PRIDE AND MEMORY

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But at my back I always hear/Time’s winged chariot hurrying near.

--Andrew Marvell
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Pride and Memory
by
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Master of Arts in English
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This thesis is the story of the son of Italian immigrants to the United States. It tracks the significant aspects of his life beginning during the Great Depression. He lived the first part of his life being part of one of the poorest families in the wealthiest town in the United States. He began working outside the home, caddying at a country club, when he was nine years old. He quit school at fifteen, hitchhiked to parts of New England and then to the Southern part of the United States before joining the U.S. Air Force when he was seventeen years old. He was honorably discharged four years later and worked at various jobs, including short order cook, bartender, drill press operator and then became a semi-pro boxer.

He eventually found his way to the university on the Korean Veterans GI Bill. While at the university he took part in the anti-McCarthy movement in the early 1950s. Later he moved to San Francisco where he met some interesting people, including Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and other poets, writers, and painters during the so-called “Beatnik” era. In 1963 he went to live in Europe for two years. When he returned to the states he got married and lived in Joplin, Missouri and in New York City. In New York he joined the newly organized National Teacher Corps and taught in Harlem for two years. When Martin Luther King was assassinated he was one of the representatives of the New York City Teachers Association selected to fly to Memphis, Tenn. for the Memorial March.

He went to graduate school in Santa Barbara during the time the bank was burned to the ground; when military helicopters were flying overhead and National Guard soldiers were on the streets.

The story also tells of his running a floating poker game, one step ahead of the police in Detroit. He also was a partner in a nightclub venture.

He served in the U.S. Peace Corps, published a few poems, as well as an account of self-deception in a philosophy journal. He lived in England, Germany, Italy, Finland and Ukraine and has visited every continent except one.

He was elected to his local school board and ran, unsuccessfully, for California State Assembly.

This thesis will be for his fourth Masters Degree.
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I also want to thank my daughter Serenella Cosentino-Long and my friends, Jim Johnston and Kay Abraham for reading and commenting on parts of the thesis.

My wife, Antonia, deserves many thanks for being patient and waiting until it was finished before she read it.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A normal academic thesis would be quite different from this one.

The average M.A. candidate would most likely be a twenty-five year old striving to show his/her breadth of knowledge, creativity and general academic prowess. I think this is a reasonable goal and the M.A. Thesis is just a part, albeit a large part, of the road to a degree.

My thesis is very different than what I consider the normal academic thesis; it is basically my memoirs. This means, for example, among other things, that there are no footnotes, since the few places where footnotes might be needed are explained in the text itself. However, I have done the normal thesis work before, e.g., my M.A. thesis for the MALA program at SDSU. Among my publications are a philosophy paper in a professional journal, (“Self-Deception Without Paradox”) in Philosophy Research Archives, and poems in poetry magazines (“A Gedanken Experiment” and “Introduction to Poetry” in Daybreak Press, and “Making History” in Via). In addition, I have published papers in two in-house publications, one for the University of California and one for the San Diego City Department of Education.

There are, of course, different types of autobiographies. There are the disguised autobiographies written as novels, e.g. Dickens’ David Copperfield, Somerset Maugham’s Of Human Bondage, James Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar, etc. There are more recent autobiographies, like Bill Bryson’s, The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid, which tells as much, or more, about the American culture than about Bryson. Hemingway’s A Moveable Feast is almost as much about the people he knew (Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, etc.), as it is about him. He warns us, in the preface, “this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always a chance that a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact” (Hemingway xiii). Then there is Angela’s Ashes by Frank McCourt, a straight-forward autobiography (although there have been some questions about that in recent years). My memoirs here are closest to the type written by Frank McCourt (assuming that his account is
true). Which brings me to Huckleberry Finn who, when talking about *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, says, “That book was made by Mr Mark Twain and he told the truth, mainly” (Twain 1). That’s what I am doing in this thesis (i.e., “telling the truth, mainly”).

I am an octogenarian who grew up during the Great Depression. I was raised by a single mom, long before that term or that phenomenon became part of our culture. A single mom, an immigrant who could neither read nor write, but she could read numbers and was smart enough to figure out the cost of her loaded super market cart, in her head, before she arrived at the check-out counter.

I have worked on this thesis, on and off, for about three years. I still see room for improvement, but I can also visualize another three years revisiting and revising, so I decided to stop. I thought I was ready to turn this thesis in and then I was informed that a thesis should not be more than 150-200 pages (mine was 465 pages), so I have spent the past month or two trying to cut it down to size.

One of the problems with autobiographies, as should be expected, is that there are various types of memories: direct and clear, faded and fuzzy, and, of course, false memories. All of these types are probably in here, but I did strive to produce only the first type. The conundrum known as false memory is especially tricky. As I wrote these memoirs, I often thought of Nietzsche’s warning about pride and memory: “Memory says I did it. Pride replies, I couldn’t have. Eventually, memory yields” (75). Thus, my title.

When writing memoirs I believe there will always be, conscious or unconscious, some kind of protective coating of the ego, usually something between a gossamer gown and a heavy cold weather coat. Memories are not only subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but also to the whims and waning of an anxious, aging brain.
CHAPTER 2

SAN FRANCISCO AND SANTA BARBARA

SAN FRANCISCO – 1959

George and Bobbye Troutt and I were in a nightclub on the Embarcadero, owned and operated by Kid Ory, the famous jazz musician of the early twentieth century. He played with King Oliver and the young Louis Armstrong (both King Oliver and Kid Ory were much older than Louis Armstrong). Kid Ory must have been about seventy years old at the time we met and had only recently opened this club in San Francisco. He came to our table between sets and we talked about jazz. George and I liked jazz and it was fascinating for us to be able to talk to this jazz legend. Bobbye didn’t say much but I know she was just as happy as we were to have this chance. We told him we felt lucky to have the opportunity to talk to him, but why, we asked him, did he choose our table out of all those in the club? His explanation was that he decided because of our response when he asked the audience what they would like to hear. Most people responded with, “When the Saints Go Marching In” (“that’s what they always say” Ory said) but George and I just yelled out, “Do What Ory Says” and, he said, he was happy to play it. We knew that tune from listening to Ory’s records when George and I shared an apartment, before he and Bobbye were married. We liked his explanation but we didn’t know if that was his real reason or if it was because Bobbye was probably the only black face in that crowd of whites. Perhaps it was both. In any case we had a good conversation with him. I remember once when he went to do another set, we talked about whether he had ever played with Bessie Smith and so when he came back to the table we asked him. His response: “Bessie Smith, oh yeah, Chicago 1926.” At one point we said, “Ed”, (he had asked us to call him Ed, not Kid Ory) what happened to the people who played in the band with you and King Oliver?” He told us they were all dead. One of us, I think it was George, said, “No, Louie Armstrong is still alive.” Kid Ory came back with, “Yeah, I like I said, they all dead.” We didn’t know if he hadn’t heard us or just didn’t like Louis Armstrong for some reason, so we just dropped it. For us it was like we were listening to the history of jazz; we were fascinated by him.
I thought of that talk with Kid Ory when I was at the University of California, Santa Barbara. A friend of mine, Fred Turner, was a professor of English at UCSB and he invited me, along with my wife, Antonia, to a party he would be giving for his graduate students. At that party one of Fred’s graduate students came up to me and said, “I am writing my dissertation on the Beat Poets and Professor Turner tells me that you were in San Francisco in the fifties and knew some of those poets. Could you tell me something about the people you knew? What was it like in those days?” Boom – there it was; suddenly I felt as old as Kid Ory was when I met him! But I was still in my thirties, and I was already being treated like I was a good historical source for this twenty-something graduate student. He asked me what brought me to San Francisco in the fifties (I had told him I grew up in Connecticut). I explained that I had been going to Wayne University (later, Wayne State University) in Detroit and someone had told me that if I was really interested in jazz and poetry I should go to San Francisco. I had heard about the San Francisco scene before (this was early in 1958) so I decide to drop my studies and go to San Francisco. I knew I could finish my B.A. at San Francisco State. I then told him that I had met and talked to some of the regulars of North Beach (that section of San Francisco was the hang-out for the so-called “Beatniks”), people like Ferlinghetti (poet and owner of City Lights Bookstore), Rexroth (called the Daddy of the Beatniks), Brother Antonius (known later as William Everson), Richard Brautigan, Jerry Kamstra, Pierre DeLattre (dubbed “the Beatnik Priest” by Time magazine), Clayton Barbeau (another writer called him, “the poet of mental health”) and David Meltzer, another very good poet. I also told him that in the twentieth century there was probably only one other place comparable to San Francisco of the fifties and that was Paris of the twenties.

So I went from listening to one of the sources of jazz history to becoming one of the sources for a graduate student’s writing of history. This was just a part of a long journey, both geographically and psychologically, from the world of my parents.
CHAPTER 3

CHILDHOOD

The background for my long journey began with my mother and father, who were immigrants from Southern Italy. Theirs was an arranged marriage with, ultimately, thirteen children. My father could read and write at least three languages; when I was young I heard that it was five or six languages (but then, much of what was said about him may have been apocryphal). I was only nineteen and stationed overseas when my father died. My father never got to know me as an adult and I never got to really know him.

My mother was illiterate, but smart. My mother, although she lived to be one hundred and one, only knew me from what she could glean from my infrequent visits home.

My last name, Cosentino, is derived from the city of Cosenza in the province of Calabria, Italy. Since last names don’t begin until about the 12th century, I think it is very probable that our family roots are deep in the soil of Calabria.

My children only began to know me when more than half of my life was over, assuming that they only began learning anything about me as an individual when they were about ten years old. I suspect this is true in most families, which is why I try to encourage my friends to write their memoirs.

Some people say their memory reaches back to the cradle. This always amazes me because the hippocampus, which is the first stop for memory on its way to storage, is not even completely formed at that age. My memory, however, has never reached back so far. With my childhood long gone, the possibility of my memory following it, and the specter of my time having an end, I must begin.

**MAKING NEWS I**

- **BABE RUTH PLAYS HIS LAST GAME WITH NEW YORK YANKEES.**
- **BEST SELLERS: GOODBYE MR CHIPS BY JAMES HILTON, SEVEN GOTHIC TALES BY ISAK DINESEN.**
- **DIONNE QUINTUPLETS BORN IN ONTARIO, CANADA.**
GENERAL STRIKE IN SAN FRANCISCO. 130,000 WORKERS WALK OUT, CITY IMMOBILIZED.

A COMMUNIST-INSPIRED AND LED REVOLT AGAINST ORGANIZED GOVERNMENT.

While 14,000 dockworkers walked out in San Francisco, the vanguard of a general strike, my family was renting an old house in North Mianus, Connecticut. I was walking in my back yard by the grape arbor, about to have a childhood experience that would clash with the benign landscape. I still see beautiful blue clusters of ripe grapes calling to me. As I looked longingly at those grapes, a bee buzzed near me, and before I had time to react it flew in my ear and stung me. It, naturally, was very painful and I screamed and ran crying all the way home. My mother and sisters calmed me down and took care of me. Despite this experience, I still recall that yard with the grape arbor as a calm, peaceful, and sunny place.

It was about a year after my bout with the bee that my sister, Louise (who was ten years older) asked me if I wanted to go for a walk into the woods and along the river. I was excited about it so she took me. As we were climbing a rocky hill I fell and cut my left knee on a sharp stone (the scar is still with me). I was bleeding quite a bit and Louise was frightened. She picked me up and carried me home, which was quite a way for a fourteen or fifteen year old to carry a child. I don’t remember what happened after we got home but I’m afraid that Louise, who was trying to do something nice for me, was punished. In later years Louise told me that she “caught hell” for taking me on that walk.

When I was growing up in that poor area of Greenwich, Connecticut, there was a policeman who sometimes came to North Mianus. I always think of him as “Piney” but my sister, Evelyn, tells me his name was Pine. We were always glad to see him because he would usually throw coins to the kids on the playground and we would run and scramble and fight for the coins. He loved to watch us and would laugh as we fought to get a coin or two.

I was very disappointed when sometime later someone told me that Piney was overheard saying how much he enjoyed “seeing those Dago kids fighting each other over a nickel or dime,” (in fact, as my brother-in-law, Bob, mentioned to me, “in those days it was probably only pennies and nickels” and he is probably right, although I do think there was at least an occasional dime). When I read Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man, where the black kids scramble for coins while the white men laughed, it reminded me of our diving for coins, but our experience was not anywhere near as bad as theirs, which was horrendous. In the
book they were sweaty from having just finished what was ostensibly a boxing match (but which, in reality, it was just a way to get them to hit and hurt each other) and were then forced on to an electrified rug where they would be jolted by electric shocks. They also were being humiliated for the pleasure of the whites. So the similarities are superficial but nevertheless I did think of our scrambling for coins when I read Ellison’s account, and perhaps that is why I connected immediately with Ellison’s characters.

In the summer sometimes there were movies when it was dark enough to show them outside. There was a big screen behind the North Mianus grammar school and the movies cost three cents. This, of course, was during the depression, sometimes called “the Great Depression” (that obviously refers to the magnitude because there was nothing else great about it). On the screen there were white actors; if there were non-whites they were usually cast as inferior, like the Lone Ranger’s sidekick, Tonto, (of course today we all know that tonto, in Spanish, means idiotic or foolish), or they were domestics, or stupid, comical characters. When you add to these movies the fact that everyone in the neighborhood was white, what was the likelihood of the children viewing these movies to become prejudiced as adults?

We were very poor and we often stole apples and tomatoes and feasted on them. One time, with my older brother, Val and his friend, we helped ourselves to some corn from someone else’s garden and went to the woods where (I was surprised to learn) Val and his friend had stashed a pot to cook the corn in. We enjoyed that cooked corn, as we had enjoyed all the tomatoes and apples we had saved the owners the trouble of picking. We would also pick wild dandelions for salad. There was another wild plant with an edible leaf which we called “bread and butter” and would pick and eat. So, in the midst of the Depression, we managed to eat well some of the time.

Normally, on school days, we had bread and a very weak coffee with milk for breakfast. For lunch we had bread and coffee or tea and sometimes, if we were lucky, bologna sandwiches. At night we usually had no meat and the very few times we did have meat it was just small portions (normally in a stew). Sometime we just had trippa (tripe, cow’s stomach lining), which I didn’t like and wouldn’t eat, which meant my supper consisted of a couple of pieces of bread, since there was nothing else to eat. Many times our
supper consisted of just fried potatoes and onions. Despite all those fried potatoes and onions, I still like them today (and I still don’t eat tripe or liver).

All my clothes, with very few exceptions, were hand-me-downs from my older brothers. On rainy days my feet would get all wet because the cardboard, which covered the holes in the soles of my shoes, would get soaked through. If it were raining hard I would come home from school literally soaked from head to toe. Fortunately we lived close to school, so I didn’t have far to walk.

I seldom had candy or ice cream except when my oldest brother was old enough to work, then he would sometimes buy us some candy. In the winter my sisters would take the clean snow from the roof and make ice cream.

My brother Val, after reading *Angela’s Ashes* (McCourt), a book written by a New York schoolteacher about growing up poor in Ireland, said that we could have written that book. I told him I didn’t think so, but when I mentioned this to my older sister, Evelyn, she said she agreed with Val. She mentioned things I had forgotten (or repressed). As an example she pointed out that one Thanksgiving Day, shortly after we had moved to Stamford, we only had one boiled potato and one hard-boiled egg each for Thanksgiving dinner (I’m glad I forgot that). She also talked about how all the older kids, when we lived in North Mianus would have to go out into the woods on those cold winter days and find twigs or other pieces of wood to keep our stove going.

We never had our own bedroom; in fact, not even our own bed. In Stamford I shared a bed with two of my brothers, Frank and Valentino. Our older brother, Albert, was in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps, one of Roosevelt’s New Deal projects which helped the poor and the country) during that time, so at least he had his own bed. In North Mianus we also shared a bed and in the winter we had to use coats for blankets, putting them over the sheets on cold nights. Between the coats and the warm bodies we made it through the night.

In our second house in North Mianus, we had a pump on the kitchen sink which pumped well water. Evelyn asked me if I remembered the worms coming out of the pump and I said I didn’t. She said there were worms but our mother put a cloth on the pump to filter out the worms. So maybe we were in as bad a situation as the author of *Angela’s Ashes* (McCourt).
My father was an alcoholic. He was a very intelligent man according to everyone I talked to. There were many stories about him. Mr. Borchetta who owned a grocery store in Cos Cob was thought by most of the Italians in the neighborhood to be as very smart man (perhaps because he owned a business). Shortly after I was discharged from the Air Force, I was talking to him and he told me that my father was the most intelligent man he had ever known ("too bad he liked to drink" he said). I heard many similar stories.

One day I was hitchhiking into Stamford and a man picked me up and asked me what my name was. When I told him, he said, "Oh, you’re Jerome’s boy, don’t listen to what other people say about your father. He was a very nice man and very intelligent. He spoke three or four languages." Some people said six or seven but I realize now that sometimes when people hear someone say a few words in another language, especially if they know the person speaks at least two or three other languages fluently, they assume that he is fluent in those languages where he really only knows a few words. There are indications that he could read other languages, but it was hard to determine how many.

One of my older sisters, Louise, told me that my father owned (and read) books by Shakespeare in English and Dante in Italian, and also had some books in German. When I discussed this with my other sister, Evelyn, she said that he also owned, and read, horticultural books written in French. I never saw his books because my mother threw them all away after she divorced him. I often think of that and wish that I could have seen his books, it would have told me something about him. I sometimes tell people when they ask me why I keep all my books (an understandable inquiry since I have more than six thousand), "those books are like pieces of my autobiography. When you see what books I have and where I have underlined or annotated you will have some idea of who I am.” For me they are also important because when I look at the titles I am reminded not only of what the book is about but also where I was and what I was doing at that time (the sweet taste of nostalgia mitigating the sometimes sour taste of getting old).

I know that for a while we were not poor, but I was just an infant then and don’t remember those halcyon days. My father was a tree surgeon and did very well, working on the estates of the wealthy in Greenwich. From my understanding he was as much of a landscape architect as he was a tree surgeon. That was before alcohol became the dominant force in his life. In those early days he did manage to buy a house and a car. He was
probably one of the few immigrants who had a car (perhaps the only one in that area). Since he could read and write English he was able to get a drivers license. Eventually his drinking led to the loss of our house (and we never owned another one after that) and we moved from Cos Cob to a rented house in North Mianus. I was only two years old at the time so I don’t remember that move. I do remember the car because when I was about four years old two men came and took the car (I think it was a Model T Ford).

Both Cos Cob and North Mianus are part of Greenwich, (the old New England Township) Connecticut, which, at that time was supposedly the wealthiest town in the U.S. We were among the poorest people in the country in the wealthiest town in the country, it made for some interesting contrasts.

My father kept drinking and eventually my mother decided to divorce him. A divorce in an Italian Catholic family was practically unheard of at that time. In recent years when people talk of single mothers I think of the first single mother I knew - my own. So there she was, divorced with nine children ranging in age from two to seventeen. There were originally thirteen of us (seven boys and six girls) but only nine survived to adulthood; three boys and one girl died in infancy. The two oldest boys died in the flu epidemic and a boy and girl died of childhood diseases.

My two oldest sisters, Mary and Louise, had to quit school and go to work (although later they went back and graduated from Greenwich High School). They worked as domestics for a wealthy family, the Cutlers (my other sister, Evelyn, also worked for the Cutlers later). When Mary and Louise left the Cutlers they went to work for Guy Lombardo’s family. He was the popular bandleader of the thirties and forties (who, for years, was everyone’s favorite on the radio for New Year’s Eve). Albert was only about fifteen at the time but he also quit school as soon as he could and went to work. We all knew that we wouldn’t finish school and would have to go to work as soon as possible. We did get help from the welfare department, as just about everyone we knew did during those depression years.

We had one uncle who was doing very well. He owned a shoe store and then an oil and gas company (his life story is now in the archives of the Greenwich Public Library). He was married to my mother’s sister but, unfortunately, this was the one sister (of five) that she had an argument (or as we would say, “a fight”) with and they had stopped talking to each
other. It was never clear to the children in the family what the fight was about. This was my mother’s oldest sister who had set up my mother’s arranged marriage to my father. Since my mother was unhappy with her marriage, perhaps the fight was about that. My mother never talked about it. The Calabrese (the Italians from Calabria, where both my parents came from) have a reputation among Italians, as being “capatost” (extremely hard headed). So we could expect no help from that uncle, probably the only one in a position to help us.

My mother and that sister went to their graves without ever talking to each other again. That was sad, not only because these two sisters never got together again or that we never received any help from that family but also because we, the children, didn’t get to know those particular cousins, as we did the other cousins. It was only when we became adults and our parents no longer had a say in the matter that we could finally get together. So the children of both families missed many hours of playing together and visiting and getting to know each other as we did with all the other cousins.

I have very vague memories of my Uncle John, Aunt Pepin’s husband. The only uncle I really remember was my Uncle George Belmont.

**SNAPSHOT – GEORGE BELMONT**

*We always called him uncle; he was my father’s cousin. He did nice things for us. For example, he took the “little kids” to the forest and made slingshots for us. The “little kids” were my two younger sisters, Lecia and Rosie, my younger brother Frankie, and myself. I was the oldest of the little kids.*

*This was the Uncle George who showed us how to tear off the bark of the birch tree and chew it. I remember him as being tall, kind, and gentle.*

*Then there was Uncle George standing on the grassy knoll in front of our house, far enough away from the front porch so that others couldn’t see him. Tears were flowing down his face. Everyone else was inside the house with his mother’s body laid out for the funeral. He was probably in his fifties then, I was about four. He was unaware that I was playing outside. I looked with amazement at the tears streaming down his face; I had never seen a grown man cry. I looked at him for a while. He didn’t see me. I walked quickly and quietly away.*
During my childhood, besides the occasional slap, there was very little physical punishment. Sometimes, as punishment, we would be sent to bed without supper. The only exception to this was one time when we younger kids were doing some rough playing and making a lot of noise. This was when I was about ten years old. As the oldest of “the little kids” I was responsible for them as well as for myself. I think my mother wasn’t feeling well that day. She kept yelling at us to stop. Finally I did something (I don’t remember what it was) that made her so angry that she grabbed a heavy pan and swung at me, hitting me on the head. I dropped like a sack of potatoes. My mother sent my sister Alecia to Zia Pepina for ice and told her to tell aunt Pepin that it was needed to make lemonade. I don’t know why she told Lecia to say that, perhaps because she didn’t want anyone to know what she had done. The next thing I knew I felt a cold wet cloth on my head and my mother crying and talking to me. I think my mother may have suffered more pain than I did from that incident, because I being not just figuratively, but literally, a Calabrese capatost, recovered rapidly.

My first day of kindergarten was a nice memory. I remember it because of what the teacher, Mrs. Wilcox, said. Louise brought me to school and told the teacher my name and the teacher said, “Dante, what a beautiful name.” Those nice words made my first day of school a lasting memory, and perhaps fueled my desire to go to school and learn.

From the time I first learned to read I always enjoyed reading. As a kid it took me to new worlds. I remember one of the first stories I read was The Three Blind Mice and I also remember sitting on the steps of the front porch and reading a Dick Tracy comic book. But it wasn’t just reading, I also enjoyed playing outside. Not just baseball (or softball, as I remember we called that baseball too) but other games like kick the can, hide and seek, and ring-o-leavo.

I would go to the North Mianus Library on every rainy day (and even some nice days when there was nothing going on outside) and read everything I could. They had one row of stacks for children and the rest for adults. When I was about eight or nine I went to the librarian (she seemed to know all of us) and told her that I had read all the books that I wanted to read on the children’s side and asked if I could go to the grown up books. She said she knew I was a good reader and that it would be okay to go to the adult section. I remember trying to struggle through Darwin’s Origin of the Species (what made me pick that book I don’t know, but I didn’t get too far into it when I realized that it wasn’t for me).
When I finished the second grade I was told that I would skip 3rd grade and was promoted to 4th grade. I, naturally, was happy about that – the only disadvantage besides being the youngest and smallest in the class was that I wasn’t ever taught cursive writing, since that was taught in the third grade. So I taught myself cursive writing and to this day my handwriting is almost impossible for others to decipher.

Although my childhood, despite the poverty, was, in general, not an unhappy one, there were at least two particular unhappy incidents; one with a nurse and the other with a priest.

I was only in the hospital once in childhood and that was (I think) for an ear operation. My experience there started off in a slightly humorous way. I was about six or seven years old. I remember when I was on the operating table and the nurse or doctor putting something on my mouth and telling me it was nothing to be afraid of, it was just like a balloon. So I started to blow into it. They then lifted it from my face and told me I should just breathe the way I always do. I did and in a short time the ether took effect.

I guess I was in the hospital for a couple of days and I remember the nurse; she was not very nice, in fact she was horrible. It was my first time away from home and I was frightened. She spoke loudly and let it be known to everyone within earshot that I had wet the bed (which I did after the operation). She also made comments about the kind of home I must come from. It was a general tirade against foreigners. A general indictment of “those people.” I was terrorized by her and tried to explain that I didn’t know what happened but I never wet the bed at home. She ignored me and made be stand against the wall while she changed the sheets, all the while screaming at me about my not having enough sense to get up during the night and go to the bathroom. Everyone in the ward could not help but hear her ranting and raving. My plea for understanding was tromped on by the wicked witch of the ward. In retrospect I realized that it was possible that the nurse just didn’t like children of immigrants or poor kids, because I could see no other reason that she would treat me so harshly.

One day our social worker came and took me out of the hospital to bring me home. She was very nice and before she took me home she took me to a restaurant to get something to eat. I still remember the taste of that grape juice she bought for me. The memory of that
taste is so strong that over a half-century later I wrote a poem about it, published later under the title “Time Travel”.

**TIME TRAVEL**

Grape juice lights taste buds
sparking images of childhood.
No Proustian description
To ignite the mind.
A boy’s feelings sends messages
across time
to a man who had forgotten
the intensity of a child’s sipping.

--Dante Cosentino

Sometime after my shame and humiliation with the nurse I experienced another incident which left a lasting impression, this one with a priest. I was probably about seven or eight years old at the time. I had an argument with our local priest (essentially about the justice of a decision he made) which led to my leaving the Catholic Church. I, and probably the church too, have since recovered from that trauma.

I was one of those kids who never missed a Sunday mass or Sunday school class after mass or Catechism class on Friday afternoons at the community center. I knew the catechism by heart (a good phrase, “by heart”, especially when connected to religion). One Sunday I missed the bus to church (which was in Riverside, about two or three miles away). I ran all the way and got to church before the gospel was read. My mother always said it was okay if you were late for church as long as you got there before the “gossip” was read (she sometimes twisted the English language in a nice way). After church, I went to Sunday school, as I did every Sunday. Later I told my mother that I had missed the bus and ran all the way to church. She told me that if I missed the bus I didn’t have to go to church. Since my religious training had told me to “honor thy father and mother”, I felt that her permission to miss church sometimes was legitimate and acceptable. So I continued my religious routine every Sunday for a quite a few weeks and one Sunday missed the bus again. This time I just went home and told my mother I had missed the bus.
The following Friday we had our usual catechism class with the nun but this time the priest, Father Ganley, was there. He asked us who didn’t go to church the previous Sunday. I and one or two others stood up (although I recognized a couple of other boys who didn’t go to the church every Sunday, including the previous Sunday but they didn’t stand up) and Father Ganley said, “You boys who are standing up can not make your first holy communion next week, you will have to wait until next year. From now on be sure to go to church every Sunday.” I was surprised by his statement. After class I mustered enough courage to talk to him and told him that I only missed church twice that year and that I knew my catechism by heart. I didn’t say anything about the others who didn’t stand up, none of us wanted to be a rat. He didn’t even ask me why I missed church, didn’t ask the nun about what kind of student I was, nor did he give me a question from the catechism to answer. Instead, he just showed his exasperation and loudly stated, “I already told you that you will have to wait until next year” or words to that effect. That ended the possibility of any future discussion.

My view of the priest (and the church) began to change after my quest for justice was thwarted by the wicked priest of the parish. I was devastated by his remarks and his unwillingness to at least consider my situation, since I always had such high regard for the priest as God’s representative. This was my first lesson in justice, or the lack of it, in the world.

A year is a very long time for seven or eight year old. From that day I stopped going to church. I didn’t want to tell my mother, I just told her that the priest said I was too young and would have to wait until next year. After that I would pretend to go to church and go play in the woods behind our house. Eventually she found out and I told her why I wouldn’t go back to church. Much to my surprise she didn’t do anything about it, so I never went back to church.

But there were good times too. Sometimes my mother would give me 10 cents for the Saturday matinee at the Strand Movie Theater in Stamford (or, if she felt good and had the money, she would give me an extra nickel to buy candy). That ten cents bought us a whole afternoon of entertainment. The movie was always two feature films, a serial (like Superman or Captain Marvel), Pathe News, coming attractions, and one or two cartoons.
Then there was my Cub Scout experience. We would meet once a week, usually in the community center, listening to boring lectures about rules and regulations, perhaps because our leader, an older teen-age boy, enjoyed having a captive audience. Sometimes we even had some fun. I liked being a cub scout but didn’t like spending a lot of time discussing rules. One day our scout leader (his last name was Currivan, as I remember) was just going on and on. He loved to talk, but not to listen. I, who had just seen a movie with the Dead End Kids and heard the phrase, “hit the road”, decided to try it out, even though I wasn’t quite sure of the meaning (it meant something like “knock it off” or “just leave”). Well evidently the scout leader wasn’t too happy about it because he told me to leave, “hit the road and don’t come back.” Thus ended a promising Boy Scout career. So before I finished grammar school (which is what they called elementary schools in New England) I had already been separated not only from my father but also from those two great pillars of American society, i.e., the church and the boy scouts.

A nice memory (which didn’t start out that way): One day I was on the playground behind the school watching the grown-ups play softball. It was a nice summer evening. I saw another kid about my age (I was probably about nine at the time) being a bully and beating up another boy. I remember wondering if he would come my way next – and he did. I was a little scared but determined not to move. He came up to me and swung at me and we started fighting. After we fought for a few minutes someone came and broke it up. It was my oldest brother, Albert. He said he had watched that bully come up to me and was proud of me for fighting back, then he told me come with him and he bought me an ice cream cone. It made my day. That bully never bothered me again.

Many years later, when Albert was dying and not responding to anything, I whispered in his ear about that day and how he praised me and bought me an ice cream cone. I told him how happy he made me that day. He seemed to smile. That was the last time I saw him.

While I was working on these memoirs, my daughter, Serenella, reminded me of another story which she said I should include. When I was about eight or nine my mother asked me to go to the store (Grants, a five and dime store) in Stamford and pick up a can of paint. She gave me twenty-five cents for the paint and five cents for myself to buy a candy bar. I didn’t get a ride so I walked to the store (Stamford was about a three mile walk). When I got to Grants I reached in my pocket, practically salivating, thinking about that Milky
Way or Baby Ruth that I would buy with my nickel. My hand slipped quickly into my pocket, feeling for the money that had already disappeared through a hole in my pocket. I couldn’t go home without the paint (this was during the depression and thirty cents was not easy to come by). So I walked downstairs in Grants, where the paint counter was and looked around. It was a long counter and there was only one woman taking care of that half of the store. I scouted around until I saw where the paint was and where the store bags were kept. At the right time I made my move and took a bag, slipped the paint into it and went upstairs and started to walk out of the store. The last thing on the way out (and first thing on the way in) was the candy counter. As I passed the candy counter I remembered that I was suppose to get a candy bar for being such a good boy and getting the paint. So, at the opportune moment, I managed to put a Milky Way into the bag and walked casually out. When I got back on the road to North Mianus I ate my candy bar and brought the paint home. I think my mother was happy that I was such a good boy and she could depend on me. Although she loved bargain buys she would not have approved of mine.

There were many other parts of my early life in North Mianus that come back to me in flashes sometimes:

The iceman who would pull his horse and cart up to the sidewalk where we were playing on those summer days and would let us take the slivers of ice from the cart while he delivered a block of ice to our house for our ice box. Those slivers were a treat on those hot summer days.

The block parties by Rada’s store; all the roads around the store were closed off and everyone would sing and dance in the street. The adults, of course, had something special to drink, which seemed to make them more lively and happier than usual.

The kitchen, the only warm room in the house in the winter. We all gathered there in the evening until it was time to go to bed.

A man who sharpened knives coming around to the houses in the neighborhood. My mother and the other women using it as chance to go outside and talk to each other.

Then there was the killing of the pig. That was a community project, all the men got together and killed the pig and as the saying goes, we ate everything except the pig’s squeal (however, we certainly heard it before he met his final end).
Before leaving North Mianus I should mention that we didn’t have a bathroom in our house. In fact we didn’t have a regular sink but a small basin with a large pump (like there was on the town well) that we pumped for water. We took baths in a big aluminum tub set on the kitchen floor.

Our toilet was an outhouse (a two seater). We boys didn’t mind the outhouse at all. We always had fun standing back and seeing how far our piss would go towards reaching the holes. We never gave any thought to the fact that the adults would have to sit there (or maybe we did and probably thought it was funny).

The old Italians always called the outhouse something that sounded like a “bugahouse.” I thought that was a good name for it with all the flies and bugs around there. I assumed that maybe that was the Italian word for an outhouse. Years later I was told that wasn’t an Italian word, they were just trying to speak English and were talking about the “back house” (their “backahouse” sounded like “bugahouse” to me and the other kids).

Something about the old Italians that were around when I was growing up really impressed me and that was that so much centered around accepting someone’s word. If someone gave his word (“his” because it was only men as far as I could tell), then he was expected to keep it. Money changed hands, houses were built, families were taken care of, etc., all on the basis of giving one’s word and keeping it. They would simply say, “dammi un parole” (literally, give me a word) and the deal was sealed.

One day my mother said someone had given his word that he would do something for her. I asked her what if he didn’t keep his word. She said that would never happen. But I was insistent and asked, but what if it did? She said if that ever happened no one would talk to them again or give them anything. In other words, they would be totally ostracized in that small, tightly knit community.

When I think of the consequences of not keeping one’s word, I think of the role of honor and respect so important in Calabrese and Sicilians I have known. When people talk about the Mafia and their concepts of family, respect and honor, as if it originated with the Mafia, I always want to correct them and say it is not something the Mafia invented, it is a deeply embedded cultural concept in Sicily and Southern Italy.
MAKING NEWS II

- ROOSEVELT RELECTED, WALLACE VICE-PRESIDENT.
- ALIEN REGISTRATION (SMITH) ACT SHOWS FIVE MILLION ALIENS. CONGRESS CREATES FIRST PEACETIME DRAFT.
- POPULATION OF U.S. 131.6 MILLION.

When I entered the 5th grade at my new school in Stamford I was the youngest and smallest kid in my class and I ran into trouble on the playground. I was being pushed around by a sixth grader and started to fight back and somehow found myself on the ground with a bunch of other kids on top of me. Before I had time to panic I felt the kids getting off me. I then spotted a much bigger kid pulling the others off me and yelling at them to “leave my cousin alone.” I didn’t know who he was, but he told me he was my cousin. I later found out that he was a part of my new brother-in-law’s family (my oldest sister, Mary, had just married). My new brother-in-law grew up in Stamford and most of his relatives lived there. My newfound cousin was a big guy who had been kept back at once or twice (promotion to the next grade was not automatic in those days, being kept back was not unusual). He was a big kid, about twelve or thirteen years old. He always watched out for “his little cousin” on the playground, since my older brothers were no longer in grammar school.

When we moved to Stamford I was nine years old and in the fifth grade (as I already mentioned I had skipped a grade and was the youngest in my class). North Mianus was like a small village but Stamford was the big city. I liked Stamford and life on the streets. We lived in a very poor neighborhood where we were one of only six white families on Pacific Street.

Somehow we did get enough money together after about a year on Pacific Street to move to a little better neighborhood on Holly Place. We lived just a couple of streets away from a future U.S. Senator, Joe Lieberman. Perhaps his family was not as wealthy as I thought (just a supposition, I really don’t know). Of course, like any city, neighborhoods can change drastically within a few blocks of one another and, frankly, I don’t remember his neighborhood at all.

I liked Stamford and life on the streets of the city. It was exciting for me to walk downtown and see all the people shopping and talking. It was very unlike the quiet rural area of North Mianus, only three miles away. But those three miles might as well have been
thirty miles because very few people had cars and either had to walk or hitchhike into Stamford. So, naturally, it was a major excursion every time we went to Stamford.

Stamford was a big city for me and I found many ways to make some money. I shined shoes after school and on weekends (and I learned how to make all the snapping noises with the shoe shine rag, which the customers loved). When I was ten years old I began to sell newspapers on the street and set up pins in the bowling alley after school. The newspaper, the Stamford Advocate, sold for three cents. We would go to where the printing presses were and watch them come off the huge press. I was fascinated by that gigantic machine and watching the newspaper come to life.

We had to pay two cents for each paper and the price on the paper was three cents. So we made a penny on each one. I would usually buy ten papers, run out to the street and sell them and then run back and buy more. Sometimes people would give me a nickel and tell me to keep the change, so I would make three cents instead of one on those deals. I eventually was able to save enough money to buy my first bicycle (a second-hand one, naturally) and later got a job delivering newspapers. I enjoyed riding that bike, going to those neighborhoods where the “rich people” lived (actually probably normal middle class) and throwing newspapers on the porches. I also collected cardboard and sold it to the junkyard.

I did some caddying at the Old Greenwich Country Club and at the Greenwich Country Club, but just twice there because I didn’t get a loop (a loop is carrying someone’s golf bag for nine or eighteen holes). Old Greenwich was better because they sometimes even gave me a double loop (i.e., carrying two bags, one on each shoulder). There were quite a few celebrities who lived and/or golfed in Greenwich. I never would have recognized any of them (although some of the older caddies did), however one time I was told that the guy I had just caddied for was on the radio He was called “The Shadow.” He was Lamont Cranston on the radio, but I don’t know his real name (Lamont Cranston was played by various people, including Orson Welles). I couldn’t believe that I had, without knowing it of course, actually been close to the man who would always say on the radio, “Who knows what evil lurks in the minds of men. The shadow knows.”

My mother always fixed nice sandwiches when I went caddying (like sausage and peppers or meatballs on homemade bread) because I almost always “got out”, i.e., caddied
for someone, and, naturally, the money went to my mother for the household, but she always gave me a little for myself.

I liked playing baseball, handball and football whenever I could. Those were the days when we organized our own sports and teams (this was long before Little League and Pop Warner). We sometimes played baseball in the streets (we lumped stickball, softball and baseball all into one category, “baseball”), but usually went to the playground. I was a fairly good athlete and enjoyed baseball even though I couldn’t play third base because I was a southpaw. Sometimes I played first base, but usually played left or center field. I wouldn’t play right field because there was so little action there. I loved sandlot ball because I sometimes got to be team captain. If I had first pick I would, naturally, choose the best players. If I thought I had a strong team by my fifth or sixth pick I would then choose the guy who all of us called “the Hungarian”, his real name was John Sylargi. He was born in the U.S. like the rest of us and his parents were Hungarian. He was not a natural athlete. He was very slow and clumsy and, as a result, was usually the last one chosen, or not chosen at all. I realized how he must have felt (you could see it in his face as he waited to be picked), which is why I would try to choose him before the last pick. Of course I would put him where the least action was, in right field, but he was happy just to be able to play.

There are two incidents, one in baseball and one in football, which I still remember quite vividly.

We were playing baseball on the school playground and I ran after a long fly ball in left field. I always knew that I had to keep my eye on the ball, which I was doing as I ran back for this fly ball. Suddenly I ran into a metal pole (I don’t know what that pole was there for) and dropped to the ground. Apparently I was knocked out briefly and the other kids revived me. We then quit playing and I went home, never thinking about a possible concussion, and never mentioning the incident to my mother. Fortunately, being a hard-headed Calabrese, I survived without any obvious damage.

Another incident from my sports career was while playing football. Since it was usually a “pick-up” game, we would choose someone who was not picked for a team, or who came too late to be chosen to be referee. We usually had two referees. I was small, but I was fast and could outrun most of the guys I played against. I usually played end or quarterback. During one game I was playing end and ran out for a pass, pulled it in and was running down
the field without anyone close enough or fast enough to catch me. Suddenly I saw the referee running towards me, so I slowed down wondering what was wrong, thinking maybe I had stepped out of bounds without realizing it. The referee came running up to me and suddenly pulled me down about ten yards from the goal. We sometimes changed referees, but usually at half time. This time they had changed before half time and out team captain forgot to tell me. So the “referee” was a hero and he was ecstatic that he had stopped me from making a touchdown. When I complained about not knowing he was now a player, he and the others said, in their usually sympathetic tones, “tough shit, your captain knew.” Those games were nothing like a later generation’s Pop Warner football.

When I lived in Stamford I was able to get with a group which were given a free bus ride and free tickets to Yankee Stadium. We were all between twelve and fifteen years old, a bus loaded with “underprivileged children” (that was what the banner on the side of the bus displayed). I don’t remember who sponsored it, but I do remember the game. The N.Y. Yankees and Washington Senators in a double header. At that time I knew the name of most of the Yankee team; Joe Dimaggio was in center field, Phil Rizzuto, shortstop, Frank Crosetti third base, Tommy Henrich, first base, and Bill Dickey catcher. I don’t remember who played who played second base or the other outfield positions. The Yankees won both games.

For extra reading material I was always able to go to the store and put a few comic books under my jacket (the old five finger discount). I was only caught once and that was because I got greedy and tried to take too many at one time. They let me off with taking me in the back of the store and saying that if it happened again they would have the police take me in. Those kinds of threats were like water off a duck’s back for me.

When I was about twelve or thirteen I learned that one of the bars off Main Street always put their empty beer bottles in cases behind the building on Saturday nights. So on Sundays a friend of mine, Sandy Schein, and I would take our bikes and put a case or two on the baskets of the bikes and ride off with them. We would collect about three or four cases and then take them to one of the stores during the week where they would pay us seventy-five cents a case of empty bottles. So between working small jobs and a few other not so legal ways I managed to make enough money to give my mother some and still have enough left for myself, which she didn’t know about.
In the ninth grade at Burdick Junior High School I played hooky so much that I missed about half of the school year. They (the school teachers and officials) decided that I should repeat the 9th grade even though I had passing grades in all my classes. They also decided to send me to the school psychologist for testing; since I was a college prep student and was considered bright they wondered why I stayed away from school so much. I was given a series of tests, which included an IQ test.

After a few weeks the psychologist called me into his office and said that I had done very well on the tests, although he never did tell me what my IQ was. He said that a decision had been made to buy me clothes and give me a weekly allowance if I would stay in school and get good grades. This offer was in response to my comment that the reason I missed so much school was because I needed to earn money for clothes and to have a little spending money (this was only partially true, actually I was bored with school and found the outside world much more interesting). He also said that if I maintained good grades throughout high school they would give me a scholarship to college. I never knew who this “they” was, but I assumed it was connected to this place called “Family and Children’s Center” and I never knew where their money came from. I agreed and received new clothing and an allowance of $3.75 per week, of course that was when movies were ten cents (and a pair of those nice Thom McCan shoes which I saw in the store window was four dollars and twenty cents). That lasted for a while but then the boredom at school got to me and I decided to leave school and home (since if I stayed home the truant officer would come after me).

**SNAPSHOT – GROUP PORTRAIT – MEMORABLE TEACHERS**

**First Row**: Mrs. Wilcox, my kindergarten teacher, who said to me, on my very first day of school, “Dante, what a beautiful name.” With that comment she opened up the world for me.

My second grade teacher, whose name I have forgotten, who let me know she had great expectations for me when she informed me that she had taught my older siblings and expected me to be as good a student as they were. She told me, at the end of the school year, that I would be skipping the third grade and going into the fourth.
Mrs. Hayes, my fifth grade teacher, who, when I was moving to Stamford, gave me a dollar and told me to be sure to get a haircut before I started at my new school (obviously she meant for me to have some ice cream too, since a haircut was a lot less than a dollar).

Second Row: My jolly grey-haired, eighth grade teacher from Wales (whose name escapes me). We would find ways to get her off the subject and she would tell us tales of Wales. We thought we were very clever, but what we didn’t realize was that she only pretended to get off her lesson. She took the bait when it would lead into something else she wanted to talk about and then she would pretend to be sidetracked. So while we thought we were steering her away from her lesson she was actually moving on to something else she had planned to teach us later.

My junior high English teacher (eighth or ninth grade), Mrs. Sheean who always appreciated my sense of humor. She once gave us a homework assignment to write a poem about Easter. I was called on to read the poem I had written. I wrote a fairly good poem that ended with the lines, “If you don’t like this beautiful rhyme/remember it was Mrs. Sheean’s idea, not mine.” She laughed along with the class and said, “very nice, Dante.”

My ninth grade Latin teacher, Mr Pollack, who was very nice to me and gave me a final grade of B when I knew I deserved a C.

Mrs. Lennon, my ninth grade Algebra teacher, who told us that happiness was arriving at what she called, “that happy medium” where you owe no money to anyone and still have some in your pocket.

It is sad to think that all in this portrait are dead by now, and I never thanked them.

**MAKING NEWS III**

- **CHURCHILL:** “AN IRON CURTAIN HAS DESCENDED ACROSS THE CONTINENT.”
- **NUREMBERG:** DEATH SENTENCE FOR TWELVE TOP NAZIS.
- **PABLO CASALS VOWS NOT TO PLAY WHILE.**
- **FRANCO IN POWER.**
- **ST LOUIS CARDINALS WIN WORLD SERIES.**
- **NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE: HERMAN HESSE.**
CHAPTER 4

LEAVING HOME AND MILITARY SERVICE

– U.S. AIR FORCE

After deciding to leave school, I hitchhiked to Manchester, Connecticut (near Hartford). I couldn’t stay in Stamford because I wasn’t old enough to quit school and the truant officer would have come for me. I found a job on a farm where I got room and board and a dollar a week. Farm work was hard work, but I also remember the great breakfasts that the farmer’s wife made. After getting up at 5AM and doing chores around the farm, the farmer and I returned to the house for a breakfast of eggs and pork chops or steak, juice, cereal, and, best of all for me, strawberries in wine.

Pitching hay made me realize that I had muscles in my forearms, because they were sore at night. I don’t remember how long I stayed (only about a month or so). I returned home for a short while and then hitchhiked down the East Coast to Durham, North Carolina where my money was running very low and I couldn’t get a job. I slept in a hotel lobby one night and, after that I found an abandoned shack to sleep in.

During the day I walked around the freight yard and learned that when the trains came in the freight cars were cleaned and put on a siding waiting for new cargo. So I would go to the super market (I think it was a Piggly Wiggly) and buy a box of Ritz crackers for about fifteen or twenty cents and then shoplift a few cans of tuna fish (or something else). I had an old Army field jacket which had those big pockets so I could stuff quite a bit in there without being conspicuous. At the register I would pay for a big box of Ritz crackers and a Coke and saunter out with my loot in my big pockets (for a total of about twenty-five cents). I would walk to the freight yards and go to the area where the clean freight cars were waiting. I would then take out my pocketknife, which had all the accessories on it, open the cans, and enjoy my dinner. It was only when I started traveling on my own that I began to carry a knife all the time, mainly for protection and it did come in handy a couple of times.
Durham, North Carolina had a Lucky Strike and other cigarette factories that gave the city a strange odor and it was very strong that morning when I got on a bus to go to a factory and apply for a job.

I sat in the back of the bus and thought nothing of it. A short time later the bus driver stopped the bus, came back to me and said, “Can you read?” I said yes, so he pointed to a sign that said something like, “Colored to the back of the bus.” Of course I knew what this was all about but I just said to him, “What’s the matter, are they any better than I am?” This, of course did not sit well with him. He couldn’t take any wise ass New York type little boys (since almost anyone who has grown up within 50 miles of New York City sounds like someone from Manhattan) talking like that. “Get off my bus! Now!” He yelled. I obliged, since I didn’t want to exhaust his Southern hospitality.

One day I went to the Salvation Army in Durham and did get a free room for the night. A small room with a broken door lock, one small light bulb which gave a dim light to the room. The window faced a big brick wall. I kept my knife right beside my bed since the broken lock on the door and the clientele seemed to require it. The next morning I was told to go to the next building for breakfast, so I did and had to listen to a sermon for a breakfast of oatmeal and coffee. I went back to sleeping in the shack and reconnoitering the super markets for more of my “special value” items.

Because there were so many factories in Durham, I thought I could get a job easily, but, as it turned out, you had to be eighteen to work there, so I was out of luck.

I went back to sleeping in the abandoned shack. Someone must have reported me sleeping in that abandoned shack because one night two policemen paid me a visit. They told me that I could go to jail or leave town. Given the choice, I decided that leaving town wasn’t such a bad idea. They were very nice and asked me if I wanted to go south or north. I said north and they drove me to the edge of town and told me not to come back or they would put me on a chain gang.

Sometimes the hitchhiking got a little scary like the time two drunken brothers picked me up and were speeding, weaving all over the road and drinking at the same time. When they eventually stopped at a restaurant I went to the restroom and took the back exit and waited until I saw them get back on the road then I resumed my hitchhiking.
Another time when I was in Philadelphia and I went to a Greyhound bus station to wash up and rest on a bench for a while. As soon as I sat down a man in his thirties came up to me and asked me where I was going, did I have any family, etc. I had enough street smarts to know that he was a homosexual, so I told him I was waiting for my older brother and we were taking a bus to New York. He was too smart to fall for that. He said he would wait with me. I eventually shook him loose by saying I was going to buy a candy bar and quickly ran out one of the far doors, and kept running until I was sure he wasn’t around anymore.

I returned home and I was now sixteen so I could legally quit school and get my “working papers”. Working papers were necessary for “a real job” and many of us could hardly wait until we were 16 to start working. No one questioned my decision to quit school since it was quite common in those days for working class kids to leave school early and go to work. We knew we were not meant for college and that the only way to make money and get ahead in life was in sports (which is one of the reasons I later became a semi-pro boxer), entertainment or something illegal (like our neighborhood bookie who always seemed to have plenty of money and drove a nice car). If we didn’t want to do any of these things we knew that “you can always go into the service.”

I worked at various jobs. I was a mail boy for Schick Razor Company, but found that job too boring. I then took a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant on the South Side, which catered primarily to factory workers at lunchtime. I liked that job because of the banter between the short order cook, the waitress and the customers. The short order cook taught me some simple things like how to cook hamburgers and bacon on the grill. Later I was hired by a big drugstore on Atlantic Street to work on the soda fountain making ice cream sodas, vanilla and cherry cokes, milk shakes, sundaes, banana splits, etc. I really liked this job because a lot of high school kids came in there. I also was happy because I was earning a regular weekly salary and felt grown up. It was sort of like the joy of the character in Dreiser’s An American Tragedy, Clyde, must have felt when he got his first job in the city, working behind the soda fountain, and enjoying seeing all the young girls his age coming into the drugstore for soda and ice cream.

Another job I had was at a relatively fancy restaurant (It was called Hugo’s) as a bus boy. When I saw the meals being served I couldn’t wait for my first break so I could have a
nice steak or lobster (which I had never had before). When my break came I went to the kitchen and was told by the chef that the help only had certain dishes they could order and, naturally, that did not include things like lobster, crab, shrimp, steak, etc. There were usually only two choices for the employees, like hot turkey or roast beef sandwiches. I didn’t keep that job very long.

My friends during those years were Sandy Schein, Donny Knight and Nick Skirpan. It was mostly Sandy, Donny and I who were together a lot and tended to like the same things (often the same girls, until Donny found his future wife, Francis). All in all it was a typical teen-age period of infatuation and fantasy – taking Lila to the movies and playing the usual games of touchy-feely or going to Mickey Modesto’s house and visiting on her porch.

Porches, those great social venues for older people and sometimes for teen-agers. It was a meeting place for the young and the old. Young kids played on the porch when it was raining, a teenage boy would visit his girlfriend (when the parents wouldn’t let her go any further than the front porch at night). It was a place for older people to sit and talk and that is mainly how I remember it. My mother would sit on the front porch as a way of telling her neighbors that she was home and open to having people stop by and talk. So sitting on the front porch was a signal to others to come and visit. If no one came by she just enjoyed sitting and doing her usual thing of “guarde il gente” (watching the people), as she would put it if someone asked her what she was doing on the porch alone.

The front porch was the center of a certain world but that world, unfortunately, succumbed, after WWII to backyard barbeques and the beginning of suburban isolation. The backyard became the focus of social life in place of the front porch. When my mother sat on the front porch neighbors would stop by and talk, greeting, news, and rumors were exchanged. The demise of the front porch began with the new homes in the suburbs and the move to backyard barbeques. This foreshadowed a change in American culture. It was no longer Old World immigrants, having a little wine or anisette, talking to their neighbors, it was a new generation, born in America, inviting new found friends from the workplace for B&B, i.e., Beer and Barbeque. Even the people of the Mid-West, although not necessarily Old World immigrants, kept the front porch tradition until after the Second World War. The front porch eventually gave way to the brave new world of Levittown and its clones throughout the United States.
One Sunday, my mother, then in her eighties, was sitting quietly in her chair, on the front porch, while the rest of the family was inside. Sunday was the day when we all gathered at my mother’s house. My niece, Doreen, noticed that my mother was by herself, so she went out to talk to her. Doreen asked her what she was thinking about, sitting there so quietly. My mother said, “I was thinking, how did I get so old.” I now find that I am asking myself that same question.

It is interesting that California, often called the future of America, has very few homes (relatively speaking) with those large front porches of the East. California, which spawned all that groupthink, group hug, phenomena of the sixties. California, where one would often see people hugging each other with enthusiasm, people who had not known each other the week before and had just met at one of those week-end feel-good seminars. They appeared to be life-long friends; instant friendship was seen as normal as instant coffee. California – take a small group, one guru, add liquid of some kind and presto, instant wisdom for everyone in the group.

Friendship and wisdom no longer required such constant work, it was just a matter of putting together the right combination of empty minds and half formed intellects, add slogans and bumper sticker thoughts, mix it all together and, whamo, instant friends, instant wisdom and, perhaps, an instant culture. Although this is true of California in general, it is especially true of Southern California. As Saul Bellow says (in Seize the Day): “…it is as if America has been tilted and everything that wasn’t tightly screwed down slid into Southern California” (12). They just have to find their guru and it is instant salvation. In the valley of the blind the one-eyed is king.

**MAKING NEWS IV**

- JAPANESE ATTACK PEARL HARBOR.
- 18 WARSHIPS, SUNK OR DAMAGED, 170 PLANES DESTROYED, TWO THOUSAND AMERICANS KILLED.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, I (like many kids my age) was fascinated by the war. I read about it in the newspapers and magazines, became interested in the strategy of the war and followed all the major battles on the map. The newspapers always had maps of the battles from all the different fronts of the war, e.g., Africa, Italy, France, South Pacific, etc. So I knew about the African campaign, the Anzio beachhead, the battle
for Mount Cassino, Guadacanal, the Battle of Midway, D-Day, etc. After the war I kept up my interest. I was interested in strategies and tactics and read books by and/or about the different generals, including American generals (e.g., Eisenhower and Patton), British (Montgomery), Russian (Zukov), and German (Rommel and Guderian).

I liked the idea of being a soldier; five years later, when I became sixteen (WWII had ended about two years before) I went to the local recruiting office and lied about my age. The recruiter told me that would have to get a parent’s signature, since I had said I was seventeen. He said after basic training I would be going to serve with the First Cavalry Division in Japan. That sounded great to me. Unfortunately, my mother wouldn’t put her mark (x) on the spot and I never thought of forging it, so I couldn’t go. I then lied my way into the National Guard, where I served until I was seventeen and then went into the Air Force. Lucky for me that I didn’t go to the First Cavalry Division, they were one of the first to go to Korea when the war broke out there.

I took basic training at Lackland Air Base in San Antonio, Texas. About half the guys in my barracks were Southerners, the rest of us were from the Northeast (New York, New Jersey and Connecticut). This made for some friendly kidding, but we all got along fairly well, despite the radio blasting out “The Yellow Rose of Texas” every morning. However, I did learn to appreciate singers like Hank Williams, Roy Acuff and others. I still know most of the words to some of the songs of Hank Williams (“Your Cheating Heart”), Tex Williams (“Detour, There’s a Muddy Road Ahead”), and Roy Acuff (“Tennessee Waltz”).

I also learned a few of those colorful Southern expressions like, “I carried my girl to the movies every Saturday”, with my image of him putting his girlfriend on his back. What he meant was that he took his girlfriend to the movies. Another expression I liked was when someone would say something like, “My wife is so pretty and so tiny, why she’s no bigger than a minute.” And I always liked the southern way of giving a word double work, like making a noun carry the burden of a verb (“I mechanic for a living”).

After finishing thirteen weeks of basic training in Texas, I was given advanced training at Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado. That advanced training included preparing for the possibility of administrative work, so I learned to type, which helped me considerably in both military and civilian life.
When I was stationed at Lowry Field a buddy of mine and I decided that we didn’t like being restricted to the base for a minor infraction, so we committed a major infraction – we went AWOL in civilian clothes. We hitchhiked to St Louis. Our last ride was with a truck driver who let us out in East St Louis, which was a very seedy part of town. He told us he was going to sleep in the truck and deliver his goods in the morning. He wished us luck and told us that there was an all-night diner just a few blocks down the street. When we got to the diner I realized that I had dropped my wallet in the cab of the truck. We immediately went back to where the truck had been parked. It was gone. We searched around to see if he had just moved the truck to a different part of the lot, but, evidently, the truck driver had some important business and had to leave in a hurry. As we searched the lot for the truck two police cars pulled up and four policemen got out and ordered us into the police cars. They claimed that we were responsible for a series of burglaries in that neighborhood. We tried to explain to them that we had just arrived in town and were looking for that nice truck driver who had given us a ride from Denver, and took my wallet to cover transportation costs.

When we arrived at the police station we had to wait while they were booking another guy. They asked him what he was doing walking around in that wealthy neighborhood ten o’clock at night. They also wanted to know what was in his bag. He said he was just on his way to work and the bag held his tools. When they asked him where he worked he said it was at a friend’s house. His friend worked nights so that was the only time he could work on the rooms. They then emptied his bag on the counter and his working implements consisted of, among other things, a flashlight, a crowbar, and a gun. They asked him why he needed these things and he said that sometimes the lights went out so he needed a flashlight, and he always kept a gun for protection “against all the thieves in the neighborhood.” The policemen appreciated his remarks and laughed before they booked him.

They interrogated my buddy and me separately. They said I might as well confess since my buddy had already told them that we were casing out the area. I told them that if he said that he was lying and I wasn’t going to confess to something I didn’t do. Then one of the other policemen came into the room and said that they had found dog tags on my friend and he told them that we were both military and we were AWOL (which, of course, is what
we should have said right away). Once they discovered we were GIs they were much friendlier, however they were required to hold us for the Military Police.

We spent that night in a jail cell until the Military Police from the nearest Base (Scott Field, Illinois) picked us up. They put us in cells on the base with General prisoners (i.e., those convicted, or awaiting trial, by a General Court Martial for major felonies like murder, rape, etc). These were guys that would be going to Leavenworth Federal Prison for many years.

The authorities at Lowry Field were contacted to see if we could be sent back on our own or would they send someone for us. Evidently they thought we weren’t trustworthy (or maybe too dangerous) so they sent two MPs to take us back. It took some time to get the paper work done, or maybe the two MPs took their time traveling from Denver. In any case, we were stuck in the military stockade for about ten days, waiting to be taken back to Lowry Field.

At night the cellblock was closed off, the guards relaxed in the outer rooms and the inmates were left to run the cellblock, with the turnkey overseeing everything. We were initiated into prison life very quickly. The prisoners convened a kangaroo court for us and gave us some minor punishment. I think it was cleaning the cells and making beds for the leaders - they had their own little hierarchy there. Eventually the MPs came and we were taken in handcuffs (maybe they thought we were General Court Martial material) to the train station. The two MPs decided to stop in Salinas, Kansas and later in Pueblo, Colorado for a day or so each time. They just put us in the local jail while they did their visiting. The sheriff in Salinas, Kansas was nice. He realized that two teen-age soldiers who went AWOL were probably not a major threat, so he took us out for lunch and we had the cell to ourselves for sleeping that night. The Pueblo, Colorado jail was quite different. It had many prisoners, it was dirty and stank. Fortunately, we were only there that one day.

When we returned to Lowry Field we were given a summary court martial (which is for minor offenses) and sentenced us to another ten days in the stockade where we worked during the day and were locked up at night. During the day we worked on a truck collecting trash. I was lucky because one of the “prisoner chasers” had the last name of “Cosentino” and he treated me like a wayward cousin. During our breaks he would give me a cigarette. When our time was up we were returned to our units. Those days in three different civilian
jails and two military stockades taught me a valuable lesson - stay out of confined, guarded places which can only be unlocked from the outside. A negative experience but a positive lesson.

**Making News V – 1948**

- DEWEY LOSES, TRUMAN ELECTED PRESIDENT.
- GANDHI ASSASINATED.
- U.S.RECOGNIZES NEW STATE OF ISRAEL.
- JACKIE ROBINSON FIRST NEGRO MAJOR LEAGUE PLAYER.
AUSTRIA

After Lowery I was scheduled to go overseas as part of the post WWII occupation of Germany and Austria. I was sent to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, which was the shipping out point for the Europe. We were told that the shipping out date was uncertain but it would be between two weeks and a month. In the meantime we were not to leave the base, however, if we lived within one hundred miles we could get one weekend pass.

I took my pass the first weekend and decided that two days was not enough so I took five. When I returned and reported for duty the first sergeant was not too happy with me. At roll call the next morning he loudly announced that “Cosentino thinks a weekend pass is good for five days. I know he will enjoy scrubbing the deck and KP duty for the whole two weeks at sea.” When we finally got aboard the troopship, I made myself scarce. I would usually go to the lower deck and join the poker games. When the “bitch box” came on and said my name I pretended not to hear it. Troop ships don’t have room service, so when I went to the mess hall for meals I had to keep out of sight of the first sergeant, which wasn’t difficult with a couple of thousand troops aboard wearing the same fatigues. I gambled that the first sergeant would not waste his time looking all over the ship for me and I was right.

So I enjoyed my cruise to Bremerhaven, Germany. When we got off the ship we were re-assigned and I, luckily, was not with my old first sergeant any more. I went briefly to Wiesbaden, Germany and then flew from Frankfurt to my first overseas assignment, which was with an AACS Squadron in Austria. This base was called Tulln. It was about thirty kilometers outside of Vienna and in the Russian zone of Austria. We were the only Americans based behind the Iron Curtain. We were basically a spy base, as will become clear.

Austria at that time was, like Germany, divided into four zones of occupation, American, Russian, British, and French. Vienna was, like Berlin, in the Russian zone and the city of Vienna again, like Berlin, was divided into four zones, American, British, French and
Russian. The Americans, after WWII, had negotiated with the Russians and claimed that we had to have an air base near Vienna to supply our troops in the city, so that was how we obtained that base, forty kilometers from Vienna. We were the only American base behind the Iron Curtain.

All the Americans on the base were told to report any troop movements or any unusual activity which we saw in the Russian zone. This was in addition to anything our Intelligence section and Crypto men were doing. So part of our mission was to report on Russian troop movements in the area, although ostensibly it was a supply base for our troops in Vienna.

The Russians knew what our real purpose was, but since there wasn’t much they could do about it they just positioned their artillery on the hills surrounding us to let us know they were watching us. This was during the Cold War and we knew that if a war broke out we didn’t have a chance and would probably be taken prisoner immediately. We were a very small group and only had a total of about 200 men on the base and a few cargo planes (no combat aircraft at all). The standard joke around the base was that (just in case we were taken prisoner) we had to learn enough Russian to say, “Give me a small shovel please.”

We were allowed to use one road into Vienna and if we got off that road the Russians would arrest us. We had one officer on the base who was fluent in Russian and he was responsible for negotiating the release of any of our men who were arrested by the Russians (I think that only happened twice while I was there). The Russian army had a checkpoint which we had to go through as we entered Vienna (like Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin). Usually the Russian soldiers on duty would just grunt and wave us on. Sometimes they would give our vehicles a cursory look before grunting and motioning us on.

I was assigned to Tulln Air Base as part of an AACS Squadron. We were responsible for all communication facilities, including Air Traffic Control and Teletype Operations. I was in charge of a group of Austrians working the teletype center and I also worked the facsimile machine, the ancestor of the present day fax machines. These machines gave us maps of the terrain in various parts of Europe. There I was, an eighteen year old in charge of twenty older men and women (who knew much more about the job than I did).

One of the Austrian woman on my staff was very friendly and made small talk with me. One day she told me that she had worked in one of the camps holding prisoners (I
assumed she meant prisoners of war, but it could have been a concentration camp, I never
found out) and showed me photos of herself dressed in her Nazi uniform. I guess she was
proud of her service or perhaps just wanted to show me how important she once was, or both.
I didn’t say much because I really wasn’t interested in any more revelations about her Nazi
past.

The other workers there were much more distant. They just did their work and went
home at the end of their shifts. The first day I was in charge there they all came to me at the
end of their shift, shook my hand and said something like, “Guten Nacht.” I asked one of the
other workers there if they were all quitting on my first day. He didn’t laugh at me but kept a
straight face and told me that it was the custom in Austria to shake hands and say good night
when they were leaving.

I met another newcomer to the base. His name was Roberto Perez, about my age and,
as I found out later, also someone who didn’t get along well with authoritarian superiors. We
became good buddies.

One night Perez and I did some serious drinking at the EM club and, as it was too late
to catch a train into Vienna, we decided to go to the town of Tulln. Of course Tulln was
strictly off limits as it was in the Russian zone of Austria. We hopped the fence, walked
cautiously to the town, found a gasthaus and had a beer. Naturally, we were in uniform and
the Austrians stared at us, since they probably had never seen anyone in an American
uniform before (at least not in their village). Despite our drunkenness we started to get
nervous, expecting someone would report us to the Russian Military Police, so we quickly
finished our beer and walked back out of the town. By now we were getting a little worried
because we knew the Russians, if they saw us wouldn’t hesitate to shoot if they had to stop
us. One of the GIs stationed in Vienna had been shot and killed by the Russians when he was
in the first bezirk (district) while it was under Russian control (that was the downtown area
and each month a different one of the four occupying countries was in charge). As we started
to make our way back out of that quiet town someone yelled out. We didn’t know if they
were yelling to get our attention, if they were Austrian or Russian, so we just started running
as fast as we could for the base. We made it back before the Russians, if they knew, had time
to look for us. That was our only experience in Tulln. Needless to say, we didn’t file any
report on that incident. All I remember of the village is that it was a small, dark, and dreary place.

Even Vienna was sort of drab in those days, still trying to recover from the war. Of course for us, American GIs, it was a great place. There was a big USO Club near the St Stephens Cathedral where we could go for some good company and entertainment. There were also many good nightclubs, the only one I remember was called the Hochhaus. The ratio of women to men in Austria was said to be about the same as it was in Germany, about seven to one. This was because many of the men were either killed in the war or never returned. We GIs were considered rich compared to the average Austrian, so, naturally, we had no trouble finding women to share the nightlife of Vienna.

It was also in Vienna where I first learned to play strip poker with three Viennese women and two other GIs. I was only eighteen but the two other guys and the women were in their early twenties. Strip poker is an exciting game for young, well-formed bodies, but I imagine for older people it might not be as uplifting.

It was about that time was when I was with another guy from my outfit and we were just returning to the base after being in Vienna all weekend. We got on the train at the Franz Joseph bannhof and when we got to Klosterneuburg, on the outskirts of Vienna, a bunch of Russian soldiers got on the train. This was during the Cold War period. The Austrians in our compartment immediately got up to give the Russians their seats. My buddy and I had choice seats by the window and, of course, didn’t move. Six Russians crowded into the compartment three on each side) and a few more stood around looking in. They were all talking in Russian, which we didn’t understand, but we could feel the tension in the air. After all we were just a bunch of American and Russian teenagers in uniform, very macho and very influenced by the propaganda from both sides. After the train pulled out of the station I opened a pack of a cigarettes and gave one to my buddy. I then decided to try to break the ice so I offered one to the Russians. The first few said no, then one hesitatingly took a cigarette and the others refused. Then I lit the Russian’s cigarette and my own. The Russian inhaled and seemed to enjoy it and said something to the others. Soon they were all gesturing to me for a cigarette, which I gave them. I was reading the “Stars and Stripes”, the armed forces newspaper. One Russian soldier was looking over my shoulder and saw a picture of a woman in a bathing suit and asked, in German (we both spoke a little German) if
she was American and I said yes, and handed him the paper to look at. He passed it around to all his friends. There was also a picture of graduates of Annapolis throwing their hats in the air. He asked me if they were American soldiers and I told him no they were sailors. So he passed that around and explained that one to the others too. By the time we arrived at our stop we were all very friendly and they said goodbye in Russian and we said goodbye in English, we would repeat the Russian word and they would repeat the English word. I have told that story many times since then to show how well things went once we, and they, realized that the others were not monsters. I think about that incident occasionally and wonder if somewhere in Russia someone is repeating the same story and trying to show that Americans were not the monsters they thought they were.

A few weeks later I went with another GI into the Russian zone. We were always told during orientation sessions that we could visit the Russian zone during the day but to be careful and stay out of the area at night. We wanted to see the famous Volks Prater, a big amusement park. This was the place with the huge Ferris wheel which was in the Orson Welles movie, *The Third Man*. As we were walking through the Volks Prater, an obviously drunken Russian soldier started walking towards me, yelling at me in Russian. Being the typical teen-age GI, I walked towards him, ready for a fight. Just then two big Russian Soldiers (probably MPs) with pistols in their holsters, came out of nowhere, grabbed the drunken Russian Soldier and glared at us as they carried him off. We left and went back to the American zone. I never did get to ride that big Ferris wheel.

The Russian zone at night was, unlike the American zone, very dark, quiet, and ominous. One night I met a woman in a nightclub and she suggested we go to her apartment. Never being one to put a wet blanket on what looked like a hot party, naturally I said okay. We left the nightclub and took a taxi to her apartment, which she told me was just a short ride. It took a while and finally we pulled up to an apartment house in a section of the city I had never been in before. She asked me to wait while she checked to see if the landlord was around before I came in. As we were waiting the taxi driver told me that we were in the center of the Russian zone and asked me how long had I known her. I asked him why and he said because she spoke German with a Russian accent. Given the unusual circumstances, I decided it was probably best to get out of there as soon as possible, so I told the driver to go back to the First Bezirk, the center of the city, which he did quite quickly.
I was nineteen years old, enjoying my three day pass in Vienna with a young Viennese woman when she made an astounding discovery. We were in bed talking and she was running her fingers through my huge mass of hair and suddenly puller her hand out and showed me a single strand of grey hair. I asked her where that came from and she smilingly answered, “your head”. She had found what I assumed was the only one on my head and I was shocked by the discovery. Within the next few years I did discover a few more, but nothing noticeable until I was in my early thirties. My older sisters were prematurely grey, but my older brothers were not, so I thought that the males in the family would not see that early grey (but we all did).

One day the base was placed on alert and we didn’t know why. There were rumors that the local Communists were going to attack the base in some way, but we didn’t know if these rumors had any substance. In any case, we were all given special duty or put on stand-by. My special duty was to guard the transmitter shack. I wasn’t crazy about this assignment because the shack was on the outer perimeter of the base, about a mile away from anyone else. An Austrian ran the transmitter. The OD (Officer of the Day) told me to walk around the shack and only take a short breather of a couple of minutes every half hour. He said I would be relieved in two hours. I walked around the shack for about twenty minutes. I realized that it was dark, no moonlight and the grass was very high, which meant anyone could sneak up on me through the grass and jump me or stab me. Thinking about it, I decided that walking around the shack under these conditions was crazy. The safest place would be to sit in the shack with the door open so I could hear, and possibly see, anyone coming down the dirt road in front of the shack. I found some comic books, pulled up my chair by the door, put my M1 rifle on my lap and started to read. I was just getting engrossed in the comic book when I suddenly heard a noise. I immediately switched off the light and did what I was trained to do. I jumped out, went to a prone position, aimed in the direction of the noise and yelled, “halt” and, at the same time, pulled back the bolt on my M1, ready to fire. Suddenly I saw a rapid movement close to my position but he was running away from, not towards, me. What I saw made me feel sorry for the man. He obviously was so frightened by hearing “halt” and then hearing the click of the bolt, that he was holding his bicycle and running away as fast as he could. Probably just some poor guy on his way home for the local gasthaus after a beer or two.
While I was at Tulln I thought I should learn to drive so I talked to one of my friends who worked in the motor pool and he borrowed a jeep to give me driving lessons. At one point I ran into the fence around the military Police Headquarters but was able to back out and leave before anyone saw the damage to the fence, the jeep damage was barely noticeable.

Besides learning to drive, I was learning more about poker. One morning, after one of those all night poker sessions, I decided I was too tired to go on duty and I knew we were given a duty free day if we took the GED. So I went to the personnel office and asked to take the GED. They gave it to me, I took it, and passed it. Now I was, officially, a high school graduate, although I hadn’t spent a day in high school.

Just as my basic training at Lackland Air Base taught me some discipline and responsibility and just as I learned at Lowry Field to type and stay out of jail, so did I learn some useful things while I was stationed at Tulln Air Base. At Tulln in addition to receiving my high school equivalency diploma and learning to drive, I received many other benefits which included learning to play chess, cribbage, poker, and pinochle. I also took TDY (temporary duty) flights to Tripoli, Libya and to Copenhagen and Paris.

**MAKING NEWS VI**

- NORTH KOREAN ARMY INVADES SOUTH KOREA.
- UN TO HELP SOUTH KOREA.
- POPULATION OF US AT 150.6 MILLION.
- BETRAND RUSSELL WINS NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE.

**GERMANY**

After serving 18 months in Austria, I was transferred to Munich Riem Air Base in Germany. Munich-Riem was on the outskirts of Munich with just a few houses and one little gasthaus in the vicinity. It had been a base for the German Luftwaffe during WWII. Today it is all built up and, until recently that airport was a major civilian airport. When I arrived there, it was serving both military and civilian purposes. I don’t think I learned as much as when I was stationed in Vienna, but I did go out more and traveled more. I worked for the Personnel Officer and the Operations Officer, which put me in a good position to get a free flight whenever one of our planes was going somewhere that I wanted to see. I was able to go on TDY status or DS (detached service) and either one of these classifications allowed me
at least a few days in whatever place we went to. I was able to fly to Paris and Marseille, as well as Copenhagen, and Rome. I also went on DS to North Africa (Tripoli, Libya).

One of the more interesting travel experiences of my time in the service was when I went to Tripoli, Libya. As a teenager in Tripoli (I was nineteen). I was fascinated by the women who had everything completely covered except for the one eye peering at me as we walked past each other. I was wearing my uniform (because, unlike today, we had to always be in uniform) and they were probably as curious about me as I was about them. The old carts pulled by donkeys and practically no cars in the streets added to the strangeness of the place. The other thing I noticed was that the little Arab kids would throw stones at British soldiers and run away, but they were always friendly to us. The British army was the occupying force there and, although we Americans also had a presence there (Wheelus Field), we were a much smaller group and were only seen in town on brief visits whereas the Brits were there all the time as an occupation force. Although they hated the British they seemed to love us. I suspect that the real reason for this was because, at that time, they saw us as liberators, not as colonial rulers. The only other non-Arabs they had ever seen, until we arrived, were the hated colonialists.

When I was transferred from Tulln to Munich I re-connected with my friend, Perez, who had been transferred there. Maybe the CO at Tulln had decided to split us up to make the base more peaceful. In any case, we were now together again to resume our role as incorrigibles.

Perez was the only one that was crazier than I was at both Tulln and Munich. One example of his wild, crazy behavior is when Perez was put on the “goon squad.” This was a way of punishing guys who committed some offense that was not serious enough for a court martial but required some form of punishment. The punishment usually consisted of a couple of hours of “close-order drill”, i.e., consistently marching back and forth to the sound of the sergeant screaming out orders. The sergeant in charge of the goon squad was someone we called “Tennessee” (which is where he was from). He was a big guy, about 6’4 and weighed about 240 pounds. Perez was a little guy, like me, about 5’8. Tennessee didn’t like Mexicans (or any other minority). One day he shouted, “Perez, if you fuck up once more I’ll kick your ass.” A very un-military approach to a recalcitrant soldier. Perez’s heavily accented response, “Okay Tennessee, I know you can kick my ass, but if you do, you better
never sleep because I’ll get you. I swear I’ll get you.” Knowing Perez’s reputation, Tennessee mumbled something like, “You just better stay in line.” He could have had Perez brought up for insubordination, but he knew better than to take that route.

That night Perez and I were drinking in the EM club and Tennessee walked in. He was very friendly and, as he passed our table, he said, “Cosentino, Perez, how you guys doing?” He was always relatively civil to us after that incident.

**SNAPSHOT – ROBERT F PEREZ**

Perez (we all called each other by last names in the service) was born in Mexico and enlisted in the Air Force when he lived in McAllen, Texas. He called all non-Mexicans (except for African-Americans), “whites” and all Mexicans, “Spanish”. I met Perez when we were both stationed at Tulln Air Base and we were later at Munich-Riem Air Base in Munich. We came close to a fistfight when we first met, but after that became good friends. We were both considered a little wild (and/or crazy) by many of the others in the squadron.

Perez always managed to find a beautiful woman for a brief encounter. We shared a room on the base. Naturally no one was allowed to bring women into the rooms. We could bring them to the EM Club for drinks but other nightly entertainment with them had to be off base. One night Perez was restricted to the base and I decided to spend the night in Munich. He somehow talked a woman into visiting him that night in our room. Someone reported them and they were both lying naked in bed when the OD (Officer of the Day) knocked on the door and said, “Perez, open the door.” Being caught with a woman in that situation could have meant a court martial. Perez, always thinking, pretended to be just waking up and said, “Yes sir, just a minute.” Then he shoved the woman and her clothes into his wall locker and whispered to her to stay there and be quiet until the OD left. He then opened the door and the OD said that there was a report that he had a woman in the room. Perez denied it and showed him there was no one there. The OD couldn’t see anyone but the room did reek of perfume, so he opened the wall locker and - bingo! The OD said, “What’s this naked woman doing here?” Perez looked surprised and said, “Woman, what are you doing there. Get out of my room.” I got this report from the enlisted man who was on duty with the OD that night. Perez didn’t get off restriction for a long time.
Eventually Perez got court-martialed (I don’t remember what the charge was). He was given a general discharge and sent back to the states. The next time I heard from him was when he wrote me a letter saying he had been discharged in New Jersey and took a bus for Texas. While he was on the first part of that bus ride he said he met a beautiful “Spanish” woman and when they got to Chicago they were married. I received one more letter from him in which he told me he was leaving his wife and going to Michigan to pick crops. That was the last time I heard from him until one night fifty years later when I received a phone call in the middle of the night and a drunken Perez was on the line. I had earlier obtained his address and sent him a letter. He told me that he had just divorced his wife (I think he said it was his third wife). He had eight children and many grandchildren, but he was now living alone in San Antonio. He also told me that he was in the real estate business and owned several houses. He said he would call me back and hung up. I never heard from him after that.

I made the rank of corporal and was even up for sergeant at one point. I went before the committee to be promoted to sergeant; I thought it would be a piece of cake. The committee consisted of three officers, I thought I was ready because I knew enough about military law, Air Force regulations, drill procedures, etc. After a few brief questions, the lowest ranking officer on the panel (of the type who is condescending to those under his command and obsequious to his superiors), a First Lieutenant, asked me if we should ever split an infinitive and a few other non-military type questions. I knew this officer didn’t like me so he tried to make it look like I was not smart enough to be a leader. It might also have been the case that he was just trying to impress his superior officers with how smart he was. Whatever it was, I was later told by my C.O. that I didn’t make it this time but I should try again in six months. However, before that six months was up, an incident happened which got me reduced in rank to private.

I often found myself on restriction, meaning I couldn’t leave the base. On one of those restrictions, I stayed on the base and went to the EM club, had a few drinks, went back to my room and then decided to break restriction and go into town. The sergeant on duty that night tried to stop me from leaving the base. I shoved him out of the way, he shoved back, I took a swing at him, missed him but my hand went flying through the glass door. Blood
starting spurting all over so the sergeant realized he had to get me to the dispensary right away. They gave me sodium-penathol and sewed up my hand.

The next day I was summoned to the base commander’s office where I was read the riot act and busted to private. I did get one of my stripes back before I was discharged.
CHAPTER 6

BACK TO THE U.S.

When I returned to the states I didn’t go back to Camp Kilmer (which was our disembarkation point before going overseas thirty-eight months earlier) but was sent to McGuire Air Force Base (which, like Camp Kilmer, was also in New Jersey).

At McGuire AFB we were told that returning GIs who had less than two months to serve could ask for immediate discharge. I was scheduled to go to McChord AFB in Tacoma, Washington, but decided to take the offer of immediate discharge. Later, when I had time to think about it, I felt that I had missed a good opportunity to get a free round trip to the West Coast (where I had never been). Since I would be a short timer, I probably wouldn’t have much to do at McChord and, after a month or so hanging out I would have been on my way home.

I signed up for three years but ended up serving four because the Korean War started and we were all extended, automatically, for one year, unless we re-enlisted. We were given a bonus if we signed up for three more years instead of taking the involuntary extension. There were quite a few in my squadron who re-upped to get the bonus. They told me I was crazy not to do the same since the government would probably do what it did in WWII, change that one year to “the duration of the war.” My commanding office told me that I had high AGCT (Army General Classification Test, which was also used for Air Force personnel) scores, so if I reenlisted I would be able to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School) and become an officer. I said I would take a chance with the one year extension, and I was glad I did.

Even though I passed on the chance to go to McCord Air Force Base in Washington, I still felt very good about what I did do in the time I spent in the service. Before my 21st birthday I had received my high school diploma, scoring higher than the average high school graduate in every category, been to almost every country in Western Europe and to North Africa, had learned to play chess, as well as cribbage, poker, and pinochle. My experience in jails and in the stockade taught me to stay out serious trouble. In addition to these varied
experiences, I, like most other GIs, did a lot of drinking, had plenty of sex, and learned much about people in general.

My first job when I returned home was as a drill press operator in a factory. This job was even more boring than my teen-age job as a mail boy. They also had me act as driver of the company car to pick up the executives when they arrived at the Stamford Railroad Station. That job ended when, with two executives in the back seat, I, not very adroitly, wheeled the car swiftly into the company parking lot and hit the side of a loading dock. It shook up my passengers and changed the symmetry of the front of the car. From there I moved on to greener pastures.

I then got a job packing boxes of multi-colored ribbons in a factory on Stamford’s West Side. Eight hours a day of packing boxes is almost as exciting as operating a drill press. My sister, Louise, worked in Pitney Bowes, which was close by and so I would get a ride with her every morning and evening, since I didn’t yet have my own car.

Sometime later, at one the family Sunday gatherings, Louise and I got in a discussion about unions. By this time I had read a bit of labor history (I think this discussion was on one of my visits while I was in college) and I was saying how much workers did need unions. Louise pointed out that she and most of the workers at Pitney Bowes always voted against the unions because their salary and benefits were just as good as what the union shops were getting and they didn’t have to pay union dues, so they were really better off than the union shops. I told her that she was only getting those good wages because the unions had fought for them in other places and Pitney Bowes knew they had to match the union wages and benefits in order to keep the unions out. My brother Val, who also worked at Pitney Bowes agreed with me about the role of the unions.

Over the years I have told those who said we don’t need unions that eventually they will see the results of that kind of thinking. Total union membership in 2010 in the U.S. was 16.4%, most of that was in public employee unions. In 1954 the private sector union membership was 35%, it is now 7%, the lowest it has been since 1932. The loss of union power can be seen in the stagnant (and, in some cases, lower) wages of workers and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. In 2011, the wealth of the top 400 individuals in the U.S. was more than that of the 160 million people at the bottom. The decline of the unions may be one of the factors in dealing with this equation. As unions are
being squeezed out so is the middle class. Formerly, the unions, because of their size, could wield some political clout, but in recent years that has diminished leaving the middle class with little or no representation, thus the decline in the middle class.

About a year after I was discharged Congress decided to give mustering out pay to those who served during the Korean War (this may have been part of the Korean War G.I. Bill, but I’m not sure). When I received my mustering out pay of $300 I immediately used $150 to buy an old (1939) Pontiac. This gave me wheels and a little freedom. I decided to quit my colorful job at the ribbon factory.

A very short time after leaving my job at the ribbon factory, I found a job in a small factory which made fans and ventilators. I worked with sheet metal in the factory only briefly because my boss learned I could type and I was promoted to the office. I eventually became assistant purchasing agent. I was twenty-one years old, with a ninth grade education, making more money than a teacher. I made a lot, but, like all the guys I ran around with, I spent it all on booze and women.

It was one of those cold Connecticut winter nights and I was with a friend driving through Stamford when, suddenly, I heard sirens behind me and assumed, correctly, that the policemen in that squad car might have something they wanted to say to me, so I politely pulled over. Both my friend and I had been drinking. The two policemen got out of their car and approached us. The one talking to me asked me if I knew that I had gone through a stop sign and went the wrong way up Bank Street, which was a one-way street. I tried to act sober and polite. I said I hadn’t seen the stop sign and that I had just returned to Stamford and Bank Street was not one way before I left. He asked to see my license. My license was stamped with the word “Veteran” on it because the state of Connecticut, during the Korean War, had passed a law giving free licenses to returning veterans. When the Korean War started in 1950 all military personnel had their service automatically extended for one year, so the very first veterans didn’t return home until 1951. I was among those extended and was discharged in November of that year. Since I was among the earliest returning veterans, it is likely that the policemen had never seen a license with the word “Veteran” stamped on it. When I handed it to him, he looked at me and asked me how long I had been back and I told him about a month. “Me and my buddy,” he informed me, pointing to the other policeman, “were both in the 82nd Airborne during World War Two and we know how tough it is trying
to get adjusted to civilian life.” He gave me back my license and said, “We won’t give you a ticket, but just be careful. Good luck.” With that they let us go on our way. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that my biggest battle was the one I fought outside a bar in Munich.

Shortly after my “give a veteran a break” experience I had a very different experience, which taught me how to talk to someone in a coma. Two of my friends and I were drinking and decided to go to a strip tease joint we knew about. We never arrived there. I was speeding along and tried to beat a yellow traffic light before it turned red and someone coming from a side street was trying to get a jump on the light and he hit my car on the side and I rolled over and was thrown out. I tried to control the car as it was flipping over (as absurd as that seems, it was an instinctive reaction). Everything seemed in slow motion and I was thinking that this was the end. I remember lying on the ground and it seemed like there were many people around me talking but I couldn’t see anything. They were saying things like, “Oh, too bad” “Yea, and he’s so young too” and similar comments. I envisioned myself bleeding badly. I tried to yell at them and tell them to shut up, but I felt like I was yelling but nothing was coming out; they kept talking and I don’t remember anything else except waking up in a hospital.

When I woke up, I was told that except for a few scrapes and bruises I would be okay. They also told me that I was “a very lucky young man” because when I was thrown from the car I had just missed hitting my head on the curb, which would probably have been fatal. I was released from the hospital. I don’t remember how I got home, but after that accident I always assumed that someone in a hospital who appeared to be unconscious might still be able to hear. So whenever I visited people in that condition I would talk to them as if they could hear me, since I remembered that I was able to hear everything although, presumably, I was totally out of it. After that experience I never liked to hear people talking as though the seemingly unconscious person in the bed couldn’t hear.

In later years I heard doctors say that the hearing is the last thing to go. I think that is probably true, but I find it interesting because in old age it is said that the hearing is the first thing to go and it is, at least for certain sounds, but not necessarily completely. So it seems that part of our hearing diminishes after a certain age, but, obviously, part of it also exists until the end of our lives.
A short time after the accident I quit drinking and began training as a semi-pro boxer and would work out in the evenings and weekends. I had the same trainer (Steve Kelly) that my brother Val had when he was boxing (Steve said that Val was good and he was sorry to see him quit). One of Val’s stable mates, also managed by Kelly, was Chico Vejar. That was before I started there, by the time I started Val had given it up and Chico had gone on to bigger things. Later, in 1958, Chico would be ranked as the 5th top middleweight in the world.

Of the four brothers, three of us boxed, Val and I as semi-pros and Frank was a boxing champion of his weight class at Sampson Air Force base.

After a few bouts, even though I did okay I decided boxing was not for me, especially after listening to those middle age fat guys in the front rows smoking cigars and yelling “hit him, hit him” and, since I was a southpaw, they were always giving advice like “use your left, use your left”. Once, when I let their talking influence me, I used my left hand at the wrong time and took a hard blow which staggered me and I had to go in a clinch to recover and stay on my feet.

Years later, when I talked about my (very brief) boxing career I would mention that I also did road work (which meant running three or four miles) when I could. My friends were puzzled and would ask me why I worked on the roads when I already had a job and was in training.

Steve Kelly, my trainer, helped me learn some valuable life lessons. He always said “pace yourself or you will wear yourself out too early.” Once, when I got angry and starting swinging wildly (and, as a result took more hits than I gave) he told me, “Don’t get mad or you’ll lose the fight, stay calm, wait for an opening, and you’ll get your chance.” I remembered that advice, although I didn’t always follow it.

After I quit boxing I went back to my bad old habits. I had what might be described as a run-in with the police. It began when I started going to the local bar again and drinking with my friends. One day I went to the bar in Stamford where we usually met. Since none of my guys showed up I figured they had gone to New York because it was getting late and the bars in New York were open until 4AM whereas the ones in Connecticut closed at 1AM. I decided to drive to a bar in Port Chester, just across the state line, which is one of the places where we sometimes went to drink and dance.
The first Port Chester watering hole (called the Old PG or old Post Grill) had a bar and dance floor downstairs on one side and a bowling alley on the other side. On top was a diner with a long counter and windows and a glass door so that anyone driving in would see only the backs of the people at the counter. I, with that twenty-one year old macho ex-GI attitude, swerved into the parking lot at a fairly high speed, wheeled the car abruptly toward the front row and smashed directly into a police car. Since I was a little high my reflexes were not what they should have been, but quickly returned to normal when I hit that car. I realized I wasn’t hurt and looked up at the diner and no one at the counter had heard the noise probably because of the noise from the bowling alley and the band downstairs. I saw the two cops at the counter talking to the waitress, who obviously hadn’t seen anything because she was too busy talking to the policemen. Realizing that there were no witness to my brief encounter, I wheeled the car back around toward the main road and went to another gathering place a couple of miles away. I often wondered how those two policemen explained their damaged car to their superiors when they returned to the police station.
CHAPTER 7

WASHINGTON D.C. AND DETROIT

It was time to travel again and even though I was making what was then a lot of money for that time ($100 per week, more than teachers were making, although I hadn’t even gone to high school). I packed up and hitchhiked to Washington, D.C. So my business career and my boxing career ended in one fell swoop.

In Washington D.C. I got a job as a counterman in a restaurant and a cheap room in a rooming house at 18th and G, right around the corner from the White House. One day I met a young female tourist from Michigan and we spent a few days together. When she had to return to Michigan she asked me to move there and I said I might do that. I was working in a restaurant in an area called Haines Point. It was a beautiful area and I would walk by the cherry trees in bloom on my way to work. Every night when I closed up I counted the cash, made entries in the book and locked up.

One of the guys that worked with me for a short time was a graduate of one of the big law schools (Harvard or Yale, I don’t remember which one). His name was Paul. He was a nice guy but didn’t mingle with the rest of us. He knew he would only be there a short time until he passed the bar and then would be gone into the Washington, D.C. world. He was the one that told me that one of his law professors had said, “If you want a hanging jury be sure to get young women and old men.” Had I been smarter I would have asked him why, but in those days I was still in awe of anyone who had such an education as he had, so I didn’t ask.

One day I came in to work and the manager accused me of stealing some money, which I hadn’t done. I was convinced that another employee who was about twenty years older than me, and had been there longer, was the one who did it but managed to make it look like it was me. Anyway, having a bit of a temper in those days, I threw the apron down and suggested, in a not too gentle way, that he should shove that job in a particular dark part of his anatomy. I said I wanted my pay and he told me I would have to come back on payday which was Friday (and this was on a Monday).
My display of temper was very dramatic, but also very stupid. It was stupid because I was living hand to mouth and had no more than a dollar in my pocket. I always ate at the restaurant before and after my shift, so leaving so abruptly left me in a lurch. I figured I could wait for my paycheck and then leave for Detroit and see that young woman who had asked me to visit her. Those days of waiting were very long. I learned that if you don’t eat for three days that the first two days are difficult but the third day was not as bad. I watched people go into restaurants to eat and thought that as soon as I got my paycheck I would order a big steak with mashed potatoes and a beer. It is strange being completely broke in a bustling city like Washington, D.C. I would walk around every day, not knowing what to do and thinking how strange it was to see everyone going about their business; to the movies, shopping, and eating. They didn’t know what it was like to be alone and hungry. Finally Friday arrived I got my paycheck (I had to walk to Haines Point since I didn’t have bus fare) and went immediately to a neighborhood restaurant and ordered tomato juice, steak and potatoes and a beer. I drank the tomato juice quickly, took two bites of the steak and found that I couldn’t eat anymore, my stomach wouldn’t take it after three days of emptiness. Now that I had money again, I bought a one-way ticket on a Greyhound bus to Detroit and a new phase of my life began.

In Detroit I landed a job as a short order cook with a restaurant chain called S&C. S&C owned 15 restaurants in Detroit and later bought the Palmer House in Chicago. I worked in their 2nd Avenue restaurant near West Grand Blvd, across from the General Motors building. The relationship with the girl I had come to see (she lived in a small town about an hour or so from Detroit) didn’t take and we both gave up on it.

I would occasionally sing in a local bar in Detroit. It was called the Submarine bar and the proprietor was an older woman (i.e., about 45 or 50) named Peggy who had recently lost her husband to cancer. She would always ask me to sing a couple of songs and would pay for all my drinks. I didn’t object, since up until that time I, usually after drinking with one or two other guys, would just start singing. I always enjoyed singing. Peggy’s requests were usually songs I enjoyed singing, like songs made popular by Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin (unlike the kind my father liked; his favorite was “La Donna Mobile” which my older sisters told me he would often sing when he had been drinking, which, of course, was quite often).
Restaurant work is one of the best deals for someone who just wants to bum around because it is usually easy to get a job right away in a strange city. You just have to worry about finding a place to stay because you can always eat at the restaurant (which is why the restaurant business has more than its share of drifters and ex-cons). After working a day or two it is usually easy to borrow money on the next week’s pay to rent a room. Because of the ease with which one can get a room and meals, it was an ideal job for drifters (like me), as well as alcoholics, ex-convicts, and other lost souls. This mixture of those who were a step away from homelessness led to frayed tempers and conflicts. An example: When I was the night manager at one of the S&C restaurants I had to step in the middle of an argument between two ex-cons who were too close to the knives to ignore. When I walked into the kitchen the dishwasher and the swamper were in a bitter argument and it was clear that the next move would be to fists and, possibly, knives. I asked them what was going on and the dishwasher said that he was going to teach this guy not to insult him. The swamper said that he was “on paper” and didn’t need trouble. I knew, from other ex-cons I had worked with, that “on paper” meant either on parole or on probation. I told the swamper that I understood and I didn’t need any trouble either, so if he would just apologize to the dishwasher we could forget the whole thing and try to work together. I waited for his response, knowing that these guys sometimes see apologies as a sign of weakness and won’t do it. Fortunately, after a brief pause, he, reluctantly, apologized and that averted the potential explosion.

I liked my job as a short order cook (sometimes called a fry cook, depending on what part of the country it is) but thought that all of us (cooks, waitresses, dishwashers, etc.) were underpaid. I began talking to the others and asked what was the union doing for us, since union dues was taken out of every paycheck. I found out that the only time they saw the union rep was when he was running for re-election, then he would come to visit and buy them a drink. That was once every two (or four) years. I asked them why they didn’t go to the meetings and complain about the low wages and they said they didn’t know when (or where) the meetings were until after they were over and the rep told them what the new contract was about. I found out when the next meeting was (it was to be held about six weeks later) and started to organize. I managed to get about twenty-five members to agree to go with me and try to elect a new rep (preferably someone from our group). I figured that
would be enough votes to swing any elections since the union officials would be expecting their usual small group of insiders to decide everything.

After a few weeks or organizing I thought everything was in place to overthrow the group in power, but I had misjudged them. Although I told everyone to keep our intended coup a secret so the officials couldn’t get all their flunkeys to come, it soon became obvious that we had a stool pigeon in our midst. I have learned since, after many years in various unions, that one must always expect a stoolie who is ready to report everything to the bosses. Even years later, when I became chief negotiator for the local teachers’ union, I assumed that whatever we said had a good chance of being leaked out within a few days – and, as it turned out, the superintendent usually did seem to know more than he should. In this case in Detroit, I didn’t realize it until about two or three weeks before the scheduled meeting when individuals would come up to me with remarks like, “Dante, I’m sorry I can’t make it that day, I promised my wife I would take her to visit her mother out of state that week.” Or “I really wanted to go but my girl is in a school play that night and I have to be there” etc. Every day one or two more would come up with excuses as to why to couldn’t go to the meeting. One of them finally said to me, “Look, Dante, you’re a young man and you’re single, most of us have families and we have to be careful, everyone is scared.”

I began to see the writing on the wall. We were in the Teamsters union and they had a reputation for not putting up with any such nonsense as I was proposing. So I put out the word, assuming that there still might be a few brave souls out there, that the planned coup would not take place. I didn’t receive any complaints from anyone. It was interesting that the teamsters local didn’t send a couple of their goons after me but decided to do it quietly by sending their boys out to talk to people. I guess if they saw that wasn’t working they would have sent their “persuaders” to visit me.

A short while after the above incident, the manager of the restaurant where I worked told me that the night manager was leaving and that he was interested in making me the night manager with, naturally, a raise in pay. Quite coincidentally of course, this happened just after most of my group had bailed out on me and I had called off the meeting. I realized that I could either go on working for low wages, quit, or take the night manager’s job that was being offered to me. So I took the job. It was a good strategy for them since they scared everyone away without using any strong-arm methods. I assume that if I had refused their
offer and kept trying to organize I probably would eventually have had an “accident” as sometimes happened in those days. So my first real attempt at organizing was not to bring workers into a union but to try to force the union’s hand and make them respond to the workers. It would have been nice to have a Hollywood ending but it didn’t work that way.

It was in Detroit where I first learned to play the races. I would often go to the Hazel Park Race Track. I learned how to read the Racing Form and check the morning line in the papers. I also learned to look at the jockey, condition of track, weight carried, etc. I didn’t win a lot but didn’t lose a lot either and had fun watching and betting. One of the regulars at the track gave me a line which is the story of a lot of regulars at the track, and has become one of my favorite stories. He said, “I hope I break even today because I need the money.”

It was in Detroit where I met David Ditterline the Third who introduced me to Plato.

**SNAPSHOT – DAVID DITTERLINE THE THIRD**

He was a jazz aficionado and piano player, a few years older than I was and had the un-jazz like name of David Ditterline the third. He was originally from Illinois but had been in Detroit for some time as a traveling salesman, selling 8X10 photos (I think they were called silvertones). He talked me into trying it with him and a group of other salesmen. I tried it and lasted three days – I was not made for house-to-house selling.

Dave would take me to parties where most of the people were jazz musicians. They were weird parties (at least for me at the time) where guys would come up to you with a handful of multi-colored pills and tell you, “Take one man.” The pills were not dangerous, usually it was just speed. It was during this time when I first tried speed that I also tried marijuana (also called weed, pot, maryjane, etc). We would go into the men’s room of bars and take a few hits and go out and listen to the music and just feel mellow.

Dave was better educated than the rest of us who made the rounds of the bars and jazz clubs. It was about this time when I first heard Kenny Burrell and Yusef Latev, and others who were well known or about to become well known. I was lucky to be with Dave during this time. He was someone I knew I could learn from and I did.

One night a group of us were sitting at a bar drinking and the bartender started changing channels on TV. As he went by a performance of a symphony orchestra, Dave said, “wait go back to that” and all the rest of us said, “forget that”, so the bartender continued
on until he found a suitable channel for most of us. Later I asked Dave how could he like classical music so much. He said something like, “let me tell you, if someone tells you they like jazz and they don’t like classical music, they probably don’t know much about either.” I remember another time, when Kay Starr, a popular singer, was on TV singing “Wheel of Fortune” and we all remarked on how good she was. All that Dave said was, “Yeh, if you dig Kay Starr.”

When we would get into discussions he would bring up Plato and I would say, “Who is this guy Plato? Dave just laughed and said, “He was a philosopher.” I eventually asked him to give me a list of books to read (because I wanted to be able to argue as well as he could). So, as we sat in a bar having a beer, he wrote out a list off the top of his head. It included Thomas Paine, Plato, Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. Except for Thomas Paine (I had picked up Paine’s Common Sense because it looked interesting and I had enjoyed reading it), that was my introduction to the life of the mind. I think it was Dave who also introduced me to a very beautiful novel, The Green Child by Herbert Read. Another book I had read before Dave gave me that reading list (which was before I went to Wayne) was Saul Alinsky’s Reveille for Radicals.

I’m not sure what made me buy Thomas Paine’s book, probably because I was interested in the American Revolution, but I couldn’t remember why I bought Saul Alinsky’s book, so I got my copy of Alinsky’s book to see what made me decide to buy it. I found what I was looking for immediately. On the first page right under the title is: “Let them call me rebel and welcome, I feel no concern from it, but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul… Thomas Paine” (Alinsky 1).

It was interesting that Dave should talk about Plato so much since when I finally went to college, I found Plato’s mentor, Socrates, as well as Plato himself, two of the most interesting people I ever met (read).

After I started at Wayne I lost touch with Dave. I saw him once after I had been at Wayne for a year but it was a little strange. I was anxious for him to meet some of my friends from Wayne and anxious for them to meet him. I thought Dave would enjoy some intellectual discussion and that my friends would enjoy talking to him. We had some beers and talked philosophy and politics. Dave made some comment about how he was amazed at how much I
had learned, but I couldn’t tell if he was happy about it or not. Other than that comment, he said very little and left early.

Dave disappeared shortly after and I never saw him again. I often wonder what happened to him. He had told me once that he had gone to college for three years but never graduated. That made him exceptionally well educated for that time.

About the time that Dave disappeared from the scene I organized a floating poker game and made enough money to buy a car and some good clothes. I would go to the expensive men’s store across from the General Motors building where all the GM executives bought their clothes and try to buy what was fashionable. Years later when I met Antonia she was surprised at the expensive overcoat I had and I explained to her that it was one of the last traces of my gambling days. I did well with the poker game and even took in a partner. His name was Sid Gold. He was a fairly bright guy. He was the brother of Herb Gold, who, later, was on the cover of the NY Times Book Review and was, for a while, sort of the fair-haired boy of American Literature. His book, The Man Who Was Not With It (Gold), was actually taken from Sid’s experiences with a circus. I thought Sid could keep the game going if I was out of town or couldn’t make it for some reason.

There was a time later when I went to Chicago for a while and returned to Detroit, where I found my partner had not done anything with the game and it had died. I tried to get a new place and find players, but finally just gave it up. The poker gig was a nice trip while it lasted. We were only raided once and nothing came of it except we got to ride in the infamous Black Maria (the police vehicle for transporting prisoners, or potential prisoners). I will tell more of that story later.

**MAKING NEWS VII**

- GOV ADLAI E. STEVENSON OF ILLINOIS DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR PRESIDENT.
- TRUMAN SIGNS G.I. BILL OF RIGHTS FOR KOREAN WAR VETERANS.
- RALPH ELLISON PUBLISHES *THE INVISIBLE MAN*. 
CHAPTER 8

UNIVERSITY DAYS

While I was in Detroit the Korean GI Bill was passed and I always liked the idea of
going to college but could never afford it. So now I had a chance to go back to school and
get money for it. I applied to Wayne University (since then renamed Wayne State
University) and was told that the GED was acceptable but I would have to take an entrance
exam. This worried me a bit as I had skipped high school and my last year of any kind of
formal education was junior high school, i.e., the ninth grade.

When it came to the essay part of the test, the part I was most worried about, I
decided to write something about my time in the service; so I wrote an essay with a title
something like, “A Spy Behind the Iron Curtain”: describing my life on the only American
military base behind the Iron Curtain. The Cold War was still on and I think that the subject
of the essay may have intrigued the reader enough to have him or her overlook any
grammatical mistakes. As it turned out I passed without a problem. Shortly after I received
a letter announcing my acceptance to the university. I was excited at becoming one of those
“college kids” that we always made fun of. I took the exam, passed it and was accepted as a
full time student. I began my university life in February 1954.

Since no one in my family had gone to a regular college full time (I think my older
brother, Val was taking some college courses part time) I had no idea what to expect or what
I should major in. I remembered being told by the school psychologist (the one who had
done that testing when I was in junior high) that I scored very high in math and should
consider becoming an accountant. So, having no one to ask for advice and remembering
what that psychologist had told me, I decided to major in business.

Later, I often wondered why that psychologist had not suggested math or physics, which I’m
sure I would have found far more interesting than accounting. I suspect it was because he
thought poor people needed to be practical. I stayed with a business major until I took one
course in economics and another in general business and then decided that business was not
for me.
I took courses in many different areas because everything was so new to me. When my GI Bill ran out I took a full time job, working nights, at the same S&C restaurant chain that I started with in Detroit, and went to school part time. I still would run an occasional poker game.

Wayne University changed my life.

My freshman English professor, upon returning my first essay, asked me if I had ever had college English before and I told him I hadn’t. He said, “Congratulations” and gave me my paper back with an A. I had also taken an introductory course in philosophy and found that it was much more interesting than business, so I switched my major to philosophy and made English my minor. Actually when I finished my B.A I had enough English credits to have claimed a double major, i.e., Philosophy and English.

My first semester at Wayne I met many people, some of whom would become life-long friends. One of these friends was Sandy Joseph. He and I were in a German class together and since he was looking for a roommate for his apartment I agreed to move in with him. Up to this point I had been living in a third rate hotel on West Grand Blvd. Sharing an apartment was a good arrangement because Sandy liked to go to bed early and I liked to go to bed late. So he would get up at five in the morning to study and I would stay up to midnight or one o’clock to study.

After one semester in our apartment Sandy said he couldn’t afford it any more and would move in with his brother and his wife, they had offered him a room in their house. I talked to George Troutt and we rented a small carriage house on Ferry St. It was a nice little place, with those half-doors, which I associated with 17th Century Dutch painters. It was just a short walk to campus.

George was another student I met at Wayne. When I met him I was a twenty-three year old freshman and he was an eighteen-year old sophomore. Many considered him the boy genius. He was, in fact, very bright, and also very radical. I met him through his girlfriend, Sandy. She and I were in the university cafeteria talking about jazz and she said I had to meet her boyfriend who loved jazz. The next day she introduced me to George and he and I connected immediately and, in a short time, became best friends. We both liked philosophy, politics, literature and jazz. We would go to 12th street to hear Yusef Latef who was a fixture there for a while. Detroit was one of the best cities for jazz; after the bars
closed many of the jazz musicians playing in Detroit and the jazz aficionados would gather at the West End Hotel for jam sessions, which would usually go to about six in the morning.

We both wrote for the campus newspaper. I wrote primarily social commentary and George was the drama critic. I quit writing for the paper after just a few articles; George lasted for a whole semester. He was such a good writer that he could even write a believable review of a play which he had walked out of after the first act.

Sandy and George broke up shortly after I met them. Later he met Bobbye Very, a somewhat shy, but very bright young woman, an African-American, who had grown up in Kentucky, where her father was a coal miner. This was in the part of Kentucky, Harlan County, where there were sharp clashes between mining companies and unions in the 1930s. Bobbye said that her father was very active in the union during that time. George’s grandparents were Russian Jews; his parents were middle class Americans.

George and Bobbye were a unique couple, not only because inter-racial couples were rare in those days, but also because both were traveling a very different road from that of their parents and grandparents. While George was very much a political lefty, Bobbye was practically apolitical (later she became somewhat political). I had gotten to know her and liked her and thought they would make a good match. They were both very intelligent and good writers; Bobbye had written some excellent short stories and George, in addition to being the drama critic for the college newspaper, was a good poet. Bobbye, unlike George, was very reserved, very concentrated on getting good grades (she always had some kind of scholarship grant), and didn’t like crowds; she tended to avoid parties when she could. George, on the other hand, was very gregarious and enjoyed partying, and did study and read a lot, but not necessarily for a class. They both were good writers. To classify by some old terms, Bobbye was an introvert, George an extrovert.

George had been going with Bobbye for a while when he came home one day and said he wanted to talk. So we took out our talking bottle of wine and sat at the table. He asked me what I thought of Bobbye and I told him that I really liked her. As I got to know her better I thought they were a good match.

After a short conversation George surprised me with: “Bobby and I are going to get married!” He wanted to know what I thought about it and I said that I was all for it, but he should realize how difficult it would be if they have children. Inter-racial marriages were
very rare and mixed race children might have very tough sledding. He let me know that they had already talked about that and realized the problems they would face. He asked me if I would be the best man and I said I would be happy to be best man. So we had a drink (or two) to celebrate their upcoming marriage. George then asked me how I thought his aunt Annie would take it. She was a schoolteacher in the inner city (then known as the ghetto) where the students were all black. She had invited George and me out to dinner quite a few times, never allowing us to pay. We would have interesting talks together about politics, literature and philosophy. She was one of George’s favorite people (and was becoming one of mine too), very caring, very liberal. I told George that I thought she would approve of his marrying Bobbye.

George had a meeting alone with Annie and he said she was surprised (she had met Bobbye a couple of times and seemed to like her). She then proceeded to warn George of the pitfalls of an inter-racial marriage. He had expected that, but what he didn’t expect is what she said after that. She said she loved him but could not approve of this marriage. She warned him that his life would become very different and he would end up being sorry. Furthermore, she said, if he insisted on marrying Bobbye, she and his other aunt, Sylvia, who was a social worker in Ann Arbor, would cut off all contact with him. These two aunts were basically all that he had left of his immediate family. This threat, I guess, was her ace in the hole, but it didn’t work. George told her that he was sorry to hear that, but he was in love with Bobbye and would marry her.

George was given his inheritance from his grandfather’s estate and his aunts (and other relatives) cut off all contact with him. I think he ultimately received about ten thousand dollars for his inheritance, which was quite a sum since, at that time, new two bedroom houses were selling for about seven or eight thousand dollars. He already had a new Chevrolet, which his aunts had given him for his birthday (before he announced his intention to marry Bobbye).

The wedding was just a brief ceremony and then the small wedding party went to Buddy’s Bar BQ on 12th street. We had some great short ribs, a few drinks and toasts to the newly weds. A couple of days later George and Bobbye went to New York and Europe on their honeymoon.
After the wedding, another friend, Chester Beaman, and I got together and decided to rent an apartment next to the John Lodge Expressway. Chet was a year or two older than I was. He had finished his degree and was working as an engineer. He was easy to get along with and loved tinkering with things. One day I came home and heard loud music and when I opened a kitchen cabinet door I discovered another speaker. Chet was very good at electronics and had built a sound system which sent loud music to every corner of the apartment. From Chet I learned more about tweeters (high frequency sounds) and woofers (low frequency sounds) than I ever wanted to know.

Once we did have someone stay in the apartment for about a week. Carole had split up with her roommate and told me she needed a place to stay for a few days, so I invited her to stay with us. She was a good guest and a week or so later when she found another apartment she moved out and left me a note. In that note she said something like this: “Thanks for letting me stay here. I appreciate your help. But you didn’t have to keep your promise.” I had promised her that she would be safe in our apartment and nobody would touch her.

Chet had introduced me to a young nurse who worked in the cancer ward of Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. One day, at a party, we were talking about religion. She was Catholic. I told her I was brought up as Catholic but was now an atheist (later I became an agnostic, but that is another story). She was surprised. She told me that what she learned in the cancer ward was that although just about everyone is afraid to die there are some differences in how they approach death. She said that religious people eventually reconciled themselves to their approaching death whereas the atheists rant and rave against death, never accepting it. I said that shouldn’t surprise her, after all the atheists see this life as all there is. For them there’s no after life, there’s nothing. So protest, in their cases, should be the norm. I told her a little story about Bertrand Russell. One of Russell’s friends asked him what he would do if, after he died, he found himself facing God and God asked him why he never believed in his existence. Russell, always the logician, replied, “I would say, Sir, there just wasn’t enough evidence.” Shortly after that discussion she broke up with my friend and I never saw her again. She was nice, simple and beautiful. I hope she had a happy life and, if gone, an easy death.
This was the fearful days of Joe McCarthy and the phenomenon known as McCarthyism. There was a group on campus trying to get an anti-McCarthy group going. The student council, like most of the faculty, avoided the issue of McCarthyism, so I went with a friend of mine (Harriet Talan) to see if we could get a sponsor for this group which we called the Green Feather group, a name which came into being at Indiana University.

McCarthyism was so rampant that in Indiana Robin Hood was banned from the public schools because he was considered a communist since he took from the rich and gave to the poor. This gave the impetus for an anti-McCarthy campaign at Indiana University, where they used Robin Hood’s green feather as a symbol of protest.

We students at Wayne started the second Green Feather movement in the country. It was fitting and proper that it should start at Wayne since it was already known as “the red school of the Mid-West”, possibly because of the many radicals who had attended Wayne, including Walter Reuther, president of the UAW.

Harriet and I found that most professors were too intimidated to sponsor a group like ours, so we went to Hillel House and the Newman Foundation (the Jewish and Catholic organizations) on campus and asked them to sponsor our group. The rabbi and the priest both listened to what we had to say and both said basically the same thing, i.e., something like, “We respect what you young people are doing but we don’t think, as religious organizations, we should sponsor political groups. We suggest you get a professor to sponsor your group.” Of course, most professors were too frightened, which is why we went to Hillel and Newman Foundation. I think the priest and the rabbi both knew that no professors would sponsor such a group and they, like the professors, were also frightened. The McCarthy scare was very effective.

It was about this time that the McCarthy-Army hearings were going on. Since I, and many other students, did not have a TV, we would gather in front of the TV in the student lounge to listen to the hearings. On one of the final days of the hearings, sometime in June 1954, came the famous remark of the special counsel for the Army, Joseph Welch. McCarthy had been trying to link one of the associates in Welch’s law firm with the Communist Party. Welch, like most of us watching the hearings on TV, was exasperated with McCarthy at this point. I have retrieved some of those remarks made in response to McCarthy’s attack. Welch said, “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never gauged your
cruelty or recklessness…” He followed up shortly after with: “Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator….You’ve done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” All of us watching cheered Welch on.

Since we could not legally meet on campus without a sponsor I sent a letter to the University newspaper saying that anyone who wanted to come to a meeting at our apartment to discuss forming such a group should come the following day. About ten people showed up the next night and we discussed how we should organize.

They were, in general, a very intelligent group of students and we had a good discussion. I discovered later that they were some of the more intelligent people on campus and they were also the political activists. After they left Sandy suggested that we shouldn’t get involved with them since they seemed so much more sophisticated than we were. Sandy, like myself, was a 23-year-old veteran returning to school, we were both freshmen. He said this because the others, during our discussion, made references to Freud, Marx, etc. I told Sandy that I disagreed. I said that although it was true that they had read more than we had, they were mostly juniors and seniors and we were just starting. I said that in a short time we would catch up (and it was true, in less than a year of intensive reading I was at least as well informed as most of the people there that night).

After having written a few short stories and poems (which I kept in my desk and never tried to publish) the possibility of becoming a writer began to take hold, but the more I read, the less possibility I saw of my becoming a successful writer. Of course I was comparing myself to well established writers like George Orwell, who says in one of his essays that the best he could ever hope for is to become a good second tier (or maybe he said second level) writer. I thought if Orwell sees himself as only a second tier writer, I would probably be on a much lower tier, so far from sight so as not to be visible. So I gave up the idea of becoming a writer. I realized much later (which is when our most fruitful realizations seem to come) that I should have talked to one or more of my professors and showed them some of my work before giving up on the idea, but I had no one to advise me since, before coming to Detroit, I didn’t know anyone who had been to college (with the exception of Paul in Washington, D.C. and I only knew him as a co-worker).

Becoming a teacher was another idea that I considered until I talked to education majors, saw their interests and the dearth of intellectual content to their courses (and their
discussions). Wayne had special weekend seminars run by the Education Department for those majoring in education. The best comment I heard about these seminars was from someone who had been to one and said that it made him drop his idea of becoming an education major. He gave us this comment: “Yea, I went to one of those seminars. The first day we all sit around in a circle and told each other our names. After that everything else was anti-climatic.” So I stuck with my philosophy major. Sometime later I did read Koerner’s book, *The Miseducation of the American Teachers* and that convinced me that my choice of philosophy as a major was right.

I eventually quit the S&C and took a job as a social welfare worker for the city of Detroit. At that time they only required two years of college to become a social worker (some years later, when I worked as a social worker in New York City, a college degree was required in most states). I didn’t want to move people off welfare if I didn’t think it was absolutely necessary and, as a result, my case load kept getting bigger and bigger. When I talked to my supervisor about it, her advice was “get rid of some of them, find a way to get them off welfare.” That experience (like my union experience) made me even more sympathetic to people who were poor and uneducated. I realized how much the government was subsidizing business. For example, our clients were told that if they were offered jobs that they could do they had to take them. Many of the jobs available to them paid so little that they continued to get supplemental help from the welfare department even though they were working full time. Men would work in those car washes in the cold Detroit winters for below minimum wage or work as dishwasher for just as little. The employers were welfare wise and let the workers know that they would be reported to the welfare department if they refused to work. So, basically, the government was supporting these businesses by allowing workers to work for starvation wages and paying the difference to keep the people alive.

I did have some interesting clients. One, in particular, was fascinating for me. She was a very old African-American woman who had come up from the South, the bayou country. One day, during one of our periodic meetings, she told me that something horrible had happened. At first she didn’t want to talk about it, but after a few minutes she told me the story. She said that her ex-husband had come to her apartment and had put blood on all the clothes in the closet. I said that was terrible and asked her what she did about it. I expected her to tell me that she washed everything, but her response was, “I know what to do
about that.” I asked what exactly would she do. She said, “The only thing to do is to put sawdust in front of the door. I didn’t think to ask her why would that help. One doesn’t question the wisdom of black magic. I did like her and she seemed to know how to handle those difficult situations.

Most of the families were honest, sometimes they were too honest. For example, whenever they told us they had made a few dollars shoveling snow, baby-sitting, etc, we were required to put that in our report and then deduct it from their welfare payment. Those who were welfare wise would “forget” that they had earned a little money. When the ones I knew were too honest would report their meager earnings I would say, “so you didn’t earn anything last month, I’ll put that in my report and you will get your full check.” So, basically, I was teaching them to be dishonest, but it was a matter of survival for them, so I didn’t feel bad about it. As might be imagined, I didn’t last long as a social worker (I think it was about six months), even though it paid more than any other job I had tried up to that point.

By combining my experiences with a corrupt union, a welfare department supporting businessmen, and my growing up poor, we have the ingredients for the making of a radical.

I enjoyed college life right from the beginning. I was unsure at first because of my lack of formal education but two of my professors were a big help in getting me through that first year. One was that professor of my English class, who I have already mentioned who, after returning our first papers, said I wrote a very good paper and asked me if I had had college English before. This remark was, naturally, a big boost to my ego and made me feel that perhaps I could do college work.

The other professor that first year was my history professor. His name I remember, it was Bossenbroek. I had him my second semester for a history of western civilization class. He would never insult an individual student but wouldn’t hesitate to insult the class as a whole. He would say things like, “As you know, Saint Augustine said, oh no, no, of course no one reads St Augustine anymore. Anyway, this is what Augustine said about this topic.” Naturally, there was those of us who would then read St Augustine, even though it wasn’t required reading. He was very good at getting some of us to read authors who were not on the required reading list. Another time when he made a comment about the culture, I mentioned that Sidney Harris, a columnist for the Detroit Free Press (perhaps a syndicated
columnist) had said something similar the day before. His response, loud enough to reach all the students in the class, was, “Yes, but who else reads Sidney Harris besides the two of us.” This was another of his clever teaching tactics. He made me feel special and, at the same time, perhaps got others in the class to read a little more. In later years I used some of his tactics in my own classes when I taught English in high school and philosophy in college, especially the one of never insulting an individual student, but making it a class insult.

Thanks to those two professors of my freshman year I felt more confident, enjoyed learning and had a ravenous appetite, devouring as many books as I could.

Another professor I really appreciated was an older woman (probably in her late forties or early fifties) who taught a speech class. I really needed that speech class, since I had (and still have to some extent) what I call my New York Italian-American accent. Most Italian-American who grew up within fifty miles of New York City have the same accent. I never did get over it completely, but she helped me a lot, not just with enunciation (that too is still in need of work), but also with slowing down. I tended to talk very fast, so that, coupled with my mumbling my words and my East Coast accent was a formidable task for her to take on. But she liked me, worked hard to help me and did have some success. She considered me her “diamond in the rough”. She certainly did spend some time trying to put some polish on me. She was very kind and encouraged me. I am sorry that I forgot her name.

There were some very good professors at Wayne, as I have already indicated. However, I did have one history professor who was a pretentious ass. I took a course from him in the history of Western Religions. Although many of the young undergraduates loved him because he was so dramatic, I saw him as all shadow and no substance. One day he gave a lecture on the Greek burial rites that I had just read about in Herodotus. He described those rites as if they were given to everyone in Greek society and I knew that, in fact, it was not true. However, I didn’t want to embarrass him so I didn’t question him in class. When the class was over I went to him and said, “Professor, the rites you described, according to Herodotus, were only for a special class of people, those who were very influential in the society”. I assumed that he would just say he had forgotten to mention that and would tell the students at the next meeting. He just said, “Oh, I’m sure they all know that.” Sure everyone knows that, all freshmen and sophomores read Herodotus in their spare time.
As often happened with me in my academic career, I didn’t finish the term paper for that class, since he had said if we couldn’t finish the paper we could take an incomplete and finish it the following semester. So I told him I would take an incomplete and I would have the paper done in a couple of weeks.

Unfortunately, I had a few weeks before, written a satirical sketch of him, which had the title, “Portrait of a Pretentious Professor” and it was published, near the end of the semester, in a magazine which was popular on campus. I never mentioned his name, but many people guessed who it was. Instead of giving myself a pen name, I used my real name and, of course, he read it. I was crossing the street on campus one day, shortly after my piece had come out, and he was coming from the opposite direction. I said hello to him and he glared at me at took a lunge at me with his walking stick (which was just an ornament, he was overweight but he was young and just carried that fancy stick for show and used it to point to the blackboard and his words of wisdom). I easily dodged his clumsy thrust. However, I couldn’t dodge his next move which was to change my incomplete to an F. So I officially failed the class, even though I had passed all the regular tests, contributed occasionally to the class and had taken an incomplete. I didn’t realize at the time that I probably could have appealed it. I just shook off his literary thrust as I had his physical one.

There were periods in my life when I would focus intently on something and learn as much as I could about it. One example was my study of alcoholism. This was just about the time I started at Wayne University. Since both my father and my oldest brother were alcoholics and since I loved drinking and partying, I was worried that maybe I was becoming an alcoholic. This worry was the impetus for my learning about alcoholism. I remember two sources in particular, Marty Mann’s book, *A Primer on Alcoholism* and the Yale Studies on Alcoholism. One of the important signs of an alcoholic is that drinking interferes with everyday life, e.g., skipping work and missing appointments (I didn’t have that problem. For instance, I never missed an appointment to party).

After doing the research I realized that I was not an alcoholic, or even a budding one. I celebrated that realization by having a couple of drinks (with my friends, of course, since everyone knows that alcoholics often drink alone).

At Wayne I became as excited about reading and finding new, interesting writers as I was when I was a kid and was allowed to go the adult section of the library. In this adult
library I met my favorite people, like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Anna Akmatova and many other nineteenth century Russian Writers. I also discovered Ibsen and Shaw and read much of their work. It was during my second year that I started to read Greek philosophy and Greek Drama (which led me to Nietzsche’s comments on the Greeks and then to most of Nietzsche’s writings). Later I discovered Camus and really liked his writing and read all his books that had been published in English. I was pleased to read what he said about Dostoevsky and Nietzsche being his spiritual parents, since they were two of my favorites. I then went on to read Sartre and other Existentialists writers.

During my first year I became a voracious reader. I was one of those students who would not only read every required book but as many other books as I could manage during the semester. When I read an assignment for a class I would usually read other articles or books relating to the subject. For example once when I was reading the introduction to a play by George Bernard Shaw, I discovered that he had been influenced by Henrik Ibsen so I immediately dropped Shaw and read many of Ibsen’s plays. I then went back to Shaw. I would roam the library looking at titles and when I found something that I knew nothing about I would check it out. Sometimes it may not have been as rewarding as I expected (like when I read a book on the Seventh Day Adventists), but most of the time it was worthwhile (like when I read Arnold Toynbee’s notion of challenge and response in the history of civilizations). This was also the time when I read quite a bit of labor history, as well as books on politics.

It was during my sophomore year that I discovered Frederick Nietzsche. I read his *Genealogy of Morals* and was fascinated by it. I had heard that the German Fascists loved Nietzsche but from my limited exposure I didn’t see why they would see him as sympathetic to their ideas, so I decided to take a course in Nietzsche in my sophomore year. However, the Philosophy Department didn’t offer a course in Nietzsche. In fact, at that time the philosophy departments in most universities, I realized later, didn’t even consider Nietzsche important enough to bother with; but I did find and take such a course in the German Department, where the reading, lectures, and discussions were in English. Today the philosophy departments in most major universities do offer Nietzsche courses as part of the regular curriculum.
That course gave me a fairly good understanding of Nietzsche’s work. I knew then that the Nazis had taken Nietzsche out of context to suit their own needs. I read Walter Kaufman’s book on Nietzsche, which thoroughly debunked the Nazi view. Even after he had, supposedly, completely lost his mental balance in the last part of his life, he wrote a letter to his sister (like Wagner, a rabid anti-Semite) in which he made the statement, “Just now I am having all the anti-Semites shot” (Kaufmann 50). This, from the man who was a classical philologist and loved the Greeks. I went on to read most of Nietzsche’s works and a few of the commentaries on him. Much later, when I was a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I had a chance to meet Walter Kaufman at a Philosophy Club party. I was very disappointed in this very aloof professor and his abrasive manner of responding to students and professors. Perhaps he was trying for a Nietzschian sort of irony, but he lacked the genius of Nietzsche.

After reading Dostoevsky’s Notes From the Underground and Crime and Punishment, I saw the necessity for a course in Russian Literature. A fascinating Russian woman taught the course. I have forgotten her name, but I remember running across it several times in the next ten years; evidently she was a well-known Russian scholar who had published quite a bit. Near the end of that semester she asked her students which writer they thought was the best. Most of us liked Dostoevsky. Her response to that was “that’s because you don’t know Russian, if you knew Russian you would see that Pushkin is the best and most important Russian writer, he is the Shakespeare of Russia.” We, having read Eugene Onegin and Boris Godunov, didn’t think so, but she was, no doubt, right. I have since heard other very knowledgeable native Russian speakers say the same thing. I still prefer Dostoevsky.

Most of my days were spent in the library and most of my nights were spent at home studying with, of course, the requisite portion of time set aside for partying.

I was fascinated by college life, the books I read, the friends I made, the new experiences. Much of my college education took place in the university cafeteria where most of our group of friends met. We would have coffee and talk when we had an hour or two free between classes. I also had interesting talks with others outside of those going to Wayne. Two examples: when George and I would meet with his Aunt Annie, we would
usually talk about politics and racial problems in the United States. Another example was Sidney Foreman, as I will show shortly in a snapshot.

It was these talks and hours of conversations with friends that helped make college life so enjoyable. What was also important to me, in addition to the lectures, were the bibliographies given out in class because I almost always did more than the required reading and the bibliographies were a great help.

**SNAPSHOT – SIDNEY FOREMAN**

I met Sid through George; they had known each other since high school (or maybe it was junior high school). Sid was going to the University of Michigan and would come home to Detroit on weekends. I remember the day I met him, the three of us were freshmen in college and we were having a conversation and Sid suddenly asked “what the hell is begging the question? All these professors are always saying, ‘that’s begging the question’. So what does it mean?” None of us really knew, although we had all heard it, so we started playing with comments like, “I beg you tell me what the question is. I have a question that’s begging for an answer”, etc. We, as was often the case later on, laughed a lot. I don’t think we answered Sid’s question that day. I didn’t learn what it meant until I had my Introduction to Philosophy class the following semester.

Over twenty years later, when I moved (with my family) from Santa Barbara to San Diego, I hooked up again with Sid and his wife Pauline. I reminded Sid of our first discussion and we had a few more laughs reminiscing about it.

Sid had a great sense of humor and I liked him right away. Playing with words was something he enjoyed as much as I did. We were both just getting into etymology and the philosophy of language.

Although we didn’t know each other very well during my Detroit days, we did get to know each other much better when I moved to San Diego (Sid had been living there about 15 years at that point). I had moved to San Diego because I had just been hired to teach high school English in Ramona (about 30 miles from San Diego).

Sid had finished his M.A. degree at University of Michigan before moving to San Diego to teach high school English. Later he taught English and Film Studies at San Diego City College. He still had that great sense of humor that I first noticed in our Detroit days.
We were both fascinated by language. Sid still studied language and etymology and I had just finished my graduate work in philosophy with a concentration on language and epistemology (despite recent criticism of Wittgenstein, I still often quote some of his remarks, especially, “Philosophy is struggle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” – from The Philosophical Investigations (109).

Sid was also an excellent photographer. He earned extra money taking photos of weddings and bar mitzvahs and portraits. My first year teaching high school in Ramona he took a photo of me and, many years later, after I retired, he took another photo of me in the same pose. I have them on my wall side by side. He also took some beautiful photos of Antonia (she is very photogenic).

Antonia is an artist and had given Sid and Pauline some of her art pieces. Sometimes, as we were leaving their house after a dinner party, Sid would say to Pauline, in a stage whisper, “No, don’t take Antonia’s piece off the shelf yet, wait until they leave.” Other times he would say something similar as we arrived at their house, e.g., he would answer the door, see that it was us and turn his head around and say, “Pauline did you put those pieces up yet?”

Sid was politically astute, a great raconteur, and a film buff. Once, at his house, he put on the famous “Blue Angel” film with Marlene Dietrich and began explaining it scene by scene. It was in German, so I was surprised at his understanding of the language. He said he didn’t know much German but he had seen the film so many times that he had memorized most of the dialogue.

About three years ago Sid was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died shortly after the diagnosis (about two or three months). He lived a full and good life. My life was made richer by knowing him.

Recently it has become common for people to misuse the phrase “begging the question” which Sid, George and I discussed all those years ago. This expression is heard more and more often on TV. It has become one of those expressions that appears suddenly and then becomes used (and usually misused) more and more on the radio and television, by news anchors, actors, politicians and talk show hosts. Some words (and, less often, certain expressions) become fashionable for a short time and then fade away. This was the case with “begging the question”, and, shortly before that, it was “oxymoron” (which was also usually
misused). It was amazing how many times “begging the question” was (sometimes still is) misused by some highly respected TV personalities. They seemed to think that it means, “the question arises”, which, of course, doesn’t mean that at all, but, if enough people keep saying it may eventually come to mean “the question arises.”

It may go through same sort of change in meaning as “oxymoron” did, i.e., where it was taken to mean a straight forward contradiction instead of it’s original meaning, which was as a literary expression where contradictory words are combined, e.g., sweet sorrow, deafening silence, living death, etc.

Besides the memorable experiences I have already mentioned there were also some easily forgettable new experiences, for example Pledge Week or Rush Week. I went to one of those frat parties during Rush Week to see what it was all about. I soon realized it was about a bunch of middle class, arrested development types who were full of themselves. That one afternoon was my only direct contact with fraternity life and it was enough. This was part of my movement into what psychologists have called “liminal space”, i.e., a space where boundaries dissolve and one moves into new phases of life.

Later, after more reading and discussions, I was able to appreciate joining in a discussion group with other students to listen and talk to people I had never expected to meet, like Stephen Spender, the English poet. I don’t remember much of what he said but what stands out is one comment he made. Someone asked him what he thought of the Writer’s Workshop in Iowa, which was very well respected. His immediate response: “Writer’s workshop, that always struck me as a contradiction in terms.”

Speaking of quick retorts, a professor at Wayne had an especially good one when he spoke to a women’s civic group in Detroit. His name was Professor Kelly and he was involved in helping with the research to overthrow segregation in public schools, i.e., Brown vs. the Board of Education. Evidently there were quite a few people who thought Professor Kelly was a radical. After finishing his talk he was asked if it was true that Wayne University taught Communism. He answered, “Yes we do teach about Communism. We also teach about cancer in our medical school, but we don’t advocate either one.”

The other famous person I remember from that first year was Ashley Montagu, the anthropologist. He had published books on gender and race, which expressed some very
radical views for that time. I wasn’t able to meet him, but did go to hear his lecture on “The Superiority of Women” when he visited Wayne.

In my six years in Detroit and my four years at Wayne I only managed to obtain two years of college credits. There were probably multiple reasons for my slow progress. One was the fact that I would sit in on classes that were unrelated to my degree, like Art and Science classes. I suppose I could argue that they weren’t really unrelated to my degree because, ostensibly, everything is grist for the philosophical mill. Another was that I took time off whenever I felt the need.

Once I took a semester off and went back to Connecticut I commuted to New York to go to the New School for Social Research where I took some classes. The New School was sometimes called the University in Exile because so many European refugees, escaping from the Nazis, ended up teaching there. The New School faculty was outstanding; among the professors there at that time were Margaret Mead and Erich Fromm.

One of my classes was a psychology class from Erich Fromm. I had read his book, Escape From Freedom and looked forward to being in his class. As it turned out, he was the old European type professor who would just give his lectures and leave. No interaction with the students. After about six weeks of lectures I stopped going to his class because I thought I could read his work and get just as much, or more, out of it. I felt like his lectures were just notes he was preparing for a book he would write. The lectures were later published as Sigmund Freud’s Mission (Fromm).

Shortly after I returned to Detroit from Connecticut I went to a Pete Seeger concert. I had heard his records but this was the first time I would see him perform. During the intermission I realized that this was probably the only time one could see the whole political left of Detroit in one place. I really enjoyed that concert, including his political comments.

Detroit, like many cities in the U.S. at the time, began to fuse jazz and poetry following the lead of the San Francisco poets. One night George Troutt and I went to one of those new jazz and poetry cafes and they knew George because he had read his poetry there before. George and I were sitting at a table talking about how pretentious the owner was and how little the audience knew about poetry. George left for a few minutes and returned with a late evening copy of the next morning’s newspaper. He turned to a page where he found one of those simple poems (the ones that always rhyme, are overloaded with truisms and pass,
with a certain audience, for profound work) by Edgar Guest, the favorite poet of the daily newspaper. He cut it out, placed it in his poetry notebook and then went to the open mike to read. The audience was silent as he opened his notebook to read. When he finished the applause was loud and long. He then told this (mostly college) audience that he had just read them the latest poem from Edgar Guest. He didn’t make many friends that night.

Another good friend (then, as well as now) was Chuck Abraham. Chuck was the son of Palestinian immigrants. He worked in a hardware store and would also manage to give us discounts on tools and incidentals in the store. Chuck was a good salesman. He told me about one of his tricks in moving merchandise. “You have to understand,” he said, “people always like a bargain. For example if I have something which sells for forty-nine cents and it doesn’t move, I take it off the shelf for a while. Later I bring it back and put it on sale with a big sign that says, ‘3 for $1.79’ and they go like hotcakes. The customer is happy with the bargain and I am happy because I got more than I originally expected.” Just like Chuck with his special discounts for his friends I also gave discounts to any of our group who came to the restaurant where I worked. We all believed in sharing the wealth.

Bobbye was going with George, Kay with Chuck (their future wives), and I was going out with other women.

Barbara – She and I were a couple for a while. She was bored with college life and wanted something more exciting. She had been a freelance reporter (she was about 24 or 25 at the time and had been a reporter before going back to school). One morning, as we lay in bed talking, she told me she wanted to go to Cyprus to see what was going on there (this was when the Greek Cypriots were rebelling against British rule). She got up, dressed and, as she was leaving, said she would call me later. I said okay, thinking I would see her in the next day or two. My next news of her was about a week or two later when I picked up the Detroit Free Press (one of the regular daily newspapers) and saw on the front page that the British on Cyprus had arrested her for causing some kind of disturbance. I never heard from, or of, her again.

Joan – interesting, good looking blond, 23 years old, two year old son, separated from her husband. She was intelligent and a very good writer. She was also a somewhat neurotic Grosse Pointe woman. We met in an English class and we hit it off right away. She wrote short stories and was very interested in poetry. She and I would go to the university library
and listen to records of famous poets reading from their works and then discuss the poems and the way each poet read (i.e., what they emphasized and the changes in tone, etc.). We listened mostly to Eliot and Yeats, but also liked Stephen Spender, Vachel Lindsay and other 20th century poets. Joan would always suggest different poets and was largely responsible for getting me started in reading and writing poetry.

After we had known each other for a few weeks Joan admitted to me that she had a boyfriend, which explained why she was busy quite often when I asked her to go out. She said she would break up with him but I had to give her a little time. His family and hers were friends and had been expecting the two of them to marry. Besides, she had already disappointed her family once before. When she was 18 she ran off with a young man who was very poor. The only thing he gave her was a baby boy before he said goodbye and moved to Alaska, so she was forced to return to her family. She said her present boyfriend was very boring, but she had known him since childhood and he always wanted to be with her and her parents were happy that she had found the “ideal” boyfriend from a good family.

It took me a while to realize how neurotic Joan was. She would call me sometimes, usually late at night, and say things like, “I must talk to you right away” and so I would run off to meet her and usually it was nothing serious, just her desire to have me come and comfort her.

When she was not showing her fearful side, she was very pleasant to be with. She was bright, beautiful and sarcastic. These characteristics were on display one night when we were having a drink in a bar near the GM executive offices. One of these every-hair-in-place executives kept looking at her and finally came up to her and said, “I think you and I went to school together.” Not very original, but Joan, with her best finishing school accent, politely says, “That would be interesting. I went to Gross Pointe Country Day which is an all girls school.” He, looked at her with his mouth open briefly, and finally said, “Oh, I guess I made a mistake.” He then disappeared into the men’s room.

I broke up with Joan before I moved to San Francisco. She moved to San Francisco about a year after I did. She found out where I lived and came to visit me. We saw each other a few times before I left for Europe. She did write to me when I was in Munich, but because I thought I would be back in San Francisco before long, I didn’t answer her letter and soon lost all contact with her.
Virginia – a social worker who became a policewoman in Detroit. A short torrid affair. We worked together as social workers for the city of Detroit. When she became a policewoman, I became distant.

One of my friends, with whom I had, until that time, a purely Platonic relationship, managed to arrange a seduction (mine, although, at the time, I might have thought I was seducing her). She was going to be married the following week. It was very late one night, the campus was deserted, the night was warm and the grass was soft. I thought that since it would probably be our last night together she just wanted to get away from the party and go somewhere to talk. Well she did find a quiet place to talk, which we did. It was also a nice place to lie down on the grass and explore other possibilities, which we did. The surprise of the night was not her wanting to talk, which we both enjoyed, nor was it the sex, which we both enjoyed even more. The surprise was when she suggested we run off to Toledo that night and get married. I was stunned by the suggestion, but as we talked some more it became clear to her that I wanted more time to think about it and it became clear to me that she was afraid of what her family would say should she give up her PhD boyfriend (with the promise of plenty of money and a safe, secure future) for a poor student whose chances of becoming a millionaire with his philosophy degree were not very promising.

It was at Wayne where I met Don O’Farrell. Don was a very bright philosophy graduate student. He was always quiet and sometimes very depressed. One time when I ran into him he was feeling down and I talked him into having a beer at the local bar. We talked a little and he went home seemingly feeling better. Later he started a relationship with Doris and she was good news for him and he began pulling out of his depressive moods. Doris was also somewhat shy and I saw them as a good match.

I would see Don around campus occasionally, sometimes with Doris, but we usually didn’t have time to talk. Everything seemed to be going along fine with the two of them. My view of Don’s new lease on life was abruptly shattered one day when I heard the sad news that Don had committed suicide. He walked to the bridge overlooking the Detroit Expressway and jumped off into traffic, killing himself almost instantly. We, his few friends, were all shocked, Doris was devastated. I didn’t see Doris around campus after that time. This happened shortly before I left Detroit for San Francisco
Amelia Janiotis was another person who would sometimes sit and talk at our table in the cafeteria. She was not a regular part of the group, but was always nice to talk with. Like Bobbye Very, Amelia was one of those straight A students who seemed to be always studying. At that time she had an M.A. in Math and a B.A. or M.A. in Russian as well. She was one the earliest group of people working on machine translations. One day I was kidding her and asked her if she had translated any Dostoevsky yet. She said, “No, we’re not quite that far. We’re still working on simple phrases. We put in the English phrase, ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’ and what we get in Russian is ‘the liquor is good, but the meat is bad.’”

It was an eclectic group. Chuck always said that George and I were part of the Jewish-Italian conspiracy to take over the world. It began, he claimed, with the Jews and Romans in the first century AD. Chuck’s favorite expression: “It’s all started with a Jewish carpenter and a Roman governor.” Then there was Grant Bentley, who was a little older than the rest of us. He seemed to be always laughing and enjoying everything. He was an African-American who was radical and liked to upset the middle-class “ofeys”. One day he borrowed a convertible from one of his friends and went driving down Woodward (Detroit’s main street) with two white female students. When he came back he gave us a laughing description of the shocked look on the faces of the people downtown.

Another good friend was Raleigh Vathis.

**SNAPSHOT – RALEIGH VATHIS**

*Raleigh Vathis, a quiet, unassuming guy with a quick mind and a nice sense of humor. The guy who never seemed to get to campus early enough to get a good parking space on the street, so he usually parked a long way from campus. One day, as we were leaving campus, I asked Raleigh to give me a ride home, which he did quite often. However, on that particular day he said, “I can’t, I’m taking the bus home.” I asked him if his car was being repaired for some reason. He said, “Oh no, but this morning I got a parking space right next to Old Main [the center of the campus], and I don’t want to lose my spot, so I’m leaving the car there.” We laughed and went to his car where he, reluctantly, relinquished his parking space to a waiting car, but not before yelling out of the window to the other driver, “Save my space, I’ll be back tomorrow.”*
Raleigh was also a veteran. A psychology major at Wayne, he had taken all the courses he needed for his degree but then took enough math courses for a degree in math. He said he was having too much fun to leave the university. He was fluent in Spanish and in modern Greek and had also studied Ancient Greek.

He related a story to us about his visit to the barbershop where the other men were talking about “how the niggers are taking over.” Raleigh didn’t say anything but after a while someone asked him what he thought about it. Raleigh told them that he’d rather not say anything since his great grandfather was Negro (at that time you were either Negro or Colored, since the terms Black and African American weren’t used). The men immediately began to back pedal and started to say things like, “Well, not all colored people are like that you know.” Raleigh ancestry is Greek on both sides. He always did things like that, e.g., if people were talking about “Chinks” he would say that his great grandfather was part Chinese, etc. He liked to bother people’s prejudices.

Raleigh did visit me in San Francisco, but I hadn’t heard from him since those days, so, as I was writing these memoirs, I decided to look him up; unfortunately the only one with that name that I could find live in Las Cruces, New Mexico. I’m fairly certain it was the person I was looking for since he had the same name and Raleigh did speak Spanish, so he would probably feel comfortable in Las Cruces. Also this person owned a bookstore which would also be likely for Raleigh. Unfortunately, he died about three months before I decided to look for him.

There was a bar in Detroit, where we hung out sometimes, called Lou Walker’s. It was owned by a Yugoslavian immigrant, who had acquired a new American sounding name as well as the prevalent prejudices. When we realized it was a whites only bar we began talking about what we should do. We called the NAACP and they told us they were working their way up Woodward Ave and would eventually get to that bar.

One day, while we were still pondering what to do, one of our group, Gypsy McCloud, an African-American, who had been in the 82nd Airborne during the Korean War, decided that he had a right to drink anywhere. So he walked into Lou Walker’s, was refused a drink, went to the police station and demanded a policeman come with him (it was just a short distance away) and then went in again and was refused again. He then started court action, Lou Walker capitulated, and thanks to this man of action, we were all able to drink
there together and plot our next nefarious move. We were so grateful for Gypsy’s actions that we never thought to ask him how he managed to get the police to go with him to Lou Walker’s bar.

**Making News VIII**

- RUSSIA LAUNCHES SPUTNIK, FIRST SPACE SATELLITE.
- PRESIDENT EISENHOWER ORDERS FEDERAL TROOPS INTO ARKANSAS TO ENFORCE ANTI-SEGREGATION LAW.
- JACK KEROUAC PUBLISHES *ON THE ROAD*.
- ALBERT CAMUS WINS NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE.
CHAPTER 9

SAN FRANCISCO - 1958

San Francisco was the center of jazz and poetry and since I enjoyed both so much I considered moving to San Francisco. One night, after a few beers, a friend and I decided we would move to San Francisco (actually, he wanted to return to his home in Saratoga, Calif.). It was easy to get a car from a dealer to drive to another city; it didn’t cost anything except for the gas and the dealers were happy to have someone deliver the car. So a few days later I dropped out of the university, packed my duffel bag (which I still had from my Air Force days), all my books (which required a few boxes) and got a drive away car. These were new cars which dealers wanted delivered to customers in different cities and would pay for the gas for anyone who would drive the car to their customer). We couldn’t find one to San Francisco but did get one to Salt Lake City, said goodbye to our friends in Detroit and left.

In Salt Lake City I shipped all my books (which consisted of about four or five boxes), addressed to myself, to Railway Express in San Francisco. In those days the Railway Express Office would hold packages up to 30 days for a pick-up; it was also possible to ship them without money, i.e., C.O.D. All my other worldly belongings were in my old duffel bag which I took on the train. I had enough money to take the train from Salt Lake City to San Francisco (and I still remember how beautiful it was going through Feather River Canyon). The train stopped in Oakland and we took the ferryboat to San Francisco. When we got there my travel companion said he was going home to Saratoga and I said I had a friend in the area who would put me up, so we parted. My friend, Sandy Joseph, had moved out to the West Coast about a year or so before and we had kept in touch. He repeatedly asked me to come and check out the jazz and poetry in San Francisco. He said it was fantastic and he knew I would enjoy it there and that he had plenty of room for me.

Sandy was working on civilian ships as a steward and would sometimes take trips for a few weeks at a time. However, when I had last talked to him he said he didn’t expect to be going to sea for the summer. When I looked at his address again I realized it was in Oakland, so I took the ferry back to Oakland. I thought I would surprise him and went to his
apartment. By this time it was about 10PM and I was looking forward to a few drinks and some good conversation. I knocked on his door and everything was quiet. I knocked a few more times, in desperation, because if he wasn’t home I was in trouble since I only had about a few dollars left in my pocket. After a few more loud knocks the upstairs neighbor opened the door and asked me who I was looking for and I told him. He said, “Oh, Sandy just got a chance to take a round the world trip and left two days ago.” I saw myself facing the night (and maybe longer) without a place to stay. Thinking about Mark Twain’s remark about the coldest winter he ever had was a summer in San Francisco, I made my way back to San Francisco.

Sandy was literally at sea and I was, figuratively, at sea. I didn’t have a place to stay and there was no one else I knew in California. I returned to San Francisco and spent that night huddled in the vestibule of a hotel on the San Francisco waterfront, getting very little sleep. The next morning I took my duffel bag and went to a bus station where I washed up, checked my duffel bag and went to restaurants in the area looking for a job, but no luck.

I ended up in North Beach that day, not intentionally, since I didn’t know where North Beach was. I remembered that this was the area that I had heard about, where all the jazz and poetry was happening. I knew this was where I wanted to be, but I needed some money, a place to stay, and a job. I went to City Lights Bookstore. Ferlinghetti was there (later on, as he became more and more famous, he was in the bookstore less and less, usually leaving Shig, his assistant, to run the store) and I talked to him, but he didn’t need any more help.

I left City Lights and went down the street to Discovery bookstore. I browsed around to see what kind of books were there and then introduced myself to the man behind the desk. His name was Frederick Roscoe and he was the owner (who I would, some months later, work for). He also said he didn’t need any help.

The following day I checked to see if my stuff had arrived which I had shipped C.O.D. from Salt Lake City. It was there but I didn’t have the money to pick it up. I had quite a few books and I remembered that I had browsed around a used bookstore in the North Beach area. It was just a few doors down from Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Books and was called Discovery. I returned to Discovery and talked to the owner again. I said that I have quite a few books and would like to sell some. He asked me what kind of books and I told
him that they were similar to what he was selling, i.e., philosophy, literature and history, but that they were in the Railway Express Office and I would need him to come with me to retrieve the books and pay the charges. I guess Frederick was accustomed to people with no money because he didn’t hesitate and said we could go get the books that afternoon after someone came in to relieve him.

A couple of hours later I went with Frederick to pick up the books. When we returned to his store I told him to just take whatever books he wanted to pay for the charges. When he finished I asked him if he wanted to buy more of the books, since I needed some cash. He agreed and bought enough to give me about thirty dollars more and I still had a few boxes of books left. I thanked him and left.

It hurt me to see all those good books go. They represented the beginning of my college education and my new life. I had saved every book from every class and had learned to browse used bookstores and got some good deals. Frederick also knew this was a good deal for him and was happy to have those books. Later, when I started to buy books again I tried to remember which ones I had sold and bought them again (since, as I have said, my books are another autobiography). I was sad about selling those books but glad to have some money again.

Since I had had very little to eat the previous two days, I immediately went to a restaurant and ate a very satisfying meal. Then I walked up the street and found an old rooming house at 444 Columbus Ave. This was the Italian section of San Francisco. It’s interesting that the two most well-known Bohemian places in the nation were in Italian neighborhoods, i.e., Greenwich Village in New York and North Beach in San Francisco. The rooming house had a few old Italian men living there. They were very friendly, especially when they discovered my name was Dante and my parents were Italian immigrants. I got a room with a bed, dresser, lamp and a chair for five dollars a week (this same place has since been remodeled and is now a small, expensive hotel). I thought I would rest for a day and then find a job in a restaurant the following day. Since it had been so easy to find a job in Washington, D.C. and Detroit, I assumed that it would not be a problem in San Francisco – another mistake!

The next day I went to the California Employment Office and filled out an application. In the section where they asked what kind of employment I was interested in
there was a section called “Seafaring”. “Seafaring”, that seemed like something out of the 19th century (“yes, my names is Ahab, and I am interested”), so I signed up for it. I assumed that it meant something like working on ships as a waiter, cook or maybe just a clean-up person. Actually I put it down as my second choice, my first being restaurant work. I also applied for unemployment benefits, since the GI Bill allowed us $26 a week for 26 weeks. The women took my application and told me there was nothing available but I should look for work on my own and return in a week. I left feeling confident that I could find a job right away. I tried to get any kind of restaurant job but was unsuccessful.

I was very careful with my money. I found a Filipino restaurant in the Chinese section of Kearney Street, across from the park, where I could get two eggs, potatoes, toast and coffee for forty-five cents. Anywhere else it would cost at least seventy-five cents. The customers in this restaurant were mostly old and poor; some so poor they couldn’t even afford breakfast. I would drink my coffee and watch people come in and look around. They would then sit down at a table with the remains of someone else’s meal and finish it. Some of them would have enough money to buy a cup of coffee first and then, with coffee in hand, look around for the best unfinished meal.

I walked everywhere I could so I would save bus fare. Fortunately I had two good pairs of shoes, expensive ones from my gambling days in Detroit. I was young and healthy, which was good since I had no health insurance (nor life insurance, nor any kind of insurance).

I was a smoker at that time, so sometimes the choice was between having lunch or buying cigarettes. I would usually choose the cigarettes, skip lunch and have one of those big Italian dinners at the New Pisa restaurant for $1.25 (or maybe it was $1.75, I’m not sure). There were quite a few restaurants like that in North Beach, but the New Pisa was my favorite. Like the others, it was family style, i.e., if you were alone you could sit with a lot of others and join in the conversation. I was amazed at how they could give such a good dinner (pasta, entrée, dessert, and even a glass of wine) for such a low price.

A week later I walked to the employment office (about a two mile walk each way) but was told there were no jobs and that it would be at least another week before I would get my unemployment checks. I came back the following week and the week after that, and still no
check. In the meantime I was slowly selling whatever books I needed to sell to get by until I could get a job or my checks came in.

It turned out that I couldn’t get a job as easily in San Francisco as I could in other cities. Two or three of restaurants asked me for my union card and I told them I didn’t have one. I eventually found out that San Francisco is a strong union town and without a union card I wouldn’t be hired. I went to the union hall to see about getting a card. I told them I had been in the union in Detroit and they asked me for my withdrawal card from the union in Detroit. I didn’t know such a thing existed. They said without a union card I wouldn’t be able to get a job in San Francisco. If I had a withdrawal card I could be re-instated, but without that I would have to have a job before they could give me a card, but, of course, here comes Catch 22, i.e., without a job, no card and no job without a card.

About the fourth week when I went to the employment office I was told I couldn’t come back every week, that I should wait at least two weeks before returning. I told the clerk that I would come back every day if necessary until my checks came in. She went and got her supervisor. Her supervisor, a much older woman, with a “I’ll take care of this kid” look, said to me something like, “Look here, we are very busy and we don’t expect your checks will be here for at least another two weeks and we don’t want you coming in here so often.” I told her, in a loud voice, that I had been a social worker, that I knew my rights and I intended to come in every day until they either found me a check or a job.” She backed off and said something like, “if that’s what you want to do.” After that incident I was treated very respectfully. A couple of weeks later my first check arrived.

After about two months I finally found a job as a short order cook. It was a small restaurant in the Richmond District, called Rancho. The owner, Steve, said he would hire me if I went to the union office the next day and told them that I would be working for him. I did that, got my union card (at a hefty price for me) and started my new job.

I enjoyed my job but it didn’t give me much time for other things I wanted to do. Like many of the North Beach crowd, I wanted to write (at that time it was short stories). There were many good poets and painters in North Beach. I would go into City Lights and Discovery bookstore quite often. I did get to know Frederick Roscoe, the owner of Discovery Bookstore, fairly well and so when his regular employee quit (or was fired, I never knew which it was) he asked me if I wanted the job. Naturally, I jumped at the chance, even
though it meant less money than I was making at the restaurant, but it was in North Beach and I only lived a block away. So I gave Steve two weeks notice and left the restaurant to go to Discovery. Steve said he was sorry to see me leave but let him know if I ever needed a job again and he would hire me.

While I was working at Rancho, Discovery and other jobs I was also going to San Francisco State. I usually went part time, still working toward my degree in Philosophy. I enjoyed my time at San Francisco State; it was another streetcar college, like Wayne. Also, like Wayne, it had an older student population than most universities. At Wayne the average age was 26 and I would guess it was about the same at SF State. We also had our little cafeteria seminars here as we did at Wayne, although they weren’t the political activists as we were at Wayne. I enjoyed the academic atmosphere in and around SF State more, primarily because I had some good philosophy professors.

A SKETCH OF THREE PHILOSOPHERS

Professor Weingartner - Just as I had learned from a history professor at Wayne that a teacher should never insult or humiliate any individual in class, so I learned from a philosophy professor at San Francisco State how to help students develop ideas. I had this professor, Rudolph Weingartner, for a philosophy of history class, as well as other classes. It was in the philosophy of history class where his technique became clear to me. We were a small class of about 12-15 students. One student who all of us knew was not too bright would say things like, “Oh, the medieval period, wasn’t that where they had knights and things like that?” Everyone wondered what made him decide to study philosophy. One time he brought up some convoluted notion which didn’t make sense to any of us, but Weingartner took the student’s remarks, dressed them up to make them presentable, and then said, “I guess this is what you mean?” The befuddled student would quickly agree. So Weingartner made the student feel good and used the newly made argument to move the discussion forward. It was another nice technique that I also adopted when I went into teaching. Weingartner also encouraged me to go on to do graduate work. I remember his comment to me when I was finishing my B.A. degree (it is interesting how we can remember verbatim such compliments) He said, “I think you have learned everything you can learn from us, you should go on and do graduate work at Berkeley or Harvard.”
Professor Bierman - Art Berman, a young professor probably about my age) who had a good connection with the students. He even came to some of our parties. For the final exam in his metaphysics class, I wrote for about 45 minutes on the essay questions he had given us. I was the first one finished with what was suppose to be a three hour exam. I gave him my blue book and left the room. He followed me out, left the door open, and we talked in whispers for a few minutes. He asked me if I actually answered the questions, I said yes, and we discussed them briefly. When I talked about something we had discussed during the semester, he said, “Very good, did you put that on the exam?” I said, “No, that was too obvious to mention.” Another item I mentioned brought the same question and the same response. Then Bierman said to me, “That’s what I like about you Dante, you take the shotgun approach to philosophy, ’bang, bang, take that you bastard’ and then you walk away.”

Professor Tilden - She taught philosophy of religion and was so good at presenting the ideas of each religion that we couldn’t figure out what her religion was, or if she had one. If she was talking about Christianity, she presented the Christian side so effectively we thought she was a Christian. If she talked about Judaism we thought she was Jewish, etc. One day she told us that Paul Tillich would be speaking at Berkