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Act 3: A Feel for Society (1949-1984)

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We live as if in Mary's rose garden,
those of us who occupy ourselves
with roses.
– Dominic of Prussia (c. 1430)

In William Shakespeare's Hamlet, Ophelia loses her grip on reality. The reasons for her emotional crisis are unclear, but they may have to do with Hamlet's abrupt and brutal disavowal. In Act IV, scene 5, she tells her brother Laertes, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts," none of which Hamlet has for her anymore.

Closely tied to the death of Hamlet's love is his accidental murder of Ophelia's father Polonius: "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say [he] made a good end." Symbols of a fructifying faithfulness, the violets faded, too, leaving Ophelia dismayed and distraught from deception and loss. Like the play, this tragic figure comes to a sad end, the consequence of a desperate recollection.

Shakespearean drama *might* have occurred to the designers of my parents' everyday silverware, Rogers Brothers "Remembrance." Most likely not. Even if the manufacturers were not so literal minded, there is less woeful poetry by Shakespeare to recall, as appropriate to Marcel Proust as it is to silverware: "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past…." Moreover, as Jesus asked of his disciples at the Last Supper, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22.19).

Whatever the designers at Rogers Brothers were thinking when this pattern appeared in 1948, neither the literary nor the sacramental allusions of its name occurred to my parents, no more than did the backhanded reference to Canada's memorial day. All this blather did not matter. My folks bought the flatware, I bet, because they liked it.

In the course of the next fifty years, the silver got lots of use. Its former luster is

now a nicked and pitted patina. Various fork tines are no longer straight because the children used them on the kitchen table that Dad had crafted in the basement workshop; the prongs poked and scored the soft wood whenever our parents were not watching. The worn tips needed to be polished frequently for all the eggs we ate at breakfast.

At one time there were eighteen place settings of dinner knives and forks, salad and dessert forks, teaspoons, tablespoons, and soupspoons. Pieces disappeared as the children settled elsewhere, figuring to return the borrowed silver eventually, but we never did. The last of the ware was kept in a felt-lined, maple-wood box, which finally fell apart; it retained the musty smell of mildew and silver polish. The setting's heft remains as generous as ever. As my mother once observed, it has a nice feel.

My parents' silver pairs well with the china and porcelain my wife Anne and I use regularly. The pattern's rose motif graces the Homer Laughlin Eggshell Nautilus that my mother-in-law bought to use for the holidays. And it shows up on the Eschenbach Caranova that Anne and I bought with wedding money. We first noticed its wild roses in June Moravcevich's Parisian apartment where we spent many a fair summer, especially when the late spring-blooming flowers in the Bagatelle were at their best.

The rose became still more important to Anne when she studied the medieval origins of the rosary, a metaphorical garland of blossoms, a string of prayers woven for the Virgin Mary by the Catholic faithful. Because we are not home in the summer, our efforts to propagate roses have been an utter failure (the local deer devoured entire canes of them). We prefer picking up the tall-stemmed buds at the open-air markets where their prickly thorns are stripped off before the bouquet is wrapped up to carry off.

So my parents' silver, with its floral embellishments, moves me in ways I have

yet to understand exactly. Its emotive force deserves further reflection in light of my life at home, but also in my leaving home. Akin to the pattern itself, the process, the performance rather, was not simple and involved more than just the family.

Education – derived from a Latinate word meaning "leading out" – required a complex array of relationships, some deeply personal, others merely casual. All of them were essential to growth and maturity, independence and responsibility, knowledge and wisdom, thinking and feeling in a necessary, complementary balance, as a well-designed spoon settles evenly and comfortably on an extended finger. This moral equilibrium was not achieved by itself. It took the ambient presence of many others whose roles, more comic than tragic, I want to touch on as if they were in fact actual flowers.

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My childhood was safe and secure. I always felt loved, wanted, and protected in a space that still represents peace, rest, comfort, a refuge from the outside world. My sincerely sentimental parents – they nicknamed me "Jimbo" to my mock mortification in middle age – succeeded perhaps too well in providing a sanctuary for their children. A dear friend Danielle Bensky's striking "L'Esprit Ascendant" (ill. 7) expresses well, I think, this sense of familial, social, indeed spiritual support.

Inimical to traditional childrearing precepts – "spare the rod, spoil the child" – my mother and father's emotional nurturing seems to have interfered with my venturing forth self-confidently. Their sustained embrace of the fair-haired youngest already endowed with a "sunny disposition" – so my mother often claimed – made for regrets about what was left behind in uneven exchange for what was yet to be. Whatever my reservations now, however, this welcome warmth must have worked. Very nearly impervious to this

molly-coddled idyll, sheltered if not indulged, I survived, little worse for this early cosseting, the last of four kids to do so.

My first years made for vivid images, the distinctive traces of earliest memory. I recall no admonishment, though there must have been some, for the exploding airplane I crayoned on the bedroom wall. I can still see its multi-colored parts scrawled across the wallpaper's decorative motifs. I also recollect a child's experiment with the condensation on the car window one winter morning as my mother drove me to David Snider's grocery store in nearby Four Corners. In calm fascination, I watched the humid translucence I created with my breath and then fingered clear to ponder the passing scenery. *Stupor mundi!*

I remember, too, the worried faces leaning over me as I regained consciousness from a bad fall during a remodeling project at home. "Fa-Fa" Horton, the grandfatherly carpenter, carried me indoors; his concern turned to relief as I opened my eyes and pressed his hand. This awakening to reassurance was as gentle as Harriet Kocher, our maid, who washed my hair in the laundry-room's double-tub sink. The tepid suds tamed my habitual squirming until the end when, after tightening the hot-water spigot, Harriet paused a second before tightening the cold, in a playful gesture of impenetrable solicitude.

The first day of kindergarten in 1954 passed without notable trauma. Hillandale Elementary School enveloped all qualms, which may be one reason for the dilatory development of my natural curiosity. I was not a mindful student for the first few years. I was interested more in the lunch menu and the games at recess than in learning to read, write, and reckon. As a remedy against certain phobic fixations, like my impetuous aversions to stewed prunes and unlaced shoes, I found that noontime dithering with play-

mates, rivals and allies alike, sufficed for the moment.

Report cards from my teachers then – Miss Gilhool, "Mama" Nudleman (later Miss White), Mrs. Siddons, and Mrs. Luther – damned with faint praise: "James always finishes his work. He gets along well with the other children." But in second grade, I thought that checking my notes during a spelling quiz was sensible enough. Distractions were ubiquitous and omnipotent. On the last day of the school year, in impatient anticipation of summer's euphoric promise, I watched the second hand of the schoolroom clock sweep ever so slowly round to noon. It was an intolerable wait for the ludic pleasures of unfettered inattention that children understand so very well.

Eventually everyday reality arrived. It instilled a tension in a child increasingly anxious to please adults to curry their favor, which suggests an incipient ambition, a juvenile desire to achieve. I learned the rules and gamed them to win. Top marks became incentives to excel, especially when my father dispensed a dollar for each A and an admonition for each C. Dad derided any discernible complacency of mine as "the best of the worst or the worst of the best," an indignity I suffered without mitigating rejoinder.

In time, I took my responsibilities more seriously, including chores around the house – making my bed, caring for the dachshunds, sweeping the front walkway – all to earn a modest allowance. Siblings contributed to this newly found dutifulness; their example precluded much and motivated more. The larger world awaited my efforts, but I remember the alarm I felt when news of the Soviet Sputnik augured ideological defeat and nuclear annihilation. Duck-and-cover drills at school, the neighbors' bomb-shelters, and the testing of air-raid sirens made Armageddon palpably part of growing up.

