# Vignettes: Memories of a Life

**Murray C McClellan**

Is there a satisfaction in the effort of remembering that provides its own nourishment, and is what one recollects less important than the act of remembering?

—Jacqueline Harpman, *I Who Have Never Known Men*, translated by Ros Schwartz



December, 2022.

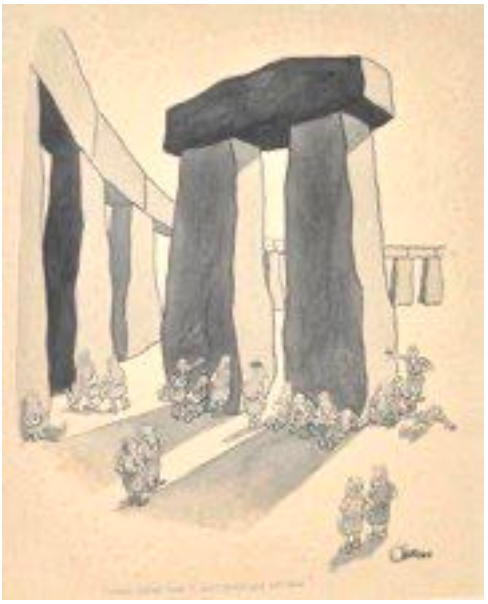
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*Building Stonehenge*



William O'Brian, "Well we've done it, but don't ask me how," *The New Yorker*, 1950's.

I think it was in 1987. I was living at my in-law's house in Tampa, Florida. My wife Pam and I had just moved there with our month-old baby from Hoboken, New Jersey, where we had spent the previous year in our first, temporary, academic jobs after we had finished our Ph.D.'s in Classical Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania. It was—as it still is—a tough time to get a tenure-track job in our field, and my in-laws couldn't have been more gracious when they invited us to come live with them as we sent out application after application in trying to pursue our careers; they even added onto their house so we could have a separate bathroom.

One day—it was my in-law's anniversary—my father-in-law Russ decided to surprise my mother-in-law Marjorie with the gift of a huge, two-ton, slab of fossiliferous rock. A large dump-truck pulled up to the front of the house, raised its bed, and off slid the massive stone right onto the front lawn. Marjorie was suitably impressed, but after contemplating her new gift for a few moments, she said that the boulder would look much nicer closer to the house where she could plant a flower garden around it. But by then the dump-truck was long gone. Russ and I looked at each other. My father-in-law was, like me, an academic and a slightly built and decidedly non-muscular man. I seem to remember one of us muttering something about Archimedes as we went into the garage to fetch a cinderblock and a long two-by-four. With a little grunting, Russ and I were able to wedge that two-by-four under the slab and, with the leverage of the

cinderblock, flip it over with a loud thump. A half-hour and a half-dozen more leveraged flips later, we moved that big old rock fifty feet right to where Marjorie wanted it.

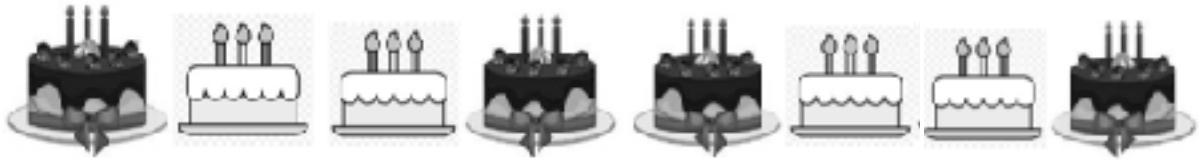
My wife and I did manage to get academic jobs the following year, and for a quarter century I taught archaeology and humanities courses at the university, secondary-school, and community-college levels. And every time the subject of Stonehenge came up and some student expressed astonishment at how a community of Neolithic farmers managed to manipulate such massive stones without the aid of modern machinery, I would tell them this story. Sorry, Erich von Däniken, Russ and I didn't need the help of extraterrestrials!

*My Third Birthday*

Memories are funny things.[1] One is never quite sure whether one is actually remembering something that really happened, or if one is just recalling a story we've told ourselves about an event in our lives—a story where we come off better than we actually were, acting with heroic self-sacrifice or giving a pithy rejoinder to a bully's taunt.

And this dilemma in distinguishing between a memory of an actual occurrence and a tale we've embellished for self-serving purposes becomes greater the further back in time one searches one's memories. We are constantly reinventing our lives, retelling —to ourselves and others—our personal histories to fit the changing circumstances of our world. And as more time passes, the stories about our lives that we store in our brains become ever more distanced from reality.

In these vignettes, I am presenting a series of snap-shot stories about my life as best as I can remember them. I am writing these mostly for myself, to reflect on who I am and how I came to be the way I am. (This self-examination was occasioned by my turning seventy years old; these vignettes are related to some essays I have already posted on my website: "Shiny Bits", "Looking from Both Sides", and "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?") I am not presenting these vignettes in chronological order, allowing each story to pop up as it sees fit. While this "Vignettes: Memories of a Life" is thus not an autobiography *per se*, it is certainly autobiographical. Anyone reading this should feel free to skip around and read any of these stories in any order they like.



Okay, so here is my earliest memory.

[Once, when we were discussing our earliest memories, my father claimed to remember being born, seeing the light as he came out of the womb in 1922. But my father said a lot of things, and he smoked a lot of weed.]

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[1] See the Coda: Seeing Yourself in Your Memories, and the Endnote Essay I: Reflections on *À la recherche du temps perdu* below.

It was April 23, 1955. We were in the breakfast nook in the Upper West Side apartment in New York City where I lived with my mother and father and two older brothers. (We were near Columbia University, where my father was a young professor at Teachers College.) I had just blown out the candles of the birthday cake my mother had made for me. As my mother was cutting slices for me and my brothers, she said that there was a special prize in the cake and that whoever got it would be the lucky one. Of course right away we all began to mash up our cake slices. Almost immediately I felt something hard under my fork. I had gotten the prize! I don't exactly remember what it was, although I suppose that it was something like a small Disney figurine or a counter from the Monopoly set (the little scotty dog was my favorite); I'd like to think that it was a tiny replica of the Statue of Liberty. Anyway, I certainly felt special.

It wasn't until many, many years later, when I had a child of my own, that I thought back on this memory to realize that my mother must have known perfectly well where the birthday-cake surprise was as she was cutting up our slices. But giving me the chance to believe in magic on my special day was one of the nicest things my mother had ever done for me.

*Six-Year-Old Murray Encounters Plato*

As long as I am on the subject of my memories of New York City, I attach here a link to a story I shared with the on-line Intro to Philosophy class I was teaching for the New Hampshire River Valley Community College in the fall of 2014 when we were reading Plato's *Meno*.

https://murraymcclellan.com/six-year-old-murray-encounters-plato/

*The Tampon Phantom*

This was Halloween, 1980.

My then-girlfriend (now wife) Pam and I were second-year members of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The American School is a research center where graduate students in Classics and Classical Archaeology at other academic institutions go to become familiar with Greece and to conduct research for their graduate degrees. Pam and I had already spent the previous year at the American School as Regular Members, touring around the country on school trips to see the major archaeological sites and museums and spending the summer digging at ancient Corinth.

[To get one of the dozen spots in the Regular Member program at the ASCSA, one has to take a day-and-a-half-long exam in Ancient Greek language, literature, and history. When we took these exams, Pam and I had just started dating in Philadelphia and it was an anxious few months before we got the results and knew that we would be going to Greece together in the fall.]

After the summer dig at Corinth, Pam took a return trip to the States to see her parents and to stock up on things, like Advil, that weren't then available in Greece. She also came back with a bag of Rely tampons—Procter and Gamble's toxic-shock-causing tampons that were withdrawn from the market only a few weeks after Pam flew back to Athens. A month later, when it was time for the School's Halloween party, I had the brilliant idea to go in costume as a tampon. I wore a white sheet tied around my head with a cord and a red tee-shirt underneath. I also brought that bag of unused Rely tampons with me. At the party, whenever any of the distinguished professors at the School asked me what my costume was, I simply said that I was a ghost. But I also went around dropping a Rely tampon into any unguarded glasses of wine I could find. And boy did those suckers work! More than one person came back from the dance floor only to discover that their drink had been totally absorbed by a gift from the Tampon Phantom!

*Kiss All the Pretty Girls*

For several years when I was in grade school, every time I left the house to go off to school my father would send me off with the same admonition: "Work hard, get smart, and kiss all the pretty girls."

[WTF, right? Talk about instilling Calvinist, heteronormative—even sexist—values! I didn't remember my father giving this advice to any of my brothers, but when I asked them about this recently, they all said that our father had said the same thing to them; my eldest brother James said that he just took the kissing the pretty girls part as a silly, iconic, addition. I am afraid that took my father's admonition a little more literally.]

Anyway, I did work hard in school, and always got good grades. And when I was in 3rd or 4th grade I thought it was about time for me to get around to that kissing part. There was one girl in my neighborhood who I thought passed the pretty test, so I thought that I should try the kissing thing with her. I seem to remember that her name was Becky.

But how does one go about kissing a girl?

I had a vague idea that a boy was supposed to start by giving the girl a gift. And one day a traveling fair came to town and one vendor had a stand with a set of what seemed to me the most beautiful rings I had ever seen. Yes, a ring! Boys are supposed to give girls rings! A perfect gift for Becky! I asked the woman behind the table how much a ring would cost. She said "five dollars." As my allowance at the time was 25¢ a month, this was an exorbitant figure. But then I remember that my mother always kept some cash on her dressing table, so I quickly bicycled back home, crept into my parent's bedroom, swiped a $5 bill off of my mother's dressing table, and went back to the fair to buy a ring with my stolen loot.

The next day I asked Becky to meet me at the playground after school. Ring in hand, I sat on a swing waiting for Becky to show up. When she did, I told her I had something to give her and asked her to sit on my lap. I gave her the ring, pursing up my lips for an expected kiss. Becky took the ring and jumped off my lap, saying "your legs are so boney!" No kiss!

*Guns, Guns, Guns*

As I mentioned in my "Looking from Both Sides" essay, I grew up with guns.

Almost every summer of my childhood I traveled with my parents and brothers from our home in the Northeast to spend two months with both sets of my grandparents in Gatesville, Texas. And in those summers we spent in Texas, we all graduated from playing with BB guns to shooting a 22 rifle or a 16-gauge shotgun.

So here are a few vignettes of how guns have figured in my life:



I must have been 7- or 8-years old. We were down at the swimming hole on Owl Creek, a little outside of Gatesville. Grampa would drive us there in his vintage 1946 Chrysler and sit in his sleeveless teeshirt beside the water, picking watercress. James had brought a 22 with him and thought that it would be a fun sport to shoot at Ross and me as we were submerged at the bottom of the swimming hole, which must have been about 6- or 7-feet deep. So in we dove, holding our breath. No one got hit—the relatively harmless 22-shorts James was using were deflected by the water—but it was exhilarating to hear the thud of the slug as it hit the water and to see the bubble-lined trace of the bullet as it came zipping by. And I did learn how to hold my breath for a really long time.

[Memories are funny things and as I said above, "One is never quite sure whether one is actually remembering something that really happened, or if one is just recalling a story we've told ourselves about an event in our lives." A case in point: in his 2013 autobiographical *Memoirs of a Baby Boomer*, my brother James describes this scene:

> We swam at Cowhouse Creek or at a swimming hole at the revival spot at nearby Mound, Texas, with a rope we used to launch ourselves into the water. Grandpaw would sit beside the water in his tee-shirt, his lily-white arms belying his red neck. At Belton Lake we fished with cane poles attached to plastic bobbers and amused ourselves by one of us discharging our rifles into the water while the others admired the bullet's wild tracings from underwater. (Imagine!)[2]

I certainly never remember being the one discharging a rifle at him!]

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[2]See the Endnote Essay II: Vignettes and Memoirs: A Reflection on the Memories of Three McClellan Boys.



A few years later—Ross was now using a shotgun but I was still gunless—we went out hunting rattlesnakes on Grampaw's 1,000-acre ranch, which was about an hour's drive away from his Gatesville home. As usual, we rode in the back bed of Grampaw's bumpy old Ford pickup truck. We would stop at the ice plant along the way and pick up a block of ice to put into a large can filled with bottles of Dr. Pepper. For the hour-long drive out to the ranch, my brothers and I would drink our fill of Dr. Peppers, peeing out of the back of the pickup when needed.

When we went hunting at Grampaw's ranch, we usually were looking for jackrabbits or quail, though truth be told, we would shoot anything that moved. Grampaw especially liked it when we shot armadillos, as their burrows were a real menace for the cattle and sheep he kept on the ranch. [I once asked my grandfather to mail a dried-out armadillo carcass to me when I was back in New Jersey so I could show my elementary school classmates; they were duly impressed to see such a prehistoric-looking animal.]

But this time we were intentionally hunting for rattlesnakes. The sheriff in Gatesville was offering a bounty for every rattler brought in, and my brothers were gung ho to cash in. As James and Ross had guns, they gave me a long stick and told me that my job was to beat around in the bushes to see if I could scare up a rattlesnake. It didn't take long before a snake came slithering out, shaking the rattle on the end of its tail to see what the commotion was all about. James and Ross blasted it. I was then told to pick the snake up and take it back to the pickup truck. I don't know if everyone knows this—I certainly didn't at the time—but a recently deceased snake will make a series of postmortem muscle spasms for a few minutes after it died. Every time the snake I was carrying had a spasm, I would drop it and insist that my brothers shoot it again before I would pick it back up. There was little left of that snake by the time we got back to the pickup truck!

My brothers cut off the ratter and Grampaw drove us back into town. I don't remember my brothers sharing with me the bounty they got for that rattler.



When I was in 5th grade, my family moved from New Jersey to Pennsylvania after my father got a job at Temple University in Philadelphia. Our new house was at the end of a cul-de-sac in a development, on a plot of three and a half acres, most of which consisted of a swamp through which ran a little stream. Whether it was part of a mid-life crisis or a way to get back in touch with his Texas roots, my father decided that he would tame that swamp—which meant that he would put his four sons to work taming it. My brothers and I spent hour after hour hoeing up mud from the little stream, piling the muck into banks to the channel the stream—a back-breaking task that had to be repeated every year after the stream flooded in the spring and wiped out those channel banks. We cut down the tall vines that entangled the trees on the edge of the swamp, not realizing that the vines were poison ivy—we all ended up having to go to the emergency ward to be treated for a rash that covered our entire bodies. We used a hand-held weed cutter to chop down the skunk cabbage that grew all over the swamp, making a meandering path along the stream—another task that had to be repeated every year after the annual floods. My father ordered tons of gravel that was dumped on the side of the road at the start of the driveway and that we had to haul in wheelbarrow full after wheelbarrow full down into the swamp to spread along the path. We also used some of that gravel to lay the foundation of a bocce court we made at the edge of the swamp where it abutted the lawn. My father also ordered tons of field stones that we had to wheelbarrow to various places on the property; with some of these stones we built a useful retaining wall at the edge of the garden we had dug, while other stones were used to built a completely random wall near the swamp that served no apparent purpose whatsoever. (Lest I am beginning to sound too resentful about this forced child labor, I now greatly appreciate having learned dry-stone masonry, as well as having developed a life-long passion for wheelbarrowing and working in the dirt.)

After a couple of years, our new property was all set, the annual maintenance notwithstanding. Everything was just the way we wanted it, except for the large rats that would on occasion venture out of the swamp. The rats were particularly attracted to the bird feeders my father had built, one near the bocce court and another, an edged wooden board attached to the railing of the back stairs right outside of the kitchen. But my family was from Texas and we knew how to deal with vermin. Above the desk in my

father's study was the gun rack, with a 22 and a shotgun, and below it was a narrow drawer where the ammunition was kept. Whenever anyone would shout "Rat!" in the house, everyone was supposed to be very quiet while that person got a gun to try to shoot the pest. I seem to remember that Ross, who was the best shot in the family, did most of the rat-killing. (James had gone off to college by the time that the rats started showing up.) But I do recall one time —I think that I was in 9th grade— I saw a rat on the bird feeder on the back stairway off of the kitchen. I shouted "Rat!", got the 22 from the gun rack, loaded it, and went to the upstairs bathroom directly above the bird feeder. As quietly as I possibly could, I pulled up the sliding glass window, leaned the gun out, and, pointing it straight down, pulled the trigger. Bang!—that big old swamp rat flopped off the bird feeder dead, falling right into a garbage can next to the stairway.



*Indiana Jones* movies notwithstanding, guns really don't play any role in archaeology. But I have encountered guns a couple of times in my career as a field archaeologist.

Once, in the summer of 1985, when I was on Donald White's University of Pennsylvania team digging at Bates Island in Marsa Matruh, Egypt—a small island in a lagoon where Oric Bates had discovered Late Bronze Age Cypriot pottery when he dug there for Harvard University in 1913—Donald and I had to go to the police station to register the passports of all the team members with the police. (Marsa Matruh is near Egypt's western border with Libya, and although, with its pristine Mediterranean beaches, it is a popular tourist resort for Egyptians, it is technically a military-restricted zone and foreigners are not allowed to travel there without special permission.) We arrived at the police station in the late afternoon, after the digging day was over. A uniformed official took our passports and told us to wait in an adjoining room. We went in. There were a few chairs and an adolescent—he couldn't have been more than fourteen- or fifteen-years old—holding a nasty looking AK 47. The boy pointed that assault rifle at us as we sat down. And for the next several hours, as we waited for someone to come back with our passports and night fell, that boy just stood there, saying nothing and pointing his gun right at us. Finally, a bedraggled official popped his

head in and said, “Are you still here? The chief left hours ago. Come back tomorrow to pick up your passports.”

Another time I encountered guns on a dig was in October, 2001. I had taken a sabbatical from the Department of Archaeology at Boston University the previous academic year to undertake an archaeological survey of the US Naval Base in Rota, Spain. During that previous 1999-2000 season, my small team (a couple of students from BU plus two Spanish archaeologists from nearby El Puerto de Santa Maria) dug the remains of a Roman villa that had been severely disturbed when the main runway on the base was constructed in 1953. (It was rather exciting to excavate that site: as we were exposing the lower courses of the few walls that remained *in situ* right on the edge of the runway, we were in walkie-talkie communication with the base control tower, which would give us a head’s-up whenever a plane was taking off or landing; at first we would dutifully back away from the runway when any plane went by, but after a few weeks we wouldn’t even move if it was an F15 or a Warthog that came screaming down the runway a few feet from us, although we always cleared out whenever a C5 was landing, as that the blast of air from that monster plane would knock you off your feet.) In addition to the Roman villa, our survey also revealed a concentration of Lower Paleolithic stone tools we found in the exposed ruts of the motocross track on the western edge of the base; although these quartzite tools seem to have been washed in from elsewhere, they were identical to the types of stone tools found at a nearby site that date to ca. 500,000 BP. (We were not very popular on the Naval base when we insisted that this motocross track be shut down!)

Anyway, in October, 2001, I went back to Naval Station Rota for a few days during fall break in order to take some soil samples from the Paleolithic site that our geomorphologist wanted and to resurvey one spot right off the western edge of the runway. Of course a civilian like me has to have a special pass from the Navy to get onto NAVSTA Rota. When we were digging on the base every day for several months in 1999, the checkpoint guards at the entrance to the base came to know us, and would always wave us in with only a cursory glance at our passes. So I was rather blasé about my pass when I returned in 2001. I did notify the US Naval commander that I would be on base for a few days, and I simply assumed that he would have notified the Spanish command that is jointly responsible for security on the base. So, on my first day back on the base, after I had parked my rental car under a tree near the end of the runway and was

walking around, trowel in hand, I was rather alarmed when a large open-back truck came barreling towards me with a dozen Spanish special forces soldiers pointing their rifles right at me. I put my hands up as I heard a dozen safeties being clicked off. Fortunately, my Spanish was good enough to explain who I was and, after I was put on the phone with the Spanish commander, the truck full of rifle-toting Spanish soldiers went on its way. (In retrospect, I should have seen this coming, as I was an unescorted civilian wandering around the edge of the runway on a base that stores a massive amount of US munitions, and it was a few weeks after 9/11 while helicopters were flying around delivering huge bombs to the Sixth Fleet destroyers docked there.)

*A Libyan Saved my Life*

In my "Looking for Shiny Bits" essay, I describe some of the"cool" things that have been found on digs I was on, including the life-sized Roman marble statues uncovered on Donald White's University of Pennsylvania Museum excavation at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone in Cyrene, Libya.

Donald White's excavations at the Demeter Sanctuary were, in some ways, a throwback to earlier ways of digging. Donald had begun to excavate there in 1969—a year before Muammar Gaddafi overthrew the pro-Italian Libyan king Idris. Donald made use of the old Decauville railroad line that the Italian archaeologist Ettore Ghislanzoni had laid across the middle part of the Sanctuary when he was "digging" at the site in 1915. (It is hard to describe what Ghislanzoni was doing as an excavation, as he was mostly just digging holes where the Italian army had previously pulled out some two dozen Roman marble sculptures.) Of course Donald White excavated in a responsible fashion, laying out a grid pattern across the site and meticulously recording where finds were made. But, using an unskilled work team of Libyan youths who were moving a ton of earth a day, pouring bucketful after bucketful of unscreened soil into the Decauville railroad wagon and then pushing it down the track to dump its contents into the wadi below, White's excavations at the Demeter Sanctuary paid scant attention to the stratigraphical nuances of the site.

As a grad student I participated in the last full season of the Penn Museum excavations in 1978; although the most exciting things that White's team found that season were those Roman marble sculptures, for me, personally, the "coolest" thing I found was the skeletal remains of a young girl who had been crushed by a wall that fell in the earthquake of 365 CE. The following year, in the summer of 1979, Donald invited me back as part of the study season at the Demeter Sanctuary. While the rest of the crew was in the dig storerooms studying the finds, my job was to go back to the site and undertake a few sondages to help clarify the stratigraphical history of the Demeter Sanctuary. I started this task by making a new scaled drawing of the baulk on the northern edge of the excavations in the Middle Sanctuary. After I re-scraped the baulk, I went back up to the top ground level to set the plumb-bob I would use for my drawing. I was sitting right on the edge of the baulk, my notebook in my lap, and I leaned over to let the plumb-bob hit the bottom. Then I got out my tape measure to see how far down the plumb-bob had gone: 2.63 meters. Just then, as I was recording that fact in my

notebook, the dried-out edge of the baulk gave way, and I went tumbling down 2.63 meters to the bottom of the excavation where I hit my head against one of the ashlar blocks below.

The next thing I remember, I was lying on the ground being cradled in the arms of a keffiyeh-wearing bearded man who was pouring cold water on my face. My Arabic was only barely good enough to understand that he was asking if I was okay (*enta taman?*). I nodded my throbbing head and thanked him a thousand times (*alf shokr*). As I stumbled back on the ten-minute walk to the dig house, I glanced at my watch. I had been passed out for nearly two hours under the scorching heat of the Libyan summer sun. I don't know if I would have made it much longer if that kind stranger had not come wandering by in a remote part of Cyrene which is scarcely visited by anyone. Although he must have been a villager with agricultural fields in the region, I never saw him again.



I had another brush with death that summer.

I was in the dig storerooms, which were in the semi-basement of a building with barred windows. I was talking to Tamsen, the dig conservator, who was at her work table cleaning some coins. All of a sudden Tamsen shouted "Snake!" and there was a poisonous horned viper slithering right towards us. I climbed up on the table and, skinny me, squeezed out of the barred window halfway up the wall; I reached my hand down and somehow managed to pull the much stouter Tamsen out of the window as well. The next day, after the snake was long gone, Tamsen and I went back to the storerooms and we couldn't believe how she managed to slip through those narrowly spaced window bars.



It is hard to describe how totally bizarre and surreal Gaddafi's Libya seemed to me in those two summers I spent there. Here are a few vignettes that have stuck in my mind from that time.

On occasion the team would make the 20-km drive from Cyrene down to Marsa Susa, the ancient site of Apollonia, the port of Cyrene. While we would tour the impressive (mostly Roman) remains there, we really made the trip in order to swim at a beautiful beach nearby. On one such swim, I was floating around in the sparkling blue Mediterranean when suddenly I started to sink! I gulped and some water filled my mouth. It was fresh water! I was in a pool of fresh water in the middle of the Mediterranean! (After a few crawl strokes I did managed to get back to the much more buoyant salty water.) A few days later I discovered the reason that there was a mysterious pool of fresh water in the Mediterranean. The Libyans were constructing a new desalinization plant not far from the beach and apparently the plant had just gone on line. But the water pipes that would take the fresh water to urban centers had not yet been laid, and, once started, the desalinization plant could not easily be shut down. So the Libyans were just pumping the newly created fresh water back into the Med.!

Not long after I discovered this fact I came across a work crew that was laying those water pipes for the desalinization plant. Rather than a team of hard-hatted engineers directing backhoes and modern digging machinery, the crew consisted of a half-dozen Black Africans—probably from Niger or Chad—who were crouched over the pavement, banging away at the macadam with rocks. (Talk about Paleolithic!)

Another example of a curious lack of civic planning in Gaddafi's Libya: After the 1978 season, I stayed on in Libya for a week after everyone else had headed back to the US. (I was going on to Cyprus to visit Pam who was digging there.) The Libyan Department of Antiquities kindly allowed me to lodge at their excavation center in Benghazi. As I was walking around that dusty city in late August, I came across a crew that was slapping green paint on the fronts of all of the buildings along a main street. Apparently they were preparing a parade route that would be used for the 1 September celebrations marking Gaddafi's rise to power. When I went around the corner, however, I noticed that one of the buildings being painted green was also being demolished from behind. I don't know if the painting crew and the demolition crew ever met up, but I suspect that the façade of the demolished building would have been left standing, at least until after the parade—an apt metaphor for modernization in Libya!

One more vignette: One day in 1978, our team was invited to attend an event that was being held that evening in the restored theater in Cyrene. (It was originally a Greek-style theater that had been converted during the reign of Hadrian to a Roman-

style theater, with a semi-circular orchestra.) As there were women in our party, we were escorted into a separate, cordoned-off, area, away from the rest of the audience, which was exclusively men and boys. As it turns out, the show liner was a famous Egyptian female singer who was accompanied by a troop of scantily clad belly dancers. Toward the end of the program, some of the men in the audience had become so aroused by the belly dancers' provocative gyrations that they started to hump each other!



I have a love-hate relation with the Arab world.

My attitude towards Arabs was initially conditioned when I was digging in Israel on the Oberlin College field school at Tell el-Hesi. That year, 1972, my Jewish girlfriend and I had moved in together at college, and I had become a fierce supporter of Israel. For some reason, I couldn't make the flight from JFK to Tel Aviv that the rest of the field school was on, so I flew on by myself a day later and made my way to Jerusalem, where I was to be picked up at the Albright Institute in two day's time. I stayed at a hotel near the Albright, which is in East Jerusalem, and I spent my first full day in Israel wandering around that area. There I was, a twenty-year-old long-hair American in Western clothing strolling around an occupied Palestinian neighborhood. Everywhere I looked, people seemed to be giving me the evil eye, staring at me out of darken hallways and then glancing away. I definitely felt that the Arab world I had stumbled upon was something "other." (I did, however, have one positive encounter on my first visit to East Jerusalem: on my second day there I was sitting on a park bench eating a chocolate bar when a young Arab boy, maybe six or seven years old, came up to me. With hand gestures I indicated that I would share my chocolate bar with him. He sat down, took a bite of chocolate, and started jabbering away. We ended up having a pleasant "conversation" which consisted of my repeating the last few sounds he made, inflecting my voice to make it into a question. He would nod vigorously, say *aywah*, and then go on with whatever story he was trying to tell me. We carried on that "conversation" for a half an hour without his ever realizing that I hadn't understood a single word he said!)

Tell el-Hesi is located not far from the border with the Sinai Peninsula, and at that time, although Israel had seized the Sinai five years earlier in the Six Day War, there

were still tensions in the area. Every day an Israeli observation plane—a slow-moving biplane—would fly over the site. I don't think the fact that this plane came by every day precisely at 5pm was a coincidence. That was the time when most of the excavators were in the showers—a screened-off open-air enclosure with an opaque dividing wall between the men and women. Flying over head, the observation plane would have had a perfect view of our naked young bodies! Still, the biplane was "on our side."

During that summer I spent in Israel, the field school took us on trips across the country. I was awed by touching the Western Wall in Jerusalem and by our dawn hike up Masada. On one trip we went up to see Saul and Gladys Weinberg's excavation at Tell Anafa, in the Golan Heights, which the Israelis call "Upper Galilee." (And little could I have anticipated that a dozen years later, Gladys would be one of my dissertation advisors!) There, close to the border, Israeli military outposts had their guns trained on the Syrian troops stationed in the hills beyond the Golan Heights. Again, I felt that the Israeli troops were "on our side," protecting us from an Arab *enemy*.

My attitude towards Israel and the Arab world began to change in 1977, when I spent most of my second year as a grad student at the Penn Museum digging in Jordan. I originally went to Jordan with Prof. James Pritchard, who was undertaking a new season at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, a site near the Jordan River that he had dug in the 1960's. One week into our new season, however, we discovered at the top of the tell a curious hole with spiraling grooves down its side. After consulting with the military attaché at the US Embassy, it was determined that this hole most likely contained an unexploded munition fired by Israel during the 1967 Six Day War. The dig was promptly called off. Pritchard went back to the States, but we three graduate students on Pritchard's team stayed on to join a new joint Jordan University and Department of Antiquities excavation at the nearby site of Tell es-Mazar. Nearly every day while we were digging at Mazar, an Israeli jet would come screaming across the Jordan River from the West Bank, making a wide turn into Jordanian territory above our heads. Unlike the benign voyeuristic biplane I saw at Tell el-Hesi, I now felt that this Israeli warplane belonged to the *enemy* and might at any moment drop a bomb on us.

Working on that excavation directed by Khair Yassine of Jordan University gave me a new perspective into the Arab world. One day, one of our teenage work crew came riding up to the tell on a beautiful white stallion. He dismounted and asked me if I wanted to ride his horse; although I hadn't ridden a horse for years, I gladly scrambled

up into the saddle (with some difficulty as it wasn't a Western-style saddle that I was used to!), and that stallion went galloping down the dirt road at a heart-thumping pace. I managed to slow the horse down, turn it around, and come galloping back to the site. Everyone was smiling. Another day, we American archaeologists were invited to dinner at the house of that work-boy. When we arrived, we were escorted into the dining room, which consisted of a low table around which the men of the family were sitting on pillows on the ground. Even though my fellow American archaeologists (Liz and Barbara) were both women, we were all invited to sit down on pillows around the table. The women of the house then started to bring in plates of steaming, delicious-smelling food. The father of the family then kindly instructed us in the proper, sanitary, etiquette one should use to eat that meal. A bowl of scented water was passed around, into which everyone dipped their hands. Then, as we were told, we put our left hands behind our backs and, using only our right hands, grabbed a pinch of saffron-yellow rice, rolled it into a ball, dipped that ball into a savory sauce, added a pinch of meat from the plate of lamb, and then used our right-hand thumb to pop that delicious concoction into our mouths without allowing our hand to touch our lips. The men around the table tried to suppress their giggles when, at first, we made a horrible mess in trying to follow this procedure, but they gave broad smiles when we finally managed to eat their food in a proper fashion. I felt at home.

Another positive experience I had when I was digging in Jordan was the time that the Jordanian Department of Antiquities wanted us American archaeologists to go down to Petra to pick up some rock samples to take back to the Geology Department of the University of Pennsylvania where they would be tested for methods that might be used to help consolidate the carved soft sandstone tomb façades of the site. Like the millions

of tourists who have visited the "Rose-red city half as old as time,"[3] we were astonished when, after walking through the long, narrow *Siq* gorge entrance to Petra, we suddenly came upon a wide open area full of dazzling Nabatean Hellenistic architecture. Liz, Barbara, and I spent the day wandering around, looking at the tomb façades of the Treasury, the Monastery and the Palace Tomb, walking along the colonnaded street, and admiring the rock-cut theater. When the hoards of tourists had returned to their air-conditioned buses that would take them back to Amman or to a resort hotel on the Gulf of Aqaba, a guard gave us the key to a little tomb chamber located above the Pool and Garden complex where we were allowed to spend the night. Soft pillows and blankets had been spread on the tomb chamber floor for us, and a tray of sweets and bottled water greeted us. After a sound sleep we woke up the next morning, all alone in the middle of Petra, feeling like Johann Burckhardt, the Swiss Orientalist who first "rediscovered" the Nabatean capital and trading city in the early 19th century. Magical. And the next day we talked our way onto one of those tourist buses for our trip back up to the Jordan Valley!

[But not every encounter I had that year in Jordan was so family-friendly or magical, and I also had my first first-hand encounter with the misogynistic, sexually violent *machismo* of Arab culture—something that is mostly responsible for the "hate" part of my love-hate relation with the Arab world. We American archaeologists were taking a taxi back to the dig after a weekend we had spent in Amman. I was sitting in the front seat and Liz and Barbara were sitting in the back. About half-way down to the Jordan Valley and our dig house, the taxi driver pulled off the road. He turned to me and asked which one of the women I wanted and which he could have, gesturing at the

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[3] This famous phrase comes from John William Burgon's 1845 poem "Petra":

> It seems no work of Man's creative hand,
> by labour wrought as wavering fancy planned;
> But from the rock as if by magic grown,
> eternal, silent, beautiful, alone!
> Not virgin-white like that old Doric shrine,
> where erst Athena held her rites divine;
> Not saintly-grey, like many a minster fane,
> that crowns the hill and consecrates the plain;
> But rose-red as if the blush of dawn,
> that first beheld them were not yet withdrawn;
> The hues of youth upon a brow of woe,
> which Man deemed old two thousand years ago,
> Match me such marvel save in Eastern clime,
> a rose-red city half as old as time.

nearby bushes where he thought that it would be fine if we raped the women. Somehow I managed to convince him that this was not going to happen, and he reluctantly drove us on to our dig house; I did take down his license number and Khair dutifully reported him to the police. I doubt, however, that there was any follow-up.]



But, this negative encounter with Arab culture notwithstanding, the time I spent in Jordan in 1977 did help me shed the pro-Zionist attitude I had earlier had. (The fact that my college girlfriend and I had broken up before I went to grad school also figured into this.)

Two border crossings I made that year illustrate my changing attitude.

During a break in the Tell es-Mazar excavation, Liz and I decided to take a quick trip to Syria. We boarded a bus from Amman that would take us to Damascus. At the Syrian border, being the only ones with US and not Jordanian or Syrian passports, we were taken off the bus and sat down in a room while a curious band of custom officials pondered what to do with the only Americans they had ever seen trying to cross that border on a bus. After about an hour of waiting, the rest of the passengers on the bus stormed into the customs office and demanded that they stamp our passports and let us go! Everyone cheered when we did get back on the bus that then proceeded on its way to Damascus. We were a team!

[After several pleasant days in Damascus, we decided to go on to visit Aleppo. Again, we took a bus; a highlight of that four-hour bus ride was when it stopped for a food break in Homs and we were handed tasty sandwiches that turned out to be grilled cow's brains! After we arrived in Aleppo and were cluelessly looking around to see if there was a hotel in the area, a young man who had been on the bus came up to us and insisted that we stay at his family's apartment. His family couldn't have been nicer as they fed us and laid out cots for us in their apartment living room. We spent several days there as we explored the marvelous city Aleppo used to be, with its colorful *suk* and fascinating archaeological remains. [Many years later, in 2016, I was appalled to read about the Russian and Syrian bombardment that destroyed much of that wonderful city, Aleppo; I have been hating Putin for years before his invasion of Ukraine!]

The other border crossing: At the end of the Tell es-Mazar dig, I decided that I would go visit Israel. Again, I took a bus from Amman to the Allenby Bridge crossing, which is the only place Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are allowed to use to enter or exit Jordan. Among my fellow passengers on that bus was Crystal Bennett, a famous British archaeologist and founder of the British Institute in Amman. When we got to the border crossing, holding up our passports, the Israeli custom officials waved on Ms. Bennett but put me in the line with the Palestinians for further scrutiny. A gruff Israeli official grilled me on what I had been doing in Jordan for so many months. He then went through all of my stuff, squeezing out all of the toothpaste left in my tube of Crest before making me strip for a full-body search. I definitely no longer felt that the Israelis were "on my side."



My love-hate relationship with Arab culture became solidified by the experiences I've had in Egypt.

In the early 1980s, while we were living in Athens, Pam and I took a trip to Egypt to see the sights/sites. We toured the old Egyptian Museum in Cairo to see King Tut. We oohed and awed at the Pyramids, dutifully climbing up the interior steps of the Great Pyramid to see the empty funerary chamber of Khufu—going nose to butt with the other sweaty tourists crouching their way up that low path originally made by tomb robbers. We took a very comfortable train ride up the Nile to Luxor where we gawked at the Luxor and Karnak temples. We then rode donkeys over to Thebes where a guide took us around the Valley of the Kings.

We had generally tolerated the hoards of beggars we encountered in Cairo, and the lewd stares of men leering at Pam everywhere we went, but we finally hit the wall at the Valley of the Kings when our guide continually asked for more *baksheesh* in order to take us into the next chamber of whatever tomb we were in. Pam broke down and sobbed "I've had it!" Our guide looked quite abashed. He ushered us over to his house, which was not far away. There his wife calmed us down with cups of sweet brewed tea. Unexpected kindness!

This negative/positive encounter with Egyptian culture continued in 1985, when Pam and I participated in Donald White's excavations at Marsa Matruh, in western Egypt

not far from the border with Libya. Marsa Matruh is a bizarre place. As I noted in my "Guns, Guns, Guns" vignette above, Matruh is off limits to foreigners, except those with special permission to be there, but in the summer time it is filled with hordes of Egyptian tourists who travel up from the south to enjoy the city's beautiful Mediterranean beaches. Our team often frequented the Beau Site hotel—the only place in town that served alcoholic drinks—and we often swam at the pristine beach in front of the hotel. One day, when I was on the beach fiddling around with a little water squirt gun I had just bought and Pam was in the water, I noticed that a crowd of a half-dozen or so men were beginning to surround Pam, ogling at this bikini-clad blonde foreigner. I jumped into the water, grabbed Pam by the hand, and squirted my water pistol at the men as we ran to shore; we grabbed our towels and kept running the three blocks up the street to our dig apartment.

But, again, not all of our experience in Marsa Matruh was negative. The dig itself was exciting. On the little Bates Island in the lagoon we uncovered the remains of several structures associated with Late Cypriot II and Late Helladic III pottery dating to the 14th–13th centuries BCE, thus suggesting that the somewhat defensible Bates Island had served as a small trading post in the Late Bronze Age—a significant new archaeological data point of an international LBA trading network where ships, following the prevailing winds in the east Mediterranean, would go in a counter-clockwise direction from the Nile Delta to the Lebanese coast, on to copper-rich Cyprus and thence to the Mycenaean Aegean, and down to Crete, returning to the north African coast at Marsa Matruh (which is due south of Crete) before going on back to the Nile Delta.

During that summer, most of Donald White's small team spent our days digging on the island, which we reached by wading through the chest-high water that separated it from the lagoon shore, pushing a small rowboat back and forth to carry our tools and our finds. Pam, however, spent much of her time in a little storeroom at the museum, washing and cataloguing sherds. She was joined there by Mrs. Said, the wife of the Egyptian archaeologist assigned to our dig; even though Pam spoke little Arabic and Mrs. Said had no English, the two of them hit it off as friends and were always smiling brightly together when we came back at the end of a dig day to deliver our finds to the storeroom.

[I might add that the water we waded through every day on our way to Bates Island was contaminated by run-off from a nearby garbage dump on the lagoon shore. We all developed fly-infested sores. Pam had one so bad that, after we had returned to Cyprus, I had to take her to a doctor to have a pus-filled abscess lanced; the doctor put her on antibiotics and insisted that she be evacuated back the US, where she spent several days in a hospital. My sores weren't so drastic, although I later tested positive for hepatitis—something that has prevented me from ever donating blood again.]



So, from from the Libyan who saved my life at Cyrene to the many Jordanians and Egyptians who showed me, and Pam, such kindnesses, I have a deep fondness for Arabic culture. Still, life is short, and, given the misogyny that seems endemic to Islamic culture, I have sworn never to return to an Arabic country again. But I do support the creation of an independent Palestinian state!

*I am an Otter*

I love to swim. (I was born in 1952 under the Chinese Zodiac sign of the Water Dragon!)

Some of my earliest, and fondest, memories involve being in the water. For several years when I was very young, my family would rent a cabin on the beach in Fairfield, CT, for the summer. Every day I would jump into the surf, joyfully bouncing up and down as the breakers came in. To this today, body surfing in the ocean is probably my favorite activity in the world!

I also remember when I was in elementary school my parents enrolled me in a swimming class at the local YMCA. Often, after the class was over, my father would join me in the pool, swimming lap after lap with that ridiculously slow crawl of his, head turning up for a quick gasp of air and then down again for three slow strokes. As an adult, I have always sought out swimming pools—from those at the college gyms at Oberlin College, the University of Pennsylvania, Stevens Institute of Technology, Agnes Scott College, Emory University, Boston University, and Wellesley College to the YMCA in Keene, NH and the Supera gym I now belong to in Oviedo—where I happily do my laps, which I find meditatively calm and relaxing. But I do swim much faster than my father!



Even though I love to swim in the ocean, I mostly stick close to shore. Open water swimming gives me the creeps, as I am always wondering if there is a shark or some other nasty creature swimming around underneath me. There was also that time—I think it was in 1966—when I was surfing in the Gulf of Mexico when my family was vacationing in Galveston, Texas, and a Portuguese man o'war jellyfish became wrapped around my arms; I had to be taken to the hospital after the poison almost stopped my heart from beating.

I did, however, once attempt something like a long distance swim in the ocean.

It was 1980. Pam and I were at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, where we both had second-year scholarships. That fall, the school's Professor, Colin Edmonson, was taking the first-year Regular Members on a school trip to northwest Greece that he hadn't offer the year before. So I finagled my way onto that bus trip. It was great fun to visit sites like the sanctuary of Dodona and Octavian's

victory monument at Nikopolis. On our way back we were going to visit Olympia. We stayed at Nafpackos for a few days before we headed to Rion, where our bus would board a ferry to cross the narrow opening of the Gulf of Corinth to Andrion, thus avoiding a long trip around the Corinthian Isthmus. (The day before the opening of the 2004 Olympic games in Athens, the new 2.38-km.-long Rion-Andrion bridge was opened; it is the third longest suspension bridge in the world, with the longest single suspension span in existence.) When our bus arrived at Rion, however, we were informed that the ferry would not be sailing for two hours. As everyone else trudged up to the cafeneion for a second cup of coffee, I turned to one of the first-year members, John Walsh, and pointed at Andrion, which we could see in the distance, across the narrow Gulf opening. I suggested that we could swim across before the ferry even left. So we slipped off back to the bus, changed into our bathing suits, and went into the water. After a few hundred meters, however, it became clear that there was a rather swift current in that part of the canal, and we were having to swim almost sideways in order to make any progress. And the water was pretty nasty, with a thin smelly oil slick floating on the surface. About half-way across we had to stop and tread water as a massive cargo ship came steaming out of the Gulf just in front of us. At that point, with another ship on the horizon heading in towards us, John and I looked at each other and decided that we would head back. We made it back to the Rion shore just in time to get on the bus as it boarded the ferry.



If there were such a thing as reincarnation, being reborn as an otter would be the closest thing to Nirvana that I could wish for. Oh, to spend all day in the water, floating on my back and munching on oysters!

Curiously, the otter has had a long life in poetry. Otters appear in poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charlotte Brontë, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Hardy, Walt Whitman, William Butler Yeats, and Rudyard Kipling, among others.

Seamus Heaney's 2003 poem "The Otter" recalls the year he had spent teaching at UC Berkeley and was missing his wife Marie, who was back in Ireland. Heaney's "otter of memory" is a metaphor for when he had observed Marie years earlier, swimming in Italy. Here are the last three quatrains of Seamus Heaney's poem:

My two hands are plumbed water.
You are my palpable, lithe
Otter of memory
In the pool of the moment,

Turning to swim on your back,
Each silent, thigh-shaking kick
Re-tilting the light,
Heaving the cool at your neck.

And suddenly you're out,
Back again, intent as ever,
Heavy and frisky in your freshened pelt,
Printing the stones.

And one of my all-time favorite poems is Robert Macfarlane's playful, tongue-twisting, "The Otter." Here are the last two stanzas of that Macfarlene's 2017 poem:

Ever dream of being otter? That
  utter underwater thunderbolter, that
  shimmering twister?

Run to the riverbank, otter-dreamer, slip
  your skin and change your matter, pour
  your outer being into otter — and enter
  now as otter without falter into water.

*Some Weird Shit I've Done When Traveling On My Own As A Teenager*

In my "Looking from Both Sides" essay I described some of the experiences I had in the summers after my junior and senior years in high school. In that essay I wrote:

> Looking back on it now, I am astounded that my parents seemed unconcerned that after my summer school in Mexico and, again, after my study tour in Spain, I spent a month wandering around Mexico and a month wandering around Europe on my own, a totally unsupervised teenaged American boy. Back in that pre-iPhone, pre-internet era, I was virtually incommunicado while I was traveling around; . . . In our current age of "helicoptering" parenting, it is difficult to imagine allowing a 17- or 18- year-old child the freedom to wander around a foreign country with no supervision and with plenty of opportunities to get into trouble; it is sad to think of a whole generation of adolescents who are not given the chances to accrue life-altering experiences as I did in those summers of 1969 and 1970.
>
> And get into trouble I certainly did.
>
> [But I will save describing some of the weird things I did during those summers for another essay.]

I know, of course, that I was by far not alone among pre-college Boomers who had taken off on backpacking trips to Europe or pilgrimages to India, and many of my friends have told me hair-raising stories of their adventures on such trips. But, as I threatened in that "Looking from Both Sides" essay, here are my stories:



After our 1969 summer school in Saltillo, Mexico, was finished, my friend Paul Russo—a high-school classmate who had also attended the Saltillo summer school—and I had several weeks free before we had to catch a plane in Monterrey to Dallas and thence back to Philadelphia. So we took a 12-hour bus ride down to Mexico City and got a room at the Hotel Monte Carlo, where D.H. Lawrence once stayed. At that time the Monte Carlo was a rather seedy place, but it was cheap and centrally located, within easy walking distance of the Templo Mayor and the Mexico City cathedral. I remember one night—Google tells me it was July 20th—we were walking around and noticed that at all the bars and cafes there were crowds of people standing in front of TV's (black-and-white in those days) watching what I took to be a science fiction movie; I had been so out of touch that I didn't know that everyone was watching the moon landing!

A couple of days after we arrived in Mexico City we ran into a scruffy-looking kid our age named Duck, who offered us some dope to smoke. Duck invited us to take a trip to a nearby village where his mother lived; of course we were willing! We took a bus to the village, arriving at dusk. As we were walking through the darkened streets towards Duck's mother's house we came across a band of vicious-looking wild dogs; we picked up rocks and threw them at the dogs to keep them at bay. When we went around a corner we saw a little lit-up taco stand—the only sign of (human) life in the village. As we were starving, we greedily gobbled up several of those rather greasy tacos; when I asked the taco-stand man what kind of meat he was serving, he replied *perro*!

Duck's mother's house was at the far end of the village, and it was completely dark by the time we arrived. Duck's mother was a kindly, older, American hippie who greeted us warmly and gave us comfortable mats to sleep on. In the morning we wandered into the walled-in garden behind the house. It was entirely filled with six-foot-tall marijuana plants! And there, just beyond the walls of the garden one could see the top of the Teotihuacan Pyramid of the Sun!

[I don't remember how we made our way from there up to Monterrey, but I assume that we did make our flight. I do remember that Paul had tickets for a rock concert the day after we got back to Pennsylvania, but, as we were tired, we decided to blow off going to a concert which was being held at some dairy farm in a place called Woodstock in upstate New York.]



The following summer, after my senior year in high school, I went on a six-week-long study tour of Spain led by Mr. Nesbit, who had been my Spanish teacher since I was in 7th grade. I had just turned eighteen years old. At the end of that program, everyone except me went back to the States while I took a plane from Madrid to London, where I met up with a classmate friend of mine, Bill Squires. Bill and I took a train/ferry over to Ireland, where we hitchhiked around from Cork up to Dublin. Bill then went back to the US and I hitchhiked on to Belfast, crossing the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. I arrived in Belfast on August 13, completely unaware that I was landing in the middle of the Protestant-Catholic riots following the "Battle of the Bogside." There were armed British soldiers everywhere. I took out my camera to snap

a picture, but a British soldier waved me off. I went around the corner and tried again to take a picture of the soldiers standing in front of a tank with smoking billowing out from a makeshift barricade down the street. It would have been a great picture, but the same soldier who had earlier waved me off saw me; he came running up, grabbed my camera, ripped the film out of it, and said "Get out of here."

So I made my way over to the docks and took a ferry to Scotland.

When I got off the ferry and started hitchhiking I had great luck with the first car that stopped for me. It was an older Scottish couple who, when I told them that my name was McClellan, insisted on taking a little detour to Kirkcudbright to show me the MacLellan Castle. And, although they were going to Edinburgh, they also insisted on taking me on to Stirling, where I stayed at a youth hostel not far from the picturesque Stirling Castle. From Stirling I went on to Edinburgh, where I spent several days before going up to Aberdeen. In Aberdeen I bought a small pup tent and a sleeping bag and made my way to Cairngorms National Park, where I planned to camp for a few days. My first night of camping there, however, was so cold that I decided to pack it in and head to Glasgow. (I later learned that, even though it was in the middle of August, someone had died that night from exposure when camping not far from me in Cairngorms.)

On my first day in Glasgow I was sitting in a small park when a raucous ban of hippies came dancing in. As it turns out, they were a traveling troupe of actors performing the musical *Hair* in town. Most of them were stoned and some were tripping. They came up to me and invited me to their performance that evening. I gladly accepted their offer, and that evening, in the "be-in" conclusion of the musical—when all of the audience goes up on the stage to party with the actors—one of the actors handed me a several tabs of LSD and said "Enjoy."

The next day I took a train down to Newcastle where I spent a few days before taking another train to London a day before my flight back to Philadelphia. In London, I unloaded my pup tent and sleeping bag at the youth hostel I was staying at before I made my way to Heathrow. There I had the brilliant idea that I would drop some of that acid and "fly high" on my way back to the States. I checked my bags and went into a cavernous waiting room where announcements were made over a loudspeaker telling passengers the gate numbers of their flights. I figured that I should drop the LSD about an hour before my plane was scheduled to depart so that it would just be starting to kick in as my flight took off. So I went into a bathroom and swallowed one of the tabs. What

I hadn't accounted for, however, was that my flight was delayed! Apparently, the Heathrow ground crew were not prepared for the number of passengers that the new, Boing 747's carried (those "jumbo jets" had just gone into service a few months before), and there was serious confusion all around as the waiting room became filled with passengers awaiting their flights. After an hour delay the acid had seriously kicked it, and I was experiencing visual and auditory hallucinations; the departure board was swirling around before my eyes and the loudspeaker announcing the gate departures was going "Whuumm whuumm whuumm" in my ears. In a panic, I looked around and saw a long-haired dude sitting not far from me; I went up to him and mumbled something about tripping as I showed him my boarding pass. That guy kindly took me by the arm, guided me to my gate as the plane doors were just about to close, and he made sure I got on my plane. The stewardess showed me to my seat, as my seat mate tried to inch as far away from me as possible.

I don't remember much about that flight back home, except that I thought the airplane food was the best thing that I had ever tasted.

*Protests, Protests, Protests*



Strikers on the ledge of Mathematics Hall, one of five buildings at Columbia University that students took over in April 1968. Credit… William E. Sauro/The New York Times. Red star over head of James E. McClellan, III.

I come from a family of radicals.

My father was a hard-core leftist. Like most of others in the New Left, he had flirted with communism after WWII but became disillusioned with the rise of Stalinism; he remained, however, a staunch Marxist. (In 1980 he and my step-mother spent a semester at Moscow State University, where my father gained some notoriety when he published a paper on how the Soviets were mis-teaching *Das Capital*.)

In the later 1960's, my father had become increasingly radicalized and a fierce opponent of the Vietnam War. I think that he had something to do with the Black Panthers in Philly, and some of his students at Temple University went on to become members of Allende's socialist government in Chile. I remember that, in 1969, we thought that our home telephone was being bugged by Nixon's Plumbers. Whenever the phone would ring, we would hear a little "click" when we picked it up. To goof on the supposed eavesdroppers, I would always answer the phone: "I believe in the violent overthrow of the United States of America. Hello?"

My eldest brother James followed in my father's footsteps—literally, when he went off to Columbia University where my father used to teach. In April, 1968, when he was a senior, James participated in the sit-ins at Columbia protesting the military recruitments on campus; James was arrested with the others who occupied Columbia University buildings, and he ended up graduating from college in a courtroom.

My next older brother Ross also became a war protester. In 1968, when he was at the University of Chicago, Ross was arrested for having thrown a brick through a window of the Provost's front door when students were protesting UChicago's involvement in the war. Ross had his case thrown out of court when he quoted *verbatim* a speech about civil unrest that one of the judges he faced had given years earlier when the judge was the Socialist candidate for Vice-President.



My own acts of civil disobedience were a little more tame than those of my elder brothers.

When I was in 10th grade at Central Bucks High School, I was sent home twice, once for wearing jeans to school, and a second time for having hair that came down over the tops of my ears. On both occasions, my father stormed into the Principal's office and demanded that I be reinstated in school. (My father had a little bit of clout at my public school as the Vice-Principal was enrolled in a Masters program at the College of Education at Temple University, where my father taught a required Foundations in Education course.)

The next year, in the fall of 1968 when I was a junior, I was kicked out of my homeroom because I refused to stand for the daily Pledge of Allegiance. That time the Principal put a chair in front of the administration office where I was to check in at the start of the day. I declared that that chair was my own homeroom, the "Happy Homeroom," and I dutifully elected myself as my homeroom representative to the Student Council!

The following year Central Bucks split into two campuses, and I attended the new Central Bucks East high school for my senior year. The Principal—the former Vice-Principal at the old school—was very solicitous at first and allowed us students to create our own form of student government. A few friends and I suggested that we should

base our new student governance on ancient Athenian democracy; once a month the entire student body would assemble—at what we anachronistically called a *forum*—and anyone could make any proposal that they wished, with all students having an equal vote on it. At first, this system worked pretty well, especially when we passed a measure that said that we could leave campus whenever we didn't have any classes—something that the Principal surprisingly agreed to! (As I only had two required classes my senior year, I spent most of my school days hanging around in town!)

[I should add that that year my father flunked the Principal of Central Bucks East out of the Temple University Masters in Education program. Afterwards, the Principal wrote to the admissions office of Oberlin College—my top choice of the colleges to which I had applied—saying that I was a trouble-maker and under no circumstances should the college accept me; I am pretty sure that his letter helped me get into Oberlin!]

As May Day, 1970, approached, I asked the Principal if those of us who wanted to go to a Vietnam War protest in town could do so as an excused absence. The Principal refused. So, my little gang of rebels and I decided that we would call in a bomb threat and close the school for that day, which we did. Many of us went to the protest, which was rather sedate and nothing like the Kent State massacre which occurred on that same day in Ohio. The only downside of our little escapade was that, after we had called in our fake bomb scare, the police went through the school with sniffer dogs and one of my friends got busted when the dogs found a bag of marijuana that the dope had left in his school locker.



When I went to Oberlin the following fall, the first thing the college did was to hold an all-school meeting to decide what to do about the previous semester, when Oberlin had shut down before the end of classes after the May 4 Kent State massacre. All of those who had been seniors had been allowed to graduate, and, at the all-school meeting, it was decided that everyone else who had been enrolled in classes the previous semester would be recorded as having passed those classes; they also instituted an new pass/fail policy, where students could opt to receive a pass or fail

grade rather than a letter grade for any given class. (I opted for pass/pass grades for all of my classes except those in my majors of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies.)

That next spring, 1971, a group of Oberlin students, myself included, planned to engage in the May Day civil disobedience protests in Washington DC. The organizers of the 1971 May Day protests, the motto of which was "If the government won't stop the war, we'll stop the government," assigned Oberlin students to shut down the Key Bridge from Arlington into DC. (Antioch was assigned to shut down the nearby Theodore Roosevelt bridge.) For some reason, even though I was a freshman, I was given the task of renting a 20' U-Haul truck that we planned to drive to DC and abandon on the Key Bridge to block traffic coming into the city. As none of us had credit cards back in those days, I had to leave a $50 deposit—a lot of money then—before the U-Haul dealer would hand over the keys to the truck. So, on Saturday, May 1, some of the older students drove the truck while the rest of the dozen or so of us piled into the cargo hold, where we had piled straw and sleeping bags for the all-day drive to the Washington DC area. We spent the next day at a Chevy Chase house of the parents of one of us Oberlin students. As it turns out, some famous news anchor—I think it was David Brinkley—lived next door to that house; we all went over there to talk to him about the upcoming protest, but he just slammed the door in our faces.

Then, on Monday, May 3, we piled into the rented U-Haul early in the morning and headed out towards the Key Bridge. About two blocks before we got there, however, a phalanx of police cars pulled us over. Some of the cops opened the hood of the truck and started pulling out wires to disable the vehicle. Another group of police officers, every one with black tape over his badge to obscure names and badge numbers, pulled open the back door of the truck and lobbed in a tear gas canister, beating every one of us with batons as we came coughing out of the back of the truck; I was one of the last to get out of the truck, and when it was my turn to jump out and get whacked on the head, I dropped the first-aid bag I had been assigned to carry. We all ran. Only three of our group—two dancers and a videographer—made it over to the Key Bridge. The dancers had planned on performing a "happening" that the videographer would film while we were blocking traffic; although the rest of us had expected to be arrested for an act of civil disobedience, as it turns out, of our group only the dancers and the videographer were arrested—joining the some 12,000 other protesters and ordinary civilians swept up that day in the largest mass arrest in US history. The rest of us ended up wandering

around the residential streets of Georgetown, together with hundreds of others. Some people were pushing over cars that were parked in the street—I might have helped to push over a BMW—but most of the protesters were just peacefully trying to make their way to the Washington Monument. There were armed soldiers everywhere, but the word went out not to hassle them as they were mostly draftees who would eventually be sent on to Vietnam; we would shake the soldiers' hands and say that we were doing this for them.

Eventually, everyone in our group somehow made their way back to our Chevy Chase base. I called U-Haul and said that while we were driving the truck a group of men pulled us over and ripped apart the truck's engine. The startled U-Haul operator asked if I had called the police. "It was the police!" I replied. U-Haul did give us another truck to drive back to Oberlin, but I lost my $50 deposit.



Oberlin College should have listened to my high school Principal. I did turn out to be something of a trouble-maker.

In the spring semester of my freshman year, before I went to the 1971 May Day protests in Washington, DC, I was arrested by the Oberlin city police.

That semester I had been taking an astronomy class which occasionally used the old telescope in the school observatory located on the otherwise totally abandoned third floor of Peters Hall, which at that time also housed the College Admission offices on the ground floor. One evening, when leaving Peters after class, I discovered that if one opened the door to the three-floor fire escape from the inside, it didn't close all the way, and one could come back into the building by going through that door after climbing the fire escape on the outside. As a freshman, I was required to live in one of the freshmen dorms. My room was a nice but rather cramped place I shared with another student. While my roommate and I got along reasonably well—at least until he smashed my Martin guitar while he was bouncing a lacrosse ball in the room—once I discovered that there were three closed-off rooms on the abandoned third floor of Peters Hall that I could access by climbing through a window in an adjoining room, I decided to use my discovery about the fire escape door and move in there. So, one night I dragged a mattress and some of my books up into my new spacious, three-room

quarters. I spent several evenings there, going into Peters Hall every day to make sure that the fire escape door was opened from the inside. One night, however, I made the mistake of turning on the overhead light in the room when I climbed through my window/door to go out to the bathroom. A passing city police patrol car saw the light go on, and by the time I came back from the bathroom a policeman was waiting for me with gun drawn. I was taken down to the police station, where the police called someone at the College to say that they had a student who they were going to charge with breaking and entering. Fortunately for me, the Oberlin official said that the College would handle the matter. So I was let go. (I did have to sneak back into Peters that night to retrieve a bag of marijuana I had left in my squatter quarters.)

The next day I was called into the Dean of Students office and was told that the following week I would have to face a Judicial Board hearing—Oberlin's system of dealing with recalcitrant student where disciplinary actions are determined by a board of faculty and students.

In the meantime, however, another issue had come up. A few days before I moved into Peters Hall, I had received a bill from the head of the Facilities Services for the extra electricity used by the small refrigerator I had brought into my dorm room. Although the charge was extremely modest, I was outraged because I knew that my roommate's huge stereo system drew much more electricity then my tiny frig did and he hadn't received any bill. So I scrawled "Fuck you" across the bill and dropped it into the campus mail. Apparently, however, my swearing defiance was passed around the Facilities Services offices, and the embarrassed head of Facilities Services felt that he had to initiate a Judicial Board hearing about my behavior.

So, I think that I might have been the only Oberlin College student ever to have *two* Judicial Board hearings on the same day. I met with the Board in the Dean's office, and sincerely said that I was sorry for all of the trouble I had caused. I was asked to wait outside while the Board consulted. When I was ushered back in, I was quite disappointed when the only thing the Board spokesperson said was that they were giving me "an admonition."

The next day I went back to the Dean of Students to ask him if I could be exempted from the College rule that only seniors were allowed to live off campus. He readily agreed, and even assented when I asked him if my girlfriend could also live off campus with me the next year.

[There is an addendum to this story: The following year my girlfriend Deborah and I did live together in a small off-campus apartment, where we cooked and ate most of our meals, although Deborah also signed up for College meals and often had her lunches on campus. Towards the end of that year, however, I received another bill—this time from the Dining Services, charging me for a year of campus meals I had never eaten. (Apparently, although I had been given permission to live off campus, no one informed Dining Services that I would not be eating in the campus dining halls!) Of course I refused to pay that bill, which was not unsubstantial. The following year, with my bill from the previous year still unpaid, I was not allowed to register for classes. Fortunately, my Classics professors allowed me to audit my classes so I could keep up with my Greek and Latin.

By the spring semester of my junior year, and after several whining trips to the Dean's office, my dining room bill was finally forgiven and I was allowed to register for classes again. But because I hadn't received any credits from the previous semester, I had to stay at school for another semester after everyone else in my class had graduated in the spring of 1974—something that cost me more than the Dining Services bill I had refused to pay in the first place! Still, my college transcript looks like I skipped from Greek I and Latin I to Greek III and Latin III!]




Mike Twohy, *The New Yorker,* 9 July, 2001.

Museums have played a large role in my life.

When I was growing up in New York City and in nearby Ridgewood, NJ, my parents would regularly take my brothers and me to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and occasionally to the Museum of Modern Art. (I remember being particularly impressed by Picasso's *Guernica*, which was in exile at MOMA until it was finally returned to Spain in 1981 after the death of Franco and the restoration of democracy in that country.)

As a child, my parents also frequently took us to the American Museum of Natural History on NYC's West Side. Of course I was enthralled by the dinosaur skeletons and the dioramas of cavemen, but I was most especially attracted to the model of the extinct dodo bird, demanding that I be taken there first where I could stare at it for as long as my parents would allow.

[Many years later, in 1992, my wife and I took our five-year-old son to the American Museum of Natural History when we were on a trip to New York. We stopped at a display on the origins of life and were reading a panel about DNA when we suddenly noticed that our little son was nowhere to be seen. I had never felt such fear and panic in my life—our little boy was lost in New York! Had he been abducted? Was he wandering around Central Park, or had he gone down to the Hudson River? No, thank goodness, the little nerd was just around the corner, fully absorbed with a display case on RNA. I am not proud to say that my reaction to finding our son was to let all of my

anxiety out in the form of anger, berating the little tyke for not staying within my sight. They say that becoming a parent is to accept a lifetime of worry.]

After my family left the New York area and moved to Pennsylvania in 1962 when I was in 5th grade, my mother ordered the *Metropolitan Seminars in Art*, John Canaday's survey of "Great Periods in Painting." I think that my mother did this as a way to keep in touch with the Met and the cultured life she had left behind. Anyway, it was always an exciting time when a new volume arrived in the mail. I remember my brothers and I would sit with our mother on the living room sofa and ceremonially open up the package. We would page through the thin text and pass around the wonderful ("Suitable for Framing"!) 9 1/4" x 12 1/2" color prints of paintings that came in an envelope attached to the front of the fascicle. It was a rare moment of cosy, warm family time in a childhood often marred by tension and outbursts of alcohol-infused anger.



In 1968, when I was a junior in high school in Doylestown, PA, my friend Ed Curran and I would skip school once a month to go to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. We would meet at the train station a few blocks away from Central Bucks High School and take the commuter train to the art deco Suburban Station in Philly. We would then walk up the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and climb the iconic steps of the museum (where there is now a statue of Sylvester Stallone from the movie *Rocky*) and go to the ticket booth. Every time we would pretend to be brothers and say that our parents had recently become members of the museum but that we hadn't yet received our membership cards; the ticket-taker would inevitably say that we had to check at the membership office and point to a door down a hall inside the museum. And we were in the museum without paying! Again! (I think that after months of our doing this, the ticket takers were probably on to our scheme, but tolerated it to allow two boys who were obviously skipping school into the museum.)



Once we were inside the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Ed and I would always make a beeline to the gallery where Marcel Duchamp's works were displayed to pay homage to his *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2*.



Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 147 x 89 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[I might note that that when Duchamp's painting was first displayed in the US, at the famous 1913 Armory Show in New York City, it scandalized a public unattuned to Modernist art. On the day that the Armory Show opened, Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper, the *New York World*, ran a piece by the cartoonist Alek Sass who said Marcel Duchamp's *Nu Descendant un Escalier* (which Sass mistranslated as "a nude person descending a ladder") "resembled a fearful explosion in a lumber yard." A few days later, Thomas Powers—a landscape artist and cartoonist who had been scheduled to have some of his work displayed in the Armory Show— responded with his own spoof of the Armory Show in William Randolph Hearst's rival *New York American* newspaper, including a cartoon of a little boy mistaking Duchamp's *Nu descendant un escalier* (mis-titled as "Sun Rise in a Lumber Yard") for a puzzle. For more than a century after this Duchamp painting came to America, it has continued to inspire humorous cartoonists.]

[For the past several years I have been working on a compilation of American cartoons and comic strips about art and archaeology, hence this aside.]



Thomas E. Powers, "Art at the Armory by Powers, Futurist," *New York American*, 22 Feb., 1913.




Bill Watterson*, Calvin and Hobbes,* 3 Nov., 1993.




Harry Bliss, *The New Yorker*, 23 Sept., 2013.

Back to 1968: After staring at the Duchamp, Ed and I would wander through the Philadelphia Museum of Art for several hours, spending time with the Impressionists (Cézanne's *Bathers*!) and then going on to one of the galleries we hadn't explored before. We would then leave the museum and make our way over to South Street to grab a cheesesteak and gawk at the hippies before returning to Suburban Station to catch a train that would bring us back to Doylestown by the end of the school day. The next day we would each forge a parent signature on an absent excuse form and go back to school for the rest of the month.

Many years later, in 2004 or 2005, when I was teaching a general humanities class at Hinsdale High School in New Hampshire, I told my students that, rather than reading Jansen cover to cover, a better way to learn art history would be to skip school once a month, take a train into Boston, and wander around the Museum of Fine Arts. I think that I remember my very tolerant principal later calling me in to his office to tell me that I shouldn't be suggesting that my students skip school!



Exterior and interior of the Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

Another museum that played a large role in my adolescent life was the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, PA. This sprawling structure was constructed in 1916 by the amateur archaeologist and arts-and-crafts tile manufacturer Henry Mercer to house his

extensive collection of pre-Industrial tools and implements. Mercer built his six-story-tall museum using the—for the time—innovative technique of pouring concrete into a form reinforced with iron rebars, a fire-proof technique he also employed for the construction of his nearby palatial home, Fonthill, and for his nearby Moravian Pottery and Tile Works factory.

The Mercer Museum is located on the southeastern edge of Doylestown along a road where I would often walk when I went into town. The first time I paid the nominal entrance fee and went into the museum, I was enthralled. Everywhere one looked there were artifacts attached to every possible surface: boats, old hay-carts, and wooden sleds hanging from the ceilings, piles of antique decorated cast iron stove plates attached to the walls everywhere; there were rooms with reconstructed apothecaries and craftsman workshops. And wandering through the meandering displays, towards the top one would come across a section where Mercer had finished off a ceiling only to later change his mind and add on another story on top of it!

Back in the day the Mercer Museum was a relatively neglected place, almost an embarrassing anachronism. Today, spruced up with a new visitor center, it is a National History Landmark; it houses the library of the Buck County Historical Society, and is a sought-after wedding and party venue.

One late afternoon in the mid-1960's, when I was walking around the museum after it was closed, I noticed a little ground-floor side door that seemed to be slightly ajar. I pushed on the door, it opened, and there I was in the museum! Alone! Over the next couple of years, I often made use of that discovery, taking friends into the museum after hours while we wandered around absorbing its many wonders. (No one ever seemed to have noticed that that little door never closed properly, and of course, that was before anyone thought of installing security cameras or alarms in the museum.)

[I am sure that my readers have detected a theme of my testing doors and finagling my way into places I shouldn't be in; I should reassure everyone that never in the many times I surreptitiously slipped into the Mercer Museum had it crossed my mind to take anything or to disturb the displays in any way.]



Another museum that had a great effect on my life is the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, where I met Pam when we were both grad student in Classical Archaeology there. For many years while we were at Penn, every day we would walk pass the Penn Museum's ornamental reflecting pool with its bronze statue of a dancing satyr and go up the steps into the museum, glancing at the Chinese Tang Dynasty glazed horse statues and the magnificent Qing Dynasty crystal ball in the center of the Museum's 90'-tall rotunda. We would then pass through galleries of African, Egyptian, Roman, Etruscan, and Greek art before making our way to the Mediterranean Section seminar room. At the Penn Museum we literally lived and breathed antiquity

I have many fond memories of the Penn Museum. One day I gave Pam a little surprise birthday party at the Museum's Potlatch cafeteria, attended by many friends and by Pam's parents who had, unbeknownst to her, come up from Florida. Another favorite memory was when Pam and I took our Ph.D. qualifying exams in 1979. We took those three-day long exams in the Mediterranean Section seminar room. One question from the Bronze Age section of those exams was "Discuss the foreign influences on Mycenaean art as reflected in the finds from the Shaft Graves." That was a particularly easy one because, just before our exams, replicas of the Shaft Grave objects had been taken off display and placed on shelves in the seminar room right in front of us! We could look up and say, "Oh yes, those daggers inlaid in a Near Eastern niello technique or that one with an Egyptian nilotic scene!"

After spending four years at the American School in Athens, we came back to Philadelphia in 1983 to finish up our Ph.D.'s. During that period, Pam had an internship in a museum studies program at the Penn Museum and I worked for a year in the Education Department, giving a couple of tours to school groups every week. I never tired of showing students around the treasures from the Royal Cemetery at Ur or watching them squeal when we enter the mummy gallery.



As I mentioned in the "Building Stonehenge" vignette above, after a few years of struggling, Pam and I eventually obtained professional jobs. As the luck of the draw would have it, Pam ended up in the museum world while I ended up in a teaching career. And the museums where I have spent the most time in my adult life were those where Pam worked: the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Tampa Museum of Art, the Fitchburg (MA) Museum of Art, and the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College.

In addition to these museums, I also became quite familiar with the National Gallery and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington DC, both when I lived in the DC area for the year I was a Program Officer at the National Endowment for the Humanities when I had a gap in my employment at Boston University and also during the five years I took students on annual trips to these museum when I taught at the private Key School in Annapolis, MD. Once, in 1992, when I was at the NEH, the distinguished British historian of ancient Greek art Sir John Boardman came to visit us in the Old Post Office Building, where the NEH was then located. (The Old Post Office is now the Trump International Hotel!) I had the honor to take our distinguished visitor to the National Gallery. After touring around the museum, we were sitting in the Garden Cafe having a cuppa when the subject of the Elgin Marbles came up—the pedimental relief sculptures that Lord Elgin removed from the Parthenon in Athens and sold to the British Museum in 1816. In 1982, Melina Mercouri, when she was Greece's Minister of Culture, had begun her campaign to have the Elgin Marbles returned to Athens. In our discussion of the Elgin Marbles, Sir John took the standard British line that Lord Elgin, who was the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at the time, had permission from the Turkish government—which controlled Greece then—to remove the marbles from the Athenian Acropolis. Sir John also argued that the pedimental sculptures from the Parthenon have been well cared for in the British Museum, better than they would have been had they remained in Athens, and that they have been seen by more people in London than if they were in Athens. I can hardly believe my audacity when I replied "Sir John, when the Parthenon frieze depicting the Panathenaic procession was originally sculpted it was a monument to Athenian imperialism. It was fitting that it was transferred to London in the 19th century when Britain was the dominant imperial

power in the world. But, now, after WWII and the fall of the Soviet Union, the US is the dominant global imperial power, so I agree with Mercouri that the Parthenon marbles should leave the British Museum, but I think they should come to the US, here in Washington, DC." As I remember, Sir John Boardman just politely smiled.



And museums played a large role in our ending up in Oviedo, the capital of the province of Asturias in northern Spain.

In 1999, when I was undertaking the archaeological survey of the NAVSTA Rota in southern Spain, Pam wanted to see the newly opened Frank-Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, so we took our first trip up to the northern, Cantabrian coast of Spain. A few years later, after we had decided that when we retired we would live in Spain, we made a number of exploratory trips during our fall and spring breaks to check out areas where we might want to live in retirement. On one such trip, when we traveled from Santander to Santiago de Compostela along the Cantabrian coast, we spent a few days in Oviedo. We fell in love with the city, in no small part because it had an archaeological museum! (Oviedo's Museo Arqueológico de Asturias underwent a major renovation in 2011, with the construction of a new addition to the original museum housed in the cloisters of the old monastery of San Vicente; today it is one of the premier regional archaeological museums in the country.)

After Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016, we accelerated our plans to retire to Spain. (I've written about this in an editorial entitled "Fleeing the Death Star: Why I Self-Deported from the US."). After jumping through all of the bureaucratic hoops to get our Spanish residence visas we finally moved to Oviedo in September, 2017. Oviedo turned out to be everything we hoped it would be, and more. In addition to the laid-back European Spanish lifestyle we had expected to find, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that, in addition to its wonderful archaeology museum, Oviedo has a top-notch art museum, the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias—with free entrance!

*On the Boards*

As long as I am on cultural matters, I might insert here a vignette on my encounters with the theatrical world.

I have always been enamored by theatrical performances. I remember when I was four years old in 1956 and my parents took me to a theater in New York City to see the ventriloquist Shari Lewis and her puppet Lamb Chops; it was magical: as I was sitting in the darkened auditorium, right there up on stage in bright lights were the characters I had seen on the *Captain Kangaroo* TV show! Later, when I was in junior high, my parents had season tickets to a repertory company performances at the Theater of Living Arts on South Street in Philadelphia; it was always such a treat to go into the city to see a play—in my memories, the magic of going to the theater is combined with the excitement of going from our quiet suburban home into the bustling city.

I was in two school plays when I was in high school. When I was a junior I had a bit part as a Denver policeman in our school's production of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. When I was a senior, I had a more substantial, albeit purely speaking, role in the the school's production of Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon*. (I could neither sing nor dance—but I could memorize lines!) I don't remember much about those high school theatrical experiences other than how much comradery fun we had in rehearsals and how exhilarating it was to receive applause at the curtain call.



When I was a senior in high school I wrote a rather jejune play, "Boy, 16, Kills 4." It was about, well, a 16-year-old boy who, after he becomes disillusioned with the "phoniness" of his world and is rejected by the girl he has a crush on, climbs up onto the roof of his house with a gun and the play ends with a literal bang as he shoots four passersby. A play about a troubled teen committing mass murder might seem prosaic in today's gun-violent America, but it was, in 1969, rather shocking, as well as being prescient.

As far as I know, my play has been performed exactly twice. The first time was at a school assembly in my senior year, with me, naturally, playing the title role. It was a more innocent time back then, and no one blinked an eye when I appeared on stage in

the final scene with a real rifle I had brought from home, and I never gave a thought to posting a trigger (haha!) warning about the play's violent ending; today—Uvalde notwithstanding—one would think that a SWAT team would have been called when a teenaged boy showed up in school with a gun. The other time "Boy, 16, Kills 4" was performed was the next year, again at a school assembly. By chance, I was visiting my old high school after my freshman year at Oberlin on the same day that the students were remounting my play and everyone was surprised by my visit. It was an honor to see my "Boy, 16, Kills 4" continuing to be part of the Central Bucks East high school experience in 1971. (Only a stage gun was used in that performance.)



I only had a couple of brief brushes with the theatrical world when I was an undergraduate at Oberlin College. In 1971, my sophomore year, the famous director Herbert Blau taught at Oberlin, where he formed his experimental theater group KRAKEN. Blau offered a number of classes for students, and I attended some of his workshops on improvisational acting. After a couple of sessions, however, when I totally totally flopped by just improvising on my own and not responding to the improvisations of the others in the workshop, Bau suggested that a better use of my time might be to stick with learning Greek and Latin.

[One of Blau's successful students was Julie Taymor, who came back to Oberlin to study with Blau after she had dropped out and started an acting career in New York City. After graduating, Julie earned an Oberlin fellowship that allowed her to study theater in Japan and Indonesia, a time when she became acquainted with Balinese puppetry—an experience that informed her award-winning Broadway staging of Disney's *The Lion King*.]

My other encounter with the acting world when I was at Oberlin was during my first Winter Term. (At Oberlin, students are required to do an independent study during the inter-semester January breaks.) That January, 1971, I joined a student film crew (all seniors except for freshman me) that went to Miami Beach to make a film version of J.D. Salinger's short story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." We borrowed some professional filming equipment from an NBC Sports TV team that was at the Orange Bowl to broadcast Super Bowl V, we rented a small cottage on the beach, and we used an agency

to hire the actors we would use for the film, including a child actor to play the role of the young girl who the disturbed Seymour Glass takes into the ocean on a rubber raft. (As I was the sound man on the crew, it was quite a chore to wade half-way into the water while carrying the bulky tape recorder around my neck and holding the microphone boom beyond the waves so that the crashing sound of the breakers did not obliterate the dialogue.) A few days into shooting, after the actors had left for the day, the parents of the child actor stopped back by our cottage to pick up something that their daughter had left behind, and they were quite disturbed to encounter a room filled with marijuana smoke! They pulled their daughter out of our project, and we had to go back to the agency to hire an adult midget actress to replace the girl and re-film what we had already shot.

[One more notable event during the making of that movie: We were in a nearby hotel getting ready to shoot the scene where Seymour berates a woman in an elevator before he goes into his hotel room to commit suicide. We had just set up our lights and cameras in front of the elevator in the hotel lobby when the elevator door opened and out walked . . . Milton Berle! Uncle Miltie, who was staying at the hotel, naturally assumed that we were there to film him, so he struck a pose and gave a few one-liners. I don't remember if we had the presence of mind to film that ad-hoc performance.]

I also don't remember ever seeing the final version of our film of Salinger's short story, although I do recall that the seniors won a prize for the best student film in Ohio that year.



When I was in graduate school at Penn, I had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to try my hand at any amateur acting.

But when Pam and I were at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece, we did do a little acting. In our third and fourth years at the School, 1981 to 1983, I was the Secretary of the School (an old-fashioned term for an assistant director) and we lived in the on-campus Loring Hall. There we participated in some of the humorous skits that our friends Alice Donohue and Charles Edwards put on for the other members of the School. I remember one little playlet where Charles had choreographed a hilarious suitcase dance, where we swung (empty) suitcases back and

forth as we danced around. And then there was a little play Alice and Charles wrote, "Hankenstein," poking good-natured fun at the Director of the School, Henry Immerwahr, as he was about to retire.

And in our last year in Athens, Pam and I somehow connected with an English-language amateur theater group. (Neither Pam nor I have any memory of how we came across this group, which wasn't associated with either the American or the British Schools.) And somehow we ended up playing a small part—a married couple—in that group's production of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Again, I have few memories of that experience, other than that the small theater where we performed was more than adequate for the size of the audience we had.



The last time I trod the boards was eleven years ago when I was teaching at the Key School in Maryland. Key has a very active Theater Arts program, putting on a school play in the fall and a musical every spring. That fall, in 2011, the theater director Nick Olson type-cast me as Professor Willard in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. That was an easy role. When the Stage Manager asks Prof. Willard to come up to the stage to give a few words about the history of Grover's Corner, New Hampshire, I really didn't have to act at all and could just stay in the normal pedantic character my students were so accustomed to in the classroom.



For Pam and me, our brief turns on stage were really just a lark. But going to the theater was always an important part of our life together. When we were first dating, we used to go to performances at the Annenberg Center at Penn. When we lived in the Boston area, we regularly attended plays at the Huntington Theater and at the A.R.T. in Cambridge. And when we moved to Keene, New Hampshire, for many years we had season tickets at the summer stock theater in nearby Peterborough. Everyone in Peterborough, whose motto is "a good town to live in," is convinced that Thornton Wilder modeled his *Our Town* Grover's Corner on their town. The Peterborough Players have regularly put on *Our Town* since 1940, when Thornton Wilder was at the nearby

MacDowell's writer colony; the most memorable Peterborough Players performance of *Our Town* we saw featured the actor James Whitmore Jr. as the Stage Manager.

Since we moved to Oviedo, Spain, in 2017, we have only gone to the theater on a return trip we made to the States in 2019, when we saw an off-Broadway show in NYC. We have have been to many music performances in Oviedo's two wonderful concert halls, and we have been to one zarzuela—a kind of musical particular to Spain. But, as we are becoming more fluent in Spanish, we are almost ready to try our hand at the vibrant Spanish theater scene.

*Teach, Teaching, Taught*

I would be remiss in writing these vignettes if I didn't say at least something about teaching, which has figured so large in my life.

Growing up, I was privileged to attend excellent public schools. (My father, as a disciple of John Dewy, refused to consider sending us to private schools, although, after my mother died, my younger brother Bruce did go to a private boarding school.)

I do remember liking all of my teachers, though only a few now stick in my elderly mind. There was my 1st grade teacher—I have forgotten her name—whose encouragement helped lead me to my lifelong love of reading. (The fact that I was privileged to live in a household full of books also helped!) And then there was Mr. Nesbitt, who, as I've mentioned, was my Spanish teacher for six years, from 7th through 12th grades. Another notable teacher I had was Mr. Aldridge, my 11th and 12th grade English teacher, who I now realize was flagrantly gay, although at the time it didn't register with us that he was homosexual; I remember being irked when Mr. Aldridge made us memorize poems or passages from Shakespeare, although now I greatly appreciate being able to recite from memory A.E. Housman's "Farewell to Barn and Stack and Tree" or Portia's "The quality of mercy" speech from *The Merchant of Venice*.

One summer—I think I was in 10th grade— my father was teaching a summer course held at Muhlenberg College in nearby Allentown, PA, and he asked me if I wanted to come to one of his classes. I jumped at the opportunity. "What are you teaching?" I asked. "I teach teachers how to teach," my father replied. I remember being impressed by the bucolic Muhlenberg campus and thinking how cool was the classroom where my father taught, with a semicircle of desks facing the blackboard in front of which my father stood. He went on and on about something—I imagine that it was the epistemological question of how one can know if a student has learned something, one of his favorite topics. And there was my dad, the center of attention, with everyone laughing at his witty replies to their questions. I wanted to do that!



I had a rather rocky start to my teaching career.

I don't remember ever thinking that I would become a teacher when I was in college. I just studied ancient Greek and Latin languages and cultures. I do remember

being involved with some program over at the Oberlin high school, but I imagine that that was just tutoring for a Latin class. So too, when I was in grad school, I never gave a thought of what I would do with my degree in Classical Archaeology, other than to continue to travel to the Mediterranean every summer to dig. In the back of my mind, however, I probably always figured that I would become a college professor like my father and eldest brother.

The first time I was actually in a classroom as a teacher was in 1977, when, as a grad student, I was trying to pick up some extra cash by substitute teaching in the Philadelphia school system. I remember once subbing in a junior high school in a rather rough West Philly neighborhood. The young teenage students weren't paying any attention to me as I was trying to follow the lesson plan their teacher had left for me. So I stopped what I was trying to teach and wrote "Homo erectus" on the blackboard. That woke them up, and for the rest of the class they listened attentively as I outlined the rudiments of human evolution.

My first experience of actually teaching a course was in 1980, when I was at the American School in Athens and taught an "Ancient Greek History" class for the University of Maryland extension program at the US base located near the Athenian airport. All of the students were US soldiers, most of whom were officers older than me, interested in learning more about the country to which they were stationed. As a first-time instructor, I was nervous, and I had written out by hand my lectures, each a dozen or so pages cribbed from Russell Meiggs' revision of the J.B. Bury Greek History textbook I had read in college. So, on the first class, which met once a week on the base, I stood in front of the soldiers and read from my prepared text for three solid hours! The next week, with a new lecture in hand, I continued to read aloud; after an hour and a half of my droning on, one lieutenant tentatively raised his hand. "Yes?" "Please, Sir, would it be possible for us to take a little break?" (I wasn't paid very much for that UMaryland course; every dollar I earned I spent at the PX on the base, amassing a liquor cabinet that was the envy of all of my friends.)

I got my first real teaching job in 1986, a one-year sabbatical replacement appointment for a professor (an archaeologist friend of mine) in the College of Arts and Letters at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ. Each of the two semesters I was there I taught an introductory level course on the ancient world and upper-level courses on Classical Greece and Republican Rome. (There may have been a bit of

nepotism in my getting this job as my older brother James also taught at in the same program at Stevens, although he had not yet become the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters as he would be years later.) As the vast majority of my students were majoring in a technological subject and only taking my courses because it was a requirement, it was a challenging task to try to share with them the enthusiasm I had for antiquity. I think that I was fairly successful in meeting this challenge; I remember James being irritated that I left the door to my classroom open and he could hear me engaging with the students when he walked down the hall!

The year Pam and I spent in Hoboken was quite memorable, and it was great fun to spend time with my brother and sister-in-law Jackie. Pam had a research appointment with a professor at Stevens and taught an ancient Greek art class at nearby Montclair State University. But the main event of the year was that, soon after we came to New Jersey after our summer digs in Cyprus, we discovered that Pam was pregnant! Fortunately, for the nine months of her pregnancy, we were covered by the Stevens health insurance I had; our son, James Russell McClellan, was born in a Meadowlands hospital just days before that insurance policy was set to expire.



As I mentioned in the first of these vignettes, "Digging Up Stonehenge," after our year in Hoboken we were not successful in the many applications we had sent out for teaching or museum jobs. So we went to Pam's parent's house in Tampa, FL, where we supported ourselves—with Pam's parents help!—by taking a variety of jobs. I did a little substitute teaching and some part-time work for a cultural resource management (CRM) company undertaking archaeological surveys for construction projects; while neither of these employments paid very well, it was nice to be in a classroom and to do some digging. (The most exciting thing I found in the various test pits I dug before construction projects began was a cache of prehistoric Native American stone tools located in downtown Tampa near what is now the Bypass Canal.)

After our fallow year in Tampa, in 1988 Pam was hired as the Head of Education at the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University and, as a concession to her spouse, I was given two courses to teach, a Latin II class at Emory and a survey of Classical Archaeology course at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, GA. While I was fully prepared to

teach the Classical Archaeology course, I was a bit nervous about teaching Latin, which I had not really kept up with since I graduated from Oberlin more than a decade before. The Classics Department at Emory had a wise policy of only allowing the most senior professors to teach the first-year introductory level Latin courses, while the upper-level Latin reading courses were assigned to more junior faculty like me. My Latin II class read a selection of Cicero's letters and his *De Senectute* (I riff on the latter in my essay "Accepting Senectitude: Some Thoughts on the Occasion of my Approaching Seventieth Birthday.") As it turns out, in spite of my anxiety about teaching Latin, that class was the easiest I have ever taught in my life. The first year I taught it I did have to spend many hours before class in my office translating the Cicero text , staying just one step ahead of the students, but the class itself was a breeze. On occasion I would add some historical and cultural details to provide a context to what Cicero had written, but mostly I would just begin the class by asking who wanted to start translating the text. (As every student would immediately stare at the floor when I asked this, that was a good opportunity to wipe one's nose if it were runny!) Then, whenever a student had difficulty in translating, we would stop to discuss some arcane rule of Latin grammar before getting back to the business of translation.

While I was at Emory, I also took a group of students on a summer field school to the excavations at the Late Roman site of Kalavasos-Kopetra on Cyprus that I had just started. It was the first time I was directing an excavation of my own—I had a co-director colleague from the University of Missouri—and one of the main sources of funding I had was a proportion of the tuition fees the students were paying that I was given for their upkeep; from that sum I was able to rent houses and vehicles and pay for the food of my entire staff. My Emory students were young and enthusiastic, and, under the direction of my experienced trench supervisors, they were, for the most part, much more careful diggers than the local work boys normally employed on Cypriot digs. And it was also great fun to take those students on trips around the island to show them some of the main archaeological sites and museums of Cyprus.



After two years in Atlanta, I finally got a real teaching position my own—and, as it turned out, it was in the top Department of Archaeology in the country! (I can make this claim because Boston University has the *only* Department of Archaeology in the US; at most academic institutions in the States where archaeology is taught, the courses are located in Anthropology, Classics, or Art History departments.) We moved up to the Boston area, where Pam had a fellowship with the Perseus Project at Harvard before she landed a job at the Museum of Fine Arts.

For many years, I simply loved teaching at BU's Department of Archaeology. I especially enjoyed teaching graduate courses and undergraduate classes in Classical Archaeology. Because I was one of the more charismatic teachers in the department, I was also assigned to teach our department's bread-and-butter course, "Great Discoveries in Archaeology," at least once a year This popular introductory course—not counted towards an archaeology major—regularly drew two or three hundred students and was often held in a movie theater on campus that could accommodate the size of that class. In those "Great Discoveries" classes I would stroll into the theater twice a week, hand my carousel of slides to one of the grad-student teaching assistants, and stand in front of the class to pontificate for an hour and a half (shades of my father!); as the teaching assistants ran the supplemental discussion sessions and graded all of the papers and exams, I never once actually meet any of the thousands of students I had in that course over the years.

While I was at BU I also ran a summer field school on my dig on Cyprus, and, after 1995, on the digs I was on in Spain. I had the same financial arrangement I had had at Emory, using a portion of the students' tuition to fund my excavations. And, again, I had a wonderful time with those students, both teaching them excavation techniques and touring around the archaeological sites and museums of Cyprus and Spain.

Eventually, however, I hit a dead end at BU. After I had been teaching there for six years, rather than being allowed to come up for tenure, I was given a three-year extension, which was renewed for another three years before I was finally able to submit my application for tenure. (It was by no means certain that I would have been awarded tenure; although I had excellent teaching reviews and plenty of published

articles, I couldn't submit in my dozier my main book publication on my research at NAVSTA Rota because, as it contained detailed military maps of the naval base, it had been classified as confidential by the US Navy.)

But, in the meantime, I was having second thoughts about whether I really wanted to continue to be a college professor. A few years earlier my father had died, and I began to realize that, to a large degree, I had been pursuing a career at the top of my academic field only to please him. So, after a soul-searching discussion with Pam, we decided that I should resign from my BU job. The next year I obtained a Massachusetts teaching certificate and took a long-term substitute position at a high school in Jamaica Plains. Later that year, however, when Pam's cousins put her deceased grandmother's old rambling house in Keene, NH, on the market, we decided that we would buy it and move to that charming New Hampshire town.



Pam took a job as the Curator of the Fitchburg Art Museum, which is in northern Massachusetts just barely within commuting distance from Keene. And I got a job doing the only thing I was qualified to do—teach. I started by substituting at the nearby Hinsdale Middle School, where I was hired the following year as an English teacher. Boy, did I have a rough time adjusting from lecturing in front of a college class to teaching a bunch of unruly teenagers! At first, I had no idea how to control my 8th-grade classes, which seemed to be intent on driving a newbie teacher like me crazy; after a few months, however, and with the help of my fellow middle-school teachers, I did manage to establish a modicum of calm in my classes and engage my students in the subject matter we were covering.

When I was teaching there, Hinsdale was one of the poorest school systems in the country. New Hampshire schools are funded primarily through local property taxes, and, given the relatively low property value of homes in Hinsdale (where the majority of houses are trailer homes), the funding for Hinsdale schools was some $2000 less per pupil than in neighboring Keene, where our son went to school. Given the relative poverty in Hinsdale, one might have thought that education would have been highly valued, as it was at the Jamaica Plains school where I had substituted previously; the mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican Republic immigrant parents in Jamaica Plains saw

schooling as a way for their children to learn English and climb the ladder of the American Dream. In contrast, many parents in Hinsdale viewed schooling with suspicion. I remember one time when I called a Hinsdale parent to say that Johnny wasn't doing his homework, Johnny's father replied "I didn't graduate from high school. Are you saying that there is something wrong with me?"

After two years of teaching 8th graders at Hinsdale, I was promoted to teach English and History courses at the high school. As I had already had many of the students before in middle school, those classes went very well. The fact that our Principal essentially left his teachers alone and free to teach as they saw fit also helped a lot. My fellow high-school teachers and I interacted frequently, and it felt like we were a team trying to do what we thought was best for our students.

Hinsdale lies at the extreme south-western corner of New Hampshire, directly across the Connecticut Rive from Vernon, Vermont, where there is a nuclear power plant that one can see from the Hinsdale High School. Every year, in addition to the normal fire drills every school has, the Hinsdale schools had a nuclear disaster drill. When the test alarm sounded from the Vernon nuclear power plant, we were supposed to march our students into the gym to wait for the school buses that, were it a real emergency, would drive them toward Keene and, presumably, beyond the immediate zone of radiation danger. It was probably the best system that could be devised, but as it took at least a half an hour for the school buses to arrive—even when the bus drivers knew that there was going to be a test drill—it was probably doomed to failure if there really were radiation drifting in our direction from a few miles away. So, I devised a supplementary plan; I told my two favorite students, Dan and Alexa, that if a nuclear accident did happen at Vernon, they were to go to the teachers parking lot, get in the back of my little sports car parked there, and I would drive us to Keene as soon as I had delivered my other students to the gym. Fortunately, we never needed to put my alternative plan into action!



After having taught for several years at Hinsdale, in 2007 I took a job at the private Key School in Annapolis, MD. The year before I left Hinsdale, David Shoenfeld, the Hinsdale Spanish teacher who had become one of my best friends, and his wife

Sarah, who had been my teaching assistant, had both taken jobs at the Key School, where David, a budding author, could teach a journalism class in addition to his Spanish courses and where Sarah could start her middle-school teaching career. When a position in the high-school Humanities Department at the Key School became available the following year, David urged me to apply for it. I agreed and, somewhat to my surprise, I was hired; the following year Pam and I moved to a little house we rented on the campus of Key School.

Teaching in the Humanities Department at Key School was, for me, an absolute delight. My fellow Humanities teachers all had advanced degrees and were experienced educators; and the Head of the school allowed us to design our Humanities program as we saw fit.

The greatest thing about teaching in the Upper School at Key was being able to help guide the intellectual development of our students from 9th through 12th grades. There are about 60 students in each grade in the Upper School, divided into three sections. From the 9th through 11th grades, every Key School student takes a set of integrated history/literature Humanities courses, with one of us teaching the history section and another the literature section; the 9th graders study the ancient world, the 10th graders European culture, and the 11th graders take an American Civilization course that consists of a history, literature, and a political philosophy section. (The seniors only have to take an English literature course.) And, of course, we instructors closely aligned what we were covering in our classes, and our major interdisciplinary assessments—exams, papers and project presentations—were integrated to incorporate what was taught in each section.

The Key School was originally founded by professors at Annapolis' "Great Books" Saint John's College to be a K-12 school for their children. As the pedagogical philosophy at Saint John's is to encourage the development of critical thinking skills by teaching only with primary sources (the beginning math course at St. John's reads Euclid's *Elements* in the original Greek!), so too, the Upper School Humanities program at the Key School eschewed the use of textbooks and only provided primary documents for students to read. The one exception to this rule was the 11th grade US History section, where, because almost every Key student takes the US History AP exam, it was felt that the students should use a college-level US History textbook.

That was the situation when, in 2010—my third year at Key—Charlie Flanagan, the Chair of the Humanities Department and long-time instructor of the US History section of the American Civ course, retired and took a job at the National Archives. I then switched over from teaching the literature section of the American Civ course to teaching Charlie's US History section. The first year I taught that class, I continued to use the Eric Froner US History textbook, but I started to amass a set of primary documents in US history for my students to read. At the end of that school year, I asked the Head of the school if I could drop the Froner textbook and have the students purchase a simple text that would give them a historical narrative for the primary documents I wanted to use. I suggested *U.S. History for Dummies*. The Head said "The parents of our students are paying $20,000 a year for their children to attend Key and you want me to ask them to buy *U.S. History for Dummies*? No way!" So I spent nearly every waking moment I had that summer writing my own US History text to accompany the primary documents I wanted to use; by the start of school in September, I was just barely able to complete the first section in time for it to be xeroxed for the students at the start of school, and, as the year progressed, to finish each subsequent section just days before it had to be sent to Kinko's.

[I might note that I had not taken a US History course since I was a junior in high school! I learned on the job when I started teaching US History at Hinsdale, where I used Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* as my textbook. Zinn's and Froner's influences can be seen in my 1,000-page long *Key Moments in American History*, the latest, 2017, version of which is available on my website.]

In addition to the joy of being on a team of teachers guiding the development of our students' critical thinking skills, the thing that most sticks in my memories about the Key School is how we incorporated Outdoor Education into our programs. For instance, when the 11th grade American Civ class took a field trip to visit the museum and excavations at the nearby Londontowne site—the original port of Annapolis founded in 1683—we didn't take a school bus, but rather we walked down to the South River a block from campus and kayaked across the river to the site. As the Senior Class advisor, I participated on the 11th grade end-of-session camping trips on Assateague Island where the juniors—all of whom were taking a Biology class—undertook an ecology project; in the evenings, in our campsite on the dunes with the muffled roar of the Atlantic Ocean surf in the background, we sat around the camp fire discussing what the

students wanted to accomplish the next year when they were seniors. Then, at the start of the following year, I would go with the new seniors on a white-water rafting trip in southwestern Pennsylvania—I once fell out of the raft and almost drowned when I got stuck under some rocks! On that camping trip, again around the crackling pops of a camp fire, we continued our discussions of their goals for the year.

Talk about bonding with your students!



When we lived in Annapolis, Pam taught some classes at the Anne Arundel Community College and at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Unbeknownst to me, however, she was also looking for other jobs, so I was quite surprised when one day she told me that she had a job interview at the Amherst College art museum—where she was hired to be the Head of Education at the Mead Art Museum the following year. So Pam moved back to our Keene, NH, home (an hour's drive to Amherst), and for the next three years we had a commuting marriage. We tried to get together every weekend, either with my flying up to New Hampshire or us both driving halfway and meeting at the upper Delaware River Valley in PA, but ultimately that was too much for us. So, at the end of the school year in 2012, I left Key School and moved back to our old house in Keene.

That next year I got a job as an Adjunct Professor at River Valley Community College, which has campuses in Keene and up the Connecticut River in Claremont, NH. At both campuses I taught a variety of Humanities courses: English Composition, US History, and an online Intro to Philosophy, for which I was paid a pittance—$2 grand for each course. The first time I taught the Intro to Philosophy course, during a six-week summer session, I made a first-time online teaching mistake of trying to replicate a face-to-face seminar discussion by having each student respond to the postings of the reading questions two other students had made; what I hadn't taken into account was that, because I had to read and comment on all of those responses, I had exponentially increased the amount of grading time that would take, with the result that I spent 80 hours a week that summer sitting in a chair reading and commenting on my students' postings—earning 25¢ an hour!

But, overall, being at a community college was the most rewarding teaching experience I have ever had. My students, who ranged from young adults just out of high school, to Army vets, to mature housewives going back to school, were an inspiration. They were all trying to make up for lost time, and they all appreciated the care and special attention we were giving them. And I felt that, having spent a dozen years teaching at the university level and another dozen years teaching at the high school level, I had the perfect pedagogical experience to be a good community college teacher. My last two years of teaching at River Valley—before Pam and I decamped from the US to move to Spain—were especially rewarding. A colleague at River Valley, Aaron Hellem, and I had designed an interdisciplinary course that replicated the sort of experience I had had in teaching at Key School. Students had to sign up for both semesters of a year-long integrated American Civ literature/history course, each semester of which counted for two course credits; the class met for three hours twice a week, with Aaron leading one session and I the next, although we were both in the classroom for both sessions, always adding to what the other was doing. Over the course of the academic year, we really bonded with our students, and it was a joy to see them develop their critical thinking skills and their ability to express themselves clearly.

[I might add that, like my friend David, Aaron was also a budding author. And on more than one occasion, I have been surprised to see a fictionalized characterization of something I've done or said in one of David's or Aaron's books. One should always be very careful of how one acts when around writers, those vampires who suck up everything going on around them!]



Like most of my fellow Boomer-generation teachers, I came into the profession during a period of technological transition.

When we were students, one of our main tasks was the memorization of a set of "facts." I remember when, in 1979, I was studying for my Ph.D. qualifying exams at Penn and was trying to memorize the names and dates of the reigns of all of the Roman emperors, I used one of those old-fashioned peel-off tape dispensers and typed out "27/14 14/37 37/41 41/54 54/68 68/69 68/69 69/69" etc.; I kept that tape in my

pocket for weeks on end, fingering it like a rosary and silently repeating in my mind the names and dates of the Roman emperors.

I was one of the first grad students at UPenn to have written their Ph.D. dissertations on a computer. Back in 1984, I had a state-of-the-art Kaypro 2 computer with a CP/M operating system, where one inserted a floppy disc with a word-processing program into the upper slot and another floppy into the lower slot onto which the text could be saved. After several months of pounding the keys on my computer and a dozen of filled-up floppy discs later, I was ready to print out my dissertation on my dot-matrix printer and to rip off the perforated hole edges that fed the paper through the printer; because those old word-processing programs couldn't deal with images, I also had to paste in photographs of all of the pictures I included in the plates of my dissertation. A day before I was to have my dissertation advisors sign the first page of my dissertation and formally submit it to the university, I took my printed-out, 900+-page-long, dissertation to a secretary in the Dean's office who had to ascertain that it met the required standard format; after taking out a ruler and carefully measuring the top and side margins of the pages, the secretary turned to me and said "this is unacceptable." "What??? What's wrong???" I blurted out. "This dissertation is not printed on 50% rag-content paper," she answered. So I went back home, bought a several reams of rag paper for dot matrix printers, and spent all night ripping off those perforated holes and repasting photographs before I could submit an "acceptable" dissertation.

I remember when I got my first, "real," academic job at Boston University how excited I was when a desktop computer was delivered to my office. The clunky tower box just barely fit under the desk, and the old, cathode-ray TV monitor took up much of the desk itself. I was so excited to be connected to this new thing, "the internet," and to be able to download images—a single picture taking about 10 minutes to download, with each raster of the phosphorescent screen slowly appearing below the previous one. I also remember being excited to join what were then called user groups—the forerunner of today's social media—and to communicate with other scholars across the world. I remember once, in 1990 or 1991, when I had posted something to a ancient world user group about whether scholars should publish articles that included mentions of looted antiquities, some asshole from Australia or New Zealand flamed me for having put a "Ph.D." after my name. Trolling is as old as the internet—a sad commentary on human nature!

I also remember my first encounter with Wikipedia. It was in 2006 or 2007 when I was teaching at Hinsdale high school. I was going on about something in class when I said "And you know, when Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, in . . . , uh, in . . ." And as I was racking my brain trying to come up with the date, a kid in the back of the room who had a fancy new cell phone called out "1859." That was a revelation for me. Up until then I had assumed that one of my main roles as a teacher was to cram my students' heads with the "facts" they needed to know, like my own teachers had done with me. Now that information like names and dates were available with the touch of a few buttons, it became clear to me that I would have to readjust my pedagogical strategy to focus more on students learning how to use those facts—on developing critical thinking skills. That shouted-out "1859" helped me to pivot from having student parrot back names and dates to asking them to analyze historical interpretations.

I had been vaguely aware of the phenomenon of Wikipedia from my son, who had unexpectedly turned out to be a math and computer whiz, but as he had already gone off to college at CalTech the year before I couldn't discuss with him the pros and cons of this new online encyclopedia. My fellow teachers at Hinsdale and, later, at the Key School were somewhat suspicious of Wikipedia. I remember once, when I was teaching at Key School, as a warning to students not to automatically trust what they read on a Wiki entry, I signed up as a Wikipedia editor and altered the entry on Adolph Hitler to say that he was the son of Jesus Christ; that entry stayed up for nearly a whole day! (It wouldn't last more than a few seconds now.) But, as Wikipedia entries grew in number and became increasingly reliable, my fellow teachers and I eventually came to encourage our students to start their research with that online encyclopedia, although we still refused to allow students to cite a Wikipedia entry as a source, forcing them to go to the original references used in those entries. I also found an innovative way to use Wikipedia as a real-life teaching aid when I was teaching the 12th-grade English Lit class at the Key School: we were reading Chekhov's short stories, which, at that time, did not have any Wikipedia entries; so I assigned one story for each student to create a Wikipedia entry and then, after some judicial editing, I uploaded what they wrote to the site. You can't imagine how proud my students were to see their own interpretations up on Wikipedia! (Of course those entries have been substantially altered in the dozen years since I originally submitted them.)

[And I should parenthetically add that I must have turned to several dozen Wikipedia entries in the course of writing these vignettes, both to check on specific facts as well as to correct my atrocious spelling!]

[And one more parenthetical comment: when I was in my 30's, writing my dissertation on a computer and being in the first generation of academics to use the internet, I was perfectly at home with computer technology. Now, at the ripe old age of 70, I feel like the technological world is whizzing past me at a rapid rate. A new update? What's wrong with the program I have been using? I do have a Quest2 and love visiting the metaverse, but I still prefer reading a book or newspaper in hardcopy.]



I have almost no regrets about having retired and moved to Spain.

As I mentioned in the previous vignette, Oviedo has proven to be everything we had hoped for, and more. Of course the COVID epidemic has affected us, especially as so much of Spanish life is lived outside, getting out of one's small apartment for daily shopping, strolling around town, or going out for coffee/drinks with friends. But now that our world here is opening up again and we are again walking around without masks, we seem to be returning to normal.

But as this overly long vignette makes clear, teaching as been a big part of much of my adult life, and it is something that I do miss.

One of the first things that I did when we moved to Oviedo five years ago was to march myself, CV in hand, over to the Universidad de Oviedo to make some contacts there. By luck, I ended up in the office of Dra. Laura Martínez-García in the Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana. Laura teaches a survey of art history that is one of the English-language classes required of all freshmen at the Uni., and she kindly invited me to give a lecture to her class so that her students could practice listening to an American academic. Over the past several years now, I have given a lecture on a variety of subjects to her classes once a semester—something that has gone a long way to assuage my need to interact with students.

*Stepping over My Mother*

My mother was a disturbed woman.

I end these vignettes with two painful memories I have from the end of her life.

I can only speculate what my mother's life had been like growing up during the Great Depression in Gatesville, TX, where she was the only child of two hard-working parents, her rough-and-tumble rancher/lumberyard-owner father and her rather dour mother. Likewise, I really only have hearsay accounts of what her life was like after she married my father at the close of WWII and followed him around as he pursued his academic career, giving birth to four boys along the way.

I do know that, when I was young, she was a warm and loving mother to me.

As I intimated above, my mother seemed to have relished her role as a faculty wife , reveling in the cultured life afforded to her in New York City and in suburban Ridgewood, NJ. When I was growing up, my parents frequently had parties. I remember many a Saturday morning when I was a kid, waking up early to catch my Saturday morning cartoons, only to find that the living room was a mess from a cocktail party my parents had thrown the night before—chairs out of place, ashtrays full of butts, empty martini and highball glasses strewn about. (I used to love to eat any olives or maraschino cherries left in the glasses!)

But things began to go sour for my mother after we moved from Ridgewood to Doylestown, PA. While my father continued to pursue his life at the university—Temple being an hour away on the commuter train—my mother became increasingly isolated. No faculty wives in the neighborhood. No parties.

My mother took a job as a receptionist in a dental office, perhaps the first time she had a paying job in her life. She certainly didn't do it for any financial need, as my father had a good job and her parents were always willing to pay for anything extra we couldn't afford. Working in the dental office was just something to do, although it was hardly the most stimulating occupation that she could have chosen. I do remember, however, how proud she was to go off to work in her starched white uniform.

In the meantime, my father became increasingly radicalized. He was involved in antiwar protests and he took up smoking pot. (I vividly remember, when I was a junior in high school, stealing some of the hashish he kept in his office desk and getting stoned for the first time in my life.) By 1968, the strains on their marriage began to reach the

breaking point. One child after another flying from the nest to go off to college didn't help matters.

My parents had always been heavy drinkers, although I doubt that that they ever self-identified as alcoholics, at least until towards the end of their lives. After we moved to Doylestown, my mother's drinking got much worse. She used to hide a bottle of vodka behind the laundry soap on a shelf above the washing machines. (I might have snuck a sip or two of that as well when I was in high school!)

One day, in the spring of 1969, I came home from school with a couple of my friends only to find my mother passed out on stairs to the front door. I adjusted her dress that had become hitched up and told my friends to pay no attention to her as we stepped over my mother to go into the house. ! ! !

That summer we checked my mother into the University of Pennsylvania hospital for an emergency alcoholism intervention. I remember how forlorn she looked as she waved to us as we drove away. Two weeks later she returned home, now sober and armed with medicine that supposedly would make her puke if she drank any alcohol.

But, after I left for college in 1970, my mother began to reach a breaking point. I remember many telephone conversations I had with her in the fall semester of my sophomore year. I urged her to leave my father, but she said that she couldn't afford to. (After her father died, he left most of his money to his son-in-law, assuming that my father would naturally take care of his only daughter.) I said that I would give her all of the money that Grampaw had left me in his will, but my mother refused to take me up on my offer. My mother also talked about how guilty she felt for, as she put it, having killed her father. (Grampaw, a lifelong drinker himself, had cirrhosis of the liver and was dying in a Gatesville, Texas, hospital when my mother came to see him and he asked her to help him end his agony; for several days my mother arranged to be in his hospital room when his medicine was delivered and told the nurse that she would give it to him, only to put the pills in her purse instead. He died a few days later.)

But the conversations I had with my mother during that fall of 1971 were also filled with tension between the two of us. My girlfriend Deborah and I had just moved in together and I wanted to bring her home for the Christmas break to meet my family. My mother, however, was dead-set against the idea. I was particularly upset when she said she didn't want a Jewish girl in her home at Christmas time; my mother wasn't

particularly religious nor antisemitic, and this comment was so out of character for her that I assumed her reluctance to meet Deborah was due to some other reason.

In the end, I relented, and a few days before Christmas I boarded a plane from Cleveland to Philadelphia alone. When I landed and was deboarding I was surprised when my brother James met me at the gate. (Those were the days, before TSA airport security screenings, when one could just walk right up to the gate to see someone off or to greet passengers when they arrived.) As we were walking down the passageway to the terminal to pick up my luggage, James said that he had some bad news. Our mother was dead. She had killed herself the night before. She had gone into the closed garage, attached a vacuum hose to the car's tailpipe, put the other end into the car window, and started the car. James said that our brother Ross, who had just come home for a visit after he had moved to Canada, had smelled the exhaust as it was filling up the house and managed to get our father and youngest brother out of the house before they too succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. (Ross also tried, in vain, to give our mother mouth-to-mouth resuscitation—can you imagine!). My main memory of having received this news was staring down at the carpet on the airport passageway; it had some sort of geometric pattern that I felt I was falling into as James told me about our mother's suicide.

It goes without saying that that was a very sad Christmas for us. It was specially poignant when we gathered around the Christmas tree my mother had decorated and opened the wrapped presents she had left for us.

**Coda**: Seeing Yourself in Your Memories

In a recent article ("You've Probably Seen Yourself in Your Memories," *The Atlantic*, Aug. 29, 2022), Jacob Stern discusses the phenomenon that sometimes our memories come to us as we had experienced an event, seeing them through our own eyes, and sometimes we see ourselves in our memories from a third-person perspective, as if we were watching a movie with us in it. Stern notes that, while this phenomenon had long been ignored by psychologists and neuroscientists, the issue of memory perspective has recently been the subject of several studies. Researchers have suggested that having third-person perspective memories is not uncommon, with about 90% of people reporting having such memories. But Stern warns that, in having a third-person memory of, say, a childhood event, ". . . it's hard to know whether these are genuine memories translated from the first person to the third person, or third-person scenes constructed from stories or photographs." Some studies suggest that we tend to have third-person perspective memories when we are recalling a traumatic event, such as a near-death experience.

Jacob Stern concludes his article:

> Maybe the most interesting thing about all of this is what it suggests about the human proclivity for narrative. When we shift our memories from one perspective to another, we are, often without even realizing it, shaping and reshaping our experience into a story, rendering chaos into coherence. The narrative impulse, it seems, runs even deeper than we generally acknowledge. It is not merely a quirk of culture or a chance outgrowth of modern life. It's a fact of psychology, hardwired into the human mind.

That would seem to be the case with the memories I have recounted here in these vignettes. Most of these memories are described as if recalled in a third-person perspective, which is natural as my goal here is to create a narrative of my life. To be sure, there are some details given in a first-person perspective: seeing "the bubble-lined trace of the bullet as it came zipping by" when James was shooting at Ross and me at the swimming hole in Gatesville; looking at the adolescent pointing his AK47 at Donald White and me in Marsa Matruh or at the truck full of Spanish soldiers pointing their rifles as me on the Naval Base of Rota; staring into the face of the Libyan who saved my life at Cyrene; having hallucination at the Heathrow airport; looking out at an applauding audience when taking a curtain call; feeling like I was falling into geometric pattern of the airport carpet when I was told about my mother's suicide. But for the

most part, my memories come to me in the third person, as I have described them here in these stories.

I am, in these vignettes, trying to recover memories of my past before I die—as I said in the "My Third Birthday" vignette above, "to reflect on who I am and how I came to be the way I am." And, as I said in in that vignette, "one is never quite sure whether one is actually remembering something that really happened, or if one is just recalling a story we've told ourselves about an event in our lives." Like Jacob Stern warned, the memories I present here are certainly conditioned by stories that I have been told, and that I myself have told, about my life. And, as Stern also suggested, my third-person memories have also been conditioned by the many photographs that have been taken of me over my long life. As I am looking back over my life, the image I have of myself is often an animation of one of those photographs.

Here are a few of those photographs that have helped picture how I see myself in my memories:









Left to right: Top row. A colorized photograph of me, age three; me, age 17, in a photograph taken by my sister-in-law Jackie; my senior-year high-school yearbook photograph. Bottom row: photo from an article I wrote in *Expedition* 1985, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 43; photo from an article about my excavation at NAVSTA Rota, *B.U. Bridge*, 28 Jan., 2000, Vol. III, No. 21; photo from a Keene *Sentinel* profile on me, 2002.





Self-portrait in a spoon with a napkin, 2018. Me, age 69, on the Asturian coast of Spain.

But photographs—those seemingly stable snapshots in time—can be fluid. As I look back on my life, the mental image I have of myself is a visual portmanteau of photographs that have been taken of me over the years. Behind the old man with white hair that I now am lurks the professional archaeologist with dark hair, and behind him the confident teenager with light brown hair, and behind it all is the little blond-haired three-year-old boy I used to be.

Among the 2,000+ lbs. of stuff we shipped to Spain when we moved here five years ago was a large plastic bin full of photo albums, boxes of 35mm. slides, and hundreds of printed photographs still in the paper envelopes they came in from the photo booth at the pharmacy. My wife and I had planned to go through all these and digitize them during all of the leisure time we would have in our retirement. Five years on, we hadn't even opened that plastic bin until I just now rooted through it to find the colorized photograph of me, age three, that I knew was in there. Here are two more photos that popped out of that bin as I was pawing through it:



My mother, Sara Francis Graham McClellan, Doylestown, PA, 1969.



My son, James Russell McClellan, Governor's Beach, Cyprus, 1990.

I took the B&W photograph of my mother when I was a junior or senior in high school and I developed it in the darkroom we had in our basement. (Cf. my story "A Darkroom Life.") It is one of the few photos I have of my mother. In it she appears to be a confident housewife: one hand on aproned hip, the other on the frig, and coiffed hair framed by a still-life oil painting from her childhood home in Texas; but as I look closely at her eyes, I can see the sadness of a woman who would end up taking her own life a few years later.

I was surprised to find the photograph of our son, taken during one of the many summers we had spent digging in Cyprus. My wife and I had often commented to each other about the time when we were at the beach and our son sat cross-legged staring out at the Mediterranean—the Buddha boy we called him. Both of us would have sworn that this mental image of our son was seared in our memories solely from the experience we had three decades ago; finding this photo, however, now makes me think that our vivid memory had been reinforced by looking at this picture, even if we hadn't seen it for many years. And looking at this photo again now, our little three-year-old darling clutching strands of seaweed as he stares out at the horizon, I can see a glimmer of the intelligent, thoughtful man he would grow up to be.

[Whenever we do get around to sorting through that big bin of photographs, I'm sure that I will find dozens more pictures that will spark vivid memories. I'll probably feel compelled to create a follow-up version of these vignettes!]

**Postscript: Some Poetry**

Here is a little poem I recently wrote:

"Growing Old"

The train of my memories
Takes me on trips
Away from myself.

I forget where I am
And button up my jeans
While still on the toilet.

And here is another:

"The Mind"

The mind only does two things:
Anticipate and reflect.

"Live for the moment" they say,
But the moments keep ticking away.

We look forward
And think back.

And here is a poem I wrote as I was finishing these vignettes:

"Has-Beens"

Sooner or later
Everyone becomes
A Has-Been

Old hat
Behind the times
Yesterday's news.

Have you ever been a Has-Been?
Passé? Past your prime?
Out of date? Démodé?

I'm a Has-Been
But I'm happy
To have been what I has been.

And here is some real poetry:

Diane Seuss, “Weeds,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 23, 2022, p. 48.

> The danger of memory is going
> to it for respite. Respite risks
> entrapment. Don’t debauch
> yourself by living
> in some former version of yourself
> that was more or less naked. Maybe
> it felt better then, but you were
> not better. Your were smaller, as the rain
> gauge must fill to the brim
> with its full portion of suffering.
>
> What can memory be in these terrible times?
> Only instruction. Not a dwelling.
>
> Or if you must dwell:
> The sweet smell of weeds then.
> The sweet smell of weeds now.
> An endurance. A standoff. A rest.

**Endnote Essay I**: Reflections on *À la recherche du temps perdu*

In 2017, as Pam and I were preparing to abandon the US and retire to Spain, I went out and bought several books to fill in some abysmal gaps in my literary education and added them to the many boxes of books and papers we were shipping to Spain. Five years later, as I began to write up these vignettes and was thinking about memories, it occurred to me that I should take a look at one of those books we shipped to Spain: Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (I have the new Penguin Classics translation, although I prefer the title, *Remembrance of Things Past*, that Moncrieff used in his earlier version). Like so many people who had never read Proust, I nonetheless was aware of the famous scene in *Swan's Way* where a tea-soaked *petite madeleine* evokes a cascade of childhood memories in the mind of the narrator. As Proust set up that scene (in Lydia Davis' masterful 2002 translation, pp. 44-45):

> It is the same with our past. It is a waste of effort for us to try to summon it, all the exertions of our intelligence are useless. The past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) which we do not suspect. It depends on chance whether we encounter this object before we die, or do not encounter it.

Although I have on rare occasions experienced something akin to Proust's "involuntary memory"—driving along the interminable dry flatness of Spain's central Meseta plain and feeling like I was back on the pencil-straight road to Grampaw's ranch in Texas; or staring at flickering flames in a fire place, undulating from purple and blue to Day-Glo red and yellow, and having flashbacks to 1968 when I dropped acid with a high-school friend while we were around a campfire back in Bucks County, PA—I nevertheless reject Proust's contention that "The past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach." For me, recollection *is* an intellectual act, not something beyond the reach of our conscious minds and dependent on a chance encounter with a material object that once played a role in our past. If I cannot re-live a past with the vividness my younger self experienced it, I do have access to the stories about my life that I have been telling myself and others for years.

At the very conclusion of *Swan's Way*, as the narrator is walking around Paris sadly remembering when he had traversed the same streets as a boy in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the mother of the girl he adored, Proust gives us what appears to be a contradiction of the idea of "involuntary memory":

> . . . what a contradiction it is to search in reality for memory's pictures, which would never have the charm that come to them from memory itself and from not being perceived by the senses. . . . The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment: and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years. (Lydia Davis translation, p. 444)

I agree. I remember what a hollow feeling I had when, after an absence of more than three decades, I returned to Texas and walked by the house of my grandparents where as a child I used to run and play every summer with unbridled joy; similarly, when chance brought me to the high school I hadn't visited in the forty-five years since I had graduated, I could scarcely see the ghost of the vain and arrogant teenager I used to be when I roamed its halls. It is in accord with the sentiment that "memory's pictures" are "but a regret for a certain moment . . . as fleeting, alas, as the years", that I am composing these vignettes.



After I had written in "My Third Birthday" vignette about how we are constantly reinventing our memories, I read Lydia Davis' insightful introduction to *Swan's Way* and was delighted to see that she had anticipated the point I was trying to make there:

> . . . For only in recollection does an experience become fully significant, as we arrange it in a meaningful pattern, and thus the crucial role of our intellect, our imagination, in our perception of the world and our recreation of it to suit our desires; thus the importance of the role of the artist in transforming reality according to a particular inner vision: the artist escapes the tyranny of time through art. (p. xi)

While I would scarcely call myself an artist—certainly not on the level of Proust or Lydia Davis herself—I am writing these vignettes as a way to escape the tyranny of time. And while I am trying, as I've said, to faithfully record the actual reality behind my retold memories as best I can—often consulting with my brothers and others about their recollections of the events I am describing—in the end, I am motivated by a desire to tell a good tale. If fact has to be sacrificed for a better story, then so be it.

[I know that I am prone to exaggeration—a trait that is evident by the way I have elaborated on a story I have apparently told my friends on several occasions. (My blessedly tolerant friends are usually too polite to say "Murray, you have already told us this story many times.") So the way this story goes: in 1968, when I was sixteen years old and had just gotten my driver's license, and we were in Gatesville for the summer, I wanted to see how fast my parent's new car would go—it was a Dodge station wagon with faux wood paneling on the side and a 318cc V-8 engine with dual carburetors under the hood. So I took it out on the arrow-straight two-lane highway on the way to Flat, Texas (I kid you not, that really is the name of the town) and put the pedal to the metal. Before long, I heard a siren wailing and was pulled over by a policeman who looked like a caricature of a southern cop—sunglasses, a pot-belly hanging over his low-slung pants, and a bow-legged stride as he came up to my car. He must have thought that he had hit the jackpot: here was a car with out-of-state Yankee license plates driven by a long-haired hippie going way over the speed limit out in the middle of nowhere in central Texas. In a cruel drawl he asked to see my ID. When I handed him my PA license, he did a double-take when he saw my last name—McClellans had been judges in Coryell County, Texas, for generations and a cousin McClellan was currently the judge in town. The cop handed my license back and just said "I clocked you going 120mph. Have a nice day." (Truth be told, I don't remember how fast he said I was going. The last time I told this story, a few days ago, it got up to an improbable 150mph.)]

[Here's a joke: My wife once said to me "I've told you a hundred billion times not to exaggerate."]



The idea that I should start reading Proust as I was writing up my own memories was sparked by coming across Elaine Blair's review of Lydia Davis' 2021 book *Essays Two: On Proust, Translations, Foreign Languages, and the City of Arles* ("Quick Words, Long View," *New York Review of Books*, December 2, 2021, pp. 10–14). In Blair's positive review, I was particularly taken by her description of what she said was her favorite chapter in Davis' *Essays Two*,

"Hammers and Hoofbeats: Rhythms and Syntactical Patterns in Proust's *Swan's Way*." Blair describes how Davis explores the way that the ambient sounds Proust himself would have heard in *fin de siècle* France influenced the rhythms he gave to his descriptions of the sounds of church bells, cooking, horses and carriages going by, a train in the distance, etc.

Although I have only read *Swan's Way* and have no intention of making my way through the other six (!) volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, inspired by Davis I have been struck by how Proust incorporates the material world in his narrator's recollections of his memories. And reading Proust has afforded me the opportunity to reflect on how my own interactions with the material world feature in my memories.



As Lydia Davis has noted, Proust clearly has a keen ear for the sounds his narrator would have heard. One of the most prominent of these sounds are bells—the church bell ringing the hours, the garden gate bell announcing a visitor, the dinner bell. So too, in my new life in Asturias, Spain, bells play an important role. I often rely on the church bells from the Oviedo cathedral to tell if it is noon, or six pm. When we are out at the little private chapel we bought in the village of Tellego—a fifteen-minute drive from our apartment in Oviedo—we will often ring our chapel's single little bell to answer the church bells sounding from the village below—which annoyingly always rings five minutes before the hour!

Proust is also attuned to the silences that allow footsteps, voices in another room, distant noises from across town, dogs barking in the night, chirping insects and falling rain to impinge upon the ear of his narrator. By contrast, we, living a century after Proust, are almost constantly surrounded by ambient sounds—cars going by, the humming of electronic equipment, the music in our earphones—and we rarely, if ever, experience the silence of the idle harp.

<u>Sounds</u>

—whistling of trains (p. 3)

—silence of the night (p. 4)

—footsteps (pp. 4, 34)

—clock chattering loudly (p. 8)

—patter read out loud by my great-aunt (p. 10)

—shy, oval, golden double tinkle of the little visitor's bell (p. 14, 23, 104)

—the sonority of his voice (p. 19)

—dinner bell (p. 27)

—distant noises from gardens that lay at the other end of town (p. 33)

—church bells (pp. 37, 56, 57, 89, 170, 174)

—village clock (p. 50)

—my aunt talking all alone in an undertone (p. 51)

—cries of birds (p. 66)

—doorbell (p. 71)

—cooing of a dove (p. 73)

—reverberating in the sonorous atmosphere peculiar to hot weather (p. 84)

—the houseflies that performed for me, in a little concert, a sort of chamber music of summer (p. 85)

—a little tap agains the windowpane (p. 101)

—the sound of nailing crates (p. 111)

—From gates far apart, dogs awakened by our solitary steps would send forth alternating volleys of barks such as I still hear at times in the evening (p. 117)

—when our sensibilities, which happiness has silenced like an idle harp (p. 118)

—an invisible bird, contriving to make the day seem short, explored the surrounding solitude with one prolonged note (p. 140)

—the last rolls of thunder warbling among the lilacs (p. 156)

—the noise of the falling rain (p. 190)

<u>Smells</u>

—exhaled an odor of varnish (p. 28)

—These were the sorts of provincial rooms which—just as in certain countries entire tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or perfumed by myriad protozoa that we cannot see—enchant us with the thousand smells given off by the virtues, by wisdom, by habits, a whole secret life, invisible, superabundant, and moral, which the atmospheres holds in suspension; smells still natural, certainly, and colored by the weather like those of the neighboring

countryside, but already homey, human and enclosed, and exquisite, ingenious, and limped jelly of all the fruits of the year that have left the orchard for the cupboard; seasonal, but movable and domestic, correcting the piquancy of the hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, as lazy and punctual as a village clock, moving and orderly, heedless and foresightful, linen smells, morning smell, pious smells, happy with a peace that brings only an increase of anxiety and with a prosiness that serves as a great reservoir of poetry for one who passes through it without having lived in it. The air was saturated with the finest flower of a silence so nourishing, so succulent that I could move through it only with a sort of greed . . . (pp. 50–51)

— . . . and, as the fire baked like a dough the appetizing smells with which the air of the room was all curdled and which had already been kneaded and made to "rise" by the damp and sunny coolness of the morning, it flaked them, gilded them, puckered them, puffed them, transforming them into an invisible, palpable country pastry, an immense "turnover" in which, having barely tasted the crisper, more delicate, more highly regarded but also drier aromas of the cupboard, the chest of drawers, the floral wallpaper, I would always come back with an unavowed covetousness to ensnare myself in the central, sticky, stale, indigestible and fruity smell of the flowered coverlet. (p. 51)

—odor of unbleached linen (p. 66)

—gave off inexhaustibly that dark cool smell of both forest and ancien régime (p. 74)

—smelling the good scent of the air (p. 89)

—a bittersweet scent of almonds escaping from the hawthorns (p. 116)

—the fragrance of the lindens that perfumed the air (p. 117)

—[the asparagus I ate] played, in farces and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume (p. 124)

—we would meet the smell of his lilacs, coming out to greet the strangers (p. 138; also p. 190)

—I found it all humming with the smell of hawthorns (p. 140)

—the little room smelling of orris root (p. 161)

—the smell of a road (p. 182)

—the fragrance of hawthorn that forages along the hedge where the sweetbriers will soon replace it (p. 188)

<u>Birds</u>

—sea swallows (p. 7)

—titmouse (p. 8)

—crows (pp. 65, 152)

—seagull (p. 65)

—dove (p. 73)

—like migrating birds which take flight all at the same time (p. 153)

Flowers

—hawthorns (pp. 15, 114, 116, 140–143, 148, 188)

—lime blossoms (p. 52)

—fuchsias (p. 64)

—horses with roses in their headbands (p. 76)

—horses with red carnations in their blinkers (p. 77)

—lilacs (pp. 138–139, 190)

—jasmines, pansies, and verbenas (p. 143)

—the apple trees opened their broad petals of white satin or dangled the timid bouquets of their reddening buds (p. 149)

—the river already promenading along dressed in sky blue between lands still black and bare, accompanied only by a flock of cuckooflowers that had arrived early and primroses ahead of their time, while here and there a violet with a blue beak bowed its stem under the weight of the drop of fragrance it held in its throat. (pp. 170–171)

—buttercups (pp. 171, 188)

—waterlily (pp. 172–173, 188)

—irises (p. 174)

—as blue as a periwinkle (p. 182)

—gave a geranium flesh tint to the red carpets (p. 182)

—nasturtiums (p. 187)

Art

—after the fashion of the first architects and master glaziers of the Gothic age (p. 9)

—engravings of Benozzo Gozzoli (p. 37)

—Chartres Cathedral by Corot (p. 40)

—Fountains of Saint-Cloud by Hubert Robert (p. 40)

—Mount Vesuvius by Turner (p. 40)

—engraving by Morghen of Leonardo's *Last Supper* (p. 41)

—like the statue of a saint in its niche (p. 54)

—dining plates decorated with scene from *Thousand and One Nights* (pp. 58, 72)

—views of Rome by Piranesi (p. 67)

—like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals (p. 72)

—ornamented, like a Gothic front (p. 73)

—those engravings depicting, against a dark background, a fleshy pink goddess driving a chariot, standing on a globe, or wearing a star on her forehead, which were admired during the Second Empire because they were felt to have a Pompeiian look about them . . . (p. 74)

—Virtues and Vices of Padua by Giotto (p. 82)

—the portal of a Gothic cathedral (p. 92)

—the moving effigies that forever ennoble the venerable and charming facades of our cathedrals (p. 96)

—portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini (p. 99)

—the Queens of Chartres (p. 100)

—the famous windows at Chartres (p. 106)

—some landscape by Gleyre (p. 149)

—that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, da Vinci's masterpiece and the portal of Saint Marks (p. 170)

"Ignorance is bliss" as they say, and I am happy to be blithely unaware of what Proust scholars have to say about how the French modernist incorporated descriptions of the material world into his fiction. And I am arrogant enough to have the audacity to put my thoughts on this subject down on paper in spite of being completely ignorant of what I imagine are vast shelves of Proust scholarship.

So here are a few observations on the selection I've made from the "Combray" section of *Swan's Way*:

- And clearly Proust has a keen nose for smells. And given the correlation medical researchers have documented between smells and memories[4], it is only natural that Proust's narrator, as he is recalling his childhood, would focus on the smells of the rooms he had lived in or the flowers he had encountered.

  [We might note that, by having his narrator say that the asparagus he ate were like Shakespearean fairies "changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume", it would appear that Proust was among the approximately 40% to 50% of humans who have the genetic propensity to smell "asparagus pee"—the foul smelling urine resulting from the breakdown of asparagusic acid into sulphur-containing compounds; that Proust's narrator describes this as a "jar of perfume", however, might suggest that he had asparagus anosmia.]

- Proust's narrator is also keenly aware of the natural world around him, especially birds and, above all, flowers.
-
-

Often as metaphor
Imagery often combined

Flowers as holy

Personification

Fictional art
—tapestries representing the coronation of Esther (pp. 62, 70, 105)

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[4] E. g., Zhou G, et al., Human hippocampal connectivity is stronger in olfaction than other sensory systems. Prog Neurobiol. 2021 Jun;201:102027. doi: 10.1016/j.pneurobio.2021.102027. Epub 2021 Feb 25. PMID: 33640412; PMCID: PMC8096712.

-I- Metafictional book-within a book.

P. 86

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**Endnote Essay II***:* Vignettes and Memoirs: A Reflection on the Memories of Three McClellan Boys.

Blah.