Living Northern California 1975-1995

Carol Wilder

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for Robin and Walker
Keep Calm and Carry On

“What can you do when your dreams come true
And it’s not quite like you planned?”

After the Thrill is Gone
Don Henley, Glenn Frey

1. Two Countries Divided. . .
A restless Ohio academic moves to California for new adventures
2. The Myth of Mellow
A job at SF State in ‘75 depends on knowing who was in or out in th e’68 strike and why the 60s seem to last forever
3. The Dutch Goose
Techno-wizards change the world over beers after 16 hour work days
4. HLL 210 to Hanoi
An office where colleagues dream big with guests
5. How to Buy a Politician SF Style
A winning bid at a school auction leads to lunch at *Stars* with Terence Hallinan
6. Cybernetic Frontier of the Soul
A chance meeting leads to a weekend at Esalen with Gregory Bateson and dinner with Jerry Brown
7. K.B. Comes Home
Beloved literary lion Kenneth Burke spends a priceless month with our hectic family
8. Time Waits for Nobody
In 1981 a mysterious illness appears, slowly at first, then on fatal fire to ravage our students and city
9. Fogster’s First Earthquake
A girl’s dream Harley rises to the occasion of the Loma Prieta earthquake
10. Big Trouble in Little Baghdad
Professors with protest experience meet their match when students build a shantytown on campus
11. Breakfast with Ferlinghetti
Friend Brian Willson’s tragedy leads to an early breakfast with Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Robert Bly
12. The Town that Time Forgot
Family trauma compels a flight deep into the redwoods, where a remote town on the coast restores heart and soul
Acknowledgments
Afterword

Introduction

Downs, near Cookstown
County Tyrone
Ireland
August 30, 1838

My dear Children,
. . . I have long looked for a letter from you but in vain . . . I thought some of you would have come over to see me in your native land . . . I bought a decent black coat for myself and think about going to see you myself . . . I was telling Mr. Carlisle that I was going to that land to see you. He told me that the journey was too long and severe for me . . . The Most High is prospering us in the work of our hands. . . I want nothing, only I am lonely. Your mother was taken away from me . . .

Your loving father to death,
Thomas Blackwood

Thomas Blackwood was my great-great-great-grandfather. All but two of his seven children immigrated to America. He died in 1839, the year after these words were written. The letter was included in a 1940 Blackwood genealogy book handed down by my mother, Elizabeth Blackwood Wilder. Three-quarters of my ancestors are Irish, the other quarter British gentry landed by King Henry VII in April 1497.

I have visited the Wilder estate in Shiplake, Oxfordshire, but always favored the Irish persuasion, as did my son Casey when he chose a visit to Ireland to celebrate high school graduation in 1998. We made our way to Northern Ireland and searched in Cookstown for traces of the Blackwoods. Like the editor of the 1940 genealogy we could find no record of them. One twilight we roamed the local graveyard but most of the stones were too worn to decipher. We did find in the phone book a nearby Blackwood, Lady Perdita Blackwood, 5th Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, and sister of writer Caroline Blackwood. Lady Perdita welcomed us warmly to her large residence and horse stables, but she knew of no historic family connection. We supposed there was one however distant. It would have made my mother happy to know she may have matched my father's fancy pedigree. My father would have been pleased that most of the

Blackwood estate had been turned into a rolling golf course, the lush green you see only in Ireland.

I retired at the end of January 2020, nine days before the first confirmed COVID-19 death in the US. It was good timing after five decades of teaching and enough experience with online learning to know I had little attraction for the virtual education that became mandatory overnight. With a respectable publication record, five thousand or so students all of whom I wish I could remember and millions of words spoken in class—many of them by me—how hard could it be to jot down a few stories from my life for my own grandchildren? A tempting retirement project, but not as easy as I thought.

In a peripatetic life that included visiting many countries, living in the Midwest, both US coasts, and even a year in Viet Nam, why focus on the quarter of it lived in California? California was a movie in my mind, long before I studied movies myself. California has retained an allure unlike any other U.S. state or most any country, which some natives consider it to be. Only France has a higher opinion of itself. The gold rush, film stars, fires, ocean, mountains, hairpin turns, deep indigenous cultures, hippies, techies, and a steady flow of newcomers and leavers. Redwoods and Silicon Valley; luscious agriculture and toiling farmworkers; blue surf's up and white powder snow to ski down; valley conservatives and coastal liberals. Mexico starts at San Jose. In fact, not so long ago it was mostly part of Spain then Mexico after conquering the indigenous population. Habla espanol? And California means earthquakes. Always earthquakes in wait, demanding a state of permanent denial to get out of bed in the morning.

1975 to 1995 were the years I lived in California. Raised and schooled in Ohio with a brief stint in Boston, California came into my life like a cosmic intervention, a vision I had never dreamed. More mundanely, my partner got a job offer he couldn't refuse at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center and I followed. With due diligence I found my own job in an era when landing a tenure track position as an academic was difficult but not impossible. Seventy percent of college jobs were tenure or tenure track then. In 2022 it is about thirty percent.

Still, it was not until recently I saw the twenty years in California as the glowing core of my identity as well as post-sixties culture. Anticipating retirement in 2020, I muddled through the standard downsizing, leaving both a classic apartment in Manhattan's Gramercy

Park and a white-picket-fenced half-acre near the tip of Long Island's North Fork. Letting go of my beloved places was a practical decision, not one of the heart. I tried not to think about it too much.

One morning soon after moving to a little place for my stuff, I was sitting on the floor rummaging through boxes and boxes of albums and loose photos. Photographs – back in the day we developed and kept them –covered my lap and spread out into a widening circle. Black and white baby pictures, childhood Easter finery, Girl Scouts, class pictures, prom night, Eurailing across Europe, college partying, early motherhood, and a thousand pictures from California. Glancing around the growing jumble it became lightening clear that the years in California—the best and worst of personal times—were lived in technicolor compared to the rest of my life.

San Francisco was a small town in the 1970s and 80s, with no more than a few degrees of separation between leading politicians, educators and artists. The Bay Area was like the big city that embraced roaring technological innovation. Northern California from Big Sur to Mendocino was, if not a state, at least a state of mind.

It was not a stretch to meet Dan Ellsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti through Brian Willson. Or Jerry Brown through Gregory Bateson. Or to meet Terence Hallinan through a school auction, or Sally Gearhart in my own office. Or Denis Johnson because we lived in the same remote Mendocino community. Social media had not been invented; social life was vibrant and personal. Relationships seemed to evolve easily among simpatico people. It did not seem as remarkable at the time as it does in retrospect.

It was the moment many of the stories in this book came to mind fully realized, a curse any writer knows means long, tedious, months or years of work with the rare flash of inspiration. I am an especially obsessive editor – a habit I continued in my more limited filmmaking. If I had known there was such a profession as film editing I might be in a dark room somewhere now. Many of the editors in film's early days were women.

As a writer I was once coached "leave no spare word standing." Advice I follow, but as often as not sneaking in one thought or two while deleting another. Having filled a shelf of journals during the California years, a practice I did less of before or after, gave me hope that there were some unpolished gems among the ephemera, some clues

to discovering why those years were so alive in me.

Casey made me laugh when he said "no disrespect intended, but your book kind of reminds me of Forrest Gump." Extraordinary things crop up in the course of an ordinary life. He is so right. During the twenty years reimagined here, most of the time each day I was putting one foot in front of the other: getting kids off to school, cramming to prepare to teach a class, commuting from Palo Alto to San Francisco on I-280, loving some new friends and colleagues and others not so much, cooking edible fare, keeping up with a lively social scene, and meetings, meetings, meetings. It is only from the thirty-thousand foot view of age and the gift of my journals that I saw the outlines of times that were pretty amazing if I had only been able to lift my head up from the quotidian moments that add up to a life.

Quotidian: daily, normal, simple, unremarkable. My favorite word and great title for this book if anyone knew what it meant. I first called the book *Breakfast with Ferlinghetti* because he had just turned 100 years old and it was cool and it was true. But too obscure, and after all I had only one breakfast with Lawrence Ferlinghetti and he wouldn't have remembered me from the omelet. *The Dutch Goose*, a Menlo Park pub popular with tech people in the 70s, then popped out of the chapter list. The title was short, quirky, and no one had used it. By the time I had written a draft to the end, *The Dutch Goose* seemed esoteric, too, and not on point. I came to *Living Northern California: 1975–95* because despite the painful obviousness, it is perfectly obvious too. I also like the gerund-y double meaning, a part of grammar I never understood but a life I did, sometimes feeling like a static noun and sometimes moving like a verb in a hurry.

Encountering Thomas Blackwood's voice from 1838 moved me deeply, knowing he was unable to reunite with his children after losing his wife and then dying himself the following year. My curiosity increased when I learned there is no trace of him in the Irish town where he lived. I have always had an interest in family histories. Growing up, my solo visits to elderly Grandmother Wilder were an opportunity to hear stories and see antique artifacts from her side of the family. My parents sent me there so she could teach me to be a lady by socializing with her prominent friends in coal-rich Western Pennsylvania, a task with which she had limited success. I did learn the difference between caviar and grape jelly. The hard way, by mistaking one for the other.

But Grandma Wilder also told a lot of stories and wrote notes on the back of every family heirloom, speaking to the future. I now do the same with the few items that came down to me. It is with these experiences in mind I decided to write stories for my own grandchildren Robin and Walker, who may someday run across these tales and decide to give them a look.

Chapter 1

Two Countries Divided by a Common Language

The first day of my new job in downtown Cleveland, I got a call with the message, "Tell that motherfucker Ev to stay away from my wife or I'll kill him." After starting college at seventeen and quitting at the end of freshman year, I had moved back home and was working as a secretary to sales reps for six different companies. My boss Gerry reassured me: "No problem. It happens."

The best part of the job was riding downtown and back with my dad every day. He was a very buttoned-down guy and I wasn't eligible for the Little League coaching where he bonded with my brothers. "Lock your doors, Sis," he would say as we drove through the rougher part of the east side. I got to know him in a way I never would have otherwise and have wistful memories of those rides.

After that that first hair-raising phone call, it was a mellow job. Once I learned to type a letter fewer than five times to get it right, I spent most of the day reading magazines and dreaming about attending Parsons School of Design in New York. All the while, I was on a mission, saving up for a dream trip to Europe the following summer. I was eighteen, and my parents were adamantly opposed.

Fortunately, our neighbor across the street was cartoonist Art Sansom of a popular strip *The Born Loser*. Art and his wife Isabel were boho for the time and an odd fit in our conservative neighborhood: my kind of people, I came to realize, as I babysat their son Chip. Every Christmas the neighborhood would have a house-decorating contest. One year Art displayed a nude mannequin wearing a Santa Hat lounging in a bathtub. I don't think he won.

But he did win my heart when he persuaded my parents to let me go on a two-month Eurail journey.

My friend Kathy and I railed through every country on the pass. No one spoke English except in Denmark and Sweden, but my French was passable. Arthur Frommer's *Europe on Five Dollars a Day* was our bible and it was good to its word. The United Kingdom was not on the Eurail. When I later married a Brit I discovered there were a few bits of culture I missed by not crossing the Channel.

The total mystery of being in a country where you don't speak the language and no one speaks yours reminds you minute to minute that you have no idea what is going on. The entire culture is opaque. Gestures and other nonverbal gymnastics may help, but you know that you don't know what you don't know. It is only recently that English has surpassed Mandarin as the world's most spoken language. In 1963 it was rare to find English speakers anywhere in Europe. Even thirty years later, on my first trip to Viet Nam, English speakers were rare. Now it is the go-to second language for most educated speakers.

It was either Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw—or by some accounts Winston Churchill—who said that "England and America are two countries divided by a common language." I vote for Wilde, but whatever the case, truer quirky words were never spoken. It's a lesson I would learn later—the hard way.

Linguists, anthropologists, and in-laws often know this. Hear a Brooklyn or a Mississippi accent and you can instantly pick-up clues to someone's education, politics, and cultural acumen. Maybe. It is true for many dialects and more so for different languages. You may not know the difference between Cockney, Geordie and Northern Irish, but they do in the British Isles. You may not buy Benjamin Whorf's controversial hypothesis that language determines world view, but I do.

During my what is now called a "gap year," I took a few courses at John Carroll University, one taught by a physics-for-poets professor who was entertaining as a PBS kids show. He knew his audience. After the year off, I decided to return to school. My dad said, "You can either return to Miami University and we will pay or you can go to Parsons and pay for it yourself." It was the kind of choice child psychologist Haim Ginott made famous: you can go to bed now or in ten minutes. When I became a parent, I called it the "gi-not a choice." Faced with a gi-not a choice, I returned to Miami.

I am getting both ahead of and behind myself here. The stories in

this book begin later, in 1975, the year I moved to California. But filling in a few of the earlier years may help the rest make more sense.

Missing Out on the Sixties

My political awakening began in 1963, when a fellow student stopped me walking across the Miami campus and said, "The president has been shot." I continued into town and took a seat at Al and Larry's upstairs bar, where they had a TV. I sat glued to my seat until curfew. It was November 23. The Beatles had released "All My Lovin'" in the U.K. the day before.

By this time, I was a junior in college and an indifferent English major. I picked up a widely regarded as easy speech and theater minor that was in fact immensely more fun than Chaucer and John Donne. Debate class brought out the killer instinct that had been latent in me and I won every assignment. Due to another lucky break, the class was taught by the department chair, who was so impressed by my performance he offered me a graduate assistantship—despite the fact that my undergraduate GPA was 2.5.

During my dropout freshman year in Cleveland, I met my boyfriend, Bo, who was in school across the state at Ohio University. We fell in love and were together for three tender years, two lost souls who found ourselves in each other. We eventually became engaged and his parents engineered a break-up. Not many years later he died too young.

Three months after the breakup with Bo, I married on the rebound to a nice man who was a bad fit. Two years later, I was pregnant right on cue. I had finished the MA and was teaching in a community college, which granted me their first maternity leave ever. I had to turn it down when my husband took a job at the same college in the days of faculty anti-nepotism policy.

Fortune smiled when I missed out on most of the mind-expanding activities of the sixties, cloistered in a snow dome college, young marriage, and motherhood in 1968. Drugs weren't around in those vulnerable years, otherwise I might be dead. Rebellious and insecure, I was an easy mark for anything new.

Motherhood on Schedule

Elissa was born on July 18, 1968, so I was hormonally challenged pre- and post-partum through an entire epic year of the twentieth century. I try to make up for it by giving her mini-lectures every birthday about

what a remarkable year it was. She humors me by pretending to listen. In a single year:

January 23: The U.S.S. Pueblo was captured by North Korea

January 31: The North Vietnamese Tet Offensive attacked 100 US sites

February 27: Walter Cronkite declared the US "mired in a stalemate"

March 4: Martin Luther King was assassinated

March 16: 500 Vietnamese civilians were murdered by the US at My Lai

March 31: President Johnson announced he would not seek a second term

April 23: Student protests shut down Columbia University

June 5: Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated

August 26: "Chicago Seven" and protesters disrupt Democratic Convention, encounter "police riot" of "unrestrained and indiscriminate" violence

October 14: "Presidio Twenty-Seven" war resisters were accused of mutiny

October 16: Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised the Black Power salute

November 5: Richard Nixon narrowly won the presidential election

November 6: The longest student strike in US history began at San Francisco State

With Elissa, 1968

And for a bit of relief, Apollo 8 orbited the moon on December 24, unless you were among those who believed the flight was shot in a film studio.

You can see why my daughter's eyes glaze over when I try to explain the year I missed.

A Cow College Teaches Life and Death

Having lost my first teaching job to the sexism of the day, I had to come up with another plan. By 1969, going to school was all I knew how to do. My debate success made me think about law school but it looked boring. My MA studies were solid and I especially loved the theater part. But theater or any form of media, with the crazy hours required, was no kind of work for a young mother given the unlikely odds of success for women. I wrote some decent journalism and was interviewed for an on-camera job at one of the first television morning shows. My husband strongly objected. No media job would work with a baby in tow, so back to school it was.

There were two PhD programs within commuting distance—Case Western Reserve and Kent State University. The prestige factor was a no-brainer. Case Western was a far better choice prestige-wise and a lot closer to my house. But Kent had a new PhD program in Rhetoric and Communication that blended humanities and social sciences. I swallowed my pride, trying to forget the Ohio adage "if you can't go to college go to Kent," and landed there in the summer of 1969. In another stroke of luck my summer seminar on "Aristotelian Rhetoric and Poetic" was taught by the Director of Graduate Studies, and by fall, I was a Teaching Fellow. It turned out to be a beautiful campus, and the curriculum ranging from classical Greek rhetoric to contemporary social movements suited my eclectic interests.

Nine months later, on a sunny Monday, May 4, four Kent State students were shot and killed and nine injured by Ohio National Guard troops responding to an anti-war demonstration. The slain student closest to the Guard was 270 feet away. It made Kent far better known that Case Western Reserve for ghastly reasons. The Kent State killings put a hard stop to the 1960s, as well as to my marriage to a husband who agreed with most Americans that "they should have shot more of them." 1970 marked the long slow decline of American Empire. The Watergate scandal and resignation of Richard Nixon in 1972 added an exclamation mark. I have written elsewhere about May 4th. Suffice it to say that my

life changed 180 degrees from Greek philosophy to political media and communication, driven by the questions "Why didn't I know what led to this tragedy?" and "Why didn't I know it?"

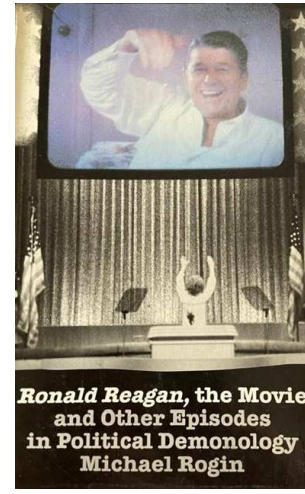
The 1960s awakenings in music, drugs, women's liberation, civil rights, peace, the environment, abortion, birth control, sexual freedom, and communal culture seemed to my young self to be doors of perception that had opened and were not possible to close.

Now I have lived long enough to know how wrong I was about most of those 1960s dreams. The rise in subsequent decades of income inequality, more stupid wars, the celebration of the individual at the expense of the community, and the commodification of attention led to polarization and fragmentation of a country that had been held together for several centuries by white male hegemony. Reflecting on the arc of the 1970s became more compelling. Glenn Frye wrote "call something paradise, kiss it goodbye." The fact that legal marijuana and gay marriage have alone prevailed during the post-sixties era is a bet no one would have made back in the day.

For many young folks across the US and around the world, the mythological 1960s sprawled well into the 1970s, a decade underrated and swallowed up by the iconic status of its more famous preceding ten years. The 1970s economy suffered with the loss of union jobs and the outsourcing of jobs to China or anywhere else in the world that would increase corporate profits by paying workers less. Music burst at the seams with talent. A 2021 *New York Times* poll asked "for the rest of your life you can listen to music from only one decade. Which do you pick?" Fifty-five percent chose the 1970s.

Enter Ronald Reagan in 1980, a movie star president for a media age.

Michael Rogin's 1987 Book



The 1970s were over, and the 60s along with them. If a B-movie actor can persuasively play a president on television, who can be surprised that skipping forward a few decades we see endless wars and media revolutions, misrepresentation and lying evolving from a presidential strategy to justify imperialism to a full-on delusion, writing a narrative that leaves reality in the dust.

Two Countries

Timothy and I met on a blind date. My first and only blind date and probably his, too. T was twenty-one, a skinny, smart, and bearded Brit. I was twenty-six and recently divorced with a toddler, staying at my parents' house for the weekend.

It was an unlikely meeting, set up not by my friend Katie, but by *her* friends Marilyn and Alan, who I had met the night before. Marilyn and Alan had met T in a London pub and he accepted their invitation to stop over in Cleveland. And he did so, on a Greyhound bus trip across the US to visit his parents, who had recently relocated to from Sussex to Vancouver so his dad could join his brother in the more promising career of running a salvage yard. Marilyn and Alan told me that T had recently graduated with honors from Manchester University studying the mysterious subject of computer science. I was reluctant to the point of paralysis about the idea of a blind date, but Katie was persuasive and the Brit thing was intriguing.

My father's jaw dropped when T picked me up. He was more hair than body. I was wearing a prim polka dot dress. An odd couple from the start. We were on our way down to The Flats, Cleveland's version of 1971 hipness. Three years earlier, oil-slicked debris in the Cuyahoga River famously burst into flame. The bar and restaurant scene of The Flats rose from the ashes of the former industrial hub. It was a transcendently cool scene for Cleveland, meandering along the river from bar to bar. T's English accent was the hit of the night, with listeners squealing about Paul McCartney. That was my introduction to the outsized seductiveness of that accent to American ears. I suppose I wasn't immune myself, since I invited T down to Kent for a few days. Then he invited me to England for a few weeks. A few months later, he left London to live with me in Kent. It was a decision perhaps not as well thought-through as it might have been, especially with my lively three-year-old Lissa in the mix. It lasted ten stormy years.

T moved from England in November 1971. After a year living in

Kent with Lissa in an early daycare co-op, me teaching and going to school, and T throwing pots and going stir-crazy, we got married so he could get a Green Card. I had sworn never to remarry and I don't think T was crazy about the idea, but we needed the money and someone had to work.

Not long after, T was sitting in a friend's yard when a page of the Sunday paper flew by: T grabbed it, found a job listing for a systems analyst at Oberlin College, and the next step was foretold.

Near the end of our second year at Kent as we prepared to move, I learned that my former fiance Bo, by then a Marine reservist and investment banker living in Southern California, put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. I never got over it, and I am sure it did no favors to my wobbly new marriage.

The Middle of Nowhere

Oberlin had its moments. It was an historically progressive town, home to the first college to admit women and Black students, and had been part of the Underground Railroad—though when we lived there, the town housing was as segregated as Cleveland. Oberlin was a picture postcard midwestern town with about 3,000 students and 8,000 residents. The

Collective Living, Oberlin

college has always ranked near the top for small liberal arts schools. I never understood why a student that smart would choose to go there unless it was to the music conservatory, but they came from all over the US and the world.

Olympian Tommie Smith of Black Power salute fame was on the faculty, brought in by sports radical Jack Scott. President Bob Fuller was, in 1983, the youngest college president in the US. We lived in a huge gingerbread Victorian collective with a dozen students and faculty. I learned that the worst sin is to steal someone else's food from the refrigerator and the greatest joy is having to cook only once a week.

It was 1973, ancient history in personal technology time, but T had a time-sharing computer terminal in a closet off our living room where housemates played Lunar Landing at all hours of the day and night. Out of curiosity, I sat in on a programming course but never caught the bug. I

Someone is playing Lunar Landing in the closet

completed the assignments to balance your checkbook and figure out how much to pay the babysitter, but it was torture to me and deadly boring. I never dreamed that programming expertise would turn out to be the Golden Ticket.

I taught communication and women's studies as a "sabbatical replacement"—meaning one year contract—and T worked as a computer analyst doing a complex SPSS conversion. Colleague Christian Koch thrust a copy of Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* into my hand, saying, "Read this. This is where it's at," a gesture that loomed large in my life a few years later. I worked hard at preparing for classes in which the students were as smart or smarter than me. I was used to cruising a little intellectually slower in the state school environment.

While the students I studied alongside at Miami were exceptionally attractive, Oberlin students were smart but aggressively disheveled, as if caring about appearance was politically incorrect. Our second year in Oberlin, the college president—very married to a mathematics professor—ran off with the dean of women's studies, permanently dimming my enthusiasm for feminism. Someone wrote a *roman a clef* piece in *Playgirl* magazine a year or two later, but you won't find this story in Wikipedia.

Living in our progressive "collective," I was assaulted in the dead of night by a homely, scrawny, shockingly strong housemate while T was out of town. I was more pissed off and disgusted than traumatized. It seemed unreal and I decided to keep it that way. I told T decades later when we were having a drink at Gotham Bar and Grill in New York. He shrugged. Maybe he didn't hear me over the din. I didn't say it twice.

The Oberlin high point was seeing the Eagles at the Beacon Theater in Cleveland with our friends Brenda and Doug in April 1974, giving me, from that night on, the soundtrack of my life. Still, after two years it was time to get out of Dodge. At last I would exit Ohio, the place that gave me roots but not wings. I have heard many expats laugh about being "from" Ohio. I know it gave them grounding, too. But I was sick of living in the middle of nowhere.

A Town of Orators

We narrowed destinations to Boston or San Francisco. Neither of us had a job. I had never been to California and Boston was closer and cheaper. T was ambivalent, so Boston it was. We moved into Brookline while I

Fanueil Hall, Boston

worked on my dissertation and collected unemployment. Who knew that working as a sabbatical replacement qualified me for some token compensation? Every week I walked down our Summit Avenue hill and rode the Green Line to city center to pick up my check.

I loved Boston. It made me feel smart, maybe the air of so many colleges in the city. I always stopped in historic Fanueil Hall and eventually learned to pronounce it [*fan'-you-uhl*]. I had studied so much about the famous orators who spoke there and wish I could have seen just one of them, probably the incendiary Sam Adams. George Washington spoke there, too. So did Susan B. Anthony, Oliver Wendall Holmes, and Ted Kennedy. Its magnificent history and architecture—it was built in 1742—brought my days studying rhetorical theory and criticism to life. If I had time to kill I would sit at the bar at nearby Union Oyster House and slurp the house special.

Within days, T had gotten a job with Ginn Publishers, owned by Xerox, who were looking to create computerized text editing and had certainly found the right guy. During my year of dissertating and collecting unemployment I also did some strange work as a "Senior Consultant Trainer" at MIT. It involved working with employees on improving their communication skills. It became clear that we had been sent the broken employees and were supposed to fix them, but from their stories it seemed it was MIT that was more broken.

I applied to a job at Emerson College, which had once been a school of oratory and now was like a big Communication department with a range of theater and media and management communication with some liberal arts thrown in. Its main virtue was a location on Beacon Street, steps from the Public Garden. I faced the fire escape but was assured that year two I would have a view of the Charles River. The rickety elevator scared the shit out of me, so I always walked up the three floors. The department chair told me, "You got the job because you had finished your dissertation, though Tracy B has better tits." This comment would have startled me had I not experienced worse in my earlier twenties from a series of male professors. I got good at payback using their underestimation of me to shine with less effort than would have been otherwise required. I have been accused all my life of having a bad attitude. Really?

At first, I thought Emerson was a place where faculty didn't really want to teach and students didn't want to learn, but I came to love its funkiness. It was up to its ears in eccentric faculty like Coleman

Bender, a Zen master in Brooks Brothers clothing. When I told Bender about the grant I had gotten to experiment with different methods of reducing stage fright, he told me "I just take 'em out in the hall and put a garbage can over their head and bang on it a few times."

I especially loved the regular cocktail hour at the Bull and Finch Pub down the street. It was a time when students and faculty could still socialize together without fear of legal action. It was the coziest place around. Luckily, I was long gone by 1982 when producer James Burrows bought the rights to outside as an establishing shot for $1 and it became the face of *Cheers.* Everybody there knew your name in 1974, but I doubt they do now.

Bull and Finch pre-Cheers

Strangers in a Stranger Land

No sooner had I settled in at Emerson when T was sent by Xerox to their Palo Alto Research Center—now legendary but then unknown—for a stay of several months working on what was called the "Office of the Future," which it indeed turned out to be. He studied the editing habits of Ginn employees in Boston and worked with partner Larry Tesler in Palo Alto to create the first modeless desktop cut-and-paste text editor interface designed to mimic human behavior. It was named "Gypsy" after Lissa's Halloween costume that year.

Larry is perhaps unfairly remembered as the guy who took Steve Jobs on a tour of PARC that had Jobs walking out with the Apple design fully formed. It was a more complicated story—not that Xerox didn't deserve it, stuck as it was in the copier mindset that caused it to miss the entire personal computer revolution birthed under its own roof.

In retrospect, it is obvious that this computer thing was a very big deal, but at the time all I knew was that I didn't want to turn around and

leave Boston just when I had gotten my dream job, salacious boss and all. But with great reluctance I did, figuring that I might end up getting off the relationship bus in Boston or California and I had never been to California and could always go back to Boston. So? Lissa wasn't keen on the idea of moving again, but she and T were like oil and water no matter where we were. She fell in love with California, like anyone who set foot there in the sixties and seventies.

We bought a dark green Dodge van. T built a bed in the back and I sewed paisley covers for the foam mattress. All I remember about the long trip west was a bar in Gallup, New Mexico, where we stopped for a drink and a local nodded, "Yeah, Gallup, New Mexico, where all there is to do is get drunk and shoot your neighbor." I hope this wasn't a pit-stop where we left Lissa in the van. She remembers that we did this on occasion. Even if it is true I deny it.

We bought a little house in Palo Alto and I landed job at San Francisco State. T worked eighty-hour weeks at PARC. Lissa found a best friend next door. We slowly built a life. Strangers in a stranger land, and as a couple still two people divided by a common language. It wasn't until too late that I appreciated the extent to which the cultural differences between Ohio and Sussex were an invisible barrier between us.

One bloody problem with British and American English—we use a similar vocabulary, but the cultures are different even when most of the words are the same. You think you are talking with someone who shares your world view but—aha—not at all.

And about that accent? What the hell is it about a British accent that is so seductive to Americans? I would watch in amazement when a shop clerk would ask my husband if he would please read his passport aloud so she could hear him speak. Among the range of British accents, the one Americans most fall for is the Royal Shakespeare Company stage version. Does it sound smart? Is it the precise articulation? Is it an attitude of confidence? The vague condescension? I have no idea, but I do know it works some weird spell that I have seen over and over and over again and never fully escaped myself. The fact that British and American words are different for many things—lorry for truck, barrister for attorney, biscuit for cookie, bonnet for car hood, chips for French fries, et cetera doesn't seem to much matter.

Maybe it wasn't the cultural differences that made the relationship difficult, but they didn't make it any easier.

It took me a long time to figure that part of it out.

Chapter 2

The Myth of Mellow

Stuck between our move from Boston to California was a speed bump: I had agreed to take a group of eight Emerson students to London for a six-week seminar on *Intercultural Communication* that summer. It would have been hard to get out of and the money was good, so off I went to live at Hughes Parry Hall at the University of London.

Hughes Perry Hall, University of London

We held small seminars, but the students were much more interested in exploring the Bloomsbury neighborhood as well as all the pubs in London. Two of the guys were incorrigible. They did whatever they could to annoy authorities, like riding motor scooters across the middle of campus. I was called to the prefect's office on a regular basis to defend my charges as best I could. I imagine he didn't expect much better behavior from Americans.

London, Better Late Than Never

The event that made the summer suffering worthwhile was an interview with eminent information theorist Colin Cherry at Imperial College. Gerry Miller, editor of the journal *Human Communication Research*, had promised me space for the interview, after he liked something similar I published in the *Journal of Communication*. Academic journals were not in the habit of publishing mere interviews, so I was pleased to have the go-ahead.

Cherry, an engineer who studied with Norbert Weiner, wrote a classic book *On Human Communication* (1957), uniting the two fields of technical and human communication. It was a revolutionary idea. He is best known for the "cocktail party problem." The question posed: How can one conversation be followed in a noisy room—especially if it includes your name? He is also known for dedicating *On Human*

Communication to his dog Pym because "at that time I was single and this dog sat with me every night—sometimes through the night. He was all I had to dedicate it to."

Colin Cherry
1914-1979

I wrote to Cherry at his London address requesting an interview. He told me the postman gave him the letter as he was leaving for the airport to attend a conference organized at MIT by Ithiel de Sola Pol, a famous ("small world hypothesis") if controversial (Viet Nam work for Defense Department) technology theorist. Colin, as he requested I address him, called me in Boston and invited me to join him at the conference. What a privilege for my young self and an example of what a gracious man he was. He also agreed to sit for an interview at Imperial College the following summer.

Imperial College

My eight Emerson apprentices were model citizens during the Cherry conversation, sitting quietly in the magnificent Imperial College seminar room. Colin believed that engineers were too narrowly taught. "The whole problem of education is not to produce people with a lot of

knowledge, but people who are emotionally able to change."

About half-way through the conversation, Colin had some sort of spell where he had difficulty speaking. We hurriedly tried to help. He seemed to come out of it and we were able to reschedule the remaining questions. I don't know what the health problem was, but he died a few years later. The interview made it to *Human Communication Research* (1978), and the students made it through eight weeks in London alive despite regular pranks.

It was time to begin a drive across the US in our trusty van for a new life on the Left Coast.

The Left Coast

Once the move to California was decided, I sent job inquiries to every university within commuting distance of Palo Alto. I didn't have much to offer beyond the basics. A PhD in rhetoric and communication from a school best known for shooting students. A few years teaching English and speech at a community college. A few more years at Oberlin teaching communication and women's studies, and a short year at Emerson College.

I had delivered a few conference papers and written an award-winning newspaper series on the women's movement for a local newspaper chain that led to a lot of local speeches and a few TV appearances, but did not have much to show on the scholarly front. Still, I was invited for interviews at San Francisco State and San Jose State Universities.

The most memorable moment of my brief career in journalism was when *Sun Papers* editor Harry Volk sent me to downtown Cleveland to interview Jane Fonda who was appearing with her *FTA* (*Fuck the Army*) tour. In the bustle I was able to shout one question to Fonda "What do you think of the women's liberation movement?" She shouted back "I think it's the greatest movement in the history of the world." When I reported back to Harry he said "One sentence? You got ONE sentence??" Twenty-five years later when Casey and I were schlepping our rollerbags up the long steps of the Plaza Hotel in New York, Jane and Ted Turner were descending in formal finery. When we passed I said "Thanks so much for coming" She replied "Thanks so much for having us." Casey said soto voce "Mom!! Why did you talk to that lady?" "So now I can say I have TWO sentences."

Politics of Dissent

The Women's Lib Movement: An Overview

By CAROL WILDER SCHLICK

"Women's Lib? Are you one of them?" Well, yes world, I am one of them. And we're really not all that bad, you know.

General public response to the movement indicates that many, if not most, people identify all new feminists with the extremist fringe of bra - burners and man - haters. Those who make this identification are no more

The Author

The author is currently writing a book on the Women's Liberation Movement and organizing a Cleveland chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She is a Teaching Fellow at Kent State University where she is working on her doctorate. She formerly taught English and Speech at Cuyahoga Community College, Western Campus. After graduation from Cleveland Heights High School in 1961, she went on to receive her B.S. and M.A. from Miami University. She is married to a college instructor and has a two - year - old daughter.

A mushrooming movement...deserves sensible attention rather than...diatribe.

realistic than those who believe that the outrageous rhetoric of Jerry Rubin speaks for the entire New Left. Both positions are dangerously false and misleading, primarily because they tend to obscure the valid arguments that both movements may present.

Rather than refuting anti - feminist misunderstandings, however, it seems more necessary and useful here to simply attempt to put this amorphous "thing" called Women's Lib into perspective. A mushrooming movement claiming well over half a million members deserves sensible attention rather than ridicule and polemic diatribe.

THE ISSUES: LEGISLATIVE, PSYCHOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, BIOLOGICAL

Before trying to get straight the "what" of Women's Lib, however, there's a need to explain the "why." Today it is no longer a question of should women work. More than 31 million women are working, and they comprise nearly 40 percent of our labor force. Government statistics on working women speak clearly for themselves about job discrimination because of sex. The average full - time male worker earned $7,664 in 1968, while the average female earned (or at least was payed) only $4,457, and this earnings gap has been widening by .05 percent annually for 15 years. For every dollar a male worker earns, a working woman earns only 58 cents, down from 64 cents in 1967. And in 1963, John F. Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women reported that women earn up to 40 percent less than men on the same job.

Needless to say, the financial plight of the black woman is even more serious, however Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm still maintains that for her "being black is much less of a drawback than being female."

In addition to pay discrimination, women are also subject to job discrimination, especially in the professions. Only one percent of engineers, three percent of lawyers, seven percent of physicians, and nine percent of scientists are women. Even in the teaching field, where 30 years ago women made up 30 percent of college - level faculties, they now fill only 19 percent of these jobs.

While few people expect women to ever occupy fully half of all professional positions, those women who chose to undergo the rigorous training involved want to be able to take their places among male colleagues and enjoy equal benefits for their equal responsibilities and performance. This holds true even for the woman who wants to become a plumber or a pipe - fitter. The point is that qualified women in all areas want the right to freely choose their vocations, and the room for freedom of choice is rendered exceedingly narrow by job discrimination in all types of employment.

But job discrimination is only one part - the clearest, perhaps - of the "why" of Women's Lib. Legislative reforms will do much in this area, still leaving us with the psychological, political and biological issues to contend with.

Psychological issues of concern to feminists center around our cultural conditioning into male and female roles. Boys, we learn, are strong, aggressive, dominant, smart, and grow up to be doctors, lawyers, and, to a much lesser extent any more thanks to one of our other abuses, Indian chiefs.

