing ("really a shack") off-campus, no real property to dispute. But in September 1969 it was the season for enjoying all they could which was a lot.

*It might as well have been "Autumn in New York" or "April in Paris" or "Moonlight in Vermont," but it happened to be October then November then December in the Mid-Hudson River Valley. Our time together was sublime, divine, and whatever else Cole or Noël would make rhyme with pure romance.*

\*

In his senior year, Peter donned the mantle of literary editorship of *The Lampeter Muse* with seriousness. Besides soliciting, accepting, and rejecting submissions, arranging for the short-run printing and distribution of the little poetry magazine were all left up to him. He later came to understand that he made some significant one-man mistakes along the way.

Since the *Muse* had a some cachet in certain circles of contemporary poetry and its readership, he pursued correspondence with many off-campus contributors, most of whom had made or were in the business of making names for themselves. In good-riddance letters in return, a few lambasted him for his rejection of their work. He also felt the sting when his on-campus requests for submissions were snubbed or he was dressed down by students whose work he had likewise rejected. It was his first bitter taste of what felt like unwarranted ingratitude for earnest endeavor, "not that I didn't probably have it coming." One of his correspondents enjoyed a hybrid status as a recent graduate (1969) and as a regular contributor moving farther and farther away from Annandale, and Peter and Thomas Meyer kept up a short-lived but lively exchange in which the latter's poetical talents, skills, and energy foreshadowed a long productive career fulfilling his potential in arts and letters [Ed. note: <https://poets.org/poet/thomas-meyer>]. When I reread the transcript of Peter's reminiscences regarding Bard and recalled his almost wistful tone as he spoke about Tom Meyer, an analogy from the history of Italian cinema came to me out of the blue. Franco Zeffirelli (1923–2019) and Francesco Rosi (1922–2015), two extremely different filmmakers, had both been assistants to director Luchino Visconti (1906–1976) during the production of his second film, *LA TERRA TREMA* (1948). It occurred to me that Thomas and Peter had been two of Kelly's followers while at Bard and, subsequently went off in different directions with meaningful differences between them. I subsequently shared this notion with him and he thought it something to consider.

2

Besides his senior thesis, the editor had other academic requirements to complete and a choice of electives. He enrolled in a course called “Alchemy,” newly conceived and taught by biology teacher Richard Clarke [Ed. note: See Note 6 to Chapter 5]. He remembers it as “stimulating, eclectic, trippy.”

*Now there was a one-man show! Billed as a survey of the historical precursors to modern science, it was really an extension and expression of whatever was moving Clarke’s hyper-active mind at the time. Regular attendance at his Sottery Hall lectures dwindled to include only Clarke’s clutch of a half-dozen devotees sitting in the front row and a smattering of holdouts like me, skeptical but curious, seated some distance back and far away from one another.*<sup>3</sup>

However disconcerting the experience of that course “with greater resemblance to a voyage on lysergic acid than any journey in Academe,” Peter’s fascination with Clarke’s intriguing imagination encouraged him to register for the man’s next innovative elective the following semester: “Ecology”—in 1970 a prescient topic to introduce into an undergraduate’s general education.

Charting the course of his senior project meant one-on-one meetings with Kelly on a more or less weekly basis, and it meant getting to know the man better. The younger Peter needed the older Kelly more than Kelly needed him, and Kelly wasn’t fostering any dependency much less codependency. Peter’s ultimate recognition, which he was the slower of the pair to accept, only arrived with greater maturity: their relationship was not and would never be one of great friendship or personal disclosure. Peter claims that he still has no idea what form interdependency could have taken with two such heavily masked men. Sometimes Kelly did not even show up at appointed hours.

*And that smarted! I took his absences absolutely too personally and used to get miffed when he went AWOL with no clear explanation offered afterward—that was telling! I had to learn to accept and then expect his no-shows. I suppose I assumed he simply wasn’t that interested in me or our project or—always ready to defer to my exaggerated sense of his elevated status in the greater mundi artium—granted that he might have bigger fish to fry.*

\*

I was struck by how public events in the late Sixties saturated our subject’s recollection of the next phase of his life. I’d say the highlights “etched” or “engraved” in his memory if those terms suggested the cinematic vitality with which he evoked them. Despite his commitment to his studies and the ripening of his love affair, never mind his usual eschewing of fads and fashions of the day, common current events impinged upon his personal life and affected him deeply. Transcribing our taped conversations concerning this period, it became clear that he felt the human consequences of the news and didn’t just view them as a detached observer. To note the most newsworthy items that came back to him is not an idle exercise. The trial of the Chicago 8 began around the start of his fall semester. In October the Weathermen broke ranks from the Students for a Democratic Society and the Days Of Rage (October 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup>) ensued. October 15<sup>th</sup> huge numbers of antiwar

protesters mobilized nationwide. Besieged by vocal protests from many quarters, Nixon took to TV for an address to the nation in which he reiterated words spoken by the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the USA (Calvin Coolidge, 1923–29), calling on the “Silent Majority” who supposedly supported the American war effort in SE Asia to speak out. November 12<sup>th</sup> news of the My Lai Massacre (Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>) broke. November 15<sup>th</sup> the largest demonstration in US history took place in Washington DC. December 1<sup>st</sup> the first draft lotteries determined the order of call up to military service for Selective Service registrants. Against the backdrop of the Chicago 7 (sic) trial and the reports of the dystopic Rolling Stones’ set on December 6<sup>th</sup> at the Altamont Speedway Free Festival in California (“...a ghoulish sequel to Woodstock.”), <sup>4</sup> Peter’s fall semester ended with his receipt of a notice from his draft board that he was to show up in Peekskill NY in February for his pre-induction physical exam. His student status deferment was apparently in place only until June when, promptly, he was to be inducted into the US Army.

\*

The young bard somewhere dug up a tie and sports coat in order to pay a visit to his father in midtown Manhattan. David M. Boffey closed the door to his office and listened as his son shared the predicament: he believed himself (“...or I’d convinced myself...”) to be a pacifist and planned to argue his case for conscientious objector status before Local Board No. 12 at 8 Bank Street in Peekskill. Teary-eyed, his father pledged financial support for any legal campaign expenses. But Peter’s honest aspiration was to accept whatever alternative service was assigned to him by the powers that be. Peter left that meeting in receipt of mixed messages. His father wasn’t in favor of the war in SE Asia, and he would bankroll his son’s litigation, yet he was still obviously distraught that Peter’s presentation as a peacenik could not be kept more secret. <sup>5</sup>

*My dad’s code of behavior had fatally excluded any practice of self-study that might have enabled him to take a stronger stand regardless of popular opinion. His commitment to my cause was half- if not whole-heartedly sincere. My best explanation is that his upbringing under two—not one—domineering women and no actively engaged fathers (not even one) had never prepared him for the complicated demands of parenting three sons through the cataclysmic Sixties. That, at least, is the pass card of forgiveness I can hand him now, however late.*

The office in Dr. Pieter Kors’ suburban home was his next stop in search of help evaluating his situation. [Ed. note: For an incident related to his reckoning with the draft, see Note 12 in NOTES to Chapter 5.] In the familiar Katonah setting, the psychiatrist listened to his story and read over the letter Peter had composed to his draft board, a document in which he quoted from the Great Books. But in the end the Boffey family shrink cut to the chase, offering to write a letter whose contents would unequivocally exempt his erstwhile patient from conventional military service. In short order, Peter accepted the offer and waited while the good doctor typed a statement and sealed the envelope. Suddenly gone were the idealist’s late-night discussions with draft card burners at the Catholic Worker and his lunchtime conversations with Dorothy Day, gone were his citations of Socrates, Jesus Christ, Gandhi, et al., for none matched the sheer fire power of a letter on the

stationary of a psychiatric MD. (“And I knew that Joan Baez would never ever be mine no matter what I did to stop the war in Vietnam!”) Peter left that meeting with Dr. Kors with one message: if he presented the envelope to the appropriate authority at the appropriate stage in the examination proceedings, he would be freed from military duties.

What magic words could sway the hearts and minds of the humorless members of the military examiners or the volunteer appeals board in Peekskill? In no time at all, Peter’s curiosity overwhelmed his better judgment, and he used tea kettle steam to pry open the envelope, discovering that the doctor had resorted to the listing of homosexuality as a mental disorder in THE DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDER-II (1968) and couched the candidate soldier’s “homosexual tendencies” as the *raison d’être* of his long-term treatment. As it turned out, Dr. Kors was right: nothing more needed to be said in order for Peter Roy Boffey to be “medically disqualified for induction under current standards.” (Statement of Acceptability, Form DD 62) <sup>6</sup>

By his own admission, without Jill’s loving companionship before and throughout their marriage, her male squire might have slipped into a quagmire of accusations and self-accusations.

*As I would find out too late in my marriage, she always deserved more appreciation and respect than the compulsive acting out on my emotional battlefields let me give her. No one on earth should have had to field all the conflicted passions of my tenderness and anger, probably expressed in equal measure. She took the flak and in the end survived the barrage—with few permanent scars, I still like to think.*

\*

During the long winter break, the two love bugs sublet the eviscerated shell of a dismal apartment between Broadway and Riverside Drive and spend two months managing the multiple door-locking devices and trying to keep the cockroach population at bay. One day they spotted a burglar systematically breaking and entering windows from the adjacent roof of the building next door. Peter rushed down to the street-level bodega to inform the shop owner and request use of his telephone to call the police. The man shrugged. He must have heard the alarm in the familiar stranger’s voice, but his reaction dissuaded the vigilant tenant from picking up the phone—why bother?

Concomitant with the regular news conferences of the highly irregular Chicago 7 jury trial, verdict, and sentencing, and capped by Peter’s harrowing February 20<sup>th</sup> experience at the Armed Forces Examining & Entrance Station in Newark NJ, our scholar made little headway in his study of CLAREL. His own “complex passion” (HM) conflated with that of the poem’s pilgrim in the Holy Land and didn’t generate the sort of contemplative perspective required for any critical reading. At the end of February, Jill and her bearer of a dinged moral shield escaped NYC for whatever spring’s eternal promise might bring them in the hills and dales of Dutchess County.

[Ed. note: Readers interested in a case study of the transformation of factual experience into fictional form should consult the author’s re-imagining of getting out of the draft as portrayed in

Richard Debruen's account presented within the context of a psychotherapeutic session in "Verbatim." This lengthy, fascinating, experimental appendage to Chapter 6 (Verbatim D) of **3NLs** can be found under the NOVELS drop-down menu at [www.peterboffey.com](http://www.peterboffey.com).]

\*

A spoken-for, love-smacked bachelor, Peter Boffey still had classes to take, a second issue of the *Muse* to bring out, and (while left largely to himself by his advisor) his senior project to bring to term. Jill palled up with a kindred non-student girlfriend and rented humble housing near the college, benefiting from carry-out food their respective beaus snuck out of the dining hall. They shared their meager savings and odd jobs like pruning grape vines before bud break. But Jill primarily seems to have kept herself ready for their overnight dates and long weekends with her sweetheart. On their highly anticipated daylong excursions in the funky Boffey family Ford, they picnicked in romantic settings like Olana, the Orientalist extravaganza of Hudson Valley painter Frederick Edwin Church (1826–1900) [Ed. note: House and grounds designated National Historic Landmarks in 1965]. Thirty minutes down Sawkill Road was Woodstock Village, and Bardlands<sup>7</sup> were readily available for their private walks and talks:

**TO J. after Robert Kelly**

Tips of white pine attenuate in water beads

and I imagine you standing in that light

your fingers playing that music

fascicles of pearl, fascicles of pearl.

Where we stood last night

the evening turned Hudson waters

to curtains of gold and tassels silver

copper beads strung westward

as light and river fabrics knit.

It smells like a summer night you said

sundown feathers of last daylight

golden across your reddened face

sun going down beyond the Catskills

blackbirds ribboning the darkening sky  
and the night before us.  
This morning at this window opening westward  
the breeze turns the leaves' white sides  
and turns a will in me  
to let the singularity of our circumstance unfold  
the dignity of plants the stance  
of trees the attitude  
of living flowers,  
Eros' scattered seeds become these roots.  
And do you think we are anything  
if not his petals seen?

[1970]

\*

Clarke's elective "Ecology" class offering that spring proved to be more structured and more comprehensible than his previous "Alchemy" course, and its options for credit included the execution of a field study of the student's design. Under unofficial teaching assistant Erik Kiviat's tutelage, Peter learned how to conduct a basic bird survey throughout Bard lands. Before mobile electronic devices and apps existed, with a pair of binoculars, a notepad, and a copy of Peterson's classic *FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1947), Erik's tutee logged many hours on the college's greater property sharpening his observational skills, and spent sufficient time at the desk to transfer his field notes onto typed sheets in a 3-ring binder so that the survey could be augmented by future students over time.<sup>8</sup>

\*

The historical upheavals of the Sixties may be profitably viewed as an earlier phase of the widespread challenges to cultural status quo in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, challenges which have in large part and perhaps for the worst found their newest expression in WOKE culture wars with their cancellations, counter-cancellations, and the rest. Late spring 1970, members of Bard's administration, faculty, and student body were in the throes of a prolonged, serious, collective re-evaluation of curricula, the structure of instruction, and procedures for student *and* faculty evaluation. Those

who were involved could report and reflect back upon this disruptive then constructive movement of historical consequences for Bard College. Peter was exiting the college and cavalierly disengaged from the hard work of these representatives from the three branches of the community, who aspired and—to the best of his knowledge—succeeded in initiating a sweeping program of revised academic goals and approaches to liberal arts education. He cannot say but senses that the Educational Policy Committee was turned on its head and reinvented.

He left Bard more of a rebellious misfit than the wannabe conformist who'd entered the institution four years prior. In his selection and presentation of that spring's *Lampeter Muse*, he exercised what he characterizes as a "juvenile" resistance to conventions, styling his editorial performance after some idealized conception of the cinematic "auteur." In response to previous feedback that his fall issue and the issues of some of his predecessors had too conspicuously showcased the work of non-Bardians, he bristled against those complaints as smallminded and provincial and in a fit of pique determined to call the intellectually indefensible bluff: the spring issue would consist of poetry by active members of the college community—exclusively. By limiting the contributors to only student body members and faculty at Annandale-on-Hudson, his tactic was to out-do the purists, virtually daring the community to prove to him and itself that such a Bard-centric collection might not turn out to be parochial in the extreme. And for those critics who never actually read the poetry anyway, he threw down a second gauntlet: the spring issue would be printed without pagination, table of contents, legal notes, notes about the authors, or any information except the poem titles and poet names.

*The Lampeter Muse would be pure poetry or would not be! With this André Bretonesque buffoonery, the 4-year-long inmate of college life took his stand. Realize that I was still at a stage when I could wear a kitschy, extra-wide, touristic tie and a frayed, undersized Madras sports coat and think it a valid Dadaist gesture! No wonder the terms "collegiate" and "academic" are so often used disparagingly!*<sup>9</sup>

A more generous perspective might reframe Peter's ploy as a version ("...however perverted...!") of artistic regionalism in which smaller-scale representations of place are valued over the expressions of broader territories. "The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds." (Ed. note: John Dewey, *THE PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS: AN ESSAY IN POLITICAL INQUIRY*, 1946) In a complimentary way, everything that Peter was coming to consider the crux of ecology cried out for attention to site specificity well before "Think Globally, Act Locally" became the bumper-sticker shibboleth of environmental politics.<sup>10</sup>

\*

A year spent on CLAREL served its disciple well. Melville's perseverance showed Peter how long-term commitment to one's "craft and sullen art" (Ed. note: From Dylan Thomas) could make embracing and eventually encompassing psychological and intellectual distress possible. An increase in his knowledge about the history, geography, and place names of the Holy Land likewise prefigured his future experience in modern Israel (1983–85). He also suggested that his immersion in



CLAREL served his mentor's purposes, especially Kelly's study of the long but not necessarily narrative modern poem, a form to which Kelly was strongly drawn and has consistently explored in his own writings.

Characteristically, Herman Melville had taken on grand philosophical questions—like what might an ideal human being be?—and the fundamental 19<sup>th</sup>-century clash between new sciences and received religions. Like the majority of readers of CLAREL, Peter was puzzled by Melville's choice of a constrictive verse format for such an expansive investigation. That decision had, in the judgment of all observers to date, generated uneven results in the poetry, and various explanations had been put forth for the choice of such formal, rule-bound prosodic parameters for this caravan of ideas cast in an episodic travelogue [Ed. note: See Bezanson's "Introduction" on how the poem's language, prosody, and formal structure relate to Melville's primary design, especially pp. lxiv–lxix.]. But from a working writer's perspective, Kelly posited that the relatively strict format of the metrics and rhyme scheme which Melville imposed upon the narrative was at the same time a discipline Melville imposed upon himself. As a veteran prose romancer (however critically and popularly deposed and dismissed he'd become by the time of CLAREL's composition two decades after MOBY DICK), the novelist and spinner of yarns may have shied off from the open-ended phrasing of long sentences in long paragraphs which his prose practice usually brought about. Kelly's insight into Melville's mind and method proved a revelation to the student who had like most readers initially chafed at the bit of the preordained rhythm and rhyme scheme of the poem.

*Here was Melville in the last fourth of his life embarking on the evocation and depiction of one variant of the classic 19<sup>th</sup>-century grand tour of the Near East, a region layered over with religious, spiritual, and historic significance. And a plethora of previous and contemporary literary accounts. So he drafts a formal poem of 18,000 lines...? Kelly helped me see that it was as if Melville needed to find a way to keep Neptune's horses in a harness whose traces could be regularly tested for their tension and flexibility. He must have been afraid that his ideation would kick off all traces, his story and storytelling going wild, out of all artistic control. Maybe he sensed he didn't have the stamina—and his diminished public and private readership was certainly not encouraging him—to take any more Nantucket sleigh rides of any kind.*<sup>11</sup>

As for his personal relationship with Kelly, Peter thinks it honest and best to acquit all parties of praise or blame, or at least let the jury remain "out"—forever. The younger man's worrying over the matter (not something the older man seems to have bothered with) may have been what Peter now calls "a frivolous distraction." Kelly's preference to keep himself at a remove could never satisfy Peter's greater neediness, yet the subject of this biography remains ever grateful that Kelly's laissez-faire strategy did force him to push his senior theses beyond the domain of most undergraduate, entry-level scholarship in English literature, i.e. the rehashing of secondary and tertiary sources couched as surveys of the literature.<sup>12</sup>

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A felicitous note was heard toward the end of his college career. On June 12<sup>th</sup> he attended composer Mark Zuckerman's senior project recital in Bard Hall where, among other pieces being heard in their premier performances, he listened to *Twilight Songs: a cycle on five poems by Peter Boffey*. Soprano Paula Melnick sang and Erich Graf played the flute. The Gothic Revival structure had been built as a chapel and parish school for Annandale Village in 1854. Looking back, Peter believes John Bard would not have blinked an eye to learn that his little wood-frame building, still standing, served as the venue for a handful of people paying attention to the poems of a latter-day, secular seminarian in his final days of residence at Bard, including his "Deathsong" (since retitled "First Song"):

it takes us into its sleep  
a white moth falls  
from an overhanging branch  
and makes delicate circles  
we also are falling and drowning  
how shall we land  
make what rings  
I made this song of my dying

[1965]

\*

Before his June graduation, any temptation or desire to advance in academia had fallen out of Peter's personal prospectus. When informed that the English Department would be happy to nominate him for a Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship [Ed. note: Awards designed to encourage graduates to consider college teaching as a profession; the Foundation provided financial support for first-year graduate students in the humanities and social sciences.], he declined, satisfied that he had deflected a direct, destructive threat to his avocation as a poet and his individuation as a new sort of man, which decision perplexed ("...and no doubt affronted...") the faculty member who had borne the good tidings.

*I think it's fair to say that Jill might have been gladdened if I'd positioned myself to make her a well-kept faculty wife. Since prep school, I'd certainly been groomed to become an English prof. But now I really wanted out ... I wanted to "drop out." More higher education ad infinitum...? As inexplicable to others as Scrivener Bartleby's "I would prefer not to," my response was at least unequivocal: I didn't want to tread a predictable path from BA to MA to PhD with a teaching post at the bottom of another ladder, its tenure-track rungs pre-numbered and pre-named. I didn't want to be known to myself or to others as a teaching*

*poet. I suppose I was issuing Kelly yet another pass: I considered him a poet teaching. But like Keats, I vowed to become a...*

Little child  
O' th' western wind,  
Bard art thou completely!  
Sweetly with dumb endeavor,  
A poet now or never,  
Little child  
O' th' western wind,  
A poet now or never!

[from "a Prophecy: To George Keats in America" 1818]

Peter's ongoing thesis work likely fueled his impatience with the thought of further schooling; reading the works of Snyder, Whalen, and Welch only poured gas on the flames. As the Beats had helped to get him kicked out of Williston, the Reed College Three now helped him kick himself off the professional career track in higher Academe. He remembers burning to resolve the dichotomies between the immeasurables of intellectual abstraction and the deliverables of concrete, non-intellectual concerns— "... and all signs pointing to the Pacific Northwest—or bust!"

Peter recollected how graduation day encapsulated his alienation from his father and stepmother. He had felt pressured to invite them to the ceremony and afterward had joined them in a private picnic spread on the garden grounds of Bard's Blithewood Estate. But his father abruptly announced he had to run to purchase cigarettes, and Peter and Jane were left with little to say to each other for what seemed like an hour. ("I knew of no country store or cigarette outlet any closer than Red Hook, five miles away.") For however long it actually was, he played the desultory prince to her unjustly accused stepmother. She even spoke her lines accordingly, fatuously thanking him for allowing her, "the evil step-mama," to attend the event.

*My dad returned with his cigarettes and a half-pint of vodka to spike his glass of whatever we were drinking that sad afternoon. I felt glad I had kept Jill out of the mix and harm's way.*

Summoning up his reflections upon the finale to his passage through college, Peter cited what he called "the gifts" which set him free to chase his Keatsean dreams: the release from any hope for a reconciliation with his father or mother; the release from any obligation to perform military or alternative service to his country; his mother's purchase of her youngest son's VW and her presentation of its keys as her graduation gift to her second son.

Without Jill, he claims, he would have been immediately and dangerously unmoored in the world at large. With Jill, and his fantasy of taking up a bohemian-in-the-rough lifestyle in Oregon ("...toward which I was propelled by my awe of Gary Snyder and for which I was utterly unprepared by my background or lack any requisite skillsets...."), they left the USA, crossing into Canada with his draft deferment and 100 dollars in hand, his antenna out for any signs that emigration might be

feasible there. Within a month, having driven the Trans-Canada Highway, they arrived broke at her parents' Portland doorstep in a sputtering VW bug, finding out fast that it could be "Oregon and bust!"—not only "Oregon or bust!"

## NOTES to Chapter 8

1. p170 Before the Third Reich sealed all exits from Austria for Jews, Jill's father's family had managed to send Leo Bergman to safety in the USA. His older brother survived WWII in Nazi labor camps. The numbers tattooed forever on her uncle's forearm were the first such mementos I ever saw up-close with my own eyes. In Portland, Leo married Pearl Savinar, American-born daughter of an Ashkenazi couple who, earlier than their son-in-law, had fled the Old World—or carried it with them—after the Russian Revolution. Jill's grandfather, the patriarch, succeeded in the meat business and his two sons succeeded in their respective lines of work. I was to meet the *ganza mischpooka*—with mixed reactions on all sides—once my status as fiancé, not just boyfriend, had been confirmed.

2. p170 SW's analogy proves provocative! In the fall of 1969, I received (and saved) six communications from Tom [Ed. note: See Appendix , the return addresses first marked "Tom Meyer c/o J. Williams, Highlands, North Carolina" then simply "TM/JW, Highlands 28741." In the spring of 1970, I received six more envelopes mailed from

Thos. Meyer  
Scar View  
Gawthrop, Dent  
Sedbergh, Yorkshire  
ENGLAND

In the course of fielding submittals for my two issues of the *Muse*, I was relieved—given the aggressive poses struck by some of the campus' more aggrieved poets—by Tom's missives overbrimming with rhetorical peripeties and foaming with literary insights evolving well beyond the basic tropes of Kelley's Pound and Post Poundian-ism (which I had thought I understood!) into a maturing idiosyncratic poetics of his own. As the return addresses indicated and his subsequent oeuvre has revealed, here was a guy who knew far earlier than I ever did just what he was going about.

Rereading those letters "from long ago and far away," I wonder if our cocky bantering over his work's appearances in his alma mater's literary rag was of the essence or mostly incidental to our communications. Our personal and vocational compasses were pointing us in different directions: his in pursuit of far subtler matters of *Engla lond* and the English language than mine, concerned with "Amurrican" presences and new influences such as the three Pacific NW poets out of Reed—Lew Welch, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder. In particular, Snyder's non-ideographic writings, his Zen practice, his environmental awareness, and his general savvy out-of-doors in the natural

world—these aspects of the man were turning him into an heroic, larger-than-life action figure blazing a poetic trail I wanted to follow!

After I left Bard, my correspondence with Tom went on pause until 2 ½ years later I sent him a card and received his reply typed on highly customized, preprinted personal stationary from

Thomas Meyer  
Corn Close  
Dentdale, Sedbergh  
Yorkshire, England

The second half of his last letter reads as follows (including original grammar and spellings):

Yet I am eager for news of you & eager too to make known that I have had thoughts of you, wonderings where, what et al.

Such things, correspondence, arise as a very natural need in my domestic situation: the freedom & reserve of the distance the poet establishes. I suspect what I've said comes from an ever increasing sense of 'the outside world' breaking down & the clearer & clearer structure of 'my own world', ie. change of season, its toll or tax pitted against the lack of any perceptible hierarchy in matters publick (not to mention the mundo politico, kulture in general).

People are not equal to or better than any given situation in which they find themselves; they are subordinate. What I'm at is the superordinance here in writing this letter: I honor (give way to) my sense of you & the affection for you those feelings breed.

It isn't odd (although each time it happens a certain particularity overwhelms the imagination) that what comes out of the blue sets an order to the house wherein the heart is dwelling at the instant. Clarity affords tenderness. By which I mean to say your card when it reached me served as a final marker on a board that let the play hang together.

... like an emblem of fond (as a thing liked & as a thing which serves as the groundwork or basis), that's what this letter is about.

I shutter to think how I would take such a letter if it were written to me. But that, must needs be, is beside the point, & I remain

sincerely yours, (signed) Tom

Truth be told, I was a bit baffled by the arch tone assumed, not at all sure I was tracking all the trajectories of his thought. However, I recognized then (still do) the gorgeous prose craft and lightly veiled candidness, and I knew he was a person of words who could—after his fashion—be true to

them. I now suspect that we had both grown out of a mutual crush upon each other. As usual, in the identifying of my own bisexuality, I was the last to figure it out!

3. p171 One of the lifelong benefits of my taking that class was my acquisition of the English translation of C.G. Jung's *PSYCHOLOGY AND ALCHEMY (COLLECTED WORKS, Vol. 12, Bollingen Series XX, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1968)* in which, as if a prospectus on Clarke's performance, this is written:

The way to the goal seems chaotic and interminable at first, and only gradually do the signs increase that it is leading anywhere. The way is not straight but appears to go round in circles. More accurate knowledge has proved it to go in spirals....

[“Introduction to the Religious & Psychological Problems of Alchemy” ¶ 34]

4. p172 The Altamont festival is a crucial plot point in Stephen Kessler's autobiographical novel *THE MENTAL TRAVELER* (2010).

5. p172 Am I caricaturing my dad's dilemma? Perhaps he was crying for the lost ideals of his own fantasy of an America which he was watching reified out of existence. I remember him sharing with me the freshly circulating account of Norman Rockwell's stance against America's Vietnam War. Enlisted by the U.S. Information Agency or some such branch of the executive government to produce one of his signature iconic images—this time of a GI carrying a wounded Vietnamese mother or child to safety—Rockwell declined, forgoing the use of his illustrative art for such American Agitprop. Of course, it could have been the poster of the year and graced the cover of many a national periodical, but his integrity won out over any ambition to become famously aligned with a cause in which he had lost faith. I put my father in a predicament, too. He was no fan of U.S. military foreign policy, yet he was confronted with a novel fact: one of his own sons was deliberating avoiding military service. My identity as a pacifist may even have been embarrassing to him in his professional and social circles.

6. p173 I'll never know if Kors had put an expedient spin on one aspect of my treatment or if he had always seen my sexual ambidexterity as a core issue in my ill-adjustment to societal norms. I do know he was pissed off when, in a follow-up session, he learned that I had opened the envelope. He showed a dolt maneuvering of the counter-transference phenomenon by expressing his anger to me—person to person—in no uncertain terms. It seems I had—and still have—more work to do getting at the roots of my chronic trespassing of boundaries and defiance of authority!

7. p174 I was taking my cues about the natural world close at hand from the text and photographs of a booklet called *BARD LANDS: NOTES TOWARD A NATURAL HISTORY* by Erik Kiviat, published by Bard College in the summer of 1969. Much more about Erik follows immediately below.

8. p175 Erik's notion of using an amendable 3-ring binder—state of the art in low-cost database recordkeeping at the time—serves as but a small example of his forward thinking about the value

of longitudinal scientific field study in the practice of natural history. As a perpetual if veteran amateur in the study of fauna and flora, I still find Erik's "Why Natural History Is Serious Science" (*News of Hudsonia*, Vol. 15, Nos. 2–3, Year End 2000, pp.1-3) fortifying. The creation of his idiosyncratic BARD LANDS booklet helped orient me in natural history and in what was then my backyard, and anyone who can in the same essay credibly align references to D.C. Peattie's NATURAL HISTORY OF TREES OF EASTERN AND CENTRAL NORTH AMERICA with "The Philosophical Tree" from ALCHEMICAL STUDIES of C.G JUNG (COLLECTED WORKS, Vol. 13, Bollingen Series XX, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1968) has my vote of confidence for life! But his research and teaching have instructed many people of all ages in how best to walk on the land and travel on the water, and he has been duly awarded for his dogged dedication.

Born several months before me in NYC, when he was aged 1 his parents purchased an old 92-acre farm in Dutchess County and turned it into Jug Hill, a children's nature camp that ran for 24 years; Erik was raised and spent his formative years there. Decades later, armed with his PhD in wetland ecology, he co-founded and to this day remains executive director of Hudsonia Ltd. His expertise is manifest in a lifetime of accomplishments. But in the fall semester of the year prior to my enrollment, Erik had dropped out of Bard. Without any official connection to the institution, he was still frequenting Bard lands and produced his authoritative publication of that same name. He also acted as an unofficial teaching assistant in Clarke's ECOLOGY in my senior year when, having known him casually for several years, I was happy to have him guide my own ornithological debut. Other benefits were a visit to Jug Hill and a deepening appreciation of his poetry—some of which I could publish when I ultimately edited *The Lampeter Muse*, poetry of a sensitive, *non-quantifiable* nature which gradually gave way to a *quantifiable* nature based on the scientific method in selfless service to the natural world.

In 1970 I was lucky to join Erik and a wildlife ranger (from which agency, I cannot recall) during the installation of a prebuilt nesting platform in South Tivoli Bay, another example of his forward thinking in action, in that case to aid the recovery efforts of the ospreys which—among other charismatic avian species like the peregrine falcon, the bald eagle, the brown pelican, and the condor—were regaining viable population numbers only after the use of DDT was discontinued (at least legally) nationwide.

9. p176 Phil Oxley, the openminded reader services librarian (1967–71), justifiably upbraided me for burdening him with such a bibliographer's nightmare and asked me pointblank: What was the use? I later learned from Bruce McClelland, to whom I had passed the editorial baton, that my self-indulgence as an autocratic editor had been the last straw: the budget of the poetry magazine supported by student funds was cut in half and, as I understood it, editorship could no longer be conducted by one egotist's divine fiat but must be shared by more than one egotist at a time. I had indeed abused the "freedom of editorial policy and a succession of proprietorships that follows democratic rule" (see WCW's AUTOBIOGRAPHY, p.266), a policy which ideally governs the wholesome culture of caretaking little magazines.

10. p176 In “Why Tribe” Gary Snyder’s swing at the big picture hit a homer with me:

Nationalism, warfare, heavy industry and consumership, are already outdated and useless. The next great step of mankind is to step into the nature of his own mind—the real question is “just what is consciousness?—and we must make the most intelligent and creative use of science in exploring these questions.

The man of wide international experience, much learning and leisure—luxurious product of our long and sophisticated history—may with good reason wish to live simply, with few tools and minimal clothes, close to nature.

EARTH HOLD HOUSE (1969) p.116

In literary and cultural matters, William Carlos Williams had articulated the “local assertion” as a leading principle in the poetic enterprise, promoting the supremacy of the particular over the general, championing place over space:

... I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself—rooted in the locality which should give it fruit.

Chapter 30, “Pagany,” THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1951) p.174

—the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern. For myself all that implied, in the materials, respecting the place I knew best, was finding a local assertion—

Chapter 23, “Painters and Parties,” AUTOBIOGRAPHY, p.138

The strictly localized (sic) sources of the spring *MUSE* can be viewed as a particularly dogmatic application of an ethic with global implications.

11. p177 The deliberate collision of one rhetoric against another, and the transparent use of lexical motifs throughout the poem seemed to strain toward the polyphonic presentation that later found its extreme expression in Pound’s *CANTOS* and the juxtaposing of the rough and the smooth in the materials and their treatment in WCW’s *PATERSON*. I appreciated what liberties Melville did take within the traditions of conventional verse. Were his restless enjambments, occasionally eccentric line breaks, and frequent exceptions to the end-rhyme scheme somehow anticipating Williams’ “variable foot,” especially as Williams planted those feet in his signature triadic layout on the page? I may dismiss my own far-fetched speculations of Melville as a precursor of modernism as totally unfounded—Monday morning quarterbacking—but the relatively strict measures of *CLAREL* did become instruments which the poet’s language and thought played upon to some amazing results.

12. p177 Let a single recollection add levity to SW’s accurate eulogy. At one of our appointed hours in his Aspinwall office, I knocked, the door opened—no one there. While I sat to wait—on the off chance that he was merely late—I found myself face to face with a scroll of Gary Snyder’s



“Smokey the Bear Sutra” (1969). The poster-size print draped the front of the absent associate professor’s desk. I’d never read it before. I guess I’ll always associate that *sui generis* piece of writing with my missing guru—with a smile on my face.

### **PART THREE: MARRIAGE & DIVORCE 1970–1974**

Upon our completion of Part Two, I received the following letter (hand-written). As I opened the envelope, my first thought was that Peter was putting me on notice. With Peter’s permission, I present his full communication here:

*Dear Sally,*

*Memory Lane is no one-way street. We drive into the future with our eyes upon rear and sideview mirrors, looking back upon the past while the present comes at us through the windshield and from both sides. But what are these convenient tenses—future, past, present? Nothing stays still: not the vehicle, not the driver, not the passengers inside. Even without detours or closures, road conditions change. Yet according to my driving lights, you are mapping my life story in a credible fashion, showing great navigational skills at all the major intersections. The manner in which you organize the serial chronology into chapters and sequences within those chapters seems to sustain the long-term balance between the phases of my life of ideas and of action—the one more literarily imagined, the other more cinematically lived. “Life is like a bicycle,” Albert Einstein somewhere wrote to his son. “In order to keep balanced you have to keep moving.” In spite of my position between the proverbial rock of retroactive invention and the temptations of fabulation’s hard place, you do keep an integrated story moving!*

*To borrow a tenet from my amateur botany: the better to know any one thing, we differentiate that one thing from the many, at one stage identifying the genus (i.e. personality type), then the species (i.e. environmental pressures), then the variety (i.e. personal history), and finally the cultivar in all its peculiarity (temperament). You have been careful not to blow the tumult of my youth out of all proportion—as if I were the only “child of the 60s”—or to start forging an ersatz legacy for me in matters literary or familial. I so appreciate your respect for my heartfelt intention not to make of this biography a mere string of episodic short stories or the occasion for score-settling or false peace offerings with people from my past—including myself.*

*If either of us has erred toward forcing the succession of discrete events into an overgeneralized pattern—as if all the elements obviously made a grand and simple sense fitting into a virtually preordained pattern—I’m the one at fault, as my recorded words no doubt must sometimes seem sorry specimens of a would-be eminence gris lurking behind your biographical construction.*

*Our readers may not pick up on your deft meeting of these many challenges, but I do, so send you a non-military salute—chapeau!*

*(signed) Peter*

Reveling in his gratitude, I celebrated having met my own goal of particularizing one person’s life within a general context. His analogy of “amateur botany” fit: I had indeed been trying to do justice to a particular case within a general typology.

His letter of endorsement was timely. Just prior to receiving it I had been struggling. Studying the recorded conversations had become easier, because by then I was supplementing the Sony device's voice recordings with my smartphone's recording capacity; with the conversations on two devices, I could navigate the played and replayed material with greater ease, reducing the time required to write synopses of some passages and select and transcribe others. But I was stuck: How to pick up the storyline from where I'd left the young couple heading westward, entering a period as intense with melodrama, as fraught with distress, and as crowded with memorable details as any other in his life to date? Facing off against the new challenge of distilling the recorded materials, after receiving his heartfelt letter I felt free to phone him to share my becalmed state as I searched in vain for a narrative thread connecting the many changes in his immediate post-college year.

He granted that his own rendition of his post-college period had probably been less than helpful and suggested that my stalled condition could partially be attributed to his irregular reportage, confessing that our earlier conversations had since recalled to mind recollections long relegated to closed vaults in his over-compartmentalized memory. If not exactly inaccurate, he'd realized that his reminiscences had skated over some disturbing elements of his incapacity to smoothly readjust to life after and outside of Annandale, likely leaving some confusing gaps in his relation. In essence, he admitted that, along with the excitement and sheer novelty of their move out West, the overall dislocation had decisively driven him in the direction of a personal breakdown.

I'd "made the right call" by contacting him, he reassured me, and he thought the best or at least simplest approach would be for us to proceed on course: he would continue carefully reading whatever sense I made of it all and, if necessary, share his responses. So I was sent back to the blank page and the ongoing work.

## **CHAPTER 9: PORTLAND, 1970–71**

Ignorant of any adult car-camping protocol in Canada's summer recreation industry, the young couple simply drove westward, his fifth transit across the North American continent's surfaced roadways and her first; for both it was their first eye-popping experience of the expanse and scale of the Canadian terrain. [Ed. note: A taste of their experience seems to have made its way into the diary entries of Katie Lowrie while traveling on the train called "The Canadian" in December 1959; see pp. 164-7, Chapter 5: Homing; Book One, 3NLs.] Their pooled finances covered the costs of food and fuel (and gas was relatively cheap) but left them no money for extra comforts or touristy. Following the Trans-Canada Highway, sleeping out in a pup tent thrown up in random campgrounds and unofficial waysides, any short side trips led quickly and by necessity back to the main East-West thoroughfare. He recalled feeling chagrined about having to pass by a pair of forlorn backpackers hitchhiking their way out of severe weather in a remote passage through the high-altitude Canadian Rockies. The VW bug engine was already challenged by the ascent, and its interior was packed to the gills—there was no room or capacity to carry more.

In his heart of hearts, Peter loved his country *and* he wanted to leave it behind. But as a bachelor and, professionally speaking, a non-specialist, he was firmly stuck at the bottom of the list of categories prioritizing desirable immigrants to Canada, where 90% of the populace resided within 100 miles of the US border. They came across no ready-made “Eurekas” where he and Jill might take up some sort of asylum in America’s “neighbor to the north.” Unless they wanted to try their luck at going undetected (as least for a while) much farther north above the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, perhaps striking a claim alongside Allen and Linda in Eldorado located just shy of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel north of Lake Athabasca [Ed. note: See Appendix IV], they were obliged to return to the USA. Running out of funds, they crossed back over the border and looked around the Puget Sound, where the “Boeing Bust” was taking a mounting toll on the regional economy and an unemployment rate three times the national average made greater Seattle a tough pace to find any job, whether as a specialist or a non-skilled worker—which is all Peter really had to offer. [Ed. note: The 1969–71 waves of layoffs at Boeing Company had rippling, crippling effects on employment throughout the Pacific Northwest.] Peter knew he had zero skills for genuinely rural living, certainly not on any Province’s northern frontier, and he didn’t have a clue how to convert his English major into income-generating journalism, substitute teaching, or even trash fiction. Disenchanted, his tail between his legs, our Pleasantville prince reached the promised land of Oregon and surrendered himself, penniless at Jill’s parents’ door.

The family daughter was welcomed home, and her mother and father treated her companion fairly enough as the essential assessment began: Was this young man marriage material? A series of false starts took place.<sup>1</sup> Jill slept in her childhood room, and Peter bedded down in a makeshift bedroom in her father’s basement TV lair—not in the absent brother’s empty bedroom next to Jill’s upstairs. Her parents’ separate bedrooms occupied the floor in between. In no time, Peter’s “girlfriend” was sobbing in his arms while breaking the news that her folks were ashamed of the relationship and not inclined to aid or abet such a state of affairs in their household. Old World mores were casting their shadow across an ocean and a continent: the “boyfriend” could not be welcomed much longer as a guest under the Leo and Pearl Bergman’s roof (“...Whither? Whither? indeed...”). Peter caved in to Jill’s tears and agreed to wed.

More false starts came on fast. Leo secured the young fiancées a huge, empty, unfurnished, older rental farther out in SW Portland. The intendeds could cohabit there, if they must, a long way from of the Bergmans’ neighborhood. Another wrong beginning followed. Leo Bergman was practicing his métier as some sort of chemist in the paint industry, and in his network of associates the future father-in-law knew the principals of a Portland-based pharmaceutical distribution company. A job interview for the future son-in-law was arranged. Pearl trimmed his hair, Peter shaved his beard, and Jill pieced together an outfit from her older brother’s abandoned wardrobe closet. Doubts plowed under, the job candidate made his way to the address and sat through a friendly enough interview, learning that the sales position entailed much travel throughout a swatch of the inland NW—Eastern Oregon, Eastern Washington, all of inhabited Idaho. As an outside rep in such a large territory, he would enjoy a considerable travel budget, for the work assumed driving lots of

rental cars and frequently hopping on and off small airplanes. In those days, one met clients face to face, and of course it was expected that he would be filling in the territory through cold calls and prospecting. The interviewee forgets the exact terms of compensation. The potential for promotion was self-evident. Going through all the right motions, he was offered the job.

Peter imagines now that he had gotten by on sheer politesse, good looks, and able expressivity. (“I wasn’t exactly free or twenty-one, but I was a white man educated enough to be launched into sales.”) [Ed. note: The author is here taking off on the anachronistic expression, “free, white, and twenty-one,” a cliché problematic enough to have passed out of most contemporary usage.] But after leaving the building with the job offer left “up in the air,” he caught his reflection in a storefront window and knew right away that the clean-shaven guy in the brown slacks, blue blazer, red tie, and shined shoes was not him. It was who he was supposed to be, “one version of who I’d been groomed to be,” but the whole setup was why he’d fled his connections in the Northeast. <sup>2</sup> An entry-level opening in pharmaceutical sales might be perfect for someone else, but he had completely bluffed his way through the civil exchange with his happy-to-be future supervisor. When he ran across a phone booth, he risked offending his in-laws (“... and all civilized man!”) by calling the company and telling the switchboard operator that he was withdrawing his application. <sup>3</sup>

The lead-up to the late August wedding was not what might be described as a romantic interlude, and the event itself (“... perhaps the most fateful of those false starts.”), while not a shotgun wedding, was no glamorous affair. Peter invited his mother and her travel schedule allowed her to attend. The Bergmans engaged a Judge to preside over the muted, secular ceremony in a public park with only the three parents of the betrothed present. Judge Roth struggled to read through the changes in the abbreviated but legal text that the young couple had rewritten according to their preferences, and he even mistakenly interchanged the bride’s name with her mother’s before receiving the white envelope and fleeing the scene. Peter remembers that his mother was a happy guest in the Bergman home, an encouraging mother-in-law to Jill, and a sophisticated, charming *shiksa* at the wedding reception in the Bergman’s backyard where she was the sole representative of his side of the family. Several dozen members of the Savinar *ganza mishpocheh* couldn’t seem to make head or tails of the groom. <sup>4</sup>

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Alienated, disoriented, the missteps wore Peter down and, after a siege of prolonged insomnia, our subject found himself in ER at the nearest Portland hospital. His presenting symptoms: his hands kept flying off at the wrists (sic). Medication administered, prescription filled, he spent the following week in the bosom of the Bergman family home, zoned out in a chaise lounge out back or asleep in the brother’s bedroom upstairs. It was apparent to all that Peter was not “finding his way.” Jill and Pearl were loving, patient, generous; Leo retired to the basement where his TV apparently kept him engaged. Research was conducted among select members of the family and netted a referral to Dr. Ransmeier, a medical psychologist whose marital therapy services were made available. Peter speculates now that, without his in-laws’ loving care and access to professional help, at

his wit's end he would have ended up running afoul of authorities and incarcerated—briefly or worse.

When the second month's payment on the oversized rented house came due (by then it was to some extent equipped with some typically practical wedding gifts), the new marrieds switched to a one-bedroom apartment in a rundown building on NW Gleason near West Burnside Street. The furnishings were vintage Depression Era. The upholstery was as threadbare as the area rugs. The wallpaper was antiquated—not antique.<sup>5</sup> Contemplating his images of the voluntary poverty of itinerant Asian poets of old or of modern mendicant monks or of nomadic post-Korean War beatniks still on the loose on the West Coast—that was one thing; ratcheting his collegiate lifestyle down to the basics in an experience of *involuntary* poverty was another. Jill finally landed secretarial work in Portland's main office of Planned Parenthood, and Peter got back on his feet and found work as a rose cutter at the Peterkort Rose Company on SW Barnes Road west of town. Punching clock for 10-hour shifts at Oregon's minimum wage (\$1.25/hr. in 1970) must have been chastening, to say the least. [Ed. note: For a fuller depiction of this work, see pp.219-220 in "DD's FLIGHT," Chapter 8, Book Five, Vol. III, 3NLs.] Not that the newlyweds ever went hungry. They benefited from the Pearl's fulsome kitchen cooking and the overabundance of fresh fruits and vegetables that Leo brought back from his ritualistic Saturday morning shopping at the produce stand belonging to his favorite green grocer—an extrovertist European immigrant like himself. With two jobs on their updated rent application, the couple again relocated, this time to an upscale studio apartment off SW Morrison Street within earshot of Multnomah Stadium, home of the Pacific Coast League Portland Beavers baseball team. There they began to enjoy a reprieve from the compression which had squeezed them since arriving out West.

Peter's job took him into exurban Tualatin Valley, providing a respite from city life, but regardless of inclement weather, his employment also involved grueling stints cutting holly in Peterkort's orchard as the holiday season neared. Usually the glasshouses sheltered him from the elements while affording endless hours to collect his thoughts while cutting and gathering tightly budded rose stems ad infinitum. Although he had no audience at hand, certain bragging rights accrued from his being able to boast, if only to himself, that he was spitting out the bit worn by elitest poetasters operating in rarified realms of urbanity, often dependent on sinecure, tenure, or independent means. He, on the other hand, was performing *real* work alongside *real* people—the people! Not that Peterkort's work force presented him with anyone with whom he could share his thoughts about what mattered to him most—writing, his writing, and peace in the world.<sup>6</sup> He may have wondered about a bit of restitution of his lost special status too.

Besides having to run the gauntlet of the extended family into which he had married, portions of SW Portland did offer Peter and Jill pockets of beauty in public gardens and a smattering of bohemia entrenched in its bookstores, coffeehouses, and art galleries. Among other factors mitigating the pressures of city life, whiffs of Maui Wowie were often in the atmosphere, especially in the vicinity of the Portland Art School where he hung around the library and neighboring coffee shops. The Portland Art Museum exhibited world-class displays of the traditional Asian arts he had been

drawn to since his youth haunting fine art institutions back East; it was an acquired, cultivated taste which he would nurture throughout his adult life in the Pacific Coast States from this point on. The proximity of the Oregon Coast made possible adventurous daytrips, sometimes by passing straight through long corridors of 2<sup>nd</sup>-growth Douglas firs taller than any trees he'd seen since his visit to Muir Woods as an oblivious young teen, sometimes by winding through the roads of the Coast Range or the Western Cascades tracking down natural hot springs in old growth forests of Doug fir and incense cedar. And, of course, whatever influences emanated from Reed College into the culture at large suited Peter just fine; those were Oregon's hippie heydays so the omnipresent counterculture kissed him in the face. But the kisses were bittersweet: the public antics made him feel homesick for his alma mater and fully aware of having cut the cord from back East. <sup>7</sup>

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However lightly he framed this entire interval in retrospect, however heavily he laid on the irony in his report, distress was still audible in my interviewee's voice recordings as he described the external and internal competition on all fronts as he struggled to align his outer and inner lives—or simply to survive his unsettling first season out of school. Of course, he wasn't the first BA in the humanities wrestling with how to reconcile his education with a shapeless future—with dignity, and that fall he was to harvest seeds he'd sown well before graduating Bard. He'd taken his stand outside academia and any circle of supporters (and detractors) built into his college life, and he had not happened upon any literary benefactors either. Despite numerous hours in Dr. Ransmeier's office (including individual sessions talking face to face, similar sessions while paired with Jill, and the young Boffeys dropping in and out of group therapy), the doctor never seems to have taken hold as a forceful stand-in for the fatherly figure Peter needed badly just then. <sup>8</sup>

The isolation was hard on him. By his account, he flailed about in a confusion of art and life, making a mess of the artistic means at his disposal, generally conflating his person and persona along the lines of an *idée fixe* that a poet worth his quills ought to be making and putting out poems of this and that and the other material, regardless of most anything else in his life—or anybody else. (“O, how I wanted to write a poem too!”) [Ed. note: viz. William Carlos Williams' I WANTED TO WRITE A POEM: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE WORKS OF A POET, reported and edited by Edith Heal (1958)] It ultimately hurt his pride to have to disabuse himself of the fact that his poetry had become a pastiche of what he knew New American poetry was supposed to look and sound like, and to have to see that his was especially derivative of Robert Kelly's ongoingly expansive oeuvre. His writing under the influence of the other man was turning out to be deleterious. Kelly's vocal inflections were not and would never become the authentic utterance of Peter's own voice.

As if to put none too fine a point on his situation, contemporaneous to his fragile situation searching for new ground to stand on in general, Peter's newest poems were serially rejected by Clayton Eshleman [Ed. note: b.1935–d.202. Poet, translator, teacher, literary editor and publisher, most notably of *Caterpillar* magazine (1967–73) and *Sulfur: A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art*

(1981–2000).]. Eshleman delivered his judgment with what Peter applauds as sensitivity and accuracy, but the process can't have helped keep his self-esteem buoy above his basic self-doubts.<sup>9</sup> [Ed. note: See Appendix V]

His reaction to the exchanges with Eshleman was extreme. He decided he didn't need to be a poet after all, persuading himself that he didn't need to exhibit his private life on display like his beloved Joni Mitchell "or any number of the new and sometimes popular American troubadours in their tortured public confessionals."

*Had I been Robin Hood, I might have shied back to Sherwood Forest and found a secret place where Maid Marion could salve my wounds. I certainly hadn't won any golden arrow. On the contrary, my shots went way off target. Well, I was missing the target ("Caterpillar") and its bullseye (Eshleman's acceptance). Crossbow, long bow, short bow—no matter my choice, my shots were missing the backstop altogether. And since the grapes tasted sour—and "Har, har, / nobody care" [Ed. note: From Blackburn's "Two Songs"]—I turned away.*

Without getting too far ahead in our story, I want to interject that it was his choice of the traditional novel form which, first in fits and starts, then in unstoppable cascades, eventually delivered Peter from the stifling dichotomy he had felt as an apprentice ("never a master") of the practice of Post-Poundian poetics as he apprehended them. Rightly or wrongly, he was long torn by a perceived incompatibility of the sorts of storytelling he associated with modern fiction and the sorts of self-projection he associated with that modern poetry. In my own judgment, it was in the process of creating his novels that the author freed his literary craft from the constraints he had felt imposed upon him by the poetics—or that he had imposed upon himself, most obviously under the influence and artful imitation of Kelly. I believe Peter was battered by too many models of the poetic lyrical "I." Too many choices inhibited the development of his own imagination and imagining of what his writing could be. His innovative exploration and applications of novelistic conventions eventually let loose a polyphonic chorus of "I's" and allowed him to play without an aesthete's pretense within a range of the voices he heard. [Ed. note: The novelist's liberated, nimble playfulness of language and thought, first made evident to me in the two Right Crafting interviews, was what drew me to this "not-a-memoir" collaboration.]

But well before taking on his long and innovative fiction, our subject made a decisive gesture that was not entirely surprising or arbitrary although it proved to be another *fause piste*:

*If indeed I wasn't to be Keats à la mode, either then or ever, I thought, why not fall back upon the minor of my major passion—good old clinical psychology. Surely I could develop a career dedicated to helping others. Note that I was thinking of "others" not myself! Surely I could learn how to understand, predict, and control human behavior. I was still twenty-three—can you tell? I think I heard a collective sigh of relief from members of the family into which I had married, not the quietest of which issued for my wife. Their talented but oh so sensitive boychik had found himself at last! And a psychologist was almost a doctor;*

*right? Such a noble cadre in which he could make himself a good living—and where even he said he really belonged.*

## **NOTES to Chapter 9**

1. p190 Sally has again reduced a complicated situation to its essential elements without dumbing it down! My status as a strapping young back-to-the-lander was pure fantasy, non-existent. My road map to mastering Zen Buddhism detachment was long lost. It didn't seem to matter that I dug Gary Snyder and had been making "Cross-County Poems" all along my way from New York State. Without access to my father's coffers, I had no more play money or any money at all. The disparity between my delusional expectations and everyday realities proved pitiable if not catastrophic. Without Jill's family's tolerance, without her friends' friendliness, without her love—would I have gone off the rails and been arrested? Incarcerated? Who knows? For better and worse, this reliance on a strong Jewish woman partner was to become a pattern for the rest of my life. This is an unbreakable narrative thread that will reappear.

