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Coda

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At last, the conclusion...

Coda

Mehr licht!
-- J.W. von Goethe (1832)

Here is one more picture, another of life's sacramental moments to tell, not of baptism but of marriage. It is a snapshot of Emily Bono and Harald Hutter at their wedding reception in Vienna, Austria, on May 27, 2005 (ill. 15). There is a striking freshness about these Europeans; they almost look American.

Emily is my wife's step-daughter. Anne's late husband Jimmy had been married previously to Kate Tewich, a German student at the University of Kansas (KU). When they met, Kate was 22, Jimmy 19, both too young to honor their obligations to each other. They soon divorced, and Kate went back to Germany with their only child to start life anew. By the time Emily was college-age in 1989, however, she enrolled at KU and reconnected with her American family. Her father had died not too many years earlier, so all the Bonos, including Anne, took a special interest in Emily's homecoming.

In the next decade Emily completed three degrees: a bachelor's in African Studies, a master's in Social Work, and a master's in Latin American Studies. She made the most of her junior year in Tanzania; traveled to Chile for thesis research; and eventually got a job with Legal Aid in Kansas City, Missouri, to succor impoverished Hispanic migrants throughout the state. It was noble employment. Emily also kept up with her German relatives, some of whom lived near Cleveland, where Kate's parents had moved as refugees from Hungary after World War II. They welcomed Emily's solicitude, too.

Then, quite suddenly, suffering cruelly from shingles, Emily announced her return to Germany. She sold her house, gave away her furniture and pets, packed up her mementoes, and left in the summer of 2001. Emily decided that she was not that much

of an American; she felt more comfortable back home, her other home, in Europe.

After an uneventful interlude, Emily landed a position administering a new business school established by Estée Lauder in Vienna, where she met Harald, the director of information technology at a research institute affiliated with the Universität Wien. The son of a munitions worker who hid from the Red Army during its occupation of Austria after World War II – providing more exploits to relate – Harald embraced Emily's views and values. Theirs was a marriage of hearts and minds (pun and platitude intended).

Anne and I joined the American contingent of guests – Anne's sister Jane and Emily's aunt and uncle, Joanne Deshazo and John Tso from Kansas City – to celebrate the occasion. We did so fully aware that our roots, like Emily's, were caught between two continents. Our cultures here and there more than crossed; they paralleled one another.

The wedding in Vienna's Hundertwasser Museum represented a complex migration, a negotiation rather, back and forth between two worlds, which have become much closer since Europeans first journeyed to America in the sixteenth century (earlier if we consider the Viking settlements in Greenland, Newfoundland, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence). It was the latest manifestation of the evolving story of shared experience, one made possible by profound changes in global history, not merely those at home.

Family is now everywhere. Besides Emily and Harald in Vienna, Joanne Deshazo's son and wife, Graham and Akiko, live in Tokyo with their two daughters. Joanne's husband, John, was born in Taipei and escaped with his mother to New York not long after his father challenged the political authority of the Kuomintang, the nationalist party of Chiang Kai-shek. My uncle Go Smith recently died in Buenos Aires, where he and Rosie resided after leaving Cuba in 1960 (some of Aunt Popsie's in-laws remain there). Go's

eldest daughter, "Tiki," restored a farmhouse in southern France. Countless relations we know nothing about exist in Ireland, Scotland, England, Germany, the Netherlands, the eastern stretches of Asia, wherever else they may have drifted over the millennia.

It is both humbling and inspiring to ponder the geographical extent of one's kinship. We are scattered around the planet, and yet we are not so far away. Our dispersed family is closer than it has ever been, tethered as we are by the new technologies of transportation and communication. With easy jet travel and even easier telephone and e-mail services, it has become routine to keep in touch. Distance is no longer measured in miles but in minutes per message. Tant mieux.

The things we lack are a common language and culture, but those differences are remediable. Hard study, good will, and quiet patience overcome them, as millions of migrants from one country to another have discovered over the centuries, not just in America. The movement and mix of peoples occur in many lands. They always have, we Americans never noticed; the United States is hardly the only immigrant nation. Resembling the Anglican faithful in Nigeria, who now outnumber those in Britain and the US combined, we partake of the same need to believe wherever we are.