(Continued on Page 4)

Carol Schlick

A side career in journalism wearing Grandmother Blackwood's dress, 1970

Today, you practically need a book published to get an interview for assistant professor, but not in 1975. In the following decades, university administrations became bloated to the detriment of faculty security and quality teaching. I was lucky to be part of my generation where women were being recognized in a 90 percent white male profession and tenure was still the norm.

I had a credible range of teaching areas but was hungover from a bad experience a few years earlier in my first serious job interview. I only had two female professors in eight years of undergraduate and graduate school; one was befuddled Mrs. Fathauer who took over as a substitute for our Sociology 101 class when her husband had a heart attack. The other was my sympathetic statistics professor in graduate school who read the terror in my eyes and led me through some of the most useful learning I ever had.

The Heyday of Sexual Harrassment

My traumatic first job search experience would now be called classic harassment. I learned about an opening at the University of Utah while on a ski vacation. The position was in political communication and seemed to have my name on it. We hadn't quite decided on moving to California, and T was thinking of going to graduate school at Utah's computer science department. I applied for the job opening and disrupted the ski week with multiple interviews. Everyone was very welcoming and all the feedback I could see or hear was positive.

When the Utah rejection came a month later it was a shock. I soon heard from a colleague at Oberlin who said "I am reluctant to tell you

this, but I have to because it once happened to me." She had a friend who taught at Utah. He told her that everyone loved me, but one of my references—the most well-known, of course—told the Utah chair that I was a "two-faced bitch and beware of hiring her."

It was easy to figure out who had blackballed me. Yes, it was a professor I had a dalliance with, not knowing he was seeing two other women in the department at the same time. He was charming, fifteen years older, and a Joyce scholar who had just published a blockbuster article. Faculty-student fraternization was then so common it didn't even have a name.

Professor Wonderful eventually decided to marry one of the other paramours—a goody two-shoes who had no idea I was part of the secret mix. I had a no idea about her involvement, either. We were friends. Or had been. He was a pro at compartmentalizing his womanizing. When his fiancé found out about me, I was quickly labeled a devil woman. Somebody had to take the fall, and it certainly was not going to be the perpetrator. This resulted in as terrifying of an experience as a young job-seeking academic can have. The evenings I spent in his apartment drinking wine and listening to Abbey Road were a diversion from my recent divorce. I was naively flattered by his attention, but I was more hostage than complicit. Power is toxic because it is so seductive.

This wasn't even my first professor-in-lust encounter. At the end of my first semester in graduate school I got a five-page-long legal pad love letter from the director of graduate studies. I wish I had saved it, but I was still married and ceremoniously ripped it up, responding archly, "Your vain self-interest has seriously jeopardized my career. . ." There were never any repercussions. It would have never occurred to me to make an issue of his attention. Professors hitting on students was barely worth noting. Professor Legal Pad had his virtues. He taught me to love the classics and to be a better writer. I never realized that his careful editing of my writing was special attention. I think he was more embarrassed than infatuated. He later married the department secretary. I ended up with a virtuous advisor who mentored me through many of the other baffling humbling hurdles of graduate study. And he had a name to be proud of: D. Ray Heisey.

This sort of predatory behavior was so common in my generation I don't even remember it being remarked upon despite the growing women's movement. "Me Too" was fifty years in the future. Maybe half of the professors I knew had married former graduate students. The idea

of institutional sexism and racism was emergent, as was the understanding of the harmful context of unequal power relationships.

When I heard the Utah news, I called my saintly advisor to share this devastating turn. Thank heaven for Ray Heisey. He called the Utah chair, a friend of his, who confirmed what had happened.

I pulled up my big girl pants and called the evildoer, who confessed. "Well," he said, "it's a very conservative school and you were with someone and I didn't know if you were married." (I was.) Ten years later. I ran into the bastard at a conference and he invited himself up to my room for a "chat," that led to his crying and telling me that he was so sorry and— bizarrely—that "my daughter looks like you, but that isn't possible, is it?" I should have thrown my drink in his lyin' eyes, but thanked him for the belated apology and left the room to return to the reception.

Downstairs, I blurted out the story to a girlfriend. She tried to comfort me by assuring that I was really just a one-faced bitch.

We drank to that.

The long tail of that experience coupled with the "better tits" comment at Emerson, along with a string of similar if lesser misogynist moments did not improve my bad attitude about men in the workplace. I could only hope that San Francisco State would be different. I was soon off on a red-eye flight from Boston for an interview.

The Most Important Thing to Know

The travel schedule was tight from Boston to the S.F. meeting. I wore my interview dress on the plane—a camel-color Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dress, the style of the year. The flight was uneventful except for the arrival of breakfast pancakes, which led to syrup spilling down the cleavage of my dress. I did my best to mitigate the disaster. By the time I arrived at S.F. State I was so deliriously tired I had forgotten about the syrup spot.

I had no idea where I was going. Maybe I was picked up at the airport. I don't remember. In any case, I made it the fifteen miles from

SFO to SFSU without incident. At the time, it was a short ride; now it's more like an hour. I managed to find the office of the department chair—Nancy McDermid, the best boss I ever worked for. Faculty began to gather in the hall on their way to the meeting.

The first thing I remember is being pulled into a utility closet by faculty member Pauline Nelson, all five-foot-one of her. Pauline taught Oral Interpretation and I learned that in her younger days she performed readings to packed audiences all over the country. That first day she firmly said "the most important thing you need to know is who was in and who was out during the strike." I had no idea what she was talking about. Pauline was invisible in the department, but that day she was my muse.

The STRIKE!

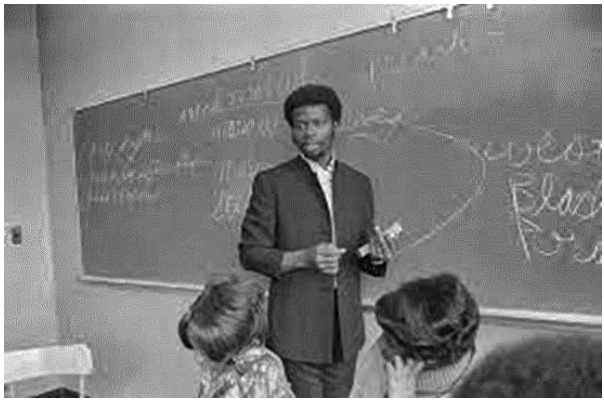
Oh. The *strike.* It hadn't crossed my mind. Not only was the 1968 SFSU strike vivid on campus seven years after the fact, it was like yesterday to the remaining senior faculty for the rest of their careers.

On the fortieth anniversary of the strike, a reporter for the university magazine wrote, "Even four decades later, emotions among faculty members who were in opposing camps during the strike run so high that some among them still do not speak to each other." The same article quoted Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies Kenneth Monteiro: "If Kent State was the paradigm shift for the anti-war movement and Berkeley for the free speech movement, it's not an exaggeration to say that San Francisco State cracked the paradigm for diversity in the student body and the curriculum. It was the epicenter."

It was not the first time I realized that my experience at Kent, which would have been the kiss of death at some universities, was actually a positive credential at a university like SFSU that had also experienced political trauma. I quickly got up to speed on the strike.

The 1968–69 San Francisco State strike was the longest student strike in the history of the nation, eventually involving dozens of faculty, hundreds of police, thousands of students, and just enough Black Panthers to keep things at a high pitch. Three SFSU presidents were among its casualties.

The action began quietly in May 1967, when sixty students held a sit-in in President John Summerskill's office protesting the college's practice of sharing the academic standing of students with the Selective Service Office that managed the detested military draft. Various



George Mason Murray SFSU Instructor and Black Panther 1968

skirmishes in 1967 and 1968 led Summerskill to resign. In March 1968, Black Panther Party Co-Founder and Minister of Defense Bobby Seale spoke in the main SFSU auditorium, telling the mostly white students that "the only power blacks have is with a gun."

The same month, a new coalition of Black, Filipino, and Hispanic students, "The Third World Liberation Front," occupied part of campus. In May, four hundred students occupied the administration building demanding an end to the Reserve Officers' Training Corps on campus, retention of faculty member Juan Martinez, programs to admit four hundred minority students fall semester, and nine new minority faculty members. In September 1968, Black Panther Minister of Education George Mason Murray, an English department lecturer, urged Black students to bring guns to campus.

Murray was fired by President Robert Smith on November 1, 1968. On November 6, the Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front officially went on strike. Their fifteen demands included a larger Black studies program and reinstatement of George Murray. University administrators called in police in full riot gear almost immediately and classes virtually came to a halt. Dr. S. I. Hayakawa was named acting president and closed the campus on November 26.

SFPD in Riot Gear

When campus reopened on December 2, President Hayakawa climbed aboard a protest truck to disconnect the speakers and his trademark tam o' shanter was ripped from his head. Hayakawa yelled "You're fired" to noted author Kay Boyle: she called him "Hayakawa Eichmann!" in return.

President Hayakawa pulling wires from the sound truck, 1968

On January 3, 1969, police surrounded five hundred people, arresting hundreds. Some spent up to a year in jail; some university lecturers lost their jobs.

This was over the line for the faculty union the American Federation of Teachers, who went out on strike January 6, 1969, demanding removal of police, agreement to student demands, and a collective bargaining contract for teachers. About three hundred and fifty AFT members encircled the campus in a picket line. Participants told me later that their most compelling and in some cases sole reason for holding the line was to protect striking students.

After five months of active striking and several years of continual protest and activism, the strike was settled on March 21, 1969 by representatives from the Third World Liberation Front and other factions. The pioneering School of Ethnic Studies was established and the administration agreed to accept almost all applicants of color for the fall semester 1969. Black students at the time comprised less that 4 percent of the SFSU undergraduate student body. More than fifty years later, they comprise less than 6 percent.

The Long Interview Table

I knew none of this detail when I settled into the comfortable conference room to be interviewed in early 1976. As I took my seat at the oval table, I wondered briefly scanning the room who had been "in" and who had been "out" during the strike. I imagined for the men—and most of them were men—you might tell by the length of their hair. There had been "in" faculty and "out" faculty, but there had also been "in+out" faculty, like the department chair who would have been "out" but stayed "in" so colleagues could get paid.

Department chair Nancy McDermid had a law degree from University of Chicago and was an accomplished First Amendment lawyer. Maybe that's why the department even had its own constitution. The only faculty member with a national research reputation was Dean Barnlund, a widely published scholar in interpersonal—and later intercultural—communication. The rest I knew only from their brief profiles in the college catalog.

I suspected my main interview inquisitor, a prim, bow-tied speech pathologist with wire-rimmed glasses suitably named Clyde Stitt, had been "in," during the strike, but his main concern in the interview was how well versed I was in quantitative methods. I learned later that his other obsession was faculty who didn't clean the blackboard and straighten the seats at the end of class. We were all very tidy.

Despite the fact that quantitative methods was my least favorite methodology, I had slaved through enough statistics that I could offer credible answers. I could talk the talk. I probably expressed more enthusiasm for the subject than I felt but, after all, it was a job interview. The department included a dozen full-time faculty and at least as many lecturers whose interests were across the board from interpersonal communication to rhetoric to women's studies to oral interpretation to "mass" media (as it was then called) to the sociology of communication and communication theory. With more than two thousand students enrolled every semester, the faculty was stretched thin. The job description didn't specify an academic area, so it was clear they wanted a utility player. It was a good fit.

On Campus

SFSU is a beautiful natural landscape with hodge-podge campus architecture built around a large open central commons. The campus is on

the edge of Lake Merced, less than two miles from the Pacific.

The only striking—and by striking, I mean *weird*—building is the Cesar Chavez Student Center, a massive modernist structure opened in 1975 that looks like a giant wounded bat. Many free speech episodes took place in its atrium, the designated location to express your political views in public.

Cesar Chavez Student Center

With nearly thirty thousand students, SFSU was one of the most diverse campuses in the country even before the 1968 strike. Many students are children of immigrants or are the first generation in their family to go to college. I learned so much about other cultures from the students, who often lived at home with their incredibly strict immigrant families. I always encouraged them to weave cultural themes into their work. Every class roster was a lesson in pronunciation of the vast range of international names.

One of the first Vietnamese students I had was named "Nguyen," like about half the people in Viet Nam. He insisted on being called "Wayne," because it was "easier." This was still the 1970s, when the American War was barely over. As years went on, fewer international students felt the need to anglicize their names, while at the same time African American students began diverging from Anglo names, often creating hybrid names from their parents, like LeShawn. An interesting dance of assimilation and identity. The class where I met Wayne also included a daughter of est (Erhard Seminars Training) guru Werner Erhard who led popular cult-like workshops in the late 70s, best known to me as all day sessions where they didn't let you leave to pee. His daughter, a recovering heroin addict, along with a sister later accused him of emotional abuse.

Wayne's class was also memorable because of the day the department secretary stuck her head in the door to tell me that rock impresario Bill Graham was on the phone for me. I had earlier called his office to complain about the ticketing process to a McCartney concert, and was astounded when Graham himself returned the call to assure me we would have great seats. We did. Graham was a class act who left us too soon in a 1991 helicopter crash. At his memorial in Golden Gate park, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young sang "Ohio" in a rare reunion that left me sobbing.

My own worldliness and respect for other cultures was immeasurably enriched by the SFSU student body. Having spent most of my life in Ohio until that point, there was a lot to learn and I loved it. The faculty was, of course, less diverse, but that changed slowly over the years as well.

For my first year I was hired as a lecturer. The time base was reduced to 0.80, with sincere apologies from the chair, but within two years I was on a full-time tenure track. The teaching load was twelve credits per semester—twelve hours a week in class—which is usually four

three-credit classes. My department had cleverly changed all classes to four credits so we had three preparations a semester. This is a heavy load, but typical of undergraduate public universities. I was shocked to learn later that graduate professors at prestige universities teach maybe one class per semester or year, supposedly for release time to write and advise dissertations. Trust me, many of them don't write well or frequently enough to justify the privilege. I taught an average of eighty to one hundred students each semester, which adds up after twenty years. I still managed to churn out an award-winning book to make my tenure review smooth sailing five years later.

The Myth of Mellow

Even though folks in California seem stylistically "laid-back," it's mostly an act. Behind the scenes, they are working nonstop to keep up with the price of the ride. Work hard, just don't break a sweat. I was later criticized for my "California" style in New York, where it apparently came off more like I wasn't sufficiently serious and earnest. "Whatever," my mellow mythos would think. New York City seemed so nineteenth-century compared to San Francisco, like falling backwards from Ferlinghetti to Dickens. The California style was a natural fit for me, not that I wouldn't go to the wall if I thought something was unfair. I was criticized and underestimated especially in New York for both ends of my personality.

Whatever.

Chapter 3

The Dutch Goose

If the walls of the Dutch Goose had ears, the story of personal computing at Palo Alto Research Center (PARC) would need no other scribe. The homey shambling Menlo Park pub was the go-to place for off-duty computer nerds who worked at PARC in the seventies. They were almost all kids then. Many would become bold-face names in computer lore in the same way PARC would become a fabled place. Some of their carved signatures are among those covering the worn redwood tables.

In hundreds of hours of tagging along in the mid-seventies, I absorbed an honorary degree in personal computing, mostly by keeping quiet. PARC budding stars like Timothy, John Ellenby, Bill Bowman, Bob Flegal, Smokey Wallace, William Newman, Alan Kay, Larry Tesler, Bill English, Dave Liddle, and Bill Duvall passed through the Goose. John Melville was a regular until he dropped to become an apple farmer in Oregon.

I didn't understand a lot of the words being bandied about at the speed of light but could hear the music and the beat was fast. PARC culture was twenty-four seven and you either submitted to the worldview

John Ellenby
late 1970s

or were left on the outside looking in. The vintage tale of Steve Jobs walking off with the goods is told in books like *Dealers of Lightening* and *Fumbling the Future* that document the storied time. Yet neither work captures the fabric of the tightly woven culture that bound our personal lives.

Turtles and Tots

Many of us had young kids and family life flowed at a tempo that merged with work. Lissa was one of the select Jordan Middle School seventh-graders invited to join Adele Goldberg's Saturday morning PARC Smalltalk class. These teen pioneers used a variant of Seymour Papert's LOGO turtle that they could command like a giant mouse to draw images on the floor. The intuitive enthusiasm and ease with which they took to this strange new activity made future video game addiction unsurprising in the rearview mirror.

The PARC personal computing project was a more progressive—even radical—environment than anyone would have projected from the staid image of computer science and the capitalist juggernaut it later

Seymour Papert's LOGO Turtle 1966 at PARC
(cyberneticzoo:com)

became. The transition—from mainframe computing where data on punch cards was fed through one goliath machine, to time-sharing where you could at least take a turn with goliath on your own terminal (as we did in Oberlin), to "distributed" computing where everyone has their

own personal device—was a political statement as well as a technical one. Personal computers embedded implicit values of democracy, privacy, and individualism as opposed to the totalitarian mainframe where all data was collected in one place. Of course in an ultimate irony virtually all data ended up being collectible anyway, but that bore little resemblance to the desired endgame of the idealistic youthful lot who first made it possible.

Personal computing was a software revolution as much as if not more so than a hardware one, where the arrangements of ones and zeros meant that ordinary human beings could engage with an electronic interface as seamlessly as writing with pencil on paper. It was also nearly impossible for non-hackers—especially Xerox top brass—to get under the hood of this strange new cyber-ship without some acquaintance with the galaxy of ones and zeros and the spectacular complexity beneath interface design. Enter Steve Jobs: the rocket launched.

Programming a New World

PARC Early 1970s, Famous for its Beanbags

When I took the programming class at Oberlin I developed no ability to program, but did come to understand why so few people have any idea at all of the vast world under that surface of the smooth cut and paste word processing on the screen. I got the gist of the extensive distance between the interminably long operating systems and user interface designed to simulate the customs of human behavior with icons like

cartoon wastebaskets and printers. A lot of the design of cut and paste came from T's close study of the editors at Xerox-owned Ginn Publishers in Boston. How did they accomplish their tasks and how could a digital word processor most closely simulate that activity?

None of the PARC breed had any doubt that they were changing the world from their beanbag chairs, decades before the Internet exploded. They had the advantage of early access to the ARPAnet, a Defense Department network available only to highly selective research universities and labs. The ARPAnet was the interstate highway system of data transmission in the days when the United States thought big and systemically.

And they did change the world.

Antonio's Nut House

Pool Hall Pleasures

Less brainy were our frequent nights at dive bar Antonio's Nut House on California Avenue, shooting pool and soaking in the funky, un–Palo Alto vibe. The kind of place you think will live forever, but it didn't survive the COVID-19 crisis and closed in 2020. I don't remember if there were peanut shells on the floor, but John's son Peter Ellenby tells me there were.

I was a non-player but an avid observer. Years earlier, Tim and I hung out in a road house near Oberlin that played Gladys Knight and Al Green on a loop. Shooting pool wasn't a girl thing to do in the seventies unless you were wicked good and I was wicked bad. I never played in rural Oberlin or at Antonio's, but loved the geometry of it all.

I was still an avid observer years later at the swankier National

Arts Club (NAC) in New York City, where a regular crew of genial members played for a decade until age began to take its toll. The patron saint of the NAC pool room was Roger Donoghue, a prizefighter who taught Marlon Brando how to box for *On the Waterfront*. A rising star who quit when he killed a man in the ring, Roger gave Budd Schulberg—and then Brando—the line "I could have been a contender." Roger and his artist wife, Faye Moore, lived at the club in a twelfth-floor apartment with a fireplace you could stand in. When I returned from Viet Nam and was between apartments I lived in their maid's room off the kitchen, the fanciest home I ever had in New York City.

Boxer Roger Donoghue, c.1980
Formerly on the National Arts Club Pool Room

The Problem with Perfection

I took an instant dislike to Palo Alto. It seemed rude because it was touted so widely as a perfect place, a summer getaway for rich San Franciscans seeking fine weather. Palo Alto reminded me of the Cleveland neighborhood where I grew up. Forest Hills Historic District was developed by John D. Rockefeller in the nineteen-twenties. It had large English Tudor and French Normandy homes and a private pool where I spent the happiest days of my youth doing water ballet, flirting with boys and working on my tan.

Forest Hills was also "restricted," a term I did not understand until much later, though I was no stranger to privilege. What "restricted" meant was that Jews and people of color were not allowed to live there,

and only the occasional Catholic. If an "undesirable" person tried to buy a house, they were outbid by the Forest Hills Homeowners Association. You will forgive me for having no idea what all that meant until I had a Jewish boyfriend in high school and all hell broke loose at home. All hell

My own first house in "Forest Hills"

would have broken loose in his home, too, if his parents had any hint of the forbidden relationship.

When a progressive new minister at Forest Hills Presbyterian Church bussed in some Black congregants from East Cleveland, my parents along with many others withdrew their financial support from the church. It was that kind of place. By then I had figured that the Jesus thing was not working for me, I had developed a fierce opposition to prejudice of any kind that evolved into a lifetime of political activism. The smugness of Palo Alto and its thinly concealed racism reminded me of Forest Hills. The difference was that sky-high housing prices, not race or religion, made Palo Alto restricted.

Palo Alto reminded me of *The Clown That Ran Away*, a children's play we did in a summer repertory company during my Master of Arts in theater studies. Students had a different assignment in each production, from my bit part as one of Jenny's whores in *Three Penny Opera* (my line: "I once was engaged to a boy from Ipswich") to working the box office for Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, to making giant feet for Dodo, the clown in question. Dodo's opening line: ". . . It was a wide, clean street. And everybody liked it very much."

That was Palo Alto. A wide clean street. Such a lovely place.

Totally white, while across six-lane Highway 101, East Palo Alto was almost totally Black. It was the most segregated place I had ever lived. Stanford gave a luster to the city, but it is a deeply conservative institution among elite schools.

Was I ungrateful for my white privilege? Or even aware of it decades before the term was coined? In 2015, Kamala Harris told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Michael Finnegan in September 2015 that when she and her sister went to visit their Stanford economics professor father, "The neighbors' kids were not allowed to play with us because we were black. We'd say 'Why can't we play together?' 'My parents say we can't play with you.' In Palo Alto. The home of Google."

This would have been the same time we lived there with my young daughter, so I guess I am not the only person who had some discomfort with the highbrow tone. Harris' experience did not surprise me, but the rejection of otherness was discreetly masked by the wide clean streets.

Parties with Panache

Palo Alto had its moments. Everyone was smart, ambitious, attractive. For a small city, life could be glamorous. Apart from the few dive bars, our favorite socializing was regular dinners at the Ellenbys and parties

Party House, Lincoln Avenue, Palo Alto

at Teri and Martin Perl's house on Lincoln Avenue. It was the place to mingle with a mélange of academics and writers and artists and musicians and "the vestal virgins of the test tubes," who adoringly encircled the

Stanford physics professors.

In 1995, Martin was awarded the Nobel Prize for discovering the tau lepton. In the 70s, he was just a regular famous particle physicist with a crown of wild white hair, a wry smile, and a sardonic sense of humor. Teri raised four kids before getting her PhD and co-founding the Learning Company, developing educational software. It was later acquired by Houghton Mifflin. Teri and Martin lived in a big blue Victorian house in the heart of "Old" Palo Alto—the fashionable part of a fashionable town. Their parties always included an unexpected pleasure. One night, my San Francisco State colleague Hank McGuckin performed excerpts from *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* to Teri's fluid piano accompaniment.

It was Martin Perl who first said to me "you have an interesting life." I didn't know it was a Chinese curse—or how prescient he was beyond the lepton.

Lissa for City Council

I wanted to graffiti the Palo Alto sidewalks. The hipness shaded the banality, so it wasn't all bad. We saw the *Rocky Horror* midnight shows at the Varsity Theater. We worked hard and partied hard and raised our kids the best we knew how, if a bit neglectfully.

The public schools were top notch, but rigorous honesty may not have been on the curriculum. In seventh grade, Lissa's class was invited to observe a city council meeting. T and I were listening on the radio when she breathlessly called.

"I'm going to be speaking. I'm going to be speaking!"

The issue before the council was whether Palo Alto residents could keep chickens on their property. When Lissa's turn came she said with perfect conviction:

"I think that people should be able to have chickens because when we were poor we had chickens and we used to eat the eggs."

T and I turned to each other: "When did we have chickens?"

She called back. "How was I?"

"Well, you sounded good, but we don't remember the chickens."

The wide clean streets of Palo Alto.

The Ellenbys

Our best friends were John and Gillian Ellenby, who lived around the

John and Gillian Ellenby c. 1980

corner with their boys, Tom and Peter. John was another Brit with a big personality and a mischievous impish smirk. He liked to say "The easy way is hard enough." Gillian was tall, slim, and fashion-forward, elegant in long dresses and wide-brimmed hats even in the country. A proud Scot, she could fire up an argument in a heartbeat. We would feud like sisters. There were times we barely spoke for a few days after some wine-fueled exchange.

This is a difficult passage to write because I don't note many deaths in the narrative of these stories. But it is too important not to mention that John and Gillian died unexpectedly in 2016 and 2020, and their sweet son Peter, a noted rock photographer, who contributed

Gillian Ellenby, c. 1980

several photos to this book and was a close childhood friend of my daughter's, died in his sleep in 2022, the only blessing being that his parents didn't live to experience the heartbreak.

Gillian was a conceptual artist, full of surprises. One fall afternoon an ice company delivered six giant primary-colored blocks of ice to a nearby creek for us to watch them melt and drift away.

Gillian welcomed Lissa to their home after school when I had to work. We all met up and drank too much while she cooked dinner. Over the years, we spent many long weekends in Mendocino County with an extended family of artists, writers, wackos, and garden variety– and garden-growing hippies.

GRiD Compass 1982

John worked with T at PARC and was his boss for a while. A few years later, having given up on Xerox's ability to market its own work, John and Brit master designer Bill Moggridge co-created the first laptop computer, the GRiD Compass.

Xerox Fumbles the Future

The Compass was popular with the CIA and was said to be kept with the president's nuclear football. It was found among the debris of the 1986 Challenger, still attached to the dashboard with Velcro—and still working.

John was recruited to PARC from England after working for Ferranti and lecturing at the University of Edinburgh. He and T were among the prime movers of the unsuccessful attempt to get copier-centric Xerox to market its personal computer, the Alto. If you are using a Mac now, or even a PC, that's the future that Xerox fumbled. And thank my little Gypsy for your word-processing program; the one you

are reading and the one you write on.

Palo Alto Unreal Estate

T and I stretched our finances to buy a tiny house in desirable Old Palo Alto on Channing Avenue for $72,000. In 2022, it is listed for $3.3 million. Now behind a concrete wall.

970 Channing Ave, Palo Alto, 1970s

Our second house for our growing family was on Josina Avenue, bigger but in a funkier neighborhood called Barron Park, around the corner from computer legend Alan Kay and his first wife, Patty. A boxy Eichler tract house built in the late forties—one of Joseph Eichler's eleven thousand dwellings that became quintessential examples of mid-century modern design. It first sold for $12,000.

Our Eichler on Josina

Mid-century modern was not yet trendy. To us, it was just an inexpensive house. Also 3 million today

Our neighbors across the street—original owners of their house—invited us over for Bloody Marys served in gallon-size goblets. Half an hour into the slowly disarming chat, Mrs. Neighbor mentioned that the previous owner of our house had killed himself in the back bedroom. It was 1978, before California required death disclosure in real estate sales—lobbied for by Chinese citizens and now standard in many states. The suicide—he was an MD: let's hope it was tidy—helped explain the ghosts and things that went bump in the night in my daughter's room.

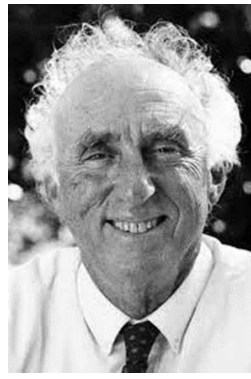
It was a perfect setting for our marriage to go off the rails.

Nine months after our son was born, I had a period of postpartum depression before it was understood, let alone diagnosed. I had to return to work when Casey was six weeks old, though there was money in the budget for us to take a British Virgin Islands sail: I stayed on board with the four-month-old baby and my seasick daughter while the others went on land to party.

Five months later, I was alone with a baby, a twelve-year-old, a demanding job, and a long commute. It was several years before I could move deep into the Mendocino redwoods to begin to heal my soul.

I hope someone writes a book called *PARC-ed Wives.* I am sure a few of the steadier couples stayed together, but none of our close friends made it together over the next dozen years. It was during that same period that more than a few of the guys in addition to Steve Jobs became superrich marketing things developed at PARC that Xerox could not imagine happening under their own roof.

There were big winners and losers among those who took all those brilliant ideas to market. I was not a winner financially, but living the cultural history was priceless.



Martin Perl

I didn't like the name of our street, *Josina*, and thought it might be part of Martin's Chinese curse. Secretaries to developers sometimes name the streets in a random way. In 2000, I was recruited to interview for a job at the Museum of Radio and Television. Chatting with the recruiter before the interview turned up that she was from Palo Alto and her grandfather had developed Barron Park. Josina Avenue was named after her grandmother.

Puzzle solved.

Curse suspended.

La Honda

Alice's Restaurant, Skyline Drive

The best part of Palo Alto was getting away from it over the ridge to the ocean. They now call it Silicon Valley. Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and the necklace of tech towns are in the valley between the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. My first trip over the hill was to La Honda to visit PARC colleague Bill Duvall. In 1969 while at Stanford Research Institute, Duvall wrote the software and received the first message sent on the Internet (then ARPAnet) from Charley Kline: "LO"

Oops. The message was supposed to be "LOGIN," but Duvall's system crashed from a bug after two letters. Leonard Kleinrock, head of UCLA's computer lab, reflected they should have prepared an iconic message like Samuel Morris' "What hath God wrought," or Neil Armstrong's moon landing "Giant leap for mankind."

Samuel Morse and the telegraph in 1844; Alexander Graham Bell and the first telephone call in 1876; Marconi's radio transmission in 1900;

Kline and Duvall's internet message in 1969. It gives one pause. Even as "LO."

The ride from Palo Alto into the Santa Cruz Mountains begins with a slow wind up to Skyline Drive. Alice's Restaurant sits at the top, named after the Arlo Guthrie song. A popular watering hole for bikers and hackers alike.

From the Skyline crest back down through La Honda, Tom Wolfe wrote in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968):

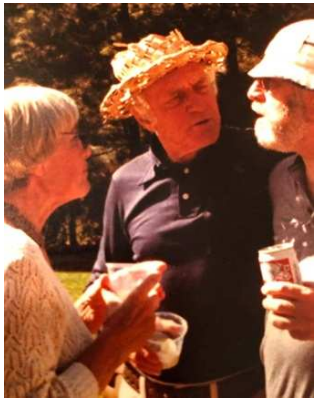
> *The way the sun came down through the redwood leaves—trunks and leaves seemed to stretch up for hundreds of feet above your head. It was always sunny and cool at the same time, like a perfect fall day all year round. The sun came down through miles of leaves and got broken up like a pointillist painting, deep green and dapple shadows but brilliant light in a soaring deep-green super bower, a perpetual lime green light, green-and-gold afternoon, stillness, perpendicular peace . . .*

A living breathing forest of redwoods, ferns and faeries. The words *La Honda* conjure coming out of the mist like *Brigadoon*, the Scottish town that appears once every hundred years. Duvall and his family lived like everyone else—in a dwelling of rough-hewn wood, filtering rays of light that barely set it apart from the surrounding forest.

The La Honda Ohlone tribe lived on the land for 3,000 years. Neil Young has long had a ranch in La Honda. Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters set-up living quarters there—in 1998, Kesey's neglected house was restored as local landmark.

Wittgenstein's Nephew

Route 84 winds down to the beach in Pescadero. It is customary to make a pit stop at Duarte's tavern, Established 1894. You can park your horse outside. Cybernetics wizard Heinz von Foerster and his wife Mai built a retirement compound a stone's throw away from Duarte's. Heinz lived by the axiom "Act always so as to increase the number of choices," and also



Mai and Heinz von Foerster with Carlos Sluzki c.1980 Rattlesnake Hill, Pescadero

believed deeply "If you desire to see, learn how to act."

We spent many a pleasant afternoon on Rattlesnake Hill listening to Heinz's mesmerizing tales, some passed down from his uncle Ludwig Wittgenstein. A favorite Heinz story was about the Greek seer Tiresias, who was blind:

> *Tiresias was walking in the woods and came upon two snakes copulating. So he took a little stick and chased them apart. And when you do that, you change your sex. So Tiresias became a woman. And he was a woman for about ten years, when he again chased them apart and of course he changed sex and became a man again.*
> *During that time there was a strenuous discussion upstairs in Olympus, between Hera and Zeus about who amongst the couple who sleep together have more fun, the man or the woman. Zeus said "Of course, the woman!" Hera said "Aha—not at all. I just do it to amuse you, to humor you." Zeus was not quite convinced, so he asked Tiresias: "Tiresias, you have the experience on the two sides. Who has more fun when the man and the woman are sleeping together?" Tiresias said "Well, it is very clear. The woman about ten times as much as the man."*

Hera was so outraged she took away his first sight, and he was blind. But

Zeus was most grateful and gave him second sight, so he became a seer. The Tiresias story was Heinz's homage to sage Gregory Bateson, who in his view was "the seer among us, who did not only have second sight but preserved also his first sight."

John Ellenby, Margaret & Jerry Pethick 1976 - Credit:Peter Ellenby

Pethick Easel 1979

Point Arena

Hugh and Nancy

Soon we were travelling farther afield than Pescadero, thanks to the Ellenbys. A few years earlier in a London pub, John Ellenby met the then-obscure Canadian artist Jerry Pethick. Pethick worked in an original range of materials and was a pioneer in holographic art, acquiring increasing renown and a growing cult following his death in 2003.

In 1974, Pethick and his wife Margaret moved to Mill Street in Point Arena. He designed and worked on the fabrication of a clear acrylic home framed with redwood timbers for Hugh Brady. Hugh, a handsome well-bred Stanford graduate with utopian dreams, bought 500 acres outside of Point Arena carved by the Garcia River. The river is a vein of the San Andreas fault that goes out to sea a few miles north in Manchester. An adjacent plot of similar size was a collective called "The Land," divided among a dozen families.

Hugh Brady, Jerry Pethick, and John Ellenby were connected by the providential strings that connected the like-minded in the seventies. And now we were connected as well.

Thanksgiving 1976

John and Gillian invited us to join them at Hugh's for our first California Thanksgiving in 1976. Our green Dodge van followed their white Dodge van north on Highway 101, east onto Guerneville Road to the coast, north on Highway 1 for fifty-six hairpin turn miles to Point Arena, right onto a winding five miles up Eureka Hill Road, down a dusty unpaved mile into the Garcia River valley to the plexiglass and redwood bubble house.

Brady/Pethick House Pt. Arena 1976

Point Arena Family Thanksgiving, 1976

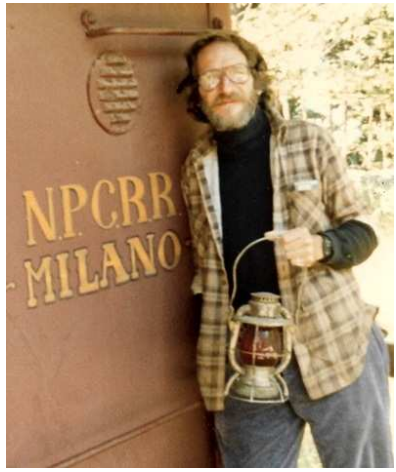
The house glowed with flickering candles and crystal reflections, a redwood coziness with bountiful food, wine, conversation, and Gene at the piano. The hippie house of your dreams. The gathered folks were accomplished at levels you would never suspect from their casual ways. The Brady dwelling was like living inside a redwood tree with windows: La Honda squared. There were a lot of kids, from baby Pan to teenage Nona, and no helicopter parents in sight.

I asked Lissa what the kids spent their time doing. I was nervous about the river and had insisted she not go down there without an adult. She looked at me blankly. I swear that's what I had said.

"Well, we mostly hung out at the river, went upstream to walk around the haunted house, and were always trying to find someone to drive us into town." I guess that is what kids do when the adults are living

in their own world. I am here to report that the kids are all alive and well. A reminder that it was the mid-seventies, when you weren't arrested for not driving your kid to enough soccer practices.