School was instructive for reasons other than the curriculum. I anticipated kin-

dergarten the year of the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education. Almost from the outset – desegregation went into effect the following year – I attended classes with black children, most of them from Stewart Lane, such as Gerald Sedgewick and Rennea Holland-Williams. In fourth grade Rennea was thoroughly amused when I misunderstood her joke: "Say 'black eyes' backwards." I told her that "I's black" made no sense, I was beige and she was mocha, new colors in the crayon box, a response which left her to cackle in glee. Her being then and there proposed possibilities well beyond what our domestic help – Jessie, Harriet, Lucy, and Hannah – ever knew.

The Naval Ordinance Laboratory nearby also brought to school the sons and daughters of Jewish scientists working for the US Department of Defense, among them Gary Glaser and Jay Weiner, I believe. I could outdash Jay, but Gary was always faster and smarter than I. I respected that fact more than I resented whatever my parents said about Jews. When Paula Feinbaum confessed her crush for me in the third grade, I was touched, and so was she when I confessed my own for another gainly girl, Anne Gray.

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By age eight, I anxiously awaited school. A picture of Lou, Weezie, Ben, and me, with the two dogs at the beach in Ocean City, captures this expectancy on the day we returned home in 1957. Classes would resume Tuesday after Labor Day. Lou and Weezie were entering their last years at Northwood High, Ben was beginning the sixth grade at Hillandale, pending a transfer to Sligo the next year; and I was bound for third grade, also at Hillandale. The churlish scowl on my face in the photo had nothing to do with the summer's end. I could no longer disguise my peevish petulance, one born of the irritation I felt at Dad's endless fiddling with the tricky settings on his Retina camera.

Comment [1]: The Naval Ordinance Laboratory

The Naval Ordinance Laboratory (NOL), just a mile from home, played a prominent role in the arms race with the Soviet Union. Built by 1946, the NOL focused on specific weapons rather than on entire systems, which ultimately led to its demise. The staff was accomplished: John Vincent Atanasoff developed the first electronic computer, and John Bardeen was twice awarded the Nobel Prize. In 1974 the lab became the Naval Surface Weapons Center until it was closed 23 years later in 1997. The property was recently decontaminated to make way for the Food and Drug Administration. As for my classmates Gary Glaser and Jay Weiner: Gary is a partner of the law firm Seyfarth Shaw in New York, and Jay is a pulmonary specialist in Silver Spring. I have no idea what became of Paula Feinbaum or Anne Gray.

As my blue eyes squinted into the summer sun, I longed to be ready for class with all the accoutrements of the new year: sharpened number-three lead pencils in a cedar-wood box, bulky binders with lined paper and colored dividers, and an outsized leather satchel to hold my cherished books. The tow-headed child in me never imagined that my tattered canvas shoes would shred apart as I ran about the schoolyard. I was itching to start autumn in another familiar setting with old pals and cooler weather.

It helped that I had talented, well-paid teachers in one of the wealthiest counties in the country. It surprises my jaded students now when I tell them I remember the name of every single teacher I had from kindergarten through graduate school. Mrs. Niemeyer taught the love of geography and Mrs. Collins the joy of figuring fractions. If we pupils behaved, Mrs. Gardner read to us during the lunch hour from the Newbery-Medal winner about the American Revolution, Esther Forbes's Johnny Tremain; it elicited my first passion for history and New England life that my father's own stories of Paul Revere and Boston's North Shore never did.

Seventh grade at Springbrook (1961-1962), eighth and ninth grades at the recently completed White Oak Junior High (1962-1964), then the rest of high school back at Springbrook (1964-1967) brought still more revelations. In my first year out of grade school, Monsieur Amyot, a native of Dijon, incarnated the French; Mrs. Gaddis read aloud Edwin Abbott's Victorian classic, Flatland, to give geometry a memorable story; and Miss Hoon, soon to leave for the Peace Corps in the Congo, lent diagramming sentences a tangible meaning for thirteen-year-olds. We were enthralled.

My parents had made the right choice in moving to Silver Spring. In retrospect, I realize, our situation was exceptional. More than half the teachers at Springbrook had

a master's degree; two of them – Jim Collier in biology and Ray Chaukley in physical education – brought their doctoral work into the classroom. Still others earned their bachelor's degree from elite institutions: Duke, Cornell, Georgetown, William and Mary, Pennsylvania, Middlebury. The competition – and cooperation – among us was ripe.

The classes were rarely bigger than 25, the schools were new, the curriculum was rich, and the blend of races and ethnicities, however limited by contemporary standards, was apparent to everyone. When my father asked in 1963 if I cared to attend Choate, I declined; I did not want to leave my boon companions. But I know now what I would have otherwise missed. My freshman roommate, Lou Barnes, a worldly Choate type, had nothing on my preparation for college, even though he had far more on everything else.

I rubbed elbows with some remarkable students. Jeff Lagarias and Mary Fang, the sharpest math minds I knew, carried me through analytical geometry and calculus. Doug Hurley and Linda Shaw were given to witty, pithy, and mordant expression, much of it at my expense. *Touché!* Elizabeth Mills had a feel for French I could only admire. An adroit draftsman, Dick Bangham later boogied with Kenny "Root Boy Slim" Mackenzie and the Sex Change Band (their drug-dazed antics were exquisite embarrassment to my very proper "Aunt," Eugenia Mackenzie, Kenny's mother). Bob Davis played advocate for pre-classical music and our hometown, while Fred Quie moved on to practice the historian's craft. Over the years, willy nilly, I learned much from these rogues.

Our teachers challenged us – in more ways than one. Mrs. Mason and Miss Darling (dreadful drudges), as well as the openly gay Mr. Zimmerman, pressed us to think mathematically. Mrs. Henderson, Mrs. Hillmann, and Mr. Isenberg (a later suicide) nuanced our notions of literature. Mr. Collier, Mr. Currey, and Mr. Carriere (the sentence-

Comment [2]: Two Cronies and their Consorts

Mom and Dad were very fond of a childhood rascal, Bobby Davis, who taught me well how to play the obsequious "Eddie Haskell" of "Leave It to Beaver" TV fame. Bob's jocular, verbal wit is impressive. A Washington impresario better known as Robert Aubry Davis, he married Patricia Brannan, noted attorney and partner in Hogan and Hartson in charge of the firm's Community Services Department. Another life-long chum, Fred Quie, now Quivik, is a consulting historian of technology, who participates in lawsuits on behalf of the EPA to protect communities from dangerous corporate waste products. For many years Fred lived in Philadelphia with his wife Melinda, a professor of practical theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. They currently reside in Houghton, Michigan, where Fred teaches environmenttal history at Michigan Tech.

swallowing mumbler) nudged our scientific curiosity. Come time for college – to schools on par with MIT, Dartmouth, Duke, Chicago, Radcliffe, Yale, and Cornell – we were off.

This suburban high school had its limitations. Less than three percent of us were African-American; still fewer were Asian-American and Hispanic. The disabled were invisible. As it is, the county's present ethnic and racial diversity followed the Hart-Celler Act on immigration and the rise of a black middle class. Until then we were witless of Washington, DC, and its intractable problems just to the south of us. Callow kids, we were also isolated from the larger, international arena, aside from Vietnam, Israel, and Soviet Russia. Otherwise, our public education was a propitious start. It is what real communities make possible for all their children, the improvident as well as the promising.