This insight was latent in my father's study. His den was filled with the artifacts of other places, if his children had the wit to see them. Besides The World Book Encyclopedia and titles in various tongues – French, German, and Italian – there were the collections of British classics by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Dickens (volumes of which, like Mom's copies of Dumas fils's La Dame aux camélias, I inherited). Dad's desk drawers contained foreign coins and stamps remaining long after his days with the Columbian Steamship Line and Pan American International Airways.

As Popsie's memoirs confirm, the Allens and their extended kin have always traveled.

On the trestle table in the library stood a globe, whose political boundaries are now much out of date. On the wall, over the couch, hung Patterson's "Glory of the Seas," the painting which Dad received from his mother in 1950 (and now belongs to my brother Ben). "The Glory" was the last of the clipper ships to circumnavigate the earth before it was sold off for shipping freight and finally for its timber on the west coast. Our family did not always venture far to make acquaintances with those so familiar to us and yet so very dissimilar. Like the photographer Margaret Bourke-White, one of whose overseas jaunts my father facilitated, cosmopolitan exotics were often a topic of conversation or, better yet, they were with us for an evening of drinks and dinner.

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By now it should be obvious, this book has followed a recursive progression from self to others, here and abroad, in a continuous movement towards effective as well as metaphorical community. It was never intended to be solely a personal memoir, but also an historical reflection about people, places, and developments. Equally self-consciously, it has indulged a natural tendency for sensual evocation. Each act or chapter opened and closed on one of the five senses – smell, taste, touch, sight, sound, and a sixth for good measure – to frame these memories tropologically in a context broader than mere autobiography. From the outset, this organization never feigned, covertly or otherwise, the spiritual exercises of some latter-day Ignatius of Loyola meditating on the five torments of hell. Rather, it embodied the storied nexus of the personal and the historical.

Comment [1]: Spiritual Exercises

Loyola's Spiritual Exercises (1524) expiates at length on the torments of hell "to ask for interior sense of the pain which the damned suffer." In quick succession, the book details, sense by sense, the infernal miseries awaiting the unrepentant in the next world: "to see with the sight of the imagination the great fires… to hear with the ears wailings, howlings, cries, blasphemies against Christ our Lord… to smell smoke, sulfur, dregs and putrid things… to taste bitter things, like tears, sadness and the worm of conscience… to touch with the touch … how the fires touch and burn the souls…." Such vivid depictions foretelling eternal damnation are tempered by the more forgiving ritual of anointment during the last rites with the traditional Roman Catholic unction of the five senses. The virtues of secular perspectives are also worth recalling. As Condillac noted in his Traité des sensations, contemplative sensuality need not be half so injurious or so wretched.

The ocean smell mattered, I suspect, in the earliest immigration of my English, Dutch, Irish, and German relatives. Its importance probably began with William Allen's

voyage across the Atlantic in 1624 and improbably ended with my parents' honeymoon to the Bahamas in 1938. Why not? They all braved far more than the sea in turning their backs on the shore. With each breath of the Atlantic, I think of them – the Allens, yes, but also the Roomes, the Smiths, the Kruegers – and their fortunes. My recollections started with them, however removed they are from my immediate experience, because the ocean's redolence suggests something of who we are, immigrants still, everyone.

The flavor of comfort foods recalled the family and its communities of tradition, beginning rather than ending with my parents this time. They were married for fifty-one years, until my father died in 1989 and my mother in 2002. Each evening when the kids were home, my mother and father brought us to table, a sacred occasion mostly. For as long as my parents remained in Silver Spring – Mom lived there more than fifty years – their faith in this ritual was ours, and we kept it with them. Our meals together informed much of our childhood, a familial commitment akin to those of others we have savored since then.

The touch of tableware was significant, too, but it had no fixed dates, except perhaps at birth, at first mine and then my wife's together with me. Years after our wedding, Anne and I carried home a box of my parents' silver. Its precious heft reminded me of the privileges this pattern expresses, an unrequited debt to many efforts besides my own. My education, training, and profession are products of a dramatic social process. I always felt the creative interplay of stage and supporting cast in this particular comedy, that is, how every "action… corresponds to the human condition of plurality," as Hannah Arendt defined it, with or without a bouquet of flowers at the end.