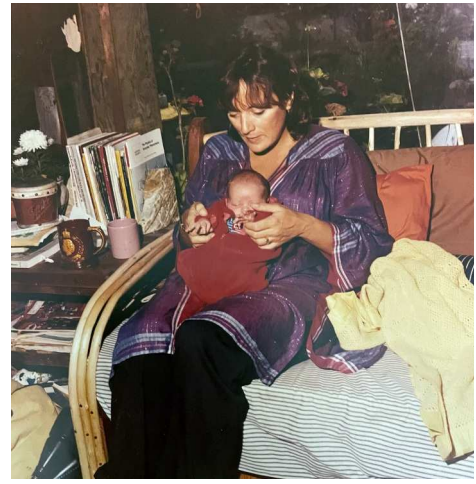
Lissa remembers Gene the most because of his brilliant piano playing and genius for shenanigans. Gene was Hugh's main man: he lived at the other end of the land in a shack next to the horse barn. Gene was staying with us in Palo Alto the night in December 1980 when Lissa came in the living room and said, "Someone named something like John Lemon has been shot and killed." Gene: "Someone must have not liked his music." A prime example of a bummer sarcastic Gene remark that has stubbornly stuck in my head.



Gene Gilliam c. 1980

Casey was born ten days after Ronald Reagan was elected and three weeks before John Lennon was murdered. He entered through a sliver of time, born to live in an unpredictable future. He spent his first Thanksgiving at two weeks old in Point Arena.

Thanksgiving 1980. Point Arena



The Whale Bar

"Driving into town" meant going back up the mile of dirt road and back the five miles down Eureka Hill Road onto Main Street, which was also Highway 1. The town itself had a post office, a tiny library, two general-type stores, an organic market, a pharmacy, a barber shop, a lunch counter, and a few restaurants and bars, notably *The Whale Bar*, the favored local hangout. Once in a while, someone would have a few too many and go sailing through the plate glass window onto the street, but usually it was mellow and sometimes had live music.

One night, Gene was getting out of control. I went to push him away for the tenth time. He lost his balance and landed on the other side of the room. In the blink of an eye, 200-pound bartender Lonnie Stornetta leapt over the bar. Gene was okay, if a little dazed, and I got a round of applause. Lonnie laughed until he cried when he saw it was me and not one of the 300-pound usual suspects.

Do They Know We're Out Here?

The anchor on Main Street was the Arena Theater, a vintage 1928 vaudeville theater and movie house seating about 200. A nonprofit volunteer community organization, it ran continuously through the seventies and eighties and was restored in 1996. Our name is on a bronze donor plaque on the bottom of a seat somewhere in the back rows.

It is where Casey saw his first live stage performance at the age of

Arena Theatre

three or four—a production of Moss Hart's *Light Up the Sky.* Seated on the fourth row, snuggled in with popcorn with yeast topping (a theater specialty), the lights went down. Casey whispered: "Do they know we're out here, or are they just doing that?"

It was the first hint that a career in entertainment arts might be in his future.

Storm Warning

Gillian Ellenby before the 1983 Storm

The Arena Cove Café—short orders—was a meeting point for the coast, the spot of spectacular Fourth of July fireworks. The drinks were weak, the food edible, and there was always someone around to chew the fat.

Pt. Arena Pier after the 1983 Storm

A walk on the pier with the ocean breezes felt like being in the middle of the Pacific. Maybe it is. Point Arena is the closest place in the continental US to Hawaii, where an early underwater cable was laid.
From Highway 1 in town, it is a narrow winding mile down to the wharf —a port encircled by tall sheer cliffs with a wooden pier that lasted a hundred years until a 1983 storm blew it and everything around it away.

When I had to retreat from Palo Alto that stormy year, Point Arena is where I fled.

Returning from Mendocino County to Palo Alto always included a reality adjustment. It wasn't that one was more real than the other, but that even on planet earth there are many planes of existence. Between the Bay Area and Point Arena, we were blessed to live in two of the most magical places anywhere. It was 1983 when I moved to Point Arena after the two most traumatic years of my life. Bill and Karin Moggridge gave us a beautiful bon voyage party that put a gloss of glamour on that terrible time and made me ever so grateful for the loving friends I was leaving behind.

With Gillian Ellenby and Karin Moggridge 1983

Chapter 4

From HLL 210 to Hanoi

With Casey and Lissa, 1982

General Semantics

There were no private faculty offices at San Francisco State when I arrived in 1996. I was assigned to HLL 210 (Humanities, Languages and Literature), a room maybe fourteen by sixteen feet, close to the department office with three steel desks, three chairs plus a few for students, three file cabinets, and three single bookcases. Humble in ambience but always lively with a steady stream of students and colleagues.

The department had just changed its name from "Speech" to "Speech Communication," and then to "Speech & Communication Studies." The speech pathologists were not about to be erased. But finally, "Communication Studies" was the name that stuck.

The name game was a universal trend in speech, communication, radio, and TV ("Broadcasting"), journalism, rhetoric, media, film and theater across the US and the world in the seventies and eighties as the media environment evolved at warp speed. The same year I joined SF State Speech and Communication Studies, across the country in New York City John Culkin introduced the first ever MA degree called "Media Studies" at The New School, which I would join two decades later.

This semantic evolution might sound trivial to an outsider, but they were life and death battles in departments that were trying to stay current in a field that changed every time you blinked. No one wanted to be forgotten or left behind the surging discipline, if you could call it a

discipline, which a lot of colleagues in other fields did not. Established disciplines never took us seriously until they, too, were engulfed by the information revolution tsunami. Communication was dismissed as "the beauty queen major." ("Hi! I'm Miss Alabama and I'm a communications major.") Yet with every new media innovation the field expanded exponentially, moving from the margins of academia to the cultural center of modern life. From the seventies on, any form of media study was a surefire enrollment magnet.

Office sharing was a good fit for a young mother because I had to be on campus three days a week and the other days home doing course preparation, writing, and kid stuff. It was hybrid before *hybrid* was a work schedule word. The best part of the job by far. I don't know how mothers who had to show up five days a week did it, but only about one half of women were in the work force in the seventies. Most families could even get by with one wage earner. The unintended consequence of women entering the work force may have been increased income inequality for all.

I could pretend at work that my kids didn't exist, which seemed to be expedient. Of the dozens of close women colleagues I have had over my career, only a handful had children. It may be more common now, but that just makes the juggling harder. I figure that each of my kids was a book or two I didn't write, but life would be unimaginable without them. I'll write the books in the next life if there is one.

Sally's Desk
HLL 210

Sally Gearhart's Desk

My two officemates in HLL 210 were giants in my eyes as well as in the eyes of many others. Sally Miller Gearhart was the first out-lesbian to get a tenure-track job in the field: a tall, fiery feminist polished with some

serious Southern charm and a disarming smile. She was born in Virginia and graduated from Sweet Briar, which may account for the charm part. Sally always had a long to-do list written on the palm of her hand.

Sally met me saying "I've introduced myself so often as 'Hi! I'm Sally Gearhart, I'm a lesbian' that I almost said 'Hi! I'm Sally Lesbian, I'm a Gearhart.'" Sally could espouse one of her favorite opinions that "men should comprise only 10 percent of the population" or that "having children is an immoral act" and still be irresistibly likeable.

Sally wrote feminist science fiction—most popularly *Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) and became widely known and celebrated in the gay community. She frequently spoke earnestly about her belief that "rhetoric is violence" because it represented a one way and not interactive model of communication. The foundation of classical rhetoric from Plato and Aristotle onward argued that "rhetoric is the art of persuasion." Rhetoric as "violence" was a direct hit that might meet with resistance in a philosophy department, but was nonetheless a well argued, catchy, and memorable part of her case for the "womanization of rhetoric." At the same time, many scholars in the wider discipline were moving in a more interactional direction, but Sally was a field unto herself.

Harvey Milk and Sally Gearhart, 1978

Sally was a fierce political activist and a close friend of San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay politicians in the United States. They were largely responsible for the defeat of the "Briggs Initiative" in 1978 that would have banned homosexuals from academic positions in public schools. Sally's dominating debate with John

Briggs is featured in the award-winning documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984).

The Briggs Initiative failed on November 7, 1978.

Three weeks later on November 20, Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated by deranged former supervisor Dan White. It was a devastating blow to the city, the gay community in general, and Sally personally. Supervisor Diane Feinstein, who later made her long-time mark in the United States Senate, made the shocking announcement and became mayor. The Jonestown massacre of nearly a thousand Bay Area followers of Jim Jones and murder of US House of Representatives member Leo Ryan had happened less than two weeks before the assassinations.

Sally excelled at personal politics as well. Late in my first year at SF State, where I had been hired with full-time lecturer rank, she took me aside with another woman colleague in a corner of the dingy basement copier/vending machine room. They wanted to be sure I understood there might be a tenure-track opening coming up, and this one didn't have my name on it. Sally's accomplice was ahead of me in time served. I would be in line for the next one.

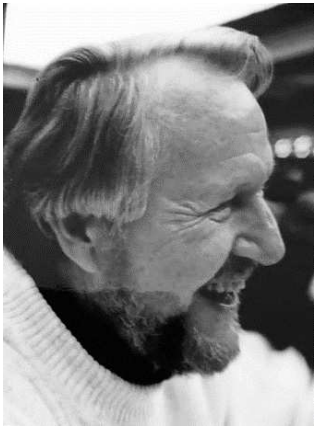
Neither one of them was actually on the hiring committee, not that it mattered. Yes, I understood. I was stunned by the boldness, though in my second career in New York I wished a hundred times that someone had been so straight with me, even if it was mobster feminism. I had taught one of the first women's studies in the US and thought of myself as a feminist, but in San Francisco the game was played at another level. As a married straight wife and mother, I was clearly under suspicion. Still, Sally and I had a lot of affection for each other. I have never known someone I could disagree with so agreeably.

Sally created her living Wanderground when she retired in 1992 in Willits in Mendocino country, creating a community of women in the redwoods with her partner Jane Gurko and a group of eclectic kindred souls. Filmmaker Deborah Craig playfully captured Sally's complicated nature describing her as "a lesbian feminist tree-hugger who lived in a rustic cabin in the woods but ate only Pepsi and junk food."

Son of a Wobbly

The other resident of HLL 210 was too cool to be a professor, too smart to be so nice, too handsome to be so radical. While we became close enough over twenty years to finish each other's sentences, contrary to the

rumor mill there was no romance or *eros*, but a deep and abiding *philia*, one of the best Greek words for love. We shared a love for classical rhetoric, politics, and decent wine. When a rumor reached me that someone on the tenure committee said I had a "bad attitude," Hank forever endeared himself by responding to my angst saying "Your bad attitude is the best thing about you."



Hank McGuckin, 1980s

Henry E. McGuckin Jr. was drafted during the Korean War and got a lucky post in France, where he met bride-to-be Jacqueline, his beloved partner with whom he had two children Eric (now himself a professor) and Nadia.

Hank and Jacqueline, 1950
Credit: Eric McGuckin

Back home from France and living in the Bay Area Hank earned an MA working as a teaching assistant for S. I. Hawakawa, who gained his five minutes of fame during the 1968–69 SFSU strike by climbing onto the protesters sound truck. This stunt did not keep him from being elected to the US Senate in 1976 for one term, where he was caught napping on a regular basis.

Hank followed his love of learning, earning a PhD in Communication from Stanford while pursuing a path as a singer with a baritone voice inherited from his father. When Hank was selected for an elite program at the San Francisco Opera he had to choose between music and the academic life. In order to spend more time with his young family he chose the latter, but performed for decades in community musical theater.

Hank as Jud in Oklahoma 1977

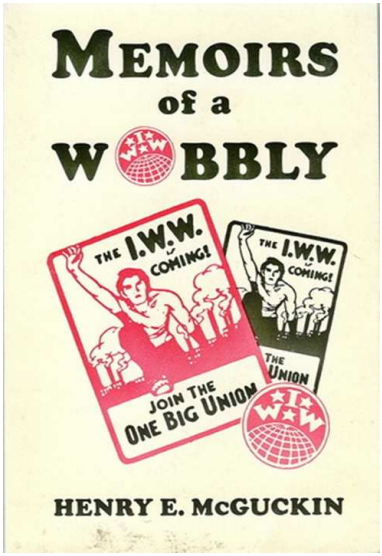
With Hank 1980s

An avid runner and skier into his eighties, Hank lived a vigorous life while managing Type-1 diabetes, which he kept very private. I was barely aware of his condition until he visited me in Hanoi in 2011 and had a scary spell of hypoglycemia that a nearby can of Coke stabilized until he could manage an insulin injection. It was heart-stopping that for all the years we had shared a cramped office I was oblivious to the challenges he dealt with in having a disease that is often a killer by middle age. Hank had a poster over his desk with a blues lyric "Ain't Nothin' Gonna Get Me Plumb Down."

And nothin' did.

Hank came by his grit honestly. He was the son of Henry "Mac" Sr., a passionately committed Wobbly. Many say the International

Workers of the World was the greatest labor movement ever seen. Hank convinced his dad "Mac" to write up his experience in *Memoirs of a Wobbly* (1987).



What a tale. Riding the rails from age eleven, from 1904 to 1920 back and forth across the US, off and on soapboxes, in and out of jail, organizing workers in fields and plants with an unparalleled commitment to social justice.

Mac was right in the thick of the labor movement with "Big Bill" Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the others. When Mac met and fell in love with Hank's mother, Muriel, she was just as committed as he. He was inducted into the army—"preferring it to jail"—and they married when he got out. "As I look back now," he wrote, "I guess I'm proud of this: that I worked for a better world for people to live in and did my part within the structure of an organization I was sure had the answers, and for that day and time it did."

When Hank and his four siblings came along, life was on the financial margins. Hank remembers "political repression and personal tragedy notwithstanding, in my childhood memories the McGuckin household sings with song—Muriel, blind, in her wheelchair at an upright piano singing Joe Hill's verses in her lusty, lilting soprano, with Mac's mellow baritone in support, while their five children distributed varied harmonies as best they could."

I once asked Hank why he ate so fast at meals. "If you didn't eat fast at my house you didn't get anything to eat at all."

The Doyenne Next Door

The office next to HLL 210 was occupied by literary doyenne Kay Boyle, described by Hank as "this slender ramrod-straight figure of incredible dignity." He had marched from Delano to Modesto with her "never once whimpering about her blistering feet." According to biographer Joan Mellen, she told him during a visit toward the end of her life she was composing a poem in her head about the mistreatment, in prison, of the IRA, though she could no longer see nor write.

Kay Boyle

Kay Boyle was close to eighty years old when I met her in 1996. Kay was a prolific author and political activist who had been blacklisted by Eugene McCarthy and spent time in jail for her anti-Vietnam War protests. Kay and I were introduced at least five times, but she never seemed to recognize me.

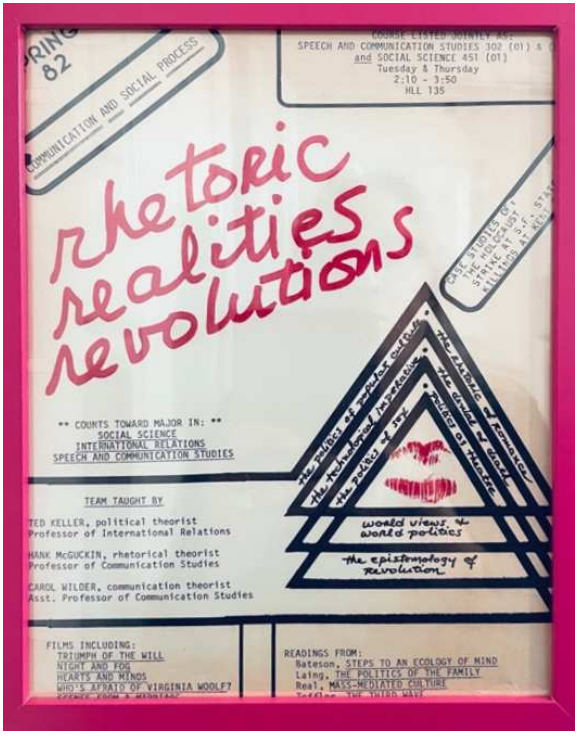
Kay spent her earlier years in Paris in the company of James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Emma Goldman, and others, so I probably didn't make much of an impression. Duchamp gave her a cot-like bed she insisted on using for most of the rest of her life. She kept a bottle of sherry in her desk "and made the best of it," we are told in Mellen's *Kay Boyle: Author of Herself* (1994).

Boyle founded the San Francisco chapter of Amnesty International and every year on her birthday there was a fundraiser that became the event of the social season. Hank said at one of the parties "She doesn't teach us how to grow old. She teaches us how to live."

Always known for an autocratic streak, Hank acknowledged that "in her last years she became dogmatic, unnuanced, and rigid in her views." I supposed she had earned it. She lived another fifteen years after she retired.

A Good Man Speaking Well

Kay was close to both Hank and his pal from the International Relations program Ted Keller. The team of three taught "Rebels and Reactionaries in Twentieth-Century Literature." When Kay retired I was honored to be invited by Hank and Ted to take her place in a more neutrally named "Communication and Social Process," a deceptively mild sounding enterprise that included lectures by Hank on intense topics like "Fascist Echoes in the American Voice" and "Weapons in the Hands of Madmen." Hank taught ideas that are even more relevant decades later—that fascism involved overweening ambition, low ethical standards, and strong nationalism.



Our Very 80s Course Flier

His lectures were impeccable performances that often earned ovations from the students, sometimes standing. It wasn't until I had been team teaching with him for a few years I realized that every word was written and planned and he used the same script year after year, pairing it

with a delivery that in every way seemed spontaneous. Genius. My shaggy style never measured up, but definitely improved thanks to his example. Hank was the epitome of Roman rhetorician Quintilian's "good man speaking well."

Ted and Hank specialized in faux sparring at a level that could have cut it in vaudeville. They agreed with each other on almost everything, but argued incessantly to the great delight of students. We typically had a hundred students in a raked amphitheater lecture hall. I was scared shitless the first few years. One student evaluation said "I didn't understand what she was talking about, but she was easy on the eyes." Ironic that especially for women the plainer you get the smarter you sound, but you take the praise where you can get it in the early years.

Ted and I playfully competed for Hank's friendship, but there was room for all of us. I am forever grateful to them both for standing in for me during the month I had the spell of postpartum depression where I could barely get out of bed let alone be easy on the eyes or make any sense. They covered for me without missing a beat or saying a word to others.

Union Dues

One of the first School of Humanities faculty meetings I attended was held in another large lecture hall. Nancy McDermid was dean, a position she held for twenty years. She was the first woman boss I ever had, and spoiled me for the many who followed with her calm brilliance, compassion, and fairness. She even taught me not to blurt out first in a faculty meeting. She always waited until near the end to speak, and whatever the issue was she nailed it.

As I swept a look around the room of more than one hundred colleagues I was struck by a blur of grey faces and beards. I was barely past thirty. Everyone looked really old. There were a few women who looked better, but no one looked very happy to be there. It turned out that this was true of every faculty meeting I ever attended in my life. I learned that most full professors eventually became involved in outside activities like music or art or politics to keep engaged as well as doing their jobs. I remember thinking at that first meeting this is not where I would grow old. It turned out to be true but short-sighted, too, since we were a union faculty and full retirement was at virtually full salary. But no one enters academia to get rich or think that far ahead.

From time to time during my first few years, John Glanville—a tall Ichabod Crane philosophy professor—would stop me in the hall and ask me to join the union. I was like "I get the same benefits. What's the advantage?" Wrong answer, but nobody pressured me and I joined anyway. It was one of the best personal and professional decisions of my life. The decline of unions is one of the unsung tragedies of the late twentieth century. I didn't fully appreciate their value until I worked for two more decades at a private school that despite its progressive reputation practiced an opaque and inequitable treatment of faculty and staff.

Veterans Speakers Alliance

We seldom had time for guests in "Communication and Social Process," but in 1981 I arranged for a visit of four speakers from a new organization called the Veterans Speakers Alliance. VSA was made up of anti–Viet Nam War vets whose purpose was to talk to as many students in schools as possible. This was six years after the end of the war and while there had been war movies like *The Green Berets, First Blood, Apocalypse Now*, and *Coming Home*, I had never heard a combat vet tell his own story. At the time it just wasn't done. If vets talked to anyone it was only to each other. Combat veterans rarely tell war stories to people who did not share the experience. This is common among all trauma survivors from vets to sexual assault victims, but PTSD was not even formally recognized as a psychiatric disorder until 1980.

Viet Nam combat vets bore the special burden of the unpopularity of that war and the fact that they were too often the object of derision for their service. The Veterans Speakers Alliance turned that upside down, by urging veterans to share their experience as a way of increasing anti-war sentiment in a way that films and books often did not. For years off and on, I did coaching for vets who wanted to speak in schools but were nervous about it. Every story was riveting. Definitely not your Communication 101 content or delivery, always moving and rewarding.

As each vet told his story to our stunned "Social Process" class, the growing silence was eerie. We were moved beyond words by this moment. Two of the vets had turned to Buddhism as a result of their experience. One told that his bus returning from the airport was stoned, and he felt treated like a homicidal maniac, an idiot, or coward. Another speaker told a wry bit of humor: the WW II vet got drinks bought for him; the Korean vet buys his own drink; the Viet Nam vet buys for the

bar to get out alive.

All speakers felt it was a war that was not only wrong, but that they were not even *allowed* to win, so the only sane response was to go crazy. More than a few vets having adjusted to the adrenalin of combat could not adjust to non-combat and requested return to the front. Combat veteran suicides and violent deaths have been at epidemic levels at least since Viet Nam. Three million Americans served and nearly 59,000 died. That is a tragedy; the three million Southeast Asians who died is a genocide.

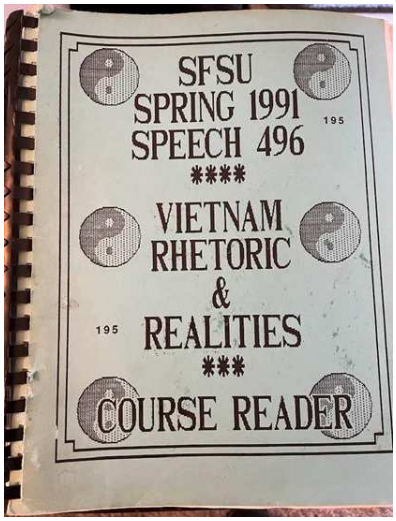
These painful stories were so deeply stirring that it set my personal and academic course for decades to come. I went off on sabbatical leave for a year, but could not get Viet Nam out of my mind.

Teaching the Viet Nam War

First Visit to Viet Nam at Ho Chi Minh Museum 1993

When I returned from leave in 1983, I attended the fall graybeard School of Humanities meeting. Dean Nancy had invited an old friend Walter Capps to speak. Capps was a professor at UC Santa Barbara and later a congressman. But more importantly he taught the largest class in the UC system with 1,400 students—a class on the Viet Nam War. I confided in Nancy about my growing interest in studying the war, and despite our skeletal budget she sent me to Santa Barbara to visit the class. Among many notable outcomes of that visit—including lunch with Bob Kerrey, later to become my president at The New School in New York—was my proposal to team-teach a Viet Nam course at SF State with Hank and a veteran to be determined. Hank would do history, I would look at Viet Nam in popular culture, and our veteran colleague would bring in his or her personal experience and other vets. There were fewer than 200 such

courses in the US at the time, and none in history departments. I was anxious about the fact I had not yet been to Viet Nam, so focusing on movies and other cultural artifacts seemed to be a safe lane.



400 pp 1991 Viet Nam Course Reader

During the 1980s, I began meeting Vietnamese visitors through my association with Swords to Plowshares, a veterans rights and service organization. There were no diplomatic relations between Viet Nam and the US until 1995, so we hosted the visitors at our homes. Since the language barrier was almost complete, there was not a lot of conversation. All of our guests enthusiastically invited us to visit Viet Nam.

I was first able to visit in 1993—and imagine my surprise upon learning that our humble houseguests in San Francisco were all high-ranking ministers in the Vietnamese government. Since it was not legal for "foreigners" to travel unescorted in Viet Nam, we were accorded royal treatment throughout the country. Nothing shocked me more than when a humble lady who had stayed with me in San Francisco met us at Ho Chi Minh airport in a Mercedes with a dozen red roses. She was, it turned out, the Minister of Health. It was the first of a dozen visits long and short over nearly two decades, stories told in my book *Crossing the Street in Hanoi* (2013).

Rhetoric and Realities

Our first "VietNam: Rhetoric and Realities" class at SF State was offered in 1986. It filled immediately. Once word got out in the active SF veterans' community, the class took off. There was tremendous interest in what was behind the curtain of a war that had defined a generation and been the

source of so much pain and disinformation. During the eight years the course was active we welcomed a heady roster of guests:

* David Dellinger, radical pacifist and writer (*From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter*, 1993), best known as one of the "Chicago Seven," eventually exonerated of charges of crossing state lines to riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

* Daniel Ellsberg, former Marine and intelligence officer with a Harvard PhD who released the top-secret Pentagon Papers in 1971, revealing US perfidy during the Viet Nam War. Tried for espionage: charges were dismissed in 1973.

* David Harris, journalist and writer best known for draft resistance, activism, and imprisonment, and founding the organization The Resistance. Also known for a 1968–1973 marriage to Joan Baez.

* Charles Liteky, the only recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor to return it.

* Keith Mather, anti-war activist and army deserter who escaped to Canada when jailed as one of the "Presidio Twenty-Seven" charged with mutiny.

* Le Ly Hayslip, Vietnamese American writer and humanitarian; subject of Oliver Stone's film *Heaven and Earth* (1993).

* Trinh Minh-ha, Vietnamese filmmaker and professor (UC Berkeley) best known for *Reassemblage* (1982) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1985).

* Vu Duc Vuong, Vietnamese American journalist and activist.

* Lily Adams, Tama Adelman, Peggy Akers, and Winnie Smith, all nurses who volunteered for Viet Nam, later becoming anti-war activists. Smith wrote *American Daughter Gone to War: On the Front Lines with an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (Morrow, 1992).

* John Wheeler, D.C. lawyer and guiding force behind the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

* S. Brian Willson, lawyer, former Air Force Captain and later radical anti-war activist. Author of *Blood on the Tracks: The Life and Times of S. Brian Willson* (PM Press, 2011).

* Country Joe McDonald, country rock legend best known for "The Fish Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die-Rag." ("One, two, three, what are we fightin for? / Don't ask me, I don't give a damn / Next stop is Viet Nam.")

* Pete Wilson, army medic in Viet Nam and anchor at KGO-TV, San Francisco's ABC affiliate.

* Many other local activist veterans including Michael Blecker, head of Swords to Plowshares, Paul Cox, Phil Reser, Jim Hardy. . .

At first we could not find any Vietnamese speakers and few women, although 5,000 American women served in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese problem was more intractable, because many of the Viet Kieu (overseas Vietnamese) in the US had fled from South Viet Nam and hated both the U.S. and communist Vietnamese governments. Several of our events were met with protests from Viet Kieu.

Our objectives in the class were to study how the war was covered in the media, by the US government, in popular culture, and in the real lives of the veterans who lived it. It was no secret even then that the US government had lied and lied and lied about both the mission and progress of the American invasion of Viet Nam, from the very first trumped-up story about American war ships being attacked by Vietnamese fishing boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. We were interested in how language was used and how information was managed to manipulate public opinion. Government disinformation was not invented in 2016, but until then it was more often reserved for topics related to foreign policy rather than topics related to anything whatsoever.

Daniel Ellsberg put this well when he said to the class that "when men in power are faced with loss, embarrassment or humiliation, they will risk almost certain catastrophe to avert it."

David Dellinger, who had been jailed during WW II as a conscientious objector, developed a personal relationship with Ho Chi Minh while acting as a go-between to release American servicemen. In his May 3, 1989 visit, Dellinger told the class how fondly Ho remembered his own time in New York City, and quoted Ho telling him:

"I feel sorry for the American GIs. They have done terrible things —you have seen them—but you know they came over here thinking they're fighting communism and for democracy and when they get here they find even the conservative Vietnamese are against them."

Le Ly Hayslip visited the class in 1989, the year her best-selling book *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* appeared, telling her own unique story of a peaceful childhood near Da Nang interrupted at fourteen by a war that subjected her to torture and exile and turned her world around.

Local ABC anchor Pete Wilson spoke for the first time publicly as

a combat medic. It is difficult even now to learn more about his closely held experience. It clearly was not good for his media career at the time, but Pete helped us get the word out and was a friend of all of our efforts. I don't know about his Agent Orange exposure, but his death from a heart attack at age sixty-two raises the question.

Charlie Liteky shared with the class that "we believe that the hope in our hearts is stronger than the despair of our times," quoting Goethe that "boldness has power and magic in it." Liteky renounced his Medal of Honor on July 29, 1986, by putting it in an envelope addressed to President Ronald Reagan and leaving it at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial before leading the Veterans Fast for Life as a protest against US policies in Central America. Liteky was joined for the fast on the Capitol steps from September 1 to October 17, 1986, by fellow veterans George Mizo, Duncan Murphy, and S. Brian Willson.

Brian spoke to the class, and later became our team-teacher. Brian was an Air Force captain with a law degree, whose experience of seeing burned bodies on the ground turned him into a lifelong peace activist. We will meet him again in a story to come.

The Moving Wall

Somewhere along the way we heard that vets in San Jose had created a "Moving Wall," a half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C. We were skeptical. It seemed like a crazy idea, but we had heard

Fragment of Jim Hardy's Sculpture "Saddle-Up, Movin-Out in Zero Five" – 199th Light Infantry Xuan Loc, VN 1969

good things about the few sites that had installed it. With $5,000 in grant money from a California State University competition, we took the leap. We booked it for three months in 1989. The original wall, inspired by

Jan Scruggs and designed by Maya Lin within three years, was a miracle in itself.

Even at half size, the 225-foot installation was a big job. All hands were on deck. Our students, local veterans organizations, campus supporters. Dozens of strong hands carried in the heavy panels onto the campus lawn where it would be most visible. We camped out to make sure it was safe: I shared a tent with a transgender veteran in the middle of hormone therapy. We programmed a week of performances, speeches, and art.

We organized our students and colleagues to have all of the 59,000 names read. We had volunteers on duty at all times to help find a name, brilliantly organized by Maya Lin in chronological rather than alphabetical order "so it didn't look like a giant telephone book." If you came to campus Monday morning, you would hear the names being read. If you came back Wednesday, the names would still be being read. If the Vietnamese names had been included, the reading would continue for as long as it takes to read three or four million names. Months? Years?

The Moving Wall at SFSU

Thousands of visitors came through, and we tried to greet each one personally. The mementos left behind grew slowly at first. Suddenly there were hundreds of flowers, teddy bears, letters. None of us was prepared for the power of this simulacrum of a simulacrum. This little wall with a big impact. The genius of Maya Lin's design—at the time it won the competition called among other things "a black gash of shame"—was that your image was reflected back from the surface. It was not just about them, it was about you. About us.

Combat poet David Collins is one of those for whom the Viet Nam War never ended. He reflected on a visit to the moving wall in his poem "Up Against the Wall":

See the writing on the wall?
The words are the names
Of those who served the call
See the empty in America's eyes

See the hollow in our lives
Notice the scars on the heart
If healing is coming, when does it start?

That granite wall is but one chapter told
Of the largest tombstone in the world.

L'Internationale

Hank retired in 1992 and I left San Francisco in 1995. We tried to teach the Viet Nam class online with SFSU and Hanoi University after I moved to New York, but between cultural and technical challenges, it wasn't the same. Imagine my excitement when he wrote that he would like to visit me on my second Fulbright at Hanoi University in 2011. I showed him all of the usual sights and he made a wonderful guest lecture to my Vietnamese film class, but his mind was set on going to Dien Bien Phu, where the French experienced their final humiliating defeat in 1954.

I understood, given his military service in France during the Korean War and immersion in French culture with his wife Jackie, but a quick look on the map showed that Dien Bien Phu is a tough trip from Hanoi to the Laotian border, and by this point the years were catching up to him. Still, he insisted, and off he went on the arduous journey.

Hank returned five days later beaming. Walking the battleground at Dien Bien Phu he had encountered a group of Vietnamese soldiers, several of whom spoke English. Hank shared with them his story and led them in a robust round of the beloved anthem "L'Internationale" as they walked down the hill together.

If only his devoted Wobbly parents Mac and Muriel could have been there.

Chapter 5

How to Buy a Politician S.F. Style

By the time Casey was in third grade, my work schedule meant it was time for him to move from Mendocino and go to school in San Francisco. His father urged that we apply to private schools. My proletariat leanings argued, to my later regret, for enrolling him in public school at Lakeshore near Lake Merced, close to my job at SF State. It was a diverse neighborhood school with a good reputation. At registration, I belatedly learned San Francisco had just started a haphazardly planned city-wide bussing experiment. Half the students at Lakeshore were now from out of the neighborhood.

The teachers, nearly all white women within a few years of retirement, had no idea how to manage this sudden demographic mosaic. For most of these longtime educators, hanging on for a few more years meant their pension curve rose steeply. They were seasoned and kind and entirely unprepared for the influx from the inner-city neighborhoods of San Francisco.

Casey on a Good Third Grade Day at Lakeshore

Casey was born on November 14, just before the November 30 school enrollment age cutoff. From kindergarten onward, he was the youngest kid in his class. Since we had been living up in the sticks, I was unaware that parents had started holding back their kids born close to the deadline for a year, especially the boys. Casey was small, blonde, and brainy and from the first days at Lakeshore was bullied to the point his stomach hurt and he didn't want to go to school. He was one of handful of white kids in his class. Some of his classmates were two years older and a lot bigger.

I volunteered at the school and was shocked at the lack of teacher control in the chaotic classroom. Even worse was the constant unmonitored trash-talking of the students during recess. Casey's saving grace was Mr. Adams, head of the after-school program and eventually

his fifth-grade teacher. Despite the challenges, Casey thrived and grew stronger and garnered multiple awards at graduation.

His proudest achievement was in fourth grade when he was selected for "Bird Patrol," an elite group of boys chosen to shoo away the disoriented seagulls who frequently wandered the halls. It was a great morale booster. For years he displayed the Bird Patrol Certificate next to his Yale banner.

Lakeshore Elementary School

CERTIFICATE
OF
AWARD

This Certifies That

Casey Mott

is awarded this Certificate for

Bird Patrol

Given at Lakeshore, this 12th day of June, A.D., 1971

After a few years I finally gave up on public school because I could, due to Casey's father's financial means. I was so disillusioned by what I had seen in public school that I did not feel the least bit guilty. Meanwhile, I rented out our house in Point Arena to some lovely tenants: a local gym owner, then a school secretary and her young daughter. Our luck ran out when a respected realtor recommended a couple who installed an electric fence around the secluded property to keep their Rottweilers in and keep attention away from the meth lab in the basement.

By the time they were arrested, six months later, the house was a shambles. After a painful restoration, I held onto the house well after moving to New York. It was not my best real estate decision, but it was hard to let go of a place that had been so healing. I also discovered that I hate being a landlord, and feel strongly I don't want anything to do ever again with owning a space where other people paid me for shelter.

Presidio Hill

Private school was like, well, private school. For a hefty tuition, your child was safe and well-taught with other well-mannered kids of professional parents, the kind of education that should be available to every student in the US.

I attended public schools all the way through my PhD and was proud of it. When my parents wanted me to go to a fancy private girls high school, I rebelled by getting two D grades in my last middle school semester, leaving no choice but Cleveland Heights High. The fact that it was a top public school was a stroke of luck. I got a decent education, despite being such a bad student that I was disqualified from my classroom's nomination for homecoming queen because my grades were too low.

Presidio Hill, Casey's new school, had all the hallmarks of progressive private education. It was in a great part of town, had involved parents and teachers, and an annual auction where everyone in the school and local community contributed irresistible items. A weekend at a Lake Tahoe condo. A case of Napa's finest merlot. A new pair of Rossignol skis. That sort of stuff.

This wasn't my first auction rodeo. I knew the wine flowed freely to lubricate the checkbooks. Silent auction items offer especially entertaining bidding competition. I had my eye on "Lunch with Terence Hallinan," then a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. His daughter Viva was Casey's classmate. I figured it was not just a fun way to contribute: since I was a political media professor and junkie, it might be a professional plus as well. Terence was an actual politician, and lunch with him was way more affordable than a weekend in Tahoe.

The evening progressed and the bidding brought out the midnight gambler in everyone. I got up to $500 for lunch with Terence. Apparently that's what it was worth, because I won. Did I mention that it was lunch at Jeremiah Tower's restaurant of the moment, *Stars*?

Terence Hallinan

The Hallinan family was legendary in San Francisco. Terence was the second of six sons born to one-time Progressive Party presidential candidate Vincent Hallinan and his beautiful savvy wife, Vivian. The family lived in a sprawling mansion in Marin County.

From a distressingly young age, Terry ("Kayo") was pugilistic, in

Vincent, Terence, Vivian Hallinan

and out of the ring, and in trouble so often that at one point he became a ward of the court. On the other hand, he nearly qualified for the 1960 Olympic boxing team, sparring in the eliminations with an athlete then known as Cassius Clay. A charismatic, complicated guy.

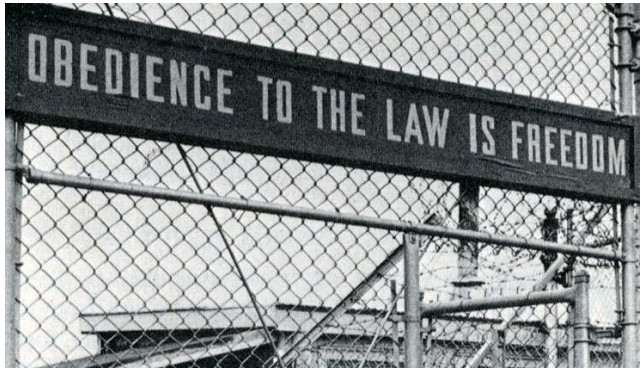
In between fisticuffs, Terence managed to earn degrees from UC

Terence Hallinan bloodied by police at 1968 S.F. State protest

Berkeley, London School of Economics, and UC Hastings College of Law. He was progressive-to-radical politically and wicked smart.

Kayo became a student of nonviolent resistance and worked on nuclear disarmament in London, civil rights in Mississippi, and the communist W.E.B. Dubois Club in San Francisco. He was a full participant of the Haight Ashbury scene, doing drugs with Janis Joplin, by several accounts to the point of the brink. He always favored left-leaning unpopular causes like legalizing marijuana and prostitution. His

civil disobedience resulted in multiple arrests and several convictions, as well as having a hard time—including several appeals—getting admitted to the California State Bar.



San Francisco Presidio Stockade

Mutiny by the Bay

The Presidio Mutiny case in 1968 was Terence's most famous. Dozens of AWOL soldiers and draft resisters were held in sordid overcrowded conditions in the San Francisco Presidio Stockade. When a mentally troubled prisoner Richard Bunch was shot in the back and killed by a guard, the prisoners rebelled. Chaos ensued, and Keith Mather was the first to break ranks. Twenty-seven of them sat down locking arms, singing "We Shall Overcome." They announced a list of demands including investigation into the murder of Bunch, opposition to the Viet Nam war, complaints about stockade conditions, and racial harassment. They were charged with mutiny.

When a LIFE magazine article revealed the inhumane stockade conditions, the killing of Richard Bunch, and the army's decision to press mutiny charges, it became a national story.

Walter Palowski Reading Presidio 27 Demands

Keith Mather, Army Basic Training 1968

Keith Mather "Nine for Peace" 1968

Terence agreed to represent the group. Keith Mather recalls that when Terence took on the Presidio Twenty-Seven, "Kayo had it all. Money, reputation, looks. When Kayo would arrive at the Presidio gate in his white Shelby Mustang with blue stripes he would rev the engine so we knew he was there." Mather became one of the best known of the twenty-seven. He went AWOL after completing boot camp, knowing that he would neither take nor lose a life in that war.

Keith was a local boy who was one of the "Nine for Peace" in July 1968 who chained themselves together with clergy in a Presbyterian church in Marin City. When the protesters were arrested three days later, he was sent to the Presidio Stockade.

Five months later, Keith escaped on Christmas Eve 1968 with Walter Pawlowski. They were driven to Canada by a priest. Keith lived in Canada for twelve years, eventually returning to the US and serving four months in prison.

Keith was a participant in the mid-eighties in a workshop I held for the Veterans Speakers Alliance members who wanted to improve their effectiveness telling their military stories in schools. Keith had the most compelling story I had ever heard. His basic training bunkmate Jay Mathews became an award-winning writer and journalist. Matthews called Mather "the Vietnam War's last prisoner of conscience" in a *Washington Post* feature.

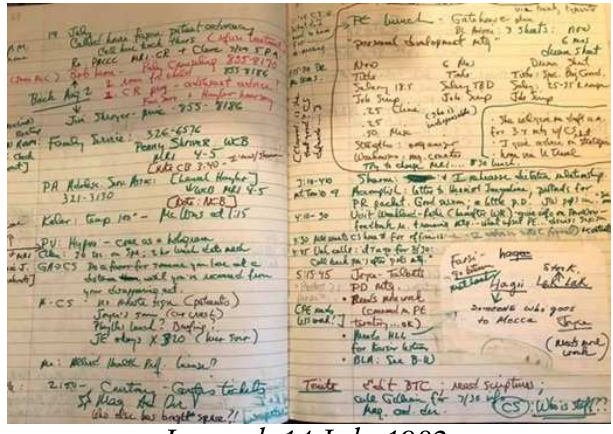
After Keith escaped, Terence represented the remaining prisoners in a trial moved to Fort Ord. In what was questionably seen as a victory for the defense, the defendants were sentenced to an average of one year, still substantial but less than the decades argued for by the prosecution, given that the mutiny charge for the twenty-seven was punishable by death.

The Sonoma Mission Inn

When Terence Hallinan turned to politics he lost his first race for San Francisco supervisor to Harvey Milk in 1977, the year before Milk was assassinated. Terence ran again and won in 1988. I worked on his next campaign. But after the auction and before our *Stars* lunch, a bolt of memory came out of nowhere.

I had met Terence Hallinan before.

I kept journals for all my years in San Francisco. I didn't do it much before or after, but for nearly twenty years I filled the same French blue-lined notebooks. The notebooks all look pretty much the same with the occasional souvenir pasted in, but the volume that begins May 1982 looks a little more frantic.



Journal, 14 July 1982

In 1982, I was struggling on all fronts with a full-time job, commuting, and two kids. The hardest period to think about putting memories on paper were the two years after my son was born in 1980. I had to go back to work in three months, up all day and most of the night. My marriage disintegrated. The usual recriminations ensued. I was diagnosed as bi-polar, a death sentence at the time and not at all yet fashionable among celebrities and consumer advertising. It turned out to be a post-partum condition that resolved itself. I never had any

really crazy episodes, but my emotions were on a roller coaster. I was angry and exhausted. My mother and my sixteen-year-old cat died. My teenage daughter started having problems at school. I was a passenger in a near-death car accident. And I was up for tenure, the most nerve-wracking process in any professor's career.

Why would anyone have a problem with all that?

My therapist said "I give up. Even if there is a metabolic substrate you're so good at what you do I'm not doing therapy, I'm doing crisis intervention. Do you know how fragile geniuses are?" Well, thank you for the back-handed compliment, but I was lost about what to do. I guess a sane crazy person would have checked into a psych ward, but I had a better idea.

I booked a weekend at the posh Sonoma Mission Inn.

Sonoma Mission Inn

I realize this is not exactly the same thing as mental health therapy, but it has remained my go-to choice when stress is unbearable.

My Sonoma Mission Inn schedule:

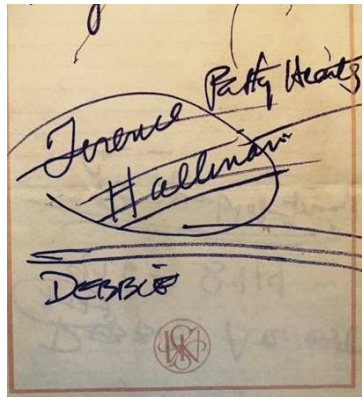
3 pm Friday Massage
2 pm Saturday Herbal Wrap
3 pm Saturday hydro tub
12 noon Sunday luncheon
1 pm Sunday pedicure

And the rest of the time at the bar.

What could go wrong?

Well, actually, nothing went wrong. It was a wonderful respite, and I met some other wounded souls, like folks joking about "Raleigh Hills,

Class of ’74” (a rehab place). I was wearing a turquoise and black top, black “tux” sweats, a red satin baseball jacket, and a spa visor. Doesn’t everybody write down what they were wearing forty years ago? Or is that a little manic? I shot the breeze with a “cute curse of the Irish guy” and self-described “dumb broad” Debbie. The “Twinkie Defense” comes to mind—the one that Dan White used to defend his murders of Harvey Milk and George Moscone. I suggest a “Tab Defense.” “Have you ever read the back of one of those cans?”



Sonoma Mission Inn, July 24, 1982

And that is how I spent an evening drinking at the Sonoma Mission Inn with Terence Hallinan, which I would hardly believe myself if he hadn’t signed a bar napkin. Maybe he wrote “Patty Hearst” in the corner because for a brief time he represented her. I know she wasn’t there.

During lunch at Stars in 1990, Terence thought it was wild when I told him about our chance meeting. Of course he didn’t remember, but then he wasn’t in my heightened state of consciousness in 1982.

With benefit of hindsight, it seems clear I had periods of serious post-partum depression after each of my pregnancies, but I had never heard the term. All I knew was that new mothers are supposed to be filled with euphoria after giving birth. It was obvious to Hippocrates in 460 BC that some women suffered difficult conditions post-childbirth – “puerperal fever …agitation, delirium and attacks of mania" - but post-partum depression didn’t make it into the official DSM until 1994. That was a long time after it could have helped me.

Stars

Jeremiah Tower’s *Stars* in the nineteen eighties and nineties was one of the coolest restaurants in the world. Definitely the hot spot in San Francisco.

Tower left *Chez Panisse* to open *Stars* in 1984 and it became an instant sensation. An innovative open kitchen, great food, breathtaking interior, and a steady stream of celebrities and politicians. Stars was the epicenter of San Francisco dining during its fifteen-year reign.

Stars, San Francisco, 1994

I met Terence at his regular table, slightly raised and private with a sweeping view of the room. Clearly the politician's perch. I have no memory of what we ate or said. I wasn't taking frantic notes any longer. But we hit it off and discovered we had close mutual friends. Before lunch was over I was volunteering to work for his upcoming campaign.

With Terence, 1990

My campaign contribution is a bit overstated because Terence never spoke a word of my well-crafted speeches. Still, I loved every minute of the raggedy venture. Even some of my students got involved after Terence came to class to speak. Shame on partisan me, but they were free to work for anyone. It was such a shambling organization I had no expectation that Terence would prevail, and he almost didn't.

Election night was an adrenalin rush, as anyone who has ever worked on a political campaign knows. We expected Terence would

squeak through, and gathered at the proto-hip Phoenix Hotel. The Phoenix is a rock and roll place—like living in the back seat of a 57 Chevy. Except that you are in the heart of the Tenderloin on Eddy street. An oasis in a swamp.

Phoenix Hotel, San Francisco

Neil Young lived at the Phoenix. Little Richard checked in. It was rumored Debbie Harry stayed there with JFK Jr. It was a more insider place than I had ever been in San Francisco. We anxiously awaited the election results. Close to midnight, it was clear that our guy was on the ropes. But he made it. There were six open supervisor slots. Terence rose to speak:

"I am happy to announce that we have finished a strong sixth!"

An inspired bit of spin before it became the political discourse norm.

The Acting Bug

There were advantages other than lunch with Terence that came from Casey's year at permissive Presidio Hill. Casey was a reserved kid until he got on stage at the age of five and the genie came out of the bottle.

ACT's Cratchit Kids

Casey got the acting bug in Point Arena and when we moved back to San Francisco he enrolled in the American Conservatory Theatre (ACT), run by exceptional director Craig Slate. I would drive him down to class near Union Square every Saturday morning and spend a few hours shopping or sitting in the lounge of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel.

Every year, ACT held a fundraising production of *A Christmas Carol* in the 2,500-seat Orpheum Theater. Scrooge and a few others were Equity actors, but the rest of the cast members were conservatory students. The first year Casey was a student, Slate offered Casey the honor of playing Tiny Tim, but Casey was off to England for the holidays with his dad's family. The next year Craig added a Cratchit kid named "Ned" so Casey could have a role. The show ran for about thirty performances, so it was a good thing Casey had an easy school year.

His one line was "The Goose! The Goose! Mother, the Goose!"

The kids got little coaching so were subdued in the early performances until they caught on and took the space. "The Goose! The Goose! Mother, the Goose!" evolved from a mumbled phrase to a line delivered with sweeping arms and all the stagecraft and bravado of Ian McKellen. You would never forget the goose.

Christmas Carol early rehearsals were all-day affairs. I would drop Casey off in the morning and pick him up later. There was one strict rule:

Terence Hallinan S.F. District Attorney
1995-2004

Do not under any circumstances leave ACT or the nearby deli during your breaks. Casey was a good kid so I had no worries, though his best ACT pal was a rascal. One day when I was doing the laundry I pulled a receipt for a milkshake out of Casey's pants pocket.

Macy's!!!

Kamala Harris vs Terence Hallinan 2004

A good four blocks outside the assigned perimeter. I had fun with the interrogation and I am not sure to this day that he knows what gave him away.

Local Icons

Terence spent seven years on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He was elected District Attorney in 1999, considered the most progressive DA in the country and long a local icon. He created a lot of controversy as usual and had a weak record of winning.

Terence gave a big break to young prosecutor Kamala Harris, hired from the bush league office in Oakland. She went on to beat him handily after mounting a take-no-prisoners campaign in the 2004 race for District Attorney. *Washington Post* reporter Michael Karnish wrote, "the lessons she learned from her first campaign reveal the birth of a political brawler." (10/5/20) A friend of Terence's put it differently to me when Harris was nominated for Vice-President: "Biden better get a food taster."

Terence continued on a colorful road returning to private practice focusing on medical marijuana, leaving the legacy of a feisty progressive with a unique San Francisco style and a lasting record of public setbacks and singular successes.

Commemorating the Presidio Twenty-Seven

Keith Mather—one of the lives Terence touched through the Presidio Twenty-Seven—spent time in prison for his resistance to a cruel and needless war, and eventually built a life raising children and becoming a building inspection professional. He did hard time both in solitary confinement and as a fugitive for his commitment.

Does he have regrets?

In his words:

Never

Even in the solitary confinement cells of my youth that took me to my knees
Or my 12 year exile
Distance from friends and family at home
Did I ever feel it was not worth it?
Never.
When beaten or kicked
Shamed or deprived
Or in my courts martial
The familiar insults let me know I was onto something.
What names I was called did fall to my feet.
My only regret is what my family went through
Over those 17 years and 2 months
Of time spent in the army
Draft to discharge.
Regret?
No!
That's not how I felt then or how I feel today
I knew I was going to jail, so I figured to make a statement that might get out
to others that could respond in solidarity.
Even in the long winters and times of depression, I don't remember
Feeling like I made a wrong turn.
Even when the war ended
And I was still out of the country, without a passport, a stateless deserter
Everyone was getting out except me.
All but a few of the men I had demonstrated with had not

Keith Mather
2018, Presidio 27
Commemoration

escaped
Were back on the block.
When denied amnesty
Or my legal efforts for clemency.
If I have any regret it would be that I allowed myself to be drafted.
Other than that I followed everything I knew to be right
All the lessons learned at home that had been handed down over generations
"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
And my personal favorite
"Thou shalt not kill"
Show respect when it's deserved
And from my Mother "If you know better, show it."
I hated the uniform.

In 2018, Keith organized the fiftieth commemoration of the Presidio Twenty Seven Mutiny. A gathering of survivors and supporters spoke and remembered. Terence was unable to attend. The Presidio Stockade is now a museum and National Historic Site.

Keith Mather with Dishonorable Discharge

Chapter 6

Cybernetic Frontier of the Soul

In early September 1978 I got a call from a woman who introduced herself as Carol Wilder. "I know this is going to sound crazy," she said, "but I was just at Esalen and there was a note on the message board by the dining hall. It was from Gregory Bateson and said he wanted to see me. I was completely baffled but got directions up to his house where an even more confusing conversation ensued. We finally figured out that he was actually looking for you. He had seen my name on the weekend registration bulletin board. He gave me your phone number and I am calling to let you know that Gregory Bateson wants to see you."

Thus was set in motion a meeting with the master I came to know as Gregory—and a long voyage of heart, mind and soul.

Small Slow Steps

My path to Gregory Bateson was walked one small unexpected step after another. Oberlin colleague Chris Koch's earlier insistence that I read *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* made an impression. I tried, but like so many who have encountered *Steps* on their own, I threw up my hands after a few chapters. Or maybe it was a few pages. Gregory's prose is unforgiving. The style is dense and precise. More often than not the ideas are new. There is as much innovation beyond the lines as within them. Reading his work with a seminar of smart graduate students was encouraging because we could share where his writing took our thinking beyond the page. His polymath mind, wide-ranging interests, disdain for celebrity, and peripatetic life (London, Bali, Hawaii, California) are other reasons he has been often neglected as a great thinker of the twentieth century. Ted Gioia, in *The Los Angeles Review of Book* in 2020, called Gregory "scandalously forgotten."

After my Oberlin introduction to *Steps*, our move to California revived my interest in Gregory's scholarship. In 1974, Stewart Brand published the slim volume *II Cybernetic Frontiers*. It was a pairing of at-first-look different essays, one on "Computer Bums" (*Rolling Stone*, 1972) and one on Gregory (*Harpers*, 1973). Brand presciently juxtaposes the two: "Though polar opposites in their relation to computing machines, they are parallel in their Man's special pride, conscious purposefulness . . . Both subvert it." We had moved to California because of T's new job at PARC, which promised our immersion in one cybernetic frontier. I was about to learn more about the other.

Junior Faculty Seeker

In 1975, as a very junior faculty member at San Francisco State, I specialized in teaching classes no one else wanted to teach, at times no one else wanted to teach them. My educational breadth—a mile wide and an inch deep—helped me get the job. It also meant I was assigned both qualitative and quantitative, criticism and theory, beginning and advanced classes. It was a mad scramble of class preparation. I was commuting from Palo Alto and trying to maintain some semblance of family life.

My interest in political media was covered by more senior faculty. I was assigned orphan classes like Small Group Communication and Research Methods. Playing my shaky statistics card during the job interview came back to bite me. I did not want to go quantitative, which was the growing fashion in much of the field. Alas, being a good sport and determined survivor, I registered for a "Multivariate Statistics in Communication Research" conference at Asilomar Hotel & Conference Grounds, the most beautiful coastal state facility in the US. I recognized the names of some of the other participants but was an unknown scholar myself. The conference was way over my head and outside my sphere of interest. But, as I said, a survivor.

Asilomar Beach

Asilomar is a National Historic Landmark and a jewel of the California coast. Designed by architect Julia Morgan and built in 1913 by the YWCA, its rustic nine acres sprawl along the ocean at Pacific Grove. Acquired by the state in 1956, Asilomar is breathtaking, conducive to deep breathing and free thinking.

During a welcome break from the multivariate gibberish, I struck up a conversation with a young Temple University professor, Art Bochner. He was then interested in family communication. Art

eventually became president of the National Communication Association, but we were both young and green when we met. Art tells this story in *Coming to Narrative* (2014). I will try not to plagiarize but he got this right: "Both of us are bored to tears and decide to take a walk on the beach." Art was presenting a paper and I was there as a curious onlooker. Me (via Art): "I heard that multivariate statistics is the cutting edge of analyzing communication data, so I came to check it out." My dissertation had been on the rhetoric of social movements, but I was trying to find my way as a junior faculty member in a big university. My PhD program had required us to study both humanistic and social scientific approaches to communication, so I took coursework ranging from statistics to Attic Greek. The profile of a budding dilettante, though it all came in handy at one time or another over the years. I loved writing Greek on the board to boost credibility in my early academic days—*ethos, pathos, logos*. I remember sitting in Greek class terrified that the kindly professor would call on me: I was proud to made it through with a B+.

The high point of the multivariate conference next to meeting Art was the final presentation by famed mathematician John Tukey (John Wilder Tukey!), who coined the term "software." Tukey used an overhead projector and many colored markers to deliver a *tour de force* of number performance art, ending with the conclusion that *he didn't think it was especially useful to apply quantitative methods to the social sciences*.

At last something I understood and endorsed heartily.

From Imperial College to Esalen

In another move toward Gregory, Art had read one of my few publications, the interview I did at Imperial College with information theorist Colin Cherry. It was the first nontraditional academic piece published in *Human Communication Research* (1977). It wasn't the sort of thing you get tenure for, but I loved doing it. Art liked it, too.

"You're in Palo Alto, right? Why don't you try to contact Paul Watzlawick or John Weakland at MRI ?" MRI was the Mental Research Institute; Paul Watzlawick had co-written a popular 1967 book *Pragmatics of Human Communication,* a sort of *Cliff Notes* for Gregory's ideas. (Earning the latter's eternal enmity, I later learned.) But aha. Another step taken.

The Colin Cherry interview taught me a great lesson: never be

afraid to try to contact someone you admire if you have something genuine to offer. The worst that can happen is that you hear nothing, which likely has nothing to do with you. I wrote to Colin, a lovely, courtly man, because I was taking that rowdy group of students to London for the summer. Colin was on his way to Boston. He invited me to join him at Ithiel del Sola Pool's world-class conference. What are the chances?

I followed Art's advice and wrote to Paul Watzlawick at MRI: 555 Middlefield Road in Palo Alto, three blocks from my house. An ordinary building with an extraordinary history as the epicenter of family therapy. Through the 1950s, the Freudian psychoanalytic model prevailed, focused on the past and unconscious. In the 1960s, therapy genius John Weakland told me, sometimes at the bar after a conference session someone would furtively admit that "I saw a family member of one of my patients." It was *shocking*, that the family system and not the individual might warrant attention.

It wasn't long before therapists were seeing family members even without the patient. It was a radical shift entirely in line with the long reach that cybernetics had from a crazy idea hatched by mathematicians during WWII, memorialized in the legendary *Macy Conferences on Cybernetics* (1946–1953). Cybernetics had a profound effect on Gregory: the epistemological shift from individual to systems thinking was the most important step of his *Steps*, and his connection with MRI founder Don Jackson led to his most famous work, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," introducing the powerful "double bind" theory.

MRI did not last beyond its founding generation, converting to a foundation in 2019. Its legacy is indelible, carried on by dozens of publications and thousands of therapists who trained there or in many of the far-flung workshops offered around the world.

My own time at MRI as a Research Associate included an interview with Paul Watzlawick, published in *Journal of Communication.* I was also a volunteer subject in one of Paul's hypnotherapy training sessions with the goal of sticking to a diet. Trance induction was a delightful transcendent experience. When I met with Paul for a follow-up, I told him that while I hadn't quite managed my eating, I had developed a crush on him. He laughed at the transference joke, playing on a common experience of a patient forming an emotional attachment to their therapist. But I did learn that

hypnosis induced by the confusion technique pioneered by Milton Erickson is no joke and explains more of modern life than almost any other notion. Gregory's famous "double-bind" hypothesis is a variant of the confusion technique: mixed messages can make you crazy if you can't reframe them. Double bind is the best known of Gregory's ideas and the most powerful, equally applicable to personal and political contexts.

My time at MRI also resulted in a 1978 article "The Palo Alto Group: Difficulties and Directions of the Interactional View for Human Communication Research," published in *Human Communication Research*. The title is a mouthful, but the article was published in a prestigious journal and widely cited. I was so proud of the response that —perhaps prematurely—I sent it to Bateson. The next step.

Esalen Institute in Big Sur may be best known in popular American culture as the retreat that welcomed Jon Hamm at the end of *Mad Men*, a subtle but perfect touch. Esalen is about an hour down Highway 1 from Asilomar, in a similar coastal setting with even more karmic weight.

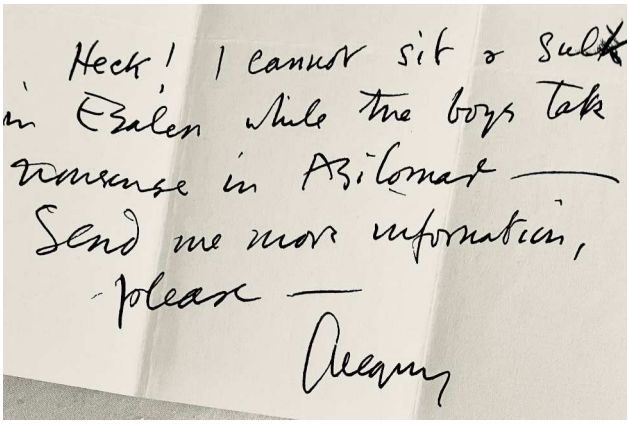
Several months after I sent Gregory the Palo Alto Group article, he wrote back with good-natured scorn: "While you should not feel yourself worse than the average when you find yourself somewhat stuck in the swamps of confusion," he said, the essay was nonetheless "yet another attempt to clean the Augean stable where you will remember the horses made the task difficult even for Hercules by continued shitting."

I learned in the same letter that he thought little of what remained of the "Palo Alto Group," one of whom he called an "inaccurate plagiarist." ("I don't mind the plagiarism as much as the inaccuracies.") John Weakland and a few others escaped harsh judgment, but John had always gone his own way. While Weakland was a student and collaborator of Gregory's, he was not a revisionist and did nothing that could be considered capitalizing on the relationship. But in general, Gregory told me, the work of his former colleagues was like being in Hawaii "seeing your gods made into trinkets for the tourists."

Fine Stilton Cheese and Slow Life

A few weeks after the call from my kindly doppelganger, I was on my way from Palo Alto to Esalen with my ten-year-old daughter in tow. I assumed that Gregory's wife Lois and daughter Nora, my daughter's

age, would be home, but they had gone off somewhere. It was just Gregory, Lissa, and me for the weekend. He greeted me with a glass of red wine and some fine Stilton cheese.


Heck! I cannot sit a Sulk in Esalen while the boys take romance in Asilomar — Send me more information, please — Gregory

Note from Gregory, August 1978

By the time of my Esalen visit, Gregory had succumbed to the invitation to join a conference on his work I was organizing for February, 1979 at, of course, Asilomar. I had no idea if Gregory would or could attend, but I knew I wanted to explore his thinking with my smartest and most eager colleagues. Most of the conference planning was set by the time I visited Esalen: when I learned who was in and who was out with Gregory, it was too late to make fundamental changes.

The gift of youth allowed me to gather a roster of giants with blissful disregard for their interpersonal baggage or histories with one another. This experience made me a believer in plunging ahead with your passion even when you don't entirely know what you are doing. Knowing too much inhibits enthusiasm and creativity. Overthinking is an occupational hazard for academics. Sometimes a little recklessness goes a long way. The best things I have accomplished have been projects where I had no idea what I was getting into until it was too late to get out.

For three days at Esalen, Gregory and I lived a slow life among the lush and rustic grounds, where he and his family had been taken in when his health took a turn for the worse. The Bateson family occupied one of the most treasured sites at Esalen, a round stone house poised over the Pacific first built for Gestalt therapy founder Fritz Perls.

Leading our list for discussion was the upcoming conference. The conversation throughout the weekend was a starburst of small

epiphanies. Gregory was worried about how he might be expected to behave at the conference.

"Am I going to have to be rude? How many of them get it?"

"Well, it won't be like being with Warren McCulloch in a phone booth, but all are searching or they wouldn't be there."

"So I'm to clean things up a bit without hurting anyone's feelings?"

"That would be the idea."

"They aren't really so afraid of me, are they?"

"Well, you are formidable. I certainly feel it, though I am usually more into irreverence than awe."

We said our goodnights and I thought about fear. The next morning we continued the conversation.

"We were talking last night about fear of you. I thought later that I am more afraid of your vulnerability than your power."

"Yes, that's it."

"I'm also afraid I will be thought stupid."

"So am I. It all depends upon the context."

The Grey Poupon Cure and Dormitive Hypotheses

The 120 acres of Esalen, developed in the early 1960s by Michael Murphy and Dick Price, have long been the epicenter of progressive learning, early on called the human potential movement. It is named after the indigenous Esselen people, who inhabited the area for thousands of years. It is one of the most sacred secular places on earth and is still a thriving community offering hundreds of workshops each year. The physical beauty and famed hot springs have been burnished by generations of seekers and brilliant teachers like Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, Timothy Leary, and, of course, Gregory. On a later visit I attended one of Gregory's "Ecology of Mind" workshops in the company of John Lilly and his wife Toni and a dozen other fascinating apprentices.

Someone once asked, "How tall is Gregory Bateson?" The reply: "Six-foot-five by the tape and ten feet tall in person." Truly the case as he lumbered slowly down the winding walk to the dining hall.

During dinner one evening, a girl arrived at our table with a Grey Poupon mustard jar full of what appeared to be sludge. She smiled sweetly, expectantly at Gregory. He knew what was coming and made an

appropriately medicinal face, announcing to all at our table that wheat grass juice is said to be a cure for cancer. He shares a bitter taste with me and downs the rest.

"What difference is it supposed to make, Gregory?"

"Well, that little girl would be very disappointed if I didn't take it."

Walking back up to the house, we were bantering about the many terms Gregory introduced— metacommunication, framing, symmetry and complementarity, double bind—when we ran across "Mad Eric," sweeping ashes from the fireplace. Gregory noted that a piece of fence-like iron wall above the fireplace was missing. Gregory and Mad Eric speculated upon how that came to be. Eventually I chimed in:

"Dormitive hypothesis. That's one of yours, Gregory. There must be a dormitive hypothesis for this."

"Yes, it is one of mine. I quite like that one. No one seems to have picked up on it."

He paused. A long Batesonian pause. Then lit up:

"Yes, Robert Frost had the dormitive hypothesis for this one: 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall'. . ."

He chuckled. There was a pause, then belly laughs all around.

I spotted *Naven* (1936) on the top of Mad Eric's book pile and said, "Glad to see you are reading some great books!"

"Yes, Gregory gave this copy to me and I treasure it. I also want to thank you for letting me listen in on your conversations."

"It was all Bateson, really."

"No, not at all. You took a very active part."

I was becoming quite fond of Mad Eric.

Scales Falling From My Eyes

"What do you get out of all this?" I ask Gregory the following day.

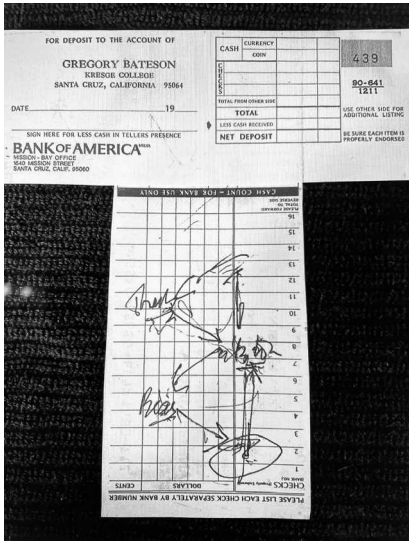
"Ninety percent of it is in the process. Very little of it comes from the rest."

"How is that?"

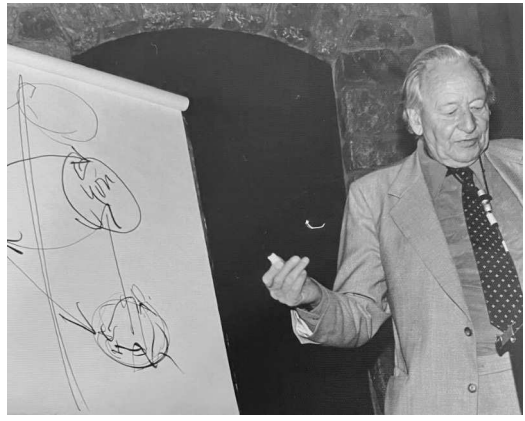
"Because they are always saying 'Bateson I don't understand,' 'Bateson why don't you write more clearly?' What we are talking about is paradigmatic change."

"I don't know how you could write what you write any other way."

"Nor do I. The seeds I have sown have grown as dragon's teeth. Where have I gone wrong?"



My cybernetics lesson from Gregory



Gregory tried his best helping me to understand by writing his cybernetic model on a bank deposit slip. I was deeply moved by the gesture, but perhaps not as deeply enlightened. On our way back from breakfast Sunday morning, we climbed one last time to the house. Gregory was measured, slow, determined. He paused.

"I stop twice on this path, the first time two steps beyond Fritz's bench. This bench was put here for Fritz when he was in a similar condition to my own. I always aim to go a little beyond it before stopping." Gregory had recently been diagnosed with lung cancer.

We said our awkward goodbyes. My daughter had been a happy sprite out among the flora and fauna. We had seen little of each other, but I have never been so secure that she was fine out of my sight. Gregory ventured some closure:

"You have heard much and have much to think about."

"And felt a scale or two fall from my eyes."

"Yes, it's hard to keep ahead of them growing back. Keeping the scales there is a big business."

"Sometimes the scales falling from my eyes feel like tears."

Virtues of Invincible Ignorance

It was the grace of invincible ignorance that allowed me to organize what was Gregory's last public honor. If I had known that some of the old invited colleagues were on the outs with Gregory, if I had known that Gregory would die the following year, if I had known almost nobody got funding from SFSU, the National Communication *and* the International Communication, if I had known how over my young head I was, it would have never happened. The book from the conference, *Rigor & Imagination: Essays from the Legacy of Gregory Bateson* (1982) received the Golden Anniversary Award from the National Communication Association, a collaborative effort offering some validation for those of us who worked so hard to share Gregory's difficult ideas with others.

Asilomar, 1979: Carol Wilder, Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, Heinz von Foerster, Kenneth Burke, Jerry Brown, Gregory Bateson

One friend who shared the whole journey was Art Bochner, who decades later wrote about his conversation with former student Bill Rawlins. "That conference was so pivotal," Bill told Art:

> "I remember the day you told me about it. I had been taking this course on Kenneth Burke. It was late in the afternoon and I was heading out of the building for class. You came bounding down the stairs grinning from ear to ear. You stopped

me in my tracks on the stairwell hollering from the floor above.

Breaking Bread with two masters:
Jerry Brown, Gregory Bateson

Carol Wilder just got funding to hold a conference in honor of Gregory Bateson.

"No!" I shrieked.

"Guess who else is going to be there?"

"Who?"

"Kenneth Burke!"'

"Holy shit. I couldn't believe it."

"We stood there high fiving, hugging and celebrating on the staircase as if we had won the lottery. People on the stairway couldn't have known what it meant to us, what a watershed moment this would be. Here were these two aesthetically informed, deep-thinking, profoundly original risk-takers, the kind of intellectuals you and I embraced and they were going to be on the same platform. I wanted to freeze that moment, you know, make the feeling last, but I had to run to catch my train."

In the process of trying to gather more far-flung colleagues to meet Gregory, the project grew to include a feast of his followers, old and new. Heinz von Foerster from cybernetics, John Weakland and Paul Watzlawick from the family therapy days, literary lion Kenneth Burke, and, most movingly, Governor Jerry Brown, who arrived by helicopter at the last minute for the Saturday banquet accompanied by his science and technology advisor, Rusty Schweikert. Schweikert was the lunar module pilot on the 1969 Apollo 9 mission and the first astronaut to experience going outside the ship.

The several hundred more-earth bound attendees were hushed as the giants honored Gregory with speeches that rose magnificently to the occasion. Jerry Brown spoke last. Introduced to Gregory by Stewart Brand, Governor Brown had a well-earned reputation as an iconoclast, and had appointed Gregory to the University of California Board of Regents. Soon after the appointment, Gregory was quoted in the paper saying that he "doesn't think much of today's student and confessed he is unable and unwilling to interest himself in the 'trivial nature' of the business the board deals with." I suspect that was the very reason Brown had put him on the stodgy board.

The Choice Between Integrity and Survival

At the end of a series of moving toasts to Gregory, Jerry Brown took the podium.

> *What will I say? Carol has insisted that I come here and I suppose to earn my dinner I have to, but my words are perhaps a little different and involves his work on the Board of Regents. When I first asked him to be a regent he, of course, refused. Why are you laughing? . . . I think he's added a new dimension and proved that even regents can think and consider the important issues, and the idea of a university is about more than parking lots and capital improvements. I guess his first contribution to my administration was—I don't know whether it was a speech or a prayer or an invocation or an exhortation—but it was the principal address at our first prayer breakfast. He spoke of peyote rights and pocketknives and the "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" and the mass media completely misinterpreted it. In fact, the only thing that really came out of that meeting was that one of the members of the Sufi choir that was providing music had his shirt off, so they reported that "shirtless dancers" were surrounding this odd rite that introduced my administration.*
>
> *But Gregory did say something important at that prayer breakfast. He told a story about an Indian group that used peyote in their rites and were contacted by an anthropologist who wanted to help them because the law was breathing down their necks. . . And so this anthropologist said, "Why don't you let me film your peyote rites? And this will show the world it is really a religious practice and protected by the Constitution?" And so all the Indians*

sat around and discussed this in their tribal council. . . And as Gregory told the story, they had to decide what this meant for their religious experience. He was trying to explain at the prayer breakfast what exactly religion is. And as the elders . . .discussed the matter, it came down to a question and one they understood very clearly. That if they had the rite filmed it would then become commercialized . . . but it would save the rite for the future. And so it became a choice between the integrity of the rite . . . and the survival of that rite.

And it was in that impulse and in that choice, Gregory told the assembly at the prayer breakfast, that the religious impulse could be found—in the choice that is faced between integrity and survival. And I thought that was a very important lesson.

With Lois and Gregory Bateson

After dinner, Gregory spoke in a proper conference room and I sat next to Jerry Brown. My knee was shaking and I didn't remember a word of Gregory's speech until I read the manuscript. Jerry Brown is one of those people with an aura that fills a space larger than his body.

Brown and I met again several times, once at U.C. Berkeley Lawrence Hall of Science to celebrate Gregory's centennial and years later, again at Asilomar, at a Cybernetics Conference around 2010. We each gave a presentation and had a series of conversations during the conference, also attended by Gregory's widow Lois, daughter Nora, and granddaughter Sa Hra.

Before leaving the Cybernetics Conference, Brown asked if he could call to get my takeaway from the meeting, though it had been way too esoteric for me. I imagine he felt the same. Gregory would have hoped for something more useful. A few days later, Brown called me at a friend's apartment in San Francisco. My friend was lurking outside the

Beautiful Bateson ladies at Asilomar, 2014: Lois, Nora, Sa Hra

door to listen. Alas, I was as baffled as Brown by the ozone level of the conference and hard as I tried could not translate the message. I have never felt at the same time so pleased by a phone call and so disappointed by my inability to say something that could move the conversation forward.

Jerry Brown and Gregory Bateson

Even while Gregory is "scandalously forgotten," many of his ideas have entered mainstream thinking. Meta-anything; framing; double bind; systemic thinking about racism, symmetry and complementary, punctuation of events, the environment, relationships. These are all seeds planted by a master gardener who knew he might never smell the roses.

Jerry Brown was one of Gregory's last visitors at San Francisco Zen Center in 1980, when his illness took its toll. As remembered by Gregory's daughter Mary Catherine, Brown "came in on the evening of the July 3 and Gregory recognized him and stretched out his hand to greet him, calling him by name."

Gregory died the next day.

Two weeks later, I was riding through San Francisco with John and Anna Wu Weakland to Zen Center's Green Gulch Farm at Muir Beach for Gregory's "Crossing Over Ceremony." Halfway through the city, John said, "I have a surprise for you." We stopped at a street corner and picked up Jay Haley, whom I had long admired from afar but not met before. Anna was a distinguished painter; John and Jay were by then famed family therapists, both a part of Gregory's double-bind team in the 1950s, and two of his oldest friends.

Green Gulch Farm is in the verdant rolling hills of coastal Marin County. The ceremony was a mingling of bells, gongs, silence, candles, bald monks chanting. Selections were read from Bateson favorites, T. S. Eliot and William Blake. Jerry Brown read Psalm 23. Many people shared remembrances, most movingly Lois Bateson: "The pattern that connects all things still connects us all to you."

On our way back to the car, Anna asked a sullen John why, as one of Gregory's oldest friends, he hadn't spoken. John erupted: "What the hell is all this horseshit? Most of them only knew Gregory for five minutes, and even then had no idea what he was about. Anna, do me a favor. If you've got anything to say to me, tell me why I'm alive. Don't talk to me when I'm dead."

No wonder Gregory loved John, as did I. John died of ALS in 1995. I think I talked to him enough when he was alive, since he was not only my friend but for years the therapist who guided my life through its most troubled waters.

"The pattern that connects all things still connects us all to you."

Chapter 7

K.B. Comes Home

Kenneth Burke, Gregory Bateson, 1979

1983 was the worst year of my life. Deaths, divorce, crushing stress at work and home. Just three years earlier, I marked the high point of my young career by organizing the esteemed conference in honor of Gregory Bateson.

Little more than a year later, Bateson was gone, passing peacefully at Zen Center in San Francisco.

One result of the conference and the bright spot of 1983 was the month Kenneth Burke lived with my kids and me in Palo Alto. We had hit it off at the Bateson conference and K.B., as he was known, cheerfully accepted an invitation to be visiting scholar for a month at San Francisco State. K.B. was 85 years young and agreed to deliver a series of lectures in his classic emphatic growl.

K.B. at the Podium

The university had nowhere properly plush to put him up comfortably so it was left with the option of a crazy house in Palo Alto. Mine. This beaming light of a little old man could not have arrived to illuminate a darker time.

K.B. was maybe five hunched-over feet tall with a mane of wild white hair and a habit of shuffling around the kitchen muttering "The thing of it is . . ." while sipping impressive quantities of his "medicine," Gilbey's Vodka. His tiny fingernails were filed to a sharp point, enhancing the elfin aura. My kids, ages fourteen and two, dubbed him "E.T." K.B. called my son "Number One," a habit he claimed to have adopted with the appearance of his own five kids. I had the pleasure of meeting each of kids—by then adults—at one time or another, and several of his grandkids.

K.B. was in sort of feral disarray of animated chatter much of the time—except in his writing, which was meticulous. Whenever the phone rang—in Palo Alto or Andover—he'd say, "If it's the Nobel people, tell them I'm busy." He never did get the Nobel, but came close in 1981, being awarded the National Medal for Literature at Carnegie Hall.

Welcome to My Nightmare

On K.B.'s first day in Palo Alto, I was dashing around to get the kids off to school and my visiting dignitary to San Francisco. We were almost out the door when my next-door neighbor Millie called with the news that my sixteen-year-old cat Crazy had passed away in her garage. Millie had taken to feeding Crazy, assuming incorrectly, though not surprisingly, that she was being neglected at home.

"Millie, can you please put her in the freezer for a few days?"

This tells you all you need to know about my state of mind at the time. It was the kick-off to a perfect month with Kenneth Burke, a teenager, and a toddler.

Millie first called on Tuesday.

On Friday, she called again.

"I think it's time for Sweetie-Pie to go home."

Three days had passed?

We agreed she would bring the cat to the front door first thing Saturday morning. I was awake early to intercept K.B. from the door. He saw me pacing and said flatly,

"Your cat's out there."

K.B. had gone to the front door to fetch the paper, opening it to be greeted by a box of frozen cat. I was mortified. We never spoke of the incident again until a month later when I was driving him to the airport.

A Giant in a Compact Man

K.B. became a part of our family and one of the dearest souls to ever grace our lives. My kids loved him. They still talk about him. He was a famous iconoclastic scholar, an unorthodox college-dropout giant of literary theory and criticism, philosophy, aesthetics, music, and more. He played the piano. He knew Shakespeare backwards and forwards. He was a poet, too, and a prolific letter-writer. At least three volumes of his correspondence with notables have been published. Malcolm Cowley, William Carlos Williams, Robert Penn Warren, William Rueckert, Ralph Ellison, Katherine Anne Porter, Marianne Moore. I have several dozen of my own precious letters from K.B.

K.B. attended Ohio State and Columbia before moving to Greenwich Village to consort with other avant-garde writers like Hart Crane and Allen Tate. In 1923, he became editor of modernist literary magazine *The Dial*. In 1928, he used a $15,000 *Dial* award for "distinguished service to American literature" to buy a farm in the rolling green hills of Andover, New Jersey. It became a family compound where he lived for the rest of his life within shouting distance of numerous Burke progeny.

While writing about twenty books, he married twice to two sisters, making his five children (three girls with Mary; two boys with Elizabeth) both cousins and siblings. "I was so glad when that damn sex thing was over," he remarked to me. The sprawling family homestead was dotted with offspring that radiated out from K.B.'s cozy paper-strewn shack, a dwelling out of *Little House on the Prairie* by way of *Hoarders*. He loved to talk in aphorisms:

Immortality is a euphemism for death.
I can't resist saving money.
I could live on what you waste.
Bad news about Reagan makes life worth livin'.
I'm hangin' on by force of habit – it's a bad habit.

K.B. relaxing in Palo Alto 1983

His shopping list never varied:

California Cellar Chablis
Gallo Hearty Burgundy
Gilbey's Vodka
1 Unsalted Peanut Butter
1 Rat Cheese
1 Whole Wheat Bread
1 Tuna Chicken of the Sea—low salt, vegetable oil
2 Red Onions

He converted me to red onion, but not much else.

Questioning K.B. on His Diet

My concerns about K.B.'s diet had little effect. We should all be so alive at eighty-five. One morning during our month together, I found a note on my kitchen counter.

4:00 A.M.

Carol

I've been awake for hours.
Now I'm all dressed and ready to go.
So if I don't come down, please let me linger
until it's time to go.
I'm taking a slug of vodka in hopes that it may change the rhythm.
Holla!
K.B.

7:00 A.M.

I SAY ITSHAY THE STUFF WAS NEAR KICKLESS.
Hell, K.B.

And, eventually, off to work we went.

The Medium Is a Terministic Screen

While K.B. may go down as the last great rhetorical theorist, I was never much attracted to his work while in graduate school. I had a great love for classical theory like Plato and Aristotle and Cicero and Quintilian, but by 1970 when I was in a PhD program, rhetorical studies were losing dominance to Marxian and French approaches, cultural studies, quantitative methods, and social science. One critic wrote that Burke may have accidentally created cultural studies, a legacy that would not make him happy. The rising political activism during the time I knew K.B. and the nascent broadcasting and social media explosion put rhetorical studies in the back seat. Rhetoric spoke historically to the occasion when one person (a man) had to speak to an assembled audience in person. While it can be and has been applied in expanded ways to many media platforms, its study went somewhat out of fashion from the 1980s on, though I always found it indispensable to my own writing and teaching.

Burke moved from literary to rhetorical studies primarily because while literary study focuses on how the parts of a text relate to each other, rhetorical studies concern the relationship between the text and the audience. A radical shift. I had become preoccupied with political communication and activism and Burke's sometimes maddening pursuit of every turn an idea can take is a dizzying habit

of mind for someone interested in action, praxis, engagement. K.B. wrote as if to omit the slightest implication might squander a diamond in the rough. The richness and density of this sort of writing can be a headache for a beleaguered graduate student, especially one who had experienced the May 4, 1970 trauma at Kent State. While I did take the plunge into similarly perplexing writing by Bateson, he wrote more of an open text that was compatible with my own way of thinking and the culture of Northern California in the 1970s.

Burke's "dramatistic pentad" for analysis of symbolic action—act, scene, agent, agency, purpose—appealed to the theater nerd in me. He told me there are five terms of the pentad because he had five children. Makes sense to me. In the *Rhetoric of Motives* he also promoted that creating "identification" with the other was the key to persuasion, rendering "both the parties both joined and separate at once, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with the other." He foresaw a turn toward relational communication that took hold in the following decades.

One of Burke's ideas, well ahead of its time, is "terministic screens" or filters, introduced just when screens were starting to dominate. Language does not reflect reality; it creates reality. "We must use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms, whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen directs attention differently to one field rather than another." Bateson called it *context*—"without context there is no communication." Marshall McLuhan famously expressed it as "the medium is the message."

Pen Pals for Life

When I met K.B. at the Bateson conference in 1979, he was a spirited eighty-two years, still the peripatetic teacher/scholar who had been in residence at countless colleges, most steadily at Bennington. K.B. agreed to contribute a chapter to the book I was editing about the conference. It was thus we struck up a regular correspondence for the rest of his life. You really have to see K.B.'s letters to appreciate their visual/verbal gymnastics. Here is a simple note about upcoming visit to San Francisco, written with as much convention as he ever used.

EMORY UNIVERSITY
The Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts
Atlanta, Georgia 30322
404/329-7601

March 23, 1983

Dear Carol,

Things is moving. When I 'gan inquiring this morn, I learned that I could get from here to there for 800 bitter tears.

It's now down to two hunnert and fifty-one.

I still have some details to precisify. But I arrive at Oakland, not San Francisco, at circa 10:48 AM. Leaving here 6:43 AM, Thursday, March 31. Apparently via a stop at Denver.
ticket
I get my tomorrow, and shall fill in t'other details. Hence, more later.

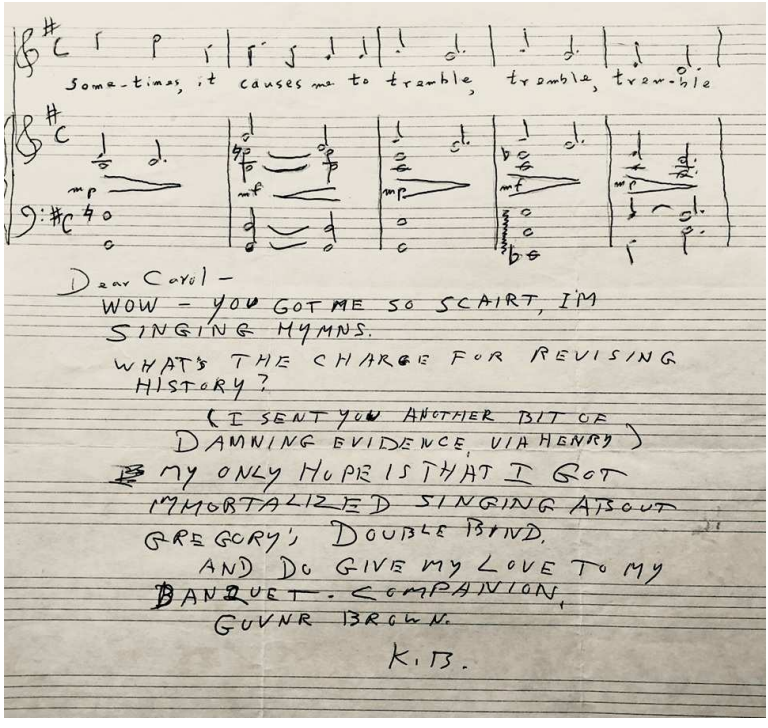
And jes got a letter from a guy who refers to the "astonishing Epilogue to The Rhetoric of Religion," thuswise: "Be assured, Burke, you're a classic. What a funny, profound, eloquent, irresistible, exhilarating piece! I thought of other great dialoguists, of Plato, Rume, Santayana, Valery."

Meanwhile, I'm trying out the new address. If this doan arrive, for gawsake let me know pronto.

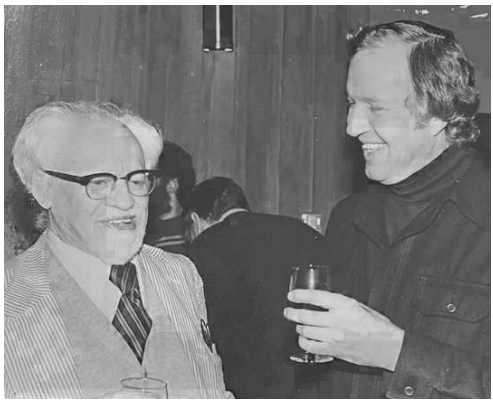
Holla!

K.B.

I recall a Burke scholar writing that his work is "dazzling and perplexing," to which I would add that his letters were dazzling, perplexing and—sometimes literally—musical compositions.

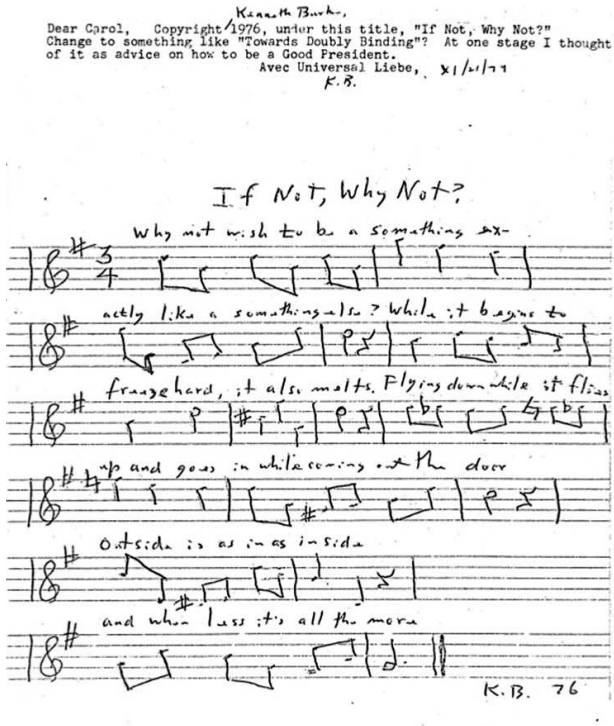


This note was written shortly after the Bateson conference for which K.B. had written another song. The reference to "Henry" is my colleague Hank McGuckin. K.B. called Hank "deVoce" because of his classic baritone. "Do give my love to my banquet companion Guvnr Brown" means exactly that. Even K.B. the legend was impressed by the charismatic young governor who attended to honor Bateson.



K.B. and "deVoce" Hank

The song K.B. wrote for Bateson was an homage to the double bind theory, Bateson's most widely known idea. K.B. prefaced the song by saying, "Before Bateson I had never heard of the double bind. Now I see it everywhere I look. *I see it everywhere I look*."


Kenneth Burke,
Dear Carol, Copyright 1976, under this title, "If Not, Why Not?"
Change to something like "Towards Doubly Binding"? At one stage I thought of it as advice on how to be a Good President.
Avec Universal Liebe, XI/21/77
K.B.

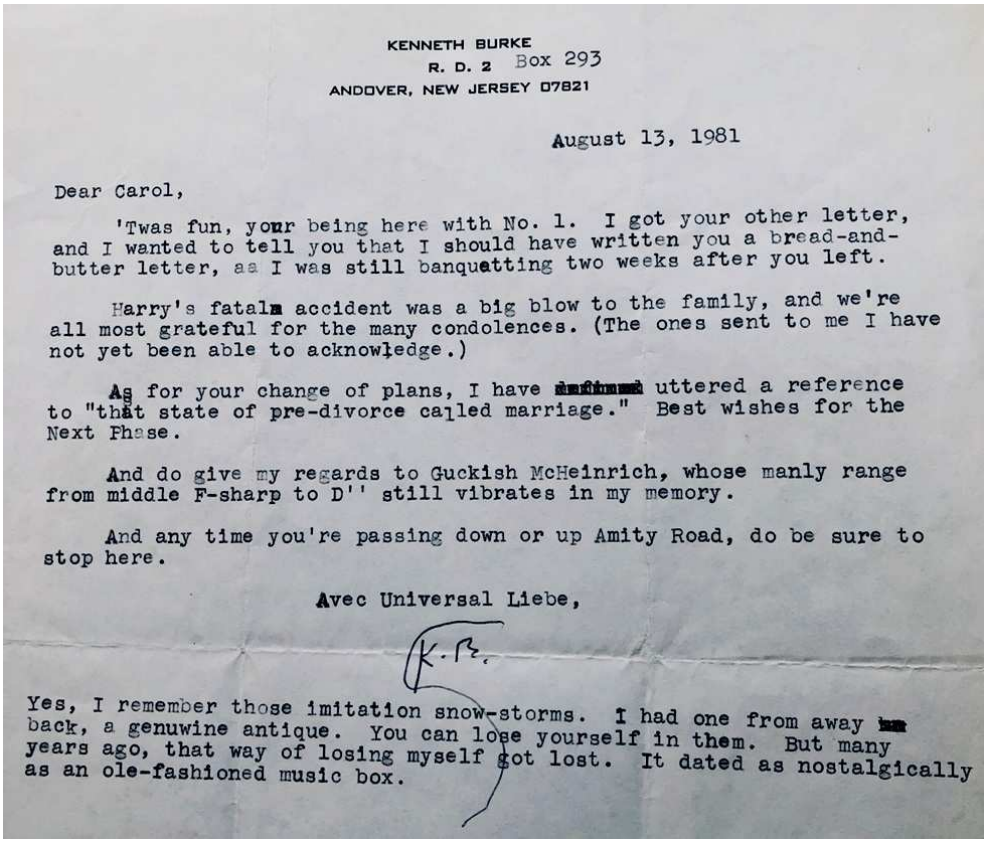
If Not, Why Not?

Why not wish to be a something ex-
actly like a something else? While it begins to
freeze hard, it also melts. Flying down while it flies
up and goes in while coming out the door
Outside is as in as inside
and when less it's all the more

K.B. 76

In early July 1981, Casey and I spent a week at home with K.B. in Andover. Only days after we left, on July 16, K.B.'s beloved grandson musician Harry Chapin died when his car was hit from behind by a truck on the Long Island Expressway. Chapin's legacy has endured in the food justice organizations he founded, still running today: Why Hunger and Long Island Cares: The Harry Chapin Food Bank.

K.B. wrote following the tragic accident:



KENNETH BURKE
R. D. 2 Box 293
ANDOVER, NEW JERSEY 07821

August 13, 1981

Dear Carol,

'Twas fun, your being here with No. 1. I got your other letter, and I wanted to tell you that I should have written you a bread-and-butter letter, as I was still banquetting two weeks after you left.

Harry's fatal accident was a big blow to the family, and we're all most grateful for the many condolences. (The ones sent to me I have not yet been able to acknowledge.)

As for your change of plans, I have uttered a reference to "that state of pre-divorce called marriage." Best wishes for the Next Phase.

And do give my regards to Guckish McHeinrich, whose manly range from middle F-sharp to D'' still vibrates in my memory.

And any time you're passing down or up Amity Road, do be sure to stop here.

Avec Universal Liebe,

K.B.

Yes, I remember those imitation snow-storms. I had one from away back, a genuwine antique. You can lose yourself in them. But many years ago, that way of losing myself got lost. It dated as nostalgically as an ole-fashioned music box.

Heartbroken but still writing with puckish humor, K.B. even gives a nod to Hank: "Guckish McHeinrich."

A Commitment Delayed

A few months before K.B. came to live with us, I accepted an invitation to write a new foreword to the social theory classic *Communication and Social Order* by Hugh Duncan, first published by Oxford in 1968. I had a passing acquaintance with the book but had not read it closely.

Sketchy preparation for making a commitment.

Communication and Social Order was more than a decade in the making. Beginning in the Fifties, Duncan wrote at least five full drafts, substantially shifting the conceptual center of the work over the years. The seed was likely planted as early as 1938, when Duncan fell under the spell of Kenneth Burke. K.B. taught Duncan in a "Psychology of Poetic Form" seminar at the University of Chicago, a fateful meeting.

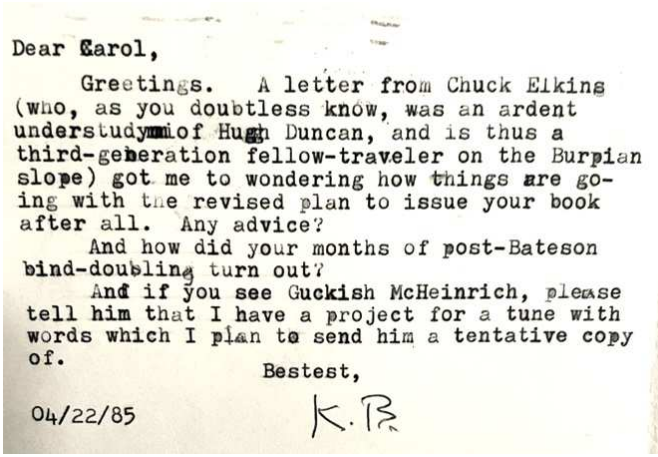
Duncan initiated a lifelong correspondence that shows him trying to find his conceptual core. In 1955. K.B. wrote Duncan a 12,000+ word critique.

> *I think if you could bring yourself to slash into the material in such fashion you'd have a very effective book. . .You could do this only by the rules I have suggested [e.g. 'read the manuscript from beginning to end without a break'] You'd have to work on it in a situation that allowed for nearly absolute retreat. For the book as it stands is too scattered. Let your Business Rot for One Week. Abandon Your Love Life For One Week. Just Glumly Revise, being Brutally Willing to Sacrifice. And you'll have a strong book. . . When in doubt, cut it out.'*

Wise words for any writer. K.B. took characteristic care, offering great detail in his mentoring of Duncan.

Duncan did, indeed, find his focus: the role of social hierarchy that allows a sort of miscommunication he called "mystification" which it is the function of social order to maintain. British radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing shared this concern. Duncan eventually works his way to comedy because "comedy opens to reason the mystifications of social hierarchy." Comedy relieves social tension and serves as a "resistance against authority."

I came to some understanding of Duncan's writing only several months after K.B.'s visit. I did not know enough during his time with us to even ask an informed question. A perfect opportunity missed. Then he started pestering me kindly:



Dear Carol,

Greetings. A letter from Chuck Elking (who, as you doubtless know, was an ardent understudy of Hugh Duncan, and is thus a third-generation fellow-traveler on the Burpian slope) got me to wondering how things are going with the revised plan to issue your book after all. Any advice?

And how did your months of post-Bateson bind-doubling turn out?

And if you see Guckish McHeinrich, please tell him that I have a project for a tune with words which I plan to send him a tentative copy of.

Bestest,

04/22/85 K.B.

K.B. was most gracious in giving me access to his correspondence with Duncan held at the Pennsylvania State University Rare Books Library. I was thrilled the day the actual letters arrived, courtesy of archivist Charles Mann. They were *original* letters, a treasure that would never be sent once technology went digital and information became more possessively managed. I dropped everything and immersed myself in these precious documents. Thanks to this priceless insight, I finished the Duncan introduction on deadline. It never would have happened without K.B.'s gentle nudging support in the form of hints dropped into his letters to me after he left.

"Let me enroll myself most zestfully in her favor."

Casey - "Number One" - and I spent our memorable 1981 week at the Burke compound in Andover, New Jersey. K.B. and I met up again five years later at the University of Victoria where he was spending the winter with his son, physics professor Anthony "Butchie" Burke.

With K.B., Anthony "Butchie" Burke, Victoria BC 1986

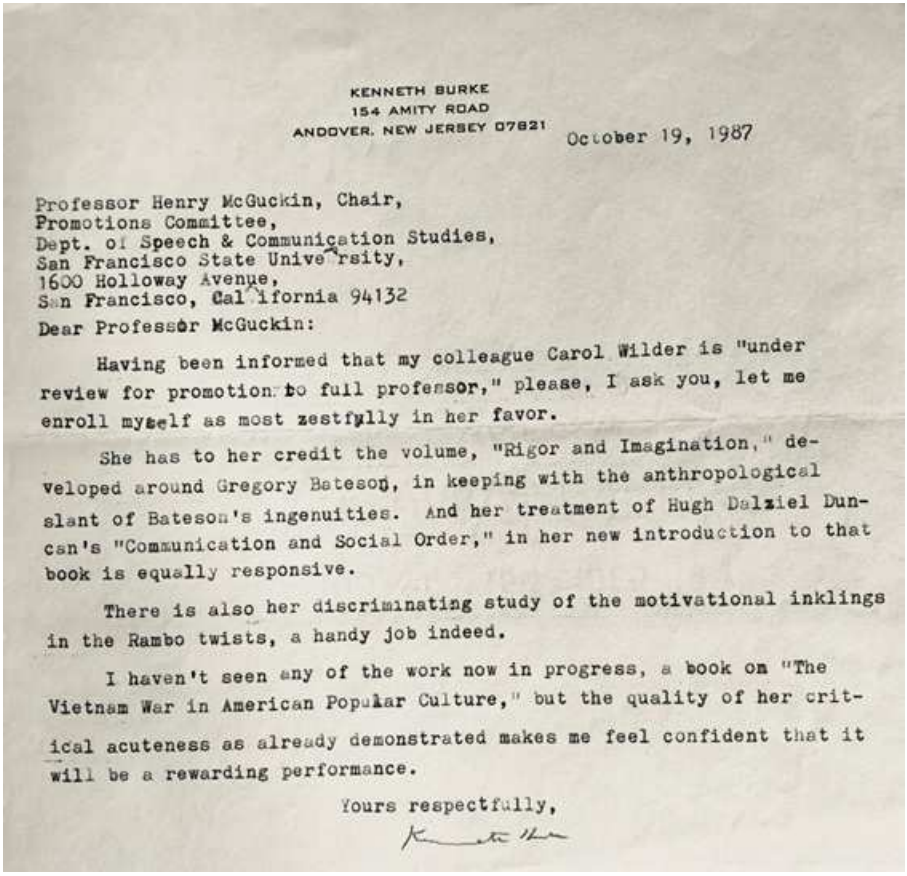
I had been invited to give a lecture by psychology professor Janet Beavin Bavelas—best known as a co-author of *Pragmatics of Human Communication*. More echoes of Bateson, Watzlawick, and the Palo Alto Group. Getting K.B. to the lecture was a bit of a challenge. One does not often have the opportunity to steer an elderly friend around a college campus. Such landscapes are not made for babies or the old. We made it to a grand room with a long conference table. I was holding my breath worrying that my dear K.B. might bark out a comment or question that was impossible to decipher.

He didn't.

It was such an honor to deliver a talk to him, though I think it was about the rhetoric of Rambo or something that seemed important at the time. K.B. took it quite seriously, as he did everything.

Toward the end of K.B.'s life in the early 1990s, his caregiver would call me on his behalf. Despite advanced aphasia, he would have something he urgently wanted to say. There was no "yes yessing" him either. He fought to the end to be understood. While he had lost the words he kept the passion.

In our dozen years of friendship and correspondence, K.B. sent pictures, essays, poems, pun, and musical compositions. K.B. was perfectly proper in his professional letters, but a free speller in his personal communication, peppering his letters with Burkeisms—or Burkishness—like referring to Hank as "Guckish McHeinrich" and exclaiming "Holy Someusarookus." He once proclaimed himself a "litry man"—"for Gawsake, Carol, plizz say SOMETHINKS." K.B. was so inventive that he could barely frame a sentence that did not include a surprising turn of phrase, as in a promotion letter he wrote for me in 1987.



KENNETH BURKE
154 AMITY ROAD
ANDOVER, NEW JERSEY 07821

October 19, 1987

Professor Henry McGuckin, Chair,
Promotions Committee,
Dept. of Speech & Communication Studies,
San Francisco State University,
1600 Holloway Avenue,
San Francisco, California 94132

Dear Professor McGuckin:

Having been informed that my colleague Carol Wilder is "under review for promotion to full professor," please, I ask you, let me enroll myself as most zestfully in her favor.

She has to her credit the volume, "Rigor and Imagination," developed around Gregory Bateson, in keeping with the anthropological slant of Bateson's ingenuities. And her treatment of Hugh Dalziel Duncan's "Communication and Social Order," in her new introduction to that book is equally responsive.

There is also her discriminating study of the motivational inklings in the Rambo twists, a handy job indeed.

I haven't seen any of the work now in progress, a book on "The Vietnam War in American Popular Culture," but the quality of her critical acuteness as already demonstrated makes me feel confident that it will be a rewarding performance.

Yours respectfully,

Kenneth Burke

The Magic of Symbols

If there was a tiny knight in shining armor in our lives during that no good very bad year 1983, it was K.B. Always kind and full of life. Always familiar and always new, as when:

> *I discovered the need to replace Roosevelt's Four Freedoms with but Three, presented thus: 'The Greatness of our Country has been based on Three Freedoms, all three of which, regrettably, are denied from now on, namely: The Freedom to Pollute, The Freedom to Waste, The Freedom to Not Give a Damn'*

Driving K.B. to the airport after our epic month, I finally managed to sputter: "K.B., I just want you to know how very sorry I am about the cat." Without skipping a beat he said, "Well, if it had been a dog it might have bothered me."

With K.B., Victoria B.C. 1986

Sweet Sorrow

If I could send words that would reach Kenneth Burke, I could do no better than those written by Hugh Duncan in a 1951 letter:

> *I have always thought that you were a lonely voyager and there have been times when I sensed that you felt some of the cold mist closing in about you as you traversed some of the fens. Sometimes I thought this was the way you had to travel to get on with your work; that you would far rather take the risks in the hope of reaching some light, than give up the glory. When we first met it was the wonderful polyphonic quality of your thinking that enchanted me. It still does but now there is something more; the instrumental value of it for saving us from more monsters who know how to use the magic of symbols.*

The spring following K.B.'s visit, in a far corner of our property, the most lavish thicket of a hundred red roses grew from the site of Crazy's final resting place. We had quietly buried her at twilight while K.B. was relaxing inside with his Gilbeys.

Chapter 8

Time Waits for Nobody

SFSU Memorial Grove

The San Francisco State "Quad" covers about five green acres at the center of a patchwork of buildings on the 144-acre campus. Over the years the Quad has seen concerts, protests, and frisbee tournaments. We placed the Vietnam Moving Wall there in 1988. Students installed a graveyard of hundreds of white crosses during the 1991 Gulf War; the Quad was the site of shantytown "Little Bagdad" the same year. But most of the time the Quad is a place for lounging in the sun, reading, and taking some quiet time. Over the years, large trees have been planted—in part, it is said, to discourage mass gatherings.

Just off the northwest corner of the Quad is a small Memorial Grove, dedicated in 1989 to students and staff who died of HIV/AIDS. Its path curves by a giant oak that houses a community of bees. The plaque reads:

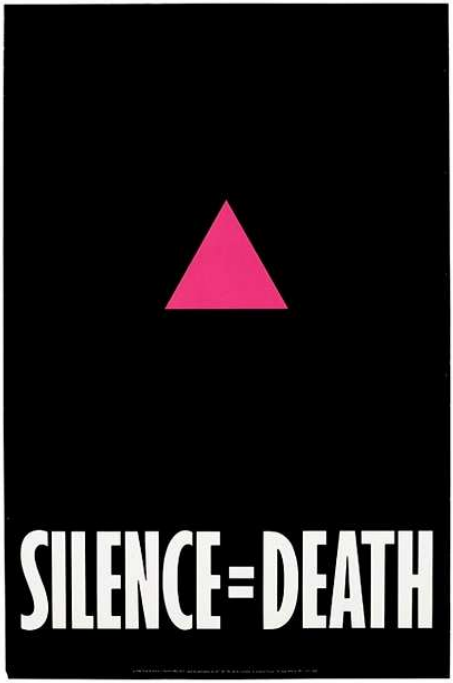
San Francisco State University Dedicates this Memorial Grove
To Our Friends and Colleagues Who Have Died
Let Us Celebrate Their Lives and Ours
Dedicated on World AIDS Day
December 1, 1989

The first time I spoke at the memorial was at a commemoration event in 1991 in memory of Josh Persky. Josh was a student in my Communication and Social Process class in the late 1980s and the following semester became my teaching assistant. A stocky, blonde,

blue-eyed beam of energy, Josh was a stand-out in a room of neutral faces. Josh was responsible for inviting members of ACT UP to the class for a loud and spirited presentation. I did not know at the time he was HIV–positive.

World AIDS Day.
December 1, 1989

ACT UP started in 1987 as an advocacy group for HIV, and their tactics focused on direct action and mediagenic public events. Tens of thousands of Americans—mostly gay men—had already died of AIDS. The ACT UP logo, designed by a group led by Avram Finkelstein, was striking and widely praised as a powerful graphic. Finkelstein said "the poster comes for you where you live."



In the class meeting following the ACT UP presentation, the students' first comments were objections to the strong language of the activists, which did indeed include more profanity than the usual classroom talk. But that was the point. ACT UP's goal was to draw attention in any way possible to an epidemic that by that time had killed nearly twenty thousand people with little public sympathy or support.

Tragedy Hiding in Plain Sight

I don't remember the first time I heard about AIDS, but the first time it got my startled attention was in a "Fundamentals of Oral Communication" class, a university requirement in the Seventies and Eighties, enrolling 2,000 students each year. Most of the sections were taught by an army of adjuncts, but tenured faculty were also expected to do one or two sections a year. Some faculty balked because it was a low status course that "anyone could teach." How can public speaking be the both the easiest course and at the same time be consistently rated at people's number one fear?

The first assignment after the introductions was the "demonstration speech"—show/tell us how to do something. It was an always informative and usually a fun few weeks. We learned how to belly dance, set a catering table in ten minutes, make origami birds, how to meditate, do yoga, you name it. One day the students sat wide-eyed when a classmate in full Deputy Sheriff uniform showed us how to clean a gun, a topic cleared well in advance. Another student was attempting to demonstrate how to be the world's fastest Rubik's cube solver. His hands whirled away at amazing speed for a minute until the cube exploded in a blaze of cubelets that showered the entire room of shocked and then hysterically laughing students.

But the most memorable speech began with a student named Steven walking slowly up to the portable lectern and lining up fifteen pill bottles across the front of the table. He then spoke about how to live with AIDS. The air went out of the room. We were all stunned, because HIV/AIDS was in the very early stages of being talked about openly and treatments were few. It was 1983, two years before President Ronald Reagan even mentioned it in public. Steven invited me to a party at his house later in the year, then I lost track of him.

1983 was also the last year French theory icon Michel Foucault visited San Francisco, to give a lecture at U.C. Berkeley on

"Discourse and Truth"—a title that, in hindsight, has sad irony. Foucault avoided the gay baths in Paris for fear of being recognized, but in San Francisco he took full advantage of the bathhouses that were soon to be closed. He returned to Paris with a dry hacking cough, "eager to report on his latest escapades in the baths of San Francisco," recounted his friend Herve Guibert, who used the pseudonym "Muzil" to refer to Foucault in his fearless autobiographical novel *To the friend who did not save my life (1990):*

> *That day I remarked to him 'Those places must be completely deserted now because of AIDS.' 'Don't be silly,' he replied, 'it's just the opposite: the baths have never been so popular, and now they're fantastic. This danger lurking everywhere has created new complicities, new tenderness, new solidarities. Before, no one ever said a word; now we talk to one another. We all know exactly why we're there.'*

Foucault died the following year, shortly after the bathhouses were ordered closed. Guibert was criticized for revealing the illness Foucault had tried hard to conceal, a betrayal the book acknowledges:

> *I know Muzil would have been so hurt if he knew I was writing reports of everything like a spy, like an adversary, all those degrading little things in my diary, which was perhaps destined (that was the worst of it) to survive him, and to bear witness to a truth he would have liked to erase around the periphery of his life, to leave only the well-polished bare bones enclosing the black diamond—gleaming and impenetrable, closely guarding its secrets—that seemed destined to form his biography, a real conundrum chock full of errors from end to end.*

Guibert himself died in 1991, the year after the book was published. He endured many ineffective early treatments, insisting, "I will not give up my book to save my life." He believed, along with Foucault, that "one of AIDS few mercies is the emphasis it places on the little time it gives you."

Condemned in Plain Sight

The HIV virus was discovered in Africa in 1910, but it was not until 1981 that it made itself known in New York and San Francisco with the sudden appearance in gay men of forty-one cases of Kaposi's Sarcoma, a rare form of cancer that presents as purple, bruise-like blotches. Many patients developed pneumonia and had compromised immune systems. Most had been sexually active and using drugs. By August 1981, more than 100 gay men had Kaposi's Sarcoma as well as pneumosystis; by the end of the year 121 men had died. By the end of the decade in 1989, 27,408 people had died from HIV/AIDS.

With over 38 million HIV cases worldwide as recently as 2021, it is easy to get the impression that this epidemic sprang fully formed from the Castro District in San Francisco. In fact, the opposite was true. AIDS crept in slowly. In 1981, 219 cases were diagnosed worldwide. Each year through the following decade and beyond, the number doubled, eventually killing more than 32 million people—a genocide of gay men and drug users.

Progress in identifying and treating this "gay cancer" was slow, largely because of the stigma placed at the time on sexual difference, especially homosexuality. It was not common to be "out."

It was not until 1985 that President Ronald Reagan said the word "AIDS," the year his friend Rock Hudson became the first public celebrity death from the disease. Reagan's press secretary Larry Speakes joked about the epidemic that they called the "gay plague." In 1982, with nearly one thousand deaths, Speakes held a press conference documented in the short film *When AIDS Was Funny* by Scott Calonico. Larry Kinsolving asked him a series of questions:

> Kinsolving: *Does the President have any reaction to the announcement by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta that AIDS is now an epidemic with over six hundred cases?*
>
> Speakes: *AIDS? I haven't got anything on it.*
>
> Kinsolving: *Over a third of them have died. It's known as "gay plague." [Press pool laughter.] It's a pretty serious thing. One in every three people that get this have died. And I wonder if the President is aware of this.*
>
> Speakes: *I don't have it. [Press pool laughter.] Do you?*
>
> Kinsolving: *You don't have it? Well, I'm relieved to hear that,*

Larry. [Press pool laughter.]

Speakes: *Do you?*

Kinsolving: *No, I don't.*

Speakes: *You didn't answer my question. How do you know?* [Press pool laughter.]

Kinsolving: *Does the president—in other words the White House—look on this as a great joke?*

Speakes: *No, I don't know anything about it, Lester. . .*

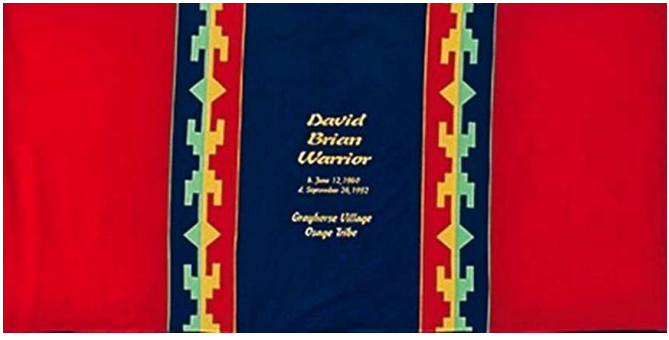
Speakes's position hadn't changed when Kinsolving raised the question again in 1984.

Kinsolving: *Is the president concerned about this subject, Larry?*

Speakes: *I haven't heard him express anything.*

And so it went for another year until federal response was initiated, soon led by the Center for Disease Control's Dr. Anthony Fauci. It was four years and more than twelve thousand deaths into the epidemic.

Dangerous Beauty



David Warrior, AIDS Quilt Panel 4421

San Francisco State colleague and friend Mercilee Jenkins became close to student David Warrior. "He was very good looking. Tall, dark hair. Coal button eyes and cheekbones for days. Native American—Osage Tribe. He claimed that's why he had 'attitude.' I didn't mind. Everybody's got something you have to contend with."

David was gay and Mercilee ("Lee") bisexual. They were in their

own kind of love with each other. Lee had a girlfriend and was David's professor and David had his own life, but blurred lines were no complication in that time and place. Gender and sexual orientation were foregrounded in San Francisco in a way I had not experienced before. It was decades before they were part of the larger cultural conversation, partly due to the liberal nature of the city, amplified by the AIDS crisis and the 1978 assassination of Harvey Milk.

Lee wrote a prize-winning play *Dangerous Beauty* about David, and they performed many adaptations of it together. "It's a love story about a gay man and a bisexual woman. Love and art intermingled and I never could separate them after that. We worked on every scene but the love scene. We joked that our director wasn't ready for that." Under Lee's magnetic mentorship, David stayed on at SF State for graduate school instead of moving to Arizona. She knew he was HIV–positive, but not how sick he was. "He didn't want me to know. It was my job to make sure he always had a future." I attended one of the first productions of *Dangerous Beauty*, among the earliest creative works of the AIDS epidemic. I sat through the play with watery eyes and a knot in my stomach.

The characters in *Dangerous Beauty* were Tom and Annie. They banter about the unusual nature of their pansexual relationship. At one point Tom attends his first HIV group discussion meeting.

> TOM: *This is my first time coming to this meeting or any meeting like this. I've never been in therapy. Never wanted to take the time, I guess. That's funny, isn't it. Because now I'm running out of time and I need to deal with that, so here I am. I haven't really dealt with being HIV positive. I mean there are people around me much sicker than I am so it's easy to focus on taking care of them and just living my life day to day. I get tired so easily sometimes that it's hard to work. But it's hard not to work too. . . I guess I'm wondering what are we going to do with the time left?*

Annie realizes at one point in the story that Tom has made an analogy between AIDS and earthquakes. The big 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake had hit earlier that year.

> ANNIE: *You know you're on the fault line and you have the virus*

but you don't know when it will hit or how. But you know something's going to happen sometime. You learn to live with it in a way that other people can't understand. . . and we made it through the semester earthquake and all. An earthquake is a good metaphor for life. It's unexpected, jolting and can change everything. It comes in waves, over and over again. Cyclical like grief. Suddenly the earth is no longer solid under your feet. Not that it ever was. This is just a reminder. My old Aunt Marian says 'why do you have to live on the crack?' I say, I don't know any other way.

Lee told David she would "never be the same without him. I knew they would invent a drug to save him. It just came too late. By the next fall he was gone."

The last time I saw him, he looked like a fallen angel. All the tubes removed, he seemed to be resting with his mouth slightly open. He always said he would look good until the end because he was that vain, and he did. But I don't think it was vanity that made him so beautiful. People think it's awful to be with someone when they die. But it's not. It's a privilege. And I made him promise me something. I think when someone makes a promise when they're dying you know they are going to keep it. . .I wanted him to promise to be there for me when it was my time to go. And he understood right away and nodded. And that was what I wanted to ask. And I was thinking that he'll be there when my time comes. Like there'll be something to look forward to even in death. And now I don't need to be so afraid.

Open Secrets

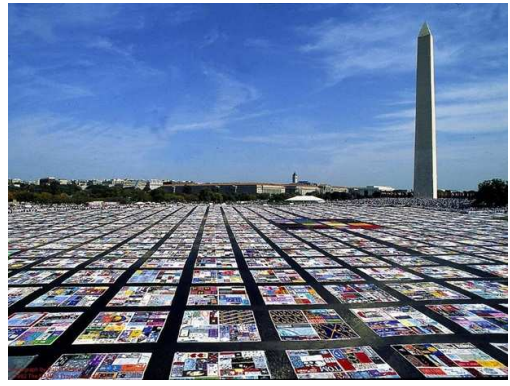
Freddy Mercury (1946-1991) Panel AIDS Quilt

Like many prominent people with AIDS, Queen lead singer Freddy Mercury did not publicly admit when he learned he was infected. Queen was a top band in the 1980s and Mercury was not thought of as gay, maybe because of his relationship with Mary Austin, which lasted throughout his life. Most likely Mercury was complexly bisexual, a place on the sexuality spectrum not understood at the time. In the months before his death the British tabloids, notably the *SUN*, blared his disease but Mercury did not publicly admit he was sick until the day before he died in 1991.

In April of 1992 Queen sold out the 72,000 seats of Wembley Stadium in three hours. A billion viewers in seventy-six countries watched the *Freddy Mercury Tribute Concert for AIDS Awareness.* Dozens of top musicians and a few celebrities from Elton John to Elizabeth Taylor participated in the legendary event. HIV was suddenly in the mainstream global conversation.

Awareness also grew that it was not a "gay" disease. First perhaps with the public attention when thirteen-year-old Ryan White contracted HIV/AIDS through a blood transfusion in 1984. When his school refused to let him return, he became the national public face of education about the disease. Another influential case was Elizabeth Glasser, who contracted AIDS while pregnant through a blood transfusion in 1991. She also passed it along through breast milk to her daughter Ariel, who died in 1998. Glasser became a national spokesperson for treatment before she died herself in 1994. It had slowly – too slowly for many – became clear that HIV/AIDS was not limited to the gay community, but was an international epidemic. According to the UN AIDS statistics, by 2022 worldwide eighty million people have been infected and more than thirty-six million have died. That is a long way from the 318 cases diagnosed in 1981

A Memorial Like No Other



AIDS Memorial Quilt

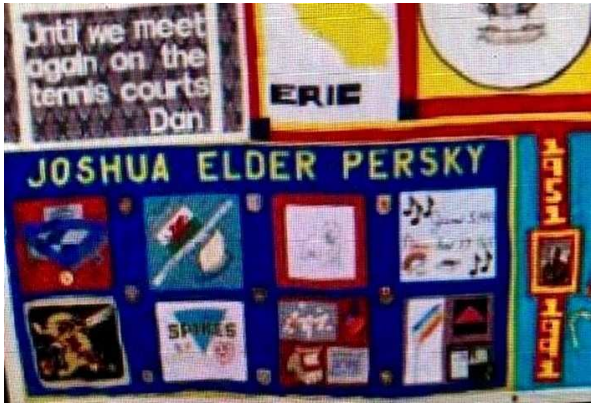
Losses like David Warrior were all around us at SFSU, but it was still very much on the down low. There was very little public conversation. As San Francisco State graduate Cleve Jones remembered in the *Golden Gate Express*, "SF State was hit very hard—almost all of the gay male students I knew in the early 80s died. As I talk about it I see all these faces in my mind of these boys I went to school with who didn't survive the epidemic." Jones interned in the office of Harvey Milk while studying political science at SF State, and went on to become one of the most influential AIDS activists, co-founding the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and creating the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.

The 86,000 names on the AIDS Memorial Quilt now weigh 56 tons, the largest piece of community folk art known to exist.

SFSU AIDS Quilt Panel

Home Schooling

Joshua Elder Persky, AIDS Quilt Panel 2279



The day before Josh Persky was to graduate in 1990, his mother Susan Elder called to tell me he was not feeling well enough to attend. Would I consider stopping by after the ceremony to congratulate him? Accompanied by several of his other professors, I went to their beautiful craftsman home on 6th Avenue, just North of Lake Street, taking along a stuffed gorilla, a commencement program, champagne, and a special gown. Josh was his usual effervescent self when we put the gown over his jeans and T-shirt. We embraced in a long hug. His cheeks felt on fire. We finished off the champagne and said our congratulations and farewells.

Josh lived another year.

At his memorial at the dedication of the Memorial Grove on campus, I read from Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*:

> *What though the radiance which was once so bright*
> *Be now forever taken from my sight,*
> *Though nothing can bring back the hour*
> *Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;*
> *We will grieve not, rather find*
> *Strength in what remains behind;*
> *In the primal sympathy*
> *Which having been must ever be;*
> *In the soothing thoughts that spring*
> *Out of human suffering;*
> *In the faith that looks through death,*
> *In years that bring the philosophic mind.*

Joshua Elder Persky

Nov. 17, 1964–June 5, 1991

Surrounded by loved ones at R.K. Davies Hospital, Joshua Elder Persky left us by his own will on June 5. His energy and passion astonished all who knew him, and will continue to inspire those he touched.

A native San Franciscan, Joshua has been an active, vibrant member of the gay community all his life. He knew and stressed the importance of being who you are. He has always been a man of integrity and candor.

Joshua helped to organize the San Francisco Spikes soccer team in 1982, and participated in all three Gay Games celebrations. He studied speech and communication at SFSU until his illness overtook him in May 1990. He made a film at the university about HIV disease, and lectured to large audiences on homosexuality and AIDS.

Chapter 9

FOGSTER's First Earthquake

Even before falling in love with FOGSTER, I was a motorhead.

At age thirteen I became interested in Elvis, boys, and cars. Also boys in cars. I saw my first Elvis show from the front row in 1956. The next morning, there was a photo of my screaming head in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* cut next to Elvis. Pre-photoshop, everyone thought it was real. I was teased without mercy, even worse because the photography credit was someone named "Wilder": no relation.

SCREAMING TEEN-AGERS by the thousands shook the Arena to its flabbergasted foundation as their singing idol, Elvis Presley, performed last Friday afternoon and evening. Their screams started the moment Presley, fresh from a fistic fray the night before in Toledo, leaped onto the stage, and never let up throughout his performance. This made it very difficult to hear his renditions, but he went blithely through his bump-and-grind routine anyway. The audience reaction picture was taken by D. M. Wilder, 17400 Scottsdale Blvd., Shaker Heights.

Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 1956

Motorhead Girl

Just as I had learned all the dinosaur names in third grade because I had a crush on Donald Sambrook, I learned a lot about cars because I liked guys who drove them and the special language they used talking about them. Were cars ever better than the 1950s?

My first car was a 1958 Silver Blue Chevy Impala convertible with a white top. Cars were prohibited at Miami University in the early sixties except if you were student-teaching and had to commute, which I had to do to teach at rural Ross High School, where the bull and cows did what bulls and cows do outside my classroom. When I walked into class and the students were hanging out the windows, after an embarrassing first time trying to get them in their seats, I learned they were observing the rural entertainment of bovine sex. I also swore I would never teach high school for real, and I never did. My parents originally bought the Impala for my brother Chuck—don't boys always get cars first even if they are younger? - and I paid dearly later for the one semester loan.

My generous Grandmother Wilder gave me $3,000 to buy my first new car for college graduation in 1965. On the basis of looks alone I picked out a 1965 ½ Mustang GT convertible: British racing green with a white top. I neglected to mention to my dad I had never driven standard transmission. When he took me out on Mayfield Road in Cleveland to pick up the car, there were a few awkward moments before I lurched off. Four years later, after Lissa was born, my brother Chuck came over in full used car salesman attire. He walked around the Mustang stroking his chin, kicking the tires and trying to persuade me that it was no kind of car for a young mother to be driving. He generously offered trade me for the 1968 Impala convertible that belonged to my mother. That's what I mean by paying dearly.

I have no idea why I bought his shameless hustle. We can only guess what that 1965 ½ Mustang GT would be worth now. Maybe only about $70,000 for mine, but a 1965 Shelby sold not long ago for nearly 4 million.

Several cars and a move to California later, I bought my favorite car ever, a new 1986 Silver Chevy Camaro for $12,000. It was fantastic on treacherous Highway 1 and perfect for my weekly commute. The most annoying things on the road were the slow drivers who made the locals crazy. Late one Thursday night, driving from San Francisco to Point Arena, I tried to pass a sputtering Volkswagen van. Soon there were flashing lights behind me. I pulled over at Timber Cove. I'm sure the sheriff thought he'd find some teenage boy behind the wheel - if he was lucky, without a proper license.

"What do you think you were doing there, ma'am?"

"Um, I was just trying to nudge the Volkswagen over."

"Well," he said, "you might try to be a little more careful."

That was it. Clearly a local cop who understood. I'm not sure a teenage boy driving the Camaro would have had the same outcome, but off I went unscathed and more careful about who I was trying to run off the road. And when.

Car Heaven: 50s Ford truck, 66 Mustang, 79 El Camino, 86 Camaro

When Four Wheels Are Too Many

A lot of boys I knew in Cleveland got motorcycles before they could shave. It never struck me as weird that girls rode on the back. It never struck me at all until I was forty and promoted to full professor and asked myself: Is this all there is? What do I want to do to reward myself for this unlikely milestone?

"I want a Harley!" shouted my inner voice.

There was nothing calculated, nothing rational, nothing about wanting to be cool. I was already about as cool as I could keep up with.

The next thing I knew I was down at Dudley Perkins on Mission Street. Founder Dudley Perkins had been a motorcycle hill climb champion: the American Motorcycle Association's highest award is named after him. The iconic Harley-Davidson motorcycle dealership he founded in 1914 lasted 103 years until it was sold in 2017.

Son Tom Perkins greeted me. After a congenial chat that may or may not have sounded like I had any idea I was talking about, he directed me to a 1988 Sportster Hugger. It was the Hugger part that hooked me—two or three inches closer to the ground than a regular 883 Sportster, which was about a third lighter than the standard

Harley. I bought it on the spot for $5,000. I don't remember how I had that kind of money—maybe from a modest profit I'd stashed away from my house in Palo Alto.

I was ecstatic. On cloud nine. An out-of-body experience.

The only downside was that I had no idea how to ride. The last time I had been on a motorcycle was a minibike in the pits of a race and I face-planted in the dirt. So I did the responsible thing and had a friend ride the bike to my apartment. Lacking a garage, I parked the bike in the living room. Before Dan Ellsberg could remember my name, he called me "the woman with the Harley in the living room." I couldn't ride but I loved looking at this work of art and technology. That lasted for about six months. Then I signed up for the AMA Motorcycle Rider Course at the Presidio.

At forty, I was the old lady on the tarmac. Despite crashing into my instructor with the 350 Honda we were given to use, I passed the course. The instructor probably figured – correctly - that comforting an hysterical middle-aged woman who didn't pass might be more trouble. But I still couldn't ride the Sportster. Meantime, I had one exhilarating success when my application for the plate *FOGSTER* was accepted by the DMV! The Dudley Perkins Harley Owners Group were the "Foghogs." Alternative names I'd submitted were *Mother*, *SF XLH*, and *FOGGYX*. I hit the jackpot with *FOGSTER*. It fit her like a glove.

"Goddamn it, Wilder. Just Ride!"

George "Goddamn it just ride!" Adams

There was still the problem of actually getting on the bike, not to mention riding it up serpentine Highway 1 to Point Arena. So I did the mature thing and had my friend Mike ride it up. In Point Arena, FOGSTER sat idle in the driveway until shame got the better of me. I went out with Mike and his friend George to a flattened few acres outside of town where some optimist had planned a housing development. Mike was patient getting me on and encouraging me to go. I was paralyzed with fear for two or three rounds of this until George shouted, "Goddamn it, Wilder, just ride!"

And I did, time and again around the dirt track. It felt right, balanced. The fact that on a motorcycle you either focus or die cured my ADD in a hurry. Riding was my passion over the next seven years. I learned the lingo: focus or die, look down fall down, drivers either don't see you or are trying to kill you. Overcoming stark terror and riding FOGSTER was a high point of my life, up there with being a majorette in high school. I know that bar may seem low to some, but it was heaven to me.

"Lift Those Knees, Wilder!"

Cleveland Heights High, 1960

Growing up, I hated school but loved the football games and especially the band. Since I played no instrument, I hatched a private plot to become one of only three majorettes in the award-winning

military marching band. Defying gravity, I did what any girl with a dream would do. I found a baton, checked out a book on twirling from the library, and several broken light fixtures later taught myself to twirl in my bedroom. In a supremely audacious move, I asked the beloved, tough-as-nails band leader Mr. Farinacci for an audition. I wasn't the only one shocked when my new position was announced. At sweltering band camp in August, all I remember is Mr. Farinacci yelling, "Lift those knees, Wilder!"

I learned a lot of things as a majorette. How to sit still in the end zone dodging footballs. How to struggle into three sets of tights in freezing weather. And best of all, how to throw high and not drop my baton by throwing a few feet lower than your maximum. And here goes: focus on the dead center of the rotating shaft, and grab it palm down as soon as it's in reach.

You're welcome.

The piccolo solo was the high point of marching to the cheering home team. In a high school of three thousand, there were more than a few piccolo players. If you had to compete to be a piccolo player, you can imagine how hard it was to become a majorette. Almost as hard as a girl learning to ride a Harley.

The day I took my motorcycle license test in Fort Bragg, I did what no one in their right mind does and slow-rode the 24-foot circle both ways on my Sportster. I learned later that no one takes the test on their actual Harley but on some borrowed Honda. In my driver's license picture from that that day, my hair is sticking straight out and I am smiling like my face would break. And to this day I have an "M" on my drivers license.

The Wonton Burrito Festival

Of course there were challenges to being a girl in a boy's world. Of the hundred - strong "Foghogs," I was one of two women members. Nearly every Sunday the Foghogs took a ride. The first time I got the nerve to join was a bright chilly January day. Our destination was the Wonton Burrito Festival in Sacramento. (Only in California?) Of more than twenty Foghogs on the ride, two were women, and I was the only one on my own bike.

I was anxious even before my engine started missing as we were running beside the river somewhere outside of Sacramento. I lurched along in the middle of the pack in the crisp air and sun in the middle of nowhere, wondering if I was going to really die or just die of humiliation.

I lucked out when pal Ranger blew a tire and we pulled over, so at least they knew I was in trouble. I only knew enough to figure it wasn't gas or sparkplugs, but ended up doubling back with a few others to a nearby roadhouse, a funky oasis—a pool table-jukebox-beery joint like where more than a few Foghogs had loitered during our misspent youths. And in many cases, middle age, too. I'm not much of a meat eater, but the bacon cheeseburger and fries hit the spot. Fuck the wonton burritos.

Roger took pity and led me through some back roads and nasty dog packs to the freeway, where I sputtered along the slow lane to the city. FOGSTER finally cut out 292 miles from where we had started the day and only a few miles from home. She cut out three more times before I chugged in the driveway, feeling run over by a truck. Mike went through the plugs, wires, and cables. Everything checked out. He thought the coil, sparking weak, might be the culprit. We called our friend Sandy, who had an 87 Sportster. He said, without even seeing FOGSTER, that the problem was the starter relay. A ten-dollar plug-in part. A beginner's learning experience, and a lesson in why real riders take their bike apart and put it back together again. That was never going to be me.

Mendocino/Humboldt Lost Coast

Other Foghog rides were more exhilarating, most memorably along the rugged twenty-five mile Humboldt County Lost Coast, a county with nearly half of all old-growth Redwoods. It was a bracing ride, demanding total concentration for every hairpin turn through the breathtaking beauty along the coast and among the redwood giants. I thrilled to the cool embrace of the ancient trees, though I didn't know until much later that the forest was connected underground as well by a network of nourishing fungi. It makes complete sense that the largest living organism in the world is a mushroom in Oregon spread out over more than two thousand acres of forest. Nature taking care of its own.

The Lost Coast ride was right at the edge of the novice rider envelope, but my heart was never in my mouth until the return to San Francisco in the Sunday afternoon slow traffic approaching the Golden Gate Bridge. No problem for Foghogs. They started lane-splitting - Jesus, is this legal? - and I had no choice but to suck it up and follow. I exhaled about an hour later. Living years later on Long Island, I could not imagine why anyone would want to ride a motorcycle along straight congested I-495, but my guess is that none of them had seen the glory of the Lost Coast of Highway 1. Or even had a wonton burrito.

Biker Politix

I drifted away from the Foghogs when the 1991 Gulf War started. I was not on their team. They were flying American flags and cheering on the war while my students were building a "Little Baghdad" shantytown on the SF State campus in protest. Around the same time, the San Francisco State magazine *Prism* published a feature about me that was both flattering and embarrassing. "Wilder at Heart: An Academic Biker

Speaks Out for Peace." Cringe. But it was well done. Apologies in advance for my favorite soppy quote: "Wilder never really sits still: she's not that kind of woman. Her intensely wise hazel eyes sparkle as she speaks and after a few hours with her it is obvious that she is everything from tailored academic to biker feminist." Okay. I'll take that, though I like to think my eyes are green.

S. F. State Prism Magazine

The article featured the "Vietnam: Rhetoric and Realities" class we had been teaching for five years, drawing both hundreds of students and a lot of media attention. I was always grateful to promote the message we tried to impart and what the *Prism* author calls the "radical concepts" we espoused: "skepticism, honesty, love and peace."

Radical, indeed.

The Day the Walls Breathed

I rode FOGSTER to work only one day, October 17, 1989. I taught a 4-6 pm "Introduction to Communication Studies" class, in which we were talking about different kinds of research methods. At 5:04 pm, there was a rumbling that stopped me mid-sentence. The classroom swayed back and forth. The laws of physics were suspended. The concrete walls undulated like membranes. When it was clear that the building might not collapse around us, I said, "Stay here. I'll go outside and find out what's happening."

It was the 7.2 magnitude Loma Prieta Earthquake, named after its epicenter.

Earthquakes hold a special place in the realm of natural disasters because of their suddenness, strangeness, and enormous potential magnitude. While they can be predicted within a broad window of time, on a daily basis prediction is still impossible. Earthquakes forge a primal collective experience of the vast and mysterious powers of nature. They are a special feature of living in California, where along with the standard human denial of death, one acclimates to the denial of earthquakes. But they happen, as the Loma Prieta event abruptly demonstrated.

The 1906 earthquake that destroyed San Francisco was magnitude 7.9. My colleague Sally Gearhart quipped after our quake that "Mother Earth was just shaking some of the concrete out of her hair."

Standing outside at 19th Avenue and Holloway, milling around with other dazed survivors, I was prohibited by security from going back into the building. My students eventually got out and forgave me for abandoning them. I think. No one knew the extent of the damage until someone heard on the radio that the upper deck of the Bay Bridge had collapsed onto the lower deck, crushing commuters at the height of rush hour.

In short order, the Marina District erupted into flame and the third game of the long-awaited SF Giants versus Oakland As World Series shook to a halt. Power went out and five million residents of the Bay Area were left to their own devices. Radio has long been the best crisis communication medium, especially in the days before cell phones, and it rose to the occasion that day, as it did a decade later in New York on September 11.

Motherhood In A Time of Crisis

As if this weren't enough, I had my own crisis to confront. Eight-year-old Casey was at after-school care and I had to pick him up. In my car. There was no helmet law yet in California so I guess I could have popped him on the back of FOGSTER, but someone terrified of lane-splitting was not about to put her own son to the test. In short order, I retrieved FOGSTER from her parking spot at a coffee shop in the Ecumenical House and rode to our home in the Sunset District - near the beach and even closer to the San Francisco Zoo, whose howling

captives kept me awake many a night.

The garage door was locked; the electricity out. I somehow finagled the door open, and breathlessly drove to the after school house where Casey stayed. There they were, half a dozen eight-year-old kids running around the backyard, untouched by the end of the world. What a sweet sight. I learned a few hours later that Lissa had ridden out the earthquake in a San Anselmo tanning bed.

By dark, my little family was safe and accounted for.

"I Realized I Could Die. Then I Made a Peanut Butter Sandwich. Then I Got Stoned."

School resumed the following week. In order to distract us from lingering trauma and make something positive of the experience, I put my class to work doing a crisis communication project on the earthquake. Research on crisis communication was not new. By that time there was a lot of information on the Kennedy assassination, the Reagan shooting, the Challenger explosion and the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. Most studies looked at how news was diffused through both media and interpersonal channels and people's subsequent communication behavior.

I was a research associate in a study of four hundred informants led by Phil Tompkins following the killings at Kent State on May 4, 1970. A modified version of that methodology was a good fit for our earthquake study. Our sampling procedure was intuitive. It was a diverse class of thirty, so I asked each student to interview ten people "like them" to complete the survey. We designed a questionnaire with forty questions: Where were you when you heard about the quake? How did you hear? What were the most credible sources? What was your first thought? Who did you try to contact first? How many times did you tell your earthquake story? What sort of psychological effects like stress did you experience?

Students were quickly trained in field interview techniques and within two weeks we had 384 completed questionnaires from people age eight to ninety-one, with an average age of twenty-seven. Our sample roughly reflected the diversity of the Bay Area, with 63 percent identifying as Caucasian, 16 percent Asian, 9 percent African American, 8 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent Other. In 1992, I presented the study with Todd Coltman and Sue Collins at the Western States Communication Association Conference as "The Day the Walls

Breathed": Crisis Communication and the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake."

Our participants yielded a goldmine of quantitative and qualitative responses.

> "*I laughed at first. Then I got scared. Then I assumed the earthquake position.*" (Male, age 21)
> "*I was finishing a cappuccino and thought 'Wow. What a great cap.*" (Female, age 20)
> "*I stopped the car and got out to see if it was a flat. Everyone else was doing the same thing.*" (Female, age 42)
> "*I thought I was going to die.*" (Female, age 14)
> "*I initially thought I had too much Diet Coke for lunch.*" (Female, age 30)
> "*I moved beneath a doorway while holding my beer.*" (Male, age 21)
> "*I felt extended violent shaking while working with dangerous live viruses and hazardous chemicals and flame. I turned off the gas and joined co-workers under the door*. (Male, age 27)
> "*I jumped up and grabbed my son and tried to run, but the floors would not let me.*" (Female, age 39)
> "*I grabbed an elderly lady standing near me and ushered her outside to watch the sidewalks buckle-up.*" (Female, age 37)
> "*I realized I could die, but I just sat there. Then I made a peanut butter sandwich. Then I got stoned.* (Female age 20)

In the twelve hours following the quake, 55 percent of our respondents cited radio as their most trusted medium. Lesson to be learned here: battery or crank-powered radio should always be nearby in a home or office. In the three days following, with power restored, television caught up with 69 percent. Swapping earthquake stories was a major interpersonal activity in the following weeks.

Risk, Trauma, and Still Livin' Your Best Life

There is no question that engaging students in the busyness of survey activity took the edge off the adrenalin after the quake. But after Mother Earth shook the concrete out of her hair, I never rode FOGSTER to

work again.

Eventually, my interest in cars waned as they became more unfathomably computer engineered. I shifted to no-fuss-no-fun vehicles like a Rabbit and a Subaru. I sold FOGSTER when I moved to New York in 1995, where I didn't have a car for years. My interest in boys waned, too, as it does about the time they lose interest in you.

Through it all, I loved Elvis. Through dumb mail-in luck, T and I scored front row tickets to a 1974 performance in Cleveland. We even delayed a move to Boston to attend. Elvis was on the decline and a caricature of himself. It didn't matter to me. He was still the King. My best teenage friend Martha, next to me in the 1956 newspaper picture, married an ENT doctor and moved to Maine. Dr. John was called to treat Elvis in one of his last performances, unsuccessfully trying to persuade him to seek treatment for what by then was a deadly addiction. Martha disguised herself in a medical gown and got to meet Elvis. He gave her a powder blue silk scarf that she gave to me. I still remember the moment in 1977 in Palo Alto when a friend told me Elvis was dead, closing for good the boys, cars, and Elvis chapter of my life.

Elvis from the front row, 1974

Chapter 10

Big Trouble in Little Baghdad

View of Beginning of "Little Baghdad" from Faculty Club

By 1990 I was a regular sound-bite contributor for local television. My more experienced colleague John Burks, *Rolling Stone's* first managing editor, told me I was "and the girl says" - his way of noting that stations were being pressured to diversify their white male talking heads. That was okay with me. Having any voice was better than none. I learned over a few years to deliver a sound-bite and not a lecture that got cut to thirty seconds anyway. I figured out that news editors especially like analogies and alliteration. Like: "Bill Clinton's bad behavior is like a bear who has been caught with his hand in the honey pot." I know that sounds stupid, but it's a sound-bite home run.

In January 1991 PBS NewsHour anchor Jim Lehrer came to the San Francisco State campus for a story on the George H. W. Bush Persian Gulf War. I was called to meet with him and a few other faculty at the University Faculty Club. We gathered at a table with a floor-to-ceiling window view of the campus commons. One colleague dominated the conversation in the apparent belief that more is more, as in the chance to be quoted. (He wasn't.) Lehrer remarked he was surprised at the lack of anti-war activism. I suggested he turn his head to look out on the Quad, where students were building shacks out of plywood and any other salvage they could get their hands on. It was the start of "Little Baghdad," a month-long saga of protest, conflict, hope, despair, and a severely rattled university administration.

Political Theory Turns Active

My fall teaching schedule included a popular class on political communication. We would start with historical context, including Aristotle's *Rhetoric* about the fundamentals of persuasive political speaking, then move to election and social movement communication in the context of the media. Every two-hour class began with a lively open discussion of current politics in relation to whatever concepts we were exploring.

The fall 1990 semester took place during the run-up to "Operation Desert Storm." Aggressive rhetoric on both sides began in August 1990 and military action occurred with American and "coalition" soldiers removing Iraqi troops from Kuwait from January 17 to February 28, 1991. It was a war supported by most of the American public. Gallup reported in December 1990: 54 percent in favor; 40 percent opposed. Ten years later Gallup reported that approval was even higher: 63 percent to 31 percent. It is still regarded as one of America's more socially acceptable wars.

Life on the ground with my students told a different story. During fall 1990, there was widespread dissent about the impending war. Yes, it was famously liberal San Francisco, but in the five-month run-up to the war millions protested worldwide. One early large protest march that many students joined mid-November had more than ten thousand participants. Back in class the next week, students who attended were puzzled that they weren't the lead on the evening news or above the fold in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

A 18 San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★ BAY ARE

BY ROD LAMKEY JR./SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Campus Protest

San Francisco State University President Robert Corrigan was jostled by students yesterday as they protested the arrests Friday of two students by campus police during a demonstration over program and teacher cutbacks. There were no arrests and no reports of injuries.

"Little Baghdad" student leader Crystal (left) taking a pass at President Corrigan's arm

Rod Lamkey Jr./San Francisco Chronicle, page A18

I had to explain my "Page A18 Theory of Protest Coverage." More often than not, you can find protest coverage around page A18 of the *San Francisco Chronicle* - unless the action is huge or there's no other news that day. Take, for instance, this jostling of SFSU President Robert Corrigan during the "Little Baghdad" protest.

Please Take a Seat

Over many years, teaching literally thousands of students about political communication, I have been perpetually amazed at how little - with rare exception - US students have been taught about culture, geography, media literacy, and the history of their own country, let alone the world. International students are almost always better informed. This applies to graduate and undergraduate students on both coasts regardless of raw intelligence.

It also applies to basic statistics, too, the kind you need to read the sports pages or election results. Almost no semester went by when I didn't have to explain different kinds of "averages" - central tendency—mean, median, mode; sampling procedures, and other fundamentals just so we could understand the polls. I usually tucked it in during a lecture when it became clear most students didn't have a clue if something involved data. And these were smart students, largely products of the US education system.

In the fall 1990 months leading up to the first Iraq War, almost no one could find Iraq on a map, let alone tell me where writing, mathematics, and irrigation were first used. It was called Mesopotamia, the world's first known civilization, dating from 3100 B.C. Now known now as Iraq. Who is Saddam Hussein? Who armed Iraq? How was "Iraq" created in the first place? Who drew the map of the Middle East and when? What is Iraq's literacy rate? Poverty rate? Population? Status of women? Religion(s)?

On another level, what about the military vocabulary that started popping up, like friendly fire, surgical strikes, collateral damage, mopping up operations, smart bombs, target-rich environment, softening up, attrition? What percentage of the US budget is spent on defense/war? In 1990 it was about 50 percent of discretionary income. Why?

The vocabulary for media analysis was even longer, beginning with the Greeks. What sources should you trust? What are the foundations of credibility, thanks to Aristotle? *Ethos*: character,

competence, and goodwill toward the audience. If media consumers asked these questions of sources, and *only* these question, we would all be a lot smarter and safer. More recently, especially since WWII, there has been a steady introduction of useful concepts for media analysis: agenda-setting, priming, gatekeeping, spin, loaded language, mis/disinformation, both sides-ism, card-stacking, gaslighting, false equivalency, face-value framing, illusion of alternatives/no alternatives, framing, inoculation, horse-race coverage, asymmetrical influence, dog whistle politics. Okay—enough. But trust me that these and many other concepts were not invented in 2020. They have been around for a long time, in some cases thousands of years, used mostly in war propaganda with few people being aware or paying attention.

And while you are sitting, what are the most common forms of misrepresentation? What is the difference between a simple *tactic,* like lying about a fact, such as General William Westmoreland's routine lying about enemy body counts during the Viet Nam War, and a complex *strategy* that includes a series of multiple contradictory messages at different levels? Does it matter where an item is positioned in a newscast or newspaper? Above the fold? Below the fold? Page A18? Of course it matters, and it mattered before Roger Ailes and Mark Zuckerberg. "If it bleeds it leads," a note of brilliance introduced in the 1890s by William Randolph Hearst, applies more than ever especially to local news.

Then there is the power of a single word choice. Is a political activist a *terrorist*, a *protestor*, or a *patriot*? When columnist Mike Royko labeled the exceptionally deep-thinking political leader Jerry Brown "Governor Moonbeam" in 1976, this "intractable sobriquet" dealt a damaging if not mortal blow to Brown's presidential chances. Multiple attempts by Royko to take it back with a strong and persistent counternarrative had little or no effect. It was thus one of the smartest visionary political leaders of the twentieth century was sidelined by a tongue-in-check nickname at a time when nasty nicknames were the exception and not the rule.

The Rhetorical Rollercoaster to War

In our 1990 current events discussions, our class began to notice that one day the *San Francisco Chronicle* headline would sound like "war," mobilizing anti-war activists, and the next day the headline sounded like "peace," taking the wind out of those sails.

This seemed too frequent a pattern to be coincidence, so with graduate student Adam Colby I collected all 167 *San Francisco Chronicle* headlines from August 2, 1990, to January 15, 1991. We plotted them out and asked a group of subjects to categorize headlines as "Bad: Sounds like War"; "Mixed: War or Peace": "Good News: Sounds like Peace"; and "No News re War." It was remarkable how frequently war/peace headlines appeared on adjacent days. Here are three of more than twenty examples we identified:

San Francisco Chronicle

U.N. Issues Ultimatum to Iraq

San Francisco Chronicle

Big Raises For State

Bush Offers to Talk With Iraq

11/30 U.N. Issues Ultimatum to Iraq

12/01 Bush Offers to Talk with Iraq

San Francisco Chronicle

Ex-Keating Tax Man's Accusation

Baker Sees 'Excellent Chance' That Iraq Will Pull Out of Kuwait

San Francisco Chronicle

Planes Collide on Detroit Runway

Cheney Says War Is Surest Way To Free Kuwait

12/03 Baker Sees "Excellent Chance" That Iraq Will Pull out of Kuwait

12/04 Cheney Says War Is Surest Way To Free Kuwait

San Francisco Chronicle

U.S.-Iraqi Talks Fail in Geneva

President Calls Response From Iraq a 'Total Rebuff'

San Francisco Chronicle

Wilson's Budget Is Severe

New Tries for Gulf Peace

U.N. Chief Reportedly Has Plan for Saddam

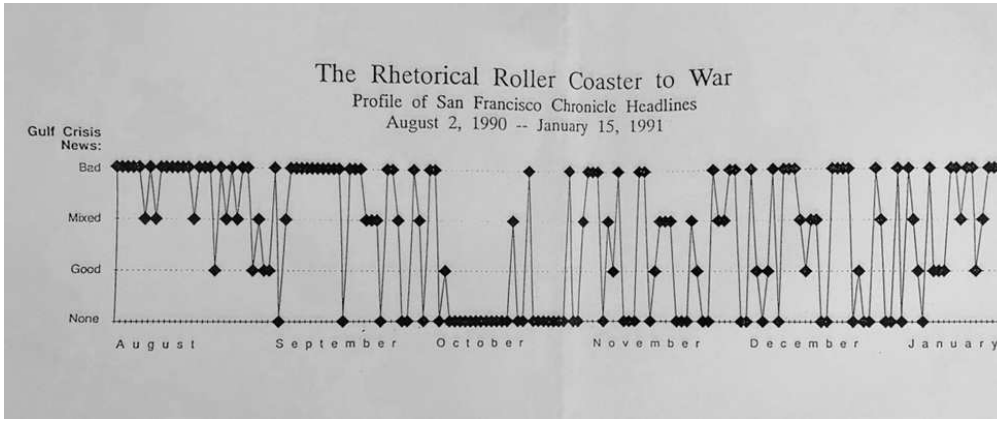
1/10 U.S. Iraqi Talks Fail in Geneva

1/11 New Tries for Gulf Peace

We weren't the only people who noticed this. *The Nation* editorialized on December 3, 1990, that the point of this "roller coaster ride plotted by President Bush" where "radical military escalations are followed by reassurances of peace" was "to create so much confusion that rational public response is impossible."

This pattern is consistent with techniques that vary as widely as Zen koans, double binds, and Milton Erickson's famed "confusion technique" in hypnotherapy. Keeping people confused and off-balance renders them both unable to act and vulnerable to the next clear message. Of equal interest were the weeks before the November election when the Gulf War headlines fell off of the front page entirely.

My favorite result from the rollercoaster research is a timeline we made of the war/peace messages:



Notice the anomalous flat line of "no news" through October into early November. Would it surprise you to learn that the impending war fell out of the news in the five weeks leading up to the November 6 election?

While we did not have direct evidence that the confusion technique was being used strategically by the government to immobilize dissent, it is certainly probable that techniques known by therapists and Zen teachers are also known and deployed by government communication strategists.

Perils of Faculty Advising

Most of the students in the political communication class were there for the usual reasons - it fit their schedule and they heard it was good. A smaller group of students began to pursue activism seriously and joined with others across the campus to form a student organization "SFSU

Against the Iraq War." To qualify for official status and get some funding they needed to register with student activities, and to do that they needed a faculty advisor. I gladly accepted. Why not?

It wasn't the most considered move I ever made. Keeping them out of jail was not on my mind, though it became more my role. I was joined in advising the student group with Myron "Mike" Lunine, an SFSU professor who had been Dean of the Honors and Experimental College at Kent State, where I taught Women's Studies during my graduate years. He was very active in the events of May 4, 1970 as a Faculty Marshall and is recognized at every commemoration more than fifty years later. It was clear to the SFSU administration that Mike and I both had experience in activism and a commitment to conflict resolution.

Before the end of the fall 1990 semester, students had begun building their protest village with a cemetery for potential war dead. This is me, taken by a student on December 11, a month before the start of the war.

Carol Wilder at Iraq "Graveyard"

Once the Gulf War bombing began on January 17, 1991, students went into full construction mode and the administration was hands-off for longer than I expected. After a few weeks a dozen ramshackle structures of various sizes and functions dotted the campus commons, some leaning precariously and most covered with striking revolutionary art. The students called it "Little Baghdad."

Little Baghdad
January 1991

On Tuesday February 19, 1991, a month after Operation Desert Storm began, SFSU students erected and a shack and a mock oil well in front of the Student Union to protest the war. The following day, Department of Public Safety Chief Kim Wible and Vice President for Student Affairs Raymond Dye asked the students to move. They declined. The following Tuesday, the Fire Marshal ordered the University to demolish the growing "Little Baghdad" within ten days. On March 6, President Corrigan visited Little Baghdad and told students to be out by Sunday.

Friday March 8th the situation escalated. Students agreed to leave Little Baghdad if it was replaced by a permanent student structure. A tractor approached the site. At 6:18 pm a dozen campus security officers appear in riot gear. Officers set up an arrest station in front of vans intended to transport arrested students to jail. There were several dozen students and four or five children in the shanties. Chief Kim Wible ordered her officers to back off and wait for reinforcements. I stood

alone in front of the tractor with a 1991 giant Motorola cell phone, lent to me by a security professional friend. I heard Wible asked later, "Who was that woman with the cell phone?"

At 6:37 pm I was joined by Mike Lunine and VP for External Affairs Brian Murphy, and we agreed to begin negotiations the following morning. We proposed three premises for Saturday's discussion: the police leave the area, the participants seek alternatives to the shanties, and that protesters dismantle the shanties if a compromise was not reached. Murphy reminded everyone that the issue had to be resolved by Sunday, then left to get administrative approval.

Students constructed barricades around the shanties and agreed to meet the next day.

Little Baghdad Barricades

Mike Lunine Meets with Students

Wilder in Negotiation

2 San Francisco Chronicle ☆☆☆☆ BAY ARE

BY JERRY TELFER/THE CHRONICLE

Shantytown Protest

Students and faculty members at San Francisco State University built a shantytown — which they named Baghdad U.S.A. — on campus to protest the gulf war, and they want it to remain as a symbol of their objection to university cuts in class offerings and health and library services. University officials brought in two bulldozers last night to remove the structures, which have been declared a fire hazard, but about 200 people gathered to stop the demolition.

Jerry Tefler/*San Francisco Chronicle March 9, 1991*

Occupation actions have a life cycle that can last for days or months. Most follow a similar arc. A group of core participants begin the actions, and if initial external communication is effective in the early days they attract other believers, sympathizers and curiosity seekers. Internal conversations focus on structure and leadership issues. Enthusiasm grows. At some point—typically after several weeks—core organizers begin to get tired and internal dissent emerges along with external pressure. Leadership models are often a vexing issue. Jo Freeman wrote a classic essay in the 1970s on the myth of the "leaderless group," arguing that if structure is not built-in, it will emerge organically and be very hard to counter.

If demands to authorities are met it is likely to be at this middle period. If no agreements are reached the occupation begins to move down the food chain, attracting opportunists, marginal characters, and often drugs. If the occupation does not disband of its own accord, police suppression is the most likely end game. This is roughly the arc of occupations at Columbia University in 1968 and Occupy Wall Street in 2011.

Conversations and Conflict

Ecumenical House was a popular coffee shop across 19th Avenue from

the University, with a "Cloud Room" upstairs for meetings. But there was nothing heavenly about the week of endless meetings that included three mediators and about ten students. President Corrigan joined the first day, saying:

> *Believe it or not, many of us in the administration agree with your opposition to the war, but I don't want to mislead you. In the external world we have good relationships with the trustees, the governor and the mayor, but there is great concern out there. I am getting a lot of phone calls, most of them calling to dismantle. You have to know that if we are not able to achieve a solution, it is only a matter of time. I do have contingency plans, but I do not want to have anything other than a peaceful solution.*

Crystal, Caitlin, Bongumuzi "Bongi," and Bryce were the most vocal students. All emphasized "overwhelming support" from other students and presented four demands:

1. *We want to talk about a permanent new structure for long term.*
2. *More reasonably and immediately to construct a free speech platform for Republicans as well.*
3. *A good faith agreement on legal and academic amnesty.*
4. *A memorial to the people of Iraq designed by the Muslim Student Association.*

Corrigan replied: "We are not negotiating. We are having a conversation." He gave a thoughtful and nuanced response: "Amnesty should not confuse academic sanction with civil sanctions. I cannot make a blanket statement. I can say that there will not be academic sanctions sought in the spirit of a healing, and more community are things I'd be willing to work on."

From there the conversation branched out to include issues related to racism, sexism, and homophobia. Corrigan stayed on message: memorial, yes; peace garden, yes; academic sanctions, no. But the shanties had to come down. Backtracking and distrust percolated among the students:

We feel betrayed, lied to.
The administration should stand by the students.
Students need to empower themselves.
We are concerned with the crimes of this government.
You are saying nothing will happen until the shanties come down.
The shanties stay. It is a matter of resistance.

President Corrigan agreed to build a peace garden if the shanties are removed and not to call SFPD or campus police. He agreed to three of four demands. Vice-President for Student Affairs Raymond Dye noted "time is running short." Students add demands including childcare.

Mike, the most experienced among us given his role at Kent State, said, "We committed to trusting a process. Looking back is not helpful." I was already getting anxious when we were joined by another faculty member, co-founder of the Black Studies Department Chinosole, who immediately changed the subject to her intimidation by force from campus police. She was a heavy presence who hijacked the conversation. I did not know at the time that Chinosole, born Patricia Thornton, adopted her name during the civil war in Angola. It means "That to which we aspire but is difficult to achieve—freedom."

Soon a student said "Carol Wilder doesn't represent the students. Chinosole does!" I made the point that as a mediator I didn't "represent" anyone. Mike tried to keep the conversation on process. The meetings became increasingly challenging. On March 17, students circulated a list of forty-five demands. A sample: 1. Permanent open mic. . . 5. Establishment of Middle Eastern Studies Program. . . 15. Resignation of SFSU President Robert Corrigan. . . 21. Swahili taught in Ethnic Studies Department. . . 25. Elimination of ROTC Program. . . 29. Free Muni Fast Passes for Students. . . 37. Increase the Temperature of the Swimming Pool. . . 40. Greenhouses on Lawn Area. .

The conversations were intense but moderately respectful. Conditions at "Little Baghdad" were deteriorating. Corrigan's representative Brian Murphy reported, "We are told there is extreme concern about very serious violence. Thirteen firebombs have been found. The ante just went up. You need to know that concern is real." On Saturday, March 16, "the walls of Baghdad came tumbling down without fanfare as residents, faculty and administrators pried them apart with hammers and crowbars." (*Golden Gater* 3/19)

Remains of Little Baghdad
March 16, 1991

Random protest continued throughout the semester and two of the Baghdad core group were arrested later in an unrelated incident. Their arrest came as no surprise, given their preference for being as provocative as possible in meetings. Mike was quoted in *S.F. Weekly* saying that they were "more clinically interesting than political significant." *S.F. Weekly* noted that "Wilder was more blunt. 'They're not radical,' she said. 'They're psychotic.'"

With Mike's wise counsel, with a thoughtful president, within an accommodating city, Little Baghdad was an activist achievement. It was born for a good cause, lived a vibrant life, and despite a sleepless month, nothing was hurt beyond feelings. Mike was my inspiration. He said to me "You are the postulate; I'm the corollary." I still don't know precisely what that means, but to me we were partners in peace. Having both come from a campus where students were killed in cold blood for peaceful protest, we agreed Little Baghdad was an infinitely more satisfying outcome.

Acts of Kindness

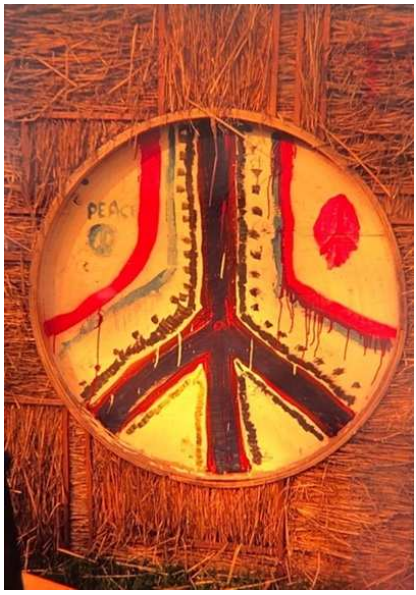
As I was reviewing my journal notes of the Baghdad meetings, an envelope stuck in the middle fell out. To my surprise, it included a note from Dean Nancy and both a note and letter from President Corrigan. Nancy's note read, in part, "Your recent work to find a solution to the bulldozers on campus is just one more example of your skill and caring. Thank you." Corrigan wrote "Many, many thanks for your continued concern and thoughtful advice. You and Mike continue to influence my thinking in a very positive way. All of us are in your debt." In a formal communication, he wrote:

> *The situation, which could have resulted in arrest and perhaps violence, was resolved through your help and that of other faculty, staff and administrators who were keenly interested in the resolution of this problem in a peaceful manner. I can't tell you how pleased I have been at this demonstration of our university's capacity for collegiality, reasoned persuasion, and mutual respect. . . We exemplified the very best of the life of an educational institution in dealing with what was a very delicate situation.*

I include these sentiments here not to pat myself on the back, but to acknowledge the respect and good will shown by both of these top university leaders in the time each took to express their appreciation, a rare gesture in my long career.

One of the shanties of Little Baghdad was designated the "Angela Davis Library." In an early evening in the first weeks when all was good at Baghdad, the setting sun cast rays that made the street art of the shanties glow. Standing among others absorbing the scene I found

myself next to the actual Angela Davis, then on the faculty. We smiled and nodded in silence at the powerful expression of creative peace and protest.



Little Baghdad 1991

Chapter 11

Breakfast with Ferlinghetti

At dusk on November 2, 1965, Norman Morrison drove with his eleven-month-old daughter Emily from Baltimore to Washington D.C. He walked to within forty feet of the Pentagon window of US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Morrison poured a gallon glass jug of kerosene over himself and lit a match on his shoe. Flames shot twelve feet in the air. At some point in the last seconds, Morrison either tossed Emily aside or she was grabbed by a passerby. Accounts vary.

Morrison's self-immolation was done as a protest to the growing US war in Viet Nam. In a letter to his wife Anne just before he left for the Pentagon, Morrison wrote:

> *Dearest Anne, Please don't condemn me. . .For weeks, even months, I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning with no warning I was shown, as clearly as I was shown that Friday night in August 1955 that you would be my wife. . .at least I shall not plan to go without my child, as Abraham did. Know that I love thee but must act for the children in the Priest's village.*
>
> *Norman*

In Genesis:22 as well as in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other religious stories, Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. In the end he did not and Isaac was spared. Morrison was distraught about the American violence to children in Viet Nam. He would not live to know that American troops increased three-fold, casualties ten-fold, and Southeast Asian casualties in the millions before the war ended a decade after his death. Did Morrison have thoughts of including Emily in his own sacrifice? Whatever the answer, she survived, smelling like kerosene but otherwise unscathed.

When Brian Willson heard of Morrison's act, his first thought was "the country is full of kooks." Then he saw the man's name: Norman Morrison.

> *"My god! Norman Morrison was a model young man who graduated from Chautauqua Central School seven years before me. He was the first Eagle Scout I had known, the polite boy who had dated our neighbor's daughter. . .What had gotten into him?.*

. . Three and a half years later, on a late spring day in 1969 in Can Tho City, South Viet Nam, I would finally begin to understand Norman's mysterious action."

By the time Brian Willson came to visit my class in 1985, he was a long committed anti-war activist.

Brian Comes to SF State

In 1985, two of the Vietnam veterans who visited our San Francisco State "Vietnam: Rhetoric and Realities" class as guest speakers were Brian and Charlie Liteky. After carrying twenty wounded men to safety during a savage battle in Viet Nam, Charlie received the Medal of Honor. The year after our class visit, he would renounce the coveted award. Both he and Brian were imposing figures, at ease with themselves. Tall and, in Brian's case, broad-shouldered, with both a modest demeanor and an imposing aura of confidence. Following their visit, my colleague Hank agreed that Brian would be a great addition to our team for the following year, made up of the two of us and a Viet Nam vet. Brian agreed.

Brian and I also became friends through the tightly knit Bay Area veterans community. It was the time when I was coaching anti-war vets to speak in high schools for the Veterans Speakers Alliance and meeting with others involved with the veteran's rights organization Swords to Plowshares, where I long served on the board of directors. Many of the activist vets spoke in our class. Some of us had little kids and spent family weekends together at Santa Cruz campgrounds. We playfully called them "weekends from hell," but in hindsight they were warm and unforgettable.

One weekend, we travelled to Ronald Reagan's ranch in Santa Barbara to protest US involvement in Central America, slept on the beach, and made the long winding walk to his back gate, holding banners, signs, and crosses. It was all very spiritual until we got to the gate and a minor skirmish ensued that ended with one of marchers wheeling around hitting a security guard with a cross. The cross wielder wasn't even a believer, as far as I knew, but that was the money shot that made it to the Sunday *Chronicle/Examiner.* Brian was not involved in the Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara capers. His bar for action was higher

than that, but it was part of the whole cloth of veteran activism mostly by Viet Nam vets against the US military involvement in Central America.

All American Boy

Like Norman Morrison, Brian Willson was a model young man, a boy scout, a star basketball and baseball player recruited for a farm team by the St. Louis Cardinals straight out of high school. He chose college instead—until his higher education was interrupted by military service.

Brian and his "best friend" Lucky, c. 1952

It is hard to imagine a less likely activist, let alone terrorist, than S. Brian Willson, raised as a "commie-hating baseball-loving Baptist" in tiny Ashville, New York. When his parents died, Willson found sixty family bibles—most bought from Jerry Falwell—scattered around their house.

In 1966, Brian was drafted and served in the US Airforce until 1970, commissioned as a second lieutenant assigned to the Inspector General's Office in D.C. In 1968, he received orders to train for Air Force security in Viet Nam. The first time he went on a "damage assessment" mission in South Viet Nam to a destroyed village he was horrified.

> *I walked up to one woman who was lying on the ground and whose eyes were open. I thought she was alive, but when I put my hands around her face I saw that her eyelids had been burned off. She was dead. I started crying. I thought this is not what I'm here for and this is not what my country is here for. But a little later I*

realized this was what my country was here for. We were involved in genocide.

His complaints to commanding officers in Viet Nam fell on deaf ears, but as an intelligence officer he became close enough to the Vietnamese he met, whom he later surmised were Viet Cong, to warn them of impending attacks. He read everything he could find about Vietnamese culture. He met librarian Anh Ly at Can Tho University, who invited him to her home for dinner. After the meal and some lively political conversation, Anh Ly and one of her brothers wanted to sing accompanied by their traditional instruments. The songs included a special "Ode to Norman Morrison." Willson writes, "I began to tremble." The family then showed him a postage stamp issued by the North Vietnamese government that featured the face of Norman Morrison. "At that moment, Norman became my hero."

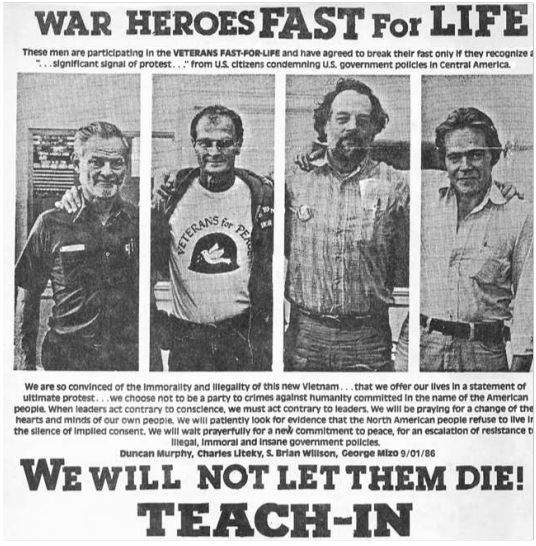
In 1970, Brian was honorably discharged from the Air Force with the rank of Captain.The experience transformed him into a daring,

lifelong political activist for peace and against, as he would note as frequently as possible, US imperialism, hegemony, genocide, and exceptionalism. He was well prepared for the mission.

After Viet Nam, Brian earned an MA in criminology and law degree from American University and was admitted to the D.C. bar. At various times he was a dairy farmer with 250 cows, and a legislative aide to Massachusetts State Senator Jack Packman where he saw a guard beating an inmate that flashed him back to Viet Nam. He then became a prison reform advocate. For four years Brian was director of a National Moratorium on Prison Construction, visiting over forty states for the cause. Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis issued a commendation to Willson for his special service to Viet Nam veterans. He married and divorced and became a full-time veteran anti-war activist.

After serving two years as director of a Vietnam Veteran's Outreach Center in Massachusetts, Willson made his first trip to Nicaragua in January and February 1986 where he had his "second great awakening" when he toured the country. During his stay, the US-backed Contras attacked a local farm cooperative, killing eleven civilians. He said "all the years since Viet Nam, I was in conflict between what I had learned viscerally and the desire to be middle class and respectable. Nicaragua clarified the conflict real fast." He never looked back from his commitment to peace to his youthful need for respectability.

Veterans Fast for Life



Brian's first high-profile activism was as a member of the four "Veterans Fast for Life," on the US Capitol steps from September 1 through October 17, 1986. Joining veterans Duncan Murphy, Charles Liteky, and George Miso, he took part in the water-only fast against US policies in Central America. Three of them travelled to Nicaragua and "intimately felt the compassion and deep spiritual beauty of the Nicaraguan people—and the pain, the brutality, and the indiscriminate terrorism inflicted upon them by the US–sponsored Contras . . . Fasting is our prayer, it is hope without assurances. We will offer our lives when the time comes, if we feel we can bring about an end to the war."

The action attracted wide media attention and the support of a variety of political figures, including John Kerry. Thirteen senators and seventy-five members of Congress issued a supportive statement; another senator called the veterans "terrorists." Brian had made it to the FBI terrorist list, where he remains.

Concord Naval Weapons Station

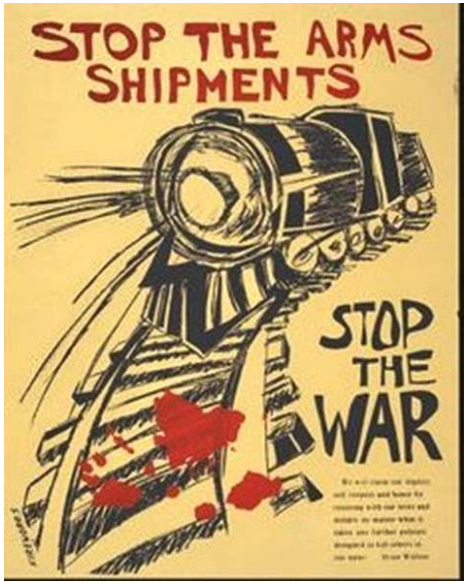
Brian at Concord Naval Weapons Station, June 1987

Just 30 miles northeast of San Francisco lay Concord Naval Weapons Station, a 13,000-acre underground armaments storage depot built during WWII. In 1944, thousands of tons these munitions exploded in the Port Chicago Disaster, killing 320 sailors and civilians working on

the docks. In the following decades, the depot would send weapons to Korea, Viet Nam, Central America, and the Gulf War.

After team-teaching the Viet Nam class with Hank and me in the spring 1987 semester, Brian spent the summer in daily vigils at Concord as part of Nuremberg Actions, an anti-war group that would routinely block the tracks in protest against the shipment of arms to contra groups in Central America. Brian wrote:

> *For those participating in the Nuremberg actions on the tracks at Concord, California, one truth seems clear: Once the train carrying the munitions moves past our human blockade, if it does, other human beings in other parts of the world will be killed and maimed. We are not worth more. They are not worth less. . .This fast, this period of cleansing and deep discernment, will assist us in preparing for this journey of liberation.*



The protests began on June 1 and continued daily for three months. On September 1, Willson and three other veterans were standing on the tracks to begin a forty-day fast. Base officials had been notified both by August 21 letter and by telephone and radio on September 1 that there would be protesters on the tracks. Instead of stopping for the protesters to be arrested, as had been the practice for

three months, the train accelerated from its 5 mph speed limit to 15 mph. Brian began to raise himself to get off the tracks but it was too late.

He was run over by the train and dragged like a rag doll 25 feet. His right foot was severed, his left leg twisted and dangling, his ear nearly removed, and his brain exposed by a missing piece of skull. Witness Michael Kroll wrote:

> *I saw him go under and I screamed and turned , and his body flailed around under the clattering train, which did not stop. . .The train continued to roll over him, flinging his body from side to side, and he rolled over and over and back and forth as the heavy steel wheels bounced him like a pinball and I knew he was dead. (Kroll 22)*

But he was not dead. His medically trained partner Holley staunched the worst bleeding. When Brian awoke in the hospital four days later, he had no memory of what had happened. Three days after the event, 10,000 protesters, including Joan Baez, Jesse Jackson and Daniel Ellsberg, gathered at Concord, ripping up the tracks. Jackson said "Brian has spilled his blood to stimulate us to a higher level of consciousness and resistance."

Public Opinion

The Concord incident kept the letters section of San Francisco's two major papers - the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* - buzzing for weeks. On September 3, the morning *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial "Naval Weapons Station Horror" closes with "It is very sad to conclude that he has not advanced the cause of peace or of world brotherhood a single millimeter." The next day's *San Francisco Examiner* evening paper editorial "Grief on the Concord Tracks" argues that obviously "the primary responsibility was Willson's," concluding "The sadness of Concord reminds us of the pains of excess." Bay Area residents wrote letters to the editor:

* *Under Nixon we had Kent State. Under Reagan we have Concord.*

* *Anywhere else in a society a person sitting in front of a moving train would be considered either a suicidal maniac or a fool. In this case, I suppose Willson will be made a martyr to the cause of peace by his peers.*

* *Let us hope that his courage will inspire men and women of conscience to strive for the cause in which he believed.*

* *No one should blame the engineer of the train that ran over Brian Willson. . .All responsibility for the event lies with an administration which directly interferes with the internal affairs of another country.*

In an official response to another concerned citizen's letter, US State Department Public Affairs Officer Joe B. Johnson stated that "according to men standing nearby, Mr. Willson 'lunged at the train'."

United States Information Service

Embassy of the United States of America
42 Elgin Road
Dublin 4, Ireland

Telephone: 688 777

USIS

September 10, 1987

Mrs. Sylvia Wigham
46 Glenbrook Park
Rathfarnham
Dublin 14

Dear Mrs. Wigham:

The Ambassador asked me to reply to your letter regarding the injury of a peace protester in Concord, California.

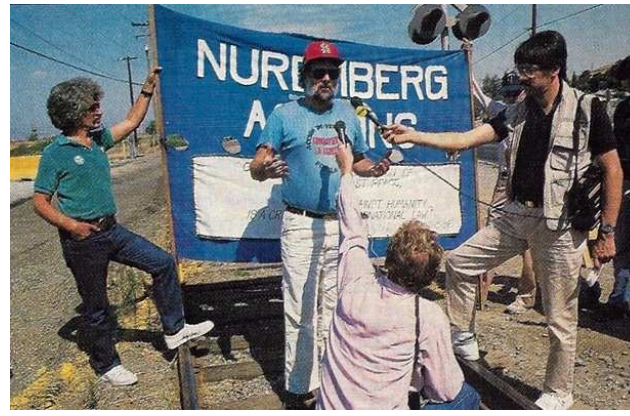
This was a terrible incident. However, it seems to have been accidental on the part of the authorities, since according to the man standing nearby, Mr. Willson "lunged for the train" carrying munitions. I certainly do not believe you can attribute this incident to U.S. Government policy.

Peaceful protest has effected many fundamental changes in U.S. policy, including the Vietnam War, and remains a vital part of our tradition.

Sincerely,

Joe B. Johnson
Public Affairs Officer

Willson himself later told a reporter "some critics have suggested I have a death wish. It's just the opposite. I have a *life* wish—for myself, for everybody." The track-side vigil continued for months.



Brian at Concord for Vigil after Recovery

Multiple lawsuits and investigations followed, first and most ironically when the train crew sued Willson for "post-traumatic stress" for getting himself run over, despite documents supporting the allegation that they had been ordered not to stop. The strong evidence of intent and negligence notwithstanding, base officials and train crew were issued mild reprimands. The US government offered Willson a million-dollar settlement that spoke loudly as a de facto acknowledgement of responsibility.

From Activist to Rock Star

I was not at the tracks on September 1, but was devastated by the event and closely followed Brian's recovery. While the legal entanglements dragged on for several years, the Institute for the Practice of Nonviolence was founded by Brian and Holley. When the government finally made a civil settlement in Brian's case, he asked if I would be co-executor for the trust that was established. The combination of my respectable title and the fact that our relationship had always been collegial and platonic may have prompted him to consider me. In any case, the role as well as our close friendship led to regular communication in the many years since. At one point when he was between relationships, he stayed with Casey and me in our San Francisco apartment on Lake Street for several months. Meanwhile, he had seriously outgrown our team teaching given his international reach.

Brian was in demand around the world, visiting as an honored guest in dozens of cities and countries including Ireland, Cuba, Korea, Japan, Israel and Palestinian Territories, Iraq, and most countries in Central and South America. It is not enough to note that Brian is brilliant: his stamina was astonishing. After losing his legs and part of his brain, he was even more committed and prolific.

When Brian emerged from a month in the hospital after the train attack, he entered the strange world of political celebrity that follows extensive media coverage of tragedy. In 1989, a benefit was held for Brian that featured Jerry Garcia, Pete Sears, Wavy Gravy, Mimi Farina, Ed Asner, and Jackson Browne. I was speechless meeting Browne, one of my heroes. Brian was just Brian—unfazed by the attention and focused on his message: "When the train moves past the blockade, other human beings in other parts of the world will be killed

and maimed. We are not worth more. They are not worth less." That was and has always been his mantra.

Brian has published thousands of pages of articles and blog posts and three books including *Blood on the Tracks* (2011) and *My Country Is the World* (2012), in which he moved me by writing an inscription that read, "Thank you for being one of my mentors. Stay on the path." On the contrary. Brian was one of my few political mentors, in addition to Hank, who stayed true to their values and beliefs no matter what the risk or ridicule.

Several years ago, Brian moved to Nicaragua, and has found a new home there. In 2019, on the fortieth anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, President Daniel Ortega - again in power - publicly thanked Brian Willson as a "hero of peace."

Concord Naval Weapons Station was closed after 2000, with uncertain plans for its future.

Breakfast with Ferlinghetti

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into

If you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then

just when everything is fine
because even in heaven

they don't sing
all the time

-A Coney Island of the Mind

I was accustomed to Brian's iconic stature among progressive public figures like Ed Asner, Kris Kristofferson, Noam Chomsky, Roxanne Dunbar, Martin Sheen, Jane Fonda, and Country Joe MacDonald. He had one more surprise in store for me when he invited me to breakfast in North Beach on a Monday morning, though I'm not sure it occurred to him to give me a heads up about who would be joining us. I didn't give it any thought either until I arrived at *Café Trieste* to sit down for breakfast with Brian, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, his partner, and Robert Bly.

Coney Island of the Mind was my bible freshman year of college. I have no idea why, except for its transgressive form and worldly references for a seventeen-year-old girl who had barely been outside of Ohio. Poet Robert Bly had just done one of his famous mythopoetic men's movement conferences the previous weekend that many veterans had attended. I had never felt at once so far over my head and so comfortably included as we slowly ate and chatted. I honestly don't remember a word that was said. All I can call up are feelings of wonder and the ecstasy of listening to the ease of conversation among the masters.

Revisiting Norman Morrison

Brian's life has been heroic, but my feelings about Norman Morrison are mixed at best. Brian faced destiny with a calculation that left him maimed but more committed than ever to spread his message of nonviolence. Norman Morrison took his youngest child Emily as a potential sacrifice as in Abraham and Isaac, and it is not at all clear that he was not prepared to take her life with his. His widow writes that "he was not insane that day" but the line he wrote in the letter he mailed her - "at least I shall not plan to go without my child as Abraham did" - sounds pretty crazy to me.

If Norman Morrison did make a difference, it may have been most surprisingly on Robert McNamara, outside whose window he burned himself alive. McNamara wrote:

> *I reacted to the horror of his action by bottling up my emotions and avoided talking about them with anyone—even my family. I knew Marg and our three children shared many of Morrison's feelings about the war, as did the wives and children of several of my cabinet colleagues. And I believed I understood and shared some of his thoughts. There was much Marg and the children and I should have talked about, yet at moments like this I often turn inward instead—it is a grave weakness.*

McNamara's belated apologia *In Retrospect* (1995) about the Viet Nam war is no excuse, but more of a tragedy because it fell on deaf ears as an attempt to curtail the US war machine as it went forward in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. McNamara's son Craig published his own memoir in *Because Our Fathers Lied* (2022), praising him as a father but openly criticizing his warmongering.

Brian Willson never varied in his message or his commitment, despite half a life with physical challenges that would have stopped most of us before we could get out of bed. With all his shyness and rough edges, I have never known him to be less than kind and loving and deep in his beliefs and stalwart in his actions. A life lived fully in service of his mantra:

We are not worth more; they are not worth less.

Brian in Viet Nam 2016
Photo: Mike Hastie

Chapter 12

The Town that Time Forgot

Point Arena Lighthouse

California on the eve of contact with Europeans was an exuberant clamor of Native American economies, languages, tribes and individuals. Indigenous people had worshiped, loved, traded and fought in California for at least 12,000 years – some believe since time immemorial. – Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide*

The Pomo are indigenous people in Northern California, primarily in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. "Pomo" is used only by outsiders. Pomo people were originally called "Bokeya," their tribelet name, later to be referred to as the "Manchester Band of Pomo." There were once seven Pomo dialects. About six thousand years ago some of the early Pomo migrated along the Russian River to the coast. Their traditional life changed sharply beginning with the 16th century arrival of Spanish, then Russian, Mexican, other European and American missionaries, colonists, gold miners, and opportunists.

Some colonization and trading were successful – like furs with the Russians, who were "amicable" and "still held in high regard" according to anthropologist Dorothea Theodoratus. She writes that "radical changes occurred after California came under control of the Mexican Republic in 1822. Massacres and slave raids were extended to the Mendocino coast in the 1840s, which together with disease and warfare nearly decimated the Indian population." The impact of the American invasion starting in 1849 was even worse, with many murdered native people and land grabs. The Pomo met the fate of most

indigenous people in the foreign invasions, being moved to remote areas, used as slave labor to build missions, and succumbing to diseases like malaria and smallpox.