I told my classmates as much at graduation in June 1967. In perfectly pat and platitudinous remarks on such occasions – what can one say in five minutes to 570 graduates and their families? – I admired our collective achievements, especially in the sciences, while exhorting my peers to temper this knowledge by continued humanistic inquiry. (I had just read Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and felt compelled to share its insights.) "The fact that science is playing too great a role in our lives today and may possibly destroy our individual freedom in the future," I opined gaily, "must be met by increased education – on all levels, in all fields of academic pursuit." A summer studying microbiology and organic chemistry at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, the previous year made me an expert, I thought. Thank God, the bored but polite audience applauded my conventional sentiments without hoots, boos, or jeers, cheers, bravos, or encores.

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Despite raging hormones, humiliating pimples, and physical deformities of our

own making – I was self-indulgently round-shouldered and myopic without the eyeglasses I hated to wear – we learned something of the realities outside of class. At school this meant sports and clubs. Instead of running cross-country, my carcass held blocking dummies at football practice. I also scored the baseball games that others played, and sold mugs for milk instead of beer to raise cash for charity. The annual Key Club conventions offered adolescence its first temptations with tobacco, alcohol, and puberty's (un)pardonable pranks: I staved off such stupid stunts, my comrades merrily succumbed.

A normal Christian kid, I evaded what I could of church services and catechism exercises to acquire the rudiments of biblical scripture and ecclesiastical doctrine for confirmation in 1962. The bishop, the Right Reverend William Creighton, laid his hands on my head one muggy, June Sunday morning to pray, "Defend, O Lord, this thy Child with thy heavenly grace; that he may continue thine for ever." Attention at mass soon reverted to whimsy. After memorizing the Anglican litanies, including the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed, I developed some dismally rigid and clumsily applied moral principles. Subtlety in faith's other lessons came only after further reflection on the social gospel.

Perhaps the most beneficial moments in maturation came from life outdoors. I joined first the Cub Scouts, then the Boy Scouts, because my brother did. Although Ben became an Eagle, I never advanced past the piddling rank of Star. The hierarchical calisthenics of conformity – the uniforms, the insignia, and the inspections – chaffed my abject soul. But for years our scoutmaster, Paul Cords, a retired Marine, made personal responsibility a possibility to my sullen, insouciant ilk. His formula? It was camping – and lots of it. Many a weekend, Troop No. 291, based at the Naval Ordinance Laboratory, ventured up White Mountain, along the Appalachian Trail, and down the Potomac River,

in preparation for a summer excursion to the pristine lakes of Maine's Baxter State Park.

For ten days in July 1963, we retreated like Lewis and Clark into the wild by canoe, hauling all our provisions, taking precautions against bears and wolves. We drew water from bright, clear springs, axed our firewood, caught and foraged much of what we ate – and watched out for one another. One false step would have jeopardized the trip for everyone. We were lucky as well as wise on this perilous path to adulthood. There were no serious mishaps or injuries, just stories of near misses: one stray canoe of Scouts encountered sturdy, bearded French-Canadian lumberjacks, to mutual incomprehension; and a trailer loaded with camping gear nearly upset on the return trip.

Out of these experiences I adapted slowly to life beyond home. I was never altogether comfortable with the inevitable transition that awaited me. The weeks I spent at Boy Scout Camp Roosevelt were wretched; I had yet to understand how others lived – the poor, the female, and the international in particular. The struggling youths from inner-city DC at Cedar Knolls Reformatory, where I played billiards and basketball on occasion with the Key Club, gainsaid a suburban white-boy's quixotic idealism.

If my activities were not well defined, if there was no recognizable code, if I had to initiate or improvise, I was lost. Akin to my father, I was painfully ill-prepared for independence when the time came. It would require four years at the university, two years of military service, and a year of graduate school to overcome my homesickness.

Travel, real and imaginary, helped. The recently conceived interstate system facilitated trips up and down the east coast, to swim at the beach but also to camp on the Appalachians. In summer 1967, for example, the Allens headed to Atlanta to visit Lou Jr. at Grady Memorial Hospital. But we forayed no deeper south than Augusta or farther

west than Kennesaw Mountain. The Midwest, the Mississippi, the high plains, the Rocky Mountains, the Pacific coast were mere yarns. Later ensconced in an armchair, I imagined them as I read Sinclair Lewis's Main Street, Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Bret Harte's Tales of the Gold Rush, and John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath.

I never left the country – except for two brief ventures to Canada, one to Montréal, the other to Québec – until I vacationed with family in Mexico City and was stationed overseas: I was 22, finally old enough to learn from it. Otherwise, the wider world remained a reverie, one animated by my early acquaintance with French language and culture. Enamored of Alexander Dumas fils's La Dame aux camélias, among other things French, I longed to visit France but lacked the will or purpose to make it happen. I did not ask my parents if I could go; I preferred the security of working at menial jobs, mowing lawns in the neighborhood, cleaning filthy used refrigerators at Apex Plumbing Supply in Colmar Manor, and holding the plumb bob and surveyor's rod for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) on Colesville Pike.

The trip to Providence, however, checked this vacuous adolescent drift. For four years (1967-1971), a university imparted texture, substance, and touch to my vagabond spirit. It was, yes, an education.

For the first time, I was surrounded by people much more privileged than I. My classmates were smarter, more urbane, more self-confident. So it seemed to me. At least they had a firmer hand on their possibilities. My heady pride in attending an Ivy League institution soon dissipated with the hard reality of living by my own devices, which I did with less ostensible grace or panache than my peers. Well, no. Despite all appearances to

Comment [3]: La Dame aux camélias

Not once but twice as a young woman, my mother was given Alexandre Dumas fils's La Dame aux camélias (1852), a mildly risqué novel about a tubercular member of the Parisian demi-monde. I suspect the gifts were more than innocent declarations of interest, which Mom had the good sense to keep if not read. The first copy carries a note in my mother's hand, "M.L. Smith, Villa Gazzolo (from Giovanni) Feb. 15, '34," while she was a boarding student in Verona. The other copy's inscription reads, "A ma tendre amie Marie Louise, Noël 1936. Gustave," when my mother was shuttling back and forth between Newark and Charlotte. The second volume's pages are uncut and so must have impressed her less than the first. I am privy to no such book that Dad ever gave or inscribed to Mom – at least that she kept – which speaks well for their literary as well as amorous discretion.

the contrary, the other students, I discovered, were coping with their transitional malaise no better than I. Home for nearly everyone was many miles away.

At Brown I came face-to-face with the capricious mix of meritocracy and social advantage in American higher education (pace Pierre Bourdieu). Sons and daughters of wealthy alumni resided with National Merit Scholars, some of whom tidied the beds and swept the floors of their better-heeled neighbors. Of more middling mind and circumstance, I was favored by neither brilliance nor legacy. But the most obnoxious presumption, I found, accrued to the dimmest-witted narcissists of limited means who, whenever a fawning audience drew nigh, nattered on about the money of all the clever people they knew.

There was worse – and much more – to come with the swirl of ideas, values, and politics in the 1960s. Though puzzled by the May 1968 events in France, I understood the Civil Rights movement and the risks its activists ran, culminating in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. My aggrieved black classmates bravely staged sit-ins in 1968 and boycotted classes in 1969. I also recall the Afro Society's Monte Bailey who spoke with fellow residents of Archibald Hall about the daunting obstacles he surmounted to reach college. Long rumored on campus, news of the university's early debt to the slave trade took Brown's first black president, Ruth Simmons, to confirm in 2006.

