GENIUS WITHOUT GENIUS:

The Autobiography of John Franklin

Vol. 5: Retirement, or, Finally Getting Down to Work

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Freedom, and Six Books To Be Completed

April 1996, when I was just one month older than 59½, the age at which I could withdraw IRA money without penalty, was the first time in my life when I could no longer deny that I did not have to worry about money. It was clear I could make it to November 1998, when I would be eligible for Social Security. I could survive until 70½ on the interest from my non-IRA savings, which amounted to around $500,000 — all in the hands of a San Francisco Peninsula firm that made loans to real estate developers. The firm paid about 10% annual interest. After age 70½ I would be required by the IRS to start withdrawing from my IRA savings. That April I was almost happy. The weather was beautiful. The roses I had planted in January were blooming. I enjoyed for the first time in my life the enormous privilege, the blessing, of not having to waste my time working for my inferiors. It was how I was meant to live. Each morning I felt as though a dump truck backed up to my front yard and dumped out pure gold — the pure gold of having all your time at your own disposal. Riches beyond belief. As Charles Lamb wrote:

> "For the first day or two I felt stunned, overwhelmed. I could only apprehend my felicity; I was too confused to taste it sincerely... It seemed to me that I had more time on my hands than I could ever manage. From a poor man, poor in Time, I was suddenly lifted up into a vast revenue; I could see no end of my possessions; I wanted some steward, or judicious bailiff, to manage my estates in Time for me. And here let me caution persons grown old in active business, not lightly, nor without weighing their own resources, to forego their customary employment all at once, for there may be danger in it. I feel it by myself, but I know that my resources are sufficient; and now that those first giddy raptures have subsided, I have a quiet home-feeling of the blessedness of my condition. I am in no hurry. Having all holidays, I am as though I had none. If Time hung heavy upon me, I could walk it away; but I do *not* walk all day long, as I used to do in those old transient holidays, thirty miles a day, to make the most of them. If Time were troublesome, I could read it away, but I do not read in that violent measure, with which, having no Time my own but candlelight Time, I used to weary out my head and eye-sight in by-gone winters. I walk, read, or scribble (as now) just when the fit seizes me. I no longer hunt after pleasure; I let it come to me. I am like the man
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> — that's born, and has his years come to him,
> In some green desert.
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> " 'Years,' you will say; 'what is this superannuated simpleton calculating upon? He has already told us he is past fifty.'
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> "I have indeed lived nominally fifty years, but deduct out of them the hours which I have lived to other people, and not to myself and you will find me still a young fellow. For *that* is the only true Time, which a man can properly call his own, that which he has all to himself; the rest, though in some sense he may be said to live it, is other people's Time, not his. The remnant of my poor days, long or short, is at least multiplied for me threefold. My ten next years, if I stretch so far, will be as long as any preceeding[sic] thirty. 'Tis a fair rule-of-three sum." — Lamb, Charles, "The Superannuated Man", in *Great Essays*, ed. Houston Peterson, Washington Square Press, Inc., N.Y., 1967, p. 126.

But there was the work to be completed: six books — three on math and computer science subjects, a collection of essays, a collection of short stories, and this autobiography. All the books had been begun; one had already been published. When they were all completed, my life's work would be done.

> "I ... asked myself, 'Not only have I still time, but am I going to be able to complete my work?'" — Proust, Marcel, *The Past Recaptured*, tr. Frederick A. Blossom, vol. 7 of *Remembrance of Things Past*, The Modern Library, N.Y., 1932, p. 399.
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> "For instinct dictates the duty to be done and intelligence supplies the excuses for evading it. But in art, excuses count for nothing; good intentions are of no avail; the artist must at every instant heed his instinct; so that art is the most real of all things, the sternest school in life and truly the Last Judgement." — ibid., p. 206.
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> "And I was crushed under the superhumanly wearisome burdens of life which I imposed upon my existence as it ebbed to its agonising close." — ibid., p. 395.
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> "...the idea of death was with me as continuously as the idea of myself." — ibid., pp. 395-396.

On the other hand, I knew, though I hated it, the truth of Proust's observation:

> "Happy years are wasted years; we wait for suffering before setting to work. The idea of suffering as an ineluctable prerequisite has become associated in our minds with the idea of work; we dread each new undertaking because of the suffering we know we must first go through to formulate it in our imagination." — ibid., p. 241.
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> "And when we understand that suffering is the best thing we can encounter in life, we contemplate death without dismay as a sort of emancipation." — ibid., p. 241.

But time is running out, and so I can merely describe briefly the events I consider to be the most important since April 1996. Fortunately, since 2000, many of the details are contained in the almost daily emails I exchanged with Gaby L — , a woman I met through the Classical Music Lovers Exchange in January of that year. But that is getting ahead of the story.

I set to work on my six uncompleted books, which included everal math papers. One day, when I slipped and applied the word "old" to myself during a conversation with Renée, the cute blonde who lived on the corner, I said: "We don't use the 'o' word. We say, 'mature'". I also told her that I wasn't actually *retired*; I was... "active at home".

Norma

One day I came across a house for sale that I wanted to find out more about, even though I knew I couldn't afford it. I called the realtor's number on the sign and found myself talking to a woman named Norma H — . She turned out to be a second-generation pure-bred Communist — she was raised in Chicago, both her parents had been Communists — but she was also the first woman I had ever met who truly loved classical music for its own sake. She was married to a down-at-heel labor lawyer; they had two grown children, neither of whom was particularly suc-

cessful. We would get together occasionally for coffee, or she would call and invite me to look at a mansion with her. She soon became, for me, an extreme example of the kind of looniness that Marxism breeds.

She used to say, "I believe that if drinking milk is good for you, then everybody ought to be forced to drink milk." When I recommended a book that challenged one of her beliefs, she always repled, "I don't need to read more books. I know all I need to know." She said that Stalin was a great leader and that he should not be blamed for the 20- or 30-million deaths he may have caused, since he caused them for the right reason, namely, to improve the lot of the Russian people. She said that the reason why communism failed in Russia was purely a matter of attitude, not because there was anything wrong with communism or socialism in itself. She said that each and every one of us is born with the talent of Einstein *and* Picasso *and* Beethoven *and* any other great person you want to name. The reason all these talents aren't evident is that it is crushed out of us by the class structure.

Yet we became friends for a time, first because she had a robust sense of humor, second because I didn't attempt to seriously argue with her, and third because of her passionate love for classical music, in particular *modern* classical, which I thought remarkable in a woman with no musical training (though, come to think of it, all the women I had known who did have musical training had not the slightest interest in modern classical).

In 2005 she ran for the School Board, one of her campaign promises being to work toward abolishing the public schools. In telling me this, John S., a member of the Board, described her as a "wing nut", the first time I heard the term used. The term apparently was derived from "left-wing extremist nut."

Coffee Shops

I went to coffee shops once or twice a day. Studying alone (as opposed to reading alone) was always difficult for me. I usually drank tea (English Breakfast) rather than coffee and after the start of the 2008 Recession, I brought my own tea bag, since a 16-oz glass of tea cost $1.70, whereas a 16-oz. glass of hot water only cost $0.50 (at Au Cocquelet — it was often $0.75 at other coffee shops).

If I had been a painter, unquestionably I would have done a series of paintings called "Girls Studying in Coffee Shops". At the start of the fall semester, the girl students would sit, with their pile of newly-purchased books and note pads and three-ring binders, trying to settle down to the routine of studying. But it would be: one minute on schoolwork, five minutes looking around, checking out the boys, one minute on schoolwork, five minutes looking around ... I loved to watch the girls bent over their books, legs crossed, pressing down on their pencils as they made notes from their sociology or comp. lit. texts, or, in rare cases, as they worked math problems. Sometimes two or three girls (in Politically Correct Berkeley, I was always supposed to say "young women", never "girls") would sit at a table covered with books and papers, talking animatedly about whatever it is girls talk about when it is not schoolwork. (I was dying to record these conversations. *What do they talk about?*)

I loved to watch Asian girls studying: sometimes you would see two of them, the one a native-born American, speaking rapid, perfect, unaccented American English, the other, as you could tell by her difficulties with the language and her shyness, a recent immigrant, probably from Hong Kong. They would sit at their table, which was covered with books and notepaper. The first would be explaining something from the reading, all the while encouraging the other, instill-

ing confidence in her. The second would sit, blushing a little, trying to take it all in, then set to work. For a while the two of them would be bent over their papers, writing. Then they would start on the next problem. It was a beautiful thing to watch.

And then there were other characters you couldn't help observing: the middle-aged guy in suspenders in Berkeley Espresso who was always talking (and much too loudly) about the stock market to a poor soul who was trapped there having to listen, his shoulders drooping, eyes glazed over, as the torrent of words continued minute after minute. It was abundantly clear that all this talk was no more than an endless repetition of just one anguished statement: "I just bought *x*; tell me I did the right thing, please," except that "tell me I did the right thing" was an interminable analysis, based on a selection of market indicators that were guaranteed to be favorable, showing that he had in fact done the right thing.

When he was alone, he would always seem to be working on diagrams of some sort, often with a ruler. One day, as I was leaving, I managed to catch a glimpse of one of these pages: he was drawing various geometric figures — rectangles, triangles — at various odd angles. He apparently had read some crackpot book to the effect that if you learned to do certain drawings right, you would make money in the market.

And then there were the ones who drove you to distraction and made studying impossible — the ones who cleared their throat every ten seconds or so, completely oblivious to the effect this might have on others. (I couldn't stand it, and had to get up and move to another table as far away as possible.) How did their wives or girlfriends tolerate it? Apparently the women suffered in silence, or the habit would have been stopped. But maybe only at home.

And the ones who ate potato chips without any attempt to muffle the sound. In fact, you got the impression that this too, like the sound of power saws, was a proclamation to the world: "I am alive! Listen to how I eat!" The biting each chip into fragments, the loud-as-possible chewing — you had no choice but to move.

And the ones who sat bent over a book or a large workbook, and read aloud, or talked to themselves about what they were reading in just a loud enough voice that you couldn't concentrate.

And then there were the ones who made sure the whole coffee shop knew how important they were by talking on their cellphones in a voice that could be heard across the entire room — "We had a deal...you tell him I want that delivery by ... I don't care, you tell him to call me if he has a problem with that...", or by talking earnestly and at length to some poor guy who apparently, for sins committed in a previous life, had been condemned to sit and listen to non-stop talkers in this life.

And then there was the "merry fellow, whose laugh is loud and whose voice is strong, and who is ready to echo every jest with obstreperous approbation."[1]

And the paper tearers: middle-aged men (maybe it was always the same man, I am not sure) with white hair who sat at a table with a cup of coffee and a pile of newspapers and carefully tore out articles using a ruler to make sure the tear was straight. The frequency of the tearing was unpredictable. You had a few seconds of silence, just enough to resume your struggle with potential theory and then there was the sound — *fffffft!* — and you looked up and watched him carefully lower another must-be-saved item onto a pile on one side of the table. It was impossible to study with this fool at work. You had to move to another part of the restaurant, which in 2008 became much more difficult at Au Cocquelet, because it no longer allowed patrons who were only drink-

1. Johnson, Samuel, quoted in Miller, Stephen, *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2006, p. 122.

ing tea or coffee and perhaps having a pastry, to sit in the very pleasant back of the restaurant. That was now reserved for diners only. So the only place to retreat to was the little alcove in front of the back room, where there were a few tables above the ramp leading up from the side door.

Until the mid nineties or so, Cody's Books had a coffee shop along the Telegraph Ave. side of the store. Julia Vinograd, the well-known street poet, would hobble among the tables once in a while, offering her latest book for sale. She was crippled in her right foot or leg, and wore a brace, in addition to a thick-soled black shoe. She dragged her left foot and had considerable difficulty getting around. She always seemed to wear the same bulky dress, which to me always looked as though it had been made out of discarded curtains from a Victorian house. She wore a black-and-dark-gold cap with a long tassle hanging down and, in her hair, a band with a buckle on it. Sometimes she wore a button on the cap; one read: "Proud to Be Weird". The story was that she was the daughter of a wealthy or at least affluent aerospace engineer in Southern California who gave her just enough monthly allowance to keep her alive.

I had always wanted to talk to her, so one day I bought one of her books and offered to buy her a cup of coffee if she would let me ask her a few questions. She nodded, then sighed as she lowered her heavy body onto the chair. I told her that I enjoyed some of her poems (and in fact I did think she was one of the most skilled practitioners of her wretched genre, though I didn't tell her that). Then I asked her about public readings, specifically, why the street poets never read any of the established poets at these readings. She replied, without a moment's hesitation, that those poets were already successful, while the street poets weren't, so it wouldn't be fair to spend time reading the established poets. I was appalled. I think I even asked her what the world of classical music would be like if only the music of unknown composers was played, and never the music of Bach and Beethoven and the other masters. I don't think my point made any impression, however.

As you stood in line at the counter of a coffee shop, you could observe some of the latest fashions: a young woman with her sunglasses pushed up on top of her hair, like an off-duty pilot of old. I should mention in passing that bald men, too, had developed an affectation involving eyeglasses: the likes of Bud Greenspan, writer/produceer/director of sports films, and Ben Wattenberg, host of the PBS talk show *Think Tank*, made a point of wearing their glasses high up on their forehead, apparently in the hope that we would think, how busy he is! No time even to take his glasses off and put them in his pocket; no, they must be ready at all times, that is how much reading he does, and that is how incapable the entire optometry profession is of making the kind of bifocals that could meet *his* demanding standards, and thus save him having to wear his glasses like that! Such thoughts, we must assume, were what these men hoped would be aroused in our minds, so that we wouldn't even *see* the bald scalps that the glasses weren't concealing.

Another affectation involving glasses, but not obviously connected with baldness, was that of having a cord securely attached to the earpieces (with little metal clips), and worn around the neck, so that the glasses would be suspended at chest level, ready for instant use. Men were more inclined to indulge in this bit of pretentiousness than women. The aim was the same as with the glasses pushed up on the forehead, namely, to impress you with how incredibly busy and intellectual the wearer was, and perhaps a little absent-minded, too (like a college professor). No time even to take his glasses from a shirt pocket when he needed them, and the optometry profession still had not managed to create the bifocals that would have enabled him to wear his glasses all the time! Such are the burdens that the exceptional few are forced to endure.

Normally, young women put their ever-present water bottles in their back-packs when they entered a coffee shop, since their thirst was about to be quenched temporarily by a capuccino or a

café bianca. But on the streets, their water bottles were held in hand, the guys' too, so that you couldn't help wondering how mankind had made it all the way to the early 21st century without plastic bottles of pure spring water always at the ready. [1] The bottled water fad annoyed me almost as much as the fad of many years among boys and young men of wearing their baseball caps with the visors toward the rear, like the catcher on a baseball team. I kept thinking, "Christ! Isn't anyone playing the outfield any more?"

In Au Cocquelet I kept seeing a slender, middle-aged woman, attractive, her gray hair cut short, sitting at a table always talking to a much younger person, typically Asian. Eventually, in April of 2008, I stopped at her table during one of the rare moments she was alone, and asked if she was a teacher. She said yes, a teacher of English as a Second Language. She worked independently, meeting her students in the coffee shop. I praised her for the great service she was performing. Afterward, I regretted not having told her: "If you *really* want to do some good, you should go into the high schools and teach English as a *First* Language."

And there were characters among the help, too. One young thing, a waitress at Au Cocquelet who worked only when she had completely run out of money, but who nevertheless somehow found a way to make trips to Hawaii, said, when I asked if she was really allowed to give me free refills of breakfast coffee, "That's the beautiful thing about being me. I can do anything I want!"

And there were the Mexican clerks at the front counter at Au Cocquelet. By 2011 it had become clear that the only way I was going to get any classical to listen to while I studied and had my tea, was by giving the clerks $1. There had been a change in the frequency of the local classical station, KDFC, and so it took the Iranian manager several weeks to figure out how to tune into the station at the new frequency. But eventually he figured it out, and after that, but during the week only, not on weekends, one of the clerks could go up the stairs to his office and tell him I was there and could he turn on the classical. I made a big show of placing the folded dollar bill in the tip jar.

Sometimes, when I entered the front room, one of the Mexicans would see me and call out, "Ees playing?", meaning, "Is the classical already playing?", which sometimes happened. It soon became clear, to my amazement, that none of them could tell the difference between classical and jazz. For them, there were only two kinds of music: theirs and everything else.

At other times, when I entered, one of the clerks who apparently had a few dollars in the stock market, would call out instead, "Ees ahp?", meaning, "Is the market up?" I could only shrug and laugh because in the middle of the day I didn't know. When I knew the market had been up the previous day, I would kid him and make him promise to remember me when he became a millionaire.

Not all the coffee shops welcomed solitary scholars, at least not all the time. The Musical Offering, on Bancroft Way, right across the street from the UC campus and half a block below Sather Gate, was a splendid place to study because only the best classical music was played, the store in the rear being the best source in Berkeley for classical music CDs. In the front was a small restaurant that served lunch and dinner. It was very tempting to sit at one of the small tables and have, say, a pot of English Breakfast Tea (or, earlier, Black Currant before they stopped carrying it

1. By the early 2000s, numerous articles had been published stating that bottled water was seldom better than tap water, and sometimes worse, since far fewer restrictions applied to bottled water. (It was legal to sell water from a well next to an abandoned gas station.) In the eighties, after a scare on the Peninsula about wells being polluted by the integrated circuit manufacturing plants, I brought our tap water to a testing lab in Berkeley along with a sample of the Cobb Mountain bottled water we — Kathy and I — routinely bought. Neither sample showed any signs of impurities.

for some reason) and read the history of the world or of mathematics. But Jean, the owner, drew the line at customers like me between 11:30 a.m. and around 1:30 p.m., when the lunch crowd was there. I once offered to pay her for the privilege of occupying a table during those hours. She shook her finger at me and said, "I am not running a study hall!" But in fact she was a sweet lady, and had to be forgiven, since she was only protecting her business interests. She was married to Joseph Spencer, a tall, friendly man about my age who always reminded me a little of Garrison Keillor, the great story teller and creator of Lake Wobegon on the radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*.

I sometimes saw them walking together, he tall, she short; they lived in Albany or El Cerrito, I believe. The Musical Offering was directly across Bancroft from Zellerbach Hall, scene of concerts and dance performances by some of the world's best throughout the year. The restaurant would cater to attendees of these concerts, serving dinner before and then managing to make it known that there was this nice place across the street where attendees could wind down, have a cup of coffee and some good pastry. In the nineties, I once stood in line next to Iona Brown, the great violinist and conductor, she looking very attractive with her long hair but a little exhausted after the concert, but doing her best to smile and shake hands and talk to the admirers who crowded around her.

Joseph was the host of an FM program called *Chapel, Court and Countryside* that featured music of the pre-Baroque. I think it was the longest-running radio program in the Bay Area, possibly in the entire nation, since it was on the air, on various stations — KPFA, KDFC, then KMZT — from the seventies until 2000. He and I had many stimulating conversations about music and the CD business. (He had a degree from UCLA in musicology.) He said that the CD business was barely profitable at all levels, the main reason being the aging and dying off of classical music listeners, since, with the demise of music teaching in the public schools, the young were never exposed to the music. I asked him for his opinion of atonal music, remarking that it was a crying shame that no CDs existed to introduce this music to at least the classical-music-loving public. He didn't disagree, but said that atonal would be merely a footnote to the music of the 20th century.

> Wildboar Records (the name was derived from Joseph's own middle name, Wilbur) was founded by Joseph in the early 1980s. Even before the era of the CD he had conceived the idea of an audiophile record label devoted to early music. The first three releases were LPs. There followed some two dozen more titles on CD, the last under his aegis released in 2001. Most of these titles are devoted to the harpsichord, Joseph's abiding passion and field of acknowledged expertise. Among the artists represented on Wildboar recordings are David Cates, Arthur Haas, Edward Parmentier, and Byron Schenkmann. These recordings were often given enthusiastic critical acclaim for their performances and sound quality in such publications as the *American Record Guide*, *Fanfare*, and *Goldberg Magazine*.
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> Joseph was deeply involved with the San Francisco Early Music Society, serving as its president from 1995-1997. Berkeley's Early Music Festival and Exhibition was largely his brainchild. The biennial festival, a production of the University of California and SFEMS, began in 1990 and hosted the world's finest performers including Jordi Savall, the Kuijken brothers, Paul O'dette, Hopkinson Smith, and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra to name just a few. It was the scene of some notable events, such as

> the incendiary American premier of "Il Giardino Armonico" in 1996, and the 1998 production of Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera, *Platee*.
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> In 2001 Joseph was diagnosed with a rare, incurable blood disease. He decided to forego faintly promising radical treatments and elected instead [to] spend his last months with Jean and friends. He died at home on the evening of November 22, 2001.[1]

In more than eighteen years, I had only three spontaneous conversations in coffee shops. The professors, with very few exceptions, avoided coffee shops like the plague, because it meant being in the presence of students (forget about the common people) *outside* of the lecture hall and of office hours. One of the exceptions was a professor who was an expert in Middle Eastern music. Bald, with dark-rimmed glasses and the intense look of the Jewish scholar, he could be found in the New Cafe Roma (the old one burned down in the nineties) on the corner of Ashby and College, and in The Musical Offering, and, remarkably, the old Caffe Mediterraneum, which went back to the sixties, but had become a hangout for aging hippies, derelicts, and a few blacks. Another exception was a mathematician in Au Cocquelet who actually approached me and asked if I was reading a math book. The description of that conversation is given below in the section, "Consultants". The third and final exception was a linguistics professor. The description of that conversation will be given in the last chapter of this volume.