The sight of the gently rolling, bright green plains of early spring in Oklahoma

has been an ageless pleasure. Amidst the fields of winter wheat, I met and married Anne. Her families, after generations of migration first eastward, then westward, had settled soon after the land rush of 1889 opened up the Oklahoma territory to folks besides the Native Americans who arrived there first. For nearly fifty years, the Winstons plowed the heavy, red clay, and the Wilsons carried the Lord's word, before they and a myriad like them sought to escape the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression; Anne's parents trailed in the long, wide furrow to California. Figuring in a renascent scenery far west of my own, this expanse is now mine.

The sound of a Parisian sidewalk sweeper was another source of reflection. On the surface, this impression is trivial; but in fact, it represents for me the formidable allure of European culture. Since our nuptials in 1984, the months my wife and I spend in France and Germany, our summer homes, are now necessary to us, thanks in part to our longstanding fascination with second languages, with their art and literature, but above all with the metaphors of their music. What we hear is swept along by a different life we have come to know and to love. It speaks to us, repatriates, immigrants in reverse (ill 16).

A sixth sense I have found jogging and working at the university. My endeavors to encompass realms of knowing in nature and in the world defy mere empiricism. Such an awareness presupposes the psychic blurring of past, present, and future in the reconstruction of memory and the sundry communities it serves. This temporizing, if you will, arises from the recent focus here on where we live now, writing, teaching, and serving a higher purpose. However tenuous and contentious, the moment finds its meaning from remembrance situated in real time and space.

Well beyond incidental memorabilia mentioned in the narrative – such as a rusty

railroad spike, a jagged piece of quartz, and a slice of wedding cake – the universal imprimatur of the senses has made this ego-document less self-indulgent, less parochial, and less antiquarian, more inclusive, reflective, and historical. It was intended to be so, as the dialogues with the dead after each act propose. In retrospect, I confess, it was unavoidable. Past circumstances broadened and deepened the account to include the likes of my nanny Jessie, the newer members of the clan, and the ones we married into: the Kempfs, the Johnsons, the Schroeders, the Winstons, the Wilsons, the Fines, the Bonos, and incalculable others we barely know. It is a very big family, all of us now.

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Like the past, the present is endowed. Post-industrial change has made our situation much the richer, not only in material but also in cultural value. The very concept of social capital, as economists and sociologists apply the term, is clearly implicated in human resources or employment skills, an information economy's complex labor requirements. And it is hard to deny. Responsible, professional jobs draw upon the accumulated expertise derived from our educational institutions.

The higher the educational attainment, the higher the average salary, especially in the fields of engineering, medicine, law, and business – less so in the older fields of theology, education, and the humanities. The demand in the labor market determines the rewards of longer, better schooling, even in areas for which no one has acquired the relevant background at first, such as webpage designers and security analysts before the advent of the World Wide Web and the war on terrorists. In these latter cases, degree programs for them did not exist, but education predisposed the appropriate innovations.

Aside from education per se, cultural capital matters. Important, too, are the in-

terpersonal communication skills of second- and third-language acquisition and the understanding of habits and gestures when individuals meet across linguistic boundaries. As Rousseau wrote, “Si je ne vaux pas mieux, au moins je suis autre.” This recognition underlies our varied and various encounters with others as we become increasingly mindful of and dependent upon them everywhere. Our relations are well worth contemplating.

Reliance on someone else’s English, for example, overlooks its delightful nuances – and its unintelligible versions – outside the United States. Try contacting outsourced IT services in south Asia; the rhyme and rhythm of their idiom clash with ours, forcing us to decipher codes, on a different continent no less, to fix our computers or to unsnarl our credit card bills. This skill is worth of another sort. It comes with a liberal education a good deal fuller than ordinary job training or proficiency in technology; it is much more than a stranger’s idle command of our dialect.

Progress exists thanks to this purchase. It is comparable to the effective entrepreneurial daring of the earliest immigrants to America, which led to their survival in the face of daunting adversity. In a few exceptions, it led to unseemly wealth and influence in America’s Gilded Age, such as Gottfried Krueger and James Smith, Jr. amassed for themselves. This crass, initial impetus has given way to the better informed professionalism required in an international economy and the social and political structures that support it. It is no longer enough to barrel beer or to tan rawhide in Newark, New Jersey; manufacturing must draw on a highly skilled management on a global scope and scale. Cultural capital underwrites this expertise and far more; it underlies the power of justice and compassion as well as the awe of art and nature. And that’s the point.