By the same token, the war in Vietnam made 2-S draft deferments damnably unjust. News of Bob Redmond, a Springbrook HS graduate maimed in the conflict, came with a sinking realization that his disabilities could have been mine. Mindful of a younger buddy, Rich Currey, and his experience in Vietnam, vividly recalled in his Crossing Over years later, I had only to find common cause and to act on it – marching, canvassing, and speaking out against the Cambodian incursion in 1970 – notwithstanding the counter-cul-

tural revolution that led others to drop out instead. Sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll were everywhere but not much for me. Arlo Guthrie's impish side was more my style.

In the midst of this anomic turmoil, intimations of solace if not salvation stemmed from schoolwork. Such were the intellectual joys in freshman English. Loren Eiseley's Immense Journey, James Baldwin's Fire Next Time, Henry David Thoreau's Walden, and classic essays in anthologies assayed as well as assuaged my moral quandaries (however much they outraged my stalwart father when he thumbed through these texts). In lieu of natural science, whose study I dimly recall reviling, literary language engrossed, sparing me from a manifest mediocrity in mathematics and its studied application to the physical universe. My mettle was more evident elsewhere.

After botching differential equations and applied dynamics – so d'Alembert says, F = ma unless the inertial F* = -ma? – I focused on my affinities for American and English literature. I never regretted the change in major from engineering to English, except for the dreadful disappointment that this initially feckless decision was to my dad. He warned, "Jim, you can't eat art," and he was right. But I could not eat without it, either.

It may not have helped that I arrived at Brown when I did. My sophomore year (1968-1969) I witnessed one of the most sweeping reforms in higher education, thanks to Ira Magaziner (known years later for Hillary Rodham Clinton's health reform debacle). Together with fellow *Wunderkind* Elliot Maxwell, he compiled a detailed, 400-page proposal to refashion the undergraduate curriculum. In response, the faculty deliberated for two days in the wainscoted, portrait-lined Sayles Hall until, at last, almost all the recommendations passed and the soft-spoken traditionalist, President Ray Heffner, resigned.

There would be no distribution requirements, just 32 courses, eight of which were

reserved for the concentration. The only mandatory grades were pass/fail; other marks applied only if the student requested them. Also at the student's request, instructors were obliged to draft a report for his or her records. Finally, faculty members were to develop new courses on "modes of thought" rather than of disciplinary content. The guiding notion was to stimulate intellectual interaction in class, hardly a concern then (or now). Given widespread indifference to this last curricular change, it did not survive the decade.

Helplessly jejune, I embraced these reforms as my own cause célèbre. For the next two and a half years, I immersed myself in literary texts, hundreds of them, each one of which I annotated and placed on the shelf to revisit. I registered for courses because of their reading lists, not because they were required or their teachers renowned, and thus missed taking classes with the best: Jacob Neusner on the Hebrew Bible, Juergen Schulz on Venetian art, Barbara Lewalski on John Milton, Gordon Wood on Revolutionary America, John Hawkes on creative writing, and plenty of other pedagogical exemplars.

I was intrigued by the modernist period and worked hard with Robert Scholes on James Joyce, with Reinhard Kuhn and Arnold Weinstein on contemporary French drama, and with R. Burr Litchfield on revolutionary and industrial Europe. The dapper Charles Nichols, my first black professor, taught the twentieth-century novel, while George Morgan, the renegade mathematician-turned-philosopher, asked students to write an essay in order to attend his course, "Concepts of Man." The invitation was just as immodest.

The results of my endeavors were imperceptible. With solid SAT scores and a high-school class rank to match – in the top 3 percent of both – I was well prepared to do much better than I did. My performance in math and science was abysmal, and my efforts

in English were far from stellar. Except in a few instances – the D.H. Lawrence scholar Mark Spilka called me "cheerfully obtuse," while the historian Burr Litchfield said I was "well suited" for graduate work – my "Course Performance Reports," which forbearing instructors submitted in lieu of grades, are replete with the same polite commonplaces as those in my elementary-school report cards. A letter of recommendation written by Assistant Dean Barrett Hazeltine, a truly dear man, states, "[Mr. Allen] gives the impression of reading widely and understanding what he reads. I suppose his strongest points are his versatility and his independence of thought." Alas, Bob Scholes, my faculty adviser, did not read my senior thesis, either.

In four years, I had little to show for my studious delight. No Phi Beta Kappa key, like my eldest brother's at Richmond, nor graduation honors, like the Smiths' and Kruegers' at Princeton. I finished smack in the middle of a fast-running pack, though it seemed I had been left far behind. No matter, the experience felt right, but its profound humanity remained in tension with equally deep anxiety. After college, what? A liberal education was not necessarily the best preparation for the next transition, that is, to be of use to others. Thirty-five cents and an English major, whether or not with Brown's cachet, got any dub a cup of coffee at the local diner.

The propinquity of extraordinary teachers and students did not translate into immediate opportunity. Yes, Elie Hirschfeld was the wealthiest classmate of my acquaintance. The scion of Abe Hirschfeld, a successful real estate developer in New York, he arrived from and returned to New York's Park Avenue in a chauffeur-driven limousine. But, however decent a guy, Elie was no entrée to any career I could manage, certainly nothing beyond that of a distracted factotum.

Then there was the Selective Service System. It drew my birthday on the 69th round of the 1969 lottery, low enough for conscription in the Vietnam War. So without an option appropriate to what I had become, I enlisted in the US Naval Reserve the next July, a year before graduation, figuring that I would be ready for active duty when the Navy was ready for me – in about fourteen months. Given my ambivalence with the Boy Scouts, I was not prime military material. But I would do my duty. Besides, I felt less guilty in the company of the blue-collar chaps I labored with each summer at the WSSC.

Summer 1970 I worked instead as an intern on Capitol Hill. With the campus unrest after the shootings at Kent State and Jackson State, I decided to do more for peace at home and abroad. I was lucky in my high school friendship with Fred Quie, whose father was a Congressman (1958-1979), later Governor (1979-1983), from Minnesota. I told Al Quie that I was a registered Democrat; he supported me anyway. How curious that he should resemble the warm Hubert Humphrey, an old-school liberal. They assumed the same social values, notwithstanding their political differences (Humphrey, for instance, never needed to pray in public).

Al arranged an interview with the House Republican Conference, chaired by Congressman John B. Anderson, then a Republican from Illinois (1961-1981). In March, I talked with John Bibby, a professor of political science on leave from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who directed the Conference staff. I did not embarrass Al Quie entirely. Despite my blasé offer "to give politics another chance" – as if the system owed me something for my participation – my relative discretion led to a new summer job.

For eight weeks, Ed Reeser, a Harvard sophomore, and I delved into what the 91st Congress had done on issues of serious concern to college students. We probed the legis-

Comment [4]: A Photo Op (and then some)

Access to politicians in Washington is often pure happenstance. In early November 1965, for example, I met Hubert Humphrey at a photo op because his nephew attended my high school. The Vice President's fellow Minnesotan, Congressman Al Quie, lived (and rode his horses) in our neighborhood. Similarly, the earnest, unaffected Secretary of the Navy, John Chafee, spoke patiently with me about the Vietnam War during a commercial flight back to Providence in March 1970. These men were humane public servants. But the vapid detachment of White House operative, Charles Colson, at a Brown alumni gathering in June 1968 was something else. What I learned from this aleatory encounter was the enduring nature of blind, unyielding ideology: religiously based or not, this animus corrupts more thoroughly than power itself; its crimes, from Watergate to Abu Ghraib, are no accident.

lative proposals from both the House and the Senate on financial aid, university funding, and the draft. The results were obvious: however much the states had done on education, the US Congress had done precious little; according to the US Constitution, it was not supposed to. None the wiser, Ed and I reported our research to Congressman Anderson and his staff at a perfunctory meeting in late July.