The only other conversation was in Au Coquelet with a former drug dealer. This was in the early nineties, I think. He was sitting with an attractive but tired-looking blonde at a table in the corner of the front room of the restaurant. It was early evening. I don't remember what started us talking, but there he sat, in his Navy blue woolen turtle-neck sweater, a handsome guy with wide shoulders and, it seemed, muscular upper arms, looking quite satisfied with himself. He said he was 25 and in the merchant marine. I asked him why he had given up being a drug dealer. He said because most of the guys who had been in the drug business with him were either dead or in jail. He decided he had better get out while he could. Throughout the conversation, his girl friend seemed more and more like a gun moll, nodding her head, occasionally putting in a word to fill out something he had said.

I saw an opportunity to get an answer to two questions I had always wanted to ask of those who were in the drug business. One was: If the point is to kill the pain, why not just do it with liquor? Buy the cheap stuff and stay drunk. He said because you don't get the good women if all you can afford is liquor. Liquor is for bums and old hippies who can't afford anything better. One step higher on the scale is heroin. With that you get a slightly better class of woman. Next came crack cocaine. I don't remember if there was a level beyond that. But the more expensive the drug, the greater your prestige.

My second question was: why were drug dealers always trying to kill each other? Why not do what the businessmen do and carve out territories and cooperate with each other in procuring the product? Form a corporation. He said that the reason was that it was all a matter of prestige. If a drug dealer walks into a restaurant and passes a table where another dealer is sitting and the first dealer doesn't show appropriate respect, then the other has been insulted and has to seek revenge, otherwise his own people won't respect him. It has nothing to do with the business, but has everything to do with respect.

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1. www.musicaloffering.com/joseph.html

I should mention in passing a type of conversation that occurred sometimes on the rare occasions I happened to eat at a counter. A guy sitting next to me would look over at the book I was studying and after a while say, "What's that, math?" I (not looking up): "Yep... math..." (Pause.) He: "I could've been good at math." I: "Oh?" He: "Yeah. Never had the right teachers, though." I (turning a page): "I'm sorry to hear that." He: "Yeah. They were never any good at explaining things. Otherwise, I know I would've been good at math." I: "I see... Well, did you ever think of trying again, now that you're older, and can look for a good teacher?" He: "Yeah, I've thought about that. Don't have any time, though. That's the problem. Never any time." I: "Well, someday when you get time..." He: "Yeah, maybe next year. Because math is important." I: "Yes, it is." (Leaving my remaining food uneaten and gathering my books and papers.) "Well, good luck." He (seemingly preoccupied, as though contemplating for the first time the life that might have been): "Yeah, thanks."

It is important that the reader understand that if this man had expressed genuine curiosity about some mathematical subject or idea or term he had heard about and not understood, I would have done everything in my power to explain it to him in language he could understand. But I had no patience with self-deluders.

And I must not end this section without relating the problem of flies, especially in Au Coc-quelet during Indian summer. The management for some reason didn't think it worthwhile to keep a fly swatter available, just as it didn't think it worthwhile to put paper napkins or wedges under table legs to prevent the tables from wobbling. This the customer had to do for himself. If he forgot to move his tea to another table, or if thought, erroneously, that he could lift the heavy table with his shoulder just enough to slide the folded napkin underneath a footing, but not so much as to spill the tea, it often spilled. At first I tried killing the flies with a folded magazine or newspaper, but the rush of air as it descended gave them ample time to escape. And so I had to bring my own fly swatter. I kept it on an adjacent chair, and when a fly landed on the table, I slowly grasped the handle, slowly moved the swatter into position above this destroyer of my concentration, and then, *whap!*, lightning fast, brought it down. I usually got him. Now I could resume my struggles with math. Except that another one of these pests soon arrived, and ... I never resorted to this campaign of extermination when I was with someone else, but if I had, it goes without saying that, after bringing out my swatter, I would have asked, out of common courtesy, "May I kill?"

(See also "Coffee Shops" in the second file of the chapter, "Additional Thoughts", in the author's *Thoughts and Visions*, on www.occampress.com.)

Street Musicians and Naked Pedestrians

In addition to street poets, there were, of course, street musicians, virtually all of them wretchedly inept. One exception was a classical guitarist who occasionally performed near the downtown Berkeley BART station in the early 2000s. Another, not nearly as accomplished, was a young woman violinist — a scrawny street waif she seemed to me — who played Vivaldi at the same location. I gave her a few dollars (as I did the guitarist) each time I stopped to listen. We got to talking. She was trying to regain her earlier skills on her instrument, but was not sure what to do with her life. She was living in a house with friends. She performed at several places in Berkeley where she performed. I told her I would like to come and listen to her, so she scribbled her name (Anastasia) and phone number and email address on a scrap of paper (I still have it).

But I never called her, or ran into her again after she stopped playing at the BART station.

Down-and-out young males often had a guitar case slung over their shoulder. From my own experience, I knew exactly what purpose that instrument served. It was the guy's soul. "I may be worthless in this world, but my soul can create something that people will like." Of course few if any of these drifters were able to face the hard truth that if you want people beyond your friends to admire you for your playing, you have to practice and study and either be a merciless critic of yourself or pay someone else to be.

This record would not be complete if I didn't mention seeing, one sunny day on crowded Telegraph Ave., as I was walking along preoccupied with my usual thoughts (math, suicide, etc.) two nude pedestrians walking toward me, hand in hand: a tall man and a tall woman, both in their twenties. I was amazed that none of the other pedestrians gave them a second look. It was just another day in the Athens of the West.

Nudity was not usual in the city, but it was certainly not unknown. In the nineties, there was a young Cal student known as the Naked Guy, who walked around and attended classes in the nude, though always taking care to place a sweatshirt on the classrom chair before sitting down.

And then, in 2007, during a protest aimed at saving an ancient Oak Grove near the campus that the University wanted to cut down to make room for sports facilities, a nude young man and woman sat on the branches of one of the trees. (The University eventually won, and the trees were cut down.)

A Gathering of Liberals

I was always on the lookout for companionship and for political groups that I could believe might do some good in the world. Around 1996 or so, I heard about a meeting sponsored by the Jewish magazine *Tikkun* that was going to take place in the Jewish Community Center in North Berkeley. I knew that the editor, Michael Lerner, lived in a big house in the Berkeley Hills. I had only browsed his magazine once or twice.

As the meeting progressed, I kept hearing the phrase "the politics of meaning" , and then learned that this was the title of a book that Lerner had recently published (1996). The phrase put me off immediately: it sounded exactly like the sort of term with which a wealthy liberal with far too much self-esteem would adorn the wishful thinking he called his political theory.

The meeting wore on. There was animated talk about what needed to be done from people who clearly had no doubt that they knew. And then, a tall middle-aged guy got up on unsteady legs, swung his arm through the air as though sweeping things off a table, and said that all this talk was a waste of breath, that all that mattered was sex, drugs, and rock n roll.

I gathered my books and left.

Pacific Film Archive (PFA)

One of the venerable institutions that were part of UC Berkeley was the Pacific Film Archive (and still is, at the time of this writing, 2008). It was located in the University of Art Museum, an ugly béton brut structure on Bancroft Way that was built in the early seventies, and was a prime example of 20th century architecture's dictum that, if you want to be modern, then you have to "take it like a man", as Tom Wolfe so accurately described it in *From Bauhaus to Our House*. Several times a year throughout the nineties I trudged up Durant Hill to see one of the offerings

that the scholars at PFA had dug up (the entrance to the PFA theater was on Durant, one street over from Bancroft; the theater was about a mile from my house). Most of them were films that only a film scholar could love, but at least you got an intelligent write-up on each film in the monthly Art Museum catalog. (The part devoted to the Museum was printed upside down relative to the part devoted to film — I never found out what dry academic mind had decided that this was somehow a creative thing to do.) Over the months and years, the programs covered the films of every nation in the world, it seemed, the vast majority of Third World films dealing with the torments of the downtrodden, in which I had no interest.

But there were also retrospectives of films by noted directors of the West, including, of course, Americans. At PFA I saw the only Garbo films I have ever seen, and was struck by her unique talent, and how it was wasted in the gaudy, Hollywood, lives-of-the-rich fairy tales she was forced to act in. I fully understood that she should want to withdraw from all that. I saw the great film, *Molière* (the Ariane Mnouchkine version, not the later, superficial exercise of the same name) at PFA, as described in the section "Egl and Jonathan Make Wine" in the second file of Chapter 2, Vol. 3. Edith Kramer, the long-time director of the Archive, had agreed to show the film if I could promise her at least 10 attendees, which I could. I saw a number of silent films at PFA, with live piano accompaniment to make the experience close to that it had been originally.

The theater was located in the basement of the Museum. Sometimes there was a line, but while you waited, you could look at the avant-garde photographs or drawings that were usually displayed on the walls in the hallway leading to the entrance. The auditorium had been designed for comfortable viewing, the floor sloping upward, the gray seats soft and comfortable. Audiences were always quiet, respectful. But like all Americans at cultural events, they had no interest in talking to their fellow attendees after the show was over. In all the years I attended showings, I never once had a conversation with anyone. If you needed proof of how lonely you were, going to a PFA film on a cold, gray, fall or winter evening, was it.

PFA, as its name implied, was primarily an archive. A PhD in film was offered at the UC Berkeley campus. There was a staff of two or three — academic moles who, looking up from their piled-high desks, seemed to blink in the light of your attention. They were crammed into tiny offices next to the coffee shop/restaurant in the basement. You could go there, or call, and they would try to come up with the title of a film you couln't remember, making it clear that a contribution of $20 or so would be appreciated.

Several times, I asked them if they knew of any groups that met to view and discuss films. They gave me a couple of names and phone numbers. None of the groups was in existence any longer. They suggested I write to professors of film at the University, and gave me their email addresses. I did. Not one replied.

Occasionally, a program of experimental films would be presented. One evening's presentations I have never forgotten. The director was a thin young man, and he had made several films based on what was then still a popular avant-garde aleatory technique. In one film, he had mounted a camera on a wire that he then ran up the center of a little creek. The camera was drawn slowly up along the wire, and took pictures of the water and occasional rocks below. That was the film. In another, he mounted a camera on the bow of a wooden rowboat in an estuary, and then at fixed intervals of a few seconds, had the camera film for a few seconds. That was it. I have seen hundreds of films since the evening I saw this director's work, and yet to this day I remember his film while having long forgotten most of the others.

After 2000 or so, I lost interest in the pilgrimmage up the hill to view usually boring films from the past, especially as I could pick up a free copy of the Museum catalog and then simply

rent one of the films that was being featured, sit in my living room before a nice, crackling fire, and enjoy a cognac and ginger ale while getting my cultural fix.

Berkeley Architectural Association (BAHA)

I kept up my membership in BAHA because it was practically the sole bulwark against the ravages of the developers, and because I felt that anyone who cared about architecture should support an organization that had a large archive on the city's old buildings and that sponsored numerous lectures throughout the year (attended mostly by the elderly), and in addition sponsored the annual House Tour each spring in which ordinary people got to look at the interiors of some of Berkeley's most beautiful homes.Sometimes I would drop in at the office on Thursday afternoons, when it was open for people who wanted to do research in the archives. Usually there were three or four people sitting around a table, perhaps one or two doing paper work or addressing envelopes to members. In 2007, these people included a middle-aged man who, with his gentle, eager-to-please manner, and the little dog he always had with him in a large leather shoulder bag, I assumed was gay. I remember that once we got into a discussion about books, and he recommended one — I think it was another have-not tract.

In the next room would usually be the hard-working Anthony Bruce, head of the organization, and Lesley E., a long-time activist like her mother. (The latter died in 2007 at the age of 104.) On one or two occasions, including a rainy day in late October, 2007, Lesley and I shared the labor of trudging the streets and placing flyers on doorsteps in an effort to get Berkeley voters to vote against the Mayor's plan to change a key city document in a way that would have made it much easier for developers to tear down historic old homes. I once asked her why Berkeley's old money didn't play a more active role in fighting for the city's architectural heritage. She said, and I think correctly, the reason was that virtually all of the damage was done below the Berkeley Hills, where these people lived. They had no concern for what didn't affect their neighborhoods.

I usually came to the office with my checkbook, and announced that fact on entering. Lesley once asked me why I felt I had to do that. I told her, "If you haven't got all that much going for you, you damn well better show up with your checkbook."

I Find My Father's House in Berkeley

Somehow, I think from reading my father's obituaries, I found out that he designed the Posey Tunnel that connects the Oakland mainland to the island of Alameda. I had driven through the tunnel whenever I had occasion to drive to Alameda but had had no idea I was driving through one of my father's engineering projects. I asked someone who was in a position to know (I can't remember whom) how the tunnel had held up over the years. The person said it had held up just fine — this despite a ship having run aground directly above it years ago. Thereafter, whenever I drove through the tunnel, I looked up to see if there were any leaks. There weren't.

In late April/early May of 1996, in order to build further barricades against my mother taking me out of the will, I decided to find the house where my father had lived with his first wife back in the thirties. My mother had often expressed a wish she could some day find it. After three days of searching through the microfilm in the Alameda County Recorder's office (and in the process learning how to get information out of sullen black female clerks), I found the documents. There was his familiar handwriting. The sale had taken place in 1934. The address was 1107 Miller Ave. in Berkeley. There was some strange business in the records about the house being given to

him by his wife and the money from the sale then being given to a company in Oakland to pay a debt to some guy.

I drove up to see the house on a hot afternoon, hoping with each turn in the road that my father had had my kind of architectural taste. I imagined a tall, brown-shingle house with a stone fireplace, hidden among the trees on a quiet, tree-lined street. I imagined knocking on the door, telling the owners about my father, and they being so touched that they would tell me there was a wonderful little cottage in the back, with bookshelves and a fireplace, and that, because my father had once owned the place, they would let me live there at very low rent — no, they would give me the house, and be honored to do so. Instead, what I found was a plain house if there ever was one: built on the side of a steep hill, only one street below Grizzly Peak Blvd., the main road which runs across the top of the Berkeley Hills. It was the standard box with a pointed roof, plus a front porch you walked up to from the street. No trees, and none in the lot on the left, or along the street. A barren place with a glorious view of the entire Bay — an ideal home for an engineer. I left a note in the mailbox asking the owner to call me, which he did about a week later. His name was Larry Riley, and he said that he and his wife had bought the place in the late eighties from a guy in his nineties who must have been the one who owned it after my father. This old man's wife had died many years before. The two of them had been known for the roses they grew. Larry said that in his eighties, the old man had been president of the Berkeley Singles' Club.

I called my mother, told her what I had accomplished. She: "What house?" I: "The house in the Berkeley Hills where my father lived." She: "Where?" I: "In the Berkeley Hills! I'll drive you there." I then described it to her, explained how I had found it, then repeated my invitation. She: "I don't know...I am not well." I: "I know, but when you feel up to it. Then we can have a nice breakfast in Berkeley. I'll show you some of the beautiful neighborhoods there." She: "I don't know..." She never mentioned it again, and neither did I.

The Break with Heim

Heim certainly had his share of troubles in life, most of them, at least in his mind, due to the fact that his father (a vice president of Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City) had never approved of his musical pursuits and had always felt that they were preventing him from making a career in a respectable profession. The old man apparently played some of the same games with him that my mother did with me, for example, threatening to disinherit him if he didn't do what the old man wanted.

His parents were cousins, and this may be one reason that one of his two sisters died at an early age and the other went blind, though she still managed to keep a programming job in, I think, Los Angeles.

As I said earlier[1], Heim studied at the Manhattan School of Music. After receiving his degree, he went to continue his studies in Paris. But he was miserable in the musical climate of the time, which was heavily oriented toward Schoenberg-inspired serialism. He hated the loss of tonality and melody. "Music has to be based on feelings!" he said to me whenever he talked about those days. He returned to the U.S. with nothing to show for his trip but fluency in French. (Many years later, in the mid-nineties, when I expressed my admiration for David Suchet's portrayal of Agatha Christie's super-sleuth Hercule Poirot in the PBS series, he remarked with disdain on what he claimed were the errors that Suchet made in his imitation of English spoken by a native speaker of

1. In the vol. 1 chapter, "Lehigh University", in the section, "Heim's Influence".

French. I am sure that, for all his love of tonality, Heim was deeply hurt by his discovery that he was behind the times and unable to compete with composers in the avant-garde. He now started his lifelong pursuit of the Answer.

He was married twice, first to a woman named Ruth he had met in a Gurdjieff group he was a member of in Warwick, N.Y. When he told me this, he told me I had to read Ouspensky. I read a few pages of *Tertium Organum* but found it too musty, too hole-in-the-corner, too full of the bad air of one who believes that the truth is what you need it to be. He also told me about Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub* but I somehow never got around to reading it.

While living in Warwick, he developed considerable carpentry and other manual skills, or at least so I gathered from letters and conversations. I found this rather surprising in a man who was otherwise so remote from anything to do with mechanical processes. He may even have built a house, I am not sure.

His second wife was a woman named Kathy whom I met once when they came West while I was living in the townhouse in Cupertino. I liked her immediately. She was young, very attractive, with a sunny personality. They lived on Staten Island, and had three children: a son, Daniel, who became an illustrator, and two daughters, Bizzie and Jessie, the latter an "all-A student" according to Heim (at the time she was just starting high school). But I think in the eighties Kathy was diagnosed with brain cancer. She began chemotherapy. Heim, who had little confidence in Western medicine, had heard of an American Indian medicine-man in Massachusetts who could cure cancer, and so he took her to him. Unfortunately, it did no good, and after considerable suffering, she died.

He then met a woman named Sonia in a theater group on Staten Island, he then about 50, and they lived together for around ten years. I would call him each New Year's and she would often answer the phone. I enjoyed talking to her, not the least reason being the musical quality of her voice.

Heim was basically a True Believer. After Gurdjieff, he became involved in Werner Erhard's est program, and made at least one trip out to California to attend an Est training camp in the Sierras (this was when he and Kathy came to visit). I remember taking him and Kathy to the chartered bus in San Francisco that was transporting the trainees up to the camp, and being approached by a glassy-eyed young woman with a smile and a warm greeting that I would have loved to believe was genuine. He told me later that the training included some kind of potentially dangerous business involving swinging on ropes, the purpose being to get the participants to trust others. It was the same kind of thing that was employed in some of the short on-site courses that companies had their managers take.

On another occasion, a phone conversation I believe, he asked me who the three greatest human beings of all time were. I said I didn't think there were just three. He replied with complete conviction that, no, there were just three: Jesus Christ, Galileo, and Werner Erhard.

Over the years, he sent me tapes of his electronic compositions. I was always enthusiastic about them in my letters and conversations, but the truth is that virtually none of them moved me. One time, however, he sent me a tape of him playing several piano pieces — I remember listening to it in one of the Palo Alto public libraries — and these definitely did move me. I wrote back to him saying (since we had been discussing the worthlessness of our lives), "The life of anyone who can compose music like that has not been worthless." He wrote back and said that there had been some misunderstanding: the pieces were not his, but those of a little-known Russian composer. And even though we had talked music ever since we first met, I was saddened by the fact that he

seemed to have less and less interest in classical music as the years passed, whereas my love of it was continually growing.

But he remained a first-rate musician. I had written to the producers of the great PBS series, *Rumpole of the Bailey*, asking if they could send me the score of Joseph Horovitz's theme music which, with its bassoons, perfectly captured the looks and personality of Rumpole (superbly played by Leo McKern). The producers sent the score and, since Heim was working on electronic music at the time, I asked him if he could transcribe it. He did, and sent me a cassette tape of the result. He had found a perfect electronic equivalent of the bassoons; my only complaint, a minor one, about the transcription was that he had the tempo a bit too slow.

His father may have been a banker, but Heim was not good with money. That fact, plus the fact that he was always working at marginal jobs — arranging, playing piano in a Staten Island church (he had great admiration for the minister, Pastor Cosby), tuning pianos, doing some work for the Navy (I don't what it was, but he never got paid for it) — meant that he was always in a state of anxiety over his finances. I tried to advise him, but I soon sensed I was doing little good. At one point, by way of an investment, he bought a time-share condo on Montauk, Long Island, but unfortunately he did so just as time-shares were beginning to lose their appeal, and so I think he never even recovered the purchase price.

Heim's parents moved to Selmers, N.Y. in their old age. In the early nineties, he told me that his mother was very ill, and I asked him if it would be all right if I called her, just to tell her how much I admired her when we were in Briarcliff High School and she had taken our side in the battle with the principal, Ed Moyer. He gave me her number and she and I had a nice chat. But it was a goodbye call, as she died only a few months later. His father lived on into his nineties, dying in November, 2000 at his expensive townhouse in Somers, N.Y. He made Heim's life miserable to the last with ongoing threats to disinherit him if he didn't do what he wanted.

It was Heim's inability, or refusal, to give the rational aspects of the world their due that resulted in my breaking up our friendship.

I had remarked, in an email[1] of 4/11/96, that, because I didn't read the fine print in my HP retirement papers, I had lost the medical insurance discount that the company guaranteed to all retirees.