2. p190 On a recent, rare sojourn visiting my older brother in Vermont, at a homecoming weekend on a private university campus I found myself surrounded by what seemed to me multiple generations of Ms. Talbots and Mr. L.L. Beans, a population of young, middle-aged, and older lookalikes varying not a smidgen from those I remember in my miserable days at the New England prep school. I cherished my time with Barnes yet also knew I wanted out of there, then and now: I still couldn't get beyond the superficial associations with my past.

3. p190 No doubt the sales manager was baffled. Pearl was understanding. Leo was miffed and declined further discussion. My anxiety to please wasn't enough to permit me to play that role or to pay the rent. Envisioning myself drumming up sales I felt as phony as the costume I'd worn to the interview. Without flattering myself too much, I can class the entire episode as a good example of how I struggled with my inherited privilege, tending to disown it, as was the case when spurning the academic fellowship that could have graced my exit from Bard. It is ironic that, once I was a married father in 1987 a comparable sales position in applied horticulture allowed me to earn the first appreciable steady income in my life, to help support our family, and to begin to save for our child's future. Refusing the job offer in 1970 can be viewed as a willful rejection of a career out of all alignment with my personality and an act of further loosening the ties binding me to my classist past. Passively accepting the job might have produced a more favorable outcome in terms of net worth—then and now—and bucking that passivity might never win me any accolades from the new Wokesters or other closedminded ideologues, but I can conjure up that store window reflection in my mind's eye and say, "Yes, you were your own worthy opponent after all, and you actually have found ways to be free while white—but you've hardly remained 21 or 22 or 23!"

4 p191 Pearl was sweet, sympathetic, supportive, warmhearted—a Jewish mother, for goodness sake! Leo was an aggrieved lion but kept his counsel although plainly not proud of some fugitive poet who'd been fucking his daughter out of wedlock for almost a year!



5. p191 It was cheap and safe and the appliances worked, but was it ever dark and musty after decades of Portland winters and no upgrades! When the resident landlady informed her mute, wheelchair-bound husband that she had let the upstairs apartment to newlyweds in a mixed marriage, the speechless man openly wept.

6. p192 Amazingly, it was only while digging up the past in this conversation with Sally that I recognize the homophonic resonance of the name Peterkort with the name Pieter Kors! *Pieter Kors...?* Hey there, you! Bring me my Decryption Code Book this very instant! Not that recognition of this subliminal feature would have added any flair to my conception or composition of Volume IV of **3NLs**.

7. p192 Like Vermont, Oregon earned a reputation as a separate country where “red neck” loggers and “tree hugging” hippies made up significant constituencies in the general population. In my observations, the “far Right” and the “far Left” used to peacefully coexist. Seventh Day Adventists and Rajneeshees may have locked horns. Hymnists and Grateful Deadheads may not have attended the same services. But once upon a time dialogue between the less radical of “enemy” camps was evident. At least there were those like me who fraternized with the “enemy.” That Oregon countryside was peppered with odd balls not necessarily at odds with one another in any physical, violent way. Perhaps I am still under the influence of that low-intensity weed of which I started smoking far too much. Perhaps such peaceful co-existence never existed except in sophisticated salons and in books, where exceptional people like Ursula Le Guin and William Stafford and their likes could imaginatively span many worlds. Come to think of it, most of Le Guin’s worlds never did exist! But that peace—or at least the long truce—no longer holds, and that dialogue seems impossible today. I remember Ken Kesey, Oregonian to the bone, at a Grange Hall rally in Eugene and on another stage at the Oregon Renaissance Faire [Ed. note: Now called the Oregon Country Fair], railing against the environmental ravages and health hazards wrought by certain agricultural practices, all the while exhorting the community to try communicating outside itself, to try giving your supposed enemy half a chance. And he also recommended sitting with the Bible and a pot of chamomile tea on rainy days! Oregon’s rainy season certainly provides ample opportunities for mulling thoughts over, and those rainy days and nights persist, but has the window of opportunity for humanizing “the other” closed for good? Over the years I’ve nurtured a reverie: when night falls on the Lower 48, the continental map folds up so that the States of Vermont and Oregon can make love, procreating kindred offspring. Just a thought and a hope and a prayer fading into old age.

8. p193 A wise understatement by my knowing biographer! Only in hindsight has this obvious yet long elusive pattern represented by my idiosyncratic roster become clear to me: T. Kelley at Williston; Dr. Kors in New York; R. Kelly at Bard; Moishe Feldenkrais in ghostly presence; Russell Delman—the last identifiable Teacher—in California and Oregon. A curiously phasic psychological homeostasis has obtained from a life span of engagements with and disengagements from such “fatherly figures.” My serial movements toward and away from each of them describes a rhythmic alternation between overdependence upon then independence from each. The self-

centeredness of this practice—in each case undertaken unwittingly—was thrown up in my face in my last communication (dated August 6, 1994) from fellow Bard alumnus Norman Weinstein when, with admirable clarity of thought and honesty of feeling, he wrote me off three decades ago:

... in your remarks I have this sense that a great deal of your letter had to do with you working out some power/authority issues in writing using me as a sounding board. That's not a role I'm interested in. I'm putting this perception out as directly as I can because this came up before, when we briefly corresponded after I graduated Bard. Like you have to knock down my authority in writing only to, in the next utterance, praise me. I really don't need either....

I wish you well in your labors, yes, but think our paths are parallel, with limited contact points. No blame. Just different ways to climb the mountain.

Sincerely [signed Norman]

I couldn't have put it better myself! Indeed, at the time I received his “pink slip” letter, I couldn't have put it any way at all, for I wasn't able to see around my selfish needs, not then and apparently not in our prior exchanges. Our paths have indeed proven to run parallelly, and now I can't seem to dig Norman's contact information up anywhere.

The point is, I have actually learned if not any one thing then two or three. Like relearning to breath in and out and in again—naturally, on my own—a life-sustaining rhythm has been gained if at some expense to me and others. Dr. Ransmeier never made the frieze of my personal Pantheon, but he was for a while a prime placeholder when I needed someone, not just anyone, to help. May I be forgiven for mildly misappropriating a passage from one Yeats' masterpieces:

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,  
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will....

This excerpt from “A Prayer for My Daughter” (1919) chimes for me with a perennial aspiration toward balance—in acts and in reflections upon them: in stillness in movement, in movement in stillness. It has taken me a lifetime to apprehend the pattern—still is.

9. p193 Sally is on to me! But then she has already exposed the fraudulent infrastructure behind the Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers (or perhaps the Kennedy couple in Camelot...?) façade of Nancy Ellen and David Mills' masquerade ball of a marriage failed. I was, after being honorably discharged from Bard, pretty much in over my head every which way I turned, and when it came to inherited self-doubt—it ran amok in my natal family, with far more monstrous consequences than my *petite crise de nerfs* and my subsequent ill-advised decision to run for cover back in school.

## CHAPTER 10: EUGENE, 1971–73

Corvallis and Eugene were then both still smallish, affordable, Willamette Valley cities with attractive university campuses, and Jill would have started her higher education at either OSU or UO. But Peter felt more in his element in left-leaning, hippie-heavy Eugene, capital of Lane County. He was supposed by all, including himself, to be embarking on the straight and narrow by enrolling in a fifth year of undergraduate studies majoring in psychology in order to gain a Bachelor of Sciences to supplement his Bachelor of Arts; nevertheless, the “Emerald City’s” counter-cultural pedigree swayed his decision.

By late spring they had made multiple trips from Portland on purposeful visits to the university’s offices of admissions, student loans, and housing; by late summer they had settled into a one-bedroom apartment in a four-plex of the Westmoreland Married Student Housing complex a few miles west of campus; by mid-fall they had established an easily recognizable pattern of the young, newly married couple (childless for the time being) riding the university’s commuter bus between home and school. Her folks made a visit or two and the young Boffeys went up to Portland on the holidays. Jill was expanding her mind and future opportunities. Peter was back in the groves of academia where everyone, except him, felt sure he always belonged. (“God was in his Heaven, all was right in the world!” [Ed. note: The author’s ironic spin on the last two lines of “Pippa’s Song” from Robert Browning’s own ironical PIPPA PASSES (1841)]).

Jill enjoyed her first year of general studies and her observer-participant status in the English Department’s administrative office’s sit-com where she spent steady if irregular hours at her work-study job. Peter’s parttime groundskeeper job seemed more along the lines of a Marx Brothers movie or Three Stooges show. He studied under the groundcrew lifers (“... a Falstaff’s army, *fur shure...*”), learning how to pace the workload (“... a permanent slowdown.”), how to game the punch clock (“... carefully counting the minutes paid dividends in more pay for less work...”), and how to tolerate the “Oregon sunshine”—dodging heavy rainfall irrupting in constant drizzle.

*My work around the university dorms didn’t seem to me as enlightening as I imagined performing humble tasks at a Zen Temple in Kyoto might, but an awakening aspect of this experience was a new awareness of the ignorant often disdainful attitude of my fellow students toward a person engaged in such menial employment. Suited up in foul weather gear, raking leaves, clearing drain outs, sweeping sidewalks—I was not subject to pity or contempt so much as non-acknowledgment, as if I were a non-being or mindless idiot below consideration. So now I was in the subservient class...? Having witnessed the ways that some privileged students behaved toward the dining hall staff at Bard, I wasn’t humiliated so much as amused by the curiosity of the widespread mistaking of appearances for substance. But then again, by my mid-teens I’d read a lot of Aldous Huxley so I wouldn’t be entirely taken by surprise.*

The new marrieds’ social contacts were situational, provisional. Jill’s acquaintances naturally tended to be among her peers in first- and second-year courses while Peter’s were among graduate

school students—to whose company he aspired and thought he ought to belong. If the young couple’s social life was usually light and frothy, their domestic life was sometimes hot and intense “... and sometimes just lukewarm.” Both of them were randy enough to feel some frustration having to keep their roving eyes and hands off all the others who, if consensual parties had been eligible, looked like lively prospects—we have Peter’s word on that.

Journaling abandoned, poetry put aside, he suspended elective writing and reading outside the prescribed domain of his psychological sciences. He did have to earn considerable academic credits in order to catch up with other applicants to clinical psychology programs in grad school, whether at UO or elsewhere. And, Peter reflected, he had bought into (“... or sold myself on...”) the notion that securing a second degree was somehow fulfilling his potential as a leader, hence redeeming himself.

*It was a rather sad, classic case of overreaction on my part, I’m afraid. The voice of Reason had spoken loudly and the Weight of the Ages was upon me.*

*“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”* [Ed. note: I Corinthians 11, KJV]

*As if that old chestnut had given me a bump on my head, I picked it up off the ground only to burnish it anew. A career in clinical psychology? That settled that, or so I thought.*

Personally, I find it fascinating that Peter whetted his ever-ravenous appetite for intellectual and artistic stimulation by unofficially auditing Willam Cadbury’s FILM AS LIT course for undergraduates, on a regular basis slipping into the lecture hall cum cinematheque. This habit brought to light a remarkable convergence in our extracurricular lives, for in my own autodidactic pursuits after graduating UCLA I had had occasion to investigate that same professor’s unpublished book! I found a loose leaf copy of Cadbury’s manuscript titled GETTING TO THE POINT: FILM AS LITERATURE archived in the faculty papers section of UO library’s Special Collections. Perusing the pages proved to be of value in my understanding of the history of auteur theory in film criticism and appreciation. Although my research occurred 25 years after Peter’s encounter, I like to think it reveals a meeting of like-minds across time—a rapport beyond mere happenstance.

Besides required survey courses and the other elective classes for which, as a re-entry student with a BA, he was qualified to take, Peter’s special status admitted him to an ongoing graduate-level seminar co-directed by two senior faculty members and a pair of their post-graduate mentees. A dozen doctoral candidates were enrolled, and for several of them the seminar was the essential part of their final practicums. Allowed to sit in silently on the meetings of the greater group, Peter was put on a team of four irregulars responsible only for mastering an idiosyncratic coding system by which they were trained to observe signs (“... not signals, not symbols...!”) of body language exhibited by couples who were receiving marital therapy in exchange for letting their sessions be

viewed through one-way mirrors and videotaped for pedagogical purposes. Absolute confidentiality was pledged and maintained. The author tells this story best in his own words:

*Between those biweekly group meetings, our team of lackeys were secreted away in a barracks-like building not unlike some woebegone “safe house” in John le Carré’s world of espionage. With stopwatches and clipboards, we huddled in a closet-size room watching the counseling sessions then watching and rewatching them on the blue-grey screen of a monitor connected to a reel-to-reel Wollensack GM tape recorder. We earnestly burnt our eyeballs out as the reel-out fed the reel-in and the magnetic tape rolled on and over and on and over again. Without any interpretation of meaning whatsoever, we were to quantify the rolling of eyes and sidelong glances; sighs, moans, groans; silences; the slightest twitch of a finger, twisting of a torso, turning of a head; the crossing and recrossing of one leg over the other. In the name of science, we synchronized all our observations with the numerical counter on the machine—and never ever made any inferences! Just the facts, ma’me, just the facts, if you please.*

*This pet project depended upon annual re-funding from the US Navy, a branch of which wanted to use the information to improve interactions between sailors confined to long tours of duty in submarines—under water of all places! Industrial psychology, I guess! After dozens of hours of such tedium, and my muted presence at the biweekly group discussions, I did sharpen my observational skills and could pinpoint minute tics and physical quirks in human communications everywhere, including in the group forum and at my kitchen table. But the end result of my eye-opening exposure to the world of behavioral psychology was to blow the last blooms off the rose of any future for yours truly in psychology at UO.*

Nearing the end of the second semester, he dropped out. <sup>1</sup>

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His undeniable despair over finding his place in the psychology department’s graduate school drove him to investigate options in UO’s department of education where he discovered an alternative training derived from Carl Rogers’ humanism rather than B.F. Skinner’s experimentalism. Adherents pledging themselves to careers in this other version of counseling were following a different philosophical approach and acquiring a completely different set of clinical practices. The marital counseling training program, at UO in particular, seemed pretty much a one-man show fortified by a loyal cadre of grad students, their apprenticeships culminating in a practicum designed and overseen by that same professor.

Peter spoke with those engaged and got permission to observe several sessions of their couples counseling in action—procedures diametrically opposed to the program in which his optimism had been gradually buried over the course of the year. At his crucial interview with the man in charge, he dissociated himself from the psychology department and expressed being drawn toward the education department’s learning model style of verbal-cognitive therapy. But the leader of the pack apparently had no qualms about dismissing the potential candidate; he cut the meeting short, more than less discouraging the young man from any further application. What the professor had

likely perceived—what Peter himself only later came to see—was that the major motivation contaminating his pursuit of a career in couples therapy or in any clinical practice at all, was par for the course of those drawn to help others while in need of help themselves—a misguided attempt to resolve one’s own problems by redressing the relationships of other people “... which has got to be one of the oldest, most frequent pitfalls on any psychologist-pilgrim’s route.”

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In addition to his terminal alienation from the behavioral psychology seminar and his a priori rejection from its alterative, at the end of spring 1972 our 24-year old found out that his repeated spring semester enrollment in the seminar could not be credited toward his degree; he had received bad academic counseling. Plus, he was served notice that he hadn’t taken the requisite course in probability statistics! He learned, to his good fortune, that the course was being offered in the summer school. He registered for the class, not to earn his B.S. so much as to keep his groundskeeping job while biding his time. A late-spring visit from his mother also contributed to his disinterest in any more schooling in psychology at all.

Nancy Boffey had made an excursion outside her usual Pan-Pacific work-travel circuit to pay a call on her son and daughter-in-law in Eugene. He recalled her as a welcomed guest, especially since the two most important women in his life got along famously.<sup>2</sup> Student and patient of analytical depth psychology, his mother scoured the materials of his behavioral coding project and reacted with negative criticism—if not open hostility. She panned the whole setup as shallow, irrelevant, and trivial—and performed in service to the US military no less! According to Peter, her view was that the proceedings were boring (“... which they were...”) and far too far afield from any inquiry that mattered, i.e. related to her own preoccupation with motivational psychology.

*The tenets of behaviorism were of course anathema to her penchant for insights that might throw light on the inter- and intrapersonal relationships in which it was her lot in life to be hopelessly entangled.*

Disillusioned, Peter kept his year-end appointment with his academic advisor (one of the seminar directors) who, dismissing the naïve student’s concerns, said something to this effect: “You’re smart. You’re young. You’re good looking. Why not cash in on it?” (“That last rhetorical question is quoted verbatim from the mouth of the jackass himself.”)

That summer’s probability statistics class was the game killer. Again, in Peter’s own words:

*I vividly remember the moment I came to my senses, waking from a daydream while gazing out at some especially luscious treetops glistening in the sunshine on a summer’s day—on the far side of the window. I hadn’t heard a word the teacher had said. Like a listless school-boy, I’d been absorbed in the swaying of vegetation, tuning in and dropping out without pausing to turn on. Outside of class I hadn’t been keeping up with homework either, and those green trees bore numerous, numinous leaves beckoning me out the door, out-of-doors, outdoors—somewhere Dylan Thomas and Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Keats made*

*music and sang songs. I left at the break and never came back. Needless to say, I never got a final grade or a B.S. degree. I couldn't blame it on Timothy Leary (yet). Perhaps I should blame it on my ignoring Jung, or on being young, or on the sights and sounds of William Butler Yeats' singing trees!*

I don't think he was indulging in gratuitous hindsight when he told me he suffered genuine remorse about his aborted attempt to plow a career path through the thorny thicket of his own self-doubts and conflicted self-image.

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His felt need to listen closer to those birds singing in summer's green and golden boughs cost Peter his first married life. In retrospect, he sees the next twelve months as one prolonged prelude to an inevitable divorce. On the tape, he can be heard carefully evoking the occasion which, looking back, seems to him to have been the clearest warning signal of the ultimate breakup of his relationship with Jill, emblematic of what might have been long-term incompatibility. Late that summer, fifteen miles west of Eugene, the couple attended an openair concert billed as a benefit for Ken Kesey's brother's Springfield Creamery [Ed. note: [www.wikipedia.org/Veneta-Oregon-8/27/72](http://www.wikipedia.org/Veneta-Oregon-8/27/72)]. The Grateful Dead were slated to play once the New Riders of the Purple Sage finished up. Except for the side effects of unavoidably inhaled atmospheric smoke, neither Peter nor Jill were tripping; far from being a Deadhead, "husband" was still curious about the scene so reminiscent of spring weekends at Bard when psychedelics dazed and dazzled his peers not yet addled by hard-drug use and its deaths. His wife, an Oregon native, never found the antics of Eugene's vibrant social tapestry particularly charming and insisted they cut their field trip short. Over his protests, accommodating her wishes, they left even before the Dead had begun to play. Peter's own subsequent forays into psychedelic substances hadn't started in earnest, but the mutually exclusive preferences and tolerances expressed that day seems to him to represent more than differences in mere mood or taste. His dropping out of summer school had prompted significant changes in their status quo: his subsequent decoupling from academia precipitated an absolute decoupling between them.

Jill remained enrolled at UO, maintaining her work-study position in the English Department. As the legitimate student cardholder, she also sustained their access to subsidized student housing. After securing a steady if halftime job as a shipping clerk in the returns section of the University of Oregon Co-op Bookstore's textbook department, Peter would be less able than ever to cover the costs of keeping a vehicle for commuting or recreational use, and living closer to campus became a must. The university, like most universities, always in the business of acquiring more contiguous property, had once upon a time procured a tiny one-bedroom house falling down at 1599-1/2 Moss Lane and added it to a category of "miscellaneous" married student housing—a hodgepodge of dubious structures generating modest revenues until development had its way. I discovered for myself that that address no longer exists: the site is now occupied by a key-padded residential/administrative building tower. But in 1972, a "cottage" with an unkempt lawn and ill-kept shrubbery still sat midway down a dirt or, depending on the season, mud lane. The lease's well below-market terms had suited the couple's budget, and the location of that then-still-funky neighborhood strip

adjacent to the eastern border of campus meant that no car would be necessary for their everyday life. This repositioning had delighted the husband, who still depended upon the campus (which he could traverse on foot to and from work) for cultural opportunities and as the source of his meager income.

While Jill applied herself to her sophomore-year studies and kept the office job, after resetting in the habitable but dilapidated (“... and decidedly mossy...”) shack, Peter began to lead a life altogether different from any she had expected from her East Coast catch (“Call it backsliding, if you like...”). By fall, she saw no compelling evidence of upward mobility in their relocation or his new excuse for employment, while his lightweight parttime job let him explore campus sites other than lecture halls and its main library, below which he discovered the language labs. The art museum housed an exceptional collection of what used to be called Orientalia, and the art and architecture school’s reference library holdings were extensive. In the student union complex he happened upon a music listening room with libraries of jazz, classical, and pop albums—and individual headphones. Within a year, on nothing but his own brazen authority, he would be raiding all these facilities on a regular basis, as well as becoming a habitu  at the New World Caf  and other coffeehouses, eateries, and bars along the campus’ western perimeter. <sup>3</sup>

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Offering legal advice pro bono, university law students ran a no-cost information clinic from a closet in the student union building. Peter learned that in the case of a no-contest divorce Lane County Courts required a \$50 fee and the presence of both parties in a proceeding during which each had only to answer (under oath) a single inquiry: Can you report experiencing chronic, insurmountable incompatibilities? Yes, your Honor. Yes, your Honor. The surviving Record of Dissolution of Marriage lists four fateful dates:

June 4<sup>th</sup> 1973: FILED for divorce  
9-17-73: Marriage of above named persons DISSOLVED  
Oct 4 1973: File RECORDED in Vital Statistics Division of  
Oregon Health Section  
11-17-73: Decree becomes EFFECTIVE by order of the  
Circuit Court of Lane County

By October Jill had found her own place to live, tried out a radically new haircut, and started freely consorted with whichever students and teaching assistants she’d had her eyes on while theirs had been on her. Liberated, Peter was likewise free to follow up on any promising leads in the field and recklessly played the libertine card as he had after being expelled from secondary school. When moving out, Jill generously left the “cottage” lease in her name and left her “ex” to prepare his own meals in the pantry-size galley that passed as a kitchen—and residential quarters for rapidly successive generations of mice. <sup>4</sup>

Reviewing this situation fifty years later, Peter seemed saddened by the separation from the object of his genuine affection yet gladdened that they got out of marriage without children to raise or



property to dispute. Summarizing the period, he recalled a “divorce ditty” for which he had never found an audience or a home in his various writings:

Lust and love are sure close allied  
And thin partitions do these walls divide.

Transcribing this rhyme did not persuade me that the couplet’s glib cynicism encompasses all aspects of a once sacred, tender relationship with his first wife, Jill. <sup>5</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 10

1. p197 Jill was wise to offload me early on. Late in my Nancy Boffey’s life, my mother confided in me that, thanks to her long-term if long-distance conversations with her former daughter-in-law, she had known that Jill married a dentist, raised several children, gained considerable *avoir-du-poids*—in short, conformed to a style of life which I could never have adapted to nor been able to support. I cherish a fondness for the younger woman I knew—a fondness I have never lost.

2. p198 An immature twenty-six, was I even capable of cultivating love or sustaining domestic householding with another human being? Probably not. I know I wasn’t ready to trade in my destabilizing pursuit of intellectual and imaginative adventuring for some pseudo-stability in a predictable marriage and merely practical career. I also wasn’t able to forestall periodically acting out a compulsive pattern in my paltry version of Don Juan. But what was the point of profligacy, then or later? Perhaps I was chasing after a phantom of some purely sexual relationship. Perhaps I was driven to complete myself in dyadic relationships that smacked of romance and compensated for my failure to fulfill myself by any other means. If I was repeatedly turning to significant others in search of true North, I only much latterly learned how to adjust the compass for magnetic variations, the better to navigate the terrain of intimate relationships with an accurate map. Whatever was I looking for? To call it Mother Love sounds hackneyed and oversimplistic but, at this point in time, it may be closer to home than any other explanation I can come up with.

3. p200 Rummaging through personal archives *after* Sarah had recorded my memories of this whole mess, I came across the carbon copy of manuscript fragments typewritten on onion skin. Dated 1974, entitled “The Talk,” it reveals a rather arty yet unartful attempt to register the contentious, gender-driven dynamics of our dyadic relation; all this seems relevant to Sarah’s rendition of the breakup of our marriage. A character named Richard is shown especially preoccupied with such matters as have run throughout my fiction and my life.

Although sharing the fragments may expose me to some embarrassment, it is interesting to see how obviously I was writing under the influence of Joyce’s EXILES: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS (1918), which itself has proved out a poor play to produce—“on occasion acted without much success.” [Harry Levin, Editor’s Preface, THE PORTABLE JAMES JOYCE (Viking, 1947) p.522] Consider the following excerpt from EXILES, an exchange between the two male protagonists:

Robert: Yes. Can we close our heart against an affection which we feel deeply? Should we close it? Should she?

Richard: We are speaking of bodily union.

Robert: Affection between man and woman must come to that. We think too much if it because our minds are warped. For us today it is of no more consequence than any other form of contact—than a kiss. [Ibid. pp.578–9]

That question raised and answered ricochets off another Joycean character's words, those of Mr. Duffey in "A Painful Case" (DUBLINERS, 1914):

Love between man and man is impossible because there must not be sexual intercourse and friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse. [Ibid. p.123]

Compare and contrast those remarks with the tone and analytical orientation of poor Steven in "The Talk." (Ed. note: See Appendix VI)

In terms of reliance upon barebone dialogue, and sometimes monologue, to create characterization and at the same time to move the narrative along, another profound literary influence would be S. Beckett. So, go blame it on the mongrel Irish in me! I don't care. My own literary specimen from 1974 reads like a badly crossed piece of Joycean stream-of-consciousness and Edward Albee's realistic WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF (1962)—and why not? I had been permanently impressed by Joyce and Beckett and Abee—all.

Where is the full original of this forgotten experimental foray? To my knowledge it has never seen the light of day—thank goodness—until now. Half-baked as it was, it may lay rotted in another cardboard box under water or fed to seagulls in a dump. But I believe "The Talk" deserves exhumation as an appendage to this "sorta memoir" of a sorta life.

4. p200 That extra school year showed me a wider range of specialties within the field of psychology, but as a participant in that graduate seminar I soon sensed that I'd hitched my wagon to the wrong horse. I can't speak for the experience of others, but I was an outsider in that hotbed of behaviorism.

5. p201 I'm quite sure my mother was relieved to find me well-loved and cared for and may have been eased to think that any further serious parenting responsibilities on her part would be negligible. I cannot speak to her grandparenting aspirations; I know she did display great love in the late 90s when her life was ending and my ten-year-old son's life was still taking shape. But, praise be, my mother got along well with *all* the Jewish women in my life. I later discovered that for decades after Jill and I had divorced and sundered all ties, out of my purview my mother and my former wife remained in communication, doubtless sharing news, exchanging consolations, sharing confidences—the gist of which I was never privy to.

## CHAPTER 11: LOOSE ENDS, 1973–74

Once the university's fall semester began, before his new bookstore job kicked in, Peter followed his hunch that a visit with some members of Janet MacRae's clan in Washington State was in order. Since the implosion of the Boffey nuclear family, he'd kept up casual exchanges with Aunt Janet over the intervening years, sending and receiving cordial postcards and holiday cards. With a simple overnight bag, he boarded the passenger train in Eugene and disembarked in Seattle, making his way to Aunt Janet's spacious, well-appointed apartment in Upper Queen Anne. He spent only one night there. The woman was older, crankier, no longer inclined to play fairy godmother, and Peter was no longer an innocent little boy. His adopted Western mannerisms, which to her seemed much ruder than the Eastern mannerisms she had adopted and retained, plainly didn't meet her strict standards for deportment—and there was that mass of his disheveled hair—and where was his wife?!? He reports disappointing her and being disappointed, unable to regress to any infantile state such as when he was the naturally born Princeling of Pleasantville, second son of her ersatz son (and substitute partner), her unblameable Mills.

Sent along to the MacRae household still resident on family property in Shelton, he got off the bus on Highway One opposite the homemade sign arching the entrance to the corridor of straightened Douglas firs: "THIS IS A TIMBER FAMILY." Although its size had been reduced to several hundred acres, the family's second homestead was still being maintained as a tree plantation. A rough road had been punched through the forest to connect the natural lake with the MacRae's manmade millpond; Peter thinks that road might have already been made at the time of his first and only other visit to the MacRae spread as Aunt Janet's own Little Lord Fauntleroy in 1954.

[Ed. note: Books One–Four of **3NLs** are "Dedicated to the memory of John G. and Margaret D. MacRae and their clan of Shelton, Washington." John MacRae (Janet's older brother) would be the model for John McLoughlin; his wife, Dorothy, was likewise the model for Dorothy McLoughlin. Indeed, innumerable elements of the Shelton property and its working operations found a home in the author's literary layout of the physical plan and his depiction of the McLoughlin-Lowries' successive lives on the "MacRae Ranch" in Cliffport CA.]

Peter recalls being treated with unequivocal kindness in Shelton and, under the circumstances, some forbearance. He was not a relative, only a vaguely familiar figure in the line of Boffey boys whom John's younger sister Janet (herself an errant child of the MacRae family) had introduced. The elderly, Republican–voting, Scots–Presbyterian couple apparently kept their counsel about any problematics in the young man's failed marriage and outwardly forgave him his smoking cigarettes and, he believes, his probably outspoken language. Snapshots taken during his two- or three-day stay show a tall, thin, gangling young man with a mop of unbrushed hair, dressed in white tee-shirt and jeans, looking more like a cross between Anthony Perkins and Montgomery Clift than a 25-year-old lumberjack ready to fell tall trees. He is pictured with Blackie the dog, in a rowboat with John at the oars, and at various locations on the tree farm.

The author conjured up two telling incidents in particular. He was there on the evening of Nixon's 2<sup>nd</sup> address to the nation [Ed. note: August 15, 1973]. The houseguest sat with the laconic older head-of-the-clan in the TV parlor watching the President insist that he had "no prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in." Peter bit his tongue while Tricky Dicky went to great lengths to "make it perfectly clear" that there were no dirty hands in his Oval Office. With slippers on his feet and his suspenders slipped off his shoulders, Peter's soft-spoken host waited until the end of the program then, before retiring for the night, stated simply, "There's something not entirely honest about that man." (Peter: "If I had to give but one example of understatement, that would be it.")

A second utterance by the septuagenarian engraved itself into Peter's brain and its direct simplicity has on several occasions found its way into both his novels. John had driven the departing guest to the turnout on the highway where the bus would usually slow down to check for prospective riders, and they waited in silence until the Greyhound appeared up the road. It was then the gentle old timberman took Peter's right hand in his and, from below his craggy eyebrows, looked straight into the young man's eyes. "Take care of yourself now," he said. "If you don't, there's few will."

*A veil dropped between my perception of my disingenuous self-presentation and my self-deception. I had somehow thought to have hidden or disguised from that benign old timer the liabilities of my hazardous new state of existence. No such luck! As far as I'm concerned, no wiser or more chastening words have been addressed to me in seven decades.*

When he got back to Eugene, Jill had moved out. After securing his gig at the bookstore but before starting on the new job, Peter took one more trip—literally and figuratively.

\*

While still enrolled, he had elected to take an introductory cultural anthropology course—"out of curiosity." During breakout sessions of the small group discussions supplementing the lectures, our hero had hit it off with the teaching assistant, a Los Angelean relocated to the Pacific NW. SF was a married father with one child and a wife pregnant with "*numéro dos*." The couple leased a small piece of out-of-the-way land with a cabin nestled in a shady hollow near Deadwood, an unincorporated community in Lane County some 50 miles west of Eugene. Although the intentional commune calling itself Alpha Farm had established itself nearby in 1971, SF still lived with his family in relative isolation. About to come to term, his wife naturally wanted to be with family for the duration and under medical care down in LA, so they needed someone to housesit and tend to their few farm animals—as well as to safeguard the maturing plot of homegrown cannabis sited in one rare sunny patch of the land. After taking his erstwhile student through the paces and explaining the simple chores, SF left him with the front door key—and a peyote button or two.

The time and place seemed right for the author's first foray into an assorted pharmacopoeia whose side effects are variously described as hallucinogenic, mind-altering, and psychedelic. Peter fasted and, in solitary ceremony, ingested a portion of the spineless mescal cactus. **FEEDING THE ANIMALS** conveys the experience of his psychoactive rite of passage in Deadwood:

Kettle softly calling  
completes peyotea night.  
A triskelion of cats at the tin plate,  
the fire needs attention repeat.  
Silver dust flakes the herd's heads  
having at hay mechanically.  
I lay my knife in the stream of the real  
the moon bleeds out the white meadow  
this was to be the alchemical dawn song  
but it's going to be ring false  
if we look for gold only.  
The trembling pink-eyed doe.  
The rooster's statue solitude.  
The eyelash of an angus calf.  
Are these trees he wonders of green reflections  
not knowing what  
they are. [1973]

After the birth and after ensuring the health and safety of his expanded family, SF returned to Deadwood, taking up his graduate school responsibilities in Eugene and relieving Peter of any further duties. Six to eight weeks later, he dropped by Peter's off-campus hovel unannounced, leaving several bags of "leaves and shakes," the low-grade leftovers from his harvested crop. [Ed. note: "Outside Eugene, David cleaned dried weed in exchange for three grocery sacks of trash, repackaged the leaves and shakes, and spent a day selling nickel and dime baggies on the university campus." (p.223, Chapter 8: "DD's Flight" Book Five, 3NLs)]

Oddly enough, SF and Peter crossed paths much later in life. Fast forward fifteen years: the Los Angelean was a single male residing on Terrace Street in Oakland where Peter lived with his wife Ophira. Our subject was attending a house meeting of neighbors concerned about public and

private safety when, midway through a presentation by a plainclothes member of the Oakland Police Department (who happened to live on the same block), Peter realized that the speaker was none other than SF, with whom he'd had absolutely no contact since 1973.

*During a break in the action, I identified myself—and him—referring to our previous connection via cannabinoid and alkaloid substances. Promptly hushed and ushered into an adjoining room, I was informed how it might seriously impact his career in law enforcement if his prior activities as a pot grower were bruited about. His request for silence came across as an order not a hint, and I did keep it under my hat, but I couldn't ask for a clearer case of one thing turning into its opposite. Jung might call it enantiodromia; in simpler terms we can consider it a stunning example of how cops and robbers sometimes operate in a rotating turnstile—sometimes on both sides of the law at the same time.*

\*

Given his meager income from the Co-op Bookstore, home economics became essential. Living alone at 1599½ Moss Lane, he learned to hang his own handwashed laundry on a clothesline in the yard where he turned a 10' X 10' plot of ground into his first rag-tag vegetable garden. He stored the pantry with enough bulk grains and legumes to feed himself—and the mice. His roller-coaster diet was vintage “Beat”—pasta, bread, rice, beans (“... nothing to write Aunt Janet about!”). After paying for rent and food staples, he had also to support a growing cluster of bad habits he now cultivated in earnest, his appetites no longer tempered by the normalizing influence of his former wife. Peter admits that “too soon and for far too long” he came to depend upon caffeine, nicotine, red wine, and marijuana or hashish to stay turned on.

Peter's experiments with mind-bending substances jettisoned him into a period of intense creativity and not a little self-destructiveness. Neither strictly recreational nor precisely spiritual in intent, his trips contributed to a volcanic explosion of artistic productivity. Without regard for fame or fortune, his writing erupted in productivity, his tripping “out” and tripping “in” yielding dramatic results in poetry and prose. [Ed. note: Dated 1973 and 1974, a dozen poems saved in **THE BOOK KEEPS CHANGES** reflect his relatively prodigious output during this turbulent period; one suspects dozens of other poems, short stories, and drafts never took final shape or had been deemed unworthy and joined pyres of manuscript burned up along the way.]

On campus Peter crashed student film club screenings and regularly raided the reference collection of the art and architecture library, spending many rainy mornings and evenings in its well-lit, high-ceilinged reading room. The acquisition of French language reading, writing, and speaking skills became a high priority, and he helped himself to the facilities in the language laboratory. He had no right to do so, but no one seemed to notice or care as he applied himself, motivated to learn more grammar, more vocabulary, and to practice the standard pronunciation of spoken French. He read surrealist and Dadaist literature voluminously and tried his hand at some translations (some straightforward treatments, some more eccentric) of simpler texts.

For sixteen months, his low-cost autodidactic pursuits were supported by his piddling paychecks earned by packing and shipping text books back to their publishers and distributors. On a typical weekday, he would awake whenever he awoke, usually early enough to make a stop at one of his favorite study stations while commuting across campus on foot. Before punching the clock at noon, he'd enjoy an espresso or two, and by 4:00PM he'd be punching out, headed to a bar for beer and a bowl of chili, or a coffeehouse for soup, a chunk of bread, a carafe of red wine. If the evening didn't deteriorate into sheer dissipation, he'd visit one of the libraries or the language lab or attend a musical event or a film or a play. If uninvited verses weren't pouring out of his open mind and open mouth, long nocturnal sessions back in the shack afforded him uninterrupted opportunities to attack the texts and pictures of any number of books lying about, open to the musty air lying face down, spines flattened—however he'd left them last.

Looking back over his shoulder at the admixture of self-indulgence and self-application during this phase of his life, Peter insisted on not “reverse engineering” the period by glamorizing it as somehow noble or ideal—or debunking it as strictly venal. Again, he considers himself “lucky” to have survived some of his excessive follies, and to have almost miraculously produced some poems and translations of quality during unprecedented surges of creative input and output. He was challenged to rein in the wilder horses of his burgeoning aesthetic imagination while breaking out of the corrals of his long-suppressed artistic practice. During our conversation, he wanted me to understand and, in my treatment of that post-divorce period, to underscore this crucial fact: by virtue of disciplined formal studies in literature and the arts—especially while still at Bard—he could embrace bohemianism and psychedelic substances somewhat prepared for the risks and liabilities of both. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he had had the advantage of being able to contextualize his breakdowns and breakthroughs within his knowledge of a “traditional modern avant-garde.” He didn't dismiss the wastefulness of some of his own silly, copycat behavior, but he'd been warned in advance of the potentially devastating effects of substance abuse and for the most part steered clear of complete psychic wreckage.

*The unloved and—I'm afraid—unlovable lack-loves I'd encountered on the streets of New York City and Boston while growing up and later during my 1965 visit to Haight-Ashbury were fair enough cautionary tales. Freaking out in one of the West Coast's countercultural watering holes like Eugene or Berkeley or Santa Cruz—I've lived in all three—that's never been my goal or purpose per se. At Bard I'd witnessed how freedom from conventions can be structured to great ends or wasted in dissolution. Part of my luck has actually been the possession of an independently calibrated internal governor protecting me in the absence of control imposed by some greater societal mandate. As for illicit, self-administered drugs, I never played with methamphetamine or narcotics—no needles, please. In 1973, when I did feel ready to own my own experience of the unknowns associated with LSD, mescaline, psilocybin—popular mind-bending substances about which I'd heard and seen and read so much—it was, paradoxically, not with total abandon. In any case, I only tried those “reality-twisters” twice or thrice each and each time—now this is of paramount importance—I put myself in pleasant and in some cases spectacular natural settings whose barely speakable or totally unspeakable beauty “blew my mind” forever. But why go on*

*and on when Robert Creeley has said it best in his elegant off-beat invocation of the Muses?*

Tonight let me go  
at last out of whatever  
mind I thought to have  
and all the habits of it.

[Ed. note: In the Righting Craft Interview (2021) conducted by Sarah Witman, a transcript of which can found on the author's website, he cites other lines from "The Finger," Creeley's so called LSD poem, circa 1968.]

The "freed" male's sexual appetites were voracious enough to land him in one of the earliest incarnations of the White Bird Medical Clinic on E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Founded as a collective in 1970, White Bird's services were low- to no-cost. When asked about any "questionable sexual activities," he could not tell a lie, but over a series of visits he once again "lucked out," for he was not diagnosed with either genital herpes or any other VD. Mercifully for all parties involved, as Peter is wont to repeat, the scourge of AIDS had yet to arrive.

*Suffice it to record that one of my partners—a professor's nubile daughter, no less—confronted me with the accusation that although she herself had only contracted a bladder infection, I was nevertheless permanently "oversexed." Do tell....*

\*

David Mills Boffey made a 24-hour visit to Eugene early in 1974. Father and son had been out of communication for four years, and Peter now recognizes that his father was no doubt hoping to effect a change in their stalemate. He doesn't know whether his father had already begun his losing battle with cancer of the throat (he didn't bring up any diagnosis), which may have been what prompted the failing advertising exec to seek out contact with his wayward second son. Peter recalled prepping accommodations as best he could—shelving books, emptying the sink, recycling empty bottles and empty cans. But given the wreckage of the two-room "cottage," there was only so much he could do to make the place presentable and nothing to disguise the material minimalism of his lifestyle.

His father took them out to a restaurant ("... with cloth napkins! Who'd ever heard of such a thing?"), and they somehow got through the evening together. Listening to the tape, I detected an elegiac strain and sensed that, in spite of the younger man's disestablishmentarianism, when ideology was set aside a mutual affection had survived the ravages of their relationship since his childhood: they could keep the peace. For one night his father slept on the cabin's only mattress on the floor and by midmorning had arranged for a taxi to transport him to the airfield outside Eugene, where regional service would put DMB back into circulation. Whatever else Peter speculates when thinking back upon that brief time together, he guesses now that his father's business-trip junket in and out of the Emerald City must have left the man dismayed, maybe aghast, at the condition of those living quarters and the nonconforming bearing of his dropped-out son. The older



author repeated that it took him a long time to apprehend that his father had in fact gone a long way out of his way and out of his element in attempting to salvage what remained of any rapport with his prodigal son. <sup>1</sup>

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An entirely different visit from Kush lasted a week to ten days and called for no masking of circumstances, for they then considered themselves coequals in the arts and comrades in pioneer artistic thinking and expression. His guest had brought *Amanita muscaria*. After a night of fasting and ceremoniously exposing the sizeable magic mushroom to the beams of a full moon's light, they ate of fly agaric and ended spending the daylight hours in Hendricks Park's Rhododendron Garden—an easy walk from Moss Lane. Peter suspects they made public spectacles of themselves—weeping, laughing, lolling on the lawns, standing stock-still (“... that is, stupefied...”) in the pathways for long periods of time.

*Presumably, we alarmed the more staid citizens of the neighborhood on their regular constitutionals when they were walked by their dogs. But this was Eugene in the early Seventies, and we were only two more guys tripping out in Eugene's oldest park, two individuals without shabby vans or unidentifiable musical instruments, not twenty or two hundred or two thousand tinkers and gypsy ragabashes making a racket and a mess.*

In a letter to Paul Demeny (15 May 1871), Rimbaud had called Charles Baudelaire “... *le premier voyant, roi des poètes, un vrai Dieu.*” [Ed.'s translation: “... the first visionary, king of poets, a true God.”] And in *LE SPLEEN DE PARIS* (1869), Baudelaire had written, *Il faut être toujours ivre.... Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise.* [Ed.'s translation: “Always get drunk... but on what? On wine, on poetry, or on virtue, it's your choice.”] The pair of young American poets had heard and heeded the royal words and would have loved easy access to the rarely available hashish. Peter recalls that a vivid, tangible fountain of music issued from the cottage's floor as the radio played a Keith Jarrett piano performance that inundated the air. Kush's vehicle took them through the Coast Range to the Pacific Ocean where, under the influence of LSD, our *voyageurs* were dazed for hours by innumerable faces in the walls of the haystack rocks at sunset's low tide. As mentioned above and evidenced in this poem, the author credits specific Oregon locales for the fruitfulness and forcefulness of his psychedelic experiments.

## POINT PIÑOS

ancient of sea lioness swim sleek  
through deepening lavender shoals I  
would tell you what happens  
when the wind is so up gulls stop, caught in their flight  
turn a wing and find themselves flung back  
along the line, waves swell  
reflecting abalone suns  
across slick as a gray whale's back, retreat

to sea smashed rocks a foot kicks off  
mussels washed back off into  
the back  
off into the  
sea.  
It's not going to take a lot of  
take a lot of concept of  
of concept of  
unlearning right now.  
Have you seen the pool in the rocks beyond sight?  
Have you cried for gulls in stormy weather  
when nothing but the winds' echoes come to call?  
when we are food savaged on sea rock  
when we are salt the sea anemone sucks  
there are waves and there are waves I speak as one now  
in the mystery of matter.  
Tired rock faces whatever weathers. <sup>2</sup>

After Kush's departure, on his own Peter escaped the smaller confines of his town life in open-ended weekend tramping through remoter sections of the Upper Mackenzie River Area in the Willamette National Forest and, closer to Eugene, the birdy portions of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge in the Willamette Valley. LSD likewise fanned him across then plunged him well below the surface beauty of Malheur and Steens Mountain in the southeast corner of the state, where he felt a strong premonition of his enduring vision of ecological harmonies ("... not without their intrinsic conflicts...") within the natural world. At the time it was a vision based on faith as much as or more than science.

[Ed. note: Fully half of **2HBs** takes place in the High Desert terrain of the Malheur Refuge and Steens Mountain, in the fiction re-christened Bonheur and Mount Deception, respectively. In Book Six of **3NLs**, Pieter Tuelling's secretive endgame transpires in a location typical of the mid-Willamette Valley.] <sup>3</sup>

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Given the glimpse of his complicated attitudes toward publishing gleaned while conducting my two-part interview with the author in 2021 and 2022, during our more new conversation I carefully asked him about publishing in connection with his highly charged outburst of creativity in 1974. What efforts, if any, had he made toward sharing his new work? I suspected that many pieces were discarded or stashed away for future reworkings, but what about the relatively few that he felt were finished. Had he tried to publish them?

At first he deflected my problematic inquiry by referring to some aborted *soirees* at his place when, in a volatile salon atmosphere, he had serially offended his worthy peers and driven the rest away. He finally got around to speaking of one publishing opportunity that came—and went. From

someone whose name he has forgotten, he received an unsolicited request for his work for potential inclusion in a periodical or one-off compilation whose title he has likewise forgotten.

*It must have been Kelly who had nominated me as a candidate in the first place. In a fiery whirlwind, I had recently sent my distant literary hero some manuscript pages “hot off the press.” Yes, it must have been Kelly who had recommended me as a contributor. I remember his postcard with a glowing response to the opening lines of a lyric I’d composed in cool-headed rapture, TO ST. ANNE MY LADY, included in whatever else I’d sent him:*

That dying dawn I heard cry out your mappemonde  
and Christophorous paused midstream....

*I also recall that in his card he had called us “star-crossed.” “Star-crossed...?” I don’t know what the behaviorists at UO would have made of such a term—not much, obviously—but I didn’t interpret it as much of an invitation to further correspondence. I took the hint. Anyway, nothing ever came of my submittal.*

Had Peter shared manuscripts with anyone else? He believes his successor at the helm of *The Lampeter Muse* printed a few sheets pulled from the conflagration of his post-divorce period in Eugene.

Prodding his memory on this same topic, I did dig up one surprising report. Kush had long been practicing his street poetics wherever he went, including during his brief stay in Eugene. Following the seasoned cultural-warrior poet’s example of free-lance performance in the oral and oratorical tradition, Peter tried putting his own verbal art out at open mics and impromptu gatherings associated with music festivals and spontaneous assemblies, taking a stab at what he labelled “publicking” rather than publishing. This struck me as a significant changing of gears for an introvertist lone wolf who had taken to navigating on the margins of mainstream society or outside the margins of any society at all. Public stealth seemed more typical of his strategy. So I was not surprised to learn that our subject had not found the theatrical poetics to which Kush can make a legitimate claim to fame had not been suitable for Peter; he never returned to any such guerilla tactics again.

\*

I asked about his voracious reading. Could he pick out some authors and salient titles from his eclectic reading during that time?

*Well, I certainly wasn’t capable of reading comprehensively. Obsessively, yes, but in an organized program...? No. The period spanning from Baudelaire to the Surrealists was my mainland. My curiosity about it forced me to fuel my study of the French language with high octane and dare I say discipline—under the circumstances, a rare exception to the rule. I often cribbed while reading original French texts—some were quite out of the ordinary, of course. And I’ve always preferred a bilingual edition with the original language presented en face the target language, in my case French en face English. Much of what I got off on was hardly standard French. Éluard’s POÉSIE ININTERROMPUE. Aragon’s LE PAYSAN DE PARIS. The essays and radio broadcast transcripts of Artaud. These*

were as potent as any psychoactive substance I ever ate. Cocteau, anything by Cocteau, including his film scenarios and, when I could actually see them, the films. The same with Jean Renoir, studying the films and the printed scenarios. It's heartening to realize how much archival visual and sound materials I could, with some generous abuse of library privilege, unearth. I got at stuff deviously, but I was always respectful of the materials themselves. Well, they were sacred texts, right? Hard to believe this was all before the web and the internet.

Many of the poems saved from the 1973–74 period can be read as spin-offs of—if not explicit homages to—that terrain in French film and literature where Peter felt himself an honorary citizen. His favorite writers?

*Nerval's concoctions of lucidity and obscurity scared hell out of me. Although his French was often over my head, I was drawn to it and felt a dangerous affinity for the man's sensibility. [Ed. note: Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), prototypical Romantic of enormous gifts and various accomplishments in the arts and letters, exhibited profound psychological instability.] VOYAGE EN ORIENT (1851)—that whet my whistle for travel and exotica. I carried LES FILLES DU FEU (1854) everywhere. “Les Chimeras. “Angélique.” “Sylvie (Souvenirs du Valois)” with its short, poignant essay “Chansons et legends du Valois.” His last novella, AURÉLIA OU LE RÊVE ET LA VIE (1855). It was a deep-water baptism in Nerval I am relieved not to have died from! <sup>4</sup>*

*At the same time I was reading Coleridge and entranced by Blake's texts and painted manuscripts. Just as I admit that I never studied or really understood the detailed architectonics of Yeats' VISION, I confess that I have never mastered—and never will—the greater cast of characters in Blake's cosmology. But a Blake specialist's presence on the English faculty meant that certain public presentations were made and certain materials made semi-available for inspection—all in Eugene Oregon in 1974.*

*But everything that held my attention wasn't de facto esoteric! I was always backfilling the huge holes left in my truncated education concerning American literature. And I wasn't keeping up with any contemporary scenes so much as devouring The Paris Review interviews with well-established and well-connected writers. And dabbling in the library's literary journals and the bookstore's periodicals for sale. I had yet to slice into the so called regionalism of and from the American Southwest which, I'm afraid, received extremely short shrift during my undergraduate years as an English major at Bard. Steinbeck and Jack London were looked down upon by any high education professional I ever met but at least acknowledged. But the 20<sup>th</sup> c. West Coasters and others west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian—Stegner, Austin, Rexroth—they were apparently considered untouchable by serious littérateurs and never mentioned. I don't conceive of such omissions by keepers of the Canon as a collective oversight so much as a collective blindness. As so many women writers and writers of non-European extraction were in their time edited out of the Big Book of English Language Literature, other heroes went unsung, the authors deemed also-rans, their works regarded small things of little worth. Disregarded. The East Coast-West Coast rivalry may be passé but damage has been done. And the—isn't it ironic?—the revenge of history periodically tolls its bells and takes its toll in the inverse. <sup>5</sup>*

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Whether he knew it or not then, Peter knows now that he couldn't forever sustain his self-imposed regimen of excessive reading, self-involved writing, irregular eating, and regular substance abuse subsisting on cannabis. Even while it kept him charged up, his Eugene bachelordom was wearing him down. Living from miserable paycheck to paycheck and always just beyond his means—how long could this financial game plan allow him to behave as if he were semi-retired, on permanent vacation, or heir apparent to a family fortune? As 1974 progressed (“... or deteriorated...”), his daily and nightly smoking of dope combined with his nightly and daily consumption of all Paul Bowles' writings began to take their toll. The author's own words offer no reasonable argument in favor of his doomed attempts to stay airborne in jet streams of fantasy:

*Then, out of nowhere, a magical rope ladder came clattering down the walls inside the depth of a desert well as hot and dry as any in Bowles' own tales or borrowed parables.*

Several years after the death of his paternal grandmother, a \$2,000 cash inheritance found its way into Peter's mailbox. Suddenly solvent, his post-adolescent way of living had been granted a gratuitous extension.

*I'd been looking for freedom from my dead-end existence in Eugene. By fall 1974 the tail of my double dependence upon dope and a Bowlsian worldview was not just wagging the dog. That tail was poised to put its owner (me) on a leash and take him (me) on a long walk down a rather humorless Moroccan road.*

Taking into consideration the legacy of books and movies portraying hapless Westerners taking missteps into the Maghreb, the author's choice of the term “humorless” to summarily describe his own adventures and misadventures is noteworthy. His itinerary ultimately had not much in common with the romantic drama of Sternberg's MOROCCO (1930) starring Gary Cooper and Marlene Dietrich, and not a whit to do with the comedy ROAD TO MOROCCO (1942) starring Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and Dorothy Lamour. But there are some correspondences with Bertolucci's 1990 adaptation of Bowles' breakout novel, THE SHELTERING SKY (1949). I can easily picture Port, Kit, and Tunner crossing paths with our protagonist along one of the most popular “hippie trails” post-WWII.

Trivial local debts cleared, he booked a berth on board a passenger freighter scheduled to sail from the Eastern Seaboard to Casablanca in the New Year.

*I was so tired of ever-rainy Oregon, and I was so ready to follow my fantasy of an always-sunny Maroc—or so I imagined it. And my appointment calendar was wide open! You have to understand: I felt rich! Think of it as wealth management turned upside down: I wanted to make the most, of course, but out of very little. Hundreds and hundreds of dollars? What an embarrassment of riches for a 27-year-old who had grown accustomed to immense inner richness mocking piteous outer poverty. Now I could fool myself and others into imagining that I was a competent young man of independent means, or a trust fund baby, or a*

*clever hands-off dealer of mountain-grown weed—none of which was true. But I cringe to think that a permanently hashish-induced hebetude was the state of being to which I secretly aspired.*

Peter's subsequent vagabonding might be dismissed as one big self-delusional detour, and fifty years after the fact no one is more cognizant of the folly of his fugue than the vagabond himself. I trust that a biographer's intrusion will be forgiven, for I can't resist underscoring the obvious but painful timing of this flight toward oblivion. Given what I know and what the reader will eventually learn about his father's self-inflicted death, Peter's flight does seem to have been guided by the light of a self-extinguishing flame. Yet he simply didn't seem to know (or care?) that he was the very sort of person who could least afford to play with fire. What's more, two weeks shy of his Eugene departure date, yet another unsettling element was added to the mix.

\*

One rare fair-weather day toward the end of November, Peter was leaning back against a tree in a park where a holiday gifts fair was taking place in downtown Eugene. Unannounced, unexpected, a caravan comprised of half a dozen young women, a couple of musicians with instruments, and another dozen or so of their associates set up camp right before his eyes. In no time, the troupe was running through some energetic exercise routines then launched into contact improvisation. Spectators came and went or stayed on a while to watch the seemingly artless performance. One of the dancers captured and held Peter's attention, and she reciprocated, at the end of the hour approaching him to borrow one of his cigarettes.

Our protagonist had just met the second significant Jewess in his life, another woman in whom he would unwittingly endow all those qualities he needed and wanted and fantasied in one partner—whether they belonged to her or not. Over the next couple of weeks, they did couple up and, by the time he left town, they had sworn to meet again ASAP—in SF, back East, who knew? Maybe even in *Maroc!* Peter hadn't been looking for trouble on his way out of all bounds, but trouble he had found. Her name was Madalon Zorn.

## **NOTES to Chapter 11**

1. p209 I later came to understand that at this late stage in my father's fractured career he had joined forces with another veteran outlier orphaned by Madison Avenue. Together they had mounted a specialty marketing service contracted—when business was good—to provide to the large corporate firms information gained from research in the field. My father's trip to The Pacific NW had to do with using one of the newer compact cassette voice recorders [Ed. note: See p.i, Bookend I, Book One, Vol. I, 3NLs) to interview housewives concerning their kitchen product needs and desires. How the mighty had fallen—and not just in the opinion of his cavalier grown-up child.

2. p210 Although Sarah has here appropriated a poem written after my moving to California in 1975, the lines and images indeed derived from the enduring aftereffects of my 1974 experience on the Oregon Coast. This is also the case with another poem composed while I was less but nevertheless still *enivré* by that powerful acid trip.

### POINT LOBOS

It's a bright lit path  
that leads through the trees  
that lead to the rocks  
that shift the colors of fire.  
We have made it  
off the military bases  
past the art galleries and crisis centers  
to this wonder: what other deer grazed here when?  
Within the thick Amerindian  
below the smoothed sloped hills  
beyond the horse's dream of beige  
we have made it to this wonder:  
that we are the voice of things  
embedded in a world of things  
before I was another.

[1975]

3. p211 Those strong doses of Dr. Kors' psychoanalytic prowess at the right time in my life also provided bedrock for my sometimes trembling, sometimes quaking technicolor world. But I cannot overstate the psychological safety net that my earlier studies of human imagination in literature had built into my experimentation with psychedelics. In my sophomore year of secondary school, I first become aware of a mysterious felt sense of pure identification with what I still remain loathe to label "Nature," and I was initiated into articulations of such a felt sense by the New England Transcendentalists, precursors—in the order of my exposure—to the English Romantics. The English literature major at Bard followed suit. All these bodies of historical literature conditioned and showed me how such seemingly unparaphrasable experiences of the natural world could be expressed, and all carried forward my firsthand experiences in childhood on Opperman's Pond. True, I had wantonly decapitated jack-in-the-pulpits and inadvertently snuffed out dragonflies, but I had been lucky enough to live in direct, unmediated contact with the natural world, with minimal interference from anxious parents, overzealous Cub Scout pack leaders, or electronic devices and social media. My pantheistic encounters later engendered by psychedelic substances again accelerated that reunion with my past and, paradoxically, initiated a practice of Adamic naming by a non-professional naturalist who, to this day, is happy to be an amateur in the wild—enthusiastic, excited, curious, imperfect. [Ed. note: The French word *amateur* means "lover of" or "enthusiast for" or "highly interested party in"—not "an expert."]

4. p212 This reference to Nerval's "*Chansons et legends du Valois*" reminds me that the business of poets and other artists who have functioned as cultural ethnologists is underrated. Nerval used his skills as a journalist and travel writer to record the songs and folk tales of his natal Valois region in the Paris Basin. Nerval's account is laced throughout with poignant strains of nostalgia and regret for what he felt as valuable forms of life slipping away. Differing from the letter but comparable to this spirit, Aragan wrote his elegy for a Paris that was passing fast and past. Nerval's role—at least in my own grasp of what matters to me in the arts and letters—stakes no claim for his field research as anything as monumental as, for instance, the contribution of the Lomax family to the history and curation of American vernacular music, or the pivotal activities of individual song catchers like Olive Dame Campbell (1892–1954), or the works of filmmaker Les Blank (1935–2013) and his musicological collaborators such as Chris Strachwitz (1931–2023). Nerval's legacy as an ethnologist seems more akin to Paul Bowles' pioneering work recording in the field in Morocco. The US Library of Congress website summarizes these holdings in the American (sic) Folk Life Center (Wash DC) thus:

An ethnographic field collection of sound recordings, photographs, and accompanying documentation of Moroccan folk, popular, and art music. The collection includes recordings Paul Bowles made in 1959 during a four-month field project sponsored by the Library of Congress with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation as well as additional field recordings that he and Christopher Wanklyn made between 1960 and 1962.

Without commercial interest, Nerval and Bowles were both preserving, if only for the historical record, traditional products of variegated ethnic cultures as the latter were being encountered and often subsumed by a more homogenous modern world—two writers kissing Blake's butterflies on the wing.

5. p213 How many educated readers have ever read or heard or spoken of Philip Whalen's provocative novel *SPEECHES FOR A BRAZEN HEAD* (Black Sparrow Press, 1972)? I'm not going to research the answer to that, but the book lives on as one of my perennial favorites, and not just because its full-tilt bohemian, antiauthoritarian characters appealed to me. I was indeed subject to copy-cat nonconformity when I first read it at the age of twenty-seven or -eight, but I have re-read it at least once every decade since. Its successes and failures as a formal work of imagination can still grip my attention, as authentic artistic experiments in film and literature often do. In the early Sixties I had been bewitched by the "lost generation" inhabiting Hemingway's debut novel, *THE SUN ALSO RISES* (1926), naively enamored of their glamorized alienation, missing the subtext of authorial critique written into the book. In the early Seventies, my subtlest reading skills were still not fully formed, and I also missed the authorial undertones of deep despair spread across Whalen's cast of self-styled beatniks deluxe. I cherished their individual indulgences and defended the image of a general type: beat, beaten, knocked down for the count but still kicking. Yet at a certain stage in my re-readings, I outgrew such precious projections and realized that the structure and form of the artistry outlived my identification with the characters whom I had felt like, whom I wanted to be like. (I wanted to be liked.) What



still sustains my fascination with *SPEECHES FOR A BRAZEN HEAD* is the narrative design and execution of a thoroughly modular novel. Over time, *SPEECHES* has been for me a writer's workshop in craftsmanship. In the Right Crafting interview posted at [www.peterboffey.com](http://www.peterboffey.com), Sarah and I covered much of this ground since a conscious use of the structural and formal elements of *SPEECHES* shaped the process—hence the products—called *TWO-HALF BROTHERS, OR SEPARATING OUT* and then *THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT*, two works of one quirky, latter-day Hephestus—laboring to know. [Ed. note: Readers interested in pursuing the author's specific references to structural and formal elements may find much of value in *NARRATIVE DESIGN: WORKING WITH IMAGINATION, CRAFT, AND FORM* by Madison Smart Bell (W.W. Norton, 1997), a book in the author's personal library.]

## **PART FOUR: FUGUES & INCOGNITOS, 1975-76**

### **CHAPTER 12: 1975**

Modeling themselves after legendary Beats traveling up and down the West Coast a full generation before them, Peter and Kush set out for San Francisco from Florence Oregon. By 1975, far fewer individuals were hitchhiking on Route 1 than in 1955 and none so ill-equipped for winter weather as this pair of poetical ramblers. Depending upon traffic and cultural pockets in any given location, especially countercultural pockets, their travel pace was uneven at best. Peter had a good month before his freighter was due to take on a dozen or so passengers in Baltimore, so he fancied the sheer adventure of improvisation while stretching his travel budget—the only budget he had. He believes Kush figured himself a Whitmanic pilgrim, a glorified “dharma bum” [Ed. note: *DHARMA BUMS* (1959), Kerouac's second published novel], or an off-beat version of some fabled itinerant Asian monk. The author doesn't recall their thinking of themselves as men fallen on hard times and following in an American tradition of hobos down on their luck.

Steady rainfall, to be expected mid-December in SW Oregon, soaked them to the skin. At least twice before reaching the California border they found themselves stranded in doghole-port towns, holding out in warm laundromats while their clothes spun dry before they hit the road during a lull in the perpetual precipitation. Despite the odds, they did enjoy a succession of rides in a basically southerly direction with occasional side excursions in vehicles where pipes packed with dry, lit leaves were passed in camaraderie. One driver took them to his residence, offering them flat mats to sleep on overnight and bowls of warm soup. Once, stuck somewhere after dark along the Avenue of the Giants, they took refuge in the cavernous “goose pen” of one ancient redwood tree, curled up in moist sleeping bags at the bottom of its towering column hollowed out by fires long past and where rain drops rarely reached them. The next morning, sun flecks lit their way back out onto Highway 101 where Kush declared, “These are my friends,” tapping

the roadside pebbles with the tip of his walking stick while they walked along the highway shoulder—watching for whoever or whatever came next.

Western Humboldt-Mendocino County borderlands and the largely roadless Lost Coast kept them moving inland until Leggett where the road takes off from 101 and leads back out to the Pacific. But 30 winding miles from Weott to Leggett and 15 winding miles from Leggett to Rockport didn't add up to 45 minutes of movement, not the way this duo were traveling. Peter couldn't recall how many days the whole trip to the SF Bay Area took them but guessed it lasted less than a week before, with no fanfare at all, they reached Bolinas one nightfall and gently broke into the Community Center where they used the kitchen to make a meal then slept in an empty room until daybreak. At Agate Beach they met a man “meditating in a pup tent” and willingly sharing his *Amantia muscari*. In Stinson Beach they enjoyed the hospitality of a woman of Kush's previous acquaintance—Peter's impetuous partner on her one futon.

Farther south in San Rafael, our latter-day Sal and Dean [Ed. note: Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the two main protagonists of Kerouac's breakout novel *ON THE ROAD* (1958)] parted paths—Kush to parts unknown—or at least unretrievable in Peter's recollection.<sup>1</sup> For his part, Peter promptly dispensed with agonizing over anybody's class struggle, scrambling back up the social ladder and arriving in Tiburon where his mother was now sharing a married life with her second husband, John Bridgman, in the man's long-term residence on Corinthian Island. [Ed. note: See p.14 ff. in Chapter 2 and that chapter's Note 16 for background information relevant to this ill-fated marital union between widower and divorcee.] Nancy B. had also hired her old friend, Belvedere interior designer Hy Cook, to properly appoint the remarried couple's *pied à terre* in San Francisco, a spacious apartment in the well-heeled neighborhood between Pacific Heights and the Marina—Peter couldn't call to mind whether it was located on Pierce or Green or Scott Street.

Revisiting the Tiburon Peninsula after more than a decade resonated with considerable dissonance for the 27-year-old, but in the interview he claimed to have turned a deaf ear. In exchange for displaying a bit of etiquette to placate his mother's worst fears of impropriety and showing a modicum of respect toward his new stepfather, he reverted to living in the material comfort he had been accustomed to when residing in Belvedere and enjoyed a guestroom and all expenses paid—“... that was the unspoken deal....” But having shed all visible trappings of that bi-coastal Son of Madman who had once-upon-a-time been groomed and prepped for the Ivy League, he thinks by then he was fooling no one: “It must have been obvious to all parties that my train of assured success had been derailed long before arriving at any recognizable station of fame and fortune somewhere along the better commuter lines.”<sup>2</sup>

\*

Learning that the passenger cargo ship's date of departure had been pushed back again (and its port of departure switched from Baltimore to Brooklyn), Peter had still more time on his hands,

and Nancy B. made a proposal (“... gingerly, as I recall...”). Upon his return from overseas, might Peter not want to channel his passion for all things French into a career in translation and interpretation or perhaps linguistic education? Didn’t that sort of avocation just naturally intrigue him? After all, he’d have to pick up a paying *métier* somehow or other, she suggested—wouldn’t he? So, what about before leaving California, he take advantage of his extra time to investigate the possibility for future studies and training at the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies, the elite educational institution situated in and about lovely downtown Monterey? Of course, she reassured him, she and Jack would cover the costs of his quick trip down to the Monterey Peninsula and back. In fact, she reported, after consultation with her husband, his stepfather had become so keen on the idea that Jack said he would foot the bill for a roundtrip *helicopter* ride from SF to the Monterey Airport! Now, wasn’t that something—and why not?

The once and former prince was, however briefly, in what felt like a logistical pickle (“... right in my element!”): how could he play the part? But he reasoned that if helicopter fare weren’t an issue then some extra pocket change and play money shouldn’t be much of an obstacle either. Nonchalant, disinterested, almost incredulously (even to himself), he accepted the proposition. Why not indeed? And checking out MIFS would give him a reprieve from interacting with his stepfather who was, as Peter described him, a hard-working, hard-drinking business man not unlike David M. Boffey—his mother’s “ex.”

[Ed. note: The Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies (MIFS) has often been often confused with the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center headquartered at the Monterey Presidio nearby. MIFS’ name and structure have morphed several times since being founded in 1955. In 1979, it became the Monterey Institute of *International* Studies (MIIS) then in 2010 the MIIS, a *Graduate School of Middlebury College*. Known as the *Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey* since 2015, the most recent re-organization has further consolidated and expanded the Institute’s goal as a provider of career specialists to arenas such as the UN, the US Dept. of State, and other governmental, NGO, & nonprofit agencies, as well as fostering leaders for public & private school systems around the world.]

As embarrassed as our subject became while reporting on this self-indulgent outing, details of those twenty-four hours remained lost in the mists of time—and marijuana. Half a century has elapsed since he made that extravagant helicopter jaunt to and from Monterey and, he admitted, he had “pretty much stayed stoned the whole time.”<sup>3</sup> Looking back, he imagined his condition was probably detectable to those he encountered when checking into the main office and being promptly handed off to a student called in to provide an informal orientation. He remembered that this well-mannered ambassador was blatantly befuddled by the rogue candidate’s odd manners of speech and distracted gazes as he was shown the facilities and introduced to any staff and faculty who happened to be on campus; a large percentage of the community was comprised of international citizens who had gone elsewhere for the winter break. Peter was invited to stay

overnight in an auxiliary apartment kept furnished for academics having short-term business with the institute and, when available, irregular visitors such as himself.

*I probably played the part with what I then considered the requisite panache. After securing the key to the guest apartment, my anxious young host was happy to conclude the afternoon tour, abandoning me to the office of admissions where I was obliged to gather the relevant literature and printed forms while engaging in casual conversation with two well-schooled members of the secretarial staff. A poet and translator, are you? Flying down from the City on a helicopter? An American Francophone with a one-way ticket to Morocco? And single? Oh, then you might like some appropriate bar and restaurant recommendations.... I expect those women saw right though my stained-glass charade as if they were looking through clear pane glass. If ever the label “spoiled brat” could be pinned to a grown man’s lapel, it could justifiably have been pinned to mine. But I was already traveling far more incognito to myself than to anyone else.*

\*

Further delays of the ship’s projected departure from the Eastern Seaboard gave him and Madalon a chance to get together; flew right down to SF. The young lovers had met less than a month prior, and it was apparently an awkward situation whenever they found themselves in close quarters with his mother and step-father under the same roof on Corinthian Island. Plus, Peter’s mother was not feeling well. He thought it might be another of her periodic meltdowns like those between stints on board one of the Ferguson company’s small but ultra-luxurious cruise ships. As the person in charge of hospitality, she always seemed to fall apart upon returning from a tour of duty, having overly loaded herself down as a charming hostess, an efficient organizer of land tours and entertainment, a maître d’ in the restaurant, as well as functioning as the main go-between to management and staff (“...usually the most stressful role of all...”). Intending to improve matters, Nancy and Jack invited the couple to join them for a spell in their rustic ranch house in Mendocino County [Ed. note: Regarding this site, see p.47, Chapter 2, PART ONE]. His mother had planned to relocate to that vacation property for some extended quiet and rest; her husband would be splitting his time between Mendocino and SF; Peter and Maddy could stay ... for a while.

Once settled in at the non-working ranch, the winter getaway proved a social disaster. Company was decidedly not upbeat, and whenever possible both couples shied off from encountering one another. Peter regretfully recounted that, like a petulant child, he had sometimes deliberately driven his stepfather off by resorting to a steady, annoying, monotonous, unskillful beating on the baby bongos he had taken to carrying with him. None too soon for anyone, Peter and Maddy made their excuses and lit off the place, somehow beating a path to Cloverdale or Santa Rosa or wherever it was they parted—Maddy northward to Eugene, Peter south to Tiburon—after renewing their vow to meet again on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Before leaving the ranch, bidding his bedridden mother farewell provided an indelible memory—a story best told by the second son:

*My mother had sunk into one of her inexplicable fatigues. I'd grown up with her periodic funks and was used to the vaguely Gothic dramatics of a general malaise. Sad to say—no, this time I should say “tragically”—I would later learn that while I was far away and much estranged, her unidentified malady turned out to be more than theatrics: she was diagnosed with breast cancer and, as was customary at the time, underwent a radical double mastectomy. But that morning I was unaware of the severity of her condition—as was she. Standing bedside to say goodbye, ready to light off the place that instant, I waited while she roused herself out of self-medicated stupor to deliver what came across to me as a curse:*

“You’re so like your father....”

*When I brought it up years later, she denied ever having said such a thing, but I wouldn't rely on her memory of any words spoken at that time. I still find it hard to believe that even Nancy Boffey's excessive self-involvement would under any other condition permit her to let slip such a maledizione. But she did and, under the circumstances, given the cognitive dissonance of my own mental state, she couldn't have delivered a more crippling blow. It is startling to consider the kinds of pain and confusion a mother can bequeath to a son and the anger and resentment a son can return in kind. Two hapless, helpless, vulnerable human beings—mother and son.*

\*

Late January 1975, weighed down by a serious winter overcoat and lugging a ridiculously heavy suitcase, he got himself to the bottom of Berkeley's University Avenue and stuck out his thumb at the entrance ramp onto Interstate 880. Cars whizzed by. Having sloughed off any outward indications of his deeply privileged past as well as any signs of his most recent reversion to the resources of that educated upper middle class whose child he was, he was headed southward to Bakersfield. The grand plan was to carve another notch in his Byronic belt by hitchhiking the more southerly route across the country from coast to coast. He didn't keep a log or a journal and couldn't tell me exactly how much time his trip eastward took, but one especially long leg of the journey—a 1,000-mile ride in the cab of a long-haul trucker whose refrigerator trailer was equipped with hooks carrying two hundred sides of suspended, swinging beef—came back to mind with a vengeance:

*I wouldn't like to revive all the sordid details of that whole experience. Fortunately, I can't. The truck driver proved to be quite the hardened opportunist. Upon finding out that I was bound for Morocco, he whooped and shouted out how he had “had a ball” while an enlisted man stationed on the US Military Base in Agadir. Over our many miles and hours together, out of all context the man would explode: “Oh, man, you'll have a ball, you'll have a ball!” Then he'd regale me with another morsel of the unsavory debauchery of his North African hitch. It gradually became clear that he regarded me as easy sexual prey. He had no compunctions about showing me how he could piss into a*

widemouthed bottle while steering the vehicle at 65 miles per hour. Emboldened by dusk, he pulled the big rig into some forlorn rest area, took a position right below my passenger-side window and proceeded to work up an erection, the display of which he used to wordlessly tempt his non-paying fare. I wordlessly declined. Later he again pulled off the highway, parting the curtain to the cab's sleeping cubby and without saying a word waited for me to join him. Plainly disgusted with my lack of response, he retired to his lair alone.

If it weren't for the extreme convenience of the long-distance transportation and my complete unfamiliarity with our surroundings on the second cold, dark, winter night, I might have gotten out and crept away while he slept. I probably should have. Hours later we were driving again and, with no encouragement from me, he volunteered how he had "shot and killed a nigger" who supposedly would not stop from trying to steal a horse from the truck driver's stable in Florida. After some informal inquiries, no charges had been brought against him, a white man protecting private property. Was he threatening me? At that point I realized I really should've gotten out earlier! In any case, shortly thereafter he did abruptly offload his useless human cargo—me—claiming that his route headed deeper into the South, opposite my destination.

The intersection where he dropped me off was unmarked and not lighted, but there was an obscure glow from the window of a building across the way. It looked like a log cabin but getting closer I saw there was a gas pump and a couple of pickups parked in front. I don't think it even had a sign out front but I rightly guessed that I'd happened upon a country store. I almost just said I'd "lucked out" by happening upon that place, but wait.

Inside, a short dining counter ran along one side of the cluttered room, and a pair of regulars sat on two of the half-dozen stools. This was no Howard Johnson's. At that early stage in my misadventures, before I switched out the cumbersome suitcase for a backpack, off one hip I was hanging a leather tool pouch, repurposed as my traveling ditty bag. After being served coffee without a word of greeting and no acknowledgment from either of the two locals, the pair swiveled themselves around on their stools and stared right at me, taking their time to appraise my net worth. "That boy's life ain't worth a dime," one concluded, and they turned back around. After this brazen cost-benefit analysis, when they had apparently determined that it wouldn't be worth their while to abuse me in any way they chose, I returned to the intersection and waited for a vehicle—any vehicle except one of their trucks—to come along. The first that did was an out-of-service ambulance and, mercifully, stopped to give me a lift.

"Are you crazy?" the driver asked in astonishment as I buckled up. "Do you know what you're doing?" Of course, the simple answer was No, I didn't know. Without a trace of gallows humor, the medic told me enough local current events to convey the absolute danger in which I was putting myself by hitchhiking at night in the hills of East Tennessee. There was the highest probability that havoc would be wreaked upon any stranger unlucky enough to be picked up. Transported to the relative safety of a well-lighted center of population in lower land, duly informed, I bided my time at a gas station until dawn then selectively approached the occasional driver, asking for a ride north.

\*

After reaching New York, Peter lived in limbo for another a week while receiving conflicting information from the shipping line about exactly when ticketed passengers would be boarding the Yugoslavian freighter: “Once the cargo had been taken on” was all the agent on the phone ever said. So Peter contacted his old friend Richard Samuelson, who invited him to crash at his loft (“... somewhere well below Fourteenth Street....”) while on standby for further notification.

He and Sammy had been in and out of touch during the decade gone by but they always got along every time they re-met. Peter couldn’t recall if he sought out any other company while in NYC. Did he reach out to his younger brother Dan, homesteading in a co-op building near First Street & First Avenue? Did he browse any of the city’s bookstores, or take in a film at one of the cinema houses, or go uptown to some of his old haunts—the Metropolitan Museum? The Guggenheim? The Frick? MOMA? He drew blanks at my questions, although he thought the extra time might have occasioned his first visit ever to view the permanent display of Audubon’s BIRDS OF AMERICA in its original double-elephant folio in the Focus Gallery of the NY Historical Society. On second thought, he had trouble imagining himself presenting himself during any excursion to the Historical Society’s tony Central Park West address—“... when my fashions were so wide open to the four winds.”

In the process of bringing that interlude back to mind, the one episode that did come down center stage was his last meeting with his father. <sup>4</sup> They hadn’t exchanged a word since David B.’s brief, bittersweet visit to Eugene early in 1974 [Ed. note: See p.101, Chapter 11, Part Three], and I gathered that they both approached another get-together warily. As his collaborator in this *life and times of* project, I can state that his scenario of this event represents one of the rawest yet most tender in a long life of disquieting one-on-one encounters between the author and the people closest to him.

His father suggested meeting (*sans* Jane) that afternoon during a quiet lull between lunch hour and Happy Hour at a neighborhood restaurant-bar located a short walking distance from both his office and his home. Peter went midtown and located his father at a café table on the mezzanine level wrapping around the wood-paneled interior of a dining room separated by double-doors from the front bar; his father had chosen to meet his son in the quietest location in the place. Did they shake hands or embrace upon greeting? No recollection. The first thing Peter remembered noticing was that his father was sporting a silk ascot puffed up in front of his neck and wearing his silver-grey hair longer than ever with locks tucked back behind his ears. He wasn’t smoking or drinking, at least nothing resembling his usual serious alcoholic poisons. When his father spoke the lifelong smoker’s voice was exceptionally throaty.

From a discreet distance, a waiter had followed Mister Boffey’s guest upstairs and stood table-side. His father consulted with the man, and the familiar way they addressed each other suggested that this had been his father’s regular watering hole for quite a while. The establishment was, after all, just a few blocks from his and Jane’s apartment on E. 41<sup>st</sup> Street, which was in turn a few blocks from the storefront where he and his business partner kept a small office for

the two-man company they ran out of Tudor City, offering customized marketing services to the advertising agency industry. The waiter had not brought a menu but assured them that the kitchen could still make up most lunch items, rattling off a short list of what was no longer available for the rest of the day. Mr. Boffey wanted nothing but encouraged his son to order whatever he liked.

His father handily dispensed with questions about the ascot, promising that it was not the artsy-fartsy affectation it might seem: he was merely hiding some unsightly sutures left from a little exploratory medical procedure. Over Peter's food and beer, they caught up on news and made small talk until Peter felt called ("... or maybe I *was* called...") upon to justify his questionable open-ended travel arrangements. He thinks he probably quoted Hemingway's advice to the effect that a writer must really live before he has something to write about. Whatever his real feelings and doubts about his second son's squandering of considerable talent, his father agreed with Hemingway, raising the ante by citing the example of James Jones' use of his Second World War experience as grist for the mill of his first great novel [Ed. note: FROM HERE TO ETERNITY (1951)]. And did Pete (sic) know that Mitchener employed an army of researchers to get the information he needed to construct his best-selling historical tales with authenticity? It sounded to me like—if their two targets hadn't been aligned at such different angle—they might have been hitting the same bulls-eye of their main talking point. <sup>5</sup>

When the waiter finally called up from the floor below—Was there anything else?—his father announced that he had to go back to the office but encouraged Pete to stay as long as he liked, to enjoy whatever else he wanted; it would be put on a running tab. Did they shake hands or embrace upon parting? No recollection. His father was a tall man who had always slumped slightly, and he did so while using the handrails of the staircase down. Pausing at the double doors, he turned, gazed upwards, then stepped slowly backwards out of the room.

*Right then, that was the last I ever saw of my dad. He brought the fingertips of both his hands to his forehead and then opened them outward as if to say, "It's all yours, son, I'm done now. The future's all yours now." I didn't immediately decode his parting gesture in exactly those terms, but now I know that's what he was telling me as he stepped backward out of the room: "The future's all yours now, I'm done. Goodbye." I swear ... 'A man, yet by these tears a little boy again....' I swear it: that's exactly what he meant.*

[Ed. note: The line cited is from Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in the "Sea-Drift" section of LEAVES OF GRASS: '*A man, yet by these tears a little boy again....*' Note the author's citation of the same line at another pivotal moment in his life: see p.71, Chapter 3, Part 1.]

Later that year Peter understood that the ascot was indeed hiding sutures and bandages following the ravages of repeatedly unsuccessful operations for esophageal cancer—not "a little



exploratory medical procedure.” He will never know if, having decided that his neck should never be cut open again, David Boffey’s surgeons had sown him up for the last time.

\*

When we met for our next round of interviews, Peter went to some lengths to thank me for having created the conditions that allowed him to recreate that last harrowing scene. He said that he had on several occasions tried but failed to quote write it out unquote but, before our conversation, he had never been able to express its cruel poignancy. “Two hapless, helpless, vulnerable human beings,” he reiterated. “This time, father and son.” He’d been inspired to bring along a stapled photocopy of a 10-page document which turned out to be the start of a memoir “Written by David Mills Boffey 1970”—likely all of it ever written. In discussion we concluded that it was probably executed as the beginning of a longer piece that would have amounted to an extended curriculum vitae full of rather elaborate personal anecdotes, cranky opinions, and not a little snide commentary reflecting the adman’s bitterness about the twists and turns of his latter career years. If his father had continued in the same vein, the document would have contained enough industry scuttlebutt to make even Don Draper blush. With Peter’s permission, I will here enter its opening passages “into the record.” They convey the businessman’s disillusioned perspective and seem to belong in this altogether different “memoir of sorts.”

I spent 26 years in the advertising agency business and if I had to do it all over again I’d do it all over Madison Avenue.

In the early days I was amazed that anyone could make so much money for having so much fun. But somewhere along the line, the fun went out of it and I began to feel I wasn’t being paid nearly enough for the contribution I was making. This feeling, coupled with disgust for the whole operation, turned delight into drudgery.

Either I changed or the business did. As I have observed in myself a rebirth of enthusiasm with my entry into a new advertising-related endeavor, I don’t think my fires went out. I think they were put out. My conclusion, then, is that what mostly changed was the business.

Not that I haven’t. I got my first agency job at 24 and I’m now 50. I was newly married and anxious to show my stuff. I’m now remarried and my child-rearing days are behind me. I had energy to spare and threw it around with abandon. Today I put it where the money is.

I am not now—and never was—cynical about the role of advertising. As far as I’m concerned, more people successfully pursue happiness under the American system, with all its faults, than under any other system. The American system is built around business. And business is largely built around advertising.

It’s not the role of advertising I wonder about. It’s the way the role is played.

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It always bugs me to read an obit in the New York Times about an “ad man” only to learn on reading the piece that he was, in fact, a space salesman. Just as it would bug Michener if my epitaph read “writer.”

I was an agency copywriter—on Madison Avenue, the national bird on the national scene *rara avis*. (I'm told there are [blank space] such in the country.) I started as a cub writer at the Newell-Emmett Company (now Cunningham & Walsh) in 1944 and worked, successively, at Geyer, Newell & Gager; Lennen & Newell; McCann-Erickson; J. Walter Thompson; Ted Bates; and ended as senior vice president/creative director of Masius, Wynne-Williams, Street & Finney.

When I started, Jack Cunningham was creative director (or copy chief in those days) on all accounts in the house except Liggett & Myers, which was an entity unto itself. My first job was thinking up cartoons for Pepsi-Cola ads, cartoons then being their advertising in print. (They also had the famous Pepsi jingle and sky-writing.)

I have worked on just about every kind of account there is, in offices on both coasts ranging in size from [blank space] to 6. I wrote my first television commercials in 1948 (Dennis James for Krueger beer) and have won awards here and abroad for my creative work.

I have been around Madison Avenue.

\*

When the Jugolina agent's summons finally arrived, Sammy accompanied his friend to the Brooklyn pier, where neither of them was reassured by the look of the somewhat weathered TUHOBIC, a workhorse which was operating on a semiregular schedule of cargo/passenger service to North African ports. [Ed. note: Built in 1965, the vessel was renamed ABU RASHID in 1981 then the CATEDAN before she was scrapped in 1984.] The unfurnished, high-ceilinged interior of the hangar at the end of the dock was not welcoming either. There were some plastic chairs. A clock hung above an unadorned ticket window cut out of the bare back wall. In response to Peter's repeated tapping upon its scratched plexiglass, a clerk appeared, checked his papers, stamped his travel documents, and declined to answer any questions about exactly how long he could expect to wait before going aboard. A band of dirty glass windows ran along the west wall, giving a partial view of Manhattan Island's eastern skyline through its wire-mesh grid. They waited. In exchange for inexpensive travel on a cargo-passenger freighter (the least costly of all modes of trans-Atlantic crossing), the paying customers were given to understand that they weren't exactly viewed as steerage-class chattel en route to Ellis Island, but they should harbor no illusions about niceties. They certainly wouldn't be accommodated like voyagers on a Cunard cruise liner.

Peter enjoyed recreating his initial impression of the motley cast of his fellow passengers hanging out in the waiting area. None seemed eager to interact; all stood apart in various combinations, "... isolated like islets in an archipelago of continental fragments." There was one party of five who emanated resourcefulness—father, mother, and three children. A trio of jaded man, woman, and child, giving off an air of extensive nomadism. One childless couple showed signs of planetary travel to exotic places; the waves of the woman's henna-dyed hair were let to flow out long over the embroidered tunic she had on. A middle-aged couple exuded weariness of life on earth. Then there were the odd ones out:

*... a man, who might have been a lesbian, looking as if he'd fallen from the pages of a well-worn copy of Gentlemen's Quarterly magazine; a woman, who might have been a man, wrapping herself in cold-season garments of some ashram vintage 1960; and then there was me. It's amazing. As I survey these actors in our mini-series on the high seas, I can still picture each of them vividly. The beaded and bangled white woman's hair was shorn to a quarter-inch on her scalp, let grown to an inch adressed along her legs, and flourishing in her armpits; she disported herself like the Goddess Saraswati and was in fact destined to attend an international women's dance conference gathering in Turkey or Romania or somewhere else far, far from her North American home. The neatly appointed gentleman said he was an Italian hairdresser; he kept to himself most of the trip, although he once peeked beyond his cabin door and beckoned me into his room where he trimmed my leonine mane; the second time he peeked and beckoned, for various reasons I declined to enter. The parents of the family were open-minded Americans using their limited means to expose their home-schooled children to the world-at-large. The ragtag trio was open-minded, perhaps to a fault—and one which I shared; their mission was to find an expat community in the Maghreb where they could live the good life on a restricted budget while eating acid and smoking kif. The radically chic childless couple was transporting a VW "Late Bay" bus secured right on the ship's deck. It had been converted into a campervan expressly for this intrepid pair, who presented themselves as import-export traders of "ethnic" objects to meet the demands of buyers for the out-of-the-ordinary. Whether they were simply enjoying the good life while living from other means, I'll never know. Against all regulations, I soon discovered that they were concealing two pet cats in their cabin which, thanks to bespoke exotic effects, they had converted into a salon with the ambiance of a Bedouin desert tent—or an opium den. The woman's behavior precipitated the only real scandal of the voyage—but more about that later. The other couple was a saddening pair of middle-aged marrieds traveling under a cursed star: she had terminal cancer, so they were exhausting their modest savings to ensure she had had the best possible experiences in what time she had left. Visibly mournful, the husband was doing his best to escort his spouse through whatever distractions she preferred and they could afford. I remember him as gracious to all of us, indulgent of all. While she seemed to remain sedated under prescribed medications, he remained permanently soused. <sup>6</sup>*

Ater heeding the call for all who were going ashore to do so, Sammy bid Peter farewell and the free-lance traveler settled in with his cabin mate, the young teen boy of the five-member family. Then he roamed about, remaining on deck for the ritualistic passage out of New York Harbor until the appointed hour when he was on hand for the official welcome delivered by the ship's purser in the mess, a compact space barely distinguishable from the contiguous galley. The steward was introduced; he bowed. The cook was indicated at work in the scullery; he didn't lift his eyes. Safety instructions, timetables for meals, hours when the barroom was open to passengers and when it was reserved for crew only—the general protocol was made clear as was the demarcation of which sections of the TUHOBIC were off bounds.

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Once underway, another change of itinerary (*modus operandi* for the Yugolina) caused a two-day delay while more cargo was taken on in Savannah Georgia. Peter re-activated the scene: a white northern prince observes from above as a band of black longshoremen muscles bales of cotton into the hold in an ultra-masculine atmosphere of nearly violent action. <sup>7</sup> Fully charged, the freighter was escorted out of port.

There were no staterooms, lounges, or shuffleboard courts on the Tuhobic, but his modest cabin (“... reminiscent of a low-budget motel...”) worked well enough. The tiny toilet flushed. The cold-water faucet in the baby sink stayed shut off when not in use. The cabinets above and below his bunk remained closed even as the ship pitched and heaved in heavy seas, plowing her way across the Atlantic. He recalled feeling imprisoned by the cell-like space during stormy-weather longueurs, yet liberated by the Beat appeal of his whole situation, for Peter knew that, starting in 1948 then on and off through the 50s, Gary Snyder had worked as a merchant seaman, probably following the example of less-lionized artistic adventurers before him. Hadn’t better-known Beats like Ginsberg and Kerouac subsequently made their ways around the Pacific Rim on freighters and tankers? It was the lowest-cost way for males to gain access to far-flung ports in foreign lands—and always fodder for the typical Romantic misfit. But upon reflection Peter realized he had been overlooking an important distinction: those Beats had *labored* on those ships, whereas he was emulating Paul Bowles.

The cachet of the cargo-passenger mode of travel *without working* had been sealed for Peter upon learning that, in 1929, Bowles, aged 19, had joined only eight other paying passengers aboard the Holland America Line’s steamship Rijndam on her final trans-Atlantic passage—a trip to the scrapyards of Western Netherlands. Then, in 1947, the year of our explorer’s birth, Bowles had likewise relied upon cost-effective transoceanic passage by sailing from Brooklyn to Casablanca on the Ferncape, an oil-engine merchant ship. Two years later THE SHELTERING SKY’s bestselling status catapulted Bowles into an altogether higher economic class where he would go on to play out his hand as “... one of the fabled if not absolutely last of expatriate literati at the end of the era of worldwide cultural colonialism...” <sup>8</sup>

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Three times a day, the Tuhobic’s passengers gathered for decent meals served in the cramped mess. Without recreation or divertissements provided to them, they passed the rare fair-weather hours sunbathing on a flat patch of deck in their allotted zone, and they passed the rest of the time in one or another cabin, especially that of the couple traveling under the weight of the death sentence imposed upon the wife. During the daytime, this doomed pair kept their cabin door open to all, with board games for children and a dry bar and portable casino left out for adults. Desperate for company, extrovertist, the husband welcomed one and all indiscriminately—and poured drinks.

Peter was especially drawn to the living quarters of the couple traveling under the rubric of “traders.” This pair catered to a more select audience, treating their cabin door like a barrier to a speakeasy rather than as an entry to an open house. Once let inside, the door was immediately relocked, and the visitor saw what they had to hide: their two long-haired Persian cats were let out of a drawer and a petit pipe, matches, and crumpled tinfoil with little pebbles of hashish came back out. It was from this intriguing parlor that the cruise’s one scandal originated.

Peter seemed to relish relating this part of the story, conjuring up the event (“... of absolutely no redeeming social value...”) with such flair that I’ll once more rely on his recorded words:

*One midday, midway, it was rumored that after dinnertime our access to the barroom would be extended to overlap with the crew’s. That evening the female American trader missed supper but she later appeared especially ornamented for the occasion. Whether she was originally from Ohio or Los Angeles or Minnesota, I don’t know, but that afternoon she had applied kohl to her eyes and temporarily tattooed her forearms and her hands with henna. And if you dared to look, she looked right back at you with shameless eyes wide open. The confidence with which she smiled upon her audience radiated great catty charm—think Rita Hayworth, the pin-up girl! Anyway, everyone drank too much and a semi-coherent talent show ensued. I played bongos to the lunging trunk, pulsating pelvis, swirling limbs, and pounding bare feet of our own Saraswati’s improvisational dance—think Susan Hayward in I WANT TO LIVE! But as Saraswati pushed her way across more and more of the floor, Rita was making her own headway in another corner of the crowded room.*

*After the bar had closed down for the night, everyone—it was thought—retired to their respective cabins. But a knock on our doors at midnight preceded the entrance of the distraught male American trader—looking for his wife. The corridors filled with all of us fomenting rumors whose worst outcome was that the missing woman had gone overboard—probably inebriated. The captain called for an impromptu assembly. He didn’t just look like he’d been roused out of his bed; I’m sure he had been! Through his first mate’s simultaneous interpretation, he demanded information from us squeezed chockablock in the hallway. Receiving nothing useful, he tromped off, leaving us to wonder, worry, and wait. It was a foregone conclusion that, if she had gone overboard, there was by now no crew or search and rescue operation in the world who could do anything more than we could. We went back to our rooms.*

*Both male and female traders were absent from breakfast the next morning as a rumor circulated then became common knowledge: the femme méchante had at some late hour emerged from the private quarters of so-and-so—let’s call him the third mate, the one in charge of safety ha-ha. The captain had been notified and (or so the gossip went) proceeded to dress her down in broken English and then to tongue-lash his subordinate in whatever Yugoslavian dialect they both understood best—or so it was said. Later that same morning I was standing at some railing absentmindedly starting out to sea when the seductress herself emerged on deck and paused first by my side. Without a word, she*

*cooly looked me in the eyes but, I think, detecting a soupcon of disapproval from me, she pished her lips in dismissal and moved on.*

*I never entered their Bedouin tent again and never saw the traders together outside their cabin for the rest of the voyage. Although we don't need Inspector Poirot to sort it all out, doesn't such cuckoldry among our dramatis personae seems worthy of a sub-plot devised by Dame Agatha Christie herself?*

The next memorable event was the sighting of some fog or clouds looking like an island on the horizon, or an island looking like clouds or—everyone finally agreed—the island of Madeira shrouded in fog with clouds in the distance—landfall! After a belabored entry into Casablanca port, Peter tagged along with the burnt-out trio in a short-lived travel arrangement. Toward the end of the cruise they had hooked up and concluded that his companionship might fortify their vulnerable presence as obviously underfinanced foreigners on a quest to go native in some idyllic spot in the westernmost outpost of Islam.

*We didn't last long. The poor girl of six or seven was frightened by me and not at all comfortable with much else in her surroundings. Me neither! But it was, briefly, a workable start to my own unrealistic pursuit of Youkali—"the land of our desires."* [Ed. note: "Youkali" (1934-35), a tango habanera, music & lyrics by Kurt Weill.]

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"Then we landed, and Morocco took over." Thus Paul B. concludes the thirteenth of eighteen chapters in his autobiographic WITHOUT STOPPING (1972). Before boarding the Tuhobic in Brooklyn, Peter B. had yet to read that book, which in our conversations he always referred to as WITHOUT STOPPING NAME DROPPING. But he had read THE SHELTERING SKY (1949), THE DELICATE PREY AND OTHER STORIES (1950), and 100 CAMELS IN THE COURTYARD: A COLLECTION OF SHORT FICTIONS (1962). And Paul Bowles' 1974 *Rolling Stone* interview had fueled his high-octane fantasies, as had Mohammed Mrabet's stories (taped and translated from the Moghrebi by Bowles) M'HASHISH (1963) and LOVE WITH A FEW HAIRS (1967). He admitted that he was operating on the basis of an extremely limited sample of writings associated with Morocco. He was unaware of the classic travelogues by Pierre Loti and Edith Wharton, and Edward Said's ORIENTALISM (1978) hadn't yet put the Western narrators' standard narrative premises on high alert. Even within Bowles' oeuvre, he hadn't read the three other published novels or the two other short story collections in print. Looking back, he speculated that reading all the Bowles available at the time might have influenced his sojourn in the Kingdom of King Hassan II. If he had been familiar with PB(I)'s WITHOUT STOPPING before taking off for North Africa in 1975, PB(II) wondered, would he have lifted fewer numbers from that older author's playbook—or more? <sup>9</sup>

It didn't take PB(II) long to discover that young people like him had been seen by Moroccans for a long time, whether US citizens pinning Canadian flags to their backpacks in hopes of fending off anti-American sentiment, or Northern European trippers without a clue as to the

roles their respective countries played during the epoch of full-blown colonial exploitation in Africa and its aftermath. Peter hadn't grasped in advance how *démodé* his individual presentation would seem to the populace of his host country, nor had he anticipated the rapid decline in his health due to heavy smoking of cannabis concoctions and his constant inhalation of dark tobacco cigarettes.

Straying from his usual fish/fowl/vegetarian diet, his catch-as-catch-can meals en route were no bulwark against illness. Left to shift for himself, food consisted of canned sardines, raw tomatoes, oranges, and an occasional USA-style hamburger prepared for international hippies hanging out near bus stations and crashing in dubious pay-by-the-day living quarters between medinas and *nouvelle cités*. Deeply perplexed, impressing himself into further service as one of Rimbaud's *voyants*, he wandered the foothills of the High Atlas outside Marrakesh and ate the ordinary fare offered by Amazigh (Berbers) to a hungry Romani (Westerner). He remembered one platter of *fruites de mer* served him on a terrace by the sea ("... a rare delight...") but couldn't recall ever sitting at a table where any higher grade of North African cuisine was served.

Our feckless pilgrim did somehow manage visits to the Five Imperial Cities (Casablanca, Rabat, Meknes, Fez, and Marrakesh) but did not get up into the Atlas Mountains or anywhere near the Sahara Desert. He made it to Safi and Taghazout and but not Sidi Ifni. He spent time in Essaouira and Agadir ("... although I don't recall *having a ball* there...") and took refuge in a colonial residence on a coastal city's plateau—until he wore out his welcome there. He never got as far as Tangiers—proverbial True North on the so called Hippie Trail.

*In some now incomprehensible state of disorientation, I tried for a tourist visa to enter Algeria and was summarily rebuffed at my first stop in Algerian officialdom. I was treated with slightly more finesse when I paid a call on the office of the Peace Corps in Rabat, still kidding myself that I was kidding anybody about anything. I was issued into the commodious office of the American overseer who, in response to my questions about the possibility of staying on in the country as a volunteer, passed me a copy of the policy statement declaring that all Peace Corps field offices getting such inquiries were to instruct the applicants to return to the States and start the formal procedure there, not in the target foreign country. In any case, my dedication to becoming a "missionary of democracy" was blatantly bogus, and I'm sure the administrator had seen my type coming from a long ways away and up close many times before.*

When it became obvious to me that the tape recorder was capturing a truncated account of what I sensed was a period of monumental stress in my subject's life, I asked for more—more information, more incidents, more nitty-gritty details of his time in Morocco. But he deflected my request, steering me back to the relevant chapters in **2HBs** that make up at least 50% of that narrative. Matters of any lasting significance ("... not to mention so called gussied-up local colors...") had been distilled into their fictional counterparts, he argued, pointing out that if the

novel was worth its salt he had redeemed the value of his implausible odyssey; he didn't want to go over old ground.

For once I had run up against an uncharacteristic reticence in my interlocutor, and Peter eventually confessed that, if it were even possible to accomplish, any blow-by-blow chronicle of events would mortify him. "To put it bluntly, I indulged craven desires and sacrificed any semblance of self-respect, yet somehow managed to survive a surrender to pure sensationalism." I interpreted this to mean that he was, in short, ashamed.

During one last pass at the Moroccan material he did come out with this telling admission: With so many decades passed and after so much reworking of that first novel, he'd actually lost the ability to sort out just what he'd experienced at the time and what, while spinning his yarn in **2HBs**, he'd by implication purported to have experienced. How much and what had really happened? What and how much had he dreamed up? I had to accept that if the author couldn't differentiate between the two, I certainly couldn't, so I stood back, measured my curiosity, and relieved myself of the task—except to re-read the novel.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 12:

1. p218 I don't know if Kush had re-sited his Cloudhouse from Lower Manhattan to SF's Mission District or if he was still scouting out the territory.

2. p219 How could I hide my pretenses as a bohemian poet and a pretentious one at that? Wasn't my breath reeking of marijuana? And wasn't I carrying around a pair of baby bongo drums in self-caricature of my bold Beat identity? The double standard of my double imposture—a problem of the rich, the poor, and those of us in-between—has dogged me all my life. My frightening capacity to pretend to any role as heir to a formerly privileged principality—whether of Pleasantville or Belvedere—was probably as transparently phony as the other role I was *o so very hard* trying to convince myself that I could play instead: the happy hippie deluxe. The essential incompatibility of resuming or adopting either of these personae in rapid succession, as well as the associated delusion that artists, intellectuals, and selected others are basically classless and consequently cannot be held accountable for any relations to class-war frays—these conflicts were part of a complicated dilemma I have tried and failed to resolve all my life. But in 1975, I was simply trying to escape the whole business of intellectual inhibitions and almost killed myself while failing to do so.

3. p220 *PLAY MISTY FOR ME* (1971), Clint Eastwood's directorial debut, features the local bars, restaurants, buildings, and streets as they still existed and looked during my own experience while visiting the Peninsula in January 1975 then later while residing in Pacific Grove for the final four months of that same year. Not incidentally, the movie serves as a paean to the natural charms of Carmel-by-the-Sea, Monterey, and northern stretches of Big Sur.

4. p223 It has occupied various stations in the theater of my personal imagination ever since.



5. p224 My dad's adulatory reference to the war story literature of James Jones prompts me to share my knowledge of the only three prose specimens of his own writing which were not advertising "copy." I am in possession of two.

Missing from my files is a typed document comprised of the first two or three pages of what may have been a stab at fiction. Or was it just a long private love letter to my mother? This ambiguity points to that small patch of common ground my dad and I shared that day, i.e. the notion that firsthand experience *and* research provide the materials requisite to crafting literature, whether of a popular variety or the more boutique. In the missing document, the writer—an able-bodied seaman/my father—addresses his fiancée/my mother from his post on standby watch aboard a Merchant Marine vessel traversing the Arabian Sea during WWII. I must have run across those pages in my mother's papers after she died (1998). I can't find them now. But the salient image I retain is of the ordinary seaman's heartbroken longing to be back home with his fiancée, not out in the middle of the war in the middle of an ocean in the middle of the night.

That start of a short story or fragment of a love letter is echoed in one of the other two documents I do have in hand: an 8-page, double-spaced, first draft of a non-fictional and more detailed account of the same episode. My mother's penciled script runs along the top margin of the first page: "David Mills Boffey 1945." This piece may have been intended as a feature article—perhaps as the first installment in a series—to appear in *The Washington Star*, where my father was employed as a newspaper reporter between his 1943 graduation from Yale and his December 1943 enlistment in the Merchant Marines.

[Ed note: *The Washington Evening Star* ran its own "human interest" article in the *Society & General News* section of its March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944 edition. Above a caption reading "BACK IN HOME PORT" Able Seaman Dave Boffey appears in a photograph with a fellow former *Star* employee with whom he had spent four days in a lifeboat before being rescued at sea.]

Whatever its intended audience or destination in print, it appears that the manuscript was typed-up after a first draft had been handwritten; there are no signs of proofreading, and the short spaces left inline are likely ellipses to be filled in once appropriate research had been done. Whether conceived as a standalone piece or the opening salvo in a thrilling serial account, the text is in need of serious editorial input as regards its narrative design and other writerly issues. However, as a firsthand testimony of being on duty on the flying bridge of a torpedoed ship then being forced to abandon that ship by going down a rope line to a lifeboat which might or might not be waiting in the waters below—it is fully credible:

"Only then did I fully realize that the sub which has gotten us was probably still out there, awaiting only the whim of a Japanese commander to release a second torpedo. From that moment on, I was scared and my every movement was made in the belief that it might be my last."

In a gallery of character sketches, his sympathetic portraits of the ship's crew cast a light on that sense of teammanship which, I believe, my father acquired as a child sent away to military boarding school at the age of eight. I interpret that personality trait of his as a crucial element in an ethical code of fair play that—by example—my father did pass on to his three sons.

The third document attests to his experience on and about Madison Avenue, and the first page is likewise marked in my mother's penciled script: "Written by David Mills Boffey 1970." In the cutthroat competitive world of corporate advertising, that teammanship of his internalized moral code may not have served him all that well, especially toward the end of his career. This prose looks to me to have been composed directly at his typewriter. On its ten manuscript pages, words are crossed out, and many notations in pen and pencil show ongoing proofreading; it was clearly meant to have undergone further revision.

I gave Sarah a copy of this latter document and, as can be seen, she made a good choice, putting a portion of its text inside her text so that a reader can factor it into a meaningful context of my father's "legacy."

6. p.227 Although too late now, I would if I could dodge a mild but malingering self-imposed penance about my own role as company aboard the Tuhobic, begging pardon from each of my fellow passengers for, while in those close quarters together, each was more or less subject to the slash-and-burn style of my self-centered stratagems. My survival strategy on those high seas could be judged as, on the whole, reprehensible. Still, however pitiable, my personal behavior does seem understandable when viewed in its pattern as a rerun or updated version of my debut of similar personal tactics put into practice when blowing through Western Europe in the summer of 1968 [Ed. note: See pp.5-13, Chapter 6, Book Two].

7. p228 So I did describe it and so it was. Sarah has again admirably corralled my ramblings. And, reading her words, I find myself standing by the facts of my felt sense of that experience recalled to mind. So be it, however politically incorrect by today's questionably "woke" standards.

8. p228 Did I really put it so summarily and so well!?! I groan to review my relationship to PB(I). Was it just another pathetic iteration of unwittingly retarding my individuation by imagining my creative life as legitimate if and only if conducted under the influence of other, older men? [Ed. note: See Note 11, Chapter 6, Part Two.] Among the differences between PB(I) and PB(II), however, one is significant: when I went to Morocco, swept up in a rite of figurative and literal passage which was not entirely under my conscious control, I wasn't carrying any letters of introduction. It took me many decades to ultimately make the damning differentiation between the masterly prose of PB(I) and his dastardly poses. In 1975 I was still thoroughly conflating the two as well as succumbing to a silly, conventional *mystique marocaine*.

9. p231 More than uncritical consumption of more Bowles, *HOUSE OF TEARS* (2005)—had it been available—would have been the better book to have reoriented and rightsized my delusional thinking about escaping to and within Morocco. [Ed. note: *HOUSE OF TEARS: WESTERNERS' ADVENTURES IN ISLAMIC LANDS*, An Explorers Club Book edited with an Introduction by Dr. John Hughes.] With its insightful introduction and succinct prefatory remarks, Hughes assembles two dozen English-language prose excerpts drawn from Westerners' firsthand accounts of their experiences in the Islamic world from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With felicitous phraseology and many enviable turns of thought, the editor reveals a sagacious perspective with altogether more knowledge of my general situation in Morocco than I have ever had—definitely then and probably now. But *HOUSE OF TEARS* was not published until 2005, and I only happened upon it five years in 2010 after that when taking on the composition of **2HBs** in earnest. Had I been capable of including the themes of that anthology in my intellectual tool pouch, I might not have lain myself open to so many dangers or at least reduced the frequency of bold, stupid actions—easy to say now.