Culture enables less anodyne observations, such as how one-third of seven billion

people survive on fewer than two dollars a day. Less than six percent of the earth's population controls more than two-thirds of its assets. Ten thousand children die every day from preventable, infectious diseases. Vast disparities also exist within the west: intergenerational social mobility is higher in Europe than it is in the US, where the infant mortality rates of our inner cities resemble those of the least developed countries. Shocking pockets of shameful poverty remain in the midst of ethically painful plenty.

We do not perceive these discrepancies quite so readily as we do our relative advantages. Although far from the Social Register – happily so – Anne and I find curious our 95th percentile ranking in The New York Times's graphics of social prestige based on occupation, education, income, and wealth. There must be an error with these numbers that place us fifteen percentage points higher than our parents. In our families, like those of the professional middle class generally, this plenitude is more embracing. Despite my parents' considerable status, there are still many more advanced degrees – MDs, DOs, PhDs, and DFAs – in Anne's family than there are in mine.

A seductive continuity in the story evolves from our earliest kin to the present. The pattern of apparent achievement, though modest, makes for a sense of wholeness and connection with the past. It steels our courage and tenacity to accomplish something apt to the narrative; and it provides assurances that institutions of our collective making do function – our schools especially – when we invest our full trust in their most ostensible purpose. A communal asset, this propensity to trust in covenant with one another, is the fount of our truest affluence.

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My wife and I feel blessed, I know, by our service to others, in the classroom and

Nota Bene:
In our distinctive musicality we are all connected, despite ourselves, whether or not we are related in fact.*(page 272)*

in our scholarship, by our creation and dissemination of new knowledge. This calling far exceeds the satisfaction of deciding whether or not to have one. Numerous breaks from institutional routine, summer months and year-long sabbaticals, are precious opportunities to pursue our beloved avocation, which most observers call a sinecure. It is no such thing; our identity is located in this effort. As the sententious angel intones in Goethe's Faust, "Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, / Den können wir erlösen" – redemption lies in ceaseless endeavor – and so like Faust, we dare Mephistopheles to wager on our future.

Neither Anne nor I care to live in the past. Its health and medical practices failed; without central heating and air conditioning, homes were miserably uncomfortable; before the automobile and the airplane, travel was arduous and, in populous households, privacy nonexistent. Folks then suffered more than material deprivation, they faced a constricted, attenuated vista of their possibilities: their labor was tiresome and perilous, their occasions for growth, agency, and poetry were minimal or rare.

The resources we take for granted, higher education and the Internet, in particular, have immeasurably enlarged our horizons. As Thomas Friedman has argued recently, the world is flat. Thanks to technology, we are no longer so isolated from our interlocutors, even in the American Midwest. The present may not be any saner or more just than the past – not really – but it is a preferable space to occupy for now. It is up to us to make it (and us) worthy of its promise for everyone, then and now, who has escaped our ken.

Our moment is favored perhaps because there have been vastly (and virtually) fewer disappearances. Bequeathed familiar lore and ample records, we know much about our relations, notwithstanding the unintended selectivity in remembering some at the expense of others. The Allens, the Smiths, the Kruegers, and the Roomes may be better

documented than the Emersons, the Rowdens, the Wilsons, and the Winstons. We tell their stories with varying degrees of confidence. But tell them we do.

Tennessee Williams once pithily observed, "The play is memory." So my account has neglected to say anything about contemporary family members of whom we know little now simply because we were not very close at the outset. I wonder what became of the Smith and Krueger aunts, uncles, and cousins. I wonder too what became of the Missouri Emersons and Alabama Winstons. We must be open to our relationships with them and beyond. One day, I am sure, we will also learn about the Johnsons, the Kochers, and the Cherrys, whose progenitors played roles in our lives a long while ago.

In life as in recollection, privilege begets privilege. Our families provided the material and cultural foundation for risk as well as growth. If we made mistakes, we had substantive and moral support, even though the prospect of failure was more than we could contemplate. Anne's parents may have ignored her for their own unhappiness, but they insisted that she venture forth and enabled her to do so. Their promotion was steadfast. Both of us had what the successful investor Warren Buffett gave his children: as much as we needed to do anything we wished, but not so much as to do nothing.

Yet more obvious was my inherited status as a white, middle-class male. My access to money, elite education, full employment, political power, professional life, health care – in short, to capital in all its manifestations – exceeded that of Anne and most others, including truly talented scholars such as historian John Hope Franklin, my parents' twentieth-century contemporary, whose autobiography details the perquisites of Caucasians he never enjoyed as a Negro. Public and private institutions do not serve society equitably, as the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasized in the French context. Con-

Comment [2]: Comparative Social Mobility

Some myths about America, the land of unlimited opportunity, die hard. According to Anna Cristina d'Addio's recent study for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on intergenerational social mobility, the United States actually lags behind Canada and eight European countries: Denmark, Austria, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Spain, and France. Clearly, mixed economies, welfare measures, and government regulation of the marketplace in the larger public interest play critical roles in fostering socio-economic mobility. Laissez-faire, and its attendant inequalities of opportunity and achievement, simply cannot do it alone. But one would never know from so many self-congratulatory views of individual success at home and abroad. Were they only true.

figured differently, inherited opportunity is no less pervasive here and now but changing at last, I trust, for the better: the educated must elevate others.

In the spirit of Matthew Arnold who propounded how "men [and women] of culture are the true apostles of equality," I must ask, if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where? "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12.48). We owe it to our neighbors to make the effort in humility and our common humanity. Otherwise, we inveigh for naught.

We are family whether or not we acknowledge our collective fortune. The legacy we share extends far beyond the narrow confines of a cultural literacy as defined by E.D. Hirsch (his prescriptive list of terms and phrases every philistine must know is woefully incomplete). And it provides far more reassurance than the equally anachronistic etiquette dictated by Amy Vanderbilt (her quaint admonitions to common sense can only appeal to the puerile voyeurs of the rich and smug). Rather, our proudest patrimony, together, lies in an enduring disposition to learn from one another in kindred comity.

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Lest I be misunderstood, mine has not been an exemplary life. I would not wish it on anyone else. I am no better a dub than the next, and my accounts are certainly no more compelling. Like children everywhere, I have not been fully worthy of my parents' dreams on my behalf. Of the seven cardinal sins in the Roman Catholic tradition, I have known them all, as the "superbia" of this book reveals. "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us." As for Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives – his secular iteration of Christian compassion – I have failed to abide by them, too. These lap-

ses, denials, nay, hypocrisies must ever perplex unprofessed Proustian types like me.

What remains? The expectations of our better selves in connection with others are priorities. We must keep them in mind and take them to heart. With this sense of higher purpose, we continue to see options, some hope, in our lives. I like to think that this self-conscious quest has moved my account of the past. Privilege I enjoyed, yes, but it entailed no preferment, no prerogative, no presumption. Without such entitlement, I came to what distinction I earned with timely assistance. There have been innumerable enablers, family and friends, along the way. I am the better for remembering them.

So, in my neighbors as well as my in colleagues and students, I recognize my advantages and share them how I can. I sense the kinship of virtual relations in our daily smells, tastes, touches, sights, and sounds. With them I embrace Walt Whitman's sonorous appeal to community, from wherever we came, to our presence together in perpetuity, ideally speaking, 310 million of us in one majestic country.

> I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
> Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
> The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
> The mason singing as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
> The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
> The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
> The wood-cutter's song, the plough-boy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
> The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
> Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
> The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
> Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

In our distinctive musicality we are all connected, despite ourselves, whether or not we are related in fact. Ultimately, "the mystic chords of memory," which bind us, stretch

from every immigrant ship and hero's grave to every living soul and hearthstone. These personal and historical bonds will yet swell the choirs of our faiths "when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

With these solemn words, Abraham Lincoln had in mind, of course, a national consanguinity, for which in March 1861 he was praying against the odds to preserve. But 150 years later, in less desperate circumstances, he would have most certainly included the inhabitants of all lands, past and present, whose recollection enriches our lives and will do so for some time to come. To this imbricated vision of a world apart no longer, fortunately, gratefully, I dedicate this autobiographical comedy in six acts and every sense.

Dialogic Finale

AK: *"Eh, bien."*

ELM: *"I'm at a loss for words."*

EHA: *"A bit much."*

LS: *"Uh huh. Oh, yeah."*

GD: *"Do you mean that?"*

DA: *"That's nice."*

BAR: *"Surely you jest."*

SvB: *"Amen."*

JG: *"You talking about me?"*

JSA: *"Tra la!"*