He replied, in an email of 4/12/96:

> Truthfully, I don't give a shit ab. medical insurance— Never had it, never missed it- Am utterly convinced that the whole doctor/hospital/pharmaceutical/insurance complex- the 'Medical-industrial complex' which supplants the former military/indus/comp. as the biggest money machine around, is a criminally corrupt and murderously lethal entity intent on robbing us, sickening and maiming us, and killing us off as son [sic] as possible. Fuck em

On 4/16/96, I wrote:

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1. Heim and I had exchanged letters ever since our late teens, when our paths diverged because of college. I tried to save all his letters, and keep copies of all of mine to him. When I first got email, in 1996, I saved all the emails we exchanged. These, however, exist only in paper form, as the CompuServe programmers had arranged matters so that, if you printed out an email, it was automatically deleted from the email archive.

There IS an honorable way to live without medical insurance, and that is to make a pact with yourself that you will end your life if illness takes you past a certain point in your financial resources and/or in the pain you have to endure. I have thought about this, too. It takes an unusual amount of self-knowledge and integrity.

As far as Western medicine is concerned: you've got to do your homework, man. You've got to check out what it was like to get sick in the Middle Ages, or indeed any time up into the 19th century. Check out what it was like to die of bubonic plague, and what some of the so-called cures and preventatives were, and how well they worked. If you can honestly say to me (and yourself), 'Nevertheless, I prefer those days,' then there's nothing more to say.

A hundred years ago, I would have been nearly blind at my age as a result of glaucoma. Instead I have pretty much the same eyesight I had twenty or thirty years ago. I made a choice: Western medicine (drops in both eyes two times a day) in return for keeping my sight. I'm still glad I made the choice.

If you want to do just a little homework, see if your public library has a video on the history of anesthesia (am thinking of a documentary they showed on PBS several years ago).

Do you know that the main reason that Darwin turned away from medicine in his youth was that he witnessed an operation on a little girl? No anesthetic. Doctor cuts, patient screams. If patient survives the operation itself, he or she often dies of infection, because no one knows anything about germs.

You may argue (and rightly) that many unnecessary operations are performed. But that doesn't mean that ALL operations are unnecessary, or that they haven't save countless lives.

As I've said so often in our discussions of this and a few others [sic] subjects, in the final analysis it's a matter of temperament."

He replied, on 4/16/96:

Most medecine [sic] is faith healing— You believe in the system, it works— In your case it would also be possible to get to the root cause of why you have glaucoma, and heal it from the inside out[1]— A hundred years ago you might have gone to an herbalist who would have prescribed the exact herbs to heal the kidney problem [I didn't have a kidney problem, never mentioned one] which causes your glaucoma *and* your depressions, and you might have been free of both for life— (still could, in fact). But if the drops work for you, go for it

The 'what if' question is what keeps the fear alive which drives the whole medical-industrial-insurance-racket. If I got one of those what-if cancers, I would see alternative methods which I know can work, to those expensive ones which I know don't, (my wife died of chemotherapy) and either I would live or I would die— Sonia would not be likely to do much for me— At the moment, and for the last four years at least, she has been totally dependent while I sent her to school

1. In a phone conversation he once told me with complete conviction that the cause of my glaucoma was my lifelong problems with my mother; if I made peace with her, the glaucoma would be cured.

> The results of my homework show me that more Americans die every year from wrong diagnosis, adverse side effects from chemicals which are not really as well-tried as the AMA would lead you to believe, unnecessary surgery (big business) and malpractice of every variety, than died in the entire VietNam war— If you'd like to hear horror stories from my own experience, I can give you plenty— Suffice it to say that vaunted modern medicine was not able to save my sister, my mother, or my wife— In my opinion, all three died too soon and unecessarily [sic]

On 4/19/96 he wrote:

> ...saw briefly on a talk show...an interview with a very intelligent young woman doctor, I believe by the name of Johnson, author of book I think called Health against all odds, or something close. This is no airhead— very articulate, well researched and thought out- Only heard a little, sorry to say— Mean to get her book— She was talking about cancer — the body's response to irritants, toxins, etc., which, she said, are in more abundance in our time than ever before— Just the little bit I heard convinced me that there may be some hope for the medical profession, if she's an example. She was saying that negative thoughts and feelings cause our body to deal with them with tools and weapons otherwise used to protect against physical pollutants, and that's why there's a strong connection between certain kinds of negativity and cancer— Something I already knew for sure out of my own experience— Kathy was one of the most negative, dark, despairing people I ever met...

I replied, on 4/19/96,

> ...I don't think we should spend much more time on the subject because our criteria for making judgements are so different. I try to look at questions in this area as scientifically as I can, which, in the last analysis, means, on the basis of statistical data (if it exists at all, and if it is valid). That is why I am extremely skeptical about anecdotal evidence ("Mary had cancer but she started a program of thinking positively and she was cured.") Maybe so, but unless you also tell me about all the Marys who did the same thing but died anyway, then I can't give much credence to the power of thinking positively.
>
> Furthermore, let me remind you again that my mother has, ALL HER LIFE, had little else BUT negative thoughts. So have I. Yet she at 91, and I at close to 60, have been in almost perfect physical health all our lives. Will you be honest and cite these two cases when you tell people about that woman doctor's theory?
>
> Any theoretician who isn't keeping a careful record of facts that go AGAINST his or her theory, has no theory! The person is in the feel-good business, not the health or medical research business.
>
> Re Kathy dying of chemotherapy: That's right, it sometimes happens, because the strategy is to try to kill the cancer cells before too many healthy cells are killed. It's a gamble. Stephanie's father also died of chemotherapy. So how do you decide on the worth of chemotherapy? You look at the data: how many people live more than five years after having chemotherapy, how many people live more than five years who haven't? That is how you make an intelligent decision.

Re not teaching nutrition in U.S. medical schools: yes, there is little doubt that this is a grave shortcoming. Why do I say that? Because I know of several studies that have tracked the effect of nutrition on, for example, heart disease and certain kinds of cancer, and the data says pretty clearly that diet affects health. No argument there. All we can hope for is that doctors will pay attention to these studies after they graduate.

Re fasting: can't comment because I don't know anything about it. I imagine it does some good if for no other reason than the fact that, when the body is suffering from certain diseases, it seems to enforce a fast on itself ("He has no appetite").

I'd like to see your reading list. But, warning! if I don't see any reports of negative results (results that went against the theories in question) I will know that I am looking at literature from the feel-good community, not the scientific community.

To which he replied, on 4/20/96,

Really feel we're not connecting — Your 'scientific method' feels alomost [sic] like a pre-recorded message.

Franklin, it is well known that anyone can make statistics say anything they want— It's also well known that research findings can be— and often are — falsified, or if not falsified, certainly slanted to promote the researcher's bias— maybe even unintentionally, or at least unconsciously— That's why, among other reasons, I'm much more concerned with direct observation of my own experience, and of that of those around me— for 'anecdotal' substitute 'experiential', and I think you'll have a much more valid basis for judging anything...

Suggested reading: (for starters)
Confessions of a Medical Heretic— Dr. Robert Mendelsohn
The Plague Makers— don't know author
Beyond Antibiotics— Schmidt, Smith, Schenert
Worse than the Disease— Diana B. Dutton
The Social Transformation of American Medicine— Paul Stark
Deadly Medicine— Thomas J Moore
Health through God's Pharmacy— Maria Treben
Why Christians get Sick— don't recall author
Sugar Blues

There's lot's [sic] more

On 4/24/96, he wrote:

...it's precisely that 'Mary' who overcame cancer by whatever means, that I'm interested in, *and so should the medical community be, if they're really interested in healing people.*[1] What did she do to succeed? what was the difference in her case? The only way progress will be made out of the current medical dark ages —

'Positive thinking' is, I think, a buzzword for you, and rightly so, and not what I'm

1. His asterisks for emphasis

talking about— Don't know why 'feel good' is pronounced with such disdain— you prefer 'feel bad', mebbe?

There is an answer, re/ the cases of you and your mother— you prob won't like it— In the matter of emotions, there is, as I understand it, a classical emotional profile of a certain type of cancer case— Someone who holds on to old and unexpressed resentments and grievances, stuffs anger, sits on hurt and rage, and locks it for years down in her muscles, is running a big risk— You and mom are more like 'carriers'— let it all hang out all the time, and let others deal with it— much less likely to get sick yourselves— my 93-year-old father also similar.

Truly, I think that anyone who pays the slightest attention to his own body can see that strong emotions have physical impact— Compare how your body feels when you're pruning roses on a sunny day, to when your mother is attacking you unjustly— Can you see that there's a difference? extrapolate— Emotions affect health! elementary, My dear Watson

Doctors are not likely to pay attention to anything on nutrition, or anything else which challenges the party line, and might limit their incomes— As long as medicine remains big business, and doctors are mostly in it for the money, not much is likely to change, and an intelligent person, in my opinion, will seek health outside of the realm of the AMA, also in my opinion, a thoroughly corrupt and evil entity

But I was losing patience. Later on 4/24/96 I wrote,

Listen, old man: please, I beg you, let's drop the medical discussion. Just as the existence of crooked gamblers does not invalidate the laws of probability, so the existence of corrupt doctors and corrupt medical associations does not invalidate the science that has produced modern medicine.

I cannot and will not argue these matters with someone who doesn't understand how scientific research WORKS. It is not that science has no interest in the Marys who seem to cure themselves of cancer — witness the flurry of interest around ONE or TWO HIV-positive individuals who after some fifteen years still show no signs of the disease. It is what science does next that distinguishes it from all other approaches. Scientific scepticism does not say, "Don't believe anything new", it says "Always try to find out why something you hope is true, may not be. If all your attempts fail, well, then, maybe it is true."

To which he replied on the same day, 4/24/96,

I'd be willing to drop it if you didn't leave me with a putdown. I believe I understand as well as the next ordinary mortal (you, for instance) how research works— Even spent some professional time in a research lab— at Manhattan College— pilot plant for garbage-into-fertilizer project— Actually, my experience there was one of the early influences on me which convinced me that modern-day scientists are for the most part, not dealing with reality— Never saw such neck-up only people before in my life— Also, if I remember right, you got this one going, challenging me on the med. insurance thing — There's really much more to be said; it's an area which is vitally important to me, and you have invalidated my point of view— therefore, I can't leave it— Truly feel you're not getting something important

To which I replied on 4/25/96,

> If the subject were music, I think you would be no less honest with me than I have been with you. Science has discovered a great deal about sound in the past 200 years, including musical sounds and their creation and reproduction. Whether or not you or I believe those scientists and engineers and technicians are in touch with reality or not, it would be utterly foolish for us to deny the validity of that body of knowledge — you use it every time you sit down to compose. (Which is not at all to say that this knowledge automatically makes one an artist.)
>
> It's not a question of being 'neck-up' or not, it's a question of the kinds of statements we can legitimately make. (A school of Western philosophy in the early part of this century struggled mightily to get straight on this.) In The Book, this is expressed more colorfully as: a question of which COUNTER YOU CAN CASH IN A GIVEN STATEMENT AT.
>
> If I say, "Tuberculosis is caused by a type of bacterium," I can cash that statement in (have it accepted as valid) at the Scientific Counter, because there are well-established procedures for demonstrating its truth. But I can't cash it in (or at least it won't be worth much) at the Poetry Counter.
>
> But if I say,
>
> > 'Not all the water in the rough, rude sea
> > Can wash the balm from an annointed king'
>
> just the reverse is the case, because this is certainly real poetry, but probably a false statement scientifically.
>
> Because you are an artist, you tend to ask one and only question of ideas, statements, you come across: 'Can I cash this in at the Art Counter?' In other words, 'Does this speak to me where I live, namely, on the artistic level?' (Sometimes called 'the emotional level') The only reason we are having this argument is that, when the answer is Yes, you then ALSO want to be able to say, "...and THEREFORE I can cash it in at the Scientific Counter as well." And in most cases, you can't.
>
> Great operas, e.g., the various 'Fausts' [sic], are full of wrong or questionable portrayals of the man who is considered by historians to be the source of the Faust legend, but that in no way diminishes the power of the operas. Which simply means, that these operas can be cashed in at the Art Counter but not at the History Counter.

On 4/25/96 I wrote (first quoting him):

> 'As long as factors of emotion, spiritual imbalance, lifestyle, and much more are ignored by the medical folks, their record of dismal failure will continue and expand, and people will continue to be sickened, maimed and killed by the hundreds of thousands by their efforts— This is demostrably [sic] true.'
>
> What record of DISMAL FAILURE? HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS? National? Worldwide? Per year? What? DEMONSTRATE THE TRUTH, then. Give me an article

published in a reputable journal.

Look: the subject is not pollution, carcinogenic compounds in our food, industrial accidents and deaths caused by unsafe working conditions (e.g., in asbestos plants), right? OK.

I doubt if nowadays you would find even 50% — perhaps not even 30% — of randomly selected physicians (particularly young ones) who would deny that nutrition and lifestyle (e.g., exercise, not smoking, living in a clean environment) have a major effect on health. The reports (often delivered by physicians!) are on the news just about every evening, for Christ sake.

That leaves the spiritual, which I gather you are opposing to the mechanical. But what do you mean by "mechanical"? Is the germ theory of disease mechanical? Is the whole DNA theory mechanical? Is the way that anesthetics work mechanical? Is the way that the new anti-depressant drugs work mechanical? Is the way that vaccines work mechanical? Is the the way that antibiotics work mechanical? If so, and one of your kids contracts something that is easily and quickly cured by antibiotics, will you ask him or her to seek a spiritual cure INSTEAD?

We would not be having this argument if you had said, 'Look, Franklin, I prefer to live, as much as I can, in a non-mechanistic world. For me, science, including Western medicine and its view of the human body, is too mechanistic. If that means I die sooner rather than later, well, so be it.' NO ARGUMENT! Perfectly legitimate thing to say. It's when you make statements about Western medicine's successes and failures that you get into trouble. SUCCESSES AND FAILURES COMPARED TO WHAT? If you had said, 'Look, Franklin, there are a number of thoroughly respectable papers showing that alternative treatment *x* for cancer has a consistently higher cure rate than chemotherapy,' again, I would have no argument, because 'respectable papers' would include data (records) kept on the alternative treatment (cures AND non-cures).

On 4/25/96 he wrote,

Believe I sent you a reading list— Suggest you check it out— Start with the first one— Confessions of a Medical Heretic— Dr Robert J. Mendelsohn— Written by a doctor about his own profession— These things merely coroborate [sic] what I have known instinctively for many years— In very few instances would I put myself in the hands of this system— And I'm certain I'll live longer by other means— Dreadfully sorry if it offends you, old sport, but ist's [sic] my life and my body— You mention antibiotics— Someone found out that bread mold kills bacteria, they make penecillin [sic], which kills bacteria for a season, doctors then start feeding patients antibiotics like salted nuts, and now we see new strains of bacteria which are totally resistant to all known antibiotics, to say nothing of the near-to-complete immunity caused in patients who have been given antibiotics for years for everything from the common cold to ingrown toenails— Or how about cortisone? Treated like a universal panacea by many docs, even though it has caused horrendous 'side' effects, including deteriorated joints and muxcles [sic], even cancer— and on, and on— Nosir— I will not worship at the altar of AMA medecine [sic], and neither should any sane person

Later on 4/25/96 I wrote,

> I will read the book you mentioned if you will read Carl Sagan's latest book[1] (on display at most bookstores; if not just ask for it). Deal?
>
> What makes me angry is that you seem to be very good at keeping score on all the bad doctors and bad medical associations but you never once mention the failings of alternative medicine. Can I mention the fraudulent faith healers? The 'knifeless surgery' doctors of the Philippines, their 'miraculous operations' duplicated on national TV by the Amazing Randi? The proponents of quack diets (which, in a few cases, have in fact caused deaths)?
>
> You keep confusing bad practice with science. Look: in the early '70's it is very likely my life was saved by penicillin, in that it cured me of pneumonia. But I can assure you my doctor (old-time GP who was at heart a true scientist) was EXTREMELY reluctant to prescribe the antibiotic for exactly the reasons you mention. In fact Marcella felt he was too reluctant, should have acted sooner. Will you please give him credit the next time you bash Western medicine?
>
> You as a patient are not some kind of putty in the hands of the medicos. I am a member of Kaiser (HMO) out here. I just completed several exams. Every step of the way it was a two-way proposition, I asking questions, in some cases going against their recommendations, always making sure I understood why they were recommending what they were recommending, always asking for a list of the alternatives. If I sensed for one moment that they thought this was none of the patient's business, I'd immediately ask for another doctor. But if anything they seemed glad to have someone do what I was doing, namely, taking responsibility for my own health.
>
> The patient has a right to refuse antibiotics or indeed any drug.
>
> You remind me a little of the Freemen. News report tonight revealed that these staunch individualists, these proud anarchists, these haters of the Federal government, have been receiving $50,000 a year in government subsidies for their farms, plus over $1 million in loans going back over a period of some ten years!
>
> The public sanitation you take for granted, the measures that are routinely employed by your water district to make sure your drinking water isn't contaminated with cholera and typhoid and God knows what else (as it is, for example, in parts of Mexico), the hard work of the National Disease Control center, the sanitary conditions in the hospital where your kids were born — all this and much, much more comes out of the same system you so arrogantly condemn.
>
> Do your homework. Start keeping an honest scorecard.
>
> Not one more word from me on this subject until you have convinced me you have read Sagan's book. I in turn will read Mendelsohn's.

On 4/26/96 he wrote,

> Franklin- I'm not particularly interested in reading more— you asked for literature that supports my position, I gave it to you— I've come to my current view of things over many years of observation, of myself, and others close to me, of reading, and of conversa-

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1. The Demon-Haunted World

> tions with knowledgeable people— If it upsets you, I'm sorry, but I'm not about to change— Can give you lots more data, but I think it's a waste of time— I question now, why are you so emotional about this? You mentioned health insurance, I told you what I thought (and still think, and still will think for the foreseeable future) about it, and since then, feel like I'm under steady and mounting attack— How come?

On 4/26/96 I wrote back,

> ...for the time being at least I don't want any more communication — on any subject. I was perfectly willing to read and reflect on a book representing your side but you are not particularly interested in reading anything representing my side? I'm 'emotional'? Yet several times I have pleaded with you to drop the discussion and you have wanted to continue it.
>
> You are, and always will be, a superb musician and composer.Your instincts in this area are always right on target, as anyone knows who has listened to your music.
>
> But when it comes to the world you live in, your instincts are juvenile, not the least reason being that you refuse to study and at least understand what the other side is saying, and why, and what the other side has accomplished (and not accomplished), and what the issues are. Yet you clearly want me (and presumably others) to give credit to your beliefs. (Otherwise you would have accepted my suggestion and ended the discussion long ago.)
>
> I can't get over it: you are 'not particularly interested in reading any more' [on the subject]. I will not be a co-dependent to ignorance and mental laziness like this.
>
> For the time being, at least, so long old buddy.

To which he replied, on 4/26/96,

You're sicker than I thought.

But then, a few days later, on 5/1/96, he wrote:

> Sorry I offended you, old friend
> Certainly not my intention
> Forgive me, please

But my patience had run out. I never spoke or wrote to him after that.

I did, however, continue to communicate with Sonia over the years — by phone and letter. We never met. She always sent me an Easter card, maybe one or two other cards during the year. I would call her, we would talk about life on Staten Island, where she lived, about her jobs, first at a wedding dress store in New York City, then in a church office (low paying, difficult) on Staten Island, about her landlord constantly telling her he was going to sell the apartment building, but then never getting around to it, about her son and two daughters who lived on the West Coast, and, inevitably, at the end of each conversation, about Heim, who moved to Canada in the late nineties or early 2000s and became a fundamentalist Christian.

During these conversations, she would occasionally let drop details about him that I never knew. For example:

— that after giving up on the Paris music scene, he had moved to the island of Ibiza, in the Mediterranean, where he lost his saxophone, a major blow to any musician, but especially to him in his depressed state of mind;

— that after returning home, and prior to meeting Ruth, his first wife, he had planned to run off to Mexico with a prostitute;

— that he always said his sister had died of Crohn's disease, an inflammation of the intestinal tract, but that she heard, at a gathering of Heim's cousins on Martha's Vineyard or Cape Cod, that she had died of anorexia;

— that both Heim's sisters had been gay, and that the sister who later died had come out at the gathering, but that Heim, who was in the room at the time, had always denied she had made any such announcement, or that she had died of anything but Crohn's disease;

that although Heim's father impressed everyone with his quiet manner, he was just the opposite when dealing with his family. Sonia remembered him standing in the doorway of his dying daughter's room, screaming at her, apparently furious at her having gotten ill or that she was gay or both;

— that after her husband's rages, Mrs. Heim would tell the kids, "Your father is not an unkind man...";

— that Heim's father had had an illegitimate daughter in France, and that when the old man was ill and near death, she had reappeared and apparently made clear to him that if he did not leave her a significant part of his estate, she would go to court;

— that Heim had allowed his kids to do just about anything they wanted.

Sonia said that every year or two her phone would ring and there would be silence on the other end. She was convinced it was Heim, the purpose of the call apparently being to satisfy some lingering desire for revenge on his part.