In the event, fully thirty-five years after spending a mere three-month's *beauséjour en Maroc*, *HOUSE OF TEARS* provided me with an historical-literary framework within which to clarify my thinking about the novel, and to make my own latter-day contribution to a literature “written by Westerners recounting amazing experiences in Muslim countries.” (p. x, Introduction)

10. p232 Sarah identified a real resistance in my response and, after a fashion, outwitted my evasiveness by taking such a step away. I think at the time of my conversations with her I feared that, had I let my biographer dig deeper into the semi-suicidal motives that eventually landed me in Morocco and *dans la dèche*, I would have had to come to terms with the sources of my attraction to Bowles' art and life story in the first place. I have pondered Sally's treatment and—with a nod toward Dr. Kors—I here proceed.

The existence of **2HBs** doesn't absolve me of my willing participation in a self-destructive fugue that was fantastical from its inception. Without refined thinking or even subtle feeling, I had deluded myself into the outlandish idea that I, habituated to a Romanticized experimentation in daily life, could actually sustain a Coleridgean “willing suspension of disbelief,” a perpetual state of quotidian euphoria—or hebetude. Call it my version of Bowlesiana.

Therefore and hereby and herewith, I (PB the Second) being of sound body and mind, shall now (if only in operettic gest) lay the blame on him (PB the First)—incorrigible predecessor in my recourse to male WASPish privilege! Yes, prior privilege has its lifelong privileges, including self-pity and self-depreciation. Our common ancestor, Henry Adams—prototype of such heritage—at least deigned to identify his privileged status as a presupposition of his birthright and justification for his self-sufficient, rarified existence; Hank was finally fine, thank you, with passively allowing the tilted board game's winnings to flow into his lap and cared not if some spilled out, fall where it may. Somewhere in his writings, Paul Bowles—although far less privileged and entitled than H. Adams—describes the bleak contour of his supposedly apolitical

class consciousness to this effect: It's all a matter of who enjoys the party and who cleans up afterward; he, assuredly, would not be among the ones cleaning up.

I still admire Bowles' literary craftsmanship, but it frightens me to think that I once thought the world of his fictional world peopled by characters engaged in either incest, matricide, patricide, homicide, suicide, or some combination of them—all neatly portrayed in a chilly, detached narrative voice with sado-masochistic undertones and pervasive misogyny. Predator or prey, anyone? Charmed, I'm sure....

Without stopping telling, I go on: I've never felt much choice about what general "stylistic" approach to take in my own storytelling. For me, settling on the creation of a secondary reality based on internal consistencies à la Tolkien, for instance, was never an option. Likewise, I might have more of an appreciative reading audience had I equipped **2HBs** narrative in Jamesian good taste. But the process of writing the **2HBs** led to the product of a written novel; that product proved to be inseparable from that process. The same might be said about the novel in six books which is **3NLs** as well as in my contribution to this "memoir of sorts." Does the interplay between SW's biographical texts and my autobiographical Notes make for a glue holding some fictive PB(II) together in any reader's mind? Do "I" exist without being forced to fit into some narrative form? Do patterns emerge or are they superimposed by some "self" supposedly reified by active imagination? Is the sculpture in the stone or in the sculptor? Or both and both and both and on and on?

An archivist shifts through pages, papers. An archaeologist sifts through sand. A *sorta* memoirist sorts through memory's seed bank—identifying seeds, weighing them, describing them, then waiting while they are "out to test" for germination. What will time tell?

[Ed. note: In this Note 10, the author assumes a reader's familiarity with concepts in J.R.R. Tolken's lecture, ON FAIRY-STORIES (1939) as well as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA: OR, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF MY LITERARY LIFE AND OPINION (1817), or at least the popularized takeaways from the latter's Chapter XIV.]

## CHAPTER 13: 1975

After Peter's feint at staying on in Morocco under the auspices of the Peace Corps had been decisively deflected in Rabat, he connected with an Australian couple on the North African leg of their extended grand tour. While driving a state-of-the-art VW camper purchased in Germany, they had traveled south through Italy, France, and Spain, and throughout Morocco; next they were headed northward. After a look around the British Isles, they planned to have their vehicle shipped by sea and fly home. This junket supreme had apparently been designed for the young man—heir to a supermarket chain Down Under—under assignment to study firsthand the contemporary trends and technological innovations in retail merchandising in Western Europe and

England. For whatever reasons, the two seasoned travelers took on the bedraggled American backpacker as a temporary third wheel.

Peter remembered how, the night before crossing by ferry to Algeciras, they parked on some out-of-the-way gravel roadway on a hillside in Ceuta before the twosome cozied up together inside the van and he was left to fare as best he could outside—in intermittent rain. Tucked into his sleeping bag lodged as far underneath the chassis as he could fit it, his last night in Africa was highlighted by a rat or two scurrying across his exposed face.

*Or was it just a nightmare? Hallucinations, nightmares, waking realities—they were the options at that point. Without the prospect of reuniting with Maddy in Europe, I swear I don't know how I could've gotten out of Morocco ... intact, let's say.*

Utilizing services in AMEXCO's Barcelona branch, he made contact with Madalon and they plotted a plan. She had located a private organization in the city of Quimper (capitol of the Department of Finistère in SW Brittany) where summer French language classes for English language speakers were offered. Starting mid-May, Quimper's teaching college provided facilities for monthlong, daytime modules of beginning, intermediate, and advanced spoken and written French; French for general business purposes; French for economic sectors such as tourism, food, the fashion industry, and import-export. Madalon could take a low-cost Icelandic flight to Zurich mid-April; he could meet her there, giving them time for improvising their way from Switzerland to the northwest corner of France. She promised to send the summer school prospectus along with a long letter she had been composing to him. With this plan in mind, he broke off from the Australians. In any case, he admitted, the association had lost its charms, and they were glad to see him go away—without being asked. At this juncture in his account, Peter spontaneously cited from Robert Creeley's novel *THE ISLAND* (1963)—“He no longer walked even after them. He fumbled in a distance of his own.” (p.133)—then he fell silent, as if those two simple sentences might sufficiently communicate his alienation at the time.

Skirting genuine depression about his recollections, he informed me that his working title for the novel that became **2HBs** had for a long time been **MOROCCAN INCOGNITOS**, and he still considered it apt, for “incognitos” suggested how far he had forsaken any pursuit of genuine self-knowledge in a surrender to hedonism and sheer survival. He concluded that if he had not been cultivating the image of his “idealized Woman” (now embodied in Madalon) he might have suffered a full-bore breakdown with multiple personalities at play or, worst, split ones. Out of such dour rumination during Peter's account of this difficult period, he recited word for word a poem composed late in 1975:

### **MARRAKESH AFTERNOON**

My own deprivations  
are as severe  
if more discreet

than that public man  
who raves sun-blasted streets  
a will to meet you  
who can't be met  
that no amount of hash can dull  
through the zebra shadowed souks  
behind my invisible veil  
in search of you  
I pen the blind man's cane across a white page  
tapping for your light.

\*

Madalon had claimed that more than anything she wanted to be with him—“And what more did I need to go on?” He'd reluctantly realized that his escape to Morocco had been a complete bust. For one thing, as a self-described writer, he had produced little of the inscrutable, esoteric, elliptic poetry that was his wont and certainly nothing upon which to build a blockbuster novel à la James Jones. Cut off from old contacts in the States, failing to make any new meaningful contacts *en vagabondage*, he relied upon the one significant woman: she would be his lover, supporter, muse—his *inspiratrice*.

*Or had I just reverted to the boyish cowboy model of the solo male in American Westerns? That trope had obviously played a role in my earlier formation. But how could all my heroic or anti-heroic trials and tribulations go so unheralded, unrewarded? Wasn't I a brilliant, misunderstood, nonconformist poet—the real deal? I was beginning to pay a higher price than I had ever bargained for when swallowing—hook, line, and sinker—the myth of the modern avant-garde artist. How about more like a self-indulgent fantasist on the loose! I really had not foreseen what it would eventually cost me to trade in my inherited role as a standard-issue Prince of Pleasantville or Belvedere for my acquired role as yet another tortured Prince of Denmark. Exiting Morocco I think I must have sensed but still couldn't articulate how I could no longer keep up such imposture. I was a mess. Meeting up with Maddy meant everything to me. All else had failed, but as a disenfranchised troubadour I always had my career as a lady's man or womanizer or whatever I was to fall back upon.*<sup>1</sup>

Peter recalled scraps of his journey to Paris. Some time spent in an agrarian commune descending into chaos *en Dordogne*. A garret above a pizzeria in Orange where fugitives from the law seemed comfortable just hanging out. More international *marginiaux* on the sidewalks of Aix-en-Provence where, in an obscure *salle de cinéma*, he spent some of his precious few *sous* attending a screening (not his first) of LES ENFANTS DU PARADISE (1945). In the unkempt garden of Cézanne's home museum, overwhelmed by pity for the seminal, tormented painter (“... and self-pity for yours truly...”), Peter slipped into some shrubbery and wept.

Madalon's multiple messages sent to him from Eugene and Brooklyn were “as if by miracle” waiting for him % *Poste Restante* in Marrakesh and El-Jadida, in Aix-en-Provence and Paris.

Newsy love letters, often hotly anticipating their sex, one last envelope included the Quimper language summer school prospectus, which confirmed the program's suitability for both of them. What's more, to his delight, she had bought her ticket—it was a *fait accompli*! Elated, he imbibed the open-air atmosphere of April in Paris, the only part of Paris he could really afford. Learning of the Guggenheim Museum's Max Ernst retrospective at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, he joined the queue to get in but while standing in line calculated that he couldn't pay the price of admission, not without sacrificing a sizeable chunk of basis living expenses before the big rendezvous slated for Basel or Zurich. <sup>2</sup>

\*

The lovers reunited, and her travel funds allowed them several adventuresome weeks, first *en pension* in Switzerland then on the open road. Both had been previously married and divorced. Neither had children nor real property. They were about the same age. Their relationship was fresh; past conflicts like past intimacies between them were few. He didn't recall if Madalon had purchased a roundtrip ticket before joining him in Switzerland, but he was reassured that she was (like him) first and foremost committed to their liaison, and her stay in France seemed as open-ended as his own. Hitching and hiking en route to Brittany, they proved compatible traveling partners, weathering together the usual range of receptions from strangers—friendliness, hostility, indifference. In Quimper, word of mouth swiftly landed them an unofficial downstairs rental in a farmhouse 8 kms (5 miles) out of the city in the rural community of Plomelin, population 2,000. The elderly owners resided upstairs; retired from various trades, the husband still practiced parttime as a self-employed *bricoleur* (handyman).

[Ed. note: In the half-century since the author's 1975 sojourn there, Plomelin's population has doubled and the quiet, backwards township depicted in Boffey's first novel has been modernized and gentrified. It is worth underscoring the novelist's major reimagining and recreation of Plomelin and its Plomelinois, for in **3NLs** he has successfully re-sited relevant aspects of that Breton Sud-Finistère into fictionalized pockets of the Canadian Maritime Provinces, transposing the action to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. See Chapter 4, "Vagabond," Book One, Vol. I, **3NLs**.]

By bus and *auto-stop* Peter and Madalon managed to attend half-day sessions at the teaching college, a lightweight schedule neither too demanding nor completely frivolous. She enrolled in beginning French; he took an intermediate course in order to backfill his eroded control of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formal usages as well as to clean up the questionable lingo he'd picked up on the street. To meet their expenses, he skipped classes on those days when the landlord's neighbors recruited his help bringing in the hay ("... *faisant le foin*...."). Most of the young men had left behind the hedge-rowed fields and milking parlors of the small, old-fashioned family farms where traditional methods were still in use—except that tractors instead of animals now pulled the wagons. Peter watched the peasant tableaux of Millet, Courbet, and Van Gogh into which he stepped come alive, but had to curtail his daydreaming and learn to fork the

hay onto the flat bed—“and the farmers had to put up with my inept performance at it.” At midday meals, he ate as many of the homemade buckwheat crêpes the farmers’ wives and daughters’ served him and drank as much of their homemade non-alcoholic cider as he liked.

In retrospect, he reported feeling ill-at-ease when heartily welcomed as a scion of an earlier generation of American GIs who had helped to get occupied Brittany out from under the German boot.

*I did feel like a fraud in the unsolicited showers of blessings rained upon me by the Breton elders, so hard-bitten during WWII. But that awkwardness was mostly felt with strangers and neighbors who remained remote figures to me, not with our landlord, who always insisted I speak to him familiarly—le tutoiement. Once our classes in the city were over and his regular assistant named Corentin was called away, in lieu of paying rent I became Raymond’s helper—and drinking buddy—four and five days a week. As we pottered away at various odd jobs—shoring up a wall here, plastering a wall there, repairing a tin roof downspout, building a cinder-block shed—he was usually getting potted himself! Full disclosure: In the course of a working day, we conspired to drop in on many a roadside bar where, dans le coin, the local people knew him. Everyone spoke Breton first there and French secondarily, English not at all or very little. Yen-emat—cheers!—was about all the Breton language I ever learned. Although I could never keep up with his consumption of pinard—the inexpensive vin rouge ordinaire—I drank far too much of it and the local distilled cider brandy called Lambig when any of that was offered. It was the Breton equivalent of Normandy’s Calvados, and I later learned that Plomelin was once considered the Lambig capital of Brittany, maybe still is. And I was constantly smoking those damned Gauloises and Gitanes Maïs, too. And coughing.*

He discovered that the Sud-Finistère was steeped in an admixture of Celtic and Catholic cultures, and even petit Plomelin had its annual *Pardon* (religious festival) culminating in a procession to its very own Chapelle Saint-Philibert. Peter was not then aware of the grand sweep of the Celtic revival post-WWII, but he was not completely out of his element either. For one, he was a self-described “sucker” for underdog cultures running counter or parallel to the mainstream, so his own non-Celtic, non-Catholic background didn’t stop him from appreciating the undercurrent of bitterness felt by the indigenous, historically oppressed Bretons in modern times. With little or no knowledge of the finer points of the actual politics involved, whether they were the Bretons, the Basques of the Pyrenees and Franch-Spanish borderlands, the radicals of the Jura, the native peoples of North America—he always harbored untested sympathies for such minority populations. And in the Finistère and the Morbihan he could cultivate his curiosity about specific places where the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s so called Pont-Aven School of Painting had taken place “... and featured my superstar and antihero, Gauguin!” He also had arrived with some familiarity with the work of Tristain Corbière (1845–75), one of Verlaine’s “*poètes maudits*” who had spent a short life in central-western Brittany. With an immediate sense of the weather, customs, languages, flavors and history of the region, Peter tried his hand at translating some of that “cursed poet’s” embittered verse “... while cribbing off existing versions in English!” He



also tried reading Eugène Guillevic (1907–1997) but understood little; he’d never heard of Yves Bonnefoy (1923–2016).

At that early stage in what evolved into a common-law marriage lasting five years, Madalon let Peter take the lead in choosing their elective activities, following his interests as he took every opportunity to explore the territory and its regional *Bretonité*. They stopped at aged wayside shrines. They searched for obscure sites of neolithic megaliths (menhirs and dolmens) and made excursions to several landmark *calvaires* [Ed. note: crucifix statues, often with Christian/pagan tableaux carved in monumental stones]. They found their way to land’s end at the Pointe du Raz, and hung out on beaches on the Baie de Bénodet and Île-Tudy. The half-timbered houses of Vieux Quimper, its Gothic-style cathedral, its *faienceries* [Ed. note: traditional pottery workshops where handcrafted ceramics are made/displayed/sold]—all could turn any trip to Quimper’s farmers’ market into a daylong affair. In essence, they carried on like young, well-off newlyweds *en vacances*, although these distractions and mitigating circumstances couldn’t compensate for the disparity between their reasons for being there. When Peter was off working (“... or goofing off...”) with the landlord, Madalon was left behind, alone in the farmhouse or investigating the township where her solitary walks were viewed with some suspicion—“... and deeply bred superstition!”

### ON MORNING SHEETS

The guitar music he put on  
spins its disks out into the room  
yet her divided will will not let her  
read Love’s letter his body writes

she walks instead where rain blows yellow barley wet  
beside him  
in blue grey shadow  
her sleep print is still impressed

beside the bed  
the blood red rose  
wears the worm’s scar

he lies down thin leaden lines along the tree’s receptive skin

what song the fields sing to her  
he cannot hear  
only the output of autoerotic words  
soothes his yearning flesh

he lies  
down thin

leaden  
lines  
along the tree's receptive skin.

[1975]

A visit to a medical clinic in Quimper also dampened the high spirits of their ersatz honeymoon. The doctor diagnosed the cough the American tourist had imported from Morocco as chronic bronchitis, and the patient was advised against any further smoking of cigarettes—especially his preferred filter-less ones.

\*

From Paris, Peter had sent a request to his mother that any correspondence addressed to him should be ganged up and forwarded to Quimper. In June he found nothing to collect at the *Poste Restante*, but in July a hefty envelope with his stepmother's NY, NY return address arrived.

BOFFEY—David M. of New York City, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1975. Beloved husband of Jane Cotton Boffey. Father of Barnes, Peter and Daniel Boffey. Funeral private.

Jane's accompanying letter expanded upon this DEATH NOTICE from the *New York Times* (22 May 1975, p.42), but the precise circumstances of his father's death "from complications after surgery for esophageal cancer" were not made clear. In the same manila envelope, she had included a sheaf of legalistic documents with unequivocal instructions: Peter was to please sign—as his brothers, Barnes and Dan, had—and have notarized the documents in order to expedite waiver of the probate of David Mills Boffey's estate. In distress, underinformed, in no condition to argue with anyone about anything, Peter spent the better part of another day in the office of the Quimper Préfecture, where the staff's English legalese was far better than his French and the appropriate officials eventually put their seals and signatures on the relevant documents.

His father had died in May. His stepmother had mailed the envelope mid-July. Within a week of learning of his father's death—three months after the event in mid-August—Peter decided it was time to return to the USA. After six months abroad, it was easy enough for him to pull up stakes he had never put down: his fugue had run its course. During her three months in Europe, Madalon had determined to resume her formal dance studies, left unfinished at Cabrillo Community College in Aptos near Santa Cruz; her interest in a general university education had also gained momentum. Disconcertingly, the first flush of blossoms had fallen off the rose of their romance—"... beside the bed / the blood red rose / wears the worm's scar...." He has completely forgotten how they managed to get back to the States but remembers it happening in quick order.

### **NOTE to Chapter 13**

1. p239 And the pattern has prevailed. When all else has failed me—rather, when I have failed all else—I've turned to a significant woman in my propensity to inordinately dependent on *l'amour fou* with all the gestures, postures, histrionics, and unbalanced exaggerations it usually

entails. Put another way: no one woman has ever needed as much love or as much hate as I have projected upon her. But, invariably, when my career choices haven't panned out or when my efforts to be published have fallen short, I have relied upon elevating Her, glamourizing and idolizing Her, making my floundering self-esteem depend upon Her capacity and willingness to support the weight I have unconsciously leaned upon Her. No surprise that I have been drawn toward empathetic, sympathetic Jewish women who have at the same time fallen for me! During the six months after leaving France, the dep need behind my need became abundantly clear yet I couldn't seem to do anything about it. This assessment has become a leitmotif of my self-study, a pattern self-evident, and a rich source of sorrow for a wandering mistral, I:

O the most welcome one  
you never even let your shoulders down  
and left before the music was done  
now I want to be alone  
or so stoned ages rock me in their arms  
no more the cricket thick white night  
attending your arrival.

[from TO C.]

A quick, summary sketch of Madalon Zorn (1947–1999) could never do her fascinating, complicated person justice or hint at her enduring place in my heart. She was the second Jewess to become the primary object of my attention, affection, fealty, and rage; the second Jewish woman to whom I completely entrusted—and upon whom I lay the burden of—my fragile sense of self-worth.

2. p239 Her transatlantic missives was not the only set of letters in our correspondence. She wrote well and often whenever we were apart, whether I was abroad or in jail. In strong, clear penmanship, she was candid about her feelings for me and clear about her thoughts, even while airing her conflicts about changing aspects of the dance collectives in which she was involved during the course of our affair, whether The Wildflower Order in Eugene or Mamalution in Santa Cruz. At times she was bold: her unsolicited “First Erotic Poem, to Peter, Feb 1976” left no doubt about her carnal appetite and no need for any glosses such as the literary and theological conceits usually applied to the SONG OF SONGS. Her handwritten notes during our final separation were flawless lasers burning right to my broken heart.

## CHAPTER 14: 1975

Madalon went out West ahead of him in order to confirm options for rejuvenating her former studies of modern dance in the greater SF and Monterey Bay Areas. Back East, occupying his mother's empty one-bedroom apartment at Mitchell Place, Peter looked up his younger brother, homesteading in a co-op on the border of the East and West Villages. Daniel was by then fully employed in some administrative capacity at New York University and pursuing his own

derailed undergraduate degree studies tuition-free at NYU. They met in a cafeteria during Dan's lunch break and, after they'd shared notes about their father's death, Peter made an overture to this effect: Since they were both survivors of the same family shipwreck, he looked forward to some reciprocity in his extension of the hand of brotherly love. Dan apparently scoffed and continued chewing his food. "He basically pissed right there into my opened palm." <sup>1</sup>

Peter's next stop was Midtown East, where he called upon his widowed stepmother. Sitting on the sofa, they commiserated, and he heard her side of the story. Believing that her husband's fragile health was stable enough for her to take a short leave of absence, she had spent a week visiting friends in Florida ("... or was it in California or on some well-off island off South Carolina? I forget."), while he died alone on the island of Manhattan. She had a good cry and then informed her stepson that, once the estate was executed, he should be receiving an as yet undetermined ("... or undisclosed...?") cash inheritance—not much, she feared. <sup>2</sup>

Peter's final memorable stop was his uncle's stately residence on some hilltop in Providence RI. Jane Cotton Boffey had inferred that, while Roy Carr was not the executor of his half-brother's will and testament, he was somehow managing to complicate matters by withholding his signature from certain papers. As Peter was about to discover, their uncle had been fiercely opposed to the expedition of the non-probated will and remained dead set against making it easy for all parties involved. Before expecting any further cooperation, the three nephews had each to answer the summons to appear before the man in person, and the Boffey heirs did make that duty call, each visiting his forebodingly Federal or Georgian Colonial-style residence in turn.

Although no doorman in livery greeted him at the building's elaborate entrance, his uncle's welcome felt as impersonal. Roy Carr issued him inside and directed him to a hard-cushioned settee in the front hall, immediately demanding to know what Peter had had in mind when so cavalierly agreeing to waive probate of Dave Boffey's will. Blindsided by this opening salvo, Peter remembers saying nothing or maybe replying that he had had exactly nothing in mind when accomplishing the notarization of documents in the offices of Quimper's Prefecture. In later years, he found out that his brothers, called on the same carpet, had received the same chastisement.

Next, buttonholed about his future intentions in life, Peter fell back upon a rehearsed script about how his studies at MIFS would likely jumpstart his career in translation and interpretation. The former naval officer poo-pooed that optimistic scenario and was launching into a belittling tirade when his female companion appeared from somewhere within the edifice and came to the young man's rescue. She defended Peter's questionable status as an author by arguing that, from what she understood, he was "just starting out" and needed time to break into being published professionally. Roy Carr was having none of his "writing" or the prospects of his schooling in Monterey and more or less dismissed his nephew out of hand, receding into some far-flung wing of the house. <sup>3</sup>

\*

In contact by phone, Madalon reaffirmed her commitment to their relationship and provided the outline of her game plan: a single semester at Monterey Peninsula College would get her fragmented academic record back on track, allowing her to transfer into Porter College as a dance major at the University of Santa Cruz. Her path was clear; his was not. But as he took leave of NYC, he sold himself on the value of the program at MIFS, convincing himself (“... or trying to...”) that he could leverage his largely self-taught and hard-won French language skills into a legitimate career. Without performing due diligence on the feasibility of such a scheme, he headed to Monterey, where he placed himself in the familiar admissions office, reframing his vagabondage in Francophonic North Africa and France as a sort of informal preparation for enrolling at MIFS. We can’t know if the admissions officer bought his pitch or not, but he offered the applicant a student loan and a work-study position which made immediate registration for classes possible. Once again, by enrolling in an institution of higher learning, Peter was taking the pledge, that is, grasping for a return to “normalcy” with—once again—predictable results.

Strapped for funds, the couple had just enough money to rent the uppermost room in a Victorian on Central Avenue in Pacific Grove and to purchase a much used Volvo 1225 (Amazon) sedan—a vehicle with bohemian if not precisely Beat cachet. Compared to his recent raw exposure to living circumstances abroad, life on the Monterey Peninsula was low stress, and they adopted a frugal but comfortable mode of life in the rich resort town which was never offseason to tourists from far and wide. The draw of the picturesque natural surroundings was indeed irresistible. When not rock hopping the shingles during low tide between Lover’s Point and Point Pinos, or wandering the pine-oak-cypress woodlands of Asilomar, or gawking at Pacific Ocean sunsets, Peter dove into the natural history literature of the sea otter, the gray whale, and the abundant birdlife of the bay, the sea, and the shore.

### **POINT LOBOS**

It’s a bright lit path  
that leads through the trees  
that lead to the rocks  
that shift the colors of fire.  
We have made it  
off the military bases  
past the art galleries and crisis centers  
to this wonder: what other deer grazed here when?  
Within the thick Amerindian  
below the smoothed sloped hills  
beyond the horse’s dream of beige  
we have made it to this wonder:  
that we are the voice of things  
embedded in a world of things  
before I was another.

The pair also picked up whatever threads were left in remnants of Pacific Grove's bohemian history—not its Methodist one. [Ed. note: In 1875, Pacific Grove became a religious destination when 100 donated acres of coastal land became the Methodist Christian Retreat with its long-running annual summer Methodist Camp.] Uninspired by the cosmopolitan crowd holding court at MIFS, Peter was intrigued by the clientele and vegetarian menu at Tillie Gorts, still in its first decade as an eatery and hip community center [Ed. note: Tillie Gorts closed permanently in 2018.] Our wayward pilgrim was also happy to hang out on the casual campus of Monterey Peninsula College—dabbling in its library's reading room, attending theatrical and musical performances, and closely following the progress of Madalon's dance studies.

His work-study job at MIFS was lightweight, "... even a joke..." and completely unsupervised. He was charged with teaching conversational English to a dozen or so wives accompanying their spouses studying in California, most of them sophisticated women with little to no knowledge of American English as it was commonly spoken. They seemed to enjoy his free-wheeling, non-structured presentations in class, but they rarely opened their mouths. He sketched them out to me as members of the upper classes in their countries of origin, unquestionably pro-American; he thought they viewed him as quirky but perhaps an amusing specimen of some species foreign to them. <sup>4</sup>

\*

The purported purpose of his enrollment at MIFS didn't stand the test of much time at all—it failed in short order. "Early on I felt like a muted foreigner in my own native land." Peter used uncomplimentary terms like "charm school" and "finishing school" and the "international polo club" to describe the French language translation and interpretation program ("...packed with rich Daddy's girls dogpaddling before the right marriage opportunities showed up."). On one hand, after his numerous escapades off the beaten path, the entire setup was simply too tame. On the other, he was unable to keep up with his peers, many of whom were polyglottal scions of wealthy families, a few sporting classical educations in Latin and/or Greek.

*I was way out of my depth. Professional simultaneous interpretation was absolutely beyond my reach. And I had to admit that literary translation per se would never prove financially remunerative. There was also that repulsion away from these retainers and sustainers of the status quo. By that I'm thinking of a hierarchical class structure to which I didn't want to belong, although I was—here we go again—its sometimes beneficiary. But I was essentially outclassed—at best a humbling recognition.* <sup>5</sup>

No surprise: his re-integration into mainstream society was sidetracked by distractions aplenty. Madalon was proceeding full steam ahead, gaining experience in stage performance and earning high grades towards a certification securing her transfer as a woman reentering higher education in Santa Cruz across the bay. And their money was running out. Upon renewed inquiry, Peter found out that Roy Carr was still delaying his signing off on certain documents, thus freezing funds Peter now needed to live on.

*We sold the car to make rent. Then I girded up my loins like a real man and placed a call to Providence from a phone booth in Pacific Grove, reversing charges I couldn't have afforded if the conversation took any time at all—I was that broke. In response to the operator's standard question—"Will you accept a collect call from Peter Boffey?"—my uncle said NO, he would not, and hung up. Whether I deserved that refusal or not, I was devastated. I heard his voice with my own ears: NO. So much for avuncular affection.*

Disenchanted with MIFS and the establishmentarianism it epitomized, unable to indulge in more free play on the Monterey Peninsula, he was at his wit's end. Then, one evening in a movie house off Cannery Row, midway through KING OF HEARTS (1966) Madalon complained that she wasn't feeling well and walked back to their apartment alone. By midnight, in the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, they learned that (1) Madalon had been pregnant and (2) she had spontaneously miscarried. She was in no danger, and the nurse consoled Peter with an assurance that "these things usually work out for the better." But neither Peter nor Madalon was mature enough to handle the aftermath with aplomb: "The usual mutual recriminations about sloppy birth control eventually followed; inner scar tissue remained."

*Deus ex machina*, before the Christmas–New Year's break a check for three thousand dollars arrived in the mail in time for him to pay off his student loan and withdraw from MIFS. Never a bounder, no longer even a faux strider, Peter simply put his tail between his legs and, by 1976, followed his Maddy to the so called sunny side of Monterey Bay.

\*

Relocating to Santa Cruz, Peter and Madalon were still acting like a couple—one habitually in conflict. They shared a room in a Capitola rental where the musical chairs of changing tenants made no pretense of constituting a communal group house. While she leapt forward into her new life organized around the performing arts at the university, he malingered in an ambitious, time-consuming, non-commissioned translation of "*La Dialectique de la Poésie*," a lecture Tristan Tzara delivered at the French Institutes of Bucharest and Prague in December, 1946 and February, 1947, respectively. [Ed. note: This text first appeared in print as a note to Tzara's *LE SURRÉALISME ET L'APRÈS-GUERRE* (1966); the author's translation was published as "The Dialectics of Poetry" in a special translation edition of a defunct California periodical *Invisible City*, Numbers 21-22, November 1977.]

While protective of his budget, he did procure a used Super-8 camera and started carrying it like a poet's notebook in the carpetbag that Madalon had sown for him, eventually editing a selection of footage and screening it at a gathering of her cohorts, presenting it as a paean to the Four Elements of Greek cosmology:

*Earth—see the dog dig the soil; Water—watch the sea anemone pulsing in the tidepool; Air—see and hear the bee hover in the air; Fire—see the flames. Or was Fire represented by a Pacific sunset à la Tom Killion? I forget but you get the idea. Bonehead simplicity.*

Such non-narrative montage did not arrest Madalon's attention. She was moving toward her own purposes, away from him, no more impressed by his so called *cinépôemes* than she was by the occasional, bluesy doggerel he came up with to amuse her and himself:

Went to the doctor  
listen what he said:  
you don't need no woman  
always treat you sweet and kind,  
she wants to keep you happy,  
she wants to keep you blind.  
You need a good lookin' woman  
with some brains in her head.  
Bring her coffee in the mornin'  
and jump back into bed.

Nor was she impressed when he tried to beguile her with snippets sung from "La Madalon," the WWI song popular among French soldiers projecting all their homesickness and horniness on the waitress called Madalon: «*Quand Madalon vient nous servir à boire....*»

*She was the one I would have amused, intrigued, somehow moved with such nonsense—and she was none of the above. When did it finally come home to me that her given name was Madalon but her surname was Zorn?*

Approaching thirty, Madalon was catching up with her studies and eager to test out her commitment to dance; Peter's aimlessness ("... except to curry and keep in her favor...") was at best a drag on her momentum and at worst an obstacle. By March she'd found herself a one-room cottage in downtown Santa Cruz, leaving her trailing partner to fend for himself.

*I felt castaway on an island of my own inadequacies in a sea of my own confusions.  
No charts, no maps, no guides, few provisions. Pure Creeley!*

Aged twenty-eight, bereft of his family of origin; without a family of his own creation; without vocation or academic program or social structure of any kind—looking back he recognized that this was only one more episode—an important one—of bottoming out in the first half of his life.

When I listened to the depiction of this crisis and of his semi-reckless reactions which he reported next, I became aware of my own jumbled projections and presumptions. Rightly or wrongly, I was assuming that digging up such portions of his past must have been doubly painful for him—first, when experiencing such felt-failures and secondly when bringing those experiences back to life. It was a challenge for me to reconcile Peter's own general equanimity in his seventies with the instabilities of his stormy, prolonged adolescence: he had somehow matured into an adult capable of relating episodes such as this separation from Madalon with composure and even wit. When I brought this up, he spoke of having learned and "... and still having to



learn....” to take other people into consideration as other than objects for his manipulation. I was repeatedly impressed to consider how far he had come from that hazardous time before he had the larger creative vehicle of long-form fiction into which he could channel his energy and through which he could sublimate his experiences, lifting his chaos into ordered art.

At the next full moon he rode the Santa Cruz Metro bus up the San Lorenzo Valley as far as Boulder Creek, walked out to Big Basin State Park, and camped under the stars (“... or the proverbial stars, the redwoods’ night sky just as likely to be fog or cloud cover.”). In the morning, he hiked from headquarters to Año Nuevo then caught the bus from Waddell Beach back to Santa Cruz. Being outside, moving outdoors proved liberating and, wanting more raw exposure to the elements, he immediately fashioned for himself an informal quest. He somehow knew he needed desperately to reconnect with a greater natural order of things to sort his smaller unnatural order of things out, but he had no Irish stone tower in Carmel to retreat to, no cabin in Bixby Canyon—and no Dr. Kors. Yet the Central Coast’s renowned surroundings were within his reach, and Big Sur had been the ground of vision for many a legendary artist and writer in his personal pantheon as well as in the pop imagination of them.

*I had read Jack Duluoz’ horrific tale of his visits to Raton Canyon, but I had a host of other inspirational figures in mind—fortunately.*

[Ed. note: Duluoz is Kerouac’s alter ego in the novel BIG SUR (1962) in which Bixby Canyon is renamed Raton Canyon.]

Three decades earlier, New Englanders like Emerson and Thoreau had permanently inculcated in our seeker the exalted values of turning oneself inside out in nature. Now the voices of Robinson Jeffers, Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley, and Ansel Adams beckoned him to Big Sur, and he heeded the call. Stuffing his sleeping bag and dry foodstuffs into his backpack, loading film into his camera, after a cursory consultation of one topo map covering the area of the Ventana Wilderness of the Los Padres National Forest in the Santa Lucia Range, he headed out in search of clarification.

*I had yet to read Steinbeck’s great early works centering on inland Monterey County—which sooner than Cannery Row I’d call the real “Steinbeck Country”—and the vicinity was new to me even though adjacent to the Peninsula I knew well enough by then. I remember one decisive moment at the onset of this brief but effective solo retreat. Hitchhiking, I was waiting at some curving onramp to Highway One outside of Watsonville. My stepmother had bequeathed to me my father’s wristwatch as a keepsake, and I’d taken to wearing it out of some sense of grieving or filial loyalty, I suppose. Without premeditation, glancing down at the watch, I impetuously peeled the flex band off my wrist and flung the thing into the ice plant smothering the ground. You couldn’t ask for a better symbolic index to my identity crisis—version 28 point something or other. I wasn’t capable of analyzing that gesture as the compulsive and semi-suicidal impulse it really was and which I’ve come to accept as my own legacy.*

Having rid himself of the timepiece, at the China Camp trailhead on Tassajara Road Peter left his last ride and headed into the forest on foot. Over the course of two nights and three days, he met only one pair of hikers, learning from them how to find his way back to a fire road that led to a parking lot at the base of Los Padres Dam. There he got a ride back out to Carmel Valley and re-entered the civilized (“... paved-over...”) world. <sup>6</sup>

\*

Thrown back upon his own strained resources and limited funds, disabused of the efficacy of projecting all his needs onto one significant other (a woman who was, in the event, no longer reciprocating), Peter faced a fact that his Big Sur outing underscored: he needed to clean up his act. And there was no place more propitious for pursuing such a goal than 1970s Santa Cruz—like 1960s Bard, a good place to dissipate or integrate; there he could radically alter his physical and mental diet in any number of ways. First, he began turning over stones in search of a suitable and affordable living situation. He spoke with acquaintances and strangers, scouring the free press classifieds, hunting and pecking at bulletin boards all over town. The ideal of collective living, preferably with housing and food gardening involved, was of course common to the countercultural movement desiring to enact its politicized ethos of cooperation and sharing. A commune or its equivalent promised to satisfy his deep-seated, longstanding yearning to belong to a social alternative to the American standard issue family or at least the Boffey variant of same. <sup>7</sup>

Ducking in and out of numerous rabbit-hole possibilities in quick succession, Peter came upon one inviting state of affairs at an address in the Live Oak district of greater Santa Cruz. An idled acre or two of disused farmland and its older farmhouse had somehow fallen into the hands of a man named John, apparent founder of a nascent intentional community. Members of this new band of communards were all about Peter’s age and, in some ways, of like state of mind. Peter took a seat at one of the wooden cable-spool tables in the common room and introduced himself to whoever came and went. Try as he might, our protagonist was never a full-tilt hippie by any definition of the term—not a Deadhead, not an anti-intellectual fundamentalist. But in its scope of activities and recent vintage, this unigenerational community of unattached singles didn’t seem to be demanding a degree of commitment anything like the 100 percent dedication of the members of Steve Gaskin’s more mature and infamous farm-based community known as The Farm. And his options were few; a peace-loving household living lightly on the land in an almost suburban Santa Cruz seemed to fit his style. For specific answers to his questions about joining the club or that membership’s price and availability of, he learned he must speak with John. <sup>8</sup>

[Ed. note: Steven Gaskin (1935–2014) became a well-known New Age figure in 1970 when he led a caravan of restless West Coast *citoyens* (“Out To Save The World”) in search of a place where they could sink their roots into the soil. They eventually settled in Tennessee and created the historical, legendary, and mythical eponymous Farm. Before that unequivocal move “back to the land,” Gaskin had commanded a following at his “Monday night classes,” first on the

premises of San Francisco State University then at The Family Dog, site of the former Edgewater Ballroom in the Playland at the Beach complex on the Great Highway in westernmost SF.]

Peter did return to meet John. A portly man dressed in loose, string-tied pajama bottoms and flip-flops, he wore his beard tapering to a single braid and a top knot on his head. As they ambled in the untended farmyard, he smoked a clove cigarette and remained silent or else uttered monosyllabic replies. It was obvious that the onus of the interview fell upon Peter, who was apparently expected to prove his worthiness to the self-appointed guru. When the visitor asked about living quarters, John pointed toward a row of dilapidated 3-sided sheds on stilts, which might have once been animal pens or bins for storing farm equipment and supplies; the newcomer could claim one of those and render it habitable; the main house was full. When Peter asked about other everyday logistics, he was told to address all such questions to Allen or Robert or Matthew or whatever were the names of his lieutenants-in-the-making. Peter observed the situation and concluded that if the community of supposed equalitarians was dependent upon this creep's leadership, he wanted no part of repurposing turkey coops.

*Just as I had pegged my man John for a self-indulgent, delusional acidhead, one of the garden-variety geese on the loose brazenly attacked me. After watching me beat the mad beast off, John—who seemed amused—declared that the geese only proved hostile to individuals who carried deep anger within them. Basta! If that space case were the sun drawing weaker satellites into its orbit, I would find another solar system.*

My raconteur closed his account of this episode by sharing his suspicion that the large, flat, treeless parcel in Live Oak had likely long since been subdivided many times over and probably now brandishes its superior status as yet more high-end real estate in what was for a while billing itself as the New Athens—Santa Cruz!

[Ed. note: The author's ire and irony about the dynamics between faux leaders and gullible followers finds ample expression in BOOK THREE (Volume II) of **3NLs**, where Elise Lowrie presents Martin Wildeman (famous *fin-de-siècle* sculptor; infamous deadbeat dad) in portions of her NOTEBOOKS. See relevant passages in 1<sup>st</sup> Notebook, Chapters 1, pp.12-17; 5<sup>th</sup> Notebook, Chapter 6, p.127ff; 6<sup>th</sup> Notebook, Chapter 8, p.176ff; and 7<sup>th</sup> Notebook, Chapter 10, pp.192-98.]

A more modest situation existed at a 4-bedroom Victorian on Van Ness Street, where the compatible tenants were disposed toward equalitarian values and dabbled in socialist aspirations. They were all students at the university and/or workers at the Staff of Life Bakery on Water Street; they shared common household tasks and met weekly to discuss issues, practicing decision making by consensus. His overtures to them went smoothly, and Peter was welcomed to place a mattress on the floor in the downstairs front room, which had once been a parlor or reading or library room separated from the dining room by double pocket sliding doors. That summer he enjoyed a room of his own, living in relative harmony within the likeminded

household, making one of them a friend for life. He has forgotten how often or what sort of contact he maintained with Madalon during this period, but he believes they both knew that, however incompatible, they were not entirely done with one another. For an uncertain duration, he told himself, they were simply learning to attend to their divergent needs—separately.

With the Westside Santa Cruz house as his headquarters, Peter drew on various resources for his personal recovery. He didn't smoke or drink. He made yogurt and granola in the group kitchen. He got a beater bicycle and pedaled to Yoga classes at Gault School on Seabright Avenue. He swam in the Pacific below the bluffs of West Cliff Drive. He read salubrious dosages of Wendell Berry and “great gobs” of Walt Whitman, and was delighted to discover the Batish House a block or two away on Mission Street, exposing himself to intimate performances of Northern and Southern Indian music there. He was cleaning up his act.

[Ed. note: The musical Batish family had settled in Santa Cruz in 1973 and started to convert portions of their residence into a center for Indian culture, offering homemade meals, instrument sales and repair, and occasional performances; still based at 1310 Mission Street, the family enterprise has evolved into the Batish Institute of Indian Music and Fine Arts.]

## NOTES to Chapter 14

1. p244 Had Dan and I become even more estranged? Yes. At that juncture in 1975 he was hammering his career into shape and did ultimately succeed in the field of business management, for the longest time headquartered in the administration of NYU's Graduate School of Real Estate in midtown Manhattan. Slowly but surely the tenets of his wife's Christian Science dictated the protocol of his imagination and lifestyle. He lived long enough to vote for Trump. I, meanwhile, was bound for California again, finetuning my translations of Tristain Corbière, and privately championing the noble merits of free-lance, artistic *avant-gardisme*. A chasm widened between us.

Given the historical record, recourse to the ideal of brotherly love may have been somewhat fatuous on my part but was not made glibly. And at that stage in our etiolated relationship, I wasn't fully aware of the full extent to which he seemed to hate my guts. Nor did I then recognize how disaffected Dan had been from our father. During that lunch, he related how, when called upon to identify Dad's body at the morgue, he had “felt nothing” when viewing the corpse on the slab.

Despite a détente at the turn of the century—initiating ten years or so during which I (of course!) felt that I was doing all the heavy lifting to make a sort of non-aggression pact survive—for the last seven years of his life we neither wrote nor spoke to one another. When he had fallen into a two-week coma in 2023, I was not invited to attend the vigil and did not feel the call to do so. Our relationship had been effectively dead long before he died.

2. p244 How many biological fathers can any one person lose? Only one. Yet that one may be a myriad of persons to others. My stepmother referred only to his “death from complications after surgery for esophageal cancer.” But my father’s Certificate of Death cites (Part I, line A) the immediate cause of death as “acute barbiturates and alcohol intoxication;” line B reads “due to consequences of suicide.” In my conversation with my younger brother Daniel, he had included a description of the death scene as reported to him by our father’s business partner as follows: When Dave Boffey had not shown up at their office as expected, had not responded to phone calls, had not come to knocks on the locked apartment door—his partner called the NYPD and the police forced open the door. They found him dead—the bedroom littered with evidence of an emptied bottle (or bottles?) of booze, cigarettes smoked, pills spilled. In composing my report of Jan McLoughlin’s suicide that opens Book Five of **3NLs**, I drew upon this information.

For the longest time, I felt so ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, and confused when speaking of his death to others—and myself—that I qualified it as “semi-suicide.” It took several decades and multiple reflections before I could drop that equivocal usage. Yet the characterological differences between my optimistic, extrovertist older brother and myself can still yield contrasting interpretations. I can speak to my brother of a suicide based on unhappiness, pain, and the despair of any escape from terminal cancer, yet Barnes can explain the motive and moment otherwise, positing that, facing up to the incipient end of his life, Dave Boffey had surveyed the terrain and—*determining that everything was in order*—taken his life with a combination of forbidden substances (italics mine!). But there were no communications to others prior to the act and no suicide note; I cannot understand where my older brother gets the proof of any such clearheaded intentionality, except through projecting his own onto the act.

By way of contrast: Twenty-three years later, our mother ultimately decided to stop all her cancer treatments, to receive only palliative care, and finally to stop eating when she admitted herself, after home care, to the hospice wing of Wilcox Hospital in Lihue HA. But she did leave her estate in excellent order, conscientiously curated, full of consciousness and concern for others. Her last months were one long suicide note conceived and written with love, faith, and clarity. But our father had informed no one of his plan and left no note. A day and night difference! I would bet that he resorted to his old poisons and available prescribed medications to get himself past the point of no return and was completely out of it when he ingested the last of those substances—all actions which would beyond a doubt be fatal to anyone in his condition.

3. p245 I’m sure, left to his own devices, he would have turned me out onto the night street, but his lady friend quietly led me to a guestroom with bath *en suite* and there I spent the night. I don’t know the exact nature of their relationship, but she apparently spent the night under the same roof too, because early the next morning she served me a modest breakfast on fine China-ware and ushered me out the front door before the lord of the manor showed up again. I’ve forgotten whatever she said but naturally remain grateful for her display of human kindness in that ice-cold palace. I never saw Uncle Roy again, thank goodness. I hadn’t anticipated “*le*

*douceur du foyer*” [Ed. note: “the sweetness of home” a phrase from Baudelaire’s “Le Crépuscule du Soir” (1852) in LES FLEURS DU MAL], but the Grand Guignol edginess to our last encounter toxified any potential redemption of a relationship between us. Within a year of my visit, when I tackled the whole of LES MISÉRABLES (1862), I was particularly struck by the bleak tenor of “*Marbre Contre Granit*” (Chapter 8, Book 3, Part II) wherein the grandson, Marius, and his grand bourgeois grandfather, M. Luc-Esprit Gillenormand, mightily clash.

4. p246 The administration may have been providing this elective course as a no-cost courtesy, harboring few expectations for any resounding success. Considering the low bar to entry which both the teacher and students had crossed—me being totally untrained to teach anything let alone English as a second or foreign language; they simply as companions to their spouses abroad—no success ensued. These wives were of various provenance. I recall a clutch of smiling Japanese who clung to one another, never once parting their lips in my presence. There were a few elegantly dressed Saudis, and a couple of bold South Americans. I tried to hold their attention and engage their participation by focusing on the routine usages of dining out and shopping. Imagine how well any small group discussions in English proceeded—either amongst themselves or with members of other nationalities—given the different cultural and linguistic habits! Inveterate and compulsive womanizer, I here confess to my inordinate fascination with one Venezuelan (or perhaps Columbian?) woman in class; in a fictional passage in **3NLs** I caricature the armed weapons of her sensual sex allure and exaggerate my horniness to the point of Richard Debruen’s pathology—not mine!

[Ed. note: Generally, throughout Volume III of **3NLs**, the author draws upon his time spent on the Monterey Peninsula. See pp.424-427, Note 1 to Chapter 3 (Verbatim B) in Book Five of **3NLs** for an example of the author’s repurposing of fantasy to fit his fictional purposes. In the case of one of his characters, Richard Debruen, the author shuttles him through the paces during his six months of court-adjudicated behavioral therapy at the County Office of Social Services and hanging out between times at the Sidecar Bar & Grill. For this particular literary accomplishment, see Book Five: Note 3 to Chapter 2 (Verbatim A); and Note 5 to Chapter 6 (Verbatim C), two Notes posted only on the author’s website].

5. p247 As an offspring of middle class America—sometimes higher, sometimes lower—I had experience falling back upon resources generally assumed available; my survival through a prolonged adolescence was rooted in a faith that such resources would somehow “be there” and could be had for the asking, whether as part of familial inheritance (literally and figuratively) or, if need be, thanks to the safety net of social welfare. But this business of being outclassed by people who assumed even more entitlement than I did—that was frustrating. Biology is destiny? Anatomy is destiny? What about race, and religion, and the nationality of one’s origin? What about class background! I had, on the face of things, rejected mine many times over, but trying on other worldviews was only a luxury I could afford (up to a point), a luxury made affordable by the very class background I could never entirely repudiate.

6. p250 None of my grand or less-than-grand plans was panning out, and I was ripe for the sort of necessary destruction I had often viewed as part and parcel of that oft-cited breakdown/breakthrough dynamic of creativity. The death of my marriage. The death of one set of fantasies in Morocco. The death of my dad. The indefinite death of ambition. Then the inconclusive death of my relationship with Maddy. I needed to fathom what it all meant, what any of it meant. I think I must have figured, before setting out for Big Sur, that if I were to go out solo, with a minimum of props and accessories—no smokes, no weed, no alcohol; no coffee; no tea!—entrusting myself to the natural world and forces beyond me I might bottom out completely but cleanly, and then be able to quote start from zero unquote. Starting from zero—that’s still one of my favorite mottos. Starting from zero, whether quietly getting up from a meditation cushion or answering the rat-a-tat-tat of a clamorous inner music by walking off into woods unknown. As it turned out, some saving grace must have been at play—as flakey as that may sound—providing me enough sense of self-preservation that I did survive, recharged and refreshed. In any case, I had nothing to lose but delusions and bad habits.

I did not call it a “retreat” or think of it as some boutique Big Sur package deal such as offered today. However primitive in design and quirky in execution, it was an authentic act, and it didn’t prove fatal. That time alone immersed in the four elements did give me an overview, not seen “as the crow flies” from point to point in a straight line but from a condor’s point of view—soaring in great circles, traveling over long distances on foot and in my head, on the edges of but not out of my mind.

7. p250 Utopian schemers and dopey dreamers were widespread flotsam and jetsam in the rising and falling tides of Santa Cruz’s amorphous and often transient population. *Cultes du jour* proliferated—and may still do!

8. p251 This no-last-name John ought not to be confused with another who was at that same time attracting a flock of true believers to some short-lived settlement located up Ocean Street Extension beyond the old Italian Gardens neighborhood. In any case, in the 1980s and 90s this area between Graham Hill Road and the east bank of the San Lorenzo River developed into yet another expensive locale with real estate prices out of reach of both newcomers to North County and the vast majority of Santa Cruz’s own native daughters and sons.

## **CHAPTER 15: 1976**

In 1969 Peter had been struck by Gary Snyder’s prophetic declaration in the parting paragraph of “Passage To More Than India,” reprinted in *EARTH HOUSE HOLD* (1969):

The American Indian is the vengeful ghost lurking in the back of the troubled American mind. Which is why we lash out with such ferocity and passion, so muddled a heart, at the black-haired young peasants and soldiers who are the “Viet Cong.” That ghost will claim the next generation as its own. When this has happened, citizens of the USA will at last begin to be Americans, truly at home on the continent, in love with their land. The

chorus of a Cheyenne Indian Ghost song — “hi-niswa’ vita’ki’ni” — “We shall live again.”

“Passage to more than India!  
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?  
O soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like those?”

Wrapped up in his Bard College cocoon (“... on daddy’s dole in a hot or at least lukewarm bed of liberal progressivism...”), the tenets of Synder’s manifesto-like vision seemed beyond dispute and by 1976, for Peter, they’d become axiomatic. His sympathies for the dispossessed of American history were firmly in place as he made a somewhat desperate attempt to align his own interests with those of the descendants of the indigenous peoples of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (called the Iroquois by the French).

His recollection of this entire episode brought many emotions to the fore. I had often felt challenged to tease out the exact motivations for some of his extreme behavior, but his decision to throw his lot in with the Amerindians was especially vexing for me, crowded as it seems with complexes resembling a maze of highway interchanges in LA! And his account of this period sometimes came across to me as self-characterization bordering on self-debasement. The burden was on me to listen without protest as my highly sensitive subject’s rendition of events approached a ritualized, self-inflected *auto-da-fé*.

*The ingredients of shame and guilt had been stewing in a recipe of Puritanical self-punishment for a long time. I’d lost respect for the premises of the dominant society from which I came, and I was ready to act as if I were free to disregard my own cultural origins. Even before I set foot on Indian land, I had fallen into an ideological trance, conflating my personal objectives with their more militant demands for new terms of public life. To understand the fabrications that led to overidentifying my utopian fantasies with the political program of the Mohawks, I can think of no more clarifying points of reference than the figures of Herman Melville and Walt Whitman, representing the two poles toward which I am repeatedly drawn and between which I seem, over time, to sustain a tenuous, dynamic balance—in mostly creative tension these days. I’m not throwing around any sanctioned literary terms of engagement here. The contrast between Whitman’s New Man and Melville’s insistence on the atavistic assertions of Old Man gradually assumed an outsize importance in my grappling with my own contradictory impulses. The pair has long formed one enduring unit of complementary opposition to which I repeatedly relate! In Section 2 of “Passage to India” (1871), Whitman reveled in the completion of the Suez Canal:*

Passage to India!

Lo, soul, seest thou not God’s purpose from the first?  
The earth to be spanned, connected by network,  
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
The oceans to be cross’d, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.



*While Melville was stating his conviction that,*

Colombus ended earth's romance:

No New World to mankind remains!

Lines 168–9, xxi, CLAREL (1876)

*No doubt treatises of a more scholarly nature have focused on this dichotomous pair of 19<sup>th</sup> c. American icons but, personally speaking, the contrary strains from these two key players in my private jugalbandi—the one of die-hard optimism and the other of bleak skepticism—create an antithetical parallelism which has almost become my credo. In 1976 I hadn't managed to apply the Whitmanic ethos of the New Man to salvation in doctrines of Communism and its project of a New World, but I had succumbed to another delusion: the Noble Savage.*

Readers tempted to dismiss this recurrent theme in the author's self-analysis as gratuitous literary grandstanding or some version of inflated grandiosity will miss the insight it grants us into the deep background to his trial-by-fire in 1976. <sup>1</sup>

Peter had been paring down his material existence, including his personal library, to bare essentials, but when he ran across a pile of *Akwesasne Notes* (published 1968–87) he plowed through the newspaper's back issues religiously, sensing that *A. Notes'* priorities dovetailed with his own. Its brand of alternative journalism shared similarities with *The Catholic Worker's* [Ed. note: See pp.122-31, Chapter 5, PART TWO]. Both were ink-smudged “rags” relatively low-cost in production with distribution accomplished through the mail and a network of outlets catering to a tiny subset of the general population. Both were lively, ornery organs of the Free Press with their own stables of writers, artists, and readers; and both carried community announcements. They also both focused, from different perspectives, on various facets of one common subject: radical social change. <sup>2</sup>

Peter's past reactions to his own WASP heritage (the antithesis of the disinherited Native Americans') had been to pop bubbles of privilege by declining to further his own advancement through openings to one opportunity after another. With a guilt-tinged conscience, he knew full well that the “lucky” breaks falling to him did so by virtue of his race, class, and gender—and, I must add, not a little to his being tall and handsome! If unimpeded, tradition's momentum would have entitled him to secure, at the least, a position in academia or to perform in a professional capacity as a writer and/or editor along some profitable commercial lines. But he had never conceived of his passion for literature and his literary skills as moneymaking enterprises, not if he were ever to reside in the ranks of those honored for their “scaled invention and true artistry”—where he had long aspired to arrive.

[Ed. note: Witman and Boffey's expositions here compel me to quote from the last stanza of Pound's CANTO LXXXI from which the author's citation of “scaled artistry and true invention” was lifted:

But to have done instead of not doing  
    This is not vanity  
To have, with decency, knocked  
That a Blunt should open  
    To have gathered from the air a live tradition  
Or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame  
This is not vanity.  
    Here error is all in the not done,  
All in the diffidence that faltered.

The full four stanzas of this “aria” doubtless contain the most frequently excerpted lines from the whole of Pound’s CANTOS if not his entire oeuvre in poetry and prose; although Pound’s more strictly aesthetic argument may not be applicable *quid pro quo* to Boffey’s dilemma as addressed by Witman in this passage, Pound’s proclamation throws light upon our subject’s general conflict between a drive *to do* and a drive *to think*, an age-old intellectual’s dilemma acutely but not uniquely his alone.]

A barrier between distinctly different compartments of art and business had only hardened since graduation; in his late twenties, he was still languishing on the margins of the margins of any contemporary literary scene, where his rebellious, headstrong autodidacticism seemed always to lead and leave him—alone.<sup>3</sup> During this between-times residence in Santa Cruz, he did place a poem or two in a local little magazine, and he did join in a public reading once or twice. But he was looking to play a greater part in social change—to make statements off the written page and beyond any gestures of vapid oratorical rhetoric.

*Whether I was sticking to my guns as an ardent adherent to passéisme or embodying a prescient avantgarde—or just stuck in a rut like a dog chasing its tail—I don’t know. I had again become something of a humorless dolt craving a resolution of the disparity between concrete action and abstract art and—not proud to say so now—I was prepared to sacrifice the latter for the former..*

Peter’s perennial need to serve a greater cause and his hunger to *somehow, somewhere* belong to *something* asserted itself—“almost taking revenge.” Despite the iconoclastic strains of 20th c. aestheticism, of which he was well aware, he wanted to act decisively in an arena aside from any debates about sacred and/or profane expression in the fashions or the arts. The absolutist politics espoused in *A. Notes* had little to do with the more superficial affectations of counter-cultural “white Indians” and the expropriation of radical chic fashions in clothing and accoutrements by those with disposable income, popular trends that ran counter to Peter’s longing to put his gifts to use in a meaningful way.

\*

In the summer 1976 edition of *A. Notes*, he came across an appeal that brought all his simmering thoughts and feelings to a boil. A member of the Pawtucket (“... or was the Wampanoag...?”) [Ed.

note: The Pawtucket tribe was a confederation of Eastern Algonquian-speaking Native Americans in present-day northeastern Massachusetts and southeastern New Hampshire; the Wampanoag tribe has inhabited present day Massachusetts and Eastern Rhode Island for millennium. Both are mostly known in the historical record for their dealings with the early English colonists in the 17th century.” Wikipedia, 2023.] was calling on the readership to show its support of his vision of forming a small-scale theatrical troupe which would mount a piece more or less reenacting the Wounded Knee Occupation on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota (Feb 27–May 8, 1973). Individuals interested in the creation of the piece and participating in its actual touring production were invited to communicate by mailing their qualifications % *Akwesasne Notes*. Peter knew that the project would be run on a shoestring budget; his own motive was not for profit. Rather, he imagined that now he could play a worthwhile role in an artistic yet authentic expression of Red Power politics.

[Ed. notes: For a comprehensive treatment of the role that *Akwesasne Notes* played in the Indian rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, see Chapter 3 in Page, Russell M., "Native Newspapers: The Emergence of the American Indian Press 1960-Present" (2013). CMC Senior Theses. Paper 638. [http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc\\_theses/638](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/638). Also relevant: “We Never Intended to Start a Newspaper” in that early summer issue of *A. Notes*.]

While evaluating his next decisions as “some of the wildest miscalculations [I’d] ever make,” My subject sometimes did avert his eyes—even wince. Peter had warned me that he might become embarrassed while disclosing the following sequence of events and even sharing his ruminations upon them. Yet he proceeded (almost bravely) with as much accuracy and honesty as he could muster. I likewise have felt obliged (almost honored) to pay extra attention to this segment of his personal history with as much clarity and fairness as I could manage, keeping in mind that the distraught 28 year old was earnestly acting on his heartfelt beliefs, willing to pay more than lip service to a cause he judged just. <sup>4</sup>

In no time he used a portable recorder to capture his reading aloud several long poems by Walt Whitman and mailed the cassette off to the newspaper’s address in Hogsburg NY. When no response to his self-styled “audition” arrived in a timely fashion, growing impatient (“... and perhaps too anxious about rejection to generate any follow-up communication...”), he unilaterally decided to simply show up on the Saint Regis/Akwesasne Reservation.

*I was hotheaded enough. Why not dive right into the caldera? What further proof of my commitment would be needed?*

Having learned that an acquaintance in Eugene would begin graduate school back East and was on the brink of driving a northerly route across the country (with forays across the border into Canada as camping opportunities arose), Peter proposed traveling along; he was told that if he could get himself up to Oregon before Larry’s departure with his partner and her child on

August 1<sup>st</sup>, he could get a ride in exchange for his share of fuel and food costs. <sup>5</sup> Our protagonist has forgotten how he got himself to Eugene for their takeoff but he made it.

\*

Little did our idealist know that the customs checkpoint on the Seaway International Bridge (now known as Three Nations Crossing) had been the site of the Akwesasne Mohawks' December 18, 1968 blockade in protest of restrictions placed on their legally free movement back and forth across the boundary between Canada and the United States, which boundary postdated the human habitation of Akwesasne land—which translates as “where the partridge drums.” The Akwesasne activists had used civil disobedience in order to confront armed authorities representing the town of Cornwall in Franklin County NY, the Ontario Provincial Police, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. My research into the border dispute led me to two short films available on YouTube: “YOU ARE ON INDIAN LAND” filmed by a First Nation Film crew for the National Film Board of Canada (which temporarily suppressed its screening) and THE ROOTS OF MODERN NATIVE ACTIVISM: THE 1968 AKWESASNE BORDER BLOCKADE. Highly partisan, passionate insider information fills the archives of *Akwesasne Notes*.

Eight years later, in September 1976, bridge guards took their time inspecting the papers and luggage of the solitary Caucasian American citizen seeking re-admission to the USA—on foot! Unable to find any outstanding warrants or technical illegalities, the agents let him continue on his way, and Peter hiked and hitched rides to the so called longhouse on the Saint Regis/Akwesasne Reservation. The building itself was not the long, low, communal structure of tradition (the major architectural feature of the Northeast forest and river lands' longest continual inhabitants) but an older multistory residence in disrepair; inside he found a few other non-Indians hanging out. This nominal longhouse may once have been a vibrant community center but now seemed to serve as a catchall for outsiders and reservation misfits—with no central authority in charge. Anticipating clarifications, Peter crashed there. <sup>6</sup>

No one spoke at any length about *A. Notes* or knew anything about any theater project. Peter waited. He improvised meals from what little canned and jarred food was available (“... mostly peanut butter and sliced white bread...”) and performed some basic household tasks in a desultory fashion. Well-intentioned strangers occasionally dropped off donations of clothes and what-not on the porch, and he sorted it into piles, packing them into boxes for distribution to needy residents “on the rez.” Once he joined a group of volunteers transported to Cornwall Island where they shucked corn and stored mounds of potatoes in the root cellars of impoverished residents there.

Unbeknownst to our pilgrim, that summer and fall a crisis was transpiring with regard to the operation of *A. Notes*. Peter had blindly walked into the crossfire between the head editor, Rarihokwats, and community leaders of all stripes, both radical politicians and more moderate representatives of the Natives' conventional governing bodies. The predicament had started playing

out before Peter arrived and resolved itself shortly after his departure; the timing of the outsider unannounced arrival couldn't have been less propitious.

One day several Christian Mohawk women delivered some food stuffs and put on cheerful miens as they bustled about doing rudimentary household chores, trying to address the squalor. Alone among the disaffected squatters, Peter showed some enthusiasm for the voluntary projects the women had in mind, and one of them proved to be the first human being willing to discuss with him his stalled situation. It was from her that he learned that the editor was hunkered down someplace in the Adirondacks; she supposed that the theater organizer, if he had arrived, was likewise staying at the remote location, but she really didn't know. She thought the place in the mountains was about an hour's drive away, but there was no public transportation and, as far as she knew, no one regularly driving to or from the site. Plainly, none of these kindly women were in contact with the politically controversial elements of the Mohawk Nation, the intelligentsia of the newspaper, or any theater people.<sup>7</sup>

[Ed. note: The December 1977 issue of *Akwesasne Notes* (No. 5 of Vol. 9) provides an overview of the unprecedented action of the 1968 blockade and a blow-by-blow account of the crisis of leadership at the periodical, documenting the repercussions of both the action and the crisis on the community at large.]

While waiting for clues about how to access the mountain place, Peter recalled fantasizing about what he might find there. The woman's report confirmed that the brains of both the newspaper and the theater were concentrated far from the dysfunctional longhouse. But of what did the mountain remove consist? Was it a settlement of genuine log cabins? A circle of trailers or broken-down mobile homes? Was it a rustic lodge of naturalistic parkitecture? Or maybe a bona fide longhouse with its wood bound together by deer hide straps, its exterior sheathed in bark? Whatever images presented themselves, for want of further information, he dreamed on. Meanwhile, he was not encouraged to participate in the everyday life on the Saint Regis/Akwesasne lowland.<sup>8</sup>

At last he met a college student who was Mohawk yet neither alienated nor intimidated by his white skin, blue eyes, ponytail hair, faux Indian moccasins—or his outspokenness! She listened to him bemoan the monolithic obstacle to his involvement that he was meeting at every turn, and she sympathized with his frustrations. It was from her that he found out about the real crisis at *A. Notes*. By the summer of 1976, while Peter had been saturating himself with the back issues, not a single Indian staff member worked in the areas of the paper's production or administration. The disparity between white lord and red labor was at a breaking point. Head editor Rarihokwats was the most prominent spokesperson on Native affairs in the Western Hemisphere, but he was holding out in the mountain house against a siege of discontent. Admitting the seriousness of the problem, he had put out a call for a successor to replace him—if, in judgment, the candidate qualified. And one more thing: Rarihokwats was non-Indian.

[Ed. note: The rise and demise of the nine-year career of Gerald Thomas Gambill (b.1932; d.2020) as an adoptee of the Bear Clan of the Mohawk Nation in 1969, including his ultimate expulsion in 1977, can be found in an article in the aforementioned December 1977 issue of *Akwesasne Notes* entitled “There Has Been No Split.”]

Peter appreciated the college student’s confidences although nothing she relayed was good news. But at least he got a better handle on the profound mistrust he encountered everywhere—except with her. Then, before she left, the young woman disclosed the worst: ever since he had shown up without references or any credible evidence of his commitment to the cause, his sudden appearance and lingering presence as an Anglo outsider had been noted by the activists and, until proven otherwise, Peter was suspected of being an infiltrator planted by the FBI.

\*

After being hit over the head by the realization that he had been summarily rejected by the strangers he had hoped (“... with flagrant naivety....”) to assist, Peter still wasn’t done:

*Was I supposed to depart as unceremoniously and ignominiously as I had arrived? Was I tempted to? Maybe so. But true to my malingering post-adolescent mentality, I stayed on. I felt compelled to disprove my status as a spy and to prove my worth as a champion of Native causes or at least a faithful fellow traveler. I might’ve been willing to accept exiting as an also-ran. But as a never-has-been-also ran? No, that I couldn’t accept—yet.*

A blow-by-blow account of what happened next reveals the tenacity of which the author was and remains capable. Armed with this new information, fueled by a sense of his own righteous indignation, Peter persisted in his effort to break through the walls of the prejudice (sic) against him and, late in September, he succeeded in joining a carload of passengers destined for “the place in the mountains.” One of the car’s occupants was a regular, long-distance contributor to *A. Notes* and an activist for the Métis, particularly the Cree of the Canadian Plains Provinces and the stateside Chippewa of Montana. This individual Métis was responding to Rarihokwats’ public letter in *A. Notes* effectively passing on the position of editor to a qualified successor.

[Ed. note: The Métis struggle, to gain recognition and consequently to win rights equivalent to those of the officially recognized Inuit and First Nations people, reached its highwater mark years later with the Constitution Act of 1982, but the long legal saga continues to this day.]

The drive to the higher elevation ended at a secluded two-story house that blended into a meadow surrounded by trees losing their leaves. After checking inside with the gatekeeper (a woman of *non-Indian extraction*), the editorial candidate returned to the car alone, leaving the others behind; despite his declaration of intentions, Peter was not permitted to travel farther nor was he informed about exactly who resided in a second more hidden house. The woman fed them a midday meal but wouldn’t tell Peter her own story although it was plain that this was not

her permanent home. She assured him that one car or another would be making his return to the reservation longhouse possible before dark. Rebuffed again, he bided his time (“... probably brooding...”); his efforts thwarted, he rode back to the lowland in late afternoon.

Some days later he made his second visit to “the place in the mountains.” This time the vehicle belonged to an Anglo man curious about his passenger’s business with the Akwesasne and forthcoming about his own reasons for being there. He was a radicalized lawyer offering services pro bono in the campaign against the extraction from Canada to the USA of an American Indian Movement militant who was charged with the murder of two FBI agents in the Jumping Bull compound on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation at Oglala, S.D. on June 26, 1975. After my 2021 interview with the author, I learned that Leonard Peltier (b.1944) remains incarcerated following his conviction in 1976. Whether he is viewed as a hardened criminal or a political prisoner or both, Peltier’s complicated case can be seen as a sometime popular *cause célèbre* and a transparent travesty of justice. The facts and one’s feelings will, as usual, depend upon who’s telling the story and who’s hearing it.

The lawyer was also obligated to check in with the gatekeeper in the meadow house and dropped his passenger off there, Peter’s movement beyond that point being expressly forbidden (“... as of course would befit an accomplice of the FBI!”). So this visit also turned out to be a day trip: once the lawyer had conducted his affairs, he collected our protagonist. Well before sundown, on the drive back, the driver passed him the keys to an old school bus and written information with a hand drawn map. If Peter wanted to help—and had a valid driver’s license—he could corral a couple of other volunteers and commandeer the bus in Hogansburg (where it was parked) in order to drive it to Massena, where dozens of twine-tied bundles of the newly printed *A. Notes* were waiting to be transported back to Hogansburg for labeling and mailing out. The lawyer had obviously pled Peter’s case and won him a small measure of trust—a reprieve from general censure. He eagerly took possession of the keys, followed instructions, and felt useful for the first time in a long time.

On his third and final visit to the mountains, still pestering the closemouthed woman in charge of traffic control, he finally crossed paths with the self-described founder of the yet-to-exist theater troupe. Peter remembered a lean, laconic, middle-aged man escorting him to a spot several hundred yards out in the field where, shovel in hand, he continued excavating what looked like a tiered earthen amphitheater in miniature. He was in fact digging out the bowl of a semi-underground sweat lodge before frozen soil would put the project on hold until the spring thaw.

In equivocal response to Peter’s questions regarding the Wounded Knee production, the man admitted that he had received the “audition” cassette; whether he had listened to it, or what his opinion was—these remained vague. In any event, Peter was flummoxed to find out that the only conceivable role that might fall to him would be playing a sheriff or US Marshall.

*So I was supposed to cast my lot in with the historical re-enactment as the definitive Bad Guy in the drama! I'd never expected a child's game of Cowboys and Indians, but when I entertained this option my heart sank. I could expect to become a readymade target for the not-so-subtle animosity from audiences wherever we went and from my collaborators as well. This was more martyrdom than I had bargained for.*

He left the man to his work and headed back to the house, eventually to learn that neither theater troupe nor theater piece had ever materialized.

\*

That afternoon there were no return rides available so, come nightfall, Peter was forced to sleep over. The theater organizer and various hangers on had occupied the bedrooms; Peter was given some blankets and told to sleep in a tepee located out of sight just inside the margin of the woods. Although not a feature of non-nomadic Mohawk cultural history, the tepee was the worse for wear; in the night it grew so cold that he let in a stray mutt that been whining outside the canvas flap door. My raconteur confessed that he would like to lay claim to an epiphany during some dark night of the soul, but all he really recalled was hugging the compliant hound for its body warmth and riding out the hours until dawn light.

In the morning, harbinger of a change of season in the Northern Boreal Forest, a hoar frost gripped the grasses. He remembered that moment when he realized he could not and would not suffer more humiliation, whether inflicted upon him by others or brought upon himself. He determined then to come face to face with Rarihokwats or get out. Inside the house he scoured up something to eat before the sleeping inhabitants stirred; by the time they came to life he was headed in the direction he'd seen the vehicles drive to the hideout—off limits to him. Peter reported that he told himself that if he were spotted and called back or otherwise challenged, he would use the fake pretext that he'd been told to deliver the bus keys back to their source—presumably Rarihokwats. A one-lane dirt road veered off into the trees, and he followed the ruts of its two tracks straddling the central hummock of brown grass.

*Looking back now, I really don't remember if at the time my outlandish behavior reminded me of some Indian brave raid out of James Fenimore Cooper or if it even occurred to me just how foolhardy I was, violating the prohibition about approaching the Akwesasne Mohawk's alternative command center. If I was indeed being identified as an enemy agent in disguise—instead of the hapless, feckless lost soul I really was—who was to say that I wasn't in the crosshairs of some sniper's rifle and about to be shot at any instant? Whether hubris on my part or self-destructive wishful thinking, I believe I was oblivious to the real risks. But then I was still not fully aware of the high stakes—the life-and-death stakes, really—of the militant actions with which I was trying to affiliate.*



Pantlegs soaked to the skin, he saw the house come into view at the end of the lane. It looked as if it might once have been a well-appointed summer vacation home; perhaps it was property donated to *A. Notes* or on loan. After considerable silence, the door opened to his knocks.

Peter drew me a word-picture of a modest figure in simple clothes, a white man “gone native,” with strains and stress written over his face—not the composure of a hermetic mountain man.

*I held out the keys and introduced myself, but he seemed to know who I was and let me inside for a cup of something warm to drink.*

The potential editor who was staying on in the secret house to assess the newspaper’s operation—and, it turned out, to lie low on the lam from all law enforcement—peeked his face around a doorjamb and disappeared again. Peter wasted no time explaining his predicament. He couldn’t wait out the winter for however long it might take for the theater company to coalesce, and his own participation in the group seemed like long shot at best. But he still wanted to offer his services to the movement, and he was sure his writerly skills could be put to good use. He certainly wasn’t lobbying to be taken on as an editor or positioning himself for decision making at *A. Notes*, but he was ready to serve. So there they were, two educated Anglos talking in a room in the Adirondacks. Recalling the encounter, Peter couldn’t swear to having confessed to the man the mean and hurtful rumor that he, Peter, was some sort of governmental secret agent or its *agent provocateur*. Was he thoroughly aware of the argument that either or both of them represented neo-colonizer interference in Indian affairs? The author thinks they probably danced around that and other problematic subjects.

Softspoken, taciturn, Rarihokwats finally proposed that if the surprise visitor really wanted to be of service, he would leave the land “where the partridge drums” and concentrate on providing an English language translation of *LA PAIX BLANCHE: INTRODUCTION À L’ETHNOCIDE* (1970) by Robert Jaulin (1928–1966).<sup>9</sup>

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Like that stray dog whimpering outside the teepee, Peter licked his wounds, put his tail between his legs, and ran from Mohawk Nation (“... like a scalded dog...”), hitchhiking to his older brother’s home in Vermont’s Upper Connecticut River Valley...

*... where I proceeded to annoy the hell out of sister-in-law by smoking cigarette after cigarette in her living room while listening to an LP record set of MARAT/SADE: THE PERSECUTION AND ASSASSINATION OF JEAN-PAUL MARAT AS PERFORMED BY THE INMATES AT CHARENTON (1963)—at least twice. My brother, just then “getting sober” himself, was generously forgiving, initially taking me in from the cold and subsequently wishing me good luck as I continued on my wandering way—so different from his.*

In Cambridge, Peter teamed up with a street musician who was also intent on getting out to the West Coast at the least possible expense. A commercial driveaway service entrusted them with

the keys to a private sedan, contracting the pair to deliver the vehicle to Southern California in a timely fashion—and in one piece. Around his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday our crushed crusader began his eighth cross-county drive, this one fueled by the highest hopes that Madalon would take him back.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 15

1. p257 “Perhaps I was born to be a half believer.” So says Maurice Castle in *THE HUMAN FACTOR* (1978) by Graham Greene [Ed. note: Chapter III, Part Three]. Whitman’s optimism and Melville’s skepticism comprise a distinguishable yet inseparable pair in two zones of the dichotomous sensibility accompanying me down through the years—if I may speak thusly in mine own olden, golden days! Whitman puts his faith in an American capacity to become the New Man; Melville is tantalized but frustrated by his conviction that “.... your future’s too sublime: / The Past, the Past is half of time, / The proven half.” [Ed. note: vii, Celio, Part I Jerusalem, *CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND* (1976)]. In my own case, I don’t know whether Whitmanesque viewpoints vein their way through Melvillian marble or vice versa. The long sinuous lines of color in the natural stone offer a spatial image of oneness, but my felt sense is of a temporality that describes the phasic fluctuations between impulses, moods, and conditions. What about invoking symbolic pairs of drums, *tablas* if not *tabula rasa*? At any given time, different hands beat the different drums: now Melville’s, now Whitman’s, the larger drum’s bass sounds, the smaller drum’s treble and tones—taken together they make a rhythmic sort of music.

2. p258 Founded by Ernest Bendict (educator, activist, chief of the Mohawk Council; 1918–2011), *Akwesasne Notes* first appeared while the great border dispute on the Saint Regis Mohawk Nation Reservation was coming to a head in 1968–69. In the 1960s and 70s, before casinos altered the socio-economic status of many indigenous people in Upstate NY, even to designate Saint Regis/Akwesasne Reservation as part of either New York, Ontario, or Quebec was to make a controversial and contestable political statement flying in the face of mounting Indian rights activism. [Ed note: The Mohawk Casino opened in 1999 and has subsequently been expanded on several occasions. The Jay Treaty of 1794–5 had granted the Akwesasne the right to cross freely back and forth over the newly established border between Canada and the USA as well as to incur no custom charges on their personal property.]

3. p259 What Sally seems to be suggesting is mine to own up to: I have often been difficult to work with, period. Not many years ago I happened upon a remark made by a literary broker who, passing my name to a book designer, inadvertently exposed the full scroll of his email communication, including the warning that “Peter can be independent—too much so.” I thought at the time that there are worst faults for a creative writer and thinker to exhibit, but I’ll admit that my outspoken and often opinionated (and sometimes underinformed) expressivity has not endeared me to people, least of all in academia or publishing! My tendency to shoot myself in

the foot—from a professional careerist’s point of view—is not irrelevant to Sally’s examination of the issue of my alienation from the mainstream establishment and my attraction toward the alternatives, however ill-fitting and ill-advised, e.g. this one-sided alliance of mine with the Mohawk activists.

4. p260 Another two such major miscalculations involving significant relocations were my fugue in Morocco (1975) and my extended sojourn in Israel (1984).

5. p260 Lorenzo de Louze (sp?) had once set the words of the last poem in my series “TO C” to piano, his music an innovative amalgam of jazz chords and hymnal rhythms producing bluesy art song!

6. p261 An older ex-con Mohawk was the sole permanent resident in the building. After he befriended me, I learned that in his youth he had killed the son of a chief and spent most of his adult life incarcerated. In the shambles of an upstairs hallway, he had fashioned a sort of cell for himself between two hanging blankets; a broken sofa served as his bed; a metal clothes hanger served as rabbit-ears antennas on his broken TV. I heard nothing encouraging from the broken man; it was with him I started smoking cigarettes, again.

7. p261 It is worth noting that, according to its own tallies, *A. Notes* was the largest and fastest growing Native publication in North America and the most widely recognized voice of authentic Native concerns in the Western World; at the time of my arrival, the newspaper vouched for upwards of 100,000 readers per issue.

8. p262 Not to forget that my prior interactions with living Native Americans had been specious to non-existent. As a kid I had consumed untold hours of Hollywood movies and TV shows in which the misrepresentation of Natives was common currency and the promulgation of racial stereotypes rife. The brainwashing was thorough. After all these years, I can still fall back on one other item that made a big impression on me and, presumably, on many others: the life-size diorama of Plains Indians in the Natural History Museum in NYC. All Indians lived like that, right?

9. p266 Amazon webpage (<https://www.amazon.com/Paix-blanche-R-Jaulin/dp/2020025175>) shows the book’s back cover blurb providing more than enough clues as to why Rarihokwats sought to make a priority of exposing that particular text to the English-reading world. He showed me his French-language copy of its hefty 400-plus pages and spent a moment justifying his advice: The indigenous peoples of South America, especially in the Amazon Basin, were the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s leading victims of Western capitalist exploitation, and a serviceable translation would go some ways toward laying out the evidence while spelling out the case. He took back the book, dropped out of any further exchanges, and—having kept me at arm’s length, sent me

on my way. As far as I know, the book remains to be translated into English. I was, essentially, of no help.

10. p266 The author of the April 18, 2020 obituary in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* [Ed.note:<https://thestarphoenix.com/opinion/columnists/cuthand-remembering-the-work-of-rarihokwats>] does not portray Jerry Gambill as the monster his excoriating cohorts had made him out to be. To me Rarihokwats had simply proven as diffident as the dramaturge of the improbable theater production had proven disdainful. Had I been given a chance, would I have glommed onto Rarihokwats as an ersatz older brother or even projected my absent-father-figure complex upon the man? Since he steered clear of me by a long shot, the question is moot.

Given the mockery made of my phantasms of myself as a new and self-made man, it must have seemed to me time for another major reckoning. What had I thought I was doing? The rejections by everyone on Akwesasne seemed to supplement the indifferent and hostile reception I had been generating within my own people. Yet I'd only been acting on—or out—my conviction that by joining up with *les misérables* I would help to alleviate the suffering of those individuals and groups of people systematically and systemically subjected to institutionalized social and economic injustice; I'd made a mistake. By denigrating myself, the Prince of Pleasantville—as Sarah seems to have dubbed me *ad perpetuum!*—thought to shore up his skewed vision of the Noble Savage. But aligning my personal liberation with the emancipation dynamics of their complex social reality was wrong-headed, and all my earnest right-heartedness did not prevail.

## **PART FIVE: SANTA CRUZ (1976-81)**

Upon completion of PART FOUR, Peter and I agreed to pause. We stayed in touch but refrained from addressing the next phase of his life (1976-1981); we needed a break. <sup>1</sup> I took the opportunity to catch up on some nagging professional obligations, and Peter had to deal with pressing personal matters: namely, the deaths of his younger and older brothers in November 2023 and August 2024, respectively. <sup>2</sup> Neither of us expected the interlude to last as long as it did, and it was almost a year before we started again with the interview for PART FIVE.

Besides these practical considerations, in the course of that hiatus two serious issues came up for me and threatened to derail my further commitment to Peter's "memoir of sorts." The subtler of the two was my befuddlement about the problematical and paradoxical personality of my subject; he baffled me. I realized how profoundly puzzled and troubled I'd become by the bold discrepancies between the 70-something's composed reflectiveness and the dissociative reactivity of the late-in-his-20s *individu* whose life we had reanimated. Were they one and the same person? I had become used to listening to the voice of a mature, quick-witted, often generous human being, yet I was repeatedly forced to dial back in my portraiture to an immature, foggy-

headed, often rather mean-spirited guy. The contradictions between rough youth and refined elder stymied me. <sup>3</sup>

Would picking up where we'd left off—with the protagonist on the brink of returning to Santa Cruz—provoke his recitation of yet more self-imposed unhappiness? As weeks went by, I recognized I was dreading the resumption of our chronicle if it entailed an account of yet more “fugues and incognitos” and confirmed his tendency toward self-annihilation. It pained me to watch someone I had come to care about suffer when I felt incapable of doing anything except to bear witness to it—which felt like doing nothing at all. Any honest portrayal of the author approaching thirty seemed to demand the depiction of more than merely another frustrated, youthful idealist; the discrepancies between his own ideals for the world (and himself) and the realities of his tortured growth and development felt incompatible. <sup>4</sup> At the same time, my curiosity was piqued. What had happened when he returned to Santa Cruz? And what had transpired in the intervening decades so that the confused cynic of moody ennui could evolve into the kindly, ironical skeptic capable of exhibiting much *joie de vivre* and even *bonhomie*? <sup>5</sup>

Halfway through our break the second major quake shook me: out of nowhere, he sent me the manuscript of PARTS ONE–FOUR *with his copious Notes appended to each chapter!* The ground went out from under me. He'd once or twice mentioned some “thoughts” he'd been jotting down in the course of reviewing my drafts, items I'd understood might be placed here and there as footnotes, but nothing requiring me to reconceive the structure of the whole project! I was upset. I was angry. I felt blindsided by this belated revelation of a body of authoritative Notes he'd been withholding from me. Peter may not have intended to sabotage my biography but it felt like it at the time. As when I had received his withering criticism of my first trial drafts, I was once again ready to withdraw from further participation in the creation of NOT ANY ONE THING.

Once the aftershocks to my system had subsided (and with a little help from my friends), I gathered my shattered wits and wrote to let him know I was dumbfounded—even offended. I hadn't been aware that while “lightly editing” my drafts he'd been cataloguing afterthoughts, compiling asides, preserving reservations, and arranging his insights, all of which he blithely deemed “Notes” to be placed at the end of my chapters. Didn't he understand that the personal voice of those “Notes” threatened to subvert the authority of my biographical treatment? Wouldn't his tidbits of insider information and his longer digressions supplant rather than supplement my text? And, by the way, hadn't he fallen into the very traps of overwriting and the amateur psychoanalysis against which he had originally railed when reviewing my initial trial draft of his childhood years? The Notes exhibited all the emotive self-indulgence he had forbidden me to enjoy! So, I thought, why not just chuck the biography and let him pen a first-person memoir on his own? I wrote him proposing as much.

Pleading innocence, begging pardon, Peter called me to apologize for having hurt my feelings or seeming to disrespect my authorial sensibility. He argued that it was my skillful distillation

of our conversations and the clarity and disciplined orderliness of my account of his life which kept prompting him “to dig deeper for the undertones and reach higher for the overtones, for the implications, for the meaning of it all.”<sup>6</sup> Peter was confident that the text of the biographical sections and the text of the autobiographical Notes could stand side by side, even “interleave quite nicely,” so that together they would be *our* book of *his* life. If I liked, he even joked, we could have the finished work copywritten as “pure fiction” and let it go at that!

As I was mulling all this over, as if it were a foregone conclusion that we would be resuming our collaboration, Peter sent me a large manila envelope stuffed with miscellaneous photographs from his years in Santa Cruz along with a note that the visuals might help me characterize the next seemingly chaotic period. Whatever the truth or weakness of his arguments, I recognized that the charming and incorrigible ironist would have his way or the project would indeed never come to term. And I realized I had come to accept that the design of my diligently tamed story of the life and times of Peter Boffey might be overshadowed but, I conceded, ultimately enhanced by the many dashes of the author’s own literary zest. Even if the NOTES upstaged my more straightforward chronicle, their inclusion enriched rather than distracted from the overall narrative of this very American writer’s American life. I made only one request: to spare me (and the reader) the exhaustive detailing which made my own post-interview work so exhausting. After a pause he replied that, regretfully, he could not promise same, that it would be up to me, in the process of selecting and editing, to leave out the worst and keep the best, “which was, after all, [my] job.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite lingering misgivings, I agreed to carry on.<sup>8</sup>

## **CHAPTER 16: 1976–77**

The finale to Peter’s reentry into California was chockfull of incident as he was handed off from one after another in a loose band of surfers driving northward in pursuit of better breaks ever farther up the Central Coast. If not for his impromptu relay team, he might have spent more than two full days hitchhiking up Scenic Route One from Long Beach to Santa Cruz. By 1976 the general citizenry was far too wary of picking up a stranger with nothing but a small duffel slung from his shoulder, but those seal-like young men were not afraid to pick up a hungry-looking guy with his thumb stuck out and take him along.

When the first night fell, the seasoned traveler unrolled his thin sleeping bag in the vicinity of San Simeon. A high-pitched agitation seems to have protected our pilgrim beneath a fragile sheltering sky.

### **CENTRAL CALIFORNIA COAST**

Across the arid coastal hills

black bulls range  
and brown horses browse the plaid.  
Where stones are stacked at the kine crossing  
I have known the cold of Orion's silver blade  
and shivered for sleep amid the Seven Sisters of the Pleiades.  
The moon is a mirror opening.  
The sun is a window opening.  
Praise the days that survive you.

[1976]

Peter sensed he had bottomed out at last. Growing up, he'd had all the advantages money can buy, but losing or doggedly rejecting such privileges since graduation from Bard had brought him to a point of diminishing returns. And what was he making of his artistic gift? He recollected the gradual emergence of that question without at the time being able to come up with any pleasant answers. Peter was not headed back to Santa Cruz exclusively because Madelon was there, but she had become his sole lodestar.

His father, "failed extrovert," had suicided. He'd lost touch with his two brothers. He'd drifted away from his mother, "failed introvert," who he felt had deserted him first! He remembers beginning to wonder for the first time if he'd lost all chance of creating a family of his own and pondered the possibility that his want of offspring was only nature's way of weeding out the unfit—"And did I regret it or not?" He didn't spend *all* his waking hours berating himself, but in fact his health was shot, his finances were not (period), and—lacking any leadership position or membership in any following, lacking affiliation with any common cause—his life was in disarray. Had he become aware that his personal problems were portable and would inevitably accompany him to whatever location he chose next? In our conversation he couldn't swear that knowledge had yet dawned on him. He just knew his destination was Santa Cruz, "... where, tail between my legs, I hid myself to Maddy."

Was he facing up to how lost to himself he was—"... unable to 'find myself,' as the saying goes..."? He certainly doesn't pretend to have been seriously grappling with any pattern of malingering post-adolescence or the consequence of his vestigial faith in the inevitability of success in whatever arena he might enter. He still felt an alienated Son of Madman and an underappreciated champion of underdogs and the avantgarde. His quest for belonging to an alternative community among Beats or Berbers or Mohawks had only exposed him to himself as a profligate version of Whitman's New Man. By his own admission, at age twenty-nine he had more

difficulty deluding himself about making an absolute escape from the influences of his personal history on his present and future life; by any measure his options were running out. <sup>9</sup>

\*

In the fall of 1976, Peter and Maddy were still a match. Cumulatively, they had already shared half-a-year together in hippie watering holes in Eugene, Pacific Grove, Santa Cruz, and France. Deeper in their backgrounds they shared having grown up and left behind metropolitan New York, although her time was spent mostly in Jewish-inflected Brooklyn and his in WASPish Northern Westchester. Separately, they had been through divorces entailing no children and no real property. One year prior they had been through her miscarriage together, and neither felt ready to bring children into the world. In the mid-70s they shared righteous indignation about social injustices and a spirited reactivity to current events beyond their control. With their budgets equally low and their native intelligences on par, they were indeed a match, not least of all in their passion for each other, a passion beyond passing affection or affectation. “And we both still smoked lots of non-filtered cigarettes!”

Their highly charged sexuality seems to have been enhanced by the admixture of his more effeminate traits and her mannishness, often blurring the lines of conventional gender-bound boundaries in and out of bed. Photographs attest to Maddy’s raven-haired beauty. Whether posing at the farm and garden at UCSC, mugging in a 4-for-1-dollar panel of photobooth snapshots, or rehearsing in her typical outfit of leotard top and woolen leggings, her facial features and modern dancer’s physique were photogenic, to say the least. <sup>10</sup> No wonder the weary traveler felt release and relief when lying beside her during their euphoric reunion:

#### **WHILE SHE LIES STILL**

Black swans cruise the neon waters flowing through her legs

seagulls circle the currents of her windy heart

and herons brush wings against her rib basket of bone.

His hands are mourning doves hovering at her neck

his tongue a hummingbird sipping at her skin

his lips mockingbirds ringing at either ear.

A magpie folds in white spotted wings, she wakes

surprised to find an iridescent tail

fanned out across her breast.

[1976]



But Madalon’s purposefulness and Peter’s purposelessness prefigured permanent strains in their long-term relationship. Standing up to his over assertions and insisting on speaking her mind—these were not practices to his liking; her increasingly feminist self-expression was ideologically correct, but it was a novel experience for him. In retrospect, he realizes that Madalon Zorn was the first serious female partner to push back against his fantastical projections upon her.<sup>11</sup> By orienting his immediate future around her, anticipating that all his needs would be met, he had neglected to consider that, to a significant degree, her needs might not be.

[Ed. note: This shortsighted overdependence upon a woman (a Jewish woman, in particular) has been broached in PART FOUR. See Chapter 13, pp.242–43 and Note 1, pp.244-45; Chapter 14, pp.250-51.]

\*

Peter had dabbled in poverty after his expulsion from secondary school, when he toyed for several months with living “... on the road and off Daddy’s dole....” before returning home as some suburban version of the proverbial prodigal son [Ed. note: See “The Parable of the Prodigal Son,” Luke 15: 11–32]. Another flirtation with material deprivation took place during his summer spent slumming at the Catholic Worker Farm in Tivoli NY, as well as during periodic crises when he contemplated committing himself to a monastic pursuit with concomitant “voluntary poverty” as modelled for him by Thomas Merton (Trappist) and Philip Kapleau (Zen).<sup>12</sup>

During his first employment after college, he had witnessed chronic poverty up close while working at Peterkort’s Rose Company, where the workers’ subsistence economies were interlinked with their minimum-wage (and below) ag jobs in the greenhouse range and refrigerated hangers. Peter labored alongside them but was almost a tourist there, having been folded into his Portland bride’s greater Jewish family and thus buffered from genuine misery. In Eugene, his steady but parttime jobs, first on the university grounds crew then in the off-campus co-op bookstore, kept him living low-budget but allowed him the free time so precious to his restless spirit. After the divorce, his free-swinging bohemianism had propelled the trajectory of his economic spiral farther downward. Living on little money while vagabonding in Morocco and France, only the rendezvous with Madalon had released him from restrictive penury as she infused her funds into their travel budget. In the first round of his “hippie deluxe” lifestyle in Santa Cruz (a lifestyle based loosely on Gary Snyder’s ecologically informed vision of communities promoting reduced extraction, exploitation, and the wasting of natural resources), Peter was tolerably uncomfortable. But it was his brutal internship on the impoverished Mohawk Reservation that had lifted the last veils away from the Pleasantville Prince’s watchful eyes: his solidarity with the cause there cost him his health and well-being, resulting in more than token misery. By the time he returned to Santa Cruz for his second round, real poverty had lost its charms.<sup>13</sup>

Madalon did welcome him back and, initially, agreed to let him stay with her in her one-room rental downtown—if he chipped in for food. He couldn’t recollect her delivering an

ultimatum—that he pay or move out—but it was clear that sooner rather than later she would reclaim the one-room, box-car sized rental for herself. She was fully engaged in her studies on campus, her parttime restaurant work on the Pacific Garden Mall, and the formation of the all-women dance collective, Mamalution [Ed. note: The simplest translation: mother tongue, referring to Yiddish; the usual English spelling: Mamaloshen]. Her priorities and preferences left no possibility for financially supporting a paramour.

Hanging around UCSC, Peter learned that the visual arts department was, as always, looking for new live studio models, and he signed up for a paid trial. The instructor and his grad students called him back, and a month of two or three modeling sessions per week—in the studio and en plein air, fully clothed and fully naked—became an effective stopgap measure against his gaping poverty, before the novelty wore off for all parties—as did Madalon’s patience with her essentially nonpaying houseguest.<sup>14</sup> [Ed. note: In dire straits, Katie Lowrie likewise resorts to nude modeling in Quebec City; see 3NLs Vol. I, Book One, Chapter 5: “Homing” pp.122-29.]

\*

Someone or other at Café Pergolesi or Bookshop Santa Cruz heard Peter’s expressed desire to work with plants outdoors—maybe in a greenhouse range to keep him out of the winter rains ahead—and suggested he call on Alice Wilder, usually to be found stationed nearby at the northern end of the Pacific Garden Mall. Unbeknownst to him, that woman apparently ran the roost in the downtown office of the San Lorenzo Valley Chamber of Commerce, where on an entirely volunteer basis she conducted her business as a renowned community planner. Famous for her decades-long uninterrupted attendance at regular meetings of the County Board of Supervisors, dubbed by all as the county’s “Sixth Supervisor” (officially there were only five), she was always recognizable as “the woman in the red hat.” In her obituary in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (Oct. 25, 1998), she was hailed as the “undaunted grande dame of local politics.” Fortunately for our pilgrim, he followed the path leading to her door not 100 yards from where he sat.<sup>15</sup>

At one point in the following daylong search for gainful employment, Peter paused on the bank of a narrow stretch of the river and cracked open a paperback edition of Irving Stone’s highly edited letters of Vincent Van Gogh to his brother, DEAR THEO: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF VINCENT VAN GOGH (1937). «*Qui n’a pas de cheval est son propre cheval.*» “Who has no horse is his own horse.” Of all the poignant passages in those 600 plus letters, that aphoristic phrasing has stuck with our subject ever since he read it that autumnal afternoon.

*I vividly recollect stopping to sit on a rock and take in another dose of those letters, my mental and spiritual medicine at the time. The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit Authority was providing my main mode of transportation those days, and I had ridden the bus up Route 9 to Felton where I was walking toward my destination, a Mom & Pop nursery called Rose Acres situated near the end of a country lane of the same name. The air was warm, clear. The plane trees threw a high shade on the pages. Sitting on that rock,*

*reading those words—«Qui n'a pas de cheval est son propre cheval.»—lifted me back up on my feet again in more ways than one.*

From the threshold of Rose Acres' wood frame house, the downstairs room of which served as nursery office and toolshed, the proprietress (whose name Peter cannot retrieve) welcomed him inside, sat him down to her fresh lemonade, and listened. She was sorry her teeny business required no hired help—not that it could ever afford any. One look at the rickety lathhouses falling away from the sides of the building and the sparse inventory of scraggly plants in rusty 5-gallon “egg cans” lined out on the torn black plastic confirmed the operation's dying days. But she referred her visitor to a certain Bob Barnhart who was running a going enterprise on Sims Road, raising and selling container-grown ornamentals to wholesale and retail customers. She heartily encouraged him to try his luck there and said it was located near the Graham Hill Horse Showgrounds just south of Henry Cowell State Park. So he headed off for that destination, at the mercy of bus drivers and strangers as to the exact directions he should take. He recounted how he'd gotten off the bus prematurely and only come across the Barnhart's mailbox, shrouded in blackberry brambles, after he'd wandered through two adjacent neighborhoods and circled the perimeter of an elementary school twice, finding his way by trial and error. Traipsing up the long, steep, gravel drive in late afternoon, he presented himself to the resident proprietor and stated his purpose.

Every fall, when nights turned chilly, the nursery's plastic hoop houses needed reskinning, the shadehouse range's broken laths needed replacement, and the glasshouse's rotten wooden frames needed weatherstripping. All these tasks could be accomplished best by a team of two, and Peter was hired to assist the regular part timer.

*Bob sized me up and, though I must've come across as garden variety of the “homeless” so plentiful those days—and now—in “good times” Santa Cruz, he'd been around and decided to take a chance on me. Good fortune had shined upon me.*

[Ed. note: Volume II of THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT is “Dedicated to the memory of Robert Orrin Barnhart, San José CA, 1925–Santa Cruz CA, 2001.”]

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His lodging dilemma resolved itself after a gentle expulsion from Madalon's place. While crashing in the group house on Van Ness Street where he'd previously stayed, he learned that the same enterprising landlords had purchased another fixer upper off Laurel Street and were looking for someone to squat there for the duration of its restoration. Peter offered his services. He now believes the utter earnestness of his intentions convinced the landlords to give him a try and without formalities he moved in at 153 Myrtle Street. He wasn't expected or invited to work on the remodeling, only to sleep on the premises and to keep the house locked up, creating a presence to ward off trespassers up to no good and safeguard the tools and building supplies left in place during the project. <sup>16</sup>

Peter camped out in the construction zone, initially without electricity or running water. Although it was only four miles one-way, it was a long bus ride from Myrtle Street up to the stop near the showgrounds on Graham Hill Road and a long walk from there to reach the Barnhart's 2-3 acre spread. He wasn't yet aware of the famed landmarks of the advantaged vicinity—the Pasatiempo Golf Course, the legendary Henry Cowell State Park, the Sandhills ecological zone—all located within the preferred clime of unincorporated suburbia between the Cities of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley, but he immediately recognized the nursery's favored southwest orientation in the sunlit "banana belt" situated well above the foggy summer weather of coastal Santa Cruz. <sup>17</sup> He did his best as young JF's working sidekick, "... and those couple of days turned into a couple of weeks which turned into the next five years..." Although he was retained on the job, nothing was yet a given. He would live at Little Myrtle for five years too.

The rehabilitative value of his settling in at Little Myrtle and staying on at Bob's nursery sounded a brand new chord: our exhausted seeker was finally fashioning for himself a reasonable facsimile of stability:

*...enough stability that I felt able to embark on reading the whole of Hugo's MISÉRABLES with a newly purchased used edition of LE PETIT LAROUSSE near at hand.*

Still on intimate terms with Madalon, they spent their time together on a date by date basis; although their circumstances widely diverged, their rapport was intact. He still frequented the teepees and yurts around the hand-dug—"...double-dug..."—vegetable and flower beds at the UCSC Farm <sup>18</sup> and explored the ever-evolving Arboretum nearby. And he still attended select films, performances, and art shows on the campus—often with Madalon and her friends. Even more than in Eugene when, as a non-faculty, non-staff, non-student freelancer he had exploited the resources at UO, Peter truly esteemed the cultural amenities of the so called City on the Hill and made sure to keep himself *persona grata* there.

\*

Outside of town, the new hired hand grew more comfortable with the comings and goings on Sims Road and more familiar with the terrain of the semi-rural suburbia where the Barnharts' had been built their relatively modest contemporary house into an exposed hillside. The area featured large parcels, and the site's southwestern orientation was especially suited to growing nursery stock in a neck of what once-upon-a-time had been all woods but had latterly become a patchwork of developed neighborhoods and occasional trophy homes set among vestigial ranchettes, orchards, timber lots, and cottage industries specializing in cabinetry and touristic wood craft such as sculpture from redwood burls. Through October, November, and even into December, these uplands between the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Cruz Mountains offered a benign

version of Indian summer; the warm clear skies by day and cool clear skies by night were the envy of many another Monterey Bay locale.

No longer a hungry canine, Peter grew less wary of the welcome Bob and Betty Barnhart extended and, overcoming habitual resistance, he stopped avoiding contact with them, slowly accepting their invitations for him to bring his daypack inside the house and eat his bag lunch while sitting alongside either or both of them at their kitchen table. This breakthrough in their acquaintanceship led to others. He realizes, retrospectively, that it hadn't hurt his chances that the Barnharts had raised a son only slightly younger their new helper—and a slightly older daughter too. Both adult children were away, but the couple was surely accustomed to the presence of a moody youth on the premises and not surprised by some of his feral feline reactions or his display of stereotypical quirks belonging to his generation.<sup>19</sup>

As fall unfolded, 153 Myrtle Street was deemed fully habitable, and the authorized squatter struck a deal with owners. Becoming the first paying tenant, he signed a contract to the effect that he'd act as their point person in whatever household took shape. He could determine who else moved in, but he'd be the one responsible for collecting and paying the monthly rent as well as protecting the property. Inducted as their inhouse agent, in the short and long term he did serve as the liaison between tenants and landlords. By New Year 1977, after considerable negotiations between the young couple, Madalon moved into the rearmost bedroom—a room of her own. The semblance of a home, a steady job, a committed romance—it was a relief to listen to my raconteur recollecting this interrelated turn of events.

Refreshed by my storyteller's accounts of his evolving situation, I heard his usual surfeit of details with greater patience. Tempered by experience, the younger person he depicted seemed to be seizing on opportunities that were good for him—for a change! Plainly, he had become better able to withstand stressors from without and within. In the course of close scrutiny of the taped recordings, I concluded that his relationship with Bob was the crucial element that allowed him to pivot from fixed positions previously holding him back—and down. Aged sixty, Bob seems to have been secure, humble, reasonable, fair, and sensitive to the young man's tenuous hold on the demands of maturation. It would be an understatement to call the man a role model, but Peter was no longer so burdened by the overdependencies and childish needs he had previously freighted into his relations with father figures. From the start, Bob and Peter met each other on their own terms if not exactly as equals. It was to Bob that Peter described the semi-suicidal aspect of his father's death—the first time he'd ever disclosed that painful perception with anyone besides Madalon.

I recognized I had already paid equally close attention to the story of something much like the rapport developing between this pair. The fits and starts characterizing the startup and eventually disappearing from the fast friendship between Bob and Peter were more than faintly reminiscent of the camaraderie and affection that ripens between Pieter Tuelling and Katie Lowrie throughout Books Five and Six of *THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT*. No wonder I was

enjoying the recording sessions and the playback every bit as much as I had earlier enjoyed reading the fictional rendition of definitely similar dynamics.

\*

Once a sleepy, working-class town, Santa Cruz was formerly known as a Republican Party stronghold and a summer coastal resort featuring the Beach Boardwalk with its Coconut Grove as well as host of the annual Miss California Pageant and neighboring Capitola's famous Begonia Festival. That general reputation was definitively supplanted after the opening of the university in 1965. Its once seasonal plein air painters and poetasters were augmented by a year-round population of celebrated figures and a plethora of lesser or entirely unknown (if sometimes equally worthy of attention) practitioners of the visual, tactile, verbal, and performing arts—and not a few nonproductive dilettantes and poseurs. By the time of Peter's 1977 return, the North County was a haven for bohemians and intellectuals savoring an artistic hotbed on "the sunny side of Monterey Bay." It had also become a magnet for moneyed developers.

[Ed. note: A full list of creative notables associated with 1970s Santa Cruz would be remarkable, even excluding its many musicians and musical alliances. A short sampling might include composer Lou Harrison, writer James D. Houston, dancer/choreographer Tandy Beale, poet/editor/publisher George Hitchcock, writer/teacher Morton Marcus, poet/critic/master handset printer William Everson, not to neglect mention of the painters and sculptors, ceramic and textile artists, photographers, and others pursuing their lives in general Santa Cruz. A short survey of the fifteen writers framed in a famous 1973 photograph (predating the author's arrival) can be found at <https://lookout.co/a-snapshot-in-time-looking-back-at-a-50-year-old-photograph-showing-the-glories-and-shortcomings-of-santa-cruzs-literary-scene/> .]

As Bard had been a matrix for Peter's earlier growth sprout in creativity, so Santa Cruz became an environment enabling his personal reformation ("...while reserving the right to some malinger private dissolution, please...."). His rejuvenated literary aspirations were shored up by a correspondence and occasional get-togethers with fellow Bard graduate (1968) and area resident Stephen Kessler who had preceded Peter as editor of their alma mater's little poetry magazine, *The Lampeter Muse*.

*Kessler was always supportive—and pretty critical!—of my writing and, later, as editor of the award-winning Redwood Coast Review (1997–2014) he did intermittently publish some but hardly all of the pieces I submitted. We have kept tabs on each other and maintain a deep if distanced affection these latest years. To wit: after reading his GARAGE ELEGIES (2018) I sent him my **OLD MAN SAY-SO:***

**TOWN**

I can't deal with this self-checkout  
shit's all ads and damn ads and more damn ads

and round and round and around  
the time you think maybe they're done  
they dare you to buy in or opt out—  
but out or in of what?  
This must be what they call the point of purchase  
where you lose your grip on things  
standing still. The signal is on to cross but  
where're the keys, where's  
the car parked, which  
way's home?

## HOME

Why do I bother with papers when  
they've got it all wrong  
blaming the language  
for their own misuses of it  
and pisspoor imaginations?  
But there you go again  
turning on the news, wondering  
is it just me whimpering  
or is this it, the Big Bang  
at the end of our story not the start of it?  
Anyway, they say,  
you can't step into the same river twice so  
I'll let my eternal presence flow downstream  
put my personal devices on deaf & dumb and  
take a nap, kissing that noisy busy bright new world of theirs fare-  
well. [January 2022]

*A couple of years ago when I told him that while embarking on my "sorta memoir" I had realized that all my men friends are narcissists and wondered aloud what that said about me, he responded with a typically stellar quip: "Oh, good, I look forward to reading about me!"*

[Ed. note: Kessler's written correspondence to Boffey survives as a small portion of the Santa Cruz County Artist of the Year 2023's archival papers held in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomfield, Indiana.]