The Republicans considered none of our recommendations. On the other hand, the Democrats from voting districts with large universities, such as Paul Simon and Glenn Poshard in Illinois, already knew what to do. They campaigned on college campuses, wooed student staffers, and returned to serve higher education; they embraced "the major tie of understanding between equally well-intentioned people in a common culture."

Years later when I met John Anderson again, long after his failed bid for the White House in 1980, he recalled nothing of my report for him. But he clearly had gotten the message. No recent political leader of his stature, with the exception of Al Gore and Barack Obama, spent so much time in the academy. I can only imagine what the ill-famed senator James Smith, Jr., would have made of his type; as it is, another scholar in politics, Woodrow Wilson, had willfully baffled my great-grandfather.

After commencement ceremonies, in June 1971, came active military service for two years. The following September I was posted to Fort Benjamin Harrison, in Indianapolis, to attend journalism school. Like boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Station, it was a belated epiphany, though the wage-earning men at the WSSC had already advised, "Lad, there's only two things you need to know at this job: shit flows down hill and payday's Friday." With similar, random counsel, I learned how to run a newspaper, from reportage

and photography to layout and duplication, in a first-rate training program thanks in part to my fellow patriots, who urged me in vain to escape the enclave my life remained.

Graduating first in my class at Defense Information School, I was proffered a plum assignment, at a small communication station near Athens, Greece. What a thrill it was to live in another culture for the next twenty months, more than ample compensation for my futile effort to secure a commission in Officer's Candidate School. It was just as well. After a bungled application interview – I appeared in mufti, with untrimmed hair and beard – the US Navy knew precisely where Seaman First-Class Allen belonged, in the ranks. And there I served dutifully for the duration of my one and only military tour.

Life in and beyond Nea Makri, a tiny fishing village just 20 miles to the east of Athens, was a puzzle. On the one hand, I was captivated by my visits to the Acropolis, Epidaurus, Corinth, Mycenae, Olympia, Delphi, and Iraklion on the island of Crete, about which I had read in John Boardman's textbook. I was also fascinated by modern Greece and its turbulent trek to democracy, very different from the ancient world's, on the eastern-most edge of the West. Neighboring Turkey, another member of NATO, was a ruder shock – and more difficult passport clearance – than the federated Balkan state of Yugoslavia still under the authoritarian aegis of Marshal Tito. Its own junta aside, Greece was well situated for trips to Italy, Germany, and France, which I easily undertook by military transport. Here, like my parents' travel after their schooling, was an education-in-motion.

On the other hand, enlisted life made for insufferable ennui, one that lasted exactly 23 and one-third months, largely because my capacity for more responsibility went disregarded. I spent deadly dull days mustered for desultory, overnight and weekend guard duty. To hasten the hours, I worked hard to edit each month a quality newspaper, aptly

titled The Marathon Runner – "the fastest news around" – after the annual foot race in the next town, the original Marathon. For our sailor-sentinels, my shipmates, it sufficed.

In my spare time, I re-wrote my senior thesis, "Artists as Young Men" – a youthful reflection on creativity – and in so doing learned how to revise a lengthy text. I read avidly; every book became a *vade mecum*. I haunted the base library and bookstore to scare up works on ancient Greece, but also in modern European and American literature. Much of this otherworldliness was mundane mental escape, of course; much more of it was an autodidact's edification by Descartes's dictum and ethos: *cogito, ergo sum*.

Late night discussions with my "comrades-at-sea" – Tom Colbert, a master's candidate in American history at the University of Iowa; Terry Hull, a graduate of Harvard's School of Education; and Tyler Powell, a law student at New York University – recaptured some of my experiences at Brown. Conscription did that for us. We all faced military service out of college, which stayed with us whatever our subsequent circumstances. With these amiably inquisitive men, I lived what I recalled and sought more of it.

Nota Bene:
They embraced "the major tie of understanding between equally well-intentioned people in a common culture."
(page 114)

So I applied for (and was admitted to) a dual-master's degree program in History and French at Tufts University. To supplement an academic transcript that lacked grades for two full years – the Magaziner reforms, I confess, were not very realistic – my application consisted of the senior thesis as well as the usual Graduate Record Examination scores. They filled the bill. Given the school's benevolent attention, Tufts was the most welcoming of new homes. I felt like a virtuous patient after an honorable discharge.

Take a Break

I intended to stay in Medford long enough to secure a place in publishing. Because I loved books – my wife and I have collected more than 5,000 of them – that pro-

ject seemed reasonable. But I was quickly disabused of this prospect by the opaque practices of the book trade. I had no mentor in the business and failed to parley a seat at Harvard's summer internship. I was also diverted, deviously, by the ambitious intellects at the Fletcher School and by the acolytes of academic celebrities on France – viz., Stanley Hoffmann, Laurence Wylie and Paul Bénichou – in nearby Cambridge. *Ah, oui, c'est ça*.

To keep company my first two years, I had become a residence hall supervisor in an experimental program. "Roots and Growth" was a residential experience for students enrolled in Professor Jesper Rosenmeier's English course on organic metaphors. Initially created under the auspices of the university's Experimental College, this alternative learning community suggested how accidental my own college life had been. Programs such as Jesper's were more integral and, I think, more successful. I wanted to further this notion; I decided to do so as a professor of European history.

My timing, however, was appalling. Baby-boomers enjoyed higher education every bit as much as I did, and for the same reason: it engaged and it inspired. What a shame that legions of us chose careers in the academy just as enrollments were contracting. Our huge generational cohort finished school about the same time, in the late '60s and early '70s, leaving myriad classrooms empty. The implications of this predicament became obvious when I competed in an ever-larger pool of applicants for a dwindling number of teaching posts. About 140 qualified individuals applied for my present position; fully a third of them could have done more than adequate work.

At Tufts – to paraphrase Henry Adams's dilation on academe – I needed the university more than it needed me. I loved my new profession, despite the pitiful personal price I paid for this ill-advised means to independence from imposing filial ties. Freedom

was one objective, certainly; survival was another.

But I persevered. The delights and satisfactions far outweighed the risks and doubts of graduate study for six years (1973-1979). My professors gave more of themselves than those at Brown. As I read French realist fiction, Fred Shepler and Martine Loutfi helped me to develop a critical voice of my own. I studied modern Europe with Pierre-Henri Laurent, Howard Solomon, and Howard Malchow (years later a traveling companion), who prodded me to read more closely, write more cogently, and think more clearly; and I aspired to effective pedagogy under the patient supervision of George Marcopoulos, a true gentleman-scholar (and shameless hypochondriac). So occupied, I came to the historian's craft with pleasure and gratitude as a determined humanist, or some facsimile of one. With President Jean Mayer, philosopher D.C. Dennett, poet Denise Levertov, and political guru John Roche also on campus, why not?

My master's thesis on the historical uses of Honoré de Balzac's La Comédie Humaine came to the following conclusion: "As Flaubert stated, 'No one, later, will be able to write the history of the reign of [Louis-]Philippe without consulting Balzac,' not only for the accuracy of the [novelist's] reproduction of surface details, social manners and mores, financial transactions and administrative procedures, but also for the structural expression he [gave] to a revolutionary social consciousness with the advent of a modern society in post-Napoleonic France." A chapter in this work, I say proudly, merited inclusion in a professional quarterly; it has since then been reprinted in a reference manual.

How I got to this point is a story I best not tell now, but my rapture with literature had a few practical applications. Whatever its use to historians of modern Europe, this intellectual passion sustained me for another two years at Tufts and resulted in another

degree. It was progress of sorts, thanks to the incomparable resources of the Harvard Widener Library and the Boston Public Library, twin bastions of literate culture to last one a lifetime. Virtually at my doorstep, they endowed my studies.

After another year of preparation for qualifying examinations in European history and literature, I embarked on a doctoral dissertation. "Enfin," as the French say. My patience with formal institutional strictures had waned – at age 28 I was still a student – and I looked forward to making more substantive contributions to the profession. I also looked forward to assuming some responsibility for others, the sooner the better. So at the outset I conceived of a dissertation publishable at a reputable university press, which would make my applications for college jobs stand out.

This strategy proved a dicey proposition. It assumed that the work would lead to another degree and that a book would soon follow. That was no small wager to win, but I was fortunate, as well as foolish, to place the bet. The effort provided material for five scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals. A proper post would come eventually, I hoped, without many more prerogatives my family had already made possible. However sad or sorry my straits, or so my self-pity had me regard them then, my state was not truly impecunious, parlous, or dire. Desperate I never was or ever could be.

What I wrote is easily summarized. "In 1830, the romantics participated… in popular culture. With its broad appeal, romanticism managed to break the earlier exclusiveness of [social elites] during the Enlightenment and to avoid the later isolation of the contemporary intellectual [who felt] threatened by mass culture. Here lies the romantic movement's true revolution… in the growth of modern popular literature."

If one examines everything printed in France from 1820 to 1840 – the creative

Comment [5]: The Harvard Widener Library

One major cultural treasure of the Boston area is the research library at Harvard University. Second only to the Library of Congress, the Widener's collections rank among the richest in the world. Because at one time Tufts and Harvard jointly administered the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the School's students and staff are still entitled to the same library privileges as everyone else on the Cambridge campus. So I was blessed to share my apartment with Fletcher types whose identification cards (without photographs) accorded me precious access to the Widener. Once when I requested a title held in a faculty member's carrel, requiring a student worker to retrieve it for me, I was confronted by the awkward prospect of responding to an apartment mate's distinctive name – Makoto Yamazake – to claim the book at the circulation desk. I did so with a broad smile and one exculpatory word – "adopted" – to which the complicit attendant nodded pensively and winked. Whew!

heyday of a new generation of ingenious writers – one sees the rise and fall of their admiring imitators in poetry, fiction, drama, and history, genres promoted by markedly younger but maturing authors, a more market-oriented book trade, and a secular increase in urban reading publics. The significance of these developments is their participation in a major historical shift in French culture from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Romanticism, I argued, was a watershed moment in the historiography of modern France.

Two extended summers prowling in Parisian libraries and archives paid off. I finished my doctorate in June 1979; I signed a contract with Syracuse University Press six months later. In 18 months I had earned a PhD and become a published author, or very nearly: my first book came out in January 1981. I was still employed part-time, initially as an editorial assistant, then as assistant editor at the Journal of Family History, a scholarly outlet, reviewing, preparing, and tracking manuscripts for publication. Staffing the reference desk at Wessell Library and teaching in Tufts Summer School also paid the rent. But academic employment, at least in the humanities, worsened; credentials were no guarantee of success. So in the interim, without further trifling or dawdling, I trusted with Emily Dickinson "to learn the transport by the pain."

I had much transport to learn. At least two opportunities, one with D.C. Heath in Boston, the other at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, ended badly because I had no clue what to do – or what not to do – during an interview. The acquisitions post at DC Heath evaporated before my very eyes as I stammered responses to predictable questions. *Zut alors!* The respectable job at Arkansas fell victim to my unconsidered informality. Petty professional gossip, I know now, makes for silly pratfalls. I never figured that my

interlocutors were acquainted with Tamara Hareven, my boss at the Journal of Family History; they took offense at my indiscretion (and incompetence) to hire someone else. *Ô merde!* Mute hostage to dumb embarrassment, I can never rehearse or mime it all.

My gaffs continued, of course – such as during a chat with Tom Dublin, a former student of Oscar Handlin, whose latest book I termed "self-congratulatory" – until at last I landed my first full-time position at the University of California, San Diego (1981-1982) as a replacement for Allan Mitchell, who was in France for the year. It was work that flatly contradicted Handlin's description of the historical calling: "Erosion of the basic skills, atrophy of familiarity with the essential procedures, dissipation of the core fund of knowledge left stranded many worthy individuals, who simply did not know what they were doing or why." He was talking about me, my fellow graduate students like Billy Pencak and Carole Levin, and, yes, several new colleagues in San Diego.

The UCSD Department of History was rife with accomplished scholars, a number of them award-winning authors: Steven Hahn, H. Stuart Hughes, Gabriel Jackson, and David Levering Lewis. I had read their books and was excited to greet them as they sorted their mail in the office. This was proud company to keep, though I found their personal foibles lamentable. The squabbling among them was reminiscent of "the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation," whom Edmund Burke decried in his ill-tempered account of small-town lawyers during the French Revolution. In my good fortune, I preferred Burke's version to Handlin's.

Good fortune is not easily recognized, however. When I next found employment, it was not on the sandy Pacific coast, but on the windy plains of the Midwest. After another poor interview – would I ever learn? – I got the job. Now I was still further from

home. The small town of Enid, Oklahoma – population 50,363 – and the even smaller college community at Phillips University – 700 students and 65 colleagues – made for culture shock. The biggest buildings in sight stored grain. My mother first learned of the four-lettered town in the crossword puzzles of The Washington Post.

I had grown up in major metropolitan areas on the east coast and attended large, research universities. With transitory exceptions, like summers at the beach, I had never experienced such insularity, where residents of more than thirty years remained "new-comers." As Jackie Steeves, a secretary, warned me upon my arrival, if I were to stay, I needed to stow my bow ties and secure a wife. She was right. Years ago my Texas friend in Wessell Library back at Tufts, Bill Olbrich, had alerted me to rural ways on the south-western plains. He did not lie.

I was luckier than I thought. There had been more than 225 applicants for the position; and the search committee had deadlocked, forcing the dean, Bob Botkin, to choose. I think he flipped a coin to decide my fate in academia (I had no other offer). To my enchantment, a congenial collection of humanists awaited me. John Boots and Glenn Doyle in English, Clark Gilpin, Susan Schreiner, and Gene Boring in the Semi-nary, and Anne Winston and Justine Boots in Foreign Languages smoothed the transi-tion. More circumspect folks, such as Bill Snodgrass in History and Bob Simpson in Re-ligion, welcomed my occasional perplexity with Phillips students to provide timely ad-vice of their own.

President Joe Jones had grand plans for the small institution. Its ties to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were conducive to intellectual engagement, es-pecially in the Seminary. On the wave of Oklahoma's economic expansion, thanks to

Nota Bene:
As the protagonist in my own minor drama, I could have never reached the stage without a supporting cast whose assistance I have felt since childhood.
(page 130)

the oil boom of the 1970s, Phillips had material resources, as well. Here curricular innovation and interdisciplinary thought could flourish, and for a brief while they did.

For the next nine years (1982-1991), Phillips was home. The teaching was onerous but the pupils polite; the summers were long, hot, and blustery, but the winters short and bright. There was much good to make from the relative isolation.

I secured a Mellon post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania (1984-1985) and a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) research fellowship in Enid (1988-1989) to release me from time in the classroom. Grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Gilbert Chinard Foundation, and the NEH funded overseas travel, where cultural life was rich and weather passable. I also found salons of colleagues at the University of Oklahoma – Bob and Mary Jo Nye and Keith Busby – as well as at Oklahoma State University – Robert and Elizabeth Williams, Glenna Matthews, "Tip" Ragan, and Joe Byrnes.

More inspiring were the efforts of Phillips to survive its frightful financial crises. The year I arrived, in 1982, the "oil bubble" burst, petroleum prices plummeted, and the disposable assets of the university's donors evaporated. Student enrollment had never been optimal, which did not matter when donations were bountiful, but the situation had changed. The school now needed a steady income from tuition.

Every year Phillips counted its heads and pennies, one by one, and kept its doors open, occasionally with the intervention of an unexpected gift, more often with some desperate legerdemain, such as selling the institution's real estate to itself for another line of credit at the bank. Once the fully tenured faculty challenged the Board of Trustees to

contribute more; if need be, for a semester, instructors would work without pay. The trustees rallied and solicited support further afield. In 1987 the town of Enid raised a three-fourths penny sales tax to buy the university's property, lease it back to the school, and establish local student scholarships.

We more than survived, we thrived. Starting in 1985, the school learned how to leverage grants from various sources to raise its visibility in the region. Building on the university's artful pedagogy in foreign language, the NEH paid for a new position in Spanish for two years: a major federal agency was willing to invest in the institution, others would follow like the warm southern winds after a summer storm.

Under the leadership of a new Dean of Faculty, Ken Shipps, the US Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education awarded two comprehensive grants, totaling nearly $500,000 (about $1 million today), to develop an integrated core curriculum based on classic texts. For two years, in 1989 and 1991, Phillips jumped in the US News and World Report rankings to number 9 in the region for academic quality. Enrollments in those years also jumped. We had responded wisely to adversity on the high plains of the former Cherokee Strip in Oklahoma Territory.

The faculty's engagement grew keener. For two summers, in 1987 and 1988, the campus had money to invite luminaries from across the nation to lead animated discussions of canonical works. Bill Mallard from Emory brought us Augustine's Confessions; Rachel Jacoff from Wellesley taught Dante's Divine Comedy; Alfred Mann from the Eastman School of Music had us sing Bach's "Mass in B-minor"; Nicholas Woltersdorf from Princeton dissected Descartes's Discourse on Method; and David Kitts from Oklahoma queried Darwin's Origin of Species. Other scholars unpacked other texts. These

were joyful moments, and we carried them directly into the classroom. For me, this intensity sustained my passion for cultural history; suddenly, an entire institution shared my dearest of dreams.

These activities were comparable to what I knew of the more reputable schools where I had attended or worked. But the exchange at Phillips was more genuine because there was so much less pretension. The paucity of vanity and snobbery eliminated the impossible posing that stifles collective inquiry. It has been many years since I have had such probing discussions about books well worth the analysis.

In 1985, after a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, where Jerry Prince and the late Frank Paul Bowman in Romance Languages guided my history of reading, I relished the embracing camaraderie at Phillips. In this nourishing context, we were all better professionals. This company enabled my second book, In the Public Eye, to benefit from musing with scholars on two continents; I completed it right there in Enid, America, close by Don's two-pump Texaco station and its severely arthritic hound.

These efforts did not alter the school's structural, long-term problems, however, which only worsened under bumbling, ultimately malicious management. In 1988 Joe Jones had run out of fiscal expedients and was asked to leave. In his place the trustees hired Bob Peck, the interim president of Alaska Pacific University. He was credited with saving the Anchorage school, and it was hoped that he could do the same for Phillips. So it seemed. Smartly, he invested in marketing, raised tuition, leveraged financial aid, and convinced the town to subsidize the institution in a sale-leaseback arrangement on the eve of a capital campaign. For the first time in a decade, the university was in possession of its material future if not its infrastructure, which now belonged to Enid; at last, Phillips

Comment [6]: Fellow Humanists

Outside of small rural towns, there are very few full-service gas stations with decrepit dogs waiting for delivery trucks to chase. What else is there for good ol' boys to talk about other than their impetuous pets? All the more wondrous then was the quality of scholarly conversation at nearby Phillips University, which owed much to the sharpness of wit and humane learning of two English professors, Glenn Doyle and John Boots. They both knew well the Great Plains, their home, whose affinities and metaphors they indulged as they could.

One exchange between Glenn and John illustrates what I cherished most about them. In the early days of personal computers, Glenn had learned to program the image of a box that after ten seconds magically disappeared from the screen. Glenn was proud of his programming prowess and presented its results to John and me. John's response was bafflement. "But why?" he asked. Glenn just grinned. The humanist's stupefaction, whatever the text, gave meaning to an apparent *non sequitur*. Always, Glenn exhorted, we must "write tight and dense with meaning," lest the moment escape us in the splendor of Don's Texaco and its shaggy-dog stories told in the middle of nowhere.

had a competent stewardship worthy of its capable faculty.

But soon after reimbursing the city in 1993, the university embarked on a truly idiotic scheme. Bob Peck eliminated tuition as a way to boost enrollment; he figured that federal and state financial aid systems would cover operational costs. Without the endowment of a Berea College, which does much the same thing, this nostrum did not work. Admissions and expenses surged while revenues and assets plunged. In a year the school verged once again on bankruptcy.

Bob Peck stepped down; and caretaker leaders, with the best of intentions, took the next four years to close the school forever. The gem of an academic community was lost on a fool's toss of the dice. It is hard to fathom how, having endured the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, this institution could implode in the booming 1990s. Even the clever legal maneuvers of the school's attorney, Stephen Jones, who defended Timothy McVeigh until his conviction in 1996, could not save Phillips in its final throes, either. The end arrived in 1998, seven years after we had departed for Illinois.

I say "we" because seven years earlier I had gotten married. It was a while in coming. Well before I left my parents' home in 1967, my affective life had been a shambles. To be sure, there were young women of note, too much so. The objects of my timorous attention were clueless to how implausibly interested I was: Anne Gray, Barbara Edwards, Cheryl Robertson, Julie McClelland, Herlene Mendelson, Karen Teener, Kathy Haber… the list of imagined and sometime relationships, before and after puberty, is astonishingly long and delightfully varied.

For all I knew these fair ones were rare, placid souls, but the presence of mind to

inquire about them myself was unavailing. The impersonal rules of school were easier to understand than the unwritten codes of friendship and affection. Like a host of ineptly coy youngsters, I lived a full fantasy life, a nugatory ideation, little more. What has become of my nubile idols since then? To my chagrin, I have no clue – or remorse.

Were these young women Oedipal proxies for my mother or sister? Was their unapproachable nature the surcharged superego of my unconscious? Lord knows, the id was well developed – popular culture made it howl – but the ego's reality principle wrestled with anxiety and pretense. For lack of common sense in my neurotic infatuations, I never surmised that anyone else faced these conflicted longings and delusions. And if I did, I was unnerved at the preposterous prospect of acknowledging them. Egad, not that.

Sex education was a toxic mix of images: on the one hand, gloriously smutty Playboy centerfolds, and on the other, venereal diseases' scabrous gore. I recall with what disbelief I learned of life's miraculous intimacies from John Divine (for real), my addled buddy in eighth grade. He was so dubious a source; how could it all be true?

In college I learned little better. As the virulent allure of women grew, the less accessible they appeared. Casual encounters at mixers, smokers, and sherry hours turned costive and remained so until I was smitten by one, last, ineffable promise sitting right next to me in class one September day in 1969. Her name was Carol Fowler.

After two years of Ivy League self-absorption – mine as well as others' – I marveled at Carol's self-effacement and quiet intelligence. I was irretrievably lost in the celestial spheres well before she decided three months later that we were ill-suited to one another. She was correct – our lunar theories figured none of our general or special perturbations – but it took me fourteen years to discover this principle in interpersonal as-

tronomy for myself. The vertiginous descent from such an apogee was agony itself. I can only imagine now how, heedless and bemused, I must have mooned about her in college, graduate school, and the profession. Star-crossed from the start, we shared this asymmetrical desperation on an unconscionably errant trajectory.

The resolution to my hapless affections arrived, after many misadventures here and abroad, at Will Rogers International Airport in Oklahoma City. I had just flown in from San Diego for the interview at Phillips and was irked to find no one from the university at the gate. Dean Botkin had assured me on the telephone that a member of the search committee, Anne Winston, would be there.

Tired and petulant from the lengthy trip, I sought assistance at the Traveler's Aid desk with paging my tardy colleague. A few minutes later, a bit winded from her rush across the lobby, a pert and comely brunette approached to shake my hand. "Hi, I'm Anne Winston. Are you Jim Allen?" she offered in apology. "Yes," I responded curtly. "And you are late." Unflustered by the rudeness, my companion led me to her car and we began the ninety-minute drive to Enid. Such forbearance was refreshing. How could I presume, given her frank, unflappable otherness? I felt humbled, indeed grateful.

The humility and gratitude lasted. After I took the job at Phillips, I watched in wonder how this woman retained her equanimity in sudden widowhood. By their contrast, grief framed her beauty. I admired her commitment to students, notwithstanding her husband's suicide. Other folks were as awed as I was by this selflessness.

So diverted, I dallied about Anne more closely and arranged to meet up with her for a weekend in Strasbourg the next summer. But by the time Anne returned to Enid, she had met a Fulbright fellow in Germany; she was thinking about life in Minnesota instead

of Oklahoma. "Reculer pour mieux sauter," I thought, in momentary retreat to my muted, clotted musings on women generally. Then, presto! in early 1984, Anne grew disenchanted with her Fulbright connection and was ready to entertain someone else.

Our first date, I am sure, was for indigestible chili at Bob's Cone Corner in February, though Anne insists that it was for a more enticing meal of enchiladas and quesadillas at an authentic Mexican restaurant in March. Soon thereafter I was calculating Anne's income taxes; it amazed me how much she was paying the IRS. This passably opaque, but immediately practical gesture was my declaration of undying love. Anne was more forthright; she took six weeks to propose.

Naturally I thought matrimony was my idea, but I credit her pluck – or was it despair? – to speak her mind first. I still had a baneful phone call from Carol to mull. In contemplating a new life, I had to conclude another. But Anne's pity for others, including herself, helped me to cope. "There's no future in depression," she quoted our folksy-wise confidant, Glenn Doyle. I soon sensed what she meant (ill. 8).

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On December 22, 1984, in the presence of John and Justine Boots, whose living room we commandeered for the occasion, Reverend Orville Crowder intoned the time-honored formula: "'Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here… Forasmuch as Jim and Anne have consented … in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a Ring, and by joining hands; I pronounce that they are Man and Wife….' You may now kiss each other."

The instant felt full. It was more than the odd, new weight of the bands; the soft

press of the hands; or the sweet touch of the lips. It was the recognition that we owed this happiness to others – in my case, to family; and in Anne's, to community.

We arrived at this festivity with only one other person, Orville's wife Anna May who joined us for the Moët et Chandon *brut* and rabbit liver *pâté*. We did not invite our parents. Given Dad's recent recovery from alcoholism and Fran's early stages with Alzheimer's, they would have managed sadly. Without our families, we did not want anyone else. Selfishly, despite our deepest debts, we reserved this wedding for ourselves.

The brief ceremony and the restricted company served their purpose: to stand for all those who had a stake in Anne's and my future together. Nuptials have traditionally concerned more than just the couple; they hew to a social as well as a religious institution, a public ceremony as well as a private resolve – in short, a comic play's skewed but welcome denouement, such as playwrights like Shakespeare have understood it.

In the epilogue to Hamlet, after the principal characters have all had their say, Horatio declaims, "And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world / How these things came about." What more can, or should, an ancillary figure offer an audience in catharsis? Akin to Hamlet's loyal and faithful chronicler, I remember events not in someone else's life but in my own. I do so cognizant of everyone who helped.

This is not to say that I have much more in common with Horatio. Hardly. The tragedy he recounts is Hamlet's, while the comedy I recall is merely mine. I am fortunate to have met Anne instead of Ophelia. As the protagonist in my own minor drama, I could have never reached the stage without a supporting cast whose assistance I have felt since childhood. This collective effort has been as precious to me as the tactile reassurance of my parents' well-worn silverware with its decorative Marian roses.

Dialogue with *Glenn Doyle*

GD: *"Do you remember the scuttlebutt I wrote up on that big grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities? It did Phillips proud."*

JSA: *"How could I forget, Glenn? It was great news for such an unsung college."*

GD: *"I'm sure you liked how I began my letter about it by describing in such loving detail those fleshy backside-half-moons. They peeked out just below the cut-offs that my cousin's younger sister wore to his wedding. My side of the family in Tulsa, you know, wasn't much known for classy taste. Why, my cousin had all the couth of that liquored up rough-neck we saw in Boise City on the way to Santa Fe. I'm not sure who paid the dinner bill, our local dude or his desperate girl friend. Life's lonely sometimes on the prairie."*

JSA: *"Ah, your wry grin makes me homesick for attitude-adjustments at the Frisco Bar."*

GD: *"Weren't those pickled eggs and redbud beers something else? Pearl, the only waitress with a full set of teeth, took good care of us. Everyone was 'Hon' for her. She didn't mind our shoptalk from Phillips or the pretentious chatter about the Western canon, so long as we left her a decent tip. If I remember aright, her brother was a cook at the Tia Juana, a steak joint in town named after a relative who'd never been to Mexico. The food was really pretty good."*

JSA: *"Anne has often told me how much you reminded her of her dad. Bob Winston was a man of the plains. He was no intellectual, but he loved a good joke, too."*

GD: *"Anne never told me much about that, Jim, though as I recall you and I were real glad to see her back sweating in the Oklahoma heat after her summer trips to Germany – whatever your objections to the double-entendre."*

JSA: *"How could I not take offense. You and Gayle were none too happy, and Anne was a lonely widow."*

GD: *"You didn't need to fret about that, my friend. Anne had too much poise for the likes of me. I had other girls to contemplate, farm gals who were more likely to flap their mouths, saying, 'I feel like that…' and 'I'm a fixin' to…,' than they were to study medieval manuscripts."*

JSA: *"You give Anne too little credit. She can talk 'Okla-hoe-ma' when she needs to, like the time she was up on the roof in the pouring rain, trying to secure plastic tarps from the wind with the panty hose she had filled with sand. As it is, the rain had flooded the dining room from a cut in the eave ignored by the carpenter the night before. Anne's roof-top exploit was not a task any lady would undertake without swearing up a blue streak, despite a very proper neighbor, Sandy Johnson, standing there below, asking if she could help."*

GD: *"I wasn't around for that one. You two had snuck away from Enid a while before. But I'm glad to know that Anne still has some of that grit we admire out here."*

JSA: *"Yes, Glenn, we've got prairie dust left on our feet."*

GD: *"Dead as I am, so do I."*