The Saints Are Reunited

In the spring of 1998 I was amazed to receive a phone call from Carl Lunsford, the banjo player in our RPI band, The Saints. He was now living in a houseboat in Sausalito, he said, and was calling to invite me to hear him play at the Ivy Room in Albany (the next town to the north of Berkeley). Naturally, I took him up on his invitation. The band was led by Mal Sharpe, a local TV personality, who played trombone. The band was not very good, a fact that was softened by Sharpe's cordial joking with the audience. The bar was the kind of shabby place that is owned by a frowzy middle-aged blonde, and which is home to lost souls like the skinny middle-aged guy who tap-danced all by himself in the middle of the dance floor through every tune the band played, he turning round and round, forearms raised, eyes fixed on the floor. But Carl was just as I remembered him. He sat in the back of the band, without expression, plunking out the chords in flawless progression. We talked during his first break, standing on the sidewalk outside. I stayed for one more set, then told him I had to leave, the truth being I found the music boring. Their blind trumpet player, Jim Gammon, had a loud, craggy tone, and a crude skill at improvising, and was capable of doing Armstrong-like lip trills on high notes. Every couple of months thereafter, when Carl had a job at the Ivy Room, which was usually on a Tuesday, he would call me — unfortunately, always on the afternoon of the day he would be there, so that sometimes I had other plans — and I would stay for at least one set and for our conversation during the break.

He said he had played with various groups[1] over the years, including the Red Onion Jazz Band in Boston (known familiarly as "the Red Onions"), which was still in existence. He said Bob Hodes, the clarinetist with the group, used to be a window washer. Carl had roomed with him, and always had to laugh when he remembered Bob cleaning the glass, rubbing away every blemish, then leaning back to check his work despite being many stories above the street. Carl had been with Turk Murphy in San Francisco from '59 to '61 (I think he had also played with them prior to joining the Saints in RPI), then was with him again from '71. He had formed a band in Albany, N.Y., from '62 to '64. Turk Murphy died in 1987. Carl had recently attempted to revive the band under the name "Earthquake McGoon's", this having been the name of the San Francisco nightclub which had been the home of the Murphy band for many years. But our old music was dying, and in 2006 he was lucky to play once or twice a week. He also gave banjo lessons. He said that he was shocked to learn that he was the only surviving member of the Murphy band.

On Tuesday, June 16, 1998 (I wrote down the date), during one of our conversations outside the Ivy Room, he remarked, "You were a good player."

I disagreed with him.

He: "We had a good band, and that depends on the lead trumpet."

I: "No, I was just barely competent."

He: "No, you were damn good."

It was the second compliment I had ever received regarding my jazz playing, the first having been when a guy at RPI, according to George, the leader of our band, called me "little Bix".[2]

He said he had never married Jan, the nurse he had dated in Troy, but had been married two or three times. His present wife, Donna, was also a nurse, as Jan had been. In other conversations, he said he had a son, 39, who was playing guitar, writing songs, living in Coos Bay, Ore. I think he mentioned another son. I told him what George Goedecke had told me about how he (George) improvised — that he had a tin ear, and thus had memorized the chord sequences for all the songs we played, and then just constructed solos by some purely intellectual process. Carl said he strongly doubted this.

Amazingly, he said he knew Joe Ashworth, the clarinetist in the the Christmas City Six, the band I led at Lehigh. He said Ashworth had a band based in Santa Cruz, although he and his wife lived in Los Angeles. (See more below under "Other Musicians in My Old Bands".)

Carl said he had become a UFO researcher, and it was clear that he had no doubt that UFOs existed, the only problem being to separate the false sightings from the true ones. As far as I know, he had never taken so much as a single course in college level physics or mathematics, but he seemed to have no doubts that the investigative procedures that UFO researchers were using, would in fact, over time, add to our knowledge of UFOs and their occupants.

He said he had known Dave Packard, co-founder of the company I had worked for for 21 years, as Carl's group had play at his house in Los Altos Hills a couple of times

He invited me to the houseboat in Sausalito which he had bought in 1974 for $16,500 (in 2011 it was worth several hundred thousand), one of twenty or so similar craft tied to a long dock at Kappa's Marina off a treeless shore not far from the main highway. It was small, neat, and had a beautiful view of Richardson Bay from the large rear window. On one of these visits (in May,

1. One of them, I was pleasantly surprised to learn from him in Mar., 2011, was the De Paris band at Jimmy Ryan's in New York City, where my band The Christmas City Six had made guest appearances at least twice. For some of his comments on the extraordinary improvsations of Sidney De Paris, see under "Jimmy Ryan's and the Wilbur De Paris Band" in the second "Lehigh University" file of Vol. 1.

2. See section, "'The Saints'", in the RPI chapter in vol. 1.

2000), as we were talking about the old days, he got the idea of doing a search for Len Barnstone, who had played bass and trombone with our old band, The Saints, at RPI in the late ‘50s. We used one of the Internet name-search programs on his computer.

We found the name “Len Barnstone”. Either then or from my home, I called him. No one there, so I left a message. The voice on the answering machine didn’t sound like him, so I thought I had the wrong number. But weeks later there was a phone message from him. I called back and, yes indeed, it was our old bass player. In response to my request, he told me a little about his life. He said that when he graduated from RPI with a degree in Chemical Engineering, he got a job at GE somewhere in New England (or maybe it was Schenectady). He then earned a PhD in Instrumentation Process Control from Cornell. It took him 5½ years. Then he got a job with Exxon (which was then called “Esso”), and stayed there for some 30-plus years, rising to be the No. 2 man in the technical staff (I didn’t find out just how high in Exxon that position was). I think he said much of that time was spent living in Europe — in any case, he did a lot of traveling sll over Europe. He said he had retired the previous year, he and wife Leah were now doing a lot of traveling, most recently to Arizona. They had met in the summer of ’56, he having been a cousin of her roommate when she was at a university in Boston. They had married in the late fifties and had three daughters, all in their thirties, and one grandchild. He didn’t pursue music after graduation.

He said that at the end of his RPI years, the band (still called “the Saints”) had made a tape recording. When he took it to a record company in New York City, an executive asked what kind of music it was, rock then becoming popular. When Len said Dixieland, the executive terminated the conversation. Len kept the tape, and in 2000 had a CD made from it: “The Saints: 1957 at RPI”, which he sent to all the members and former members of the band that he could locate. I am not on it because I had left RPI by the time the tape was made, but he was generous enough to give me credit on the CD as one of the former trumpet players with the band.

We had a few phone conversations after that. One of them was around Feb. 20, 2011; during it he told me how much he had enjoyed playing in the band with me for that year and a quarter I was at RPI; he remembered my learning the Haydn Trumpet Concerto. He said that he had cancer, but seemed to be recovering. Then, during a call in early November, 2011, he said he now had lymphatic cancer, which he had had before, plus breast cancer, and was dying. We talked about our days at RPI, and I sent him a copy of the pages of this autobiography that were about the band. He said our room number in the dorm had been 328 (or perhaps it was 388, my notes aren’t clear), and that it was the same as the number of steps to the bottom of the campus.

He had occasionally played tuba in the band, and so I asked him when he had started to play that instrument. He said it was in seventh grade. He had played in a school band called the Sorrowful Seven; they were hired by the Knights of Columbus and were paid $5 — for all seven musicians in the band! He apparently had taught himself to play string bass and trombone. He played bass in the high school orchestra. He said that he once dropped the bass on the ground, and bought a beautiful blond Kaywoodie to replace it.

On summer vacations in high school, he practiced trombone, and worked in a restaurant clearing tables. During high school he also worked in a frozen fish storage facility

During these years, in addition to all the other instruments he played, he took up trumpet and sax and piano, reaching a level of skill on the latter that enabled him to play “In a Mist”, a famous

piece by Bix Beiderbecke, the great 1920s jazz trumpet player. (I have a recording of Bix himself playing it.)

Not surprisingly, he was allowed to join the musician's union while in high school. (He was also president of high school student council.)

He said his wife Leah had been a nurse when they married. At the time of our converesation, they had been married 52 years.

Inevitably the conversation turned to the jazz of the '50s and the importance of improvisation. I told him that one of the most extraordinary improvisations I had ever heard was Dave Brubeck's on "Give a Little Whistle". He was not familiar with it, so I asked him if I could send him the CD, and of course he agreed. I raced to get a copy and mail it. I tried to call him a few weeks later, but his wife answered the phone and said he had died on Nov. 19 (2011), but that he had been able to listen to the CD several times, and had enjoyed it.

In late 2006, Carl told me that Collectibles Jazz Classics had re-issued many of the Wilbur De Paris recordings on CD. (The reader will recall from the chapter on Lehigh University, in the first volume of this book, that De Paris had the house band at Jimmy Ryan's in New York City, that my band made several guest appearances at the club, and that I always had the highest admiration for Sidney De Paris's trumpet playing.) I bought all the De Paris CDs that were available from www.oldies.com[1]. Many are mediocre performances but Sidney (Wilbur's brother) can be heard at his best on "March of the Charcoal Grays", "Are Your From Dixie?", "Yama Yama Man", and "Flow Gently Sweet Afton" (all from the album *Wilbur De Paris and His "New" New Orleans Jazz Band*), and on "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee" (from the album *The Uproarious Twenties: Wilbur De Paris in Dixieland*). His performance on "Are You From Dixie?" is close to his best ever, namely, close to that on "Wrought Iron Rag" as described in the above-mentioned chapter of this book.

Carl also told me how Wilbur had died: apparently he was in the habit of saving on his electric bills by tapping into his neighbor's electric circuits in the basement of the building where he had his loft. One day he was careless and electrocuted himself. I don't know if the story is true.

Other Musicians in My Old Bands

Other alumni of bands I was in, or led, also went on to make careers out of playing music: Lewis, Romig, and Carney, all of the Christmas City Six, formed a trio that played country clubs and hotels in the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington areas. Carney and Romig also "started a booking office and became as popular in that...circuit as Lester Lanin", according to an email of 11/12/04 from David R —[2]. Romig pulled out after a while, however. Later, around the year 2000, he fronted a big society band, playing piano and singing. In late 2006, I heard that Romig had died of a brain tumor that year.

Tom Artin continued to play, making at least one LP (a copy of which I have) with the Ed Ashley band. David R — said, in an email of 11/10/04:

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1. I couldn't help wondering who the Collectibles people imagined would buy these re-issued CDs: old men with pot bellies and pacemakers, reliving their long-gone youth as they awaited the inevitable.
2. In an email of 8/26/09, David R — said that the office booked "club bands all over the country (including Washington DC where I ran into him a couple of times)".

> Artin quit teaching about fifteen years ago and went back to playing full time. He also married a woman who was something of a commercial wiz — in the buying or marketing department of Federated or Allied or one of those outfits. And then he and she started a boutique booking agency for jazz groups in the NY Metro area and I gather it has been fairly successful. As I often say, he is the only full-time jazz trombone player in New York with a Ph.D. in Medieval Literature from Princeton. The other thing he is doing is making and exhibiting photographs. He was always a photographer, as you may know, and worked commercially (albeit briefly) as a kid. He said to me a couple of years ago that he had come full cycle, gotten his education, done all the grown up things he was supposed to do with it and then found himself making a living by doing what he had done as a kid, that is, playing jazz and taking pictures.

In an email of 8/26/09, David added that, after Artin left teaching he took the place of the famous trombonist Vic Dickenson in the band of banjoist/guitarist Eddie Condon, another famous musician. Eddie Condon's was a popular New York jazz club.

Joe Ashworth, clarinetist with the Christmas City Six, worked as an aerospace engineer for several years, then gave it up to devote full time to playing Dixieland, appearing at various festivals in the Western U.S. and Canada. I heard his name mentioned on a radio broadcast of one of these festivals, somehow got his phone number in Los Angeles, and spoke to him.

Then, in 2009, while trying to track him down on Google, I came across a web site with heading, "[Dixielandjazz] Joe Ashworth — Memorial Jazz Jam — East". The text, written by someone named Steve Barbone[1], and dated Aug. 21, 2004, began,

> "Just returned from the Memorial Jam in honor of clarinetist Joe Ashworth. 7 hour drive round trip to play about 40 minutes. It was worth it. Joe would have loved it. A large group of his friends and fellow jazz musicians got together in an old cow barn/music studio on a farm in Northwest New Jersey and played their hearts out.

Further probing in Google yielded another web site that indicated that he had played with Conrad Janis and the Beverly Hills Unlisted Band . But no one replied to my emails

In early March, 2011, I had lunch with Carl Lunsford, banjoist in the Saints, and was pleasantly surprised to learn that he had known Ashworth and had played many jobs with him.

David R — , our sax player, had earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and aesthetics from Columbia, then a master's and a doctorate in organizational theory (whatever that was) from New York University. He was soon a professor at a well-known New York City art school and eleven years later became its executive dean. He then moved to a left-wing New York City college and while there, founded a credential-granting jazz school. In the early nineties, he became the head of one of the nation's leading art galleries , where he remained for 14 years.

Nevertheless he continued to play jazz, appearing occasionally with Chico Hamilton, a drummer who had played with the Gerry Mulligan Quartet in the fifties, and trumpeter Don Byrd. I think he even did several tours with Hamilton's group. He also played with Larry Rivers, the famous painter, who was also an accomplished jazz musician.

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1. barbonestreet@earthlink.net

I wrote him every few years and it became clear that he had succeeded in his goal of becoming a snob. If you wanted to have any chance at all of holding his attention, you had to make sure that whatever you said always conveyed to him that you never forgot for a moment how important he was. In emails, he usually didn't bother replying to anything you said unless it afforded him an opportunity for an anecdote in which he talked to famous people (usually in the arts), all of whom he named. I often thought that the question he lived by was, "Of what possible interest can there be in anything that is not about me?"

The reader may recall, from the last file in Vol. 1 of this book, the argument that David and I had regarding the saxophonist Ornette Coleman, following the release of Coleman's first album, *Something Else!*. David said he was a fraud, I strongly disagreed, having complete faith, even then, in my musical instincts. But during our occasional email exchanges, when we were both in our seventies, I told him that I had grown more and more admiring of alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, who played in Dave Brubeck's groups in the '50s and '60s, and less and less admiring of alto saxophonist Charlie Parker ("Bird"), because the latter seemed primarily interested in dazzling the audience with his virtuosity and mastery of be-bop chords. (Black jazz musicians were said to have developed be-bop in the early '40s in an attempt to create a type of jazz that white musicians would be unable to play. I grew more and more to feel that that was not a good basis on which to build a new genre of the music.) Surprisingly, David agreed with me, and said that, in his youth, he had known the composer/arranger Alec Wilder, a friend of the orchestra conductor and oboist Mitch Miller, who often appeared on TV ("Sing Along With Mitch!"). He said that Wilder told him that after working with Parker, including, possibly, on the arrangements for the albums *Charlie Parker With Strings*, he was amazed at the number of Parker-invented phrases that Parker kept repeating in his solos. Wilder did not have much respect for Parker's supposed originality.

In any case, I feel that even though I had been only a mediocre jazz musician, at least I fathered these other musical careers.

Old age, and the writing of this book, made me realize that time was running out on my chances to thank musicians who had been a great inspiration to me. Sidney De Paris, the extraordinary trumpet player in his brother Wilbur's band, had died in 1967. (The reader will recall from the chapter in Vol. 1, "Lehigh University", that our band, the Christmas City Six, had made several guest appearances at Jimmy Ryan's, the New York City nightclub where the brothers' was the house band

One of the musicians I definitely wanted to reach before it was too late was Carl Halen, the trumpet player in the Gin Bottle 7, the band that we admired most during my RPI years. At the least, I wanted to get a copy of the record we had listened to over and over, and which contained Halen's near-perfect solo on the tune "Nagasaki".

Eventually, in poking around in Google, I found a man — who happened to be a monk — who was a devotee of Dixieland, and he made copies of the two records that the 7 had made, and sent them to me. He also managed to find Halen's phone number, and so at the end of August 2005 I called him. He was obviously pleased to hear me tell him how we had practically memorized most of the tunes on the 7's LP, and how in particular I had memorized, and often played at our performances, his superb solo on "Nagasaki".

He said he had suffered a heart attack in the late eighties, and retired in the nineties (I think he was involved in public school education). He was now 77, and had taken up the horn again. I repeated my expressions of admiration for his playing before I said goodbye. We have to do these things before it is too late.

Jeff Is Fired Again

By January 1997, a couple of months before he turned 29, Jeff was making $420,000 a year working as currency trader for Merrill-Lynch in London. And yet, despite the pressures of his job (he was, after all, handling tens of millions of dollars each day), he still seemed to enjoy life. He was by now an advanced skier. Once a year, he flew to Aspen to meet with old college friends and their fathers (at least one of them an airline pilot) and spend ten days on the slopes. He also skied at several of the best resorts in Switzerland and Austria.

Then, in August of 1998, the company sent him to work for a few weeks in the New York City office. When he returned, they asked him if he would like to work full-time in the City. The offer was a reward for his outstanding performance while there. He said yes.

So now I could visit him for the price of a round-trip plane ticket to New York City. On my trip in December, he remarked, while we were discussing women, that all his friends were trying to set him up. I said something about looking for Ms. Right. He: "Well, it's not Ms. Right I'm looking for, but Ms. *Right Now*!"

We began our tradition of eating at the Aqua Grill in the Village, one of the City's outstanding restaurants, always having six or nine oysters each from their selection of close to thirty (they gave you a slip of paper with the names of the oysters, in order, on the multi-leveled silver tray they were served in), I throwing caution to the winds as far as my cholesterol was concerned. We followed the oysters with a fish dinner. But then, in February 1999, the industry turned on him again. On Feb. 14, 1999, I wrote in the journal:

> J. is laid off along with several hundred others. His boss, a woman, so angry [that] she refuses to do the company's dirty work in giving the news to the selected employees. After his stellar performance last August, they had offered him a job in New York, but pointing out that the salary cap is lower in NYC than in London, would he still be interested? He said yes. They paid for all his moving expenses, plus a temporary apartment till he found his own [at something like $3300 a month]. Then they told him that the criterion for laying off people was whether their salary in '98 was lower than it had been the year before.
>
> On day it happens, Marcella happens to call him. She is distraut [sic], senses he is depressed also. She: 'What are you going to do now?' He: 'Go skiing!'

Proust

There are times in our lives when we know that we are now ready to start listening to a composer or start reading an author we have heard about since our youth. The mid-nineties were that time for me for Ravel, and the late nineties for Proust.

I remember having read I think the first page of his novel, *Remembrance of Things Past*, in my twenties or so. I found it hopelessly difficult. People laughed when you said you were going to try to read Proust, because everyone knew that no ordinary person could understand him. But I

was looking for something difficult to read — something with big words, as part of my lifelong campaign to overcome the damage inflicted on me by the Hemingway simple-Anglo-Saxon-words-are-best Party Line.

This time I found I could understand not only the first page, but the second, and third, and... and although it took me several months of reading, in spare moments, I went through all seven volumes of his novel, marking the words I didn't know as I came across them and then going back and looking up the meanings and writing them in the margin.

At the time, I would see, on her daily walks, an eccentric French woman named Monique who lived in North Berkeley. She always wore a light green surgical mask, and a light blue scarf made out of some synthetic material, tied tightly around her head. She would walk determinedly along Shattuck Ave., head down, hands clenched. I don't recall how we got to talking: perhaps I struck up a conversation with her by asking her why she always wore the mask. (Her reply: she was allergic to pollutants.)

I told her that I had started reading Proust and she was impressed. A month or so later she asked if I had finished him yet. I said no, she shook her head, said words to the effect that if one couldn't read him any faster than I was, then one really had no business reading him at all. (I had enough self-confidence not to be bothered by what I considered the stupid opinion of an eccentric woman.[1])

In any case, I loved Proust's long sentences, loved the magnificent vocabulary, loved his deep, lengthy analyses of his own and others' feelings (a million miles from the accursed "show, don't tell" of my youth), loved the very un-American characters that the books described. By the time I finished the seven volumes I was praising him to anyone who would listen, although to this day, 2005, I have not found one person in California who has ever read him. My neighbor Chet said he tried to go through the first novel, but gave up when he found it took Proust "thirty pages to describe how someone turned over in bed." He said it with that haughty laugh of his, clearly directed at those fools who allow themselves to be seduced into believing that such unnecessary detail is worth spending time on. (He read modern novels, including science fiction, and considered this the only fiction worth reading.)

A few months after I finished the novel, I went back and read it through a second time. It is only with a certain amount of discipline that I can keep myself from reading it a third time. I tell people that, if I heard that Proust had written a phone book, I would read it.

Of course, I remembered the Monty Python sketch about the Annual All-England Summarize Proust competition, in which contestants are given fifteen seconds to summarize all seven volumes of the novel. Needless to say, the contestants are hilariously not up to the challenge. But I thought: what about me? So I attempted to summarize the novel in a few pages and added the results to my essay, "Art and Literature" in *Thoughts and Visions* on the web site www.thoughtsandvisions.com.

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1. In the course of our conversations, she revealed that she was divorced, and that her mother was sending her an allowance (she had no job), but that there were family problems which she didn't specify, so that she might or might not inherit the family house in France. Our casual acquaintanceship ended as a result of her pestering me for roses. She would call me and leave a message saying that I should call and tell her when she should come over, or else she would simply march into the back yard when I was there. She would complain if she felt I hadn't cut enough blooms for her. One day I simply refused, telling her that I wasn't running a public service, or words to that effect. We never spoke thereafter.

Danielle, or, The Composer

On Sept. 24, 1999, in keeping with my promise to Tatiana (see "Heartbreak" under "Tatiana" three chapters before this one), I sent an ad, via email, to the Personal Ads Dept. of *The New York Review of Books*. It appeared in early October:

> **BERKELEY** man, 63, bearded, bald, slim, 5′ 11″, published author, seeks local woman, 50+, for companionship and possibly more. Must have superb sense of humor, and love classical music, foreign films, and beautiful houses. No lawyers, psychotherapists, or elitist academics, please. [My email address followed.]

On Saturday, Oct. 16, 1999, I received the following email:

> Subject: Re:your enticing ad
>
> Dear Berkeley Man,
>
> It seems I more than meet all your criteria except the fundamental, logistical one. Nonetheless, the other elements seemed so essentially in sync, and my current geography so peculiarly fluid, that I thought I'd send you a note in any case.
>
> I am a 53-year-old childless widow (although I enjoy children), a rather successful composer, a voracious reader, a regular swimmer, a very, very private painter, a city dweller longing for landscape....
>
> Not only am I not a "lawyer, psychotherapist or elitist academic," but I understand extremely well why you might want to avoid those characters.
>
> Friends consider me warm, loyal, humorous (both a clown and a compassionate wit) and idiosyncratically elegant. If pressed for three words, I'd describe myself as imaginative, funny and wise.
>
> If you'd like to know more about my musical life, hear some tiny, tinny clips of my music or to see some photos, you could look at my website at ... ; if you'd like to know more about my sense of humor, you might phone me at ...; and then if you'd like to know more about my possible regional flexibility, we could discuss that at some time at some length.
>
> I am not infrequently in the Bay area, and in fact will be there in mid-December for the premiere of a little tuba and strings concerto in San Jose.
>
> I look forward to hearing from you.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Danielle ...

I called her at the number she gave, we talked for close to three-quarters of an hour, and thus began what was, without question, the most passionate relationship of my life, even though it lasted less than two months and we didn't meet until it was over— it was conducted entirely by phone and email. She was a glamorous woman, as I learned from the publicity photos she sent me. (She became angry when she found out that I had not put a photo in my bedroom and in the living room, as well as my study.) After a few weeks, we were making plans to be married. She: "You have shown me I am ready to love again." But her behavior grew more and more bizarre. She became furious when I told her I intended to leave most of my money to my son. Then an old friend, a jazz musician, came to town, and she became even more furious when I expressed anger at her expectation that I compete with him for her hand. The full story cannot be told until after her death, not the least reason being that I have every reason to fear a lawsuit if she ever discovered I had made the story publicly available during her life. And yet I loved her music: two chamber pieces she sent me tapes of, moved me to tears.

She always seemed impatient when I brought up the music of the great composers, for example, Brahms. She didn't like Mahler because, she said, he wore his heart on his sleeve. In talking about her own compositions, she said that she always took great care that each instrument's part could stand by itself, and this increased my respect for her as a composer, because I recalled that Bach had said the same thing about his own music.

Jeff and Robin

Jeff was an advanced skier, and skied at resorts in the U.S., Western Europe, even Australia. One weekend in January of 1999 he skied at a resort near Red Bluff, Montana. Since gambling is legal in that state, he decided to spend an evening at the tables. He took a place at a poker table. One of the players was a young woman, and he thought (as he later told me), "This will be easy. I'll wipe her out." An hour or so later, he found that he was the one who had been wiped out, she having won most of the games. "Pure luck", he thought, "I'll win it all back the next evening." She was at the same table, and again, she soon relieved him of all his cash. He was impressed, and afterward struck up a conversation with her. He found out that her name was Robin, that she ran a retail business that sold Latin- American crafts at malls and fairs during the Christmas holiday season, that she had a log cabin in Red Bluff that she and her former husband had remodeled themselves, and that was good enough to earn an article in a national magazine devoted to log cabin architecture, that, in addition, she had a houseboat moored at one of the Florida keys, and an office in New York City. She had also been a regional poker champion in the Red Bluff area.

After the disasterous affair with Danielle, I had begun corresponding with another woman who had replied to my *New York Review* ad. Her name was Jackie, and she was as desperate as I was. She lived in New Jersey. Within a week or two, I had booked a flight to New York. Sadly, when we met, I knew immediately I was not physically attracted to her, which caused her great sadness, and filled me with even greater self-contempt than I was already carrying as a result of the Danielle affair. As it happened, at that time Jeff and Robin were going to Florida to spend New Year's of the year 2000 on the houseboat. They invited me to join them. I was reluctant to intrude, but I felt that any companionship with people I could feel comfortable with was preferable to the wretched misery I was in, so I booked a flight out of Newark Airport. Since it was only a day before New Year's, and many people were afraid to fly because of the Y2000 problem[1], I was able to buy a round-trip ticket for about $60. It cost $35 — more than half of the airfare — for the cab ride from the subway station to Newark Airport.

Robin was a very attractive, slim young woman in her mid-thirties, with neck-length red hair and a quick kind of energy that made you feel that there was always something interesting and exciting to do. She was one of those people who are always able to see the humor in everyday occurrences. It turned out that her ex-husband still lived on the houseboat, a fact which bothered Jeff initially, but which he eventually accepted, since it seemed there was no longer any sexual relationship between the two, and since the ex-husband continued to be a partner in her crafts business. An ex-boyfriend was also around once in a while.

The houseboat was small, cluttered, "complex" in its design, and moored in the tall weeds in the still water of a little narrow inlet. You could practically drive to the plank leading aboard, since the mooring site was at the edge of the parking lot of a bar called, I think, the Lorilie. They gave me the middle room, the interior of which made me think that every item of furniture was there for the purpose of piling stuff on — clothes, blankets, baskets, boxes, rolled up things, items of equipment.

Jeff had bought an outboard motor boat and so the next day we all had a picnic out in the bay. The two of them were natural together: the sharing of the minor tasks that went into such an activity — being sure there was ice and soft drinks in the ice chest, and sufficiently many life-preserver/pillows, checking on gas, bringing towels, sunscreen, and what-not — the parcelling out of these tasks went as though they had been together for years. There is a picture of Jeff and me sitting together in the stern, I with my baseball hat as always. It was on this trip that I became introduced to Robin's incredible ability at the game of Scrabble. She played as she did just about everything else — with sheer delight, and with frequent bursts of laughter. When it came time to add up the score after each round, mine would be in the teens at best, Jeff's would be in the twenties or thirties, hers would be in the seventies or eighties. Game after game she was able to do this. She was competitive without the slightest trace of that grim urgency that often afflicts competitive people.

On New Year's Eve, we again went out in Jeff's boat. He and Robin had bought a bucket or two of stone crab, plus some champagne and wine, other things to eat, and so at ten, with the inky waters lapping about the boat, and the stars twinkling, and the first of the fireworks from a nearby hotel beginning to streak across the sky, and us shivering under blankets and jackets, we ate stone crab and drank champagne and laughed and I thought it was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Like the fathers of old who used to buy electric trains for their sons so that they (the fathers) could play with them, Jeff bought a ticket for me so I could attend the Orange Bowl game in Miami with him and Robin. Her father came along also, he being a short, bald, guy who looked and talked like a New York Jew from the garment district. Robin said he had a penchant for gambling. He was divorced from her mother, who had gone on to run a successful business.

We sat together at the game, Robin on my right, Jeff at her right. The two were affectionate,

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1. This now all-but-forgotten problem (usually referred to as the "Y2K problem") was a cause of great concern at the time: it concerned the fact that most computer programs, including those operating in banks and the stock market, public utilities, and the airlines, had no provision for the changing of the year from 19XX to 20XX. Major computer failures were predicted, with resulting international chaos. Long-retired programmers suddenly became in high demand, because they were the only ones who had any idea where in the old software the date-controlling programs could be found, and what the codes for the dates were. I bought a piece of software which would prevent the problem from occuring on my computer and had the store that sold it to me, install it on my computer. As it turned out, virtually nothing happened worldwide as the New Year dawned.

very much comfortable with each other, as usual. She knew as much, if not more, about sports than he did. I, of course, knew next to nothing — not even the names of the teams, or what the significance of the Orange Bowl was until this had been explained to me by them. At one point, Robin leaned over to me and asked, with that laugh of hers, "You know what my favorite Chinese dish is?" "No," I said. She: "My Young Guy."

Jeff and I decided to fly back together: he would drive the rented car to Miami, where we would board a plane. The three of us stood, in the parking lot near the boat, early in the morning. It was clear how sad Robin was to see us go, even though she would see Jeff in a few days. We stood together, she laughing perhaps a little more nervously than usual. Finally, she said, "Oh, come here, let's have a last hug," and the three of us put our arms around each other's shoulders, and all said what a terrific few days it had been, and when we stepped back, the tears were visible on her cheeks.

As he drove back along Key Largo, I had nothing but good things to say about her. I said to him, "This is the best one so far. Keep her." He agreed, then, after a pause, said he was beginning to think about the "m" word. I was delighted. I said I would love to have her for my daughter-in-law. He said Marcella had reservations about her because she didn't have a college education. I told him that I had known a lot of people with college educations in my life, including a number who had majored in business, and she was without question much smarter than any of them. She had one of the fastest minds I had ever come across. I reminded him that she had started her own business and made a success of it.

That was in January, 2000. In early March, he told me that he had broken up with her. I was shocked, and very sad. He said the reasons had been, first, her age — she was approaching forty, and thus her chances of having healthy children were dropping rapidly — second, her illness (lupus). I sensed that a third reason was her obvious desire to marry him.

Around Wednesday, Mar. 8, I called her at her houseboat in Florida to tell her I was heartbroken over the breakup. She laughed through her tears, and described their recent trip to Baja California, how paradisiacal it was. She: "You know how Jeff loves to fish. Well, we went fishing, but I think it's better to call it 'catching', because all you had to do was drop a line in the water and the fish jumped at it." She thought his decision might have been a result of her having another bad attack from her arthritis. Maybe that drove him away, she said. She was now taking treatment.

A few days later, I wrote him the following letter. It was the first and only time I attempted to change his mind about a woman.

Mar. 12, 2000

Cher Jeffoire:

Please forgive me but I need to say a few things about your apparent breakup with Robin. You do *not* have to reply to this letter in any way, you do not even have to acknowledge receipt of it! I ask only that you read it. I don't think I am interfering in your life, because after I have had my say, I will accept whatever final decision you make.

A couple of days after our phone conversation, I suddenly remembered something that happened during my visit. You remember I took the train to Hoboken to meet the woman I had been calling "Pennsylvania", because that is the state where she lives. You remember that you reserved a ticket to Fla. for me in case it didn't work out with this woman. It didn't, hence my spending those delightful days with you and Robin on the houseboat.

Let me tell you what happened in my meeting with the woman, whose name, by the way, is Jackie. But first, by way of background, let me say that she had answered my *New York Review of Books* ad, the same ad that Danielle had answered. Jackie and I began an email correspondence which soon became quite warm and friendly, and then became somewhat erotic. I was worried about the fact that we didn't share very many interests -- she liked, but didn't really love, classical music, and was not particularly well-read. But she was otherwise very nice, and obviously very interested in our having a relationship. And I was turned on by the erotic emails she wrote. (Yes, we had exchanged photos, and I thought her attractive.)

Within a few minutes after I met her, it became clear that she had put all her eggs in the basket of our having a long relationship, including, possibly, marriage, although she never once mentioned the word. It became clear that I was the man she had been looking for, that I would give her life meaning and purpose, especially now that she was free of the obligation to take care of her elderly mother, who had died just a few days previous.

Now here is the important point: *I immediately lost all sexual desire for her.* I felt trapped. I wanted nothing so much as to get out of there. Which I did, even though I truly hated myself for having to break her heart — she was in tears after I told her, she even pleaded with me just to come to Pennsylvania and spend the weekend with her, we wouldn't have to have sex. Etc.

I am wondering if something of the same kind of thing happened with you. Whether or not Robin said anything, perhaps you were increasingly getting the impression that she felt that until you two were married, she would be a little less happy than she could be, a little unfulfilled and unsatisfied. I think most men tend to want to withdraw when they feel that kind of clinginess coming from the woman they are with.

But now here's the other side of the story. Unlike Jackie and I, you and Robin share a great deal. I spent close to a week with you two, I saw how the two of you related on a daily basis, both when you were together and when you were apart (you in NYC, she in Fla., communicating only by phone). I saw two friends, companions, pals. If ever two people were on the same wavelength, it was you two. She loved doing things with you — even if it wasn't something she actively joined in on, e.g., fishing, she was delighted to be with you. In passing, let me mention her remarkable knowledge of sports. I was truly amazed.

There are, of course, other reasons why your relationship may well be under stress. Let me list a few that occur to me:

Certainly your inability to get out of the apartment purchase is one, and the fact that you can't sublet it for two years, which clearly puts a damper on your plans to go into business for yourself and set up a household for the two of you in Bozeman or elsewhere. (By the way, my New York lady[1] says there is something called "flipping", where you sell immediately after you buy. I think she lives in a co-op, too, so she is talking on the basis of some knowledge. It might be worth looking into.)

Another reason the relationship might be under stress is the uncertainty about your job, what with the purchase/merger.

Another reason — it just occurred to me — might be the illness she mentioned when I

1. Gaby, who contacted me in January in response to my personal profile in the Classical Music Lovers Exchange. She will be described in the next chapter.

was there. I don't recall the details, but I think it had something to do with arthritis. But my understanding was that it was treatable, although she hadn't begun treatment yet because initially that would mean she couldn't have any alcohol and she wanted to enjoy New Year's with us.

Another reason may be the one you mentioned during our drive back to Miami, namely, that the window for having children is closing fairly rapidly because of her age.

Any one of these would put stress on just about any relationship. Nevertheless, I ask you to consider the following. You are a very handsome young man[1], and you make an extraordinarily good living at present. You are, by any standards in New York City, or anywhere else, a real catch. I *absolutely guarantee you* that if you leave Robin, and take up with a younger woman (but I recall you've almost always preferred women who were older than you — that's an important fact to keep in mind), sooner or later they will want to marry you! You will feel the same pressure — "Oh, Jeff, if we were married then I'd be truly happy...". It has already happened three times that I know of (with Theresa, Trish, and now Robin). You will never be able to run away from it!

Suppose you find a woman who is only, say, 34 or 35. She will almost certainly have a career. You will want to spend some time getting to know her and finding out how much she enjoys doing what you do. So she will almost certainly be 36 or 37 by the time you are thinking or talking about marriage. Which is almost exactly where you are now with Robin.

Regarding Robin's illness: in the real world, people get sick. In my opinion it is a waste of time even to hope that out there is someone who is and will remain in perfect physical health, and never have any concerns, problems, that the two of you will have to deal with. I speak from considerable experience here, as you know. Of course, it is true, you can just drop them as soon as any trouble develops, or as soon as they start dropping hints about marriage, and keep this up for years to come, but personally I would not want a life like that. Building a life with someone *matters*: it feels good to share your life with someone who has stood by you in hard times, and whom you have stood by — someone you can trust and rely on. Sharing a life together is a beautiful thing! (You might be inclined to reply that my long-term track record isn't all that great. But both my marriage to Marcella, and my five-year relationship with Kathy, ended at their request, not mine. They had legitimate reasons, of course, among them my bouts of depression.) And the truth is, God forbid, that even you can get sick; even you might run into hard times when having someone by your side will make all the difference in the world.

Here is my suggestion, and you can ignore it completely if you wish. Get together with Robin and talk out your concerns with her. Level with her. Tell her, e.g., "I sense how much you want to get married now, and it is driving me away. I feel pressured, it is turning off my sexual desire for you. I want us to stay together, but I cannot and will not promise you marriage at this time, and I don't want to feel you are just waiting for me to pop the question. If you feel you must find a husband now, well, then I guess we will have to part. If you don't, and want to stay with me, then I think we can go back to what we had." Tell her about any other *feelings* you have that are affecting your relationship. This may well be difficult for you. It may well feel icky to get into this emotional territory. But I am convinced it will be worth it. (And in any long-term relationship, it is part of the ter-

1. He was then just a few days short of age 32.

> ritory. People who stay together, talk about their feelings to each other.) Perhaps you might even consider going to a counselor of some sort — **not** because there is anything wrong with you that needs to be cured, but because there is something, at present, wrong with your relationship.
>
> Remember when we three were standing together in the parking lot outside the houseboat prior to your and my leaving for Miami, and we put our arms around each other's shoulders in a kind of three-way hug? Remember what I said? "Jeffoire, listen: this one's special...keep her."
>
> With all my love,
>
> Ton père,
>
> John

But he didn't go back to her. They remained friends for a while. I called and emailed her a few times. A year or two later she came to California to visit her cousin, Jill, an architecture professor at UC, and the three of us had breakfast on the porch at Jill's apartment near the UC San Francisco campus. Then Robin and I took a driving trip up the coast, stopping in Bolinas to look at a house that Jill and her then-husband had lived in, and which Jill had redesigned. (It seemed to me utterly ordinary.) Then we bought oysters from an oyster farm at Point Reyes. The weather was cloudy, but for me it was a beautiful day. I did everything I could to make it at least a less sad day for her, and she seemed to have recovered her old sense of humor. But I sensed that her heart was still broken. We communicated via email once in a while after that.

I had a few dates with Jill, including dinner and the seeing of the play *Proof*, but I found her too eccentric in architectural tastes (the only good architect in the world since 1900 was Louis Kahn), and appallingly jealous, having not a single good word to say about the remodeling of the Berkeley Main Library by Cynthia Ripley, which I thought was an outstanding piece of work, as did everyone else. She published an anthology of poetry in which she attempted to show, among other things, that the visual structure of the poems corresponded to the visual structure of some buildings. The book was set in the infuriatingly-difficult-to-read, small, faint Futura Light typeface, a font, she explained on the back page, "which uses very little ink. To my eyes it manifests the direction in which architecture must go." Too eccentric, too precious for my tastes.

Robin bought a house on the New England coast, near New London, Conn. She continued to talk, once in a while, to Jeff, and I continued to write her emails occasionally.

In an email of August, 2006 she wrote:

> The Lupus turned out to be Rheumatoid Arthritis. Which in many ways is worse. But it is under control and I have to [be] better about things concerning my health. I am more susceptible to lots of stuff, cancer, tumors, heart disease (and my bad cholesterol is off the charts). No one can believe it's me either when they read that number. I'm an enigma to all the DR's. I'm not over weight, don't smoke, drink wine only occasionally, and fried food is not my choice of menu. Yet there it is. I'm a walking heart attack!

I believe she never recovered from her loss of Jeff. But later she married, continue to pursue

her business ideas, and appeared on *60 Minutes* once in a piece about poker, she teaching host Dan Rather how to be a good player.

Strangely enough, I have no anger against my son for his decision, nor have I ever criticized him for it. But losing Robin as my daughter-in-law was one of the saddest things that has happened in my life.

My Old Boss Wins a Pulitzer

The reader may recall that the editor of the Bethlehem Globe-Times the year I worked for it (1959-60) as a reporter/photographer was John Strohmeyer, for whom I had great respect. I was pleased to hear during the writing of this book that he won a 1972 Pulitzer Prize for his editorials aimed at reducing racial tension in Bethlehem. By the time I learned this I had already read and admired his book, *Crisis in Bethlehem* (1987), about the collapse of Bethlehem Steel. (The reasons for the collapse were similar to those that led to the crisis in the automobile industry in 2008 and beyond.)

I had seen him on PBS in the fall of 2003 in a program based on his book: his face was fuller, he had less hair,, but he spoke in the same thoughtful way I remembered, with the same quiet air of knowing what was going on.

In the nineties or early 2000s, he became chairman of the Journalism Dept. at the University of Alaska in Anchorage

Fate of the Old Harbor Inn

My mother told me in the nineties that Mr. Nickerson had died while out fishing, apparently caught in a storm. According to his granddaughter, Phyllis Nickerson Powers, whom I spoke to by phone on 6/28/99, in 1969, he and another fisherman were out in their small boat. They hit a buoy in the fog, the boat began to sink, and they froze to death before they could be rescued.

I hoped, throughout my life, that the Old Harbor Inn would somehow be one of those things that didn't change over the years, and that when I was old, I would be able to go back there, and find it much the same, with perhaps one of the Nickersons children running the place, and the meadow leading down to the sea much the same, with the evening sunlight on the waving grass, and the old helmsman's wheel still in the living room above the stone fireplace, and people playing shuffleboard in the back yard. But Phyllis said the place was sold in 1965 and converted into a private residence "for a woman with lots of children, as their summer home". People in Chatham I spoke to on the phone said they weren't even sure where the Inn had been located. Meantime, someone unrelated to the family, perhaps having never known them, had opened another hotel in another part of town, and called it...the Old Harbor Inn.

Willard Nickerson, the Nickerson's son, and father of Phyllis, died around age 74 in the mid-nineties. He had been in the Chatham band since age 14, playing sax every Friday evening.