In 1975 the Kuumbwa Jazz Society had founded itself and the first incarnation of the Kuumbwa Jazz Center opened in May 1977 at 320 Cedar Street—"...an easy four-block stroll from Little Myrtle." That ever evolving venue provided yet another rich artistic resource and source of musical excitement throughout Peter's residence in Santa Cruz. At about this time Kessler organized a public reading at Kuumbwa and invited Peter to lead off the pack of half-a-dozen local poets Kessler had picked. Another indication of his renewed inspiration can be dated to

late spring 1977 when he began an attempt to alchemize his travel experiences into fiction. His capacity to sit still with, not run away from, his own ideas and their language—“...to elevate experience into art....”—signaled a new era and ultimately proved fruitful.<sup>20</sup>

\*

My subject facetiously referred to the differences in his activities in and out of Santa Cruz proper as a poor man’s version of the traditional landed gentry’s town-and-country lifestyle. But even within the rhythm of that commute his holistic recovery in progress was evident when, that spring, Peter bought himself a secondhand bicycle. He was forced to ride the bus in foul weather, but otherwise he took his ten-speed *cheval* climbing four strenuous miles up to Sims Road and then gliding four thrilling miles back down, exploring alternate routes on the frontage roads and surface streets to either side of Highway 17.

## NOTES to Chapter 16

- 1 . p269 In line with Cocteau’s dictum, “*Il faut laisser reposer la machine,*” we suspended activity until such time as we would both feel the curiosity and stamina required to go on.
2. p269 I cite entire the piece I wrote upon returning home from my older brother’s Memorial Service back East in September 2024:

### RE: MY BROTHER BARNES AND ME

AUGUST 1–2, 2024 DREAMING: Barnes takes off in my camper van, backing the vehicle out of the garage, easing it down a narrow lane which gives onto a major thoroughfare—and he’s gone! On foot I wander high-walled corridors and through roofed courtyards of a windowless complex, blindly navigating toward a diffuse light from the outside. Homeless people pester me. Bandits accost me. Construction workers let me pass through their work zone. A kindly custodian apologizes: he has no more meals to offer the vagabonds surrounding his station until he spots one last platter of deli sandwiches wrapped in brown butcher paper and is delighted to hand them out to us. I continue walking down more hallways, passing in and out of chambers without exits. The vague light reflects onto the ceiling and upper walls from some exterior source—I wake.

DURING THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS of my relationship to Barnes, I gradually experienced utter alienation from all he came to mean to me, all he came to stand for or stood for him. By his own admission, by 1953, aged 8, he had latched on to an alternative to his natal family and thereafter switched his allegiance from the NY Boffeys to his VT summer camp community. Where did that realignment of priorities leave me, aged 6, or Daniel, aged 4? Barnes’ fealty elsewhere left us on our own, if not collaterally damaged by his abandonment.



Full of himself, of his troubles, of his activities—there was no room for younger brothers in his early life.

As bad a big brother as Barnes proved out in my formative years, I turned out to be worse to Dan who, as the youngest sibling, got a double whammy. In later life, during one of our *détentes*, Dan and I discovered that we both perennially suffered the identical nightmare: death by suffocation under pillows pressed down upon our faces by Big Brother Barnes. This bleak scenario derived from Barnes' especially nasty practice of using the hefty living room sofa cushions to subdue us whenever our unsupervised three-way roughhousing took a turn for the worse.

Widespread public rewards for David Barnes Boffey's later more laudable achievements send me a clear message: his must be a hard act to follow, big shoes to fill, etc. Yet by my preteens I had tossed off any such ambitions, rejecting wholesale whatever Barnes prized, disdaining the people he allied with, the causes he espoused. Football, hockey, wrestling? Not for me. Summer camp? Nope. This blind reaction continued into and through my teens. A college fraternity? No way! This second son was compelled to take an entirely different route. If he promoted something, I did not. Whereas he pursued a career in formal education and humanistic psychology, I plunged over my head into Jung and *la vie bohème*. No enlightened calculation on my part, the whole suite of my reactions was a revelation of how unconsciously I still depended upon the sources against whom I rebelled (i.e. my father and his stand-in, my brother); during my college years and well after, a productive personal revolution remained years away.

AUGUST 16–17, 2024. DREAMING: At conclusion of a residential retreat taking place in a facility dedicated to a variety of self-improvement programs, Barnes oversees our leave-taking, in a summary fashion addressing us one last time with pithy words of wisdom. Another group of retreatants are to arrive soon, another residential retreat to begin. Barnes will preside. I exit down halls leading to an open doorway. From the threshold I survey a nocturnal terrain ravaged by warfare. Armed gleaners use flashlights to rifle through the personal belongings of downed troops and pick over the battlefield debris. Wishing I had brought my camping headlamp, I step outside, fearful, hoping to cross to safety—and I wake.

THE MIDDLE PHASE OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH BARNES started after our father's death in 1975, the same year Barnes "got sober." I was settling back in Santa Cruz CA for what turned out to be, in all, a restorative 5-year stint. Barnes made it a point to visit me on the West Coast, initiating what became a lifelong pattern of such visits deliberately built into his nationwide and international itinerary as a trainer, first for the William Glasser Institute and then for the Institute for Reality Therapy of which he was a founding member. He was welcome where I was living in a group house in Santa Cruz, and later when he went out of his way to bring himself to Oakland—alone, or with his wives and/or sons—where my wife and son and I lived from 1987 to 1998. But—I repeat—it was my older brother who was responsible for making the lion's share of these times together happen. I cannot lay claim to being instrumental in what seems, in retrospect, to have been his undeclared campaign of incremental rapprochement. At

my son's Bar Mitzvah in 2000, his hyper-intentionality culminated in what he shaped into the occasion for a reunion of the three brothers augmented by their extended families and friends. In that period of our relationship, I still did not fully trust or admire Barnes Boffey, but I now think that his conscious drive toward reconciliation was dovetailing with my own maturation and provided us a foretaste of our eventual feast of friendship.

Another major marker in our relationship occurred in the seventeen minutes between the strikes on the North and South Twin Towers at the World Trade Center on 9/11. Unaware of the news, I was mindlessly commuting on a California highway and had just turned on the radio when he called me on my cell phone. It was as if Barnes felt that if a version of apocalypse was kicking in, he wanted to talk to me before it was too late. Fifteen years later, I received another long-distance call which disarmed all my defenses and brought me down to the ground of our love for one another. Barnes was parked at the curb in front of a Manhattan building where he was slated to make a presentation; he was running late but just then he could not get out of the car: seriously sobbing, he had first to tell me that he and his second wife had broken up. I heard his suffering and felt honored that the Green Giant of the Upper Connecticut River Valley had chosen to speak to me at that not-so-jolly moment, entrusting me with his pain.

AUGUST 18–19, 2024. DREAMING: In the kitchen preparing food, I watch Barnes and his oldest son playing standup basses in the patio outside. Suddenly his son enters and hurls himself at me in a mock body block knocking me off balance. I ask him to stop but he laughs and hits again. I look for Barnes to help me out—but where is he? Can his be that bulky figure on the couch with back turned, asleep under a blanket in the darkened living room? I dread that he'll never wake up, or that he will wake up and disrupt my routine life. I wake up.

THROUGH OUR FORTIES AND FIFTIES, as our children grew and our disparate careers kept us far apart, I began reciprocal visits as a counterpart to my brother's not so subtle campaign to cultivate contact. Together and separately, my wife and I visited Barnes and his family back East; our son spent one summer working at his summer camp. I, too, worked to heal past wounds with greater understanding and forgiveness as our respective individuations finally allowed me to re-evaluate and rightsize our relationship. By the time we reached our sixties, Barnes was no longer having to swim upstream against the currents of my mistrust. During our mother's last years leading up to her own conscious, deliberate dying in the hospice wing of Wilcox Hospital in Lihue, Barnes and I had by then learned how to bandage our heads and hearts together.

I confess that I still harbored reservations about aspects of the life he led while, with notable lapses, embodying the principles he believed in. Throughout the last half of his life, I would have liked to see him taking better care of his own health while taking care of the well-being of so many others. I still took issue with his problem-solving agenda, and I always thirsted for him to be more specific, less general. Only in the last phase of our relationship did he seem to give more than a passing nod of recognition to my own specific passions and my elective activities which lay outside his domain. The absolutist convergence of his avocation and his vocation

resulted in what often felt like a dismissive attitude to my own engagement in the arts and, in particular, my dedication to the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education and, subsequently, Russell Delman's Embodied Life Mentorship Program—two of the most transformational commitments of my adult life. Certainly I would have preferred not quite so often to be on the receiving end of the phonenumber when he put in use one of his abrupt finales to a longish conversation with the flimsy excuse that he was about to lose a signal—“*Mountain pass coming up gotta go I love you bye!*” Of course, I came to understand that I was only one (although an “important” one, I like to think) on his list of the many people he needed and wanted to contact. “*Tunnel ahead gotta hang up now I love you bye!*” My New England brother—*mon vieux frère le trappeur!*—was never a saint to me, but what do these pet peeves matter now? In the final stage of our relationship, long after I needed or sought his disapproval or approval, when he was deathly ill we held each other close in open, breaking hearts.

I last visited my brother Barnes in Vermont in October 2023, when he was enjoying a respite from a seemingly interminable cycle of visits to ER, sojourns in ICU, and weeks- and month-long hospitalizations; years before the diagnosis of inoperable pancreatic cancer in April 2024, such measures had been supplementing the routine treatment of his chronic disorders. We enjoyed quality time together, and he made certain to introduce me or reacquaint me with a few of his most important friends from a long life in the Upper Valley. After the diagnosis, his consultation with others and himself persuaded him that Compassionate Care was the way to go: he would live and die in dignity in home hospice. Envisioning his own end-of-life scenario and acting accordingly, he saw no need for me to come East, he said, reassuring me that we had said goodbye in person the previous fall and that we would be together in his Zoom Room on a regular basis, which we were. Also, he did have to contend with that considerable *polis* of people requesting his attention as well as with members of a far-flung following who, like me, did not live nearby. Taking into account the lifespan of our relationship, aware of the heavily populated society in which he was embedded, I understood his dissuading me from making another trip.

Surrounded by his family, Barnes died by his own volition at 11:15 AM on Monday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. At his September 7<sup>th</sup> Memorial Service in the United Church of Christ on the Dartmouth College campus in Hanover NH ( <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukR07UaWwy8> ), some 300 people attended with standing room only. As far as I could tell, each of them *wanted* to be there, for each of them felt they had experienced a unique connection with Barnes. Legacy mattered to Barnes. Living well mattered to Barnes. Living and dying in dignity mattered to Barnes.

Any secretive notions that I kept close to my vest, such as a sense that the ceremony might serve some as Barnes' beatification, were dispelled by the speeches and the music as well as the lively reception afterwards, not to mention the even livelier party that evening. 10,000-plus visits to his webpage ( <https://www.caringbridge.org/site/fdd564c4-9bdc-3b8b-8f05-44e8b7e4897e> ) testify to the way he had effectively reached out and touched people in ways that felt distinctive

to each. “Was he religious?” someone asked me upon my return to California. “A secular minister for some, perhaps...?” I essayed. “A spiritual advisor for many ... maybe...?” In his last recorded interview ( <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU6G1f1neJE> ), Barnes ran through aspects of his outsize personality: warrior, poet, artist, cowboy, minister, and teacher—always a teacher (whether you wanted to be taught or not!). “Was it a cult?” another person inquired. “No, not a cult. But he was a leader and a member of a community in which he could act out all the parts of his BIG personality.” In more private areas of his life, members of his family had to reconcile some of his actions at odds with his public persona; none who knew him well considered him a saint. Or a cult leader. He was just his own man.

23 AUGUST 2024. DREAMING: In an expansive complex of units housed under one roof, having attended a natural science seminar I don’t know how to exit the compound. I hook up with another student. “Wait,” he says, “are you studying turtles or human beings?” “Both,” I reply, and he ditches me posthaste. With a more sympathetic companion, I try to find my way through the maze of interconnected interiors but wind up in a transit center populated by junkies, prostitutes, and derelicts beyond repair. I end up standing outside at a remote, uninhabited junction of unmarked rural roads. My companion has made a side trip to call on his relatives in the vicinity. I trust that he will retrieve me and guide us to safety. Night falls. Rain falls. I get soaked to the skin as I follow a young woman driving an ATV toward a row of low buildings. She stops, her headlight illuminating the opened roll-up door of a public storage unit where my camper van is securely parked.

3. p269 But is this now genteel good fellow—clean, polite, considerate—but a swashbuckling monster in disguise? Beauty in the Beast? The Beast in Beauty?

4. p269 Sally seems to veer in the direction of a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder then, to my good fortune, to steer shy of pathologizing my prolonged adolescence and persistent narcissistic tendencies.

5. p269 The short answer: In adulthood I have learned to cultivate balance and counterbalance by embracing not fleeing from perennial, personal distress!

6. p270 By then I was quite sincerely in awe of Sally’s capacity to create order from our recorded interviews, a capacity provoking my own augmented understanding. Of course, in my Notes, I was often wondering aloud which meanings she (or I) was discovering and which meanings I (or she) was simply inventing along the way.

7. p271 Had I been including too many details in my recorded ramblings? Sounds likely! Had I found my tale-telling groove graced with finer points or fallen into a rut replete with particulars? As long as I am able, in many walks of life, I prefer to take the spiral staircase in lieu of the elevator. Isn’t the footfalls’ pace the appropriate mode for philosophical circumambulation? Isn’t bringing attention to bear on what readers don’t know the province of the fictional creator?

I have now to hope that, by insisting on so much granular detail, the process will not totally alienate Sarah Witman—let alone that the final text might not push away some phantom “average reader.”

8. p271 It was my reading of her skillful distillations of our ongoing conversations that first prodded me into amassing and secretly hoarding a host of private comments, which I eventually decided to work up into communicative, publishable “Notes.” In them I was able to eschew her biographer’s third-person point of view as well as avoid the closed-loop circularity of too much half-baked contemporary “autofiction.” Contrary to my acquired tastes and habits, I like to think I had found a way to address some undeniable, underlying truths about my own life. As she states, when Sally learned of their existence and my desire to make them part of the book, she initially resisted ceding so much space, partially out of concern that I was stealing her thunder in the biographical portion and partially out of her resentment that I was “hogging the lime-light”—both legitimate issues I hadn’t even imagined!

After further dialogue, she agreed to proceed. “It’s your book, do what you like,” she concluded. “And I may too!” she warned me, without explaining exactly what she meant. I was relieved that our project had survived this late-hour contretemps. I also promised that, moving forward, I would, when possible, omit absolutely unnecessary details and always try to be more aware of giving offense by trespassing onto her narrative territory. Shortly thereafter we began a new round of taped conversations followed by her transcriptions, selections, chapter drafts, revisions, and, with her blessings, the incorporation of my Notes.

9. p272 My only consolation is that the subject of this passage was half-a-century younger than he is today! But can I really pretend my dilemmas are resolved, that in old age I can now plow open seas with certitude—full sail ahead? I reserve the right to make lousy decisions; lousy, yes, but not so “delusional” as imagining that I could have sustained existence as a street poet surviving on rancor, bad wine, caffeine, tobacco, “skunk,” and an occasional burrito with beer. Or that I could have made a difference on Akwesasne land and in the Indian Rights Movement at large. Or that I could have survived life as a latter-day expat indulging in a sheerly hedonistic lifestyle in postcolonial North Africa. In the face of Sally’s accurate depiction of my enduring identity crisis, I fear her casting such a cold eye on my fevered past will not absolve me of my survivor’s guilt and elitist’s shame; it may only reinforce them! So, does this make me blameworthy, or blameless, or both? The scales seem weighed against a final judgment. A more pressing question: Do I dare let Sally go on doing what she likes with our book, brandishing her firebrand intelligence with such *élan*? And how could I stop her now if I wanted to?

10. p272 Staring back at the camera’s lens, Maddy could look serene or severe, dreamy or concentrated, fetching or reserved. Lips fleshy, teeth white. Curls tight, eyebrows black, dark eyes as if carved by a sculptor’s wooden instrument aided by a jeweler’s needle tool. One black-and-white snapshot shows her sitting on the front steps to a house, obviously just landed there with a grocery string bag plopped down beside her; with bare feet, in a spaghetti-strap summer

dress, sporting her large loop earrings, *sans maquillage*, her dark-complexioned Ashkenazic skin toned by sunlight—all of her was radiance to my eyes, smitten then as now.

11. p273 We were a perfect match, or so it seemed in the fall of 1976. For a while Maddy would hear out my monologues marbled with self-pity and laced with facile projections upon every far-left cause célèbre, with fallbacks on jeremiads for every tree, flower, or creature rumored about to go extinct. I don't remember exactly when I discovered that I was not eternally to be the Enamored One for whom she would drop everything—to study French, *par exemple*, because I did; to follow me to France, because I went; to lend credence to everything I said or did because I did or said it. This was a rather slow but always rude awakening for a young yet experienced *tombleur de femmes*; it certainly didn't come clear to me in one fell swoop.

12 p274 I later came to view these episodic near-misses with monasticism as fear-laden rever- sions to an uncompromising Protestantism albeit of more exotic strains than the Presbyterian Church of North America ever provided me.

13. p274 During one of my daylong or overnight visits to KUSH's Cloudhouse on Valencia in San Francisco's Mission District, KUSH played for me his recent recording of an extemporane- ous rap by painter and street poet Jack Micheline. It was plain, even then, that I wouldn't be getting any coherent career guidance from Jack—or KUSH! [Ed. note: A full-length biograph- ical tribute to Jack Micheline (1929–1998), who hated being tagged as a Beat, is entitled RAG- GED LION, written and published by John Bennett of Vagabond Press (USA), 1999.]

14. p274 It was neither the pittance paid nor the naked exposure that proved tiresome; I'd learned how to eat “reality sandwiches” and disabused myself of the conventional inhibitions around nudity per se. I even enjoying flouting the genteel mores! What annoyed me were the airs put on by some of the students who communicated in any number of ways that they consid- ered themselves superior to the likes of me. They were, of course, better-off than I was at the time, but their living conditions and life experiences struck me as risk-free, untested, trivial. In my vainglorious effort to survive self-imposed adversity, I felt superior to them! [Ed. note: The above referenced “reality sandwiches” spins off the closing quatrain in Allen Ginsberg's poem, “On Burroughs Work” published in REALITY SANDWICHES, The Pocket Poet Series, City Lights Books, 1963

A naked lunch is natural to us,  
we eat reality sandwiches.  
But allegories are so much lettuce.  
Don't hide the madness.                      1954 ]

15. p276 Whatever she had been doing before I knocked, she left off, let her reading glasses dangle from their necklace, and heard me out in full. I believe it was the earnestness of my appeal for honest outdoor labor that led staunch Republican Wilder to overlook whatever else she may have thought about me and suggest that I speak with the proprietress of Rose Acres

Nursery who, I gathered, belonged to the same mixed band of stalwart old-timers spread throughout the San Lorenzo River Valley and farther up that way into the Santa Cruz Mountains.

16. p276 Built in 1906, 153 Myrtle was not nearly so swanky, inside or out, as it appears in realty internet slicks today; it was not swanky at all in 1976. But it was a solid raised-basement “cottage” with high coved ceilings; hardwood floors; thick wood trim and wainscoting; horizontal, paneled windows divided into lights of multi-paned glass. Nicknamed “Little Myrtle” by virtue of its proximity to another of the enterprising landlords’ prior acquisitions—the larger, two-storied, full-size craftsman bungalow next door at 159 Myrtle—the floorplan and layout of Little Myrtle’s modest one-story entertained many combinations of inhabitants during my years there. In late 70s Santa Cruz, the Big and Little Myrtle households together formed a loose circle of university students, almost students, and likeminded renters; both addresses lent themselves to many meetings, gatherings, and not a few parties over the next five years.

17. p276 I never did play golf at Pasatiempo or ride a horse at what is now Santa Cruz County’s Equestrian Center, but I have camped out at the vintage state park and learned to appreciate the exceptional vegetation community of the Sandhills’ Zayante soils between Felton and Sims Road, with its relictual stands of ponderosa and knobcone pines as well as botanical endemics like the Ben Lomond spineflower and Ben Lomond buckwheat.

18. p277 By 1972, UCSC’s Farm & Garden innovator Alan Chadwick—British organic gardener extraordinaire—had been fired. By 1976 the inertia that had kept an ongoing community of informal “interns” on the university property petered out and/or was challenged by the powers that be. The structure of the pioneering project would be reformed many times over, but it was still decades away from achieving its current status as the Agroecology Center granting undergraduate degrees!

19. p277 Dating from my sojourn on the reservation back East, I had carried with me a mild but long lingering case of diarrhea/dysentery that would not quit. Neither diagnosed nor treated, the disorder finally abated and, about the same time, I took to using the family bathroom inside the house instead of hiding behind a coyote bush to do my urgent business, scurrying out of sight to use both hands to dig a cathole in the sand.

20. p280 An account of the composition of my first long fiction, ultimately self-published as *TWO HALF BROTHERS, OR SEPARATING OUT* (2014), might best be conceived and rendered as what Mark Twain or someone of his ilk would call a short story with a long tail. There was never one version; there were many manuscripts. Over and again, I picked up and dropped off hammering out my raw experiences. Sometimes I set the project aside for a year or more or just abandoned the thankless campaign altogether. The original efforts to which Sally refers were essentially a travelogue thinly veiled as a novel, not much more sophisticated than the juvenilia of my (thankfully) unpublished *WHITHER, WHITHER?* (1966). [Ed. note: See Note 13, Chapter Five, p.139 above] I showed Morton Marcus one manuscript, imagining that it was

a finished piece of imaginative realism; he said it contained some fine travel writing but was based on an improbable plot and annoyingly underdeveloped characters—back to the drawing board! In successive stages, that first “book” had (1) three brothers, whose dynamics I was in no way capable of credibly bringing to life in my mind let alone on any page; then (2) there were two brothers, more manageable but still a mess and far too obviously an expression of my own psychological dichotomies and dualities; when (3) two *half*-brothers hatched, I felt I’d finally hit on a premise as reliable and viable as the moral dilemma drawn in the Old Testament’s “Am I my brother’s keeper?” [Ed. note: Genesis 4:9]. After 37 years my first scribbling on the proverbial plywood-on-sawhorses desktop and lots of theorizing and vetting and arguing over relevant ideas (especially with Kessler—long suffering colleague who knew not to suffer just every whim and impulse of this particularly poor fellow foolscapper)—I had got it done, unknowingly clearing the way for my incipient indenture to a novel in six books—**3NLs**.

## **CHAPTER 17: 1977-78**

The situation at the Barnharts fortified Peter’s sense of well-being. After the geographic dislocations, substance abuses, and general neglect of his health during the four years since divorce, old fashioned physical work proved to be good medicine overall. Building mounds of planting mix from bulk ingredients with a hand shovel then with bare hands canning up started plants while knee deep in the soil pile); rowing out the newly canned 1-, 2-, and 5-gallon stock on the sandy, sunlit terraces; dragging long, heavy watering hoses all over the hillside—all these daily activities conditioned and strengthened his physique and his self-regard. It helped that Bob was an unpretentious supervisor, a relaxed taskmaster evolving into Peter’s mentor in the ornamental plant trade. [Ed. note: See the author’s portrayal of Pieter Tuelling throughout Books Five and Six in **3NLs**.] And it didn’t hurt that, even as his health revived, Bob and Betty remained sensitive to the badly damaged self-esteem of the undernourished stray who had wandered up their driveway. According to the weather and seasonal projects, his schedule at the cottage industry was flexible and in his first year of employment rarely amounted to a forty-hour week. His duties were at first limited to the production and care of the plants; no long-range planning, no interactions with the visitors from outside, no outside sales—the right regimen at that initial stage of his recuperation.

In town, on the other hand, socializing was built into everyday life. By the summer of 1978, Little Myrtle was fully occupied and, he thinks, may have begun the periodic switch-outs of one or two or three renters in place of others—that went on over the years. But even as their housemates—some in pairs, some as singles—moved in and out of the third formal bedroom and a smaller room, formerly a sewing room or pantry off the dining area, Peter and Madalon retained their private spaces.

Close to home, Westside Santa Cruz and selected sites and activities on the upland campus of UCSC supported what he called a “casual prolo-boheme lifestyle.” His self-education did take



him out to the horticulture department at Cabrillo College in Aptos and he attended performances there too. He made visits to a complex of art studios in the Live Oak district. But for the most part his needs were met just west of the San Lorenzo River cutting through downtown, where he enjoyed easy access to the cafes and the book and record stores. All manner of diversions and amusements were available on the sidewalks of the semi-pedestrian Pacific Garden Mall (as Pacific Avenue was known prior to its destruction in the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989). For cinema, the Sash Mill and the Nickelodeon; for coffee and company in the open air, the gallery and café in a restored Italianate Gothic Victorian house at 451 Cedar Street. On his off-hours and days off, when he had money in his pocket, the small neighborhood just steps from Little Myrtle went a long way towards satisfying his hedonistic and intellectual appetites.

*If the stars lined up right, I could move from one pleasure to the next in the course of a single afternoon, proceeding from the Bagelry to Logos Bookstore to a sauna house, whose location now boasts a more sophisticated wellness spa. An exceptional but not inconceivable day would see Maddy and me splurging beyond our means at the Pearl Alley Bistro & Wine Bar (extant 1973–2007) and finishing off the evening at Kuumbwa down the street.*

Though they might venture out to Capitola's Esplanade—midday, midweek, off season when tourists were away—he and Madalon never frequented the popular Crow's Nest or the Catalyst Club: "In my bedroom or hers at 153 Myrtle, our own crow's nest was still more than catalytic enough for us."

Sometimes with her, usually on his own, he explored the region's parks and open spaces and, with partners more knowledgeable than himself, expanded his occasional excursions out of the area to include some backpacking in the High Sierra. Without a vehicle of his own, Peter was more likely to ride the bus and go hiking in second-growth oak and redwood forests, meadows, and streams up along the North County Coast or poke about the semi-abandoned Union Ice Company plant located on the spur railroad tracks at the terminus of Chestnut Street—one block from Little Myrtle. <sup>1</sup>

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For the exercise and airing of his deepest seated anxieties, Peter still felt tethered to Madalon, left in waiting at her beck and call. But after entering the upper college, she became less available to him. <sup>2</sup> She remained his preferred companion, but he often sensed that their relationship played second fiddle to her own engagement with her first love, the women's dance collective. Although Peter was one of very few males who enjoyed some license to let themselves in and out of the troupe's activities, <sup>3</sup> he remembers feeling only semi-welcome at most of Mama-lution's spontaneous gatherings and potlucks—and not at all welcome at their rehearsals or during their scheduled meetings or within the many secret conversations about goings-on between its individual members.

Yet there were other individuals in his life. Just as a variety of places concentrated in a small geographical zone were meeting his needs and keeping his curiosity alive, so a variety of new people were coming into his life, a few to stay on as friends for life. The term “groupie” might accurately describe Peter’s relations to the Memes (1975–82). He’d become aware of the doings of the Santa Cruz Meme *Workshop* in public schools and its live, free, outreach theater around the county, but at the beginning of 1977 the comedy troupe rented a house and was living collectively. When a couple of them paired off and took up residence in Little Myrtle, he was put in prime position to keep closer tabs on the group’s development, which was changing gears as its members sought to expand their audience and range.

At the start of 1980, amiably parting paths from their founder, inspiratrice, and dramaturge, Judy Slattum [Ed note: She had been a teacher of the arts at Cabrillo College and is now co-principal of Danu Enterprises], they renamed themselves the Screaming Memes. As the group wrote and performed their original sketches, musical pieces, and improvisations in clubs and other venues for adults, Peter’s critical input was not particularly sought out by the Memes any more than by Mamalution. Still, he felt privileged as an insider and sometimes offered feedback. We know Peter had always longed to feel at ease in *some* sector of *some* society, and in the company of the Memes he did so. He recalls writing one highly favorable article fanning the ensemble’s talents in one of the many short-lived free press periodicals in which Buzz Bezore was instrumental [Ed. note: Buzz Bezore, 1945–2014, legendary pioneer of multiple alternative journalistic enterprises in Santa Cruz]. In any event, he knows for certain that he played at least a practical role making some late-hour beer and pizza runs and staffing the open bar at special Memes events at Kuumbwa (“...always a hazardous occupation for the likes of me...”), one of the group’s favorite and regular venues. <sup>4</sup>

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In 1977 the Santa Cruz chapter of People For a Nuclear Free Future (PNFF) started conducting informational meetings and nonviolent civil disobedience trainings in the relocated offices of the Resource Center for Nonviolence at 515 Broadway. PNFF was an affinity group-based organization coordinating its activities with the statewide Abalone Alliance created in order to stop the ongoing construction and startup of PG&E’s Diablo Canyon Power Plant on San Luis Obispo (SLO) County’s seismically-prone coastline. After his thorough inculcation into Gandhian nonviolent philosophy and tactics, and his immersion in decision making by consensus and leadership by peer-facilitation, Peter embedded himself within an affinity group dubbing itself “Bumps in the Road” and in August 1978 joined some 5,000 protesters at the reactor site above picturesque Avila Beach outside the city of San Luis Obispo; he was among 487 arrested for staging a blockade, a significant event in the history of the US’s anti-nuclear movement of the 70s.

Buses transported those arrested to an empty warehouse he thinks may have been located at a National Guard facility on Camp SLO Army Base. The detainees had plenty of time for a

marathon townhall meeting—nonviolent style—while they were being individually booked, fingerprinted, cited for trespassing, and released on their own cognizance to reboard the buses for a ride back into town. Peter was subsequently ordered to pay a \$500 fine by mail or appear before a judge in SLO by such and such a date.

*The DA had apparently determined that the county could charge the protesters for a civil violation if not for putting principles of conscience into practice.*

Unlike the majority of his cohorts in crime, our protagonist chose to appear before the judge, pleading *nolo contendere* and reciting from the I CHING to a nonplused bench.<sup>5</sup> Sentenced to fifteen days, ordered to pay the penalty prior to surrendering himself to custody, he was released on his own cognizance once more and given several weeks to make a roundtrip to and from Santa Cruz before turning himself in at the SLO County Jail. When—without paying the fine—he did show up at the facility, another citation was issued and a date for his reappearance before the judge was set.<sup>6</sup>

After a week of incarceration, the prisoner was manacled—hands and feet<sup>7</sup>—and shuttled to the same courthouse where the same non-amused judge sentenced him to another fifteen days for failure to fork up the money. During his full month as an inmate, our unrepentant criminal recalls the letters (“...life buoys...”) received from Madalon, Bob, and other allies in the Movement. His substitute father had tacitly endorsed the civil disobedience of the man half his age while Betty had critically disparaged its lawlessness—“...an odd position, I thought, given the high value ascribed to acts of conscience and the appeal to nonviolent solutions to conflict intrinsic to the Quaker tradition to which she subscribed....”

The former internee’s own words best describe his experience behind bars:

*The day before I was due to start paying back my debt to society—and no more questions about that!—Maddy gave me a ride to the SLO home of a family in the Abalone Alliance and I crashed there overnight. Early the next morning, I surrendered to the unquestionable authorities in the whole matter and was run through the usual admission routines including signing papers for my personal belongings to be held in safekeeping for the duration. There followed a peculiar session in an anonymous area where I was frisked then instructed to turn around, lower my pants, bend over, and “spread my cheeks.” I’d had my brushes with the Law before so I knew that the Wheels of Justice can take some perverse twists and turns, depending upon who’s steering. In this case, I suppose the driver’s seat was jointly shared by the sadistic attending staff and the pair of toady inmates with homoerotic “tendencies” who seemed to relish this part of their work assignment during the official intake of fresh meat. Fast forward to lodging in a sort of holding zone where I overnighted with two other cellies. One looked me over upon my entry, said “Don’t trust anybody” and turned his face to the wall; I never saw him leave his bunk in 24 hours. The other liked to provide running commentary to daytime TV such as “It’s one lucky sonabitch boning that chick,” announced in reference to the teacher on the “Romper Room” children’s hour. On the second day a sheriff’s deputy interviewed me in a neighboring room. He’d reviewed my case and, determining that I would not be a*

*threat to my fellow prisoners, he made a proposal: if I would shave off my beard, I could transfer to 'The Farm.' The Farm certainly sounded to me like a better place to vacation than the holding zone or any regular cell block which I had yet to see, so I agreed. Led down the hall to a dormitory with two or three dozen bunk beds set against the walls, I was admitted to the so called Farm. After little ceremony except a recitation of DON'Ts, I was escorted to the bathroom with its doorless stalls and provided with a plastic-handled Bic shaving blade: no soap, no shaving cream, just cold water, and a throwaway razor. I managed to get the hair off my face, leaving nicks and scratches which healed over the course of my stay. Other scarring remained from my exposure to willful human cruelty. The Farm consisted of this barebones dormitory, whose central metal table served for dining, and a concrete volleyball court outside the back door, a stage set for racism, coercive homosexuality, homophobia, and general malaise. What spared me from any physical encounters, besides some queer proposals that I rejected in the dark of night, was probably my size and the fact that I was fairly fit after more than a year laboring under the sun. What saved me from despair were those letters received, and a battered copy of Thomas Mann's MAGIC MOUNTAIN (1924) from the library cart. I had plenty of time to read the 800-plus pages of the Lowe-Porter translation, and I could relate to Han's predicament, especially his exhortation to see beyond the ending of his Blizzard Dream called simply "SNOW." Neil Young's "Comes a Time" was just out and during all waking hours being pumped through the dormitory's loudspeakers' default pop AM radio station broadcast. I remember one particularly unfortunate incident. As a result of some miscommunication either on my part or county administration, Maddy drove down from Santa Cruz to pick me up on what she'd come to understand was my release date—one day too soon. I learned of this snafu when speaking with her on the phone the next day when I was released and spent the night in the Morro Bay home of a kindly couple who likewise supported the Abalone Alliance cause. I don't like to picture the scene Maddy made when she arrived and was informed of the mistake. I don't like to conjure it up because, after all, her last name was Zorn, and she was by nature explosive and by nurture an "expressive" performer. I remember riding the train back up to Santa Cruz alone, much of the track running alongside the ocean or through the Central Coast's sensuous, vistaed inland hills. I know I was viewing all things with new eyes after my unvarnished sampler of "manunkind"—that's an e.e. cummings line from I X I (ONE TIMES ONE) (1944). No doubt I was humming the familiar tune that had brainwashed me, looking out the window, truly wondering how those tall eucalyptus trees weren't laying down.*

[Ed. note: For a commendable piece of Boffey's fiction putting his personal experiences to artistic use, see "Chapter 9: Tourista," pp. 267–336, Book Six, Vo. IV, 3NLs.]

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Relaxing back into his relatively sheltered life in town and in country, Peter didn't "expect or want or get" a hero's welcome from his PNFF communards; he'd earned his stripes by single-handedly heading up an Alternative Energy Faire in 1977, the first public event held in the county's remodeled Laurel Community Center at the corner of Center and Laurel Streets. [Ed. note: In October 1979, the repurposed Laurel School was rechristened the Louden Nelson

Community Center in honor of the freed slave who, upon his death in 1860, had bequeathed all his belongings to benefit the local schools. In June 2021, the site's name was updated to the *London Nelson Community Center* to reflect the more accurate historical spelling of his name.]

The Barnharts were surely glad to have him back, partly for his own good and partly so that, once Peter was in the traces again, they could resume their daylong trips to wildflower meccas like the Pinnacles or Bear Valley in Lake County; especially in spring, they entrusted their helper with the care of their home and the operation of the nursery. He opened the place, fed Fritz the family dog, kept the well and water tank full, and closed up the property whenever the Barnharts weren't back by closing time. Taking care of the nursery stock and other regular tasks in Bob's absence, he could unplug his boss' favorite news-talk radio station, take on a roach whenever he pleased, and eat lunch on the deck off the house—"... often buck naked, solo, and solarized, watching proverbial red-tailed hawks making prophetic circles in the sky." He admitted occasionally nipping from the kitchen's liquor cabinet "...just for old time's sake...." before locking up and heading back to Santa Cruz for the night.<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES to Chapter 17

1. p290 I feel compelled to counterbalance Sally's cheery note. A moody meditator brooding alone while seated on a bench above the bluff at Steamer Lane when bad weather drove off the crowds—that was still my style, too. When it drizzled outside, hunkering down with a beer and a burrito at Las Palmas Taco Bar on Front Street opposite the wharf, the windowpanes fogged, no one else around—I thought that was splendid!

2. p290 How often have I returned to Robert Duncan's masterpiece from *BENDING THE BOW* (1963), where the essence of my own Mother/Maddy imago conflation is mapped out in his exquisite music of a so called literary conceit?

My mother would be a falconress,  
And I, her gay falcon treading her wrist,  
would fly to bring back  
from the blue of the sky to her, bleeding, a prize,  
where I dream in my little hood with many bells  
jangling when I'd turn my head....

3. p290 "Enjoyed" or suffered? It's as if I were being tolerated, put up with only as an appendage to Maddy. Their dance creations mostly grew out of a shared experience in contact improvisation so that left me out of that loop, as did the melodramas and soap operas of the romantic liaisons formed within and outside of the collective clique. But what perhaps is missing from my biographer's summary of the situation—and perhaps I didn't spell it out clearly—was that I was still quite stuck in the age-old trap: "If she's happy, I'm happy." That fatally flawed premise I'd introjected from my natal family and culture at large is no good mindset for sustaining an

enduring and happy relationship. For me it repeatedly proved out a recipe for resentment, the disappointment rooted in the expectation which, in time, spread underground and sprout above—as pernicious weeds.

4. p291 My friendship with longtime Meme, Patrick Morrissey, started up during this era. I landed him a short-term job at Barnharts to help him make ends meet; he tried to assist me without killing too many plants! Paddy has since enjoyed a career in standup and corporate comedy and managed to make money in commercial graphic design. He has also designed, laid out, and illustrated my published books, written a novel, and crafted innumerable comedic pieces and inventive jokes galore!

5. p291 I took enormous liberties with the bestselling English translation of the ancient classic of Chinese divination, the I CHING OR BOOK OF CHANGES, without explanation citing aloud a couplet from Hexagram No. 49, Ko/Revolution (Molting): “Times change, and with them their demands. / Times change, and with them their opportunities.”

Those were heady times. I was brazen youth or felt young enough to act brazenly. Today I cannot even locate those two lines in the 1968 edition of the text as translated by C.F. Baynes, introduced by R. Wilhelm, with a forward by H. Wilhelm and C.G. Jung (Princeton U. Press). With pedigrees like that, you would think I’d have been a bit more circumspect about my sloganeering but, having made my decision, I threw caution to the same winds which had swept me into the anti-nuke movement and carried me away in the first place. I recently ran across a Latin adage whose first use has been attributed to many but with evidence traced back to a 16<sup>th</sup> c. German theologian: *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. “Time are changed; we, too, are changed with them.” I could perhaps have made better use of this latter citation as my sole comment before the judge: it would certainly have been closer to home for both of us.

6. p291 What was I thinking at the time? I was thinking that it was strategically and tactically valid to put a strain on their coffers, forcing SLO County to transport, process, house, and feed a nonviolent political prisoner paying his way with the price of personal freedom, the only political power I felt at my command. What I still wonder about is the serious sprain that arresting officer deliberately put on my thumb when he twisted me into some sort of paramilitary hold while dragging my limp body off the barricade. I wasn’t actively resisting arrest; I simply wasn’t abetting it. I suppose he reasoned (ha-ha) that since I was putting him through pains he would return the favor—using physical violence, perhaps the only political and personal power he felt at his command. That right hand of mine was sore for months yet I remained too proud to ask the county facility for medical attention.

7. p291 Consider the menacing threat to the general citizenry! I may not have been armed and dangerous but I did exhibit imagination, usually viewed as a liability in such learned circles.

8. p293 I'm relieved that Sally has felt free to mention these lapses, or relapses, in my bad behavior. I was growing afraid she was reframing my Santa Cruz years as one journey on a straight road to Redemption! I here and now confess that I wasn't above or beyond drinking a bottle of beer from a brown bag while waiting for the bus on Graham Hill Road, or rummaging in ashtrays for the best roach as I headed out from Little Myrtle, or secretively sipping from a half-pint of some off-brand hooch while I sat in the darkened audience at the Kuumbwa, imbibing the vibes.

## CHAPTER 18: 1978–79

Proximity to the Memes and Mamalution didn't mean Peter's struggles with his novel, tentatively entitled MOROCCAN INCOGNITOS, were being resolved. The social, improvisational nature of those two performing groups—and jazz shows, and public poetry readings—all had little to do with his solitary composition of long fiction. Since college his critical skills kept at bay any application of bop prosody or downright slapdash Dionysian ravings, and he'd long differentiated the demands of the written from the spoken word. Years earlier some variants of Dadaist text mashups and automatic writing may have influenced his literary creations, but now he felt called to sit down in Apollonian sessions in order to engage his novel's fully-written, half-written, and unwritten manuscript pages, striving for language fit to the elements of story and storytelling—both of which kept changing on him. <sup>1</sup>

Incapable of clarifying his novel's overarching design, let alone putting it down on the page, he reports plowing through ream after ream of recycled paper only to recycle it again. Since I'd known him, I've found my interlocutor adept at spontaneous conversation but, besides providing raw material for first, rough drafts, improvisation didn't sustain the requirements of his extended prose. When I wondered aloud if the halting progress on his project had perhaps been the consequence of perfectionism, he defended revision as integral to envisioning and re-envisioning the meanings and import of his work, meanings and import discovered and invented by virtue of the writing and re-writing process itself. Peter pointed out that even with his shorter lyric poetry he rarely satisfied himself with hastily written one-offs. What relatively few poems he has kept and posted on his website have survived tests of time and periodic revisits to their texts. [Ed. note: In light of this observation, the title of his collected poems—THE BOOK KEEPS CHANGES—becomes less enigmatic.]

It is tempting to interpret his meager literary output during this period as evidence of some evasion of fealty to his muses, and by his own admission he was operating “on the margins of the margin of the local literary scene.” As if courting obscurity, he seems to have disdained competing for any share of the limelight in artistic Santa Cruz. I hazarded a guess that his deep involvement in direct political action with PNFF and his tag-along associations with “the Mamas and the Memes” might

have been an implicit declaration that he was above the fray—*hors de concurrence*. Peter countered:

*After all I'd been through before I settled down in Santa Cruz for a while, liberation from my demons had become the motive. Not enslavement to art or ideology. Not material or for that matter spiritual success. Or fame. Or recognition. Or even influence. I was still busy repairing, remodeling, and reinventing myself and just not able to come all the way out as an artist, certainly not to chase any literary brass rings.*

Looking back, he does still value his participation in a few modest publishing efforts in George Fuller's *JAZZ* poetry magazine (Jazz Productions, Santa Cruz) and Uri Hertz' *Third Rail* (LA). [Ed. note: *Third Rail*, a review of international literatures and the arts was put out in print 1975–89 and currently lives online at [literatureandarts.com](http://literatureandarts.com)]. And the author says he will always be ready to tip his hat to “Kess” and “KUSH,” with whom he has maintained long if prickly associations.

*A study in contrasts, Stephen Kessler and Steven Kushner inhabit, for me, the opposite poles of a dynamic spectrum in my notion of what real poets (as distinct from academic versifiers or fanciful showmen) do. Kessler, admirably self-made journalist and consummate Californian homme de lettres or, in his case, hombre de letras. Kushner, CLOUDHOUSE proprietor, guerilla theater poet, exemplar of the oral tradition in American poetics. I'm fortunate to have caught their attentions on and off over the last fifty-five years including when I lived in Santa Cruz.*

\*

The author contends that he was not consciously avoiding his art or deliberately ignoring the development of his craft, but semi-communal living did present plenty of action and distraction. In his own experience, the immediate community spread beyond the conjoined households of Big and Litte Myrtle to include their nearest neighbors, Harry and Louise. Peter gradually struck up a casual, over-the-back-fence acquaintance with the older couple, and sometime in his second year or so at 153 Myrtle he began dropping by to do their lawn moving and weeding. In exchange, Harry set the volunteer gardener up with “boilermakers”—shots of budget-bourbon Early Times chased down by gulps of inexpensive Buckhorn-brand beer. Peter claims that Louise would invariably loiter in the kitchen doorway until, having sufficiently insulted her husband, she commandeered the table as Harry, cussing and grumbling, retreated to his basement woodworking shop. Then she had the young man all to herself.

*Without profiling the pair too cavalierly, it must be said that she was an American of Italian extraction and he was an American of Portuguese stock. Louise must once have been a belle, though now she was only in the pluperfect tense. Her health was not good. Beside her Dachshund and me, I don't know what other social life she led—probably most of it over the phone. She watched TV. She smoked. She drank coffee. Whenever I was around, she cursed her ill-fated second marriage and revealed not a thing about her personal past.*

*Harry was an ornery old Native Son who had never set foot outside California and was proud of it. He had no good words for his wife, woman, Italian people, or anyone in my*



*generation. His days were divided between two places: a long-gone workingman's bar near where Pacific Avenue and Front Street converge—out of curiosity I stopped in there once but felt unwelcome; and the basement where he built small-scale windmills for placement on front lawns and gravel, wooden whirligigs with a few moving parts jig-sawed, glued, nailed together, painted: a woman washing clothes, a hunter shooting a bear, a lumberjack sawing a log; a horse trotting in the breeze. His hands shook, his nose dripped, his eyes watered, and when he was sufficiently lubricated he sat me down on the stoop and told me stories of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Santa Clara Valley where he was born and raised. His first job as a kid had been picking up bricks—a penny apiece—after the Earthquake of '06 at Agnews Insane Asylum, sometimes known as the California Hospital for the Chronic Insane. Over a hundred patients and staff had been killed. Much of what I drank in, so to speak, besides all the bad alcohol pissed away, made its way into the spoken life story of Jan MacLoughlin in THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT. I can't now sort out exactly what I ripped off from Louise's life and Harry's tales and wouldn't want to try.*

At 153 Myrtle, regular weekly house meetings became necessary as the musical-chairs rotation of housemates played out its course. Common areas needed to be kept in some sort of order; the one bathroom and the shared kitchen needed to be kept reasonably clean. A set of guidelines evolved and did carry over through the ensuing years. Even Peter's brother Barnes, then director of the teacher's certification program at Dartmouth College and soon to become assistant director at Camp Lanakila, remarked favorably upon the soft but effective housekeeping structures in place when he visited the West Coast for his first time since "getting sober."

Regarding friends made among various housemates at Little Myrtle, Peter spoke at length and with particular affection about two: Fred Yuengling and Catherine Rhodes. Fred was, after Madalon, the next to move in. Peter and he had been members of the same affinity group during the Diablo blockade, and they served their subsequent sentences out in the SLO County Jail. <sup>2</sup> The two had both been brought up back East and often enjoyed shooting the breeze in conversations of no particular socially redeeming value to anyone—"...but we had fun." Fred was an undergraduate at UCSC where he switched majors more than once and wound up with a B.A. in Religious Studies. He was apparently always quite the social butterfly ("...or maybe, given his late night hours, a social moth...?"). One of Fred's several circles of acquaintances and friends radiated out from the Whole Earth Restaurant on campus where he worked on and off from 1978–82. Another connection between the two housemates was their shared love of contemporary music, of which Fred always knew more than Peter did; Fred and his closest friend, printer and painter Paul Fortis [Ed. note: <https://paulfortis.com/index.php/about/>] occasionally conducted their regular jam sessions at Little Myrtle: Fred on vocals and harmonica, Paul on vocals and guitar. The duo worked up mostly original songs with some R & R covers, and the three of them enjoyed getting wasted on weed, wine, and beer in the comfort of the sound-saturated salon ("...or sometimes simply *saloon*..."). Despite geographic distances, Peter and Fred have remained in communication and periodically enjoyed one another's company over the intervening years. <sup>3</sup>

Fred has left him no correspondence but Catherine Rhodes has—“a couple dozen phenomenal letters all told.” [See APPENDIX VII] Catherine Ann Rhodes (May 18, 1951–Sept. 5, 2023) was one of eight siblings in an Irish-American family based in Washington DC and Richmond VA. Yet another East Coast transplant, she seems to have remained uprooted throughout her life, making a lifelong career out of adventuring out West and around the world. After the author granted me access to her letters, I can attest to her sensuous grasp of specific places and sensitive apprehension of people and peoples. Her obituary [Ed. note: <https://www.blileys.com/obituaries/Catherine-Ann-Rhodes?obId=29299228>] lists diverse gigs and stints but, significantly for Peter, omits reference to either her practice of weaving in wool or her housesitting and caretaking of property—especially her year as land steward in residence at the Big Creek Preserve field station in Big Sur. Her bold and dramatic landscape descriptions there immediately reminded me of Tom Killion’s stunning woodblock prints in CALFORINA’S EDGE: THE COAST IN POTERY, PRINTS, AND HISTORY (2015).

[Ed. note: Find current information about the Big Creek Preserve at <https://ucnrs.org/reserves/lands-hill-big-creek-reserve/> ; for deep background, “An Oral History of the Lives and Events at Big Creek, Big Sur” by Susan E. Georgette (Environmental Field Program Publication No. 15 (UCSC, 1980) can be found online at <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/big-creek-oral-history---the-rough-land-to-the-south.pdf>.]

Onlookers’ presumption of an obviously romantic attraction between Peter and Catherine meant that their friendship was often more problematic for others than for them, but their platonic, sibling-like rapport survived, “...even if people could not perceive it or believe it to be such...” Peter admits that an elusive, underlying erotic tension may have been present, but they remained faithful to their respective partners, maybe because they were both habitual boundary breakers who flouted conformity to many cultural norms—“...such as facile extracurricular affairs!”

*Of course, it would’ve been a shipwreck of Wagnerian proportions in both of our lives if we’d ever gone off course or fallen overboard.*

During our interview, I’d caught onto Peter’s infatuation with the long-distance correspondent who seemed, to me, almost caricaturing tropes from the longstanding cinematic tradition of epic romance. As I read her *unedited* letters sent to Berkeley, Israel, and NY, NY, I realized where I had seen this movie before. Even beyond tormented heroines like Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O’Hara in GONE WITH THE WIND (1939) or Merle Oberon as Catherine Earnshaw Linton in WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1939), besides the role played by County Kerry’s Dingle Peninsula in RYAN’S DAUGHTER (1970), her self-portraiture in words seemed almost typecast from two movies filmed on the very wilds of the Atlantic islands west of Scotland and Ireland: Micheal Powell’s THE EDGE OF THE WORLD (1947) set on Foula in the Shetland Islands to the north of Scotland and, even more so, with Pamela Brown as Catriona Potts, I KNOW WHERE I’M GOING (1945) set on the Isle of Mull, the second largest of the Inner Hebrides. The letter writer’s idealization of Aranmore Island seemed right out of Robert Flaherty’s MAN OF ARAN (1934). But I finally hit

on a dead ringer: Catherine Rhodes' conflicted love affair while in Big Sur (redacted from the published excerpts) showed uncanny parallels to ZANDY'S BRIDE (1974) with its utmost specificity of place and its echoes of the torturous partnership between Liv Ullman as Hannah and Gene Hackman as Zandy: the production was shot entirely on location not far from Big Creek. Catherine prose histrionics almost rise to the pitch of Jeffer's "Apologies for a Bad Dream" (1926), a poem referring to Big Sur—"This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places." <sup>4</sup>

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After Madalon's graduation, they took a summer trip to visit her brother, his wife, and their child in Silverton OR where Jeff Zorn lived close to his work in the Correctional Facility at 99 Prison Road in Woodburn. This wasn't Peter's first time in the heart of the Willamette Valley or at Silver Falls, but Jeff was the first (and last) of Madalon's family members he ever met. He recalls witnessing the sibling's different takes on their difficult father who had left them and their mother early on. Privy to their late-hour kitchen table talk, Peter became aware of Maldon's intransigent resentment of the father gone missing from her life while Jeff seemed inclined to forgive the man his faults. When she learned that her brother was in communications with their father and had even taken up regularly supplying items for the older man's ongoing hobby collection of historical post-cards from around the USA, Madelon was shocked and dismayed. <sup>5</sup>

Back in Santa Cruz, she devoted herself to Mamalution while working as a server and a cook at the Cedar Streer Café where the staff had become a loose association of the dance collective's members and their personal appendages. With Bob's encouragement and tools borrowed from the nursery, Peter took on parttime maintenance of the ornamental gardening in the raised brick-in-sand patio of the restored Victorian house fronting Cedar Street. Then, with one of the co-owner's blessings, he reclaimed the overgrown yard out back and plotted out an organic herb and vegetable garden, double-digging raised beds planted to gourmet "crops" requested by the cooks. "The distance from garden-to-table via the kitchen was all of one hundred feet, start to finish—*très chic!*" Roy Riddell, a prominent Santa Cruz landscape architect with an office down the street, often came by for a light lunch; once Peter approached the table where he sat and asked him how to go about tackling the long-abandoned red flowering quince bush that had far outgrown its allocated spot and was almost blocking the side court's walkway between the front and rear of the building. The architect took one look and commiserated with the younger man, commenting that such a job ought be undertaken only as "a labor of love."

Peter performed his gardening duties in exchange for a wholesome meal or two per day and unlimited beverages—wine, beer, Italian sodas. He ate generous salads, homemade soups, breads and pastries, and drank espressos, often prepared by Madelon herself.

*There were always a couple of opened magnums of the house white Soave in that big fridge—believe me! Talk about a job hazard!*

As long as the new flowering bulbs came up prettily, the old roses recovered from his radical pruning to bloom anew, and the plants harvested from the kitchen garden kept gracing the restaurant's recipes, the informality of working arrangements suited all parties, although it proved to have its downside for others. The paid staff eventually grew disgruntled about the typical minimum-wage-plus-tips pay structure, and Madalon led the charge demanding a redress of their grievances. The main demand: an increase in wages to be issued en bloc, not in negotiations with employees one-by-one. Peter forgets the outcome of a confrontational meeting that occurred, but he managed to stay on the sidelines, practicing eminently practical gardening for the owners and for the patrons of the fine arts and other clientele enjoying the menu—customized daily—and the “outdoor room” at this tasty intown location. [ED. note: The “outdoor room” was a concept emphasized by Thomas Church (1902-78), proponent of the defining “California Style” of modernism in garden landscape design. See Church's GARDENS ARE FOR PEOPLE (1955)]

When it came down to his rocky relations with the more adamant members of Mamalution, Peter's professed “male feminism” didn't always carry the day. He seemed often to be violating unspoken codes of action and thought, and skirmishes arose over his ironical verbal choices and roving eyes. More importantly, Madalon lost patience with traces of his politically correct posturing or excessive self-effacement in his interactions with her and others.<sup>6</sup> As she wrestled with her own personal and professional issues, she retreated from engaging in any attempt to vitalize her partner's own nonconfirmed career and or jumpstart his stalled development as an artist. At some stage she also started turning away from his sexual as well as his social advances. Piled on top of his chronic self-doubt (“...malingering legacy from my Mom and Dad...”), Madalon's overbearing manner and Peter's passive aggression precipitated a crisis. Theirs had become an unhappy union, and there was no chance of a resolution to their battle of the sexes as rendered in the comedic slapdash of Classic Hollywood's masterpieces by the likes of Billy Wilder, Frank Capra, or George Cukor. They sought counseling.

*I remember one, maybe two sessions took place. One of the first pet peeves I brought up was her smoking. I was trying to quit smoking cigarettes, again. I had quit, again. But Maddy persisted down to sneaking smokes and saving butts for a later puff or two. Whenever her dance group was in the throes of mounting a show, she no longer even pretended to have quit and smoked out in the open whether I liked it or not. OK. My argument for health aside, my main beef was that her breath made kissing unappealing. Perhaps this was fatuous since our exchanges of physical affection were infrequent enough. But the therapist picked up on my claim and suggested that my complaint might be avoiding the angle from which the issue should be attacked. Oh? I suppose she saw through my smokescreen before I did. In any case, we didn't go back to have a closer look at my long-lasting feelings of low self-worth—or my partner's deep-seated anger.*

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Madelon and Nancy Boffey maintained a cordial yet cool rapport during the two times she flew into SFO and blew through Santa Cruz. Once in 1978 and once again in 1979, Peter's mother

visited, staying at Little Myrtle for a couple of nights before heading back into her whirlwind of stops on the mainland before her next cruise was scheduled to embark. These stopovers didn't help matters between the struggling pair, and Peter didn't perceive her visits as evidence of any earnest effort to spend time with him and perhaps salvage the love lost between them; he felt she was simply touching down in the Bay Area to call on a string of friends and associates in San Francisco, the Peninsula, and Marin and, opportunistically, including her second son and his girlfriend down in Santa Cruz.

*True or false, I felt it. While still maintaining her pied à terre at 5 Mitchell Place NYC, my mom was still in her Gale Storm Show glory days as head of hospitality on D.L. Fergusson's international tours. She'd invariably end up regaling Maddy and me and whoever else was around with tales of her thrilling adventures on the high seas and the high jinks and double dealings among the ships' crews and staff and owners—homosexuals all. Duh. It was never easy for me to sit among others listening to her insinuations of her own shorter and longer affairs with handsome island guides or well-off conquistadores of Capital enjoying ultra-luxurious voyages on Ferguson's premier line. Mom's presence only compounded my problems with Madalon.* <sup>7</sup>

[Ed. note: This hornet's nest of thoughts and emotions was the source for extended musings in fiction. See especially Note 4. pp.403–409, Chapter 1: "Jan's Estate," Book Five, **NLs**, where Katie examines the photographic memorabilia from each of her employer's four honeymoons:

Harry Landmark Jr., Greek Isles, 1928  
Lloyd Griggs, MD, Wyoming, 1933  
Michael Doty, Lieu., Inside Passage/Alaska  
Charles Lambert, Architect, Venice, 1951

Our subject's conflation of his responses to Madalon and his mother may have ultimately doomed his "second marriage." With the waning of a sexual outlet for expression of the conflicts between them, Peter's womanizing instincts—Don Juan's flipside to supposed "male feminism"—grew along with his suppressed homoerotic appetite. Still, although its essence was losing any binding force, Madalon and Peter remained true to their unwritten, monogamous contract. <sup>8</sup>

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Barnhart's was no sealed hermitage. Bob never advertised but word-of-mouth brought customers to his small, casual production nursery. People with antennae attuned to a palette of plants ahead of its time. a selection not usually available in the garden centers, did find their way there. <sup>9</sup> A handful of trustworthy landscape contractors and non-licensed installers were welcome at any hour to help themselves to the stock and, on the honor system, leave a tally of their acquisitions to be paid for then or later. When the azaleas and camellia came into their blooming season, an East Bay jobber regularly called ahead so that Bob and Peter could pull his orders in advance. The lowkey wholesale/commercial operation didn't cater to the general public, especially not the "carriage trade" that Bob had once served in his retail nursery in the Oakland Hills' Village of Montclair, but

in the course of locating, selecting, and loading the purchases of some intrepid shoppers, Peter met some interesting individuals and discovered that he had a knack for connecting people and plants “... which was essentially how I made a living in various aspects of applied horticulture for the next 35 years....”<sup>10</sup>

His transition to so called outside sales was painless. He thinks Bob (“... unaffected member of a comfortably American middle class....”) noticed his helper’s good services and well-bred manners while representing the nursery’s interests, for he made a proposal: if Peter would cut his hair to a reasonable length—or at least keep it tied back or tucked under a baseball cap—the younger man could accompany him on the owner-operator’s regular Friday sales runs calling on a circuit of retail garden centers in North County spring through fall. In no time, Peter was making that circuit on his own “... along with Fritz the dog, of course....”

Retail buyers loved to see Bob’s Chevy pickup—dinged and dented, with its high-set aluminum shell—pull into their parking lots carrying a candy-store assortment of flowering plants. They were delighted because they knew the plants on board, once off-loaded, would “blow out the door” come Saturday morning in garden-crazy Santa Cruz. If it had rained midweek and promised to be a bright, sunny weekend, a larger operation like the Santa Cruz Garden Center annexed to Santa Cruz Lumber would take everything off the truck’s floor and shelves and, cash in advance, have Peter go back uphill to reload and return with a duplicate delivery. Rose Acres Nursery may have folded outside of Felton, but every hamlet farther up San Lorenzo River Valley—Ben Lomond, Brookdale, Boulder Creek—boasted a small, often family-run nursery setup—“... pure pleasures to call upon....”<sup>11</sup> Bob eventually got to giving him a freehand to load on whatever his mentee thought appealing and to head up Route 9, selling right off the truck.

Strictly local sales expanded to include prearranged deliveries into the East SF Bay, including an annual truckload of 4” potted golden dwarf chrysanthemums supplied to a high-end nursery in Lafayette. Peter thinks it significant that at that point in his life calling upon such a tony business—showing off sculpture and patio furniture, a florist department and a gift shop—reminded him that well-off suburbia was still alive and well-off—“... despite my zealous, failed efforts to discover something to die or to live for, for once and for all...”

*Not only did they still exist—they were thriving! And to be honest, I think I felt a bit comforted knowing, like Brer Rabbit, that the briar patch where I was born and bred was still available and still growing strong.*

Bob got to handing the truck keys off to him with a list of ag supplies to fetch at warehouses and irrigation houses in South County, or instructions to pick up planting cans in an antiquated manufacturing plant in Santa Clara, or to bulk-load oak leaf litter from sites above grounds belonging to an Old World nurseryman—“... dust in his boots and cash in his pocket...”—still running the Begonia Gardens in Carmel Valley.

Rounding out his third year at the nursery and his education as a West Coast nurseryman, Peter enrolled in a non-degree battery of courses in the horticultural department headed up by Richard Merrill at Cabrillo College. Again, it was with Bob Barnhart's blessings that his employee took time off ("... and the company truck...") to attend vocational classes in soil science, integrative pest management, greenhouse design & management, and Merrill's *pièce de résistance*—applications of solar energy in agriculture.<sup>12</sup> His benefactor doubtless thought that shoring up the younger man's spotty skillset was worthwhile per se, and not to keep Peter in further servitude at an idiosyncratic home industry. For his part, Peter harbored vestigial fantasies of applying what he learned in a rural, Northern Californian commune that was or would be ecologically sustainable and politically correct: "Growing pot crops was not absolutely *de rigueur* nor was it out of the question." The make-believe noble savage within was still tantalizing him with this updated, upgraded mirage of a doable alternative to his life in town or in suburbia or anywhere else in the real world.

The Barnharts' daytrips evolved into overnights for weeklong family summer gatherings in the Sierra near Carson Pass and midweek wildflower excursions near Ebbets and Sonora Passes. Eventually they entrusted their property and the nursery to their helper's care while they traveled for weeks at a time, once in Europe and once in China and Japan. Such interludes provided Peter a respite from his peer-crowded life in Santa Cruz. He'd take a few personal effects with him and move in at Sims Road for the duration. He describes one sojourn with great animation:

*I liked those long spells out of town. It was so much quieter and more solitary there. The house was certainly better appointed than Little Myrtle. Of course, I could drive their Volvo sedan to Santa Cruz or Scotts Valley whenever I wanted or needed to, but there were days on end when by choice I never got off the place. I'll never forget the siege of a ferocious winter storm when I had to kick butt, so to speak. It was the winter holiday season and no business to speak of, but once an ominous Pacific-born storm struck, I could no longer lounge about the house half the morning or sit by the fireside after lunch, reading some Steinbeck or Segner pulled down from the living room bookcase. Suiting up for foul weather during darkly lit daylight hours, I went about, running the place like a fleet of ships on the high sea subject to squalls and downpours. Helpless, I watched the corners of our hand-built sandy terraces collapse as the plank bulwarks gave way. Wherever there was a tear in the black plastic sheeting, erosion followed. Inside the main glasshouse, I rechanneled the rainwater puddling and flooding the earthen and gravel floor. Shivering while reading the old high-low mercury thermometer's fogged glass. I mean, it wasn't just a little drafty in there. I had to keep an eye on the gas-fired space heater's pilot light. Even during fair weather the hand-cranked gear-wheel attached to the roof vent went haywire—that had to be lashed down to keep the windows securely closed. What windows? I was scrounging cardboard to cover the glass panes blown out by the gusts. It really was like sailing a ship. Maybe not as dangerous and stupid as climbing aloft the radar tower to hug the highest point of a passenger-freighter during an Atlantic storm at sea—been there, done that! But it was a daunting experience, sloshing about in the raw elements while knowing that a hearth and warm beverages and a dry copy of Arsenyev's *DERSU UZALA* (1923) awaited me inside the house.*

\*

Peter and Madalon traveled 250 miles north to check out a property located on the South Fork of the Eel River some 10 miles inland from Weott CA. He reports later realizing that this site has since been absorbed by the Angelo Coast Range Reserve, another of the tracts of land in the UC Natural Reserves System ( <https://angelo.berkeley.edu/> ) to which Big Creek Reserve belongs [Ed. notes: See Appendix VII for Catherine Rhodes Correspondence]. That their daughter's two young friends from Santa Cruz were considering moving back to live on their uninhabited land—the absentee owners thought it was a grand idea. After a tour—a spring inside a rotted box in the hillside; non-salvageable structures left over from the original homestead; the promise of late sunrises and early sunsets—the foursome sat picnicking and kibbitzing about possible scenarios. In any case, the openminded owners offered them permission to reside there for a year, free of charge. Then the retirees headed back to Eureka, leaving Peter to take a soil sample according to his college assignment's protocol.

*Even as I dug my holes, glancing over at Maddy meandering by the creek, I knew that regardless of the lay of the land, she was in no way contemplating removing herself to this remote hollow in Mendocino County, especially not with some wannabe poet kidding himself into playing the feckless redneck with aspirations toward sheer survivalism. Annual precipitation topped 80 inches. Average summer temperatures were in the 80s and the 30s in wintertime. I didn't have the skills or the drive to start from scratch off in the woods, off the map, off the grid—off my rocker! My delusions about radically reinhabiting the Earth and beating the Planet Drum—kaput!*

[Ed. note: Another excellent example of the author's fictional reworking of raw material can be enjoyed in Betsy's stories about just such a fabled place and her family history in "Chapter 2: Besty Young," Book Six, **3NLs**, pp.36-7 and appended notes (2) & (3), pp.515–7.]

Scaling back unrealistic fantasies, he continued working in semi-suburban Santa Cruz which, after all, offered challenges more his size. On the shifting sands of the nursery off Sims Road, he was handed more and more responsibility taking care of the Barnharts' property and was entrusted to tend and secure propagules from the large well-established shrubs dotting the hillside, "...mother stock specimens like flowering quince, Matilija poppy, flannel bush, wild mock orange, and big old roses carrying the past into the future...." With virtually the same climatic conditions, there were endless similarities between landscape gardening and horticulture along the Northern California Coast from Crescent City down to coastal areas of the Greater San Francisco and Monterey Bays ("... all lying within Sunset Zone 17...." [Ed. note: See the **SUNSET WESTERN GARDEN BOOK**, 9<sup>th</sup> edition, 2012]).

*Cecile Brunner: and Lady Bank's in yellow and in white. Staples in Santa Cruz landscaping included ubiquitous favorites like the white potato vine and pink jasmine vine and coral passion vine. Hardenbergia. Bougainvillea. We grew them all and fed them to a seemingly insatiable public appetite....*



While listening to recollections of this period, when our protagonist was broadening and deepening his knowledge of plants as well as the horticulture trade, it struck me that his community college studies under Richard Merrill did not elicit any enraptured prose for a glamorized teacher. Merrill was yet another educated transplant from back East, and he had gained a following as the go-to-guy for practical knowledge in domains that appealed to Santa Cruz's countercultural population pursuing small-scale farming and gardening expertise—people like Peter. But at this stage his need for an archetypical figure in the form of a substitute father or big brother must have been met by his filial relations with Bob.

## NOTES to Chapter 18

1. p296 Sally's speculations bring to mind "Art," a short poem by Melville—uncharacteristically concise and direct:

In placid hours well-pleased we dream  
Of many a brave unbodied scheme.  
But form to lend, pulsed life create,  
What unlike things must meet and mate:  
A flame to melt—a wind to freeze;  
Sad patience—joyous energies;  
Humility—yet pride and scorn;  
Instinct and study; love and hate;  
Audacity—reverence. These must mate,  
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,  
To wrestle with the angel—Art.

From TIMOLEON (1891)

2. p298 But, if I recall correctly, Fred ended spending two weeks there, not four, and in the company of two fellow activists as well as five other jailbirds in an eight-person cell, whereas I spent four weeks on the "Farm" with no sympathetic politicians in sight.

3. p298 Nobody but Fred seemed to appreciate the sheer comedic interest of my investment in a beat-up Chevrolet Apache pickup truck which, for a couple of hundred dollars, I bought from some stoner stuck in some hippie hollow up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The owners needed cash. The vehicle needed work. A paint job. New upholstery. It needed some handles and knobs. But all these were merely deferrable maintenance issues to a boy with his "new" truck. It started and it stopped—almost, for the Apache also needed a new sets of brakes, badly, as I discovered the first time I took it to the nursery and took it on one hairy ride back down Graham Hill Road. I didn't have money for brakes, or paint, or knobs and handles, or seat covers. I barely had money for gas. I forget how I got out of that misadventure in automobile ownership. Chalk it up to inexperience and a boy growing up—belatedly.

4. p299 Sally’s fascinating filmography aside, in all fairness I must insert that Catherine Rhode’s tall tales had their bases in her own experience, and I never once called across the moors like Olivier did: “Cathy, you are still my queen!”

5. p299 After coming back from Oregon, Maddy further discovered that their father had quickly remarried long ago and parented a daughter not much younger than Madalon. Her brother had not had the wherewithal to update her in person. Upon learning the news, she became furious and made it clear that as far as she was concerned her half-sister had usurped all the love and attention withdrawn from but rightly belonging to Maddy.

6. p300 Forty-five years later, and much better armed for the cultural warfare running amok in the 2020s, I encountered concerted hostilities aimed at my person and the male chauvinism I was supposed, or presupposed, to manifest. Without detailing the blow-by-blow, I want to share my take on an experience which ended my working as a volunteer at one particular public, non-profit garden. These hostilities were exhibited by a pair of genteel furies on staff, a pair whose intentions were transparent to me and whose unilateral actions went unpoliced by others.

For four years, I had been happily learning how best to lead small-group tours and teach a wide variety of visitors about the garden’s history, design, mission, and unique features. As a trained docent, I had gotten quite good making guests feel welcome *and* better informed. Admittedly, I had developed a “personality conflict” with the newest volunteer coordinator, the latest in a cast of employees rotating in and out of an administration known for its high rate of turnover. A mere volunteer in conflict with a paid volunteer coordinator? Never a good omen.

During a kangaroo trial, I was accused of having violated a tenet of the new linguistic behavior. While making conversation with an extremely reticent new hire in the nursery, I’d casually suggested that she (sic) “looked like a runner” in response to which remark she told me about her soccer playing. Little did I suspect that she would subsequently be reporting to someone with political leverage that my remark had made her feel “uncomfortable.” It was this trumped-up charge of *my having made her feel* (a notion derivative of a rather naïve view of how behaviors and feelings interact) uncomfortable that my vaguely Kafkaesque trial transpired. I only later figured out the source of the circumstantial evidence, for my accusers would not say to whom I had spoken or what I had said! They claimed they only wanted to make me “aware,” etcetera. I cried foul. They claimed, ad infinitum, that they were not accusing me at all; they only wanted to make me “aware,” ad nauseum. So, apparently unaware and insufficiently WOKE, I simply got up and walked away until my main *accuser* suggested—in a cowardly manner, broaching the subject while walking behind my back—that perhaps I should consider “taking a break from docenting....” It was then I lost my temper, spoke my mind, and went off to fry other, bigger fish volunteering elsewhere. The collision had run its course. The petty power politics exercised by this localized clique of cancel-culture warriors were not worth my while contesting. In any case I would have lost for they were the new powers that be!

In the late 70s, I was still susceptible to such stereotyping for, try as I did to disguise it, I still wore (inside) clothes cut from the cloth which had indeed swaddled me while growing up white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and male. In my teens and twenties, I was young, tall, educated, good-looking, and—when I opened my mouth—I could sound perhaps a bit too well-spoken. In the 2020s, I like to think I am still (with the exception of “young”) all of the above. But there is one thing I am not: I am not apologetic for having been born, and I refuse to internalize the projections of those who cast aspersions on my general bearing if not my sheer existence. I believe that my not being apologetic was the one aspect of my demeanor that most rattled my accusers.

Over the decades, I’ve come to accept my basic situation in general society as paradoxical and, in the arena of social justice, something of an insoluble dilemma. I may have been the standard issue product of my parents’ parenting and of their times, that brief historical blip of extreme prosperity and cultural pretensions to American superiority post WWII, but I have gone my own way since—felt forced to—and no longer deserve to be branded and duly canceled as if I thought Donald Trump or Tucker Carlson, for example, belong to any race I want to run in. Once upon a time, after being raised as a Prince of Pleasantville—how my mother would have preferred to watch that moniker morph into a Prince of Princeton!—I had had to abdicate any claim to such entitlement and cede the throne to others only too happy to rise in my stead. There is no denying that I had every material advantage and have selectively taken advantage of some, but to become the default victim of reverse sexism, reverse racism, reverse classicism...? Lately, as I progressively retire from indiscriminate social activities, it feels almost comedic to take the long view and see myself as The Oppressor.

By declining to attend a follow-up meeting in the office of the garden director, which promised to be a thinly veiled dismissal procedure rather than the invitation’s purported “discussion” of the incident, I effectively resigned. Within mere minutes of my email message (RSVP **no!**), I received an official acceptance of my resignation, an expression of gratitude for my years of service, and a gag order: upon penalty of expulsion from the premises on all future occasions, I was instructed not to discuss the incident with any members of the volunteer community, the staff, or the management, including the Board of Directors. Oh, my! Wouldn’t that have shown bad form!

So, I offer this apologia without apology. My dismissal-resignation was not fair. It was not smart. It was not even done well. The organization lost a valuable resource (me) because it was beyond the imaginations of certain individuals to grasp the symbolical substrate of the whole affair and perhaps re-perceive my dastardly foul, pernicious, and uncommonly sadistic comment—“...you look like a runner...” as belonging to an order of social interactions that their cancel-culture agenda cannot afford to entertain. A friendly inquiry to a team member...? A way to find some common ground with a new acquaintance...? I was later to learn that a fellow *older white male docent* had likewise been purged from the ranks based on similar circumstantial evidence: the identical employee reported having been *made to feel* “uncomfortable” by something in his harmless attempt at small talk.

The complainant victimized by such out-of-date language is, I've heard, no longer on staff. But, thank goodness, the very term “docent”—deemed elitist—has been excised from all educational programs and the lexicon of the educational department. Everyone loses. Does anyone learn?

7. p301 I regret now that I didn't have the foresight to be unequivocally glad for her, that she enjoyed all she could while she could: a few years later, a major stroke and her first bout with cancer made her sexual adventuring and her career in travel impossible.

8. p302 Coming so brusquely on the heels of my biographer's questionable assessment of my relations with Catherine Rhodes—that it was at core a close encounter of the frustrated romantic kind—I am tempted to tear into Sally's somewhat pat analysis (dare I say *psychoanalysis*?) of my conflictual relationship with Madalon Zorn—that it was sabotaged by a Father complex (hers) and a Mother complex (mine). My biographer seems to revert to amateurish pathological explanations and be framing my connection with Catherine as a prequel to my relationship with Maddy, but they were never functional equivalents.

Should I mount a rebuttal as if we are engaged in a political contest or an academic debate? I might take exception to her assumption here, her presumption there, but I won't try. Why? I can tolerate her best guessing, and I can't deny the overall credibility of her summing up. Also, about my “conflation” of Madalon and my mother, I can't deny the parallel between the highly influential desertion by the fathers—when both girls were young—upon their view of men. As far as identifying the key motivations driving those two women's actions and reactions? I can't come up with better ones than Sally has.

[Ed. Note: Indeed, this theme is essential to Elise's search for surrogates and substitutes running throughout 3NLs, especially in her “Notebooks” and diary entries of Book Three.]

I should not be surprised by Sally's forward charge. After all, including the RightCrafting interview(s), it's been several years now that I've been disclosing all (almost) of my private life to her, entrusting her to make sense of it or try to. In a pivotal moment of mirroring, she has stepped forward and I am stepping back.

9. p302 Starting in 1978, Nevin Smith's Wintergreen Nursery (now Suncrest Nurseries, Inc.) in Watsonville was the only other outfit in the area that we knew to be offering such items as classic herbaceous perennials or California natives in gallon-size cans. Or sub-alpine in 4” pots. Lewisia in 4” pots? That was a connoisseur's specialty idea but Bob grew them for anyone to buy.

10. p302 I had no idea I would end up employed in the hardcore outside sales of plant and seed “materials” and managing special projects for suppliers to the horticultural and landscape industries. But gainful employment certainly began to matter mightily with the birth of our child in 1987, when I had to make some real money for a change. I naturally cashed in on my earlier sales experiences and began a thorough and immersive exploration of Northern Californian locales.

Before mobile devices or pc's, when one relied on phone booths, voicemail message machines, handwritten order forms, and faxes, I was out on the road. I got to know which booths had phones that worked, which gas stations had toilets that flushed. Sometimes I was prospecting on salary, sometimes cold-calling on salary plus commission, sometimes just out on my own selling (or not selling) on straight commission. I left behind a shameful "carbon footprint" in pursuit of the almighty dollar, or at least lots of rubber tire residue and gas fumes, ultimately wearing myself out. Burnt out on driving, burnt out on motels. Downhearted by the recurrent, disappointing disjunct between sales (my job) and product control (what was delivered to my customers). But I did often enjoy the theatricality of the job, the role-playing, the great play of character and type, and the exposure to new people and places was rich. There were trade shows and trade scuttlebutt. The longer I worked in the business, the more money I made, the less actual contact I had with plants. It was never a lot of money but it was enough. But it got to be all too much of the business of business. I finally burnt out on that, too, and the mendacity pervasive in the business of business!

11. p303 Staked flowering vines. Staked hybrid delphiniums. Russell hybrid lupines. All bearing color and in bud and pest free? It was a snap to sell products such as these. The buyers would instruct me to fan the cans out to either side of the entrances, knowing they'd turn their purchase over within 12 to 24 hours.

12. p303 An example of Bob & Betty's nurturing support: Having studied how to construct and install a simple solar hot water system from wood, screws, copper flashing and tubing, and black paint, the Barnharts let me—or rather, they actually paid me to put in a new hot water system at their place. I wasn't privy to whatever they discussed out of my earshot about the relative costs (low) and benefits (dubious) of the project, which involved violating the membrane of the garage roof and replumbing water lines to bypass (in good weather) the existing network of the gas-fired water heater, but I believe that Bob's faith in the value of my testing my ability to see a technical challenge through won out over his wife's practical and justifiable objections. Also, it might be an aesthetic insult to the roofline, but it would be a feather in any environmentalist's cap to display a solar panel *chez soi*. In dark or overcast periods, the existing system would insure the availability of hot water. So I wrestled for a week accomplishing that job. Nearing the finishing line, something didn't work quite right; it was growing dark; plumbing supply stores were closed. Bob was left to break the news to Betty: no hot water on demand for at least another day. The next day I gathered she was none too pleased and she expected a finale ASAP. Yet, in all, she was forgiving enough for, even more than her husband, Betty was rooting for my advancement, going so far as to state that solar energy system installation might be a line of work where I could get ahead—me, a tradesman! In the event, it was a losing proposition financially, even if small change for them. I learned that I was *not* cut out to be a tradesman, but that with Bob's oversight and forbearance I found out that I could see such a venture through to its end. Again, in the Barnharts' way of dealing with me, I was the recipient of loving kindness in consistent action. I hadn't know that growing up.

## CHAPTER 19: 1979–81

In the summer of 1980 Bob brought his handwritten worksheet for business taxes to the kitchen table, and the figures made it clear the nursery was not financially breaking even—even without factoring the owner-operator’s time into the calculations. The sole employee’s wages were by far the single largest recurring expense. Looking back, Peter considers that sobering disclosure the opening gesture in a friendly conversation between the two of them, a conversation that went on for the next twelve months.

Aged 65, prosperous enough to be “well off” regardless any proceeds or losses from his idiosyncratic enterprise, the proprietor was eyeing the EXIT sign, hoping to convert the business of growing plants *for sale*—of which he had grown tired—into the hobby of growing plants *for pleasure*, which he still loved. While working side-by-side at the dirt pile canning up plants or sitting over lunches at the kitchen table, Bob made it plain that Barnhart’s Nursery had run its course, at least under his watch, and he was looking for ways to phase out. Short of some reasonable alternative, that meant the end of Peter’s relatively stable situation on those shifting sands of the hillside off Sims Road. But what if Peter were to buy the business and lease the site? Bob didn’t pretend that his successor would have an easy go of it. The infrastructure was reaching the end of its useful lifespan and, without extensive and expensive upgrades, it would be impossible to carry on with the existing equipment and foolish to persist in the old-fashioned methods—and expect to make a profit. Betty was more blunt and more biting: “No grown man should be spending half his life at the end of a hose!” There was no telling how much longer the antiquated well and the bottomland’s aquifer—which made the nursery’s water supply affordable—would hold out. Bob was candid: in any transition to modernity considerable costs would be unavoidable. Droughty years in close succession were also changing water usage in residential and commercial landscaping as well as influencing the marketplace’s movement toward a palette of more strictly “waterwise” plants. Barnhart’s old-time staples included a deep inventory of camellias, azaleas, and rhododendrons—all falling out of fashion in the undeniably xeric West.

*Of course I knew my generous padrón would offer me extremely favorable terms of payment and provide all sorts of favors in kind. His goodwill and the “goodwill” of the business were its strongest selling points, but still I would have in effect to start over, and that overhaul would force me to take out an institutional loan. My mentor would no doubt have co-signed it. And would be there to shepherd me through the major demolition and construction projects—a new greenhouse; a new well and pump and storage tank; how about a real irrigation system? And what of an efficient stabilization of those shifting sands? It was all too much for me. At the thought of taking on real debt I balked like a skittish colt. Plus, contemplating a grinding dawn-to-dusk existence of physical labor and practical, mechanical problem solving, seven days a week for the foreseeable future—I ran from that part like a scaled dog! Gone would be the sunny days when “Nature Boy”—the nickname bestowed upon me, half in jest, half in ridicule, by one regular customer—could come and go according to the varying seasonal needs of the nursery and his (my) cash flow. Gone would be the fun, fair-weather Friday rounds of selling plants off the truck like some hapless,*

*happy peddler in a New Yorker cartoon. No, there were too many gears for me to change and all without any guarantee that I could make a profit. Not a killing. Just a simple profit enough to pay off the loan, to keep the place open, and of course to invest in its maintenance. For what? So one day I could pay for a hired hand? Bob and I never even talked dollar figures. Sadly then, gladly now, I concluded: No sale.*

The Barnharts accepted with equanimity Peter's decision, but they were concerned that whatever happened next would shake the ground beneath his hard-earned stability. Betty even intimated that the 33-year old had been wasting his time, not "getting ahead" like the Barnharts' own son who had some real "earning power" after having graduated from Cal Poly. Younger than Peter, Bill was indeed embarking on a career in various positions in the field of landscape architecture, some of them financially remunerative!

The wheels of change were in motion. One morning Bob announced that—before engaging in any further discussion about a purchase—a pair of nurserymen employed in the management of a large and successful retail garden center in Santa Cruz would be making their way up Graham Hill Road to have a look-see at the premises. The straight-talking seller spent a couple of hours showing them about before the duo took a tour on its own.

*I wasn't privy to any negotiations, but at one point in their comings and goings H. and L. issued a noncommittal statement, almost as an aside: why of course I'd be kept on staff. So apparently I was viewed as a positive asset to be retained, at least for the initial transition,. As usual in such situations, I was assured that "nothing would change in that regard...." I suspect the capital investments required for modernization killed any deal between them and Bob. Anyway, nothing ever came of it.*

Peter doesn't remember any other in-person visits by any other parties interested in buying or leasing the operation.

\*

By late fall 1980, his long and fruitful grace period was coming to a close. Four years living under the protection of the Barnharts' patronage; four years residing at 153 Myrtle Street; six years of a conflicted common-law marriage with Madalon—each of these arrangements was about to expire. With no need to stand before a judge to plead for a dissolution of marriage due to irreconcilable differences, Madelon moved out of Little Myrtle, effecting a trial separation that became permanent. No histrionics occurred [Ed. note: Cf. APPENDIX VI]. Peter even called on her in her new studio apartment on the second floor of an old vine-shrouded house on Elm Street several blocks away. They sipped tea together, treating each other with great sensitivity, lying side-by-side in a bittersweet farewell embrace. However, no cordiality could reclaim the lost common ground, and my interviewee felt no good use would be had by recounting the break-up blow-by-blow. He thought one or two incidents would be enough to indicate the deeper currents of strong emotions at play:

*Some housemates and friends were gathered around the wooden electrical cable spool which served as Little Myrtle's kitchen table. Probably drinking tea, no doubt passing joints. Although not an official member of the dance collective, one person present had graduated with Maddy as a performing arts major at UCSC. Now I knew she had recently broken up with her beau whose name, if I'm not mistaken, was Peter! Anyway, during a lull in the general conversation, staring right at me, addressing Maddy, she said, "So, Maddy? You still looking for someplace else to live?" Not exactly what I'd call passive aggression—more like active aggression. At that point, Maddy and I had discussed this eventuality but this woman's pronouncement took place before Maddy and I had decided to resolve our stalemate by her doing so, by her moving out. We hadn't made that decision yet. Upon hearing that shrewish remark—a blow aimed right at my psychic solar plexus if not my metaphorical testicles—I absorbed the impact—at first. Then a carload of us, including Maddy and I, drove up to the university campus to take in a special screening of NANOOK OF THE NORTH (1922) sponsored by the anthro department or film department or something. I remember sitting beside her through the academician's introduction to the film and feeling the slowly burning embers stirred awake by that woman's cruel remark about Maddy's secretive search for alternative lodging—well, those embers just burst into flame. The split second the lights went down in the auditorium I bolted from my seat, strode out of the building, and hiked overland all the way downtown. Or to West Cliff Beach. Or to the house on Van Ness Street. Actually, I forget where I went. On another occasion I did see Flaherty's film, but the hot, hooked harpoon wielded by that femme féministe has left a scar in my heart forever. Breaking Maddy's confidentiality while channeling her personal bile—at all Peters, so to speak—if that was an honorable show of women's solidarity—God help us all!*

\*

*«Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là: c'est l'unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous.»*

[Baudelaire, XXXIII: "Enivrez-Vous" xxxiii, LE SPLEEN DE PARIS (1869)]

Released from his self-imposed bondage to Madalon, in his physical prime at age 33, Peter immediately started playing the open field, reveling in a Rimbaudian *carpe diem* obliteration of any measured Apollonian self. An acrimonious closing of accounts with the landlords who blamed him for the general decline in gentrified standards at Little Myrtle—it meant nothing to him as he moved out, taking his books, his writing table, and his Swiss military portable typewriter out to a tiny one-and-one-half-room cottage on the Portola Avenue bus line near Capitola Avenue on the Eastside. With no furniture other than a schoolhouse chair, a foam mattress, and a Styrofoam cooler kept on the shaded porch out back, he set up his “den of iniquity” more along the lines of a surfer's cabana than of a true gentleman's temporary abode. He went so far as to fashion window blinds from composition board, fitted to block out traffic noise—and black out unwelcome views from within or without. A long repressed Don Juanism took revenge. His appetite for sensuality had become ravenous, and he made it clear to select others that he was available for loveless sex. Reverting to an earlier *dérèglement de tous les sens*, tempered only by the need to put in a



minimum of requisite hours and keep up appearances at the nursery off Sims Road, Peter threw moderation out the windows of his “bachelor pad” and once again opened his fashions to wild winds.<sup>1</sup>

### **NOTE to Chapter 19:**

1. p313 I’m afraid my gal Sal has made me out as a monster, a maniac, or a pervert—or perhaps all three, implying that I paid or was paid for pure sex! *Jamais de ma vie!* That little shack was a hothouse, not a whorehouse. I just gave in to my fantasies, indulging my whims in a town full of fleshpots where a passing parade of youth displayed its ephemeral charms to one another, one after another. Reckless as the next lost soul in Santa Cruz, doomed to meaningless rounds of silly seductions and dalliances, I pursued pleasure in abandon—not that far from the so called Pleasure Point, come to think of it.

At some point during this period of public inanities and private parties, by chance Maddy and I found ourselves in line at the bank. I approached her and said hello. “I don’t trust you,” she replied and turned away. I suppose she’d gotten wind of the libertine lifestyle by which I had been fleeing my sorrows since our separation. She certainly had good reason not to trust me. By then I didn’t trust myself. But somehow that simple statement bespoke a fundamental mistrust of me and *of all men* and still strikes me as a part of her personal baggage which I no longer cared to lift or carry with me. I probably still felt justified blaming her for the utter failure of my projections onto her, projections of The Woman who could be the be-all and end-all of my existence—if she only would! What a perfect recipe for mutual resentment! We had tried and failed at a version of the marriage experiment and I just no longer cared. “I don’t trust you.” Those were the last words she ever spoke to me. *Finito la commedia!*

# APPENDIX I: CHRONOLGY

## CHRONOLGY

Dedicated to my son and grandson, who may one day seek an account of the lifetime particular and peculiar to me and the times through which I have lived.

—Peter Boffey, 2025

### **PART ONE: Childhood & Adolescence (1947–1965)**

**1947** Peter Roy Boffey born Oct 13<sup>th</sup>, New York NY. Second son of David Mills Boffey & Nancy Ellen (nee Hayes) Boffey. [Older brother David Barnes Boffey born July 16, 1945.]

**1948** Family moves from leasing house in Hartsdale NY (Westchester County) to buying house at 3 Lake Drive, Oppermans Pond, Pleasantville NY (Westchester County).

**1949** Younger brother Daniel Howard Boffey born April 8<sup>th</sup>.

**1951–57** Attends nursery school then Roselle Avenue Elementary School for Boys & Girls, Pleasantville.

Summer 52: Drives with mother to Florida to visit her sister and nephew.

Summer 53: First of several family vacations on Cape Cod MA.

Summer 54: Drives cross-country with Janet MacRae (“Aunt Janet”) to visit MacRae family in Shelton WA; makes return trip solo by airplane and train.

Summer 55: With brother Barnes, attends Lanakila Camp for Boys, Fairlee VT.

**1957** Enrolls in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Bedford Road School, Pleasantville. Father’s employer (J. Walter Thompson Advertising) transfers him to San Francisco office; family vacations in Mexico before moving into 8 Oak Avenue, Belvedere, CA (Marin County). Enrolls mid-school year in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Reed Elementary School, Tiburon.

**1957–61** Attends Reed School. Parents separate; father rents apartment in SF and occasionally spends time with family in Belvedere.

Summer 59: Attends 2-week boys camp, Cloverleaf Ranch, Santa Rosa CA (Sonoma County).

Winter 59: Parents temporarily reunite; family vacations in Yosemite Valley.

Summer 60: Participates in High Sierra back-packing trip with father, brother Barnes, and friends—led by professional guide.

**1961–2** Attends freshman year of high school at Lick-Wilmerding Day School for Boys, Ocean Avenue, SF; commuting from Marin with brother Barnes & often spending weeknights at father’s apartment.

**1962** Father’s employer (J. Walter Thompson Advertising) relocates him to New York NY. Parents cancel divorce proceedings; family travels cross-country by car in late summer. Aunt Janet settles into the “Day House” leased in Bedford Hills NY (Westchester County) to care for younger brother Dan while Barnes and Peter are sent away to boarding school. Mother breaks down, temporarily residing inpatient at Four Winds Hospital, Katonah NY. Father regularly overnights at Yale Club, Manhattan.

**1962–65** Attends Williston Academy (Easthampton MA)

Fall 62: Traumatized by relocation and the family’s fragmentation, contends with boarding school’s regimentation & alienation.

Spring 63: Discovers American literature and Walt Whitman. Begins writing poetry. Participates in Dramatic Club (HENRY IV, PART ONE) and Studio Theater (HELLO OUT THERE). Family moves into a converted “carriage house” at 35 Harris Road in Katonah (Westchester County)

Summer 63: Job on commercial egg farm owned & operated by Orthodox Jewish family in exurban Northern Westchester. Reads all available A. Huxley.

Fall 63: Poetry & short story printed in school’s literary publication *The Scribe*. Acts in school play *J.B.* Heavily influenced by drama coach and English teacher Thomas E. Kelley.

Spring 64: First exposure to foreign film; discovers “Beat” writings.

Summer 64: Family vacations on Nantucket Island MA. Reads all available Kerouac.

Fall 64: Begins amorous relationship with Francis Ross.

**1965** Spring: Accepted to Columbia University on “early admissions” program. Suspended (Feb-March) from Williston Academy then expelled (April). Drifts away from home, school, job.

Summer: Philadelphia–San Francisco–New Orleans–NY road-trip with boarding school friend.

Fall: Personal breakdown. Resides at family house in Katonah. Begins intensive treatment with Dr. Pieter Kors. Breaks off relationship with Franny. Works as messenger at headquarters of the Reader’s Digest Association, Chappaqua NY.

## **PART TWO: College Years (Hudson River Valley & NYC, 1966-70)**

**1966–70** Attends Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson NY (Dutchess County).

Fall 66: Enrolls with high school equivalency diploma. Fellow students include Stephen Kessler, Steven “KUSH” Kushner, Thomas Meyers.

Winter 66-67: Writes novella WITHER, WITHER? as “winter project.”

Summer 67: Resides Catholic Worker Farm, Tivoli NY (Dutchess County). Jailed for antiwar protesting in Red Hook NY. Parents finalize divorce Aug 31, 1967. Mother works in Katonah office of Donald L. Ferguson World Tours.

Fall 67: Begins keeping private journal.

Winter 67–68: Father marries Jane Cotton on Dec 22<sup>nd</sup>; they settle in Manhattan NY. Reads New Criticism as academic winter project.

Spring 68: Sophomore year ‘moderation’ paper entitled *Human Suffering in Oedipus Rex*.

Summer 68: Hitchhiking through Europe with sojourns in Amsterdam, Paris, and Zurich.

Fall 68: First course with Robert Kelly.

Winter 68–69: Reads William Butler Yeats as winter project.

Spring 69: “Pound and the Post-Poundians” course with Robert Kelly. Poetry published in college’s poetry periodical *The Lampeter Muse*; junior class valedictorian. “Carriage house” in Katonah sold; mother moves to apartment in Bedford Hills NY; she will spend most of next decade in professional travel abroad for Ferguson World Tours.

Summer 69: Apartment-sits upper Broadway NYC; works at “spin art” arcade in Greenwich Village; reads in anticipation of senior year project with Robert Kelly. Meets future wife Jill Cecile Bergman.

Fall 69: Senior year at Bard; begins yearlong project on Herman Melville’s CLAREL with Kelly; edits first of two issues of *The Lampeter Muse*.

Winter 69: Rents upper Broadway apartment with Jill Bergman; 4F draft status exempts him from military service.

Spring 70: Edits second issue of *The Lampeter Muse*. Graduates Bard with B.A.; receives John Bard Scholar Award for “A Critical Introduction to Herman Melville’s CLAREL”.

### **PART THREE: (Marriage & Divorce, 1970-74)**

**1970** Drives with Jill to Pacific Northwest via the Trans-Canada Highway, investigating expatriation to Canada. Meets her family and friends in Portland OR; marries Aug 29<sup>th</sup> and they rent various apartments. He works in rose greenhouse range outside city; she at Planned Parenthood clinic. After his minor breakdown, they enter marriage therapy.

**1971** Fall relocation to Eugene OR where he enrolls for 5<sup>th</sup> year of undergraduate studies in University of Oregon in order to earn B.S. prerequisite to attending graduate school in clinical psychology; she enrolls as freshman at UO. He works on campus grounds crew; she in the English department office. They reside in married-student housing, first in Westmoreland (West Eugene) then in jerry-built “cottage” immediately off-campus. Begins unofficially auditing Cadbury’s “Film as Lit” course on regular basis.

**1972** Drops out of summer school, discontinues plans for graduate school. Briefly house-sits in Deadwood OR, tending to its few farm animals and cannabis patch. They relocate to “cottage” of

“miscellaneous married student housing.” Begins working in returns shipping section of the University Co-op Bookstore’s textbook department, Eugene.

**1973** Jill moves out but Peter retains two-room “cottage” rental adjacent to campus. House-sits in Deadwood OR, tending to its few farm animals and cannabis patch. Legal dissolution of marriage in Oct. Travels by train and bus to visit MacRae family in WA (Aunt Janet in Seattle; John & Dorothy MacRae in Shelton). Visited by father in Eugene.

**1974** Continues steady parttime at UO bookstore; uses campus resources for auto-didactic studies in French language & literature; reads voraciously; writes profusely. Visited by KUSH. Explores Oregon backpacking & birding.. Experiments with LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, peyote.

#### **PART FOUR: (Fugues & Incognitos, 1975-76)**

**1974-5** Meets Madalon Zorn prior to departing Eugene. With KUSH, hitchhikes Route 1 & Highway 101 south to Bolinas. Rendezvous with Madalon in SF Bay Area; visits mother and her second husband John Bridgman. Hitchhikes solo cross-country (Berkeley–Baltimore–New York). In Brooklyn, boards Yugoslav cargo ship as passenger, disembarking in Casablanca, Morocco.

**1975** Late winter–spring: Adrift in Morocco’s Five Imperial Cities, on coastal El Jadida & Essaouira, in foothills of Atlas Mountains. Shares rides through Spain & France to meet Madalon in Zurich; they hitchhike to Brittany to attend French language short courses in Quimper. Resides with Madalon in commune of Plomelin outside Quimper; assists landlord in parttime *bricolage* throughout rural *Sud-Finistère* region. Translates Tristan Corbière.

July: Receives news of father’s May 19<sup>th</sup> suicide.

Aug: Returns USA. In Providence RI, visits his father’s half-brother Uncle Roy Carr; in NYC, visits stepmother and younger brother Dan. Learns of mother’s cancer surgery.

Sept: Joins Madalon in Pacific Grove where she attends Monterey Peninsula College preliminary to enrolling as re-entry student in Dance at the University of Santa Cruz. Madalon miscarries. Peter finishes semester in Translation & Interpretation at Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies and withdraws from program. Breaks off all further communications with Uncle Roy.

**1976** Spring: Upon relocation in Santa Cruz (SC), Peter & Madalon separate: she attends UCSC; he takes up residence in group house on Van Ness Street; first meets James Barrett there.

Summer–Fall: Financially and emotionally at loose ends. Pursuits in SC, Berkeley, and Eugene include elective translation projects and public poetry readings. Shoots Super-8 footage edited into privately screened *cinépoèmes*. Shares cross-country ride and resides on Mohawk territory of Akwesasne straddling Cornwall Island in the St. Lawrence River. Expectations of participating in a Wounded Knee traveling theater project never materialize. Exits upon first freezing weather. Visits brother Barnes in Vermont. Delivers

cross-country driveaway car to Southern California. Hitchhikes up Central Coast; reunites with Madalon in SC.

## **PART FIVE: (Santa Cruz, 1976-81)**

**1976–77:** Fall: Former landlord invites him to “camp out” inside fixer-upper under restoration at 153 Myrtle Street (“Little Myrtle”). Starts parttime at Bob Barnhart’s wholesale cottage-industry plant nursery located off Sims Road outside SC. Frequents UCSC Farm & Gardens. Begins first draft of many drafts of a novel he will ultimately self-publish as *TWO HALF BROTHERS OR SEPARATING OUT* (2014)]. Begins literary correspondence with Stephen Kessler.

**1977–78** Winter–Spring: Little Myrtle becomes habitable 4-bedroom group house; situation formalized in official rental arrangement with owners; Madalon moves in as first housemate.

Spring: Participates in SC poetry readings.

Summer: Enthusiast of two local performance groups: Mamalution, a women’s dance collective of which Madalon is member; the Santa Cruz Screaming Memes comedy improvisation troupe (befriends Patrick Morrissey in particular). Explores Central California backpacking & birding.

Fall: Translation of Tristan Tzara’s “The Dialectics of Poetry” published in *Invisible City* (The Red Hill Press, Fairfax CA) numbers 21-22.

Becomes active with grassroots political group People for a Nuclear Free Future based at the Resource Center for Non-Violence (SC). Lead organizer of Alternative Energy Faire, the inaugural event at Laurel [sic.] Community Center (SC). Visited by brother Barnes.

**1978–79** 30 days in San Luis Obispo County Jail after pleading nolo contendere to charges of trespassing, i.e. protesting with Abalone Alliance at the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, Avila Beach, SLO. Finishes select courses in applied horticulture & solar energy at Cabrillo College, Aptos.

**1980–81** Madalon moves out of Little Myrtle; Peter rents one-room cottage off Portola Drive near Capitola Avenue. Libertine adventures. Affair with B.S. In NYC his mother suffers left cerebral infraction and begins recovery of speech, memory, and motor skills; she gradually increases time spent in Princeville, Kauai HI and eventually lives there fulltime. Meets Ophira Zahava Druch (his future wife) at Easter Day “kegger” in SC. Breaks off from B.S.

**1981** Peter & Ophira travel by bus to then-sleepy fishing village of San Felipe, Sea of Cortez, Mexico then return to share apartment on Seabright Avenue (SC). Meets Uri Hertz. Visited by brother Barnes.

[Ed. note: Ends Volume I of **NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS**]

- 1982** Revives manuscript of novel (working title: MOROCCAN INCOGNITOS). Relocates with Ophira to granny unit on Acton Street, Berkeley. He works at East Bay Nursery (EBN); she at California College of Arts & Crafts (CCAC).
- 1983** Earns Certification as California Nurseryman (CAN) and pursues Certification in Teaching English as a Second Language. Visted by mother in Berkeley. August in Israel. Meets Ophira's extended family & friends. With Ophira visits selected kibbutzim as prospective guest residents/candidates for membership. Back in SF Bay Area they prepare one-way move: Ophira to repatriate, Peter to enter Israel on "Immigrant's Temporary Resident's Visa." Confidential civil marriage ceremony, Oakland Courthouse, Oct 17<sup>th</sup>; Paddy Morrissey & Janice Fitzpatrick, witnesses.
- 1984** Jan: En route to Israel: Ophira visits friends in Amsterdam; Peter visits mother & brother Dan NYC. They spend 2 weeks in Haifa *en famille* prior to moving onto Kibbutz Ein Ha-Shofet in Menashe Hills (20 k. from Haifa).  
Feb–Oct: Works on landscape crew; Hebrew language studies in *ulpan*; organized educational tours of Israel with other volunteers; private trips and family time with the Druchs.  
Nov: Ophira suffers meltdown; Peter suffers burnout. Composes long poem *ISRAEL 1984: A PERSONAL MOBILE*.  
Dec: Announces his imminent return to USA, initiating "trial separation;" Ophira decides to stay on in Israel before making her decision to re-join him or not.
- 1985** After stopover in NYC, Peter returns to CA, staying with Paddy Morrissey & Janice Fitzpatrick in SF. Re-hired at EBN with stated intention of setting up his own gardening business. Ophira notifies him of her decision to return to CA where she has been invited back to work at CCAC. He sublets bedroom in Berkeley then, with Ophira, rents an apartment on Terrace Street in Oakland.
- 1986-7** Develops a one-man gourmet landscaping service, The Garden Artisan. During wife's pregnancy, visited by sister-in-law from Israel. Ariel David Druch-Boffey born Feb 6, 1987, Merritt Hospital, Oakland. In lieu of returning to work at CCAC, Ophira begins launch a self-made career in Hebrew language instruction.  
March-April: Parents-in-law visit from Israel. Visited by brother Dan en route to Kauai.  
April-May: Visited by mother from Kauai.  
July: Visited by brother Barnes and nephew David from Vermont.  
Dec: Ophira takes son to Israel for the first of regular summer visits [1990, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999 & 2009].
- 1988** Purchase rundown bungalow, Pleasant Street, Oakland CA. Pursues multiple treatments to address debilitating back pain. Dissolves The Garden Artisan; hires on as outside sales

- representative for Pacific Coast Seed Inc. Visited by mother; parents-in-law; brother Barnes & nephew David.
- 1989** Visited by Barnes, his wife Sharon, and their second son Adam Boffey). Visited by mother (twice). Peter, Ophira & Ariel make their first joint visit to Nancy Boffey in Kauai.
- 1990** Son starts Montclair Elementary School, Oakland. Visited by Barnes. Peter's back problems intensify.
- 1991** Quits PCS and hires on to outside sales (fully commissioned) for Monterey Bay Nursery, Watsonville CA. Death of father-in-law Joseph Druch. Ophira makes 2<sup>nd</sup> trip to Israel that summer; Peter and son to visit Dorothy MacRae in Shelton WA.
- 1992** Visited by Miriam Druch, widow.
- 1993** Third & final season of road sales for MBN.
- 1994** Hires on at retail garden center near home in Oakland. Various therapies for back. Experiences explosion of creative fiction writing. Visited by Barnes; mother.
- 1995** Consumed by writing. Mother visits Israel; visited by mother-in-law in CA.
- 1996** Rehired by Pacific Coast Seed Inc. (marketing & sales). Visited by mother; mother-in-law.
- 1997** Back surgery scheduled; discovers Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education in group class setting and experiences beneficial effects of its holistic approach; cancels operation. Visited by Barnes & partner Heidi Dahlberg.
- 1998** Jan: Individualized sessions (Functional Integration) with Oakland Feldenkrais Practitioner Judith Drambovic.  
 Feb: Mother reports diagnosis of terminal cancer & decision against further invasive medical procedures.  
 June-July: Sale of Oakland house, purchase of townhouse in Walnut Creek, Contra Costa County.  
 Aug: Peter, Ophira & Ariel visit Kauai.  
 Oct: With younger brother Dan, attends to mother's homecare and last days in hospice (Wilcox Hospital, Lihue HI). Mother dies Oct 11<sup>th</sup>.  
 Nov-Dec: Confined to bed. Acupuncture sessions effective against sciatica. Discovers opera.



- 1999** Wife undergoes emergency surgery and begins yearlong recovery with major follow-up surgery. Madalon Zorn dies (SC).
- 2000** Feb 26<sup>th</sup> Bar Mitzvah of Ariel David Druch-Boffey, Temple Sinai, Oakland occasions celebration and reunion with family from Israel and back East & with friends from far and wide. Peter, Ophira & Ariel visit Barnes & Heidi during Thanksgiving week in Vermont. Visited by nephew Adam.
- 2001** Immersed in daily home practice, weekly classes, periodic seminars, and weeklong retreats in elective study of the Feldenkrais Method.
- 2004** Enrolls in 4-year professional training program at Feldenkrais Resource Center in Berkeley. Thanksgiving week with Barnes' family in Vermont.
- 2005** Son graduates high school with National Merit Scholar Award. With wife, summer visit to Vermont where Ariel works as counselor at summer camp where Uncle Barnes is Director. Son enrolls as music major at Porter College (UCSC).
- 2006** Completes 2-year study of theory and practice in the Feldenkrais Method and is authorized as a teacher of Awareness Through Movement (group classes to public).
- 2007** Substitute teaching Feldenkrais classes in recreation program.
- 2008** Completes full course of Feldenkrais Training and is authorized as a teacher of Functional Integration (group classes & private sessions). Recognized as a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner by the Feldenkrais Guild of North America. Retires from fulltime employment at PCS. Expands free-lance teaching in senior centers and retirement communities; fitness clubs and health centers.
- 2009** Terminates employment at PCS. Son graduates with multiple Honors from UCSC; son makes 9<sup>th</sup> trip to Israel with mother. Peter expands car camping throughout Northern California & Oregon.
- 2010** Returns to multiple manuscripts of unfinished novel. Begins 3+ years in the Embodied Life Mentorship Program (ELMP) created by Russell Delman, master Feldenkrais teacher. Cultivate free-lance work as Feldenkrais teacher including weekly sessions at Cancer Support Community in Walnut Creek (2010–17).
- 2012** Adds weekly Feldenkrais class at home studio to offerings.

- 2013** Finally completes first novel, entitling it TWO HALF BROTHERS OR SEPARATING OUT (2HBs).
- 2014** May: Self-publishes 2HBs.  
 June: Completes ELMP training.  
 July: Son marries Elizabeth Ashley Sullivan, Tomales Bay CA, July 19<sup>th</sup>.  
 Dec: Grandson Matthew Ashley Boffey born Dec 31<sup>st</sup>.
- 2015** Visited by mother- and sister-in-law.
- 2016** Jan-Feb: Retreats to rented cabin Green Springs Mountain, Ashland OR, to review private Journals extant from April 1987.  
 Summer: Breaks off further communications with younger brother Dan.  
 Fall: Begins composition of new novel conceived as four books to be printed in two companion volumes.
- 2017** Discontinues formal Feldenkrais teaching. Visits older brother in Vermont. Enters docent training program at Ruth Bancroft Garden (RBG), Walnut Creek. Revisited by mother- and sister-in-law. Son enters graduate school in Exercise Science in Orlando FLA.
- 2018** Begins as volunteer docent at RBG. Self-publishes Vol. I & II of THE THREE NAKED LADIES OF CLIFFPORT: A NOVEL (3NLs) dedicated to John G. & Dorothy D MacRae.
- 2020-21** Dec-Jan: Retreats to house-sit in Arcata CA to edit final manuscript of Vol. III, 3NLs.  
 Feb: Begins as volunteer Garden Ambassador at the University of California Botanical Garden, Berkeley.  
 May: Son earns doctorate & hires on at Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg KS.  
 Fall: Self-publishes Vol III, 3NLs dedicated to Robert O. Barnhart.
- 2022** Composes and self-publishes Book Six (Vol. IV) of 3NLs dedicated to Miriam Yakira Druch. Posts essay “ReReading THE PLAGUE [2020-22]” and fictious “RightCrafting Interview” on website. Discontinues as docent at RBG; continues as volunteer at UCBG. Thanksgiving week with Ophira & son’s family in Pittsburg KS.
- 2023** Begins composition of NOT ANY ONE THING: A MEMOIR OF SORTS, posting sections as the written material matures. Makes October visit to older brother & his family in Vermont. Younger brother Daniel dies in Georgia, November 19<sup>th</sup>.
- 2024** Pauses composition of his “sorta memoir” to enjoy spring and early summer car camping trips to North Coast, Trinity-Shasta NF, the North Sierra, all within the borders of

California. Older brother Barnes dies in Vermont, August 19<sup>th</sup>. Attends Memorial Service in Hanover NH. Resumes composition of NOT ANY ONE THING.

## **APPENDIX II: Correspondence from Jory Berkwitz**

In April 2024, Jory wrote up the follow recap of our cross-country roundtrip. When reconstructing the events of our trip, I could remember next to nothing and focused on what remained in my memory, perhaps because it mattered most to me; i.e. the meeting (or rather *non*-meeting) with my former girlfriend in Sausalito. Note that that particular incident did not factor into his recollection *and*—until he jogged my memory—all the details he recalled had been missing from mine. This seems another example of the relative subjectivity of memory (and the effects of substance abuse on a 17-yr-old "mind"—mine).

I think of our road trip to SF often. Sleeping out at night next to OHIO turnpike—cops waking us up with a flashlight. Taking the TR3 up to 105 mph. It almost blew up. Stopping for lunch in Brazil Indiana to get a burger—they wouldn't serve us because we weren't 21. Paying the toll at the Kansas Turnpike, where a nice old man said we were a long way from PA and wished us well. I said "Thanks, Pops" and laid rubber. Look who's "Pops" now. Getting an earache in the Rockies from the change in altitude and going to urgent care.

California was great. I had never been west of Pittsburgh in my life. Drove to Woodland to see my aunt, except she lived in Woodland Hills, 500 miles south. At least she gave us a steak dinner when we got there. I remember sleeping under a water tower somewhere near your old home. Am I right? The return trip a blur—driving nonstop from Laguna Beach to Amarillo, staying in a fleabag motel \$4. Then to New Orleans, ostensibly to see Tom Durivan at Tulane. Walking up to a few random freshmen asking, "Say, do you know a guy named Tom Durivan?" Blank stares. What were we thinking?

Without missing a beat, then off to Philly. You told me later you fell asleep at the wheel somewhere in Georgia. Glad you snapped out of it.

## **APPENDIX III: Correspondence from Theodore Enslin**

SW has touched upon those aspects of Ted Enslin's work and lifestyle which moved me to seek out his FORMS as the focus of my term paper in Kelly's class. FORMS I-V would not appear in any sort of book format until 1975 (Elizabeth Press) but, having heard the poet read from his ongoing "sequence[s]" and "long working[s]"—and with Kelly's encouragement—I gleaned what I could find in little magazines and obscure small press publications. Then, in response to my solicitations as editor of *The Lampeter Muse*, I hit the motherlode, receiving a large sheaf of FORMS in manuscript directly from the poet.

Typically succinct, even sparse, the following eight notes sent to me between 11/2/69 and 12/19/72 may be too short to be called “letters” yet meant a lot to me at the time. Even in their brevity, they signaled that my attention was being taken seriously. I display them here to suggest how much developmental nutrition can be had by a young writer hungry for useful knowledge, as well as to show a fine specimen of patience expressed from an elder toward a youth.

Typos and spelling are corrected; original layout and punctuation have been left intact. † indicates a short explanatory note.

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RFD #1, Temple, Maine 04984

11/2/69

Dear Peter Boffey,

Please forgive me the long silence. A summer I don't care to remember, but at least it's over, and I seem to have come through. If it's not too late, I'd like to send you a few things---possibly for the Muse, though certainly no pressure.

When you find time, have it, I'd like to see the paper you wrote for R.K.

Best,

Ted Enslin

\*

RFD 31, Temple, Maine 94984  
11/26/69

Dear Peter,

O.k. and herewith another slice of me---from FORMS, as you request. No sweat or tears---just if it appeals to you.

I think we'll forego some of the rigors of Maine this year. I have work to do elsewhere---mainly homeopathic. So, keep warm at Bard---or wherever.

best,

Ted Enslin

\*

RFD #1, Temple, Maine 04984  
12/10/69

Dear Peter,

Certainly. Hold Canto Harold as long as need be. p.304 tenth line from bottom should read 'account.' P. 309 bottom line 'despite' repetition is intentional, yes.

Ginsberg is undoubtedly still the man. I listen with sadness to the usual professors who now admit his existence, but don't understand why. Mumbling about a 'charismatic figure' but of course

Howard Nemerov is a much finer poet. That, verbatim, from UMP † where I read a week ago. Oh well.

I'll be looking for the fall Muse.

best,  
Ted

† presumably the University of Maine at Presque Isle

\*

RFD #1, Temple, Maine 04984  
1/13/70

Dear Peter,

No, I hadn't read the recent LM † ---many thanks. And if you see Erik Kiviat please tell him that I really liked his poem from the land of the crystal tree. Very good things throughout, but that stays with me.

Try-  
ing to absorb the fact that Olson is dead. It doesn't come real to me as yet.  
I might send you something else in a month or so.

best,  
Ted Enslin

† *The Lampeter Muse*

\*

RFD #1 Temple, Maine 04984  
3/5/70

Dear Peter,

You needn't worry about saying what you feel---straight. That never bothers me. We might disagree at times, but why not? Anyway, I'll give you these, and see whether they come through better for you.

We were at RK's  
during the end of your interim. Such a presence that man has. Much that was valuable to me.

Struggling now to get out of a pile of correspondence that's Deeper than Maine snow: i.e. deep.

best,  
Ted Enslin

\*

3/25/70

Dear Peter,

O.K. Years ago, I was very sensitive to reactions, particularly those that were adverse. Now, they sometimes amuse me, more often amaze, since the poems that one man feels not to have 'strength' (whatever that is) are the ones that appeal most strongly to someone else. All that I can do is to send

poems, or publish them, which at the moment, at least, seem worth it for me. I can't attempt to please anyone, nor will I. Just a statement of position. It may be that what I'm into now doesn't appeal to you---no sweat---as it happens.

best,  
Ted

\*

RFD #1, Temple, Maine 04984  
7/16/70

Dear Peter,

Thanks for the new LM. I do like the Kiviat and Bruce Mclelland most---at this reading. Later things change, often. Yr. own Hudson poem has a swing and breadth to which I respond, and with an eye to detail---as RWE † said to Asa Gray: 'Pay particular attention to the grasses.' And Asa did.

best,  
Ted Enslin

† Ralph Waldo Emerson

\*

12/19/72

Dear Peter Boffey,

Good to hear again through Jim Weil. Yes, but I have the accessibility to it (New England) and spend more time cursing its necessity than I should, I suppose. At the moment, I'd gladly be anywhere else. To come back, but I need a sabbatical.

And they weren't 'Father Bastards.' † They came to it all legitimately.

best,  
Ted Enslin

† 'Father Bastards' refers to a rather silly line in an ineffective poem I wrote referring to New England literary titans Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau immediately after viewing some of their manuscripts in a library at Amherst University. I hadn't meant to imply impertinence so much as my own frustration at my accomplishments compared to theirs. I foolishly send the half-cooked poem to Enslin and later wisely threw it away.

## **APPENDIX IV: Correspondence from Allen Mytkowicz**

Although neither strictly biographical nor autobiographical material, I am including selected passages from five lively long letters mailed to me between the fall of 1968 and February 1970. I have cobbled together excerpts in admiration of their rough and tumble rhetoric, charged action-language, bop prosody (as in run-on sentences!), and Allen's lyrical and philosophical observations. I borrow from the letters as a landscape designer might borrow scenery from the surroundings, not

as thievery but in acknowledgement that surroundings can be an important part of a well-placed garden—sometimes the best.

These passages can be read as a sort of bittersweet counterpoint to my existence. While I was at Bard, Allen was in Eldorado, Saskatchewan near the border of the Northwest Territories. While I was enjoying the relative luxuries and comforts of my last two years of life on the country campus, with winter and summer breaks passed in New York City and interludes in Katonah, Allen was evading the draft by traveling underground to Canada and remained there in exile.

I have not been able to track down my erstwhile friend's whereabouts or gather information about his doings since that winter of 1970 when last I heard from him, but his letters remain—for me—more than merely a facet of my “self-portrait, with what surrounds.” They are also evidence that there was more than one way to lose our best and brightest native sons—and friends—during the Vietnam War.

Brackets indicate short explanatory notes; spelling has been corrected; original punctuation has been left intact.

---

... my time of paranoia in Campus Land [UMass, Amherst]. Like I used to sleep on the roof and have secret hiding places in the cellar and a knapsack ready and I would run and hide in a little dale.... I always depended upon them not shooting as I dashed into the brush. One day I snuck back [to home address] and O no here comes our friendly mailman down the street—trapped—so I remembered what squirrels do when they don't want to be seen—around the old elm keeping it between him and me. It was desperate. I wouldn't even show up at the Drake [bar] even though I had gone beyond that scene it was such a simple pleasure. And the war dreams: I thought of mining the whole area and have everything electrically controlled and have all kinds of ammunition and when they finally called in the National Guard and the jets to strafe the place I would duck down a manhole with a tunnel leading out of the area. The dreams continued for some time—even in Canada—I learned a lot about the psychology of a hunted man. Weird dreams like the FBI would be after me (In fact they were: they showed up at my mother's place and my brother's wedding) and that I had finally made it to Canada and took refuge for the night in a farmhouse only to awake the next morning on the Vt.–Mass. border (if you never thought of the two of them ever having one, there was one that night). Well at the time I was raising hawks, Goshawks, that I had stolen from a nest as a rightly insane mother Gosh fought me off, the hawks names were Clovis and Hypolyta and could eat so I had to play mother (found the nest on my way to poach trout at the Pelham country club—beautiful fish and delicious with pancakes the next morning which I had every morning for the 2 odd months that I lived in Pelham [Hampshire County, Mass], Linda and me.... So every morning I would go out and nail a half a dozen chipmunks which wasn't enough so I would buy steak and chicken guts down in Hadley [Mass] which got to be prohibitive and cutting into the Canadian fund though I was working for Old Man MacLeod who I think I told you

was a good friend of Frost and MacLeish but very conservative but very good at heart, even took the hawks to work on a job for Northfield School for Girls, so it got to be that I would wake up at 5:00am and go out on Rt. 9 and pick up dead rabbits, snakes, frogs, and squirrels and birds that were hit by cars—well anyway these massacred forms would appear in my dreams as the FBI and by the time I got to Canada I was ready for some rest and I didn't care how long I worked or at what wages. First job, designing props and stagehanding for the Feux Follets at Expo Theatre—

\*

... worked as a gardener for an old white haired man in Williamsburg [Mass] named MacLeod. This old man (82–83), I said to myself when I first saw him and knew nothing of him, by the way he talks, walks, looks at things, thinks, and lives, this man is a poet. Well he was a poet, although he hadn't written anything, but he could twist words and make them ring. MacLeod and R. Frost were good friends and often met at A. MacLeish's (a friend of MacLeod from childhood) in Conway [New Hampshire]. I worked for MacLeod for some time and we enjoyed each other's company and I [illegible] Frost learned a lot about trees from MacLeod.... I was supposed to go to MacLeish's place to fix a stone wall and clean an old [ineligible]. The one thing I really feel bad about is this. I lied to MacLeod and I always felt it impaired my communication [illegible]! MacLeod was an old Republican—a hawk on Vietnam—otherwise ok.—We didn't speak politics and I can forgive an old man. So, one day, I called my mother, she told me, the FBI were at her place and at my brother's wedding—I was frightened—I had planned to work a week or 2 more—I needed the money; but now I would have to leave and soon, precious little things were discarded and left behind. —I bid Hypolyta [pet goshawk] farewell in the Berkshires—left behind about \$60, told MacLeod I had a job in Washington State and would have to leave immediately and wanted my pay. He bade me a warm farewell—though disbelieving himself, but with Linda and I dressed up in suits it was convincing. And this is an example of all the loose ends and dishonesty I had to live with. Linda knew and I knew what we were doing and what had to be done. Stupidities, stupidities—but, it's getting better                      good-night, Allen

\*

... I had some very nice things going with spray can paint when I was in Montreal and had Expo Theatre workshop as my studio. Sprayed & etched & lacquered. One is called Looking Homeward which is good—little art (watercolors) now—much geology. I like Canada: things aren't uptight here, government is a little sloppy, there are Indians, roughneck miners, cowhands, frontiersmen, inspiring mountains, water, air, rocks, space; I feel familiar with all Canada, and think nothing of distances. I dig Montreal—it's a good city; lots of [illegible] and theatres and arts and restaurants, a real gem; Toronto—Hogtown (Armpit of the Nation) not bad I used to go to the St. Lawrence Market and the Marketo Judeo [sic] every Sat, and there is a good Chinese restaurant below the university, Yorktown isn't what it's cracked up to be, but there is a place called The Little Victoria (Public Enemy #1) that has Arty flicks—saw a lot of movies in Toronto. Also friends there. Edmonton—cowntown; Calgary oil, cattle, the Dalles of the North. Yeah, I like it here—though



Eldorado is isolated and we haven't a radio, tv, or record player (as of yet). I need the rest. I need a lot of time to grow—or outgrow the oppressive shit that weighed so heavy on me—I want to move, sway like the tall spruces and disappear amongst the people of this land. Allen

P.S. There are very few Canadians up here mostly immigrants Eastern & Northern Europe. Allen

\*

Well it's beautiful and big and fucking cold in the winter and hot and dry in the summer and Edmonton is the poorest excuse I've seen for a city. Put Springfield Mass. in the middle of a prairie with wheat fields on all sides with big granaries with signs saying Jesus Saves (Jesus Saves Green Stamps) and that's Edmonton. The food is terrible except for the Chinese stuff which along with the service is out of sight—Canada does have good Chinese food restaurants and when you go you know because you look around and see all those yellow [sic] faces. I'm big on Chinese food, Linda cooks it well too, and big on Chinese tea, I've got about 8 varieties and I've written a description on what each is good for. So Edmonton may be worth it after all. But like it closes after 9:30. And it happened one night that Linda ordered spaghetti and meat balls and like my idea of spaghetti was so drastically different than that shit they gave us I had to get up and leave. Again: our images against reality. Like the barbecued hamburger I ordered at the U-City Hotel. Do you know what they gave me? A regular hamburger that looked like it was boiled with pizza sauce over it. Amazing. Too freaking much. Like carry that to an extreme. Menu: Fried Lake Trout. What do you get: A piece of toasted Wonder bread with fish juice on it. Breakdown. Or like this Check immigrant who tells me the Germans are gentleman killers or that we have a saying in our country: Shut up and smile. So, I tell him up against the wall and smile. Well we do have a little fun up here. Almost a year without grass and then bang I score big in the city like the country cousin come to see the city cousin and I'm loaded and so what if it's a little high like in and out again for six months and man I'm shopping for supplies. Spring is beautiful up here. Furry crocuses—wild everywhere even before the snow melts. Nice weather now 70 but March was like -30°F. The ice doesn't get off Beaverlodge Lake until 1<sup>st</sup> week in June, but you can usually find open water in mid-May to fish. Swimming is good in late summer and I grow a few vegetables and got to start building swallow nesting boxes for they arrive about May 4 and there is a severe housing shortage. Did you ever see ptarmigan: like they come on like giant snowflakes and their tracks are like fallen yarrow sticks. Did you ever see a Raven at least 200 up here and they got something going: highly organized. Loons nest on a lot of the lakes; they can be approached within 15 feet. Also nesting Golden Eagles in the neighborhood. I actually saw four Starlings (one of my favorite birds) Apr 18 like honestly they should be given the Freedom Award. The Thrushes (Grey Cheeked which by the way nest on Greylock) sing like bells all night and like from now on it doesn't really get dark. Place is swarmed with Yellow Warblers, nesting, and Myrtles. Also Harris, White Crowned Sparrows, Chickadees and man would I love to see a Great Grey Owl: like now I can't believe they exist. Birding is something that drives me along with the rocks. I don't know what to do when I step out into the bush: bird or rock.

\*

We've got a small film society up here but everyone says they want moves with an ending OK. Anyway the movie I am making (not really but I enjoy talking about ideas) ... like the book I'm not going to write but will tell you about it no its not a book but a TV show with no commercials (breaks). The program is all commercials. The guy, let's say a detective a mission impossible type on a mission, the clothes he's wearing, the car he's driving the gas he's getting the food he's eating the chick he has with the clothes she's wearing the cigs they are smoking the beer they are drinking the hotel they're in the jets they fly the guy they're after, the article or deal he's pulled off the whole scene would be a commercial just like local radio they have commercials and then they have commercials for the records they are selling. I don't have a TV and I'm not getting one and fuck the news too because that's a vicarious thrill and addictive.

\*

Here they express themselves in different forms that I cannot yet fully read. My guesses and conjectures as to the whole arrangement and modes of life of individuals to the whole are at best weak and I have a haunting feeling that I will never know most of them as I have known the ones I was raised with. Will I ever know the caribou or moose as I know a cow, and how about the wolverines, wolf, lynx, and Great Gray Owl, and the numerous warblers that may wander this way when before, a silhouette, a flash of color, a single note, a track, a hair, and I knew the animal, where he had been and where he was off to. Or a drumlin that would make a good orchard or cemetery, or a wood where I could expect to find princess pine for a wreath and where I could find pussy willows on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day of March and where on April 1<sup>st</sup> it wouldn't be uncommon to find a Hermit Thrush.

But this familiarity will come with time and many walks and I have confidence in my observation powers—I can still remember or make up ? the details of the landscape and predict what it will look like in moonlight, fog, brilliant sun, haze, rain, and approaching winter. Already I have ideas and ambitions too. To know the North and the rock that underlies the shield that has its own story and if I am good I can sit down on some hilltop or high in some spruce and dream of the events that welded this continent together over a period since the beginning of time— To proceed from the beginning and follow the changes that took place often deep in the earth or ancient oceans and volcanoes some 2,000 million years ago and at the end of my dream which is death I am one with the earth and universe..... It amazes me to see the little chickadees. I am standing my back to the wind, -30; he, unaware is busy feeding on ? 4' away. Not even an ounce against these hostile forces of cold, wind, and [eligible]. Now it becomes apparent although it sounds like triteness—some of my insights are into things that are known, accepted, commonplace, everyday, that strike home to me suddenly in their full weight and meaning. This is terrible, Peter, because I am not going to tell you more because it really isn't important.

\*

... I am working as senior geologist for Eldorado Nuclear Limited mining u308 and living in Eldorado Camp. Uranium City 6 miles W of here is a typical mining town; not much everyone either works in the mine or in support industries, even the Indian prostitutes. There are miners like Haywire Steve, Hollywood Mike, Millhole Pete, FBI, Yah-Yah etc. I even owed money to the Company Store! The country on all sides is beautiful of course and Linda and I have a pretty comfortable home and I am active in the Film Society—Drama Club and work is most engaging and the money is not bad and I am something of a dude in this Canadian version of horse racing and like I dig mining and we do some pretty fancy things and I get 4 weeks' vacation with pay and I still get ideas and I don't have to look straight and mostly wear boots and jeans under 30 lbs of clothing and all in all Linda I have come a long ways a long ways [sic] from what we used to know as life and community and social groupings to the Frontier.

\*

... As I walked along the road from camp to mine, up a hill and parallel to a spruce covered scarp bordered by alder and willow thickets where three big snowshoe hares hide out and ptarmigan unconcerningly feed, a twittering and jingling reached my ears and a little flock of [illegible] action caught my eye in the low alders and birches. Finches, for sure—but what kind? And without field glasses, I'm lost! I quietly approached, saying they were Artic wanderers who have never seen a human. Simultaneously—like an electric message—the flock shot up into the sky above the hill and were out of sight. Redpolls, my first guess with lingering doubt. Finches are finches. I tried to reconcile—what difference their name; that never does for me; this thing has to be settled. On my return two of these birds were feeding high in a birch. I walked slowly to the base of the tree. The light was bad. The sun was down. I prayed the little birds would venture to the lower limbs. Then out of the sky the flock rained down all around me at arm's length—like Francis de Assisi. Hoary Redpolls.

Anywhere you go the Ravens follow or are there—they're ubiquitous and they love to gork people. And the other day when I visited a drill site on the ice up a place called Francis Lake I understood why they call a Whiskey Jack a Whiskey Jack—the drunken jay went crazy calling spitchew. Thinking of doing some ice fishing (but to chop 3ft of ice) maybe I'll find an Indian fishing and buy a trout. I like fish—I'm trying to change my diet to nonfat foods—no eggs—no bacon, steaks, butter etc. Living on fish, cereal, rice, and Chinese-like foods (we have a Chinese cook in U-city!) chicory and tea—no substitute for tobacco (pipe & cigar) and have a 2" Cannabis reaching for sunlight.

\*

Beautiful Country up here—plenty of it—coyotes in the back yard, bears up the rd. and trout like the Pelham country club ain't never going to see. Can't say much for the town—Uranium City—though I live in camp 6 miles away and 15 minute walk to the mine. Actually owed money to the company store before I started working. Well Edmonton is the nearest city 450 miles from here and we fly in and out on a DC4 or sometimes a 3 and like our pilots got all kinds of balls that you

never see on commercial airlines—like they've only missed getting in 2 times in the last 5 years and that was due to mechanical trouble and they come in every day twice and sometimes thrice and they don't have all this fancy radar like they fly up in a blizzard from Edmonton because they got to get the food in and the uranium precipitate out and when they get here the wind is blowing 40 mph and they can't find the runway so they duck down 4 or 5 times to find it and then they put her down and the plane does a skid at the end of the runway and it's all in a day's work and they load up and they're off again. Like these guys were miners before they were pilots.

\*

Old Massachusetts, the University finally caught up to me and sends me this unsolicited Alumni Monthly which is an atrocity sheet with pictures of higher and higher buildings and lists and lists of guys who got decorated in Vietnam for shooting some geek's ass off and finally the pitch along with a letter saying how they're not cow towing to campus hooligans. And then after no response from me, I get another letter much blunter saying cough up and put A.J. Mytkowiz on the list of contributors. The fuckers. List. Fuck their tyrannical lists. If this mining show ever pays off big time I'm going to be a Guy Grand. The fuckers can't get it through their heads that I didn't leave the States because I like the fishing northern Saskatchewan has to offer.

\*

... and there comes a time to say fuck this bullshit—bless the boy who walks away let him eat some different coloured [sic] shit it's good for him....

... entering Canada is not difficult if that is what you decide and if you want to become an exile and if you do you will be an exile and learn the meaning of that state of existence. Canada is not the USA it is quite a different country and it is not a country where the real action of the 20th century is happening. Socially there is a 15 yr. lag....

Well this goes on, but WHO speaks about animals these days except in the context of ecology and pollution. Boy, I can get down on all of them except my HONEY whom with I am very much in love and like everything else it goes through changes with each thing bringing us closer and closer and closer and deeper and deeper and into AWARENESS of each other and Eldorado hasn't been a bad place to do it so that's what I'm into and that's the way it goes and all this shit took place since the days have been getting longer. It's been capt. Allen and capt. Linda and the USONENESS and it's like this I am out to Edge City—chasing a dream, and I ain't never coming back... And like me and she might get lost finding ourselves, but we'll never find ourselves lost, cause without her I'm a ruptured Apollo drifting in space and cause without her I'm just a telephone pole in some small country N. ENG. town that dogs piss on when they pass. Like my life has taken on dimensions I'd never dreamed. It's all a sweet numbness in my mind running around and around thinking about all I've found.

One more Aesop fable Peter: Watch out for PIGS with super PIG tactics. Love , Allen

## APPENDIX V: Correspondence from Clayton Eshleman

By the end of 1970, I had sent Clayton Eshleman at least three sets of poems for possible publication in *Caterpillar* although we never met one on one. In his first and subsequent responses, *Caterpillar's* editor/publisher proved to be a worthy opponent and excellent educator. His original grammar and spelling are retained in the excerpts below.

A postcard (dated 14 July 70) from NYC had been addressed to the LAMP. MUSE in Annandale and forwarded to me % Bergman 3320 NE 30<sup>th</sup> Ave Portland. He wrote that the spring *Lampeter Muse* was “a damn good issue” and asked of me “a group of shorter poems to read for CAT.” I must have previously sent him—unsolicited—a longer piece. I followed suit and his second reply (dated Aug 16 1970) was kind and candid:

Dear Peter,

There are flashes of poetry in most of what you send, but in my sense of it, reading you, the work is not working as poems yet. I kind of identify with you in a particular way, that is, of having a lot to write out that must be written out to find out where the poetry is, and you may have some hellish years before you before the work starts to be rooted in itself. The alternative, of trying for less than your life to make successful poems – and it is an alternative – does not seem to be the way you are choosing. Nor was it for me (as it was say for Cid Corman or Wallace Stevens). So – I am going to hold off for the time being and lets see what happens. When I feel more substance in your work, if I am in a position to, I will be happy to print it.

All best to you, (signed Clayton)

I had never received such a thoughtful and considerate rejection letter before. At least someone of merit and industry was paying attention to my work! Undaunted, I sent off another batch of recent poetry. His second generous, insightful response was dated 28 Dec 1970:

Dear Peter,

...

There continues to be spots of energy and grasp in your work, and as I think I wrote you before, continue to write out what you have to and don't think much about publication.

From the Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

Isiah answered: “I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception, but my senses discovered the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote.”

Let me show you a couple places in your work I dug, and then I will say a couple dark things about it.

... o let me go on, let me  
be a phallic tower talking, since when  
did I have this strength of lion's loins ?

(great urgency comes thru there, but then you don't do what you say you gonna, you still, to play with above figure, care for the consequences. I mean, after all the feeling in the above 3 lines,

dance  
into dawn : days and nights  
are one continuum of waking, sleeping, stations  
in the dream

is pretty blah).

The other section that comes to mind comes to mind without some of your lines it; third from last page of the marriage poem.

when  
my prick  
slips into you like an otter  
entrance into water then (not "when" do I hear here)  
we are that free.

I mean, that is pretty exact registration, as most of the work is NOT. Most of the work is much more referential than registrative (same problem in gigantic scale in Pound). Probably Kelly influence in that, and, if you want my sense of it, it is something to be kicked out. Not RK (he is a fine fine poet) but that LINT picked up from him. I mean, like "gnosis of my New England auto-stop" is funny! But you dont intend that do you? In language it is funny. As thot it may be accurate etc., but LANGUAGE LANGUAGE LANGUAGE.

A powerful poem shd  
be able to come out of the Homosexual Poem material, but (again) maybe not for  
sometime. Don't write the power out of the experience when you are not up to  
confronting  
the experience.

Hoping you are well.  
Best wishes to you and Jill,  
(signed Clayton)

I must have sent one last round of unexceptional poetry, because he yet again graciously replied while referring me to Rilke's LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET and including in his envelope the draft of his essay on same, which I have regretfully misplaced.

11 Jan. 1971

dear Peter,

well, thank you for such a kind letter. I guess yours and a few others from time to time balance out the flak and fury I get from people by talking straight to them, I got a furious letter a few weeks ago from a fellow in NYC who I had written that one of his poems he sent to Caterpillar had some feeling in it – I think I sd: it shows you have some feeling in you. He sd: how dare you say that to me! Really surprised me, as I thot I had sd something positive to him. (tho I didn't take any of his poems, and for people who are more on the make than in a making, publication is The thing – “on the make” funny, I just saw ice there, a person skating around on another's making --)

Yr work enclosed. End of the homosexual poem strikes me as still firm as I read thru it again. Starting with “the mirrors snap” –no, not there. Better: here is what has resonance and a real understanding for me in the way the poem works out:

the man  
is free to move yet chooses  
to stay where he is

--- learning to inhabit the poem.  
moving there. no longer afraid  
to be fucked by woman

(I mean, I think the last line if you really, IF YOU really understand what you are saying is powerful enuf to drop the “that” from – tho by dropping the that I might be cutting into yr sense of particularity.

An afterthought: what is the difference between your last line and no longer afraid to fuck woman . ? or “embrace” woman – always a problem with fuck since it carries so much hostility yet has still more energy / act in it than the word “embrace”.

Also will enclose an essay I wrote this fall and had a few copies xeroxed. Will be a little book this spring.

Be well!

(signed Clayton)

That is the last communication from Clayton I have found in personal archives or remember receiving, and I have no copies of whatever bad verse written in that period I had sent him. Our exchange was effectively suspended. I had much more to learn in living and in writing, not a little along the lines that he has indicated, and “some hellish years before [me] before the work starts to be rooted in itself.”

## APPENDIX VI: Manuscript fragments (from archives)

The Talk (1974)

- You ever see this before?
- What is it, decorative sculpture?
- The Ludovici Throne in Rome. Look at this modeling here, the way the breasts swell upwards off the ribcage. The cloth is like another membrane of skin. There she is: Venus, Aphrodite, “Nascita di Venere.” The two midwives are Love and Desire.
- Want some honey in your tea?
- Sure. But what do you think? Isn't it beautiful?
- Tell you the truth, Steven? I'm a little tired of this. I mean, I think there's some clandestine sexual thing going on between you and all these naked women in your art books.
- Oh, Julia, that is so...! You and your sick-ill-logical interpretations of everything. Can't you just once....
- No, I mean it and you know what I mean. Here. Listen. I have something I want to talk to you about.
- You're not pregnant, are you?
- NO, Steven, I'm not pregnant. Something else.
- What?
- I think I want to live alone for a while. Did you just hear me?
- Yeah.
- Well? Come on. Don't clam up on me and make me feel guilty or something.
- No no no, it's just... Are you really serious?
- YES, I'm serious. Can't I be serious? We've talked about a trial separation before. More than once. Now'd be a good time. What'd you just start to say?
- I don't know
- So? How do you feel about it?
- Like now?
- Yes, like now. I want to know how you feel like right now.
- No no no, I mean, you want to move out now? I'm not moving out of here just like that!
- I didn't mean you'd move out. It'd be me. As soon as I hear back from Britt.
- You're serious, aren't you?
- Yes.
- Deadly serious.
- Oh all right: deadly serious. I need time to myself. Maybe we settled down too soon.
- Is that so? I wasn't aware we'd settled down at all.
- Oh God, Steven. How can you be so cold?
- What do you want from me, a warm hug? No, you want my permission, right? My blessing. Is that it?
- No, that's not it.



- Julia. I wasn't exactly expecting this first thing Tuesday morning. You know it's hard to figure out everything that goes on between us. I mean, it is hard for me to sort out our stuff from certain images of Woman that...
- That's just what I mean. I can't make space for your image of Woman....
- Images. At least give me that. Images.
- OK. Your repertoire of images of Woman.
- Julia, I'm trying to tell you how I feel, all right?
- So? Tell me.
- What?
- Oh God, I am so tired of your intellectualized bullshit! I'm going.
- Wait, where? Where you going?
- To Britt's.
- Right! To Britt's. When the going gets tough....
- Bullshit! The going's been tough for me for a long time.
- Wait a minute. Julia, don't pack a bag, come on. How're you going to afford it? Hey, that's a valid question. How are you?
- You jerk. You think I haven't been making my own money. I'm going.
- So GO!

\*

*Trial separation sure. So now she's liberated. Ought to be writing this down. Writers who don't write, painters who don't paint. How many times have I heard that but what does she wouldn't know a real artist if she married one and he wrote her. I don't see how you can be so cold. You think that was cold baby wait till I drink my Freon nightcap I can be one mean dada process sir yes sir o way up here in the stratosphere won't you hear me holler real loud and clear hey Julio hey Julio this is your astronaut Stephano. So she's splitting this scene to pursue her fucking feminist dream. Maybe I will miss her after a while. Will there be a big wave of pain? Your wife wants to live alone. I think she means alone. I have something I want to talk to you about then WHACK off with my head goes rolling along the floor and I'm right away thinking this is all good raw material for a story. A place of her own no a room of her own. I better stay away from that pipe are you trying to have a crisis or something. Sucking on another bowl who cares. Blue smoke curlicues. Cat scratching screen door. One thing follows another. Your wife wants to live alone so maybe she won't be your fucking wife for long. O mine eyes have seen the gory of statistical columns. You can only get so close to your real feelings then when did she drop that bomb on me. Like you constantly shift to various levels of vulnerability. My intellectualized bullshit? And I kept waiting for her confess to an affair with some other guy. Ryan. That'd be Ryan. She couldn't even take a good look at this Venus on a half shell foaming away. Now she's foaming away in another direction away from me. No wonder she didn't like other night I rubbed up against her in bed she didn't like that at all. So Julia dear. Aren't we even good for one grand goodbye fuck. You shouldn't be thinking that but you are. She wouldn't even be there I'd be fucking my fantasy. Okay kitty kitty come in god it's like spring out here. I'm not doing another veggie garden if she's not here. Levels of*

vulnerability. *That's a weak spatial analogy or metaphor or something. What are those primroses she potted up. Well she's sure been taking care of business before she goes unless she plans to take those with her too. I wonder if she's balling Ryan. You know she's not going to love I mean live like a nun. Maybe she's getting it on with Britt too. Black cat gestalt green grass in porch light. Maybe I'll move out of this damned neighborhood everybody always watching everyday o nobody knows anything about what's going on with us but they'll find out. Some news spreads like flu. God I'm hungry. That undergrad waitress comes on around six quits about ten. Around sex. Beautiful body to her smiles at me every damn time. Soon as I brushed up against Julia she didn't like that at all. Breeze. Smoke goes this way that way hash clouds writing the sky right. Witches rising the sky. I hope she get out of my face right away GO GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT then I can get to work set my hand on the page is all that counts. One two three four she don't love you anymore. Five six seven eight nine, gee I'll miss you now and then. The story of Steven's divorce. Capital S capital D. What story. The story you're going to write you thought wasn't going to happen. The divorce or the story. O we'll build a bungalow big enough for two walla walla walla big enough for two writers who don't write what she doesn't know about it could fill a fucking book. A nest out in the West and let the rest of the hash clouds pass by. Go in there and write something down right now. And let the rest of the whirled go by. I hear music when there's no one here. I see stars at night when I drink beer. Born in the wrong error I should've been hatched full bloom in a Leopold pond on a lily with a hookah to float upon. Into the spotlight. Ladies and gentleman tonight we are proud to present County Tenor direct from the old sod singing some of your favorite tunes from his very own selection of Original Songs of the Young and Newly Separated. General applause. Silence. Left right left right left right my gal left me in old Eugene without a scheme to chase her dream left left left.*

\*

- Leave that pizza alone and listen to me. You made me feel like a clown. Don't you even listen to me anymore?
- Don't raise your voice.
- Then stop diddling with that pizza and talk to me. That's why we're meeting, right?
- Yeah....
- Trial separation. Who're we trying to kid? Maybe I'm being paranoid or something but you're being blind. Talking like that to other people? At least do it behind my back. I mean, you're always telling me to get in touch with my feelings. So I felt like a clown taking those things to Britt's.
- Aren't you blowing things up a little?
- But I did. You act like maybe I didn't or shouldn't. You deny the fact that I feel the things I do feel when I do tell you.
- O come on.
- No. I think you enjoyed it, like putting me down.
- I didn't make you feel like a clown, Steven, you did. Anyway I can tell you've been drinking. When did you start drinking in the afternoon? Do you think it helps all the hassles we're going

through? Britt's been divorced, twice, for goodness sake. What's her housemate's name, Pauline? She's living apart from her husband for a while.

- You make it sound like some sociological metric or something.

- Well, we're not exactly the first.

- No, we are. I mean I'm an individual and this is the first time for me to get a divorce or whatever we're doing. And you're an individual, Julia, and as far as everybody else is concerned just fuck 'em. We are the first. You act like we're subjects in some social science study. Or maybe examples in one of your women's magazine.

- We'd like to be the first. You'd like to be an individual.

- What?

- Never mind.

- No, Julie, what'd you just say?

- Do you want any more of this?

- Wait a second. What'd you say?

- Do you want any more of this pizza or take it home?

- NO, I don't want any more pizza and will you just listen to me?

- You're not saying anything new, Steven.

\*

*I could've just hit her really hard just once no that's crazy talk. What am I doing talking to myself get outside the screen door BANG is the cat in or out tough shit kitty wherever you are. Ahh a full moon. Alte dame shine excellently bright. So is she enjoying our b.s. trial separation with another man? Go ahead and ask her no you fool you don't want to know. Maybe she's already been to bed with Ryan. Think of me at all making love to him? O that's crazy what you're thinking. Shaking your head as if this shouldn't be happening. As if this couldn't happen. But it is. That room they do it in. The bed they share. O Jesus you're jealous as hell and you don't even know for sure god I'm getting hot again it's not normal. My hands look red my god my skin is peeling off it's cracking go inside look in the light BANG. No it isn't you're just hotter than hell. No your face feel your face it's burning it's flaking off I know it is go to the mirror it feels like paint it's not. It's not flaking off now cool it you're just jealous. You've got to let her go. She'll never come back you know you can't love someone you stopped loving before but you might love someone new. Me too but who? Someone kissing her now. Someone else watching her come with her eyes rolling up under her eyelids closed. You married her and now you'll never even touch her SHIT A WHOLE COAT OF SKIN IS BURSTING INTO FLAMES UNDER MY CLOTHES I KNOW IT IS BURNING ME UP GO MAN GO BUT WHERE E.R?*

## APPENDIX VII: Correspondence from Catherine Rhodes

Catherine's letters postdate my years in Santa Cruz, but I here share passages of their highly charged prose. The challenge: to extract gold from ore, for her prolixity rivals my own! In order to let her own words carry across her keen observational skills, her visceral experience of the natural world, and her telling insights into people (including herself and sometimes me!), I suppress parts and bare others, by necessity violating the integrity of her communications, I'm afraid.

My rationale: to omit oft-belabored contingency planning, a constant juggling of incompatible opportunities at jobs, schools, and geographical relocations; to condense detailed reports of interactions with a vast network of family and friends; to skip recitations of medical and financial challenges; to drop descriptions of the chores and tasks of construction projects. I also avoid exposing revelations of her intimate love life best left in private, not to posterity.

The lion's share of this correspondence was addressed and sent to my wife, Ophira, and myself, where we lived in 1984 on Kibbutz Ein-HaShofet in Northern Israel, letters written while Catherine was a residential caretaker on the 4,000-acre Big Creek Reserve in *el pais del sur grande* in 1984 (her second extended period of work-in-residence there). In a postscript to her letter of July 18th, she made the following request; evidently foreseeing the value of revisiting her chronicle at a later date:

P.S. Could you please keep my letters for me? I've no time to keep a journal for the most part. If I do have time to write, I'd much rather write to you both than to myself. If they get in the way, you can always mail them back to me.

*Merci beaucoup, Catherine*

I also cite from two earlier missives: one from Arranmore Island, Ireland (1981), a classic epistle home from an American woman (aged 30) of Irish descent; and a second whopper (using every line of ten yellow legal-size sheets) mailed from Anchorage, Alaska (1983)—with at least one zinger for Little Bo-Pete!

It would be remiss of me not to credit all her letters as sources of inspiration, and some heavy borrowing of details, while I was creating both **NHBs** and **3NLs**. Elise's journey south of Monterey (in search of her father); Katie's vagabondage (transposed from Catherine's Ireland and Alaska to the Maritime Provinces of Canada); Paul's travels (*passim*)—all these examples and others compel me to make a belated acknowledgement of my debt to Catherine's correspondence, an acknowledgement I inadvertently omitted in the addendum to both those books; my own excuse is that these influences were subliminal.

All spellings, punctuation, etc. are transcribed here as she wrote them, obviously sometimes in haste and under challenging conditions. The writing materials themselves reflect the myriad traits and colorful features of their writer's personality: all manner of paper (onion skin, construction paper, aerograms, pastel and watercolor stock) was typed on or written across in her animated

cursive in a variety of fountain pen inks; the assortment of envelopes is likewise wide-ranging. This variegation mirrors Catherine—the wild, woolly, daring, childlike and childish, sophisticated and naïve, restive and ecstatic, reactive and responsive, Romantic and melo-operatic, irrepressibly lovable person I knew her to be.

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December 6, 1981, Aranmore Island Ireland

... I have hitch-hiked from Limerick to the County of Donegal & north of it, back down to Burtonport & took a fishing boat to Aranmore Island. There's a rough & wild beauty to this place and a primitiveness I admire. I can't imagine what it would be like to live here in Ireland. But seeing it the way I am, I am taken by the outgoing people—they are the friendliest people I have ever seen. Everyone comes up & talks to you. I feel very safe here hitch-hiking alone. I have walked a lot, as well. I've been in very remote places where there's been no traffic at all. Up north near Sheep's Haven & Hornehead Bay people are not so ready to pick you up, as it is closer to "the troubles" and there is more fear & paranoia—understandably so.... It is a poor country here but no one thinks of themselves as being poor. They all think they are lucky to live in such a beautiful place and wouldn't leave it. The countryside is spectacular...

The cities are another matter—or from what I have seen so far. Limerick—tarnished and industrial. Apparently everything is central in Dublin—so other towns have never really gotten the opportunity to develop on their own. They are parodies of real cities—they have the dirt & grime of commercialized areas—but none of the character or conveniences of a true city. I may be surprised—Galway may be different. It is so funny though, as I approach another town, the driver will tell me "Oh, Sligo is a lovely town".

I also wish I had come to Ireland ten years ago when I was first in Europe. I think it would have helped me better understand my parents, grandparents, etc. I feel like I am home here but without the painful closeness of family non & miscommunication. I am able to observe the way people relate to each other here without being brought in, effected and hurt by it. There are so many similarities & parallels I see here to my own family. Everywhere I look, I see people that could pass for my brothers, sisters or close relatives. Sometimes people here think I am from Dublin. All the names—O'Hara, Donnelly, Donovan, O'Malley, Sullivan, Slattery, Rooney, Fitzpatrick, Durkin, etc. are names of families that I grew up with—went to school, went to the same church, lived in my parish, etc. Many people in Ireland have a sister or cousin or aunt in "the States".

... I could go on and on.

---

July 1983, Anchorage Alaska

... I have many letters in me.

... spent much time with my Mother [in Richmond VA] & we became good, close friends after many years of her being essentially afraid of who I was, what I stood for & her bewilderment of

my way of life, morals, politics, etc. Her familiarity with me through some time spent with me showed her that I was not, in fact, from another planet & she grew comfortable with me—opened up....

I have just taken a 30 mile or more hike from Crow Pass to Eagle River, meeting a black bear en route, fording icy glacial, swift rivers and streams, traversing glaciers and scree—reminding me of what I have seen of the Himalayas—& then descending into meadows of wildflowers of columbine, Nootka Lupine, wild blue geraniums, fireweed, cow's parsnip, monk's hood & many, many more. I took this hike on 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday with my friend B.B. It was spectacular & full of surprises & encompassed about 5 different terrains....

Alaska is a whole other story. I was shocked by Anchorage when I arrived here—in the middle of “Spring Breakup”—gritty, gray dismal—a bleak city, suffering from “recovery architecture” after the Big Quake in 1964. A planner's nightmare—victim of leap frog development. A Boom Town.... After about three weeks, I just had to look at it like a foreign country, in order to make it a positive experience & appreciate its uniqueness. I had to try to be a little detached (hard for me) & not respond so strongly to everything.

...I'm afraid that I am an adventurer at heart & feel reluctant to change my ways... I think it is brave, unselfish and curious that you are seriously contemplating making your home there [Israeli kibbutz]. I understand & identify with your desire for the elements of a community to match your needs. But with your self-admitted high principles/standards and impatience at imperfections, I should think it would probably be very difficult for you.

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March 19, 1984, Santa Cruz

...I promised myself that I would mail this off tomorrow. I arrived here as darkness fell on St. Patrick's Day. I've been meeting w/ friends & storing my things in the attic at Delaware St. I'm still healing—mostly my spirits are good but at times I feel low & tired & impatient w/ myself. I go off to Big Sur tomorrow. The road just opened to locals. I'm very much looking forward to being & working there. Thanks for the letter from Israel. I'm glad things are going so well....

---

May 1, 1984

I hiked 15 miles the other day, up & down steep canyons—to the warm springs, cold creek (took a plunge!) & on top of the mountain ridges down to the ocean. I loved it. I had always wanted to go to Dolan Ridge—it is across the canyon. I was swimming in the ocean a few weeks ago (freezing—but wonderful) & two whales breached less than 100 feet from me, with a sea lion on my right. I awakened to the mating howls of bobcats the other morning on my ridge. I see deer frequently. Today I saw dozens of harbor seals lying on the beach with their pups. I sleep outside every night & see shooting stars, different phases of the moon & clouds play. The wind whips up the canyon—unexpectedly up to 40 m.p.h. at night & in the afternoons. I love the wildness here. I love the unpredictability. I was here a month without leaving and I was beginning to feel like a wild animal. I loved it.

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May, Big Creek

There are 97 harbor seals hauled out—just north of here on the beach w/ 75 baby pups. I saw a big deer last night & I ran across a huge rattle snake yesterday—I thought it was a shadow...

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June 9, 1984, Big Creek Reserve, Big Sur, Ca 93920

The half-moon is bathing the ocean, cypress trunks & land in a luminescent white wash. The surf is pounding and the great horned owls are calling to each other. The night beckons...

... being exposed and delighting in the elements, swimming, deliciously swimming, delighting in eating, enjoying not eating, sleeping lightly under the stars, sleeping soundly under the cypresses with unpredictable winds coming up out of the ocean—or up the canyon. The birds abound—I'm getting better at knowing them by sight and sound. I see deer nearly everyday and bobcats and rattlesnakes frequently. The wild irises are still around and many wildflowers continue to come up. I picked wild strawberries the other day and I'm waiting for the thimble berries to ripen...

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July 8, 1984

I had no idea that a mail strike has been going on in Israel. Unfortunately, I have not seen a newspaper for a very long time. The way Peter describes the situation there, I'm sure you all are much better informed of U.S. and international affairs than I am, (and much sooner, I'm sure!) The fog has just burned off on the ridge where the cabin is, with a panoramic view of the ocean. The heat is thick today & the sun glaring, but there is a welcome breeze, alternating between warm & cool, coming off the ocean. I'm quickly getting my fill of fog...

I hiked up to the summit last night and slept in one of the high meadows. I've been feeling somewhat sad and depressed over the failure (I presume) of my involvement with M.M. What seemed so rich in promise has turned out to be so fertile in disappointments. Last night as I lay naked and alone under the brilliant 2/3 moon, watching shooting stars, listening to the night birds, an occasional harbor seal and the thundering surf, I was once again moved by this place, the nature, in turn the universe, and even the wonderment (although, unfortunately, not always) of people. I cannot be unhappy for very long here—for the land, sky and sea continually inspire, renew and delight me. I am hurt, but I am not broken...

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July 18, 1984, Big Creek

Many nights, I climb up several long steep hills and up to a grassy meadow which overlooks the ocean and sleep there alone. Even then, I can sometimes hear their laughter [20 field archeologists staying at the Reserve while blitzing Dry Creek Canyon], overriding the breaking of the waves, the barking of harbor seals and not in the least muffled by the fog—no matter how thick...

One night under the full moon, I was sleeping soundly on top of the grassy meadows that overlooks the ocean. I was awakened in the middle of the night by loud snorting. As I struggled to wake myself up from a deep slumber, my first thought before I opened my eyes, was that it must be a bear (from bear consciousness left over from Alaska). I opened my eyes, saw where I was, realized that there are no bears, sat up and began to look around. The snorting was loud and close and accompanied by stomping. Above me on the very top of the grassy meadow, was a large buck with a full rack of antlers, leaping, snorting, pacing and stomping in the moon light. It was so beautiful! So dream like! This is the sort of experience that holds me here, giving me no desire to go anywhere else.

The vista of the ocean with the fishing boats comes into clarity again. The light is continuously changing. This place fascinates me. I must learn to draw & paint it sometime soon.... Well, I hear the pump—sputtering to a stop. I must go check the cistern, spring house, etc. and shut off some valves.

---

August 27, 1984

I went fishing in the ocean in the Univ. small rubber Zodiac on Sunday & caught 6 fish. I loved it! I love to be out on the swells, looking down through the coppery kelp, rubbing elbows w/ the cormorants, harbor seals, sea otters and herons. Life is magnificent here. I am reading “Force of Circumstance” by Simone d Beauvoir, although I have no time to read these days, unfortunately.

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October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1984, Sunday morning. Next day, new day.

About a month ago or more, I borrowed “Hieronymous Bach and the Oranges of Big Sur” [sic] by Henry Miller... but although I knew or had heard of many of the people he wrote about, I found it boring for the most part and haven’t really been able to involve myself much in it. He rarely lets the characters speak for themselves, he is so deeply self-involved. Of Kerouac, I think I have only read “On the Road”, long ago. Gary Snyder I could never really appreciate very much. I know people rave about him. But much of the time he only seems to be stating the obvious to me. I started reading some of Robinson Jeffers in April. I love some of his poetry and the imagery of the coast here and the hills, but I read “The Poor Little Shepherdess” and almost got sick. She was completely self-effacing to the worst degree. Her generosity knew no bounds and she was taken advantage of for it by any man she came across and she and her sheep suffered greatly, down to the last one. I’d have to read more before conjecturing that Jeffers seemed to have a very strange view on women. On water, lupines, canyons and clouds, he’s quotable and his imagery is right on target....

The books I’ve read lately have been “Cannery Row” by Steinbeck which I much enjoyed. “Seven Years in Tibet” by Heinrich Harrer and “The Mountains of the Middle Kingdom [Exploring the High Peaks of China and Tibet]” by Galen Rowell. I want to try to get my hands on some local stuff. J’aime D’Anguelo’s [sic] “Indian Tales” is out of print and one of the archeologists has been trying to make me a copy of it.



For my Christmas present to myself this year, I promised myself I would not go home to see my family. It is just too much for me to handle—too traumatic.

---

October 30, 1984

The beauty here continues to astound and hold me. The sky this week has been magnificent. Every night I have watched the new moon growing, one night with a companion star next to it. The sunsets have been aflame in orange, with traces of color lasting for hours. The moon had been turning a bright yellow and then turning a harvest orange before it sets over the ocean, every night.... I am gathering my courage to try to catch these colors on paper.

I still need to get ready for the winter. D. and I spent one day getting firewood, but I need to get more and split it, as well. I wanted to take the back wall off of the kitchen in my cabin and insulate it and put vapor paper up. As it is now, the wind rushes through the room, making the kitchen (nearly ½ of the house) nearly unusable when it is cold.... I have been glazing and painting the windows, outside on my cabin to get ready for the rains. (What rains?)

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November 15, 1984, Big Creek

... a storm finally broke at about 6pm with winds that went up to 70+ miles an hour. It was fantastic! The electricity finally flickered off for good. D. and I went to B. and F.'s ... dried some of our clothes, drank some wine, talked .... Hiked back down the mountain in the rain & fierce gale. We drove back to the reserve, dodging rocks hurled by the storm from the cliffs & driving into sheets of rain. We got back to the reserve safely & I hiked up (642 feet) the ridge up to my cabin. It was completely black outside. I saw an insect that glows green in the dark on the hillside under the redwoods. Winds threatened to take me & my cabin airborne, but the old structure tenaciously held its ground....

The next day, of course, was indescribably beautiful....

I have been in good spirits and have been very motivated and productive. Much of this life agrees with me. If only I got paid decently and was mutually madly in love with someone who was here. I couldn't ask for anything else.

---

November 20? 1984 Monday

... I went to Esalen. From 8pm–10pm locals can go for free & have a hot bath. It was the first time that I had ever gone by myself. I've always felt uncomfortable there because it can be very creepy and sleazy coupled w/ Esalen pseudo spiritualism and psychobabble—it has never been a place I felt comfortable going alone. But last night I was the only person there in a large tub overlooking the ocean & under a brilliant blanket of stars. Later, others came and it was all right as well.

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