In 1850 the US Cavalry slaughtered Pomo men, women and children at Clear Lake, an assault known as the Bloody Island Massacre. Writes Madley:

> *The US Army poured in a destructive fire indiscriminately against men, women and children. They fell. . . as grass before the sweep of the scythe. Little or no resistance was encountered and the work of butchery was of short duration. The shrieks of the slaughtered victims died away, the roar of the muskets ceased.*

About eight hundred Pomo found a watery grave at Clear Lake, one of the most lethal Native American massacres in American history.

In the 1860s the towns of Point Arena and Manchester were established, and "the Bokeya found themselves aliens in their own land." With the approval of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bokeya became officially known as the "Manchester Band of Pomo Indians."

Another Victim of American Mis-Education

I had no idea of this long history when I lived in Point Arena. It certainly helps explain the attitude of some Pomo who currently live in the Manchester Rancheria, known locally as "The Rez," adjacent to the small city of Point Arena. It also helps explain why in addition to a hair raising 123 mile drive from San Francisco on coastal Highway 1, Point Arena's currently population of less than five hundred hasn't changed for decades, and is equivalent to the population of the adjacent Rancheria.

Point Arena
Main Street
Looking South

Point Arena is one of the smallest incorporated cities in California and will likely never become a second-home haven. There is no short-cut to driving there or to living there, either. The "Rez" is under US Federal control and pretty much off limits, including to the county sheriff. It was known to be an unfriendly and even dangerous place for outsiders.

My only daunting Pomo encounter was one morning the day after Christmas sitting for breakfast at the counter of the Arena Cove Café. The Café was painted institutional mint green burnished with a film of fish fry oil and cigarette smoke. The bar looked out onto a magnificent cove. Fish and chips went for $3.25 and beer was a dollar. It was a cozy local joint designed, said a friend, "to keep the middle class out." She added "I'd rather be desperate and lonely in this wonderful place than desperate and lonely anywhere else."

So the morning after Christmas in 1982 having breakfast at the bar was a unexpected time to feel a hammerlock around my neck and the words "I'm going to kill you." I caught a glance of Jimmy Carter, a handsome blue-eyed Pomo with a bad reputation who had no doubt been up all night. Everyone froze. The next few minutes are a blur, but I distracted him long enough to slip under his arm and spin behind the counter.

And as suddenly as he grabbed me he was gone.

I heard later he had mistaken me for my daughter, who had spurned his advances on a day of skipping school a few weeks earlier. She passed his open door at a local motel where he was performing a ritual with candles, twigs and shells. He invited her in and she turned him down. Not long afterward Jimmy Carter went to prison, I think for murder. I learned the cowboy lesson "never drink with your back to the door." Or eat: it was 10 a.m.

A Double-Wide on Eureka Hill Road

In the late 1970s we had already spent many magical weekends in Point Arena. When my life turned upside down in 1981 and I had a sabbatical leave coming up, I picked up my kids, bailed out of our trendy Eichler house in perfect Palo Alto, and moved to Point Arena to a trailer in the middle of the redwoods, four miles up Eureka Hill Road from town.

My children would want me to mention that it was not just any trailer – they always added it was a *double-wide*. The land included a

two-bedroom shack where Lissa and her friends hung out, a one room cottage where I wrote a terrible novel, and a tiny pot patch if you walked far enough uphill from the cabin.

Many days I would watch the state CAMP (Campaign to Abolish Marijuana Planting) helicopters buzzing the nearby pot crops. The General Store phoned heads up to growers when CAMP showed up in town. I never grew pot and didn't much smoke it, but it was the base economy of "The Emerald Triangle," the sobriquet for that stretch of North Coast. Legalization in later decades corporatized the growing as it does anything it touches which, along with the arrival of Mexican and Eastern European cartels, drove many local growers out of business. Marijuana also created a foothold for Hmong immigrants, an agricultural hill tribe from Viet Nam known for their opium growing skills and support of the United States during the war.

Our place on Eureka Hill was about an acre, close to the river, near the Brady bubble house we had visited when life was more simple. In mid-year the place was sold under my nose in foreclosure for $40,000 to a wily local codger. I had no idea it was even for sale, though a year living on the shady side of the ridge made me relieved I hadn't known enough to put in a bid. Living in a stand of redwoods on the dark side of the hill is like living in a refrigerator. Always damp during the day and so quiet in the middle of the night you can hear the redwood leaves land soft as a whisper on the ground.

We had no television reception but a brand new VCR. We wore out tapes of *Trading Places, The Last Unicorn*, and *Children of the Corn*. I especially liked *Christine*, or *"Christine the Crazy Car"* as we called it with its George Thorogood "Bad to the Bone" track. Lissa liked playing *Corn* to scare Casey, then age three. Casey's favorite was *The Neverending Story: "FALCOR!!!"* It wasn't haute cinema for a media person. I compensated by writing most days in the little shack, a cozy redwood room with a wood stove that would be many writer's dream. It turned out I have no imagination – none - for writing fiction. At the time my mind had to work around the clock to manage reality.

Getting in the Game

I joined a women's softball team coached by Raven B. Earlygrow. Yes, that was his name. Not his real one. I met some great women. My favorite was Rebecca who was involved in the Arena Theater and had a dog boarding and training business. She was tall and strong and

probably the best player on the team. I was arguably the worst, at least Raven thought so when he assigned me to right field. I was one of the oldest members of the team at 39, which I think had something to do with his dismissive attitude toward me. There was no point in noting to him that I had played first base and pitcher in high school, and coached high school teams when I was in college. Obviously my mojo was tarnished.

Point Arena Softball 1983

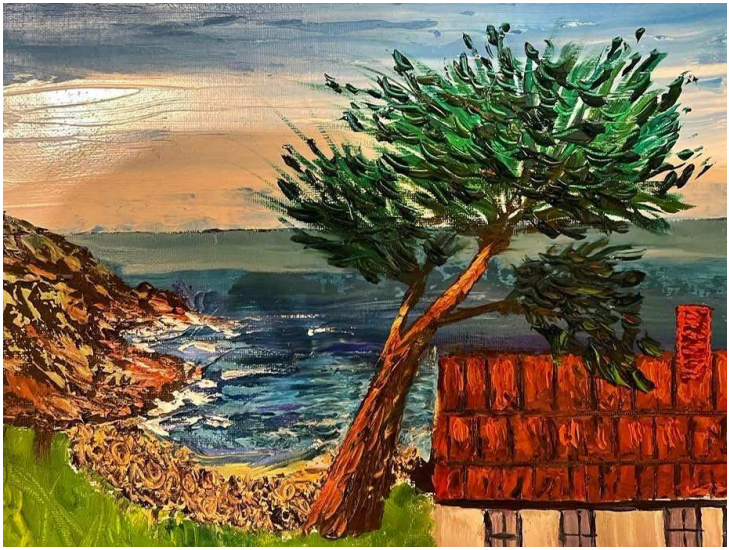
I didn't know my teammates very well, but it turned out I wasn't the only one who thought Raven was an asshole. A meeting was called. I offered my house. It was a real girl power conversation that ended with a consensus to fire him. Rebecca took over and not only was I promoted to catcher, but I tagged out a runner at home plate that won a game for

us. I learned that you don't have to be good at something to give it a try. I thought of this years later when my son's freshman dean at Yale lectured the incoming students that having worked so hard to get where they were, they should use the next few years learning the value of trying some things they might not be good at. A great lesson for perfectionists and over-achievers.

The theater became the heart of our life in Point Arena. I did everything from taking tickets to producing a wacky variety series called the "Tuesday Night Lectures," that featured local talent reading their writing, baffling performance art, music from awesome to awful, and polished monologues like Lee Jenkins "Fitness for Feminists."

I tried out my first and only stand-up comedy routine, good enough not to be embarrassing but not a career-changer either. A high point was Hank McGuckin's performance of *Jacque Brel*, that I had first heard long ago and far away in Palo Alto. We always packed the house. When the choice was the Whale Bar or the Arena Theater, usually the theater won out. Or at least was the first stop in the evening.

A Quarter for Your Life



Every day we could, Casey and I would drive down the hill to town and walk the mile from town to the wharf to beachcomb. The road from Highway 1 to the wharf was dusty, narrow and winding. I would give Casey a quarter every time he heard a car coming before I did. After a little practice he made a tidy sum on our walks. Sometimes I gave him a few seconds of extra time, but winning kept him interested long enough to learn the lesson. The sheer cliffs, beach and pier at the Cove create a majestic envelope of nature, small enough to feel protected and grand enough to inspire awe.

Casey entered kindergarten at Point Arena Elementary School with a wonderful teacher. My kindergarten experience at Oxford Elementary School in Cleveland had been a nightmare. My teacher Miss Malina tied me up and put me on the "thinking" bench, the 50s answer to Ritalin. As a volunteer in Casey's class I had the rare opportunity to redo that awful year of my life. There was a well-regarded alternative school called "Acorn," based on the progressive educational philosophy of prolific local resident Herb Kohl who coined the term "open classroom." In a rare conservative moment, being so new to the community I fell back to the traditional option.

Casey was a reserved kid until he got on stage at the age of four or five, when some other genie came out of the bottle. I videotaped a *Kindergarten Alphabet* that included all the kids and forced me to learn the hot new Portapack video technology. It was the first moviemaking device that could be handled by one person and created an independent film revolution. Every kid in the class picked a letter of the alphabet – not your most original idea, but parents were amazed and delighted when they saw the result because home video was so new. Emboldened by this modest success, for First Grade I got even more ambitious.

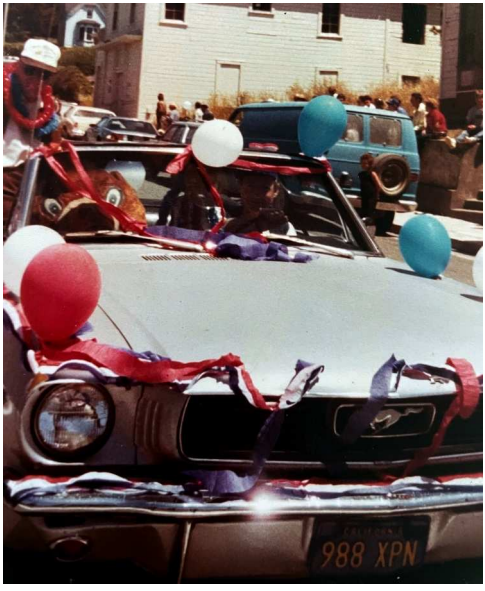
First Grade was taught by young Mrs. Donna Stornetta. The Stornettas raised cattle and owned half the land around town. In the 2000s they donated 1600 pristine coastal public acres it to create the Stornetta Lands National Public Monument. In 1985 Mrs. Stornetta was a new teacher and scared to death when I proposed producing a "First Grade Circus" at The Arena Theatre. She was charmed enough by the idea to take a chance, and we went to work. Every student had an act – clown, acrobat, animal trainer, hula hooper, and – with a little nepotism - ringmaster. We practiced for months. I dug up an old 33

rpm military marching band record from my majorette days. Casey was ringmaster, and the show went off before a full house of delighted families without a hitch except for Nelson, a usually boisterous kid who had a paralyzing attack of stage fright.

Ringmaster Casey
1985

Small Town with a Big Heart

The high point of the year in Point Arena was the Fourth of July Parade and Acorn School Picnic that followed up on the ridge. My '66 Mustang convertible got to lead with the Grand Marshal each year.



Every monster pick-up and police and fire vehicle within twenty miles honked and hollered down Main Street. Ponies, chickens, dogs and human animals in festive get-ups marched down the hill to the tunes of musicians in various ensembles and keys.

Dae Brady and Seabiscuit
(Courtesy of Dae Brady)

Dae Brady accompanied her pony Seabiscuit pulling a pirate ship with her brother Pan, led by mom Nancy. Everyone eventually went up to the ridge for a raucous community picnic put on by Acorn School.

Fourth of July evening always ended with a much loved fireworks display down at the wharf.

The Curse of the Irish

I was in pretty bad shape when we moved to Point Arena after all the traumatic things that happened in Palo Alto. In retrospect, it is clear I had periods of serious post-partum depression after each of my pregnancies, but I had never heard the term. After all, weren't new mothers supposed to be filled with delight and euphoria after giving birth? It was obvious to Hippocrates in 460 BC that some women suffered difficult conditions post-childbirth - "puerperal fever … agitation, delirium and attacks of mania" - but post-partum depression didn't make it into the official DSM until 1994. That was a long time after it could have helped me.

My therapist years later said she thought I was filled with unresolved PTSD from a run of bad luck and life from about 1979 to 1982. PTSD may not sound like great news to you, but it was an enormous relief to me, making me more like a crazy normal person than like a crazy crazy person. She surprised me by remembering that I had disclosed to her I had a kind but emotionally distant father and a mother not built to be a 1950s housewife. Forty years after a devastating bi-polar diagnosis, I felt unspeakable relief hearing a description of my experience that fit the experience itself. Lifting the stigma of the old label freed me to face more directly feelings I had been storing deep in my psyche. Having the jagged pieces from long ago begin to fall into place was comforting closure, like finishing the edge of a puzzle.

"You can't get drunk on 3.2 beer," was a frequent refrain during my years at Miami University. Yes you can. Still, drinking never got me in real trouble and seemed in line with my friends. My apologies to those I have offended with my loose lips. I was so hopped up on diet pills prescribed by the family doctor from the time I was about fourteen (Dexamyl, widely abused by physicians and discontinued in 1982), a little alcohol helped me come down. This was a beloved doc who passionately kissed me at the end of several office visits. He later lost his license, under unclear circumstances. Not because of me. I wasn't

surprised.

As a kid I didn't think much about alcohol. All of the adults around me drank like good WASPs of the 1950s. It wasn't until I spent a semester at home when I dropped out of college that I realized my mother had a problem. Until then I just thought that she was sometimes loud, fawning to her friends and mean to my father. When she had a lunchtime garden or bridge club, we knew what to expect when she came home. My youngest brother saw the worst of it after I left home. My father didn't want to leave my little brother. My parents stayed married for 40 years until my mother died of lung cancer at 66. Those Alpine cigarette coupons she saved from her two-pack-a-day habit weren't worth much then.

Palo Alto was a drinking-fueled social scene in the mid-70s. One by one friends stopped drinking, in the way they had stopped smoking a decade earlier. My friend Janet was among the sudden abstainers and she started attending AA, about which I knew nothing. I don't remember a specific precipitating event, but I was curious. Janet encouraged me to check it out and she promised that I could be a mouse in the back and would absolutely not have to speak.

Early one evening I trepidly walked over to the Palo Alto Community Center on Middlefield Road and sat in the back. And guess what? The leader of the meeting fucking called on me. It kept me away for years. I never questioned the help AA has given to millions. But don't call on me at my first meeting. And don't tell me I am in denial because I sometimes like to drink. Denial is nature's greatest gift. I was always what is snidely called a "functional" drinker, but obviously my choice to drink at all has had consequences. I have had many alcohol-free years, just not all in a row until advancing age came calling.

Point Arena was even more alcohol-fueled with endless weed, but I moved there to clear my head not further muddle it. I started attending AA meetings as part of the new life I wanted to build for my kids and myself. One of the North Coast's cardinal virtues is that it is a judgment-free zone compared to Palo Alto. It's the difference between "you have to be Nobel Prize or billionaire material" and "just don't be an asshole."

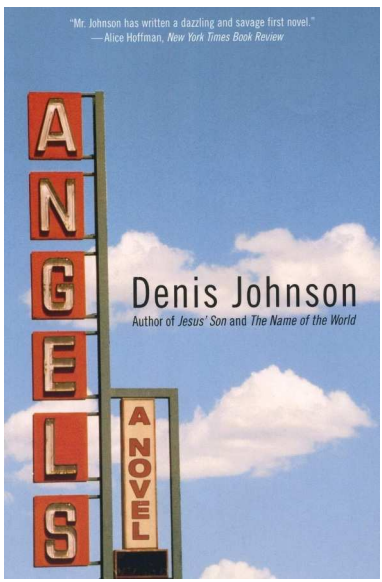
The meetings were held upstairs from an insurance office in Gualala (pronounced, just so you know, wuh-LA-la), about twelve miles south of Point Arena on the coast. Gualala is the first town north

after you cross the sign for the Mendocino County line. The sign usually provokes a spontaneous cheer in the car after the long and winding Jenner Grade part of Highway 1.

I was the only woman among the eight regulars in the meeting. It was a comfortable ragtag coastal crew, a welcome change from the conceits of the city. The conversations were bare bones and often funny and moving. I remember "Steve" asked one week: "What is this feeling I keep having of impending doom?" Someone cracked "Impending doom," typical of the sardonic tone in the room.

As we went around the circle with the AA "share" of the week one of the guys had a lot more wattage than the others, even sitting still. "Dennis" always arrived in a plaid flannel shirt and sweat-stained leather outback hat, thick brown curls circling his neck. He told his stories in a calm self-assured manner like no one I had ever heard. Spellbinding tales from a drug addled dangerous past. The room fell quiet. I couldn't take my eyes off him. Every week for a year I made it to the meeting partly because I needed to but just as much to hear Dennis.

This being AA, we didn't know much about each other and didn't talk about the meetings outside or hang out together. The last meeting I could join before I had to be back to the city on the nights we met, Dennis gave me a book, *Angels*, and wrote in it "This girl reminds me of you. Love, Denis"



It was the first time I knew he was a writer, it was his first book, and the first time I knew how to properly spell his name. It took a few years before I could bring myself to read *Angels* and more than two decades before Denis Johnson won the National Book Award for *Tree of Smoke*. In 2002 his play *Shoppers* opened in New York. By this time Denis was widely celebrated as well as famously reclusive. We missed a planned meeting due to one of my New York pointless last minute work interruptions. Denis died before I got to thank him for being such a sweet spot in my life. The last words of his in my journal are his notes on writing:

> *Write naked. That means to write what you would never say.*
> *Write in blood. As if ink is so precious you can't waste it.*
> *Write in exile. As if you are never going to get home again, and you have to call back every detail.*

Jamie Mays is the girl in *Angels.* She leaves her cheating husband and takes her two little kids on a Greyhound bus across the country, where she meets ex-con Bill Houston, who is executed 209 pages later. Along the way she has a nervous breakdown but works her way out of a mental hospital with a shred of hope. I had to wonder which part of this girl reminded Denis of me. Or maybe was even part of me given the time between our meetings and its publication a year later. Jamie's story is harrowing, one of the lost and marginal characters Johnson wrote so raw. Like Jamie, I was divorced with two kids and had an edgy boyfriend, but fortunately the resemblance stopped there.

Almost.

Eat It

I was never into bad boys, but I had arrived in Point Arena a blank slate, psychologically beaten down and vulnerable. Men were the last thing on my mind. Please! My exterior bravado has served me well, but is easily breached. The tall skinny tattoo covered guy who worked at the gas station was flirtatious with everyone and had an air of someone who lived nowhere and everywhere. We ran into each other a few times at the Whale Bar, and before I knew it he was at my back screen door

on Eureka Hill Road with his Harley Panhead and a backpack of poetry and clothes asking if he could crash for a night.

It was a night that lasted nearly five years.

Mike was a Viet Nam combat vet – "First Air Cav" – in the Central Highlands in 1967. This appealed to my deepening interest in the war. Like me, he was from Ohio. Mike returned from Viet Nam straight to work in the GM Lordstown plant when the union was on a brawl-filled strike and the country was in turmoil. On the outside, Mike was languid and easygoing. My kids loved his accepting manner and wry humor. He was affectionate and kind to them. I was taken by his poetry and the fact that this rough looking biker was brilliant in his own way. Inventive, too. Mike would often say "What the fuckover?" It struck me as odd. It was months before I realized "over" was a radio call signal from his combat days, as in "What the Fuck, over??" He told me endless stories about Viet Nam, for which I had a bottomless curiosity stemming from my 1970 experience at Kent. 1967 was one of the worst years to be in combat and the adrenalin had etched every detail on Mike's brain. He was ready to talk and I was eager to listen.

But his poetry was angry and should have given me more of a head's up about his potential for rage. Maybe I was still trapped in *Angels*. Here's what I mean.

> "*Eat It*"
> *More than ten years have come to pass*
> *Still my mind keeps drifting back to those kidnapped boys in rubber sacks*
> *Murdered in a foreign land and then shipped back*
> *To a mother who wasted affection*
> *Ten thousand dollars and a goddamn flag*
> *For a teenage corpse in a rubber bag*
> *A battlefield death on a foreign shore*
> *To save a freedom that lives no more*
> *I'd like to tell you just how I feel*
> *About your phony patriots*
> *And the cheapness of your deal*
> *You can't bring that boy back to life*
> *You stabbed him in the back with your best steak knife*
> *Then imprisoned his brother for refusing to fight*

How do you sleep at night?
I'll tell you what I'd like to do
I'd like to steal your eyes and piss on you
Just knowing you are alive makes me write this two-bit rhyme
Just knowing you are alive tells me there is a major crime
Not yet brought to justice
If there's a god, and I hope there is
Maybe some day he'll bust you for raping his kid

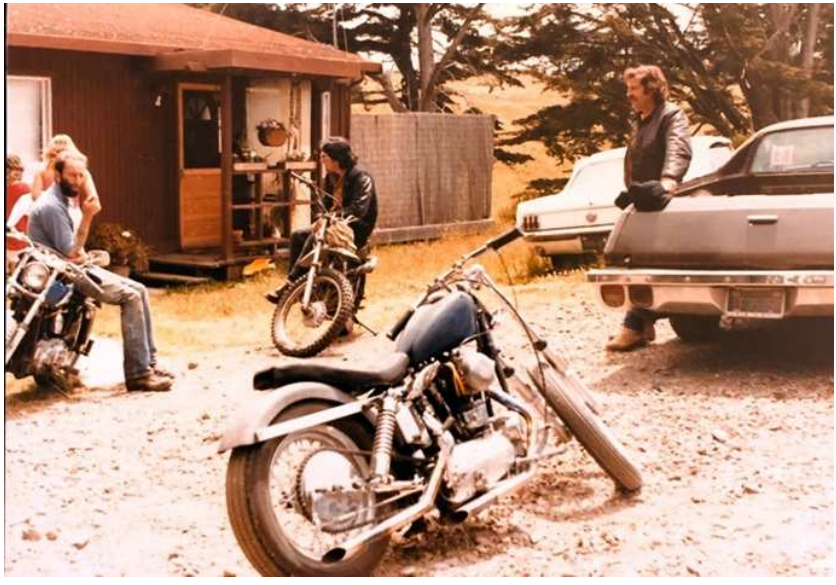
450 Main Street

After a year on Eureka Hill Road I bought a little house on a cul de sac in town from a local sheriff. It was close to everything but hidden from view. Mike's friends liked to hang out and my love of cars and bikes was in full bloom. Lissa's and Casey's friends liked to come around, too. Casey's best friends, identical twins Ben and Conor, lived next door. We had the unexpected luxury of a hot tub that came with the house – our first and last. A treat every day of the year.

Casey in the Main Street Hot Tub

It was a rolling scene from beauty and the beast. The beauties on prom night:

Beauties: Chris, Elissa, Meredith and Jennifer



And the beasts of 450 Main Street: Mike, Duke, and George

I thought it was the cutest house in the world, perched on a cliff high above Windy Hollow Road, a vein of the San Andreas fault. The beauties and the beasts depicted the bandwidth of our lives. I had a soft spot for the El Camino until it sprung an oil leak that wouldn't quit. The white '66 Mustang was my pet car and usually in the garage except when it came out to drive the Grand Marshal. In the many years since my brother talked me out of my '65 GT I mourned the loss until one day my friend Carlos was moving and offered me his '66 for a song. I think at the time of those pictures I had bought a Camaro for commuting, but had yet to graduate to my own Harley.

Motorhead Heaven

Mike had a small income from his VA disability, but it wasn't much and he still needed something to do. I have had some strange jobs in my life, like checking feet at Cumberland Pool in Cleveland (age 14), selling LIFE magazine door to door in a college summer (18), and slinging hash at a campus restaurant that fired me when I complained that they were shorting us on our 85 cents an hour pay. But I had never owned an auto body shop until I met Mike in Point Arena.

We rented a rickety garage off Main Street and opened for business, which consisted mostly of Mike's friends turning it into a clubhouse. Casey was a great apprentice. He loved hanging around with the big guys and exploring the rugged acres in back of the shop.

Apprentice Casey at The Body Shop 1983 - Photo: Paul Miller

The closest place for auto parts was about an hour up Highway 1 in Ft. Bragg, and Mike seemed to need a lot of parts. When he really got into working on a car he would focus for hours. I could never figure out how to encourage that state. It didn't happen as often as his daily drive to Fr. Bragg for parts.

The shop was in a dry gulley just off Main Street across the from the road to the wharf. The rent was cheap. I was involved with my kids and some writing, so I tried to stay out of the way. The scene was more of a Harley tinkering enterprise than an auto body shop. Duke, George, Steve were regulars. It took me a while to realize that Mike liked to talk about working on cars a lot more than he liked working on them. When he did dive into grease monkey mode he was a master. We didn't make any money to speak of, but didn't lose any either, so the social factor and the fact that Mike was occupied was worth the price.

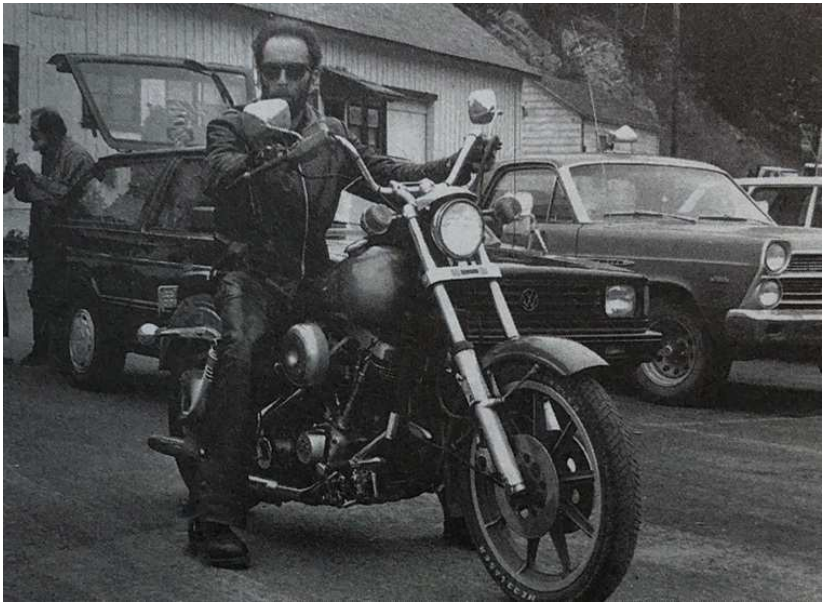
Point Arena didn't have much of a professional class – no doctor, no lawyer, but a whip smart CPA Patty. We became ski buddies, taking the long trip to Lake Tahoe several times. It was the first time I began to feel my age. Patty in her twenties got more attention at any bar than old lady me at about forty. I wasn't used to that, but over the years came to enjoy the increasing invisibility of women after a youth of too much unwanted attention.

Patty did my taxes, and she came in especially handy the year I was audited for The Body Shop. The Body Shop! It was the only time I have been audited. Also the time I was making the least money. IRS questioned the mileage deduction and the fact that I wrote off our satellite dish as a professional expense. When I dug into the bucket of receipts from Mike's trips to Ft. Bragg they more than met the mileage deduction. The satellite dish was a little trickier. I had to ask my SFSU Dean Nancy to write a letter claiming I had to watch television for my job – possibly an untried IRS case for a media and communication professor. Bless her heart for this and countless other acts of kindness – Nancy wrote the letter.

Audit over. A lifetime of guilt-free television ahead.

After about three years The Body Shop was slowing from a crawl to a full stop. Lissa was off on her own and Casey and I were in the city most of the time. Mike was coming unraveled. He did three in-patient tours of the newly created PTSD unit at Menlo Park VA, but it didn't make much of a difference. I was done, so done, with

PTSD in my life. I wouldn't say that the split was amicable, but I was burned out by the morbid dance of the co-dependent. To Mike's credit he was a model citizen around my kids. He was a damaged soul with love and poetry in his heart. Mike affected me deeply as a half-living survivor of terrible carnage, as an amazing mind untouched by formal education, as an American original who paid for the mistakes of his elders. And as someone who knew how to be loved by a Harley when he needed unconditional support.



Mike Photo: Nick King

I kept the house on Main Street when I moved to New York in 1995, not the smartest real estate move. It seemed like a good investment at the time. And it was so hard to let go. I had some model renters – a school secretary and then a gym owner. At the end, on the strong recommendation of a local realtor (along with six months rent in cash) I leased the house to a couple who circled the property with an electric fence to keep their Dobermans in and visitors to the meth lab they built in the basement out. They were arrested, but not before they trashed what they could of the house. The lessons I learned are that my commie self is not made to be a landlord and my greedy self has to know when to say no. Maybe I should have caught on at the six months of cash.

I'm glad the Pomo now have a casino and happy that my alma mater Miami University is now the RedHawks and not the Redskins and that they have a joint program with a Miami tribe in Oklahoma. I hope the Miami student center is no longer called "The Rez." Just as I was blind to the history of the Pomo, I spent six years at a school named for the large Miami native American nation without giving it a second thought. To add to the colonial legacy, the town was named "Oxford, Ohio" as in "Oxford" in England as a seat of learning. No wonder US history is so distorted and erased. I realize I grew up in a generation where the atrocities of slavery and Native American genocide were obscured, but there is no excuse today to deny whatever reparations can be made to atone for the sins of the past. Tragically, the culture wars of the 21st Century US point to more ignorance and exploitation, not less.

Everyone needs a magical place in their mind and in their life. Point Arena has been mine since the day I first arrived. A place of feeling and thinking, breathing the fresh and foggy air, walking the cliffs and beaches, scheming and dreaming. If it didn't exist I would have to invent it. But it does live in all its vividness in my heart, like another child, my real life Brigadoon and secret garden of healing.

Arena Cove at Twilight

Afterword

In 1995 I was Chair and Professor of Communication Studies at San Francisco State. Casey was in his last year at Marin Country Day School, applying for the transition to high school. We lived in an Edwardian condo at Lake Street and 11th Avenue, looking out onto Mountain Lake Park, where Gladys the widowed swan had bonded with a neighbor. When I once tried to shoo her from his door back into the lake, she stood to her full height and squawked at me eye to eye. Terrifying.

Life was good.

Casey on Lake Street

View from kitchen: Mountain Lake Park, Gladys and New Friend

One day I got a letter about a job at The New School for Social Research for Chair and Associate Dean of Media Studies and Film.

Hmmm. Casey's father had moved to Sun Valley Idaho, so visitation was no longer an issue. As a Cleveland girl, New York City had always been a bright shining aspiration.

"If you can make it there. . ."

I replied to the job opening, thinking I might at least get a free trip to New York. The department secretary Donna said later "I knew from that day you would be gone."

I loved San Francisco State, but had also observed twenty years earlier when I started that fifty-ish faculty looked a little worn out. Our union pension gave virtually full salary after thirty years, and nearly everyone hung around at least that long. Faculty rarely left. I was to become one of few who did. One later grace note was from SFSU President Robert Corrigan, who named me the youngest Emeritus Professor at that time for mediating charged student protests.

After three trips to New York for interviews for me and a school search for Casey, an offer was made and accepted. New York City it was, beginning Fall 1995.

Leaving the Best Job Ever

My 25 years at The New School were remarkable in many ways. I definitely got the New York experience: constant challenging work, regular underestimation, a steady stream of bold-face names, a sometimes glamorous night life, real estate heaven and hell – the co-op experience. I joined the National Arts Club and it was the center of my social life. For five years I lived there until my first Fulbright Award sent me to Viet Nam to start a documentary media lab at

Hanoi University.

I lived in the city and bought a little place at the end of the North Fork of Long Island in Greenport, the closest I could get to the feeling of Point Arena. Casey went on to Yale, London School of Economics, and USC Film School, flying high with his own wings. Lissa graduated from The New School and worked in hospitality and media before embarking on a professional counseling career. Both Casey and Lissa have wonderful loving partners and Casey and Sarah gave us grandsons Robin and Walker, for whom these tales are told.

New York may indeed be the greatest city in the world. Or maybe was. And I made it there, if sometimes by the skin of my teeth. But none of my life is more etched in my memory than the twenty years in California that make up the stories in this book.

One outcome of writing this book surprised me as much as the day three years ago I sat surrounded by memories and the images of California caught my eye in living color. I impulsively took a look at real estate in zip code 95468, Point Arena. A little shingled cottage in town looked pretty cute and was within my budget, if barely. I called Sharon, my broker from forty years ago, and asked her to take a look. It checked out as a great location and recent remodel on a dead-end street within view of an African animal preserve. The wildebeests could be seen from the yard, the giraffes and zebras not far away. I couldn't see Russia from my house, but I could see my former Point Arena home from the back fence. We moved fast on the property, and my story ends where it began. My kids and brothers thought I was crazy, but why stop now? Many friends and their children still live in Point Arena and I felt indescribable peace that I had found my spot once again, a rare full circle in the splendid uncertainties of life.

Another Little Spot for My Stuff

Acknowledgements

It was only after I retired after 30 years growing up in Ohio, 20 years in California, 25 in New York, and a year here and there in Boston and Hanoi, that the two decades in California glowed in living color in my imagination. They were by no means the easiest years of my personal life, but the vibrant culture and unforgettable people at work, at home, and at play came back fully imagined.

I had the good fortune to retire in January 2020, just weeks before Covid made the academic life I loved not so lovable anymore. This book was written during that time, and many friends along the way were generously encouraging. In some cases, sadly, it was their children who reviewed and added to my accounts.

Peter Ellenby comes to mind first for sending several wonderful pictures of his late parents John and Gillian. Peter's untimely death at 53 occurred in early August 2022 as I was finishing this book. My thoughts go out for all of the beautiful memories they left us.

Eric McGuckin kindly gave me feedback on the chapter about his father Hank, one of the dearest souls in my California life. Longtime friend S. Brian Willson read and commented on the words about him, as did comrade Keith Mather. They are both heroes to me for the deep sacrifices they made in opposition to the Viet Nam War.

Former colleagues Nancy McDermid, Gerianne Merrigan, Mercilee Jenkins, Michael Krasny and Erica Kohl-Arenas gave a wide variety of help. Friends including Lisa Hallinan, Janet Freeland, Michele Doliveck, Francie Angwin Pearce and Rebecca Golly did what friends do, going easy on any shortcomings. Kate Todd warmly granted permission to use several of her late husband Nick King's brilliant photographs. Photographs from the 1979 conference in honor of Gregory Bateson were taken by diligent graduate assistant for the conference Cynthia Hartley. Another former graduate assistant and my go-to guy in Hanoi, the multi-talented John Coogan, did the cover design and managed the production process.

Eloisa Oropeza and Salvador Martinez contributed their unique personal and scholarly expertise to research on the Manchester Band of Pomo Native Americans, a history too often sorely neglected.

I have not noted chapter and verse of most quotes as conventional academic protocol would suggest, but all material can be

found through Works Cited.

My all-grown-up kids Elissa Miles and Casey Wilder Mott read any chapters I sent them to check if it agreed with their memory. Luckily, it did. Casey made a small suggestion that reframed the book, for which I am grateful.

A shoutout to Claire Potter who recommended Evangeline Riddiford Graham as a free-lance editor. Eva has been a delight to work with, always professional with a gloss of New Zealand charm. I had no patience to go through commercial publishing hoops as I had with my former books.

These are stories for my grandsons Bubba and Walkie: Robin Atkinson Mott and Walker Blackwood Mott. I am ever so happy we have a Blackwood at the end as we did with my third-great grandfather Thomas Blackwood at the beginning.

Carol Wilder
Calverton, New York
December 2022

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A restless Ohio academic moves to Northern California for two remarkable decades, finding success and heartbreak from Big Sur to Mendocino. Time well spent along the way with pathfinders who would transform American culture through politics, philosophy, education and the arts, including Gregory Bateson, Jerry Brown, Daniel Ellsberg, Le Ly Hayslip, Kay Boyle, Sally Gearhart, Kenneth Burke, Heinz Von Foerster, Terence Hallinan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Brian Willson and Denis Johnson, as well as a visionary crew of techno wizards gathered at Menlo Park's iconic Dutch Goose pub where they hatch the personal computer revolution.

Carol Wilder has authored over one hundred papers and publications and two books: Rigor and Imagination: Essays from the Legacy of Gregory Bateson (with John H. Weakland, 1982, National Communication Association Book of the Year), and Crossing the Street in Hanoi: Teaching and Learning About Vietnam (Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2014). She is Professor Emerita at San Francisco State University and The New School for Social Research, where she was chair and dean of Media Studies and Film