End of the War with God

There is a huge gap in this narrative because it omits details of a battle that went on in my mind and soul ever since my teenage years. As the reader will recall from the pages about those years, I was never attracted to formal religion, or at least to the Lutheran church, which my mother tried to get me to join, or to Catholicism. Around the age of 15, I began reflecting what it

must be like for God to awake each morning and hear the chorus of wailing and pleading from humanity. I made a promise to him never to bother him unless I felt I could not go on, and that meantime, I would only bother him with thanks for the good things that happened to me. Even so, as the years went on, I was not at peace with him. I felt that he was on my mother's side, and that my lifelong misery was punishment for my hatred of her. Then, in Cupertino, in one of my darkest moments, when I truly felt I could not go on one more day, I got down on my knees and prayed for help, remimding God that I had kept my word not to bother him under any other circumstances. Nothing happened, I remained as miserable as I had been. I began to feel that perhaps this being did not deserve all the respect and admiration and worship that mankind was so willing to give him. John Stuart Mill's words encouraged me in this thinking:

> "If, instead of the 'glad tidings' that there exists a Being in whom all the excellences which the highest human mind can conceive, exist in a degree inconceivable to us, I am informed that this world is governed by a being whose attributes are infinite, but what they are we cannot learn, nor what are the principles of his government, except that 'the highest human morality which we are capable of conceiving' does not sanction them; convince me of it and I will bear my fate as I may. But when I am told that I must believe this, and at the same time call this being by the names which express and affirm the highest human morality, I say in plain terms that I will not. Whatever power such a being may hold over me, there is one thing he shall not do: he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go." — John Stuart Mill, "An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy", quoted in *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Marshall Cohen, The Modern Library, N.Y., 1961, p. 428.

I knew of the logical positivists' argument against agnosticism, namely, that since there is no scientific test for the existence of God, there is no sense in waiting for a proof or disproof of his existence. Furthermore, it slowly dawned on me in my fifties that it was important to separate the question of God's existence from the question of whether I could bring myself to worship him. And so I arrived at the view I have held ever since, namely, that although I can believe that God might exist, I cannot respect, much less worship, a being that would create a world like this. So I rejected God on moral grounds. Further reflections can be found in the short essay, "God", in my book of essays, *Thoughts and Visions*, on the web site www.thoughtsandvisions.com.

A Remarkable, If Eccentric, Mathematician

Michael O'Neill

TEvery couple of months or so, beginning around the mid-nineties, I would write up an ad aimed at finding readers of my papers. One of the early ones was:

Help Wanted

Grad. student or faculty member who has worked on the Syracuse Problem[1] wanted

1. The reader will recall that in the early eighties I decided to work on the most difficult problems I could find. This was one of them.

> for consultation on an idea which suggests the Problem may not be intractable after all. Will pay any reasonable fee.
>
> Call John at (510) 548-... or send email to....

Then I would make the half-mile walk up the hill to the UC campus, then across campus to Evans Hall, the home of the mathematics and computer science departments. I would take the elevator up to the ninth floor, and then surreptitiously pin copies of the ad to the UC Math Dept. bulletin boards on the ninth, then the eighth and sometimes the tenth floors. On a couple of occasions, just as I was getting ready to put the ad up, I would find that my printer had omitted the line in a fraction (an explicit definition of the problem involved a fraction), and so I would have to attempt to draw it in pencil, kneeling before one of the benches in the lobby, anguishing over the possibility that, seeing a hand-drawn pencil line, the grad students (forget about the faculty) would dismiss the ad as the work of a crackpot.

To me, Evans was a fortress of intimidation. The very atmosphere breathed, "Not for you!" Sheets announcing talks to be given were posted on the bulletin boards, the titles all but incomprehensible. In the library on the first floor, I thought to myself, "The one thing I can be certain of is that this is an institution designed to keep people *out*." I didn't mean that they would eject me if they found out who I was, but rather that the books, and all but a few of the journals, all had one fundamental message: "For the initiated only!" The one thing that was lacking on all those well-filled shelves was any attempt to make this vast knowledge rapidly accessible even to the mathematical community at large. Years of study were required to understand many of the books and journals, and no one was bothered a bit by that fact.

The Math Department had no electronic bulletin boards — unlike Stanford's, which maintained a mailing list of some 500 people, nominally in the Electrical Engineering Department, but including some in the Math Dept., to which you could send an ad, and, often, get a response. But if UC Berkeley had one, the email address was carefully guarded and not revealed to outsiders.

After one of these postings, I got a reply, I can't remember if by phone or by email, from a man named Michael O'Neill, but he made clear at the start that he wished to be called by his last name. He turned out to be the most colorful, the most eccentric, mathematician I ever met. He lived only a few blocks from my house, in apartment #4 at 227 Dwight Way. Initially, I simply dropped off my Syracuse paper in his mailbox, and told him the statement I was trying to prove, and how much I was willing to pay for a correct proof. Within a couple of days, I received an email message stating that he had a proof, and asking where he should deliver it. I gave him my address, we set a time, and there, at my doorstep, appeared a figure out of the Old West, or out of 17th-century New England. He was tall, wore a long black duster and a black, wide-brimmed hat, from which his long blond hair hung down à la Gen. George Armstrong Custer. I never saw him without his hat until around 2003, and was surprised to find that he wasn't bald. He carried a walking stick that was in fact a thin black cardboard tube of the kind that are used to hold draftsman's drawings.

He handed me the proof. I glanced at the hand-written pages, and he began to expound first on his strategy and then on other subjects. The torrent of words, covering subjects in mathematics and computer science, and interlarded with bursts of profanity, lasted some two hours. I quickly learned that if I was going to say anything in reply, it damn well better not take me more than five seconds. He would use my brief remark as a point of departure for another outpouring of knowledge, commentary, criticism. He was skeptical that anything I had done so far on the Syracuse

Problem would lead to a solution, or indeed to anything of importance, on the grounds that if it were that simple, someone would have thought of it long ago.

After the two hours, I was exhausted from trying to keep up with what he was saying. I wrote him a check, we shook hands, and I told him I would certainly have more work for him. And so I did. Over the course of the next eight years or so, he proved many, in fact, most, of the theorems and lemmas in my Syracuse papers of the time, always accomplishing this in a matter of days, the proofs always elegant and short, and usually requiring only a lemma or theorem from a standard undergraduate text such as Niven and Zuckerman's *The Theory of Numbers*. All that his proofs required was a little editing to convert them into smooth prose.

During these years, I would occasionally see him on Telegraph Ave. in Berkeley, sometimes in that relic of the sixties, the Caffe Mediterraneum. Sometimes we would stop and talk, or rather, I would listen to him for as long as I could, then find some excuse to leave. Eventually I hardly dared walk up Dwight past his apartment on the way to Telegraph, for fear of meeting him. His talk was physically exhausting because you never could ask for a clarification, or an opportunity to express what your understanding was. The torrent of words drowned you out. So you had to keep trying to understand what he had said minutes ago, while at the same time trying to remember what he had said since then.

He certainly wasn't boring. For one thing, his talk was always spiced with profanity or at least colorful language. He once handed me a proof and said, with a sly smile, "This one's slicker'n snake spit." Sometimes his profanity was accompanied by physical gestures, as when, declaring a certain approach to an unsolved problem as hopeless, he would make the motions of male masturbation.

Another example of his colorful language occurred in connection with a famous theorem, first proved in 1930, and known as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. It asserts that there are mathematical truths that can never be proved. The proof involves the rigorous creation, from the axioms of number theory, of a statement that asserts, "This theorem cannot be proved." Thus if, in fact, the statement is false and it *can* be proved, then number theory contains a contradiction, something that mathematicians are extremely anxious to avoid. Therefore, to avoid the contradiction, it must be concluded that the statement is true, thus providing an example of a mathematical statement that cannot be proved. O'Neill.'sgraphic description of the proof was: "Gödel creates this theorem that fucks itself in the ass."

He was not on the faculty, and indeed, did not teach, at UC Berkeley or at any other university. He was contemptuous of just about every mathematician and computer scientist he mentioned. A Berkeley mathematics professor, known for his impossibly high standards (he was eventually prevented from sitting on PhD committees, because he would almost invariably find the candidate's years of work unsatisfactory) — this professor O'Neill called "a dick-snout".

I learned that he had worked as a programmer at Lawrence Berkeley Lab, but I could well imagine he proved impossible to manage or to work with, given his overbearing manner and nonstop talking. According to Doug Finley, my computer consultant at the time, who had known him since Doug arrived in Berkeley in 1971, he had been a boy genius at Los Altos High, but had never been able to get along with his father, a military man. He was already doing programming as a teenager, in the sixties. He went to UC Berkeley, where he had Ted Kaczynski, later infamous as the Unabomber, as professor for one of his courses. He got his math undergraduate degree in 1972. When I first met him, he was in his mid-forties.

But despite his brilliance — Doug said that he had an IQ of 190, and after seeing the speed at which he proved my conjectures, I could believe it — he had not gone on to graduate school.

Instead he had chosen to live on a pittance, apparently handed out by his father, or given him as a condition of his father's will. He did occasional consulting jobs.

Strangely enough, when I wrote in an email to him, or managed to squeeze into a conversation, an idea regarding an approach to Syracuse (or any other mathematical or computer science idea), he never responded. It was as if he had no intuition, no radar, for ideas. He could only deal with formally stated conjectures, and then would quickly prove or disprove them.

In the early years, I would drop off the latest version of my Syracuse paper, but I doubt that he ever read any more than he needed to in order to do the proof.

The procedure we developed was that I would send him an email containing a conjecture. I would offer him, say, $35 or $50, sometimes more, for a proof. Because of his poverty, I always made sure that the Subject field said "$ for proof". Within a few days, he would write me back either asking for a clarification, or else sending the proof, or else, and, I must say, more rarely, sending a disproof. I would then put his check in an envelope and leave it in the shelf below the outdoor mailboxes at his address.

On one occasion, he invited me up to his apartment. We have all heard the expression, "the dirt was inches thick", and we assume the expression is only a metaphor. But in the case of O'Neill's apartment, it was literally true. Along the mouldings at the base of the walls was a thick line of dark, wiry dust that must have been at least an inch or two high. The apartment was filled with broken-down furniture and computer listings and technical magazines and who-knew-what-else piled on table- and desk-tops and chairs. A couple of computers were in sight on the desks. Finley told me that O'Neill was an expert at scavenging parts from computers he found in dumpsters, that he had a reputation for, and earned a little money from, his skill at repairing these old machines, and that he was also a master at the almost lost art of soldering with a soldering gun.

His precarious financial situation must have grown even worse, because in 2003, as I was going to Peet's Coffee and Tea on the corner of Walnut and Vine in North Berkeley, whom should I see on the corner, next to the newspaper stands, playing some sort of stringed instrument, but O'Neill. I didn't know how to respond: he might have felt humiliated if I had dropped a dollar into his cup (why not $2, or $5, or $10, or $50?). On the other hand, if I had merely nodded at him, then hastened into the store, he might have felt humiliated because I certainly could have dropped a least a dollar into his cup. I think I may have made sure he didn't see me, or I may have just nodded to him, mumbled something about being late, and walked past. The truth is, I was eager to learn about the instrument he was playing (I can't remember much about it now[1]), what kind of music he currently was interested in, and what kind of classical he liked, if any, that being a subject that I had never brought up with him. But I couldn't afford the time.

The last time I saw him was one evening in summer of 2003; he was sitting next to the window in the Med (familiar name for the Caffe Mediterraneum) at a table with a bunch of other people. I was always nervous about going into the Med and finding him there because it would mean having to listen to his non-stop talking. So I made it a rule to poke my head in and pretend to be looking for someone, and, seeing him, give him a nod or a wave, then leave. It was strange to see him sitting with more than one other person, and I remember thinking, "Could it be that O'Neill is going in for politics?"

Then, on Nov. 10, 2003, I received an email from Doug which contained a paragraph of an email from a friend of his. The friend had written:

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1. See the sub-section "Reminiscences of O'Neill by a Friend of His" following this sub-section.

> i am not sure whether you were aware of it, but o'neill had been very ill. he died wednesday.
> in keeping with his wishes there will be no service or anything like that. i know you were
> friends with him and would want to know.

I wrote Doug asking what O'Neill had died of. He replied on Nov. 11, 2003, that he had asked the friend who was settling O'Neill's affairs.

> I haven't heard back from Eric yet. He's undoubtedly busy with some of those messy after-death details, like who cleans out 29 yrs' worth of stuff from the apt. O'Neill had a couple of brothers, but his mother if alive would be in her 80s.

I had said, in my email:

> I had always intended that he would be co-author of the first papers on the Syracuse Problem that I published. I could not have accomplished what I have on this problem without his help. He was absolutely indispensable.

To which Doug replied:

> Quite fair. I don't know enough math to tell, but those who did said he was brilliant.

Within a day or two, I added a section titled "In Memoriam" to first of my two Syracuse papers.

Reminiscences of O'Neill by a Friend of His

The following was sent to me in January 2004, at my request, by Doug.

> I first met Mike O'Neill in September '71, when I arrived in Berkeley for my first regular session at UC Berkeley. I'd signed up for the student co-ops, the cheapest way for a student to live there, and been assigned to my last choice, decrepit old Oxford Hall, at the corner of Oxford St & Allston Way, across the street from the southwest corner of the campus and a block from the downtown shopping district on Shattuck Ave. It was somewhat unusual for the time in having completely mixed coed housing, and not unusual for the time in having very leftist and activist politics. The building is still there, but has long since been private student housing at higher prices without the shared public areas.
>
> There was then a lounge area downstairs, and O'Neill could usually be found there at most hours, holding forth to a small but attentive audience on almost any subject, often math, science, computing, or music, but hardly limited to those. There was a quarterly 'awards' issue of the house newsletter, generally a vehicle for insults. O'Neill once got the 'opinions on his fingernails' award, quite deservedly so, for having a strong and usually well-informed opinion on everything. We became somewhat good friends rather quickly. He looked the same then as for his whole life--straight blond hair to between his shoulder blades, pinched face, thick glasses, and often a somewhat disgusted look on his face. Always wore some kind of boots, a worn and dirty leather jacket, and brown corduroy jeans. Everyone knew him as 'O'Neill'; I was generally the only person who called him 'Mike,' out of some misguided sense of California informality.

For most of that school year, he was 'dating' a very nice, pretty and intelligent woman named Robin, who later became a book editor, married a much nicer and more handsome guy from Oxford Hall, and looked like she hadn't aged a day 20 years later. I'm not sure what she got out of the relationship, even though he was clearly brilliant and a fascinating conversationalist. He never mentioned any test scores to me, but I'd guess his IQ at around 190, give or take 10. After college in the '70s he had perhaps a half-dozen brief affairs with women, all ending quickly when they discovered how arrogant and insulting he could be, especially to women. He claimed that like Nietzsche he wasn't a misogynist, and hated dumb men just as much as dumb women, but somehow it didn't seem that way to the women. I made the mistake of introducing him to my then-girlfriend Eva in Jan. '96, and he managed to permanently offend her to the point of her no longer speaking to him in 5 minutes. In the late '80s at one of his parties, I met one flamboyant gay man who was 'dating' O'Neill for at least several months; I don't now either way if there were others. Far as I could tell, his basic inclination was heterosexual; in later years, which for him started around the early '80s, he just couldn't find any women who would put up with him.

His father was 'Tex' O'Neill, who was a Navy fighter pilot who fought in Korea, and later in peacetime, in the '50s, was the commander of the fighter squadron that had the first tour of sea duty in US Navy history that didn't lose a single pilot to an accident. Carrier landings have always been a dangerous business. As one could imagine, there was a total generational and political conflict between father and hippie-looking son, and they had mostly quit seeing or speaking to each other some time before I first met him. They did speak lately enough for his father to comment about Jim Morrison's death at 26 (which was on my birthday, July 3 '71, as Brian Jones' had been 2 years earlier) 'musta been drugs,' at which O'Neill took great glee in pointing out that Morrison was 'the most notorious juicer in all of rock 'n roll.' Not least because his father was a heavy binge drinker, and died not much later, sometime in the late '70s I believe. His mother, who I met several times in the mid-'70s when she was visiting Mike, lived much longer and was a very nice and intelligent woman, a loyal Navy wife who also worked for the CIA at times. She always got along fine with him, far as I saw or heard, and when visiting him in Berkeley always had a new high-tech gadget from Silicon Valley for him (she lived in a nice suburban house in Los Altos Hills).

Mike and his 2 (?) brothers had the usual experience of military brats, being uprooted from their schools and childhood friends every year or 2 for their entire childhoods. In his case it certainly had the classic effect of making it very difficult for him to form close friendships of any kind. Even when I first met him, he very much projected the attitude of not caring what anyone thought about him, and not needing anything from anyone.

After graduating with a BS in Math in June '72, and not being interested in further formal education or a normal job, he stayed with me briefly in another coop during my summer session, but that was somewhat uneasy and inconvenient for both of us, so he soon found first a tacky modern apartment, but soon an old and cheap but roomy apartment on Dwight Way on the Southside of campus, 1/2 block east of Oxford, where he lived the rest of his life, as it gradually filled with underground comix, books, computers, miscellaneous electronic junk, and dust. It was rent-controlled, giving a real incentive to never move lest he have to pay 2 to 3 times as much.

I arranged for him to get a ride and a place to sleep on the floor at the '72 Worldcon

(the world science-fiction fan convention) at LA airport, where we both smoked funny mushrooms and talked a little with Philip K Dick[1], neither of us knowing who he was until my friend Dwain told us later. At one point Dick's girlfriend told him "If you don't stop hallucinating, I'm not going to drive you home." O'Neill was forever fond afterwards of using the term "dicksnout" as an all-purpose term of disapproval, reserving "dickhead"[2] as a term of endearment for those who actually read and loved Dick's original SF novels, as he and I did.

In the mid-'70s he briefly had a job in a machine shop in Oakland, working on a heavy-duty police ID camera, using a metal lathe among other tools. At the end of the many-month process, the photos came out reversed left to right. With Mike using a pack of cigarettes as a visual aid, they figured out that the camera's designer had made a serious error in the optical path, involving several mirrors and lenses, in a way that was impossible to correct in any affordable way. So the shop had to drop the project and eat the expenses, which resulted in Mike (through no fault of his own) losing his job. Far as I know, that was the last regular job he ever had. He would do occasional work as a programmer, which he was very good at, sometimes for friends working at Lawrence Berkeley Lab or on campus, and later when more individuals and small businesses had computers, computer consulting. After his father died, he apparently inherited enough money to hardly ever have to work again, albeit living a very simple lifestyle. But he mostly chose to live at vow-of-poverty levels to have more time to read books, or hang out at the Caffe Mediterraneum drinking cappuccino and talking with whatever interesting people dropped by, which was many over the years.

He loved folk music of the British Isles, especially Celtic and Gaelic, and was an excellent guitarist, with an unfortunately croaky singing voice. He was in a bad mood for weeks after first recording, and so objectively hearing, his own voice around '74. He occasionally played for a little money in local Berkeley nightspots. He met many people at Oxford Hall, and later, become fans of the Incredible String Band, Steeleye Span and its lead guitarist and singer Martin Carthy, among several other UK folk musicians, and folk-rock and other groups. He also built an electronic bagpipe in the shape of a squared-off ukelele.

After the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, was arrested and many biographical details were published, including that he had been a lecturer in the UCB Math Dept for a year in the mid-'60s, O'Neill figured out from old UCB college catalogs and his transcript that he had indeed taken one upper-division math course from him—and he'd been so quiet, O'Neill had no memory of what he looked like or was like.

We drifted somewhat apart, due to diverging interests and time pressures on my part, and my living in more distant locations like Menlo Park, El Cerrito and then San Pablo. In the '90s, I began attending the Berkeley PC Users' Group once a month on Southside, and

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1. "Philip K. Dick was a science fiction writer on whose work a number of popular films have been based, most notably *Blade Runner* (from "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sleep?"); also *Minority Report*, *Total Recall*, *Screamers*, *Imposter*. Amazingly, it was his real name, not a pseudonym. He died in 1982 at age 53 ." — J.S.

2. "'Dickhead' was the standard term for recruits in basic training at Fort Dix during my eight weeks there in 1962, presumably because of our shaved heads. O'Neill had probably heard his military father use it in that context." — J.S.

would usually meet him at the Med before each meeting, so we kept in touch that way and by occasional e-mail. I always gave him my obsolete computers, and other hardware that I couldn't fix but he might be able to.

In the fall of 2002, I began working until mid-evening in Richmond, preventing me from attending the BPCUG. Then in November I met and fell in love with my current German girlfriend, Jutta, who really took all my time. So I never saw him after about Sept 2002.

Long after Jutta and I had decided I'd go to stay with her in Hamburg, I phoned Mike in May 2003 from the San Pablo apt I was in the process of clearing out, just to let him know why he hadn't heard from me and that I was going to stay, at least for a while, in Germany. He told me that he couldn't walk well due to 'sciatica' (compression of a leg nerve at the spine), couldn't see me one last time for that reason, but rather pointedly said that 'it always gets better.' I didn't quite believe that even at the time. I happened to be dealing with his friend Julie over advice on selling cameras on eBay, and she said she didn't believe it either. I heard nothing further until his friend Eric e-mailed me, a couple of weeks after the fact, to tell me that O'Neill had died on Nov 5, 2003, and that Eric had taken care of him, including things like shopping, for the last several months that he'd been unable to. He would have been age 53, give or take a year.

I suspect the cause was some form of cancer, since it took so long with gradually disabling symptoms, and he was a lifelong smoker (of hand-rolled 'pure' tobacco, which he imagined was healthier) who'd only quit a very few years before. But I haven't received an answer to that question in e-mail yet, and there hasn't been time for me to get the death certificate I ordered from the county.

On Feb. 16, 2004, Doug wrote, in an email:

> ... his death cert says #1 [cause of death was] respiratory insufficiency, caused by #2 bronchopneumonia, contributing factor cachexia, which I had to look up. That's a symptom, not a disease — general wasting away due to a variety of diseases, including cancer & AIDS, which I think are the 2 most likely. It other words, it doesn't really say. One NIH paper says:
>
> "Cachexia is a condition of severe malnutrition characterized by anorexia, weight loss and muscle wasting that occurs as a consequence of chronic conditions such as cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, cancer, AIDS, congestive heart failure, failure to thrive in older populations, end-stage organ failure, neurological degenerative diseases, chronic obstructive lung disease, chronic liver disease, and chronic renal disease."
>
> Despite all his personality flaws, he. was a remarkable man, probably the smartest and most widely-informed person I've ever been acquainted with, never mind friends with, and I'll miss him.

I Was Meant to Be an Amateur

Even though O'Neill and I never had a conversation, in the normal sense of the word, and even though he was pessimistic that I would accomplish anything in my work on the Syracuse Problem because if anything as simple as the ideas I was pursuing had any merit, someone else would have already made something out of them, and even though he never offered any sugges-

tions as to ways I might proceed — nevertheless, the mere fact of having someone to communicate my conjectures to, which he would then prove or disprove, left no doubt in my mind that I was born for the life of the amateur. Unfortunately, I had been born into an age when the amateur was a figure of scorn throughout the academic community, the professors having chosen to ignore the fact (or being ignorant of it) that in the not-too-distant past, some of the best of the best in their field had been amateurs. (Some of the greatest mathematicians had worked entirely outside of the university: Descartes, Pascal, Fermat and Leibniz in the 1600s, and Galois in the early 1800s.) On the few occasions afterward when I had someone to communicate with, via email, who was willing to discuss my ideas with me (usually at a fee of from $20 to $50 an hour) without the nasty contempt that seemed almost universal among mathematicians, my realization that I was born to be an amateur was confirmed. I spent several months in early 2003 exchanging emails with a genuinely kind, respectful, young computer scientist at a midwestern university. He charged me no fee for his efforts. Unfortunately, just as we were starting to make progress, the press of other academic duties forced him to end his consultation. Then, for about ten months starting in October 2003, I communicated with a mathematician who was on sabbatical from a Canadian university. He charged me only $25 an hour, not the $50 an hour that mathematics graduate students typically charged. Unfortunately, just as he agreed that seven out of eight steps of one of my proposed solutions to the Syracuse Problem were correct, he likewise had to end his consultation in order to resume studies on a second doctorate (in economics). Then a recent PhD in physics — hereafter to be known as "Ed the Physicist" — answered the ad I had posted on a bulletin board in the UC Berkeley Physics Dept., asking for help in understanding General Relativity and tensor calculus. His mathematical ability was certainly sufficient for him to read and criticize one of my Syracuse papers and my paper on Fermat's Last Theorem, and so I asked him to do this. But after a couple of months, he said he could no longer continue because his brother had become ill. Months later, he resumed consulting, and continued to do so for several years. See the section "Ed the Physicist" in a later file of this volume.

I then asked a mathematics editor who had worked with me for several months in the past if he would be willing to review just a few pages in my Syracuse paper, but he said he was "up to his gills" in work. By then it dawned on me that even at $20 to $50 an hour (or, in the editor's case, $60 an hour), and even despite my prompt payment of their bills, these consultants had no real interest in my approaches to the problems I was working on. They certainly had no interest in the prolonged labor, with its inevitable errors and repairs of errors and struggling onward, that work on difficult problems requires. I felt that I was composing for an orchestra of tone-deaf musicians.

Yet even during these weekly interchanges of emails, I knew that I was doing what I was meant to do. I thought: How different it would have been for me in my early high school years if instead of trying to get ham radios to work, I instead had been working with other kids trying to get proofs to work! No worrying about broken parts or loose wires or bad solder connections or poor atmospheric conditions or not following the schematic correctly — just worrying about proving the validity of a new *idea* (though certainly there was plenty of engineering involved trying to present the proof as simply and clearly as possible). I became convinced that if there was a single reason for my lifelong depression, it was simply that I never, or almost never, had had someone to talk to about the things that interested me. And therefore, paying people to listen to me and read what I wrote seemed an eminently sensible idea. (I have said elsewhere, I think, that for me psychotherapy amounted to nothing more than bought friendship — paying someone for an hour or two of conversation each week. And, in fact, the thought has crossed my mind of putting an ad in, say, *The New York Review of Books*, simply offering conversation at some modest

hourly fee. It is not therapy that many people need, just someone to talk to. I remembered how, as a child, I would stand in front of our house on Elm St. and say hello to every passerby — and keep saying hello until they responded.)

The realization made the academic life seem even more bizarre. I didn't need or want to be a Professional Knower, I didn't need or want to feel good because I knew more about a subject than others did, or because my subject was difficult and could only be mastered by a few, or because students were subordinate to me. I didn't need or want to be saddled with the onerous burden of forcing students to study my subject. If I did any teaching, I wanted to be hired with the understanding that if the student didn't think I was doing a good job, he or she could fire me and find someone else. I wanted to consider it part of my job as a teacher to try to put myself out of business by creating books and/or computer programs (for example, Environments[1]) that would more and more enable students to teach themselves. I wanted to be sad, not happy, when I heard that students found my subject difficult. I didn't need or want to be required to continue to impart knowledge in a way that I knew was antiquated and grossly inefficient. I didn't need or want pompous department heads looking over my shoulder and counting the number of papers I published each year — papers that were often little more than CV stuffing.[2]

For an insightful discussion of why most contemporary mathematics papers are of low quality, see Kline, Morris, *Why the Professor Can't Teach*, St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1977, in particular chapter 3, "The Nature of Current Mathematical Research", pp. 41-69. Kline was no outsider, having led a research division of the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences at New York University (NYU) for twenty years and having been a distinguished professor at NYU and elsewhere. Kline's book also confirmed my growing suspicion that most PhD theses are molehills that have been made into mountains. (See, for example, "Ted —" in the third file of Chapter 1, Vol. 3.)

To be curious about a problem, to work on its solution according to my own lights (my own esthetic sense) with no concern about whether I was demonstrating (to some skeptical onlooker) my intelligence or knowledge, to do so with another person who was equally interested in the problem (I never found such a person), and who did not treat my mistakes and wild surmises with contempt, but rather with a friendly but always critical eye — that was all I needed in this life.

Mathematicians and Graduate Students

But finding professors or graduate students to read my papers — in effect, to act as consultants — was easier said than done. Several times a year, I had to trek up the hill to Evans Hall on the UC Berkeley campus and thumbtack half a dozen ads on the bulletin boards. Then (much easier) I had to post ads on the Stanford electronic bulletin board for electrical engineers since, like the UC Math Dept., the Stanford Math Dept. had no electronic bulletin boards, or, if it did, then it was impossible for an outsider to find out how to post an ad on them. (In 2004, however, I was able to find two electronic bulletin boards for math students and faculty.) I suppose I received half a dozen replies a year to these ads. I used the electrical engineering students only as a last resort, since they tended to have a much higher opinion of their mathematical maturity than the evidence warranted. And then, once every year or two, I would write directly to a professor. All but three of these many letters and emails went unanswered. I am sure that I have written many

1. See Curtis, William, *How to Improve Your Math Grades*, on the web site www.occampress.com.
2. "CV" is an abbreviation of "curriculum vitae", the academic equivalent of a resumé.

hundreds of emails and letters trying to find people to read my papers. One mathematician, after I told him how difficult it was to find readers, said, without having glanced at my paper, "You have to understand that no professional mathematician could afford to spend more than 15 minutes on your paper." I managed to conceal my anger at this insult. He would not have dared to make a similar remark to any professional whose paper he had not read. Another said that perhaps, if I earned a PhD in mathematics (a process that could take five years or more), a professional mathematician would be willing to read one of my papers. Yet another said that I shouldn't expect a mathematician to read my papers for anything less than $1,000 an hour.

I knew from the start that I could never reveal that I had no degree in mathematics, and only a master's in computer science. Fortunately, an affectation among the professionals provided a way out: the professionals never said "I have a PhD in..." or "My PhD is in ..." because that suggested that it was possible *not* to have a PhD and still be communicating with the august personage on the other end. Unthinkable. So the professionals merely said, "My degree is in..." Thus in the part of my email or letter where I urged my correspondent to believe that I was not a crackpot, I would say "My degree is in computer science, and for several years I was a researcher at Hewlett-Packard's main research lab in Palo Alto" All of which was true! Of course, only having a PhD in computer science (as they assumed), instead of mathematics, made me a second-class citizen, but at least it did not put me beyond the pale.

After 2000 or so, I was spending several thousand dollars a year on consultants. The mathematics graduate students charged the highest fees — at least $45 an hour. Electrical engineering graduate students charged only $20 or $25, the above-mentioned professor on sabbatical charged only $25, and the two other professors who spent any time on my paper charged nothing. At first, when I wrote to a professor, I would offer "any reasonable fee". One of the very few professors to reply to my letters or emails said, in so many words, that he considered it something of an insult to be offered money to read a paper. Thereafter, I made it a rule *not* to offer a fee when I wrote to a professor. But then a professor let it be known that his services were not free to the public. So after that, when I wrote to a professor, I concluded with the sentence, "If you are not offended by being offered a consulting fee, then I would like to offer you a consulting fee, but if you are offended, then I do not offer you a consulting fee."

Superficial Readings

The mathematics graduate students not only charged the most but also were the most superficial in their review of the possible proofs I asked them to look over — I got the equivalent of homework-paper-correcting from them, often, I suspect, while they were eating a hurried lunch or watching TV. Getting them to complete the work they had promised to do within the time limit they had agreed to, was a major effort in itself with many of them. The ones with Arab names were universally unreliable. One of them took four weeks to complete an easy one-hour project, another promised to complete the work "over the weekend", and each time I contacted him, asking about progress, he repeated the same promise. ("Sorry. I must of forgot.") But it was never completed.

Lack of Awareness of Importance of Ideas

The graduate students never commented on the underlying ideas, despite all my attempts to set these forth as clearly as I could. Their attitude seemed to be, "If your proposed proof has an error, what possible good can your ideas be?" — an attitude that revealed a truly appalling ignorance of the history of their own subject — of the fact that even some of the best of the best math-

ematicians of the past circulated proofs that were found to contain errors or logical gaps, which I learned for the first time as a result of reading, starting in the late nineties, one of the masterpieces of the history of mathematics, Morris Kline's *Mathematical Thought from Ancient to Modern Times*[1]. (No graduate student or mathematician I recommended it to had ever heard of it.) For me, this became another of those books — like Bittinger's *Logic and Proof*, described in the first of the "Working at Hewlett-Packard" chapters, in the section "First Programming Job" — that changed my life.

In *Mathematical Thought...,* Kline is concerned above all to explain what questions *led to* the theorems and lemmas and concepts that are so routinely and matter-of-factly taught in countless mathematics courses as though the reasons why just these theorems and lemmas and concepts were developed were perfectly obvious — courses that leave frustrated and angry students with the impression that there is no real difference between mathematics and the tax laws. Kline's book is one about which you say, years later, *it made the light dawn*. My copy is now worn and marked-up, the corners of the dark blue covers long since bent down from years of the thick volume being carried in backpacks, the pages full of underlinings and brackets and arrows (bracket = Important!; arrow = Enter in appropriate Environment!; vertical line through arrow = Entered!), every page with a check mark in the upper-right-hand corner (Gone through!), many with one or more lines through the check mark to indicate the number of times the page had been studied. If I were a professor of *any* mathematical subject, this book would be one of the required texts, and if some students couldn't afford it, I would buy it for them, provided they promised to keep it and treasure it for the rest of their lives. I don't know or care how Kline's mathematical papers rank in the eyes of the professionals: his history and his calculus text are worth far more than the lifetime publications of many other mathematicians.

It is difficult to convey to the non-mathematical reader what it means, in mathematics, not to be able to understand an *idea* unless the logical justification is given. Let me use, as an example, an idea that the reader has almost certainly heard of, though he or she may know nothing of the mathematics that supports it, namely, the idea underlying Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, that gravity curves space-time. What this means, among other things, is that if a ray of light passes near to a large gravitational body, say, the sun, it will follow a curved path, whereas when traveling in empty space, with no gravitational bodies around, it travels in a straight line.

This concept existed in Einstein's mind before he was able to express it mathematically. (In passing, I should mention that a very similar concept existed in the mind of one of the 19th century's great mathematicians, namely, Bernhard Riemann, who thought that, possibly, gravity might curve *space*. He tried to prove that it did, but failed, the reason being that gravity does not curve three-dimensional *space*, it curves four-dimensional *space-time*.)

In any case, Einstein did not arrive at his theory, which has proven to be true in numerous experiments, by sitting at his work table and playing with numbers and equations, all the time repeating to himself, "All that counts is that my equations do not contain a mistake, all that counts..." until one day he realized that one of his logically correct sequences of equations had demonstrated the remarkable fact, which had never occurred to him before, that gravity curves space-time. No, first he had the idea, and then he had to see if he could find the mathematical machinery to give it formal, logically-coherent expression.

" 'I have a few splendid ideas,' he wrote to his friend Marcel Grossman, 'which now only

1. Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1972.

need proper incubation.'" — Ferris, Timothy, *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, Anchor Books, N.Y., 1988, p. 190.

So I believe that, in all the mathematics that really counts, *first* comes the idea, *then* comes the proof, exactly as Hadamard said, and not the other way around. *First* Gödel had the idea, in the late 1920s, that there might be some mathematical truths that can't be proved, and *then* came the laborious proof that the idea was correct. *First* Alan Turing had the idea that there might not exist a program that could tell, in all cases, if another program would eventually halt in its computing or not, and *then* came his proof that indeed there was no such program. Not to be able to understand a mathematical idea without a proof is like an engineer not being able to understand a machine — what the machine does — unless he has the drawings before him.

I suspect that the above-mentioned Canadian mathematician, who couldn't understand a paper unless it was logically correct, himself recognized, perhaps only subconsciously, how limited he was as a mathematician, and that that was one of the main reasons why he decided to go into a lower-level field like economics.

But most surprising of all to me was that none of the graduate students (or professors) had any interest in what to me lay at the very core of mathematics' attraction and beauty, namely, *ideas*. They were all like the above-mentioned mathematician on sabbatical: ideas and intuitions separate from proofs were impossible to understand. All that mattered to them was *results*, which meant proved lemmas and theorems that could be published in refereed journals. The hard coin of the profession.

The students seemed more and more like factory-workers-in-training. Nietzsche's words, though not originally a description of professional mathematicians, fit perfectly the condition of the modern mathematician:

> "These young men lack neither character nor talent nor industry: but they have never been allowed time to choose a course for themselves; on the contrary, they have been accustomed from childhood onwards to being given a course by someone else. When they were mature enough to be 'sent off into the desert', something else was done — they were employed, they were purloined from themselves, they were trained to being *worn out daily* and taught to regard this as a matter of duty — and now they cannot do without it and would not have it otherwise." — Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Daybreak*, tr. Hollingdale, R. J., Cambridge University Press, N.Y., 1983, paragraph 178, p. 107.

I began asking myself what constituted *creativity* in mathematics. It certainly wasn't mere knowledge, or logical correctness, or the ability to write in the approved style. Thinking of my father, I decided that for me creativity meant *the ability to do a great deal with very little*. Most of the mathematical ideas that had stopped me in my tracks — Cantor's proofs about the infinities, for example — had had that quality.

Lack of an Esthetic Sense

There was no doubt about the amount of knowledge the graduate students had at their fingertips. A few of them were no doubt winners, or high-ranking performers, in some of the brutally difficult annual mathematics olympiads. No one could doubt for a moment the extent of their knowledge and the speed at which they could solve textbook problems. But I felt that none of the students — many of whom were tomorrow's mathematicians in the making — had an esthetic sense. There was no doubt in my mind that the structure I had discovered underlying the Syracuse

function was beautiful, imposing a grand order on a function that many regarded as "chaotic". I repeatedly thought of Leonardo's remark that if a painter could not see entire worlds in a crack in the wall, then he probably was not going to be a great painter. I thought, too, of my father's collecting jars, plastic spoons, other discards from my mother's kitchen and then making a beautiful water wheel out of them. My father knew, as did Leonardo, and many of the greatest innovators, that good material does not need to come with the right credentials.

It seemed that, for the graduate students, what mattered first and foremost was to be correct (they were always happy if they could find that I had made an error), and then, second, to work on a research problem that had been deemed important by someone in authority, and, third, to write in the approved style. Many times the first response I got from a graduate student after he had spent a little time on one of my papers, was a comment on my style, which I already knew was bad. I spent a small fortune trying to improve it, but even when I had paid someone — in one case a professor who was a well-known international authority on style — several hundred dollars to edit a portion of a paper, the first words that the next graduate student, or professor, would say was, "Well, the first problem is your style: it's terrible." One consultant made it clear that the fact that I had used subscripted subscripts, that is, terms like

$$t_{5_2}$$

made it highly questionable that my paper contained anything of importance. Only terms like t and t_5 were allowed (the latter meaning the fifth t of many t's), even though I often found it useful to have a concise way of representing things like item no. 2 in the fifth t, for example, in the case where I was talking about a great many short lists, t_1, t_2, t_3, ..., and I wanted to refer to item 2 in the short list t_5.

Another example: around 2000 or so, in the Berkeley Espresso coffee shop in North Berkeley, I happened to get into a conversation with a man who turned out to be a retired math professor from one of my alma maters, San Jose State. He said he had married a wealthy woman and now was spending most of his time on classical music. That made me optimistic about the possibility of his giving my Syracuse Problem paper a fair reading. I asked him about his own research. He said that he had never developed a liking for doing research. I got the impression he was made uncomfortable by the possibility of being wrong about something, about pursuing potential dead ends, or at least about not being able to come up with an approved notation. But by the end of the conversation, he consented to take a look at my paper on the Problem. I can't remember how I got the paper to him, but I do remember that when we next met at the coffee shop, he was almost beside himself over the fact that, on the first page of the paper, I had used an incompletely defined index! In other words, that I had spoken of something being at level i (i is an index) without specifying the range of i. Did i stand for a number in the sequence 0, 1, 2, 3, ... or did it stand for a number in the sequence 1, 2, 3, 4, ... or did it stand for a number in the sequence 2, 3, 4, 5, ... ? Let me hasten to say that it was indeed a minor omission, on the first page of a paper, not to have said, "where i is greater than or equal to 2", but a real mathematician — or I should say, the kind of mathematician I could respect — would have merely made a note of the omission in the margin of the paper, or said to me, "I assume you define the range of i somewhere...", or, "What is the range of i?"and gone on to the substance of the paper. But not this lifetime Custodian of Correctness. It became clear he felt he could not allow himself to read any more of the work of a person who would have an incompletely defined index in his paper. I never spoke to him again.

But he had made me realize that there are people — and I would bet they constitute at least 50% of professional mathematicians — who are attracted to mathematics because it is a symbol-manipulation game. They love the notation, the cleverness required to convert *this* string of symbols here into *that* string of symbols there. Ideas hold no interest for them, whereas for me, it was always ideas, and not symbols, that was the attraction of mathematics. Furthermore, my years in computer science had given me a healthy contempt for such a reverence for symbols, and around this time, I added two sentences to one of my books: "Contrary to popular belief, mathematics is not a language. It is a system of abstractions, held together by formal logic, and expressible in any of an infinite number of languages, some better for human use than others."

I mentioned above the mathematician on sabbatical from a Canadian university who answered one of my ads in the UC Berkeley Math Dept., and that he had spent several months going over the paper with me, and doing so at only around $25 an hour, instead of the usual $50 that the graduate students always charged. (Some of them asked for $75, but I told them I couldn't afford it.) Then, one day something he said made it clear he had not understood one of the most fundamental facts in the paper, and not a difficult one at that. He soon thereafter bowed out, saying that he had decided to get a PhD in economics. More than once he said that my main problem was my writing style. I asked him what was wrong with it, pleaded with him to point out specific things I could correct, but he never came up with any. I am sure he was referring to literary subtleties that professionals learn to recognize as the sign of membership in the Club. In any case, he knew, because I had repeated it to him many times, that if something wasn't clear, he could simply ask me for a clarification and I would be glad to give it to him. In connection with my errors, which I often made, he said several times that if the logic wasn't correct, he couldn't understand a paper. I was astounded. I immediately quoted to him a saying well-known in mathematical circles, attributed, I believe, to the great 20th-century mathematician Jacques Hadamard: "Logic is the means by which I convince the world of the correctness of my intuitions". It made no impression on him. (But let there be no doubt in the reader's mind: I am not "against" logic: If God had created a world without logic, I would never have forgiven him. I simply believe that it becomes important after, not before, one has a good idea.)

Not once did a consultant (whether graduate student or professor) begin by saying words to the effect, "Well, OK, your style is very clumsy, and you've got a lot of terminology, but let's forget about all that for the time being. Tell me, informally, and as simply as you can, what your basic ideas are."

Lack of Curiosity

I was also amazed at the consultants' universal lack of curiosity. The professors had told the graduate students that it was a waste of time to try to find a simple solution to Fermat's Last Theorem, and so that is what they accepted as incontrovertibly true. Even when I offered them shared authorship in the paper if they made an original contribution to it, they were not interested. Once, in the Au Cocquelet coffee shop, a rotund old guy — bald, with frizzy hair sticking out from the sides of his head, suspenders, a rumpled look — stopped by my table and asked me if that was a math book I was reading. I said it was. We got to talking. It turned out that he was a professor emeritus at UC Berkeley who now spent most of his time in Paris. He asked what problems I was working on. I mentioned the Syracuse Problem. He apparently didn't know it. I explained it briefly. I then mentioned that I was curious if there might not be a simple proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, hastening to make clear that I knew the Theorem had been proved in 1994 by Andrew Wiles of Princeton University. Without a word he turned, picked up the papers on his table, and

walked out.

No Interest in Better Ways of Presenting Mathematics

The graduate students had not the slightest interest in possible ways to make the presentation of mathematics simpler, more efficient. "I know nothing about that," Ed the Physicist remarked, indicating clearly that he thought the whole thing a waste of time for any real mathematician or physicist. I was stunned, when I first began writing papers, at mathematicians' and graduate students' indifference to indexes at the back of papers. Such indexes would enable the reader to find definitions of terms quickly, as well as lemmas and theorems stated and proved in the paper. Who wouldn't consider *essential* such an aid to increasing the speed of understanding the paper in a world in which thousands of mathematics and physics papers are published each year? But the linear, start-at-the-beginning, understand-page-1, then-understand-page-2, then-understand-page-3, ... paradigm of the classroom held the graduate students and the professionals in its iron grip. (If you need to look things up, you have not understood and memorized — in short, you have not learned — and therefore you should be ashamed of yourself, and deserve no help from the author.) I sadly realized it would be 50 or 100 years, maybe longer, before anything like my Environment idea would even be considered by the professional mathematicians. (The revolution would have to come from the students.)

It dawned on me how lucky I had been to come to mathematics from the computer science of the 1970s, when there was great concern over what was then called "the control of complexity". Even though this referred to the complexity of computer programs, nevertheless many of the good practices that were developed were directly applicable to mathematics — for example, the technique called "structured programming" could be applied directly to proofs, making any proof much easier and quicker to understand. This technique is set forth in William Curtis's *How to Improve Your Math Grades* (occampress.com), which was derived from my book setting forth a new approach to computer documentation.

Computer scientists of that time also had what seemed to me a healthy attitude toward notation, regarding it as something that should be adapted to serve a purpose, and not an end in itself.

But mathematicians wanted no part of a drive toward control of complexity[1] and ease of understanding.

No Interest in Structure of Subjects

The graduate students also had not the slightest interest in the history of their subject, or in its structure. On several occasions I asked graduate students and professional mathematicians to give me what they considered a good description of the structure of the subject they were specializing

1. In 2005, I was told by a mathematician who had spent many years at one of the nation's leading research laboratories, that it was customary for mathematicians in his department to dismiss with contempt any new paper that was easy to understand. So my constant worry during the first 25 years of my work on the hard problems I had chosen to try to solve, that I was writing too clearly, had been justified. But as it turned out, a major reason why professional mathematicians didn't want to spend time on my papers was that the papers had obviously been written by someone who had not had a mathematics education. When, around 2005, I decided once and for all to master the writing style that professional mathematicians regarded as correct, I confronted a paradox, because I found that four of the best books on writing style all emphasized the importance of writing clearly. The resolution of the paradox seemed to be this: there was great emphasis on the importance of "local clarity" — of following very strict rules of style that aimed to remove ambiguity from terms and sentences — but there was complete indifference to "global clarity" — ways of making an entire paper, or subject, more easily and rapidly understood.

in, or even of the whole of mathematics at the top levels. It was clear that students and professionals both regarded the question as irrelevant. A typical response was the following:

> It's kind of agreed now that no classification of mathematics is needed or possible, as fields merge or split, new ideas come from physics, biology, computation. ...mathematics as it is, seems to be unclassifiable.

A remarkable statement! Yet within a subject or specialty, it is inconceivable that a mathematician would say, "No classification of the entities in this subject is needed or possible." But I must hasten to say that to me, the notion of an "unclassifiable" subject is fundamentally interesting in itself: What does it mean? I can imagine, at one extreme, a subject in which each thing is all by itself, and not a part of any other thing in the subject, and at the other extreme, a subject in which each thing contains all the other things. I want to know what mathematical subject investigates such questions.

In any case, the American Mathematical Society has a list of all mathematical subjects, with a code number associated with each, so that the author of a paper can indicate, on the first page of his paper, what subjects his paper is primarily concerned with. This list is in itself a classification of mathematical subjects. From it a more refined structure of the whole subject could be generated, for example, by going through each subject in the list and recording all the other subjects that are referred to in that subject.

Lack of Emphasis on Distinction Between Problems and Classes of Problems

In October, 2005 a friend of my lady friend Gaby (she will be introduced later) who had been a mathematician at Bell Labs sent me an undergraduate algebra text that he was discarding in preparation for a move to an apartment in New York City. It was John R. Durbin's *Modern Algebra*[1]. I welcomed the gift, since I can't resist going over textbooks in subjects I already know a little about. I had gone through I. N. Herstein's classic text, *Topics in Algebra*, in the eighties and nineties, and had dipped into a few others, but I had not looked at a text on the subject for several years.

A few weeks after receiving the book, I was scheduled to travel to New York to visit Gaby and my son, and so, in looking for other things to read, I came across Clifford Pickover's *A Passion for Mathematics*[2], a collection of puzzles and mathematical curiosities and facts, including several of Ramanujan's remarkable formulas for pi. Browsing these books side by side I soon noticed how annoyed I became with the Pickover text even though I was able to solve a few of the puzzles, and even though I was interested in some of the facts. The trouble was that most of the facts were unrelated, giving the naive reader the impression that mathematics is merely a collection of curiosities, each of which can be proven correct.

I kept feeling pulled back to the Durbin text, with its development of the basic structures of modern algebra — groups, rings, fields — and the various types of numbers they contain. Here things "held together', they were related to each other; when you learned something you could be confident it would have applications later in the book. I realized that, ever since those afternoons at Beckman when Manny Gordon conducted his little after-hours seminar on symbolic logic, and then my later coming across Cantor's proofs, that the systems, the organization of abstractions,

1. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, N.J., 2000.
2. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, N.J., 2005

were what had attracted me to mathematics. I had little interest in mere isolated facts about numbers. I later remembered the words of one of the 20th century's great mathematicians, G. H. Hardy:

> A significant mathematical idea, a serious mathematical theorem, should be 'general'... The idea should be one which is a constituent in many mathematical constructs, which is used in the proof of theorems of many different kinds... The relations revealed by the proof should be such as connect many different mathematical ideas... a theorem is unlikely to be serious when it lacks these qualities conspicuously; we have only to take examples from the isolated curiosities in which arithmetic abounds...
>
> (*a*) 8712 and 9801 are the only four-figure numbers which are integral multiples of their 'reversals':
>
> $8712 = 4 \bullet 2178$, $9801 = 9 \bullet 1089$,
>
> and there are no other numbers below 10,000 which have this property.
>
> (*b*) There are just four numbers (after 1) which are the sums of the cubes of their digits, viz.
>
> $153 = 1^3 + 3^3 + 5^3$; $370 = 3^3 + 7^3 + 0^3$;
>
> $371 = 3^3 + 7^3 + 1^3$; $407 = 4^3 + 0^3 + 7^3$.
>
> These are odd facts, very suitable for puzzle columns and likely to amuse amateurs, but there is nothing in them that appeals much to a mathematician. The proofs are neither difficult nor interesting — merely a little tiresome. The theorems are not serious; and it is plain that one reason (though perhaps not the most important) is the extreme specialty of both the enunciations and the proofs, which are not capable of any significant generalization." — Hardy, G. H., *A Mathematician's Apology*, Cambridge University Press, N.Y., 1979, pp. 104-105.

One of Pickover's puzzles was the following:

"What is the value of the missing digit in this sequence?
6 2 5 5 4 5 6 3"

He remarked, "(I have never known anyone who was able to solve this puzzle.)"[1] He had several other similar puzzles, all of them much easier than the above. Yet he had not one word about the desirability of finding a *procedure* for solving this kind of puzzle — a procedure that one might use to make the attempt at a solution go more efficiently. Whereas for me, if the labor of solving a problem does not reveal, or improve, a procedure for solving *many* such problems, then I feel I have wasted my time.

In passing, let me mention that in the book I self-published in the eighties, I felt I had at least made a stab at an answer to the question, "How do we know, when we are asked to find the next number in a sequence, that the answer the author gives is correct?" My answer was (and still is) that the next number is the one generated by the smallest (i.e, having the fewest symbols in its definition) Turing machine (idealized computer program) that generates the first numbers.

Let me also mention that, in looking at Ramanujan's extraordinary formulas for pi — formulas that Pickover calls "eye-candy" — I was angered that Pickover simply accepted them as the

1. ibid., p. 65.

small miracles they were, without addressing what to me are at least two obvious questions, namely, "Is it possible that there is a rule for developing these formulas that is based purely, or largely, on the *appearance* of the symbols on the page — in other words, a visual esthetic rule?" and, going back to the idea regarding Turing machines, "Why isn't there an extensive effort to categorize these formulas by the number of symbols they contain, so that we can say things like, 'There exist exactly *n* formulas for pi that have *k* symbols'?"

Reflections on the Academy

An outsider learns something about the inside — he sees things that insiders do not see. I began, in my youth, with the firm conviction that academics would be wise and competent critics of my work — that they would see what I was so clumsily driving at, point out what was wrong with my ideas, and tell me what was right about them.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment of my lifelong attempt to go it alone was the discovery of how wrong I was in this conviction. The sad truth was that the vast majority of academics wouldn't think of doing anything that wasn't approved beforehand — a practice that began with the PhD thesis. I think of the extraordinary difference between Descartes, Pascal, Fermat, Darwin, Einstein, on the one hand, and the typical tenure-track PhD on the other, and I am not referring to degree of accomplishment here. I cannot imagine any of those great thinkers beginning by saying to themselves, "What problems are deemed proper to work on?" I think of Benoit Mandelbrodt (discoverer of fractal geometry, whose work began at IBM with the observation that the curve of certain statistics functions pertaining to the noise in telephone lines resembled the outline of mountains), of Greg Chaitin, discoverer of algorithmic information theory, whose questions about the meaning of randomness began when he was a teenager; of Eric Hoffer, the longshoreman philosopher whom I have mentioned earlier in this book, and whose life was about as far from the PhD culture as it is possible to get. I think of my father, running a successful engineering company and in the evenings working on his inventions and pursuing the questions that interested him ("Why are walnut shells so strong?"). None of these thinkers spent their lives counting the number of papers they managed to get published each year, and counting the number of references to their published papers that is published regularly, and looking over their shoulders to see what the competition was doing (because they were constantly worried about their reputations).

I think of the humanities, and those who, after years of faultless pleasing of those in power, obtain positions at some of the nation's greatest universities (greatest citadels of prestige) and then dazzle their colleagues with the originality and daring of — another book about Shakespeare, another biography of Lincoln, another analysis of the poetry of Keats.

I think of the naiveté of my youth, when I fervently believed that if I perfected my writing craft, I would need only show some samples of my work to those who know in order for it to be taken up with enthusiasm. The lesson of the years has been that those who know are incapable of judging anything that has not been previously approved. They are skilled merely at explaining the depth and originality in works of art that they have been told have depth and originality. If the ms. of Joyce's *Ulysses* had been dropped on the front doorstep of any one of them before it was published, it would have gone straight into the wastebasket.

But as students of intellectual and artistic history know, this hot-house culture has a price. Independents like me sense it when we visit the university: the electric buzz in the air: Who is smartest? Who knows more? Who's on top? Who has created complications that will be the most important? Who will win the prizes and the contracts? Never any quiet when the mind can be

merely curious, merely inventive in its own way about things it chooses to be inventive about, approved or not.

All my life, I have been a man of books, not of schools. I think of the dreadful waste of time that classroom learning has always been for someone like me (not for all students, certainly). I didn't so much want to study on my own as to study on my own terms — the same terms under which I wanted to teach. I wanted to be able to pay someone to help me understand what I was having difficulty teaching myself. If the person didn't seem to be helping me, then I wanted to be able to look for someone else. I regarded it as an unforgivable rudeness for someone to presume to tell me how I should go about learning something — as rude as if someone were to sit by my side at the dinner table or in a restaurant and tell me what I should eat next, and how much I should put on my fork. I always felt confident that I knew how to go about teaching myself what I wanted to know, in any subject, one reason being that I knew that I very seldom wanted to know everything about a subject or topic or concept. I knew exactly what questions to ask of someone knowledgeable (if I could ever find such a person who was willing to talk to me on my own terms).

The idea that getting an *A* in a course was somehow a proof that one knew the material of the course grew ever more bizarre with the years, because among other things it presumed that what you had learned you would always know. Yet in the vast majority of cases, nothing could be farther from the truth. For me the question was, "How rapidly can you *find out* something in the subject?" My Environment idea grew directly out of this question. I thought: "A course should above all teach you *where things are*." Furthermore, with the years, I became more and more convinced that only *I* know if I know something. Getting a good grade in an exam or a course simply meant that I had satisfied someone's definition of what it meant to know something. But the mere concept of knowing or not knowing seemed childishly naive. There are many levels of knowledge of any concept, ranging from the mere name of the concept, to a rough idea, with few or no equations, of what the concept means, to having a rough idea of how to solve certain important classes of problems associated with the concept, to being in possession of written procedures for doing so, to having memorized these procedures, to ...

I often thought, thinking back to my alienation from the university that began already in my first semester at RPI, "They could have had me for a song! If they had just told me what I had to be able to do and what books would help me do it and how much time I would be allowed with each professor each week, and if they had allowed me as much time as I needed to complete all the work for the degree, there would have been no doubt in my mind about how I wanted to spend my life after I got the degree."

And yet there was a very high price that every self-teacher paid, namely, the awareness that in the eyes of the academic world, self-taught knowledge is worthless knowledge. "If you didn't learn it from us, you didn't learn it." No matter how inefficient, how plain *bad*, a classroom course might be, if you sat through it and got a good grade, then you had a proof that you could show to others that you had learned something, and you were allowed to feel confident that you had acquired something valuable. So I labored in shame, knowing that all this effort was a complete waste of time in the eyes of those whose attention I wanted to gain with my knowledge.

What It Takes To Be a Professional Mathematician

I could sense, in the graduate students I communicated with, the budding arrogance that seemed to be a *sine qua non* of the professional mathematician. Only two of the professional mathematicians who spent any time on my papers lacked this arrogance. The rest seemed to con-

sider it their No. 1 duty to keep people like me (amateurs) humiliated and ashamed for wasting the time of such great and important men as they were.

If someone were to ask me what it takes to be a professional mathematician today, I would reply: know a lot about a subject that is very difficult for non-specialists to understand, don't make mistakes in the presence of others, work only on approved problems, be nasty to anyone in an inferior position to you, and make up in arrogance what you lack in talent. How could I spend my life in the company of such people? How could I spend my life always looking over my shoulder as I worked, always trying to publish more papers than the next fellow? Always in a frenzy of worry: "Is anyone getting ahead of me? Am I as brilliant as I was? *Am I working on the right problems?* " How could I want to become like such people?

There were times when I wondered if mathematics, the greatest of all intellectual disciplines, would be able to survive mathematicians, at least the mathematicians of my time.

Prof. X

In the late nineties I somehow got the name and email address of a math professor who I thought might be interested in the Syracuse Problem — or, I should say, in helping me with my paper on the Problem. It turned out he was, and for several months he exchanged emails with me, each of his emails pointing out errors in my reasoning. I was surprised and honored by his patience. Eventually he said the press of other work did not permit him to continue. Since he will be reappearing in this narrative, I will call him "Prof. X"[1].

My Old Nemesis

After repairing all the errors he had found before he bowed out, I submitted my paper to a journal. I can no longer recall how I came to select that particular journal, but within a month a rejection letter arrived, with a copy of the referee's report, as was customary. (The referee's name had, of course, been removed.) The report revealed that the referee had not read much of the paper. He had read my statement at the beginning that the paper contained several lemmas that were similar to lemmas that already existed in the literature. He then used that fact to reject the paper as offering nothing new. I sensed immediately, in the dismissive tone, my old nemesis — a man whom I had spoken to on the phone in the eighties. He had then been a new PhD working at a well-known computer research laboratory. I may have previously sent him a copy of an early version of the paper. In the phone conversation, he lectured me on the danger of making "a pet hobby-horse" out of an idea. He said he had done that in his PhD research, and it had cost him a year or more in wasted effort. I am sure I told him that I believed that first and foremost we must be guided by our esthetic sense, and that I for one could not give up on an idea as long as my esthetic sense said it was worth pursuing — at least not until there was convincing evidence that my esthetic sense was wrong in this particular case. But he seemed barely to hear what I said. I had the clear impression he regarded mathematics as a matter of being better than everyone else, or almost everyone else. I sensed a star performer in school, a winner of prizes, a man who already in his teenage years had learned and accepted — in fact, had reveled in — the idea that for the exceptional few, there was all the difference in the world between a 98% and a 99% grade: if someone got a 98%, and you got a 99%, then the other person was a loser, with little hope for a

1. "X" is not the first letter of his first or last name..

career. Thus, I sensed, this mathematician felt that his number one task was the same as that of Georgia's professor husband[1], namely, to keep the rabble out — to make sure that no encouragement was given to those who had not attended the right schools and obtained the right credentials — to discourage and humiliate wherever possible. And he succeeded, for a time, because I was so ashamed that I gave up working on the Problem for several years.

In the nineties, when I had returned to the Problem, on at least one occasion I wrote him, offering him shared authorship if he would work with me on my paper. He turned me down with thinly veiled contempt. By that time he had become an authority on the Syracuse Problem, having written a number of papers and given lectures on it. He had become a respected researcher, and a referee that many editors turned to when the editor received a paper on the Problem — and especially a paper that claimed a solution. I thought: if you can't solve a problem — if you haven't got any good ideas — then become extremely adept at detecting what is wrong with other attempts to solve it (but never at seeing what might be right with those attempts). (I learned later that, possibly while he was still working toward his PhD, he had found a fatal error in a claimed proof that had been published.)

A Kind Editor

I was so outraged by his dismissing my paper without having read it that I wrote the editor and said that I regarded the referee's behavior as disgraceful. Amazingly, the editor wrote back and said he would allow me to re-submit the paper. Which I did, but then, in going over it, I found an error I couldn't quickly repair, so I wrote him telling him I was withdrawing the paper. I asked him if he would be willing to work with me in repairing my argument and helping me improve my writing style, which I knew was wretched. Once again amazingly, he said yes, on condition that there be no communication about the details of the paper over the phone or via email, and that each week I would come to his house with two copies of the latest revision of the paper; we would go over the passage I had selected, he would give me the corrections on the spot. He charged I think $65 an hour, which I considered very reasonable.

This went on for several months. I was impressed by his unerring eye for errors, both logical and stylistic, all the more so as he spent no time studying the previous version of the paper prior to our meeting. He had that Jewish devotion to scholarship and precision that I had always admired. I kept hoping that the *idea* underlying my attempted solution would arouse his interest and curiosity, but it didn't. He simply did, each week, what he had contracted to do, no more, no less. He made no suggestions as to better approaches to proofs of lemmas. I asked him what his PhD thesis had been on; he said topology. I asked him what research he was pursuing; he said he had decided not to pursue research — he had his hands full as an editor. His mastery of mathematical writing was flawless. I remember a definition that occurred near the beginning of my paper. I had written it in a way that made it easy to understand but that was not as concise as it could have been. In brief, I had written the definition along the lines of, "We define the structure U as follows: at level 1, the constituents are ...; at level 2, the constituents are those constituents of level 1 such that ...; at level 3 the constituents are those constituents of level 2 such that ...; etc. But he shook his head as he read the definition, then said it could be presented more professionally as ... and gave a short definition that, unquestionably, said the same thing more precisely and more formally, but had to be deciphered to be understood. (I was reminded of the programming language

1. See second file of chapter 1 of Vol. 4, under "Georgia"

APL which in the early eighties I had attempted to learn at HP Labs: it enabled a programmer to express a whole program in as little as half a line but made it difficult for another programmer to understand what that program did.) I naturally wrote the definition as he had recommended, but I couldn't help reflecting on how the correct, formal style had come to dominate mathematical writing. But I must also say that his eye for brevity also resulted in his coming up with a single term for a clumsy long-winded descriptive phrase that I had been using. I used that phrase thereafter.

After several months, he still didn't feel I had a proof, and he began to find reasons why we couldn't continue our consultations: mainly, pressure of work. I did my utmost to remain in his good graces, and so I asked him when it would be all right for me to contact him again. But it soon became clear that he didn't want to spend any more time on the paper. In the years following, I sometimes asked him a question about protocol, or sent him a book recommendation. His replies were always prompt and civil, but they seemed to grow ever shorter.

Prof. X Again

In the early 2000s, I wrote the first-mentioned professor above once or twice a year offering him shared authorship if he worked with me on the paper, and reminding him that I was continually searching for, and occasionally finding, graduate students, and very rarely a professional mathematician, to read the paper, that the paper was on my web site and receiving several dozen visits a month, and that I had been able to fix all errors that had been reported to me. He never remarked on my offer of shared authorship, and said he was too busy to spend any more time on the paper. However, he later did, as will be described in the next file of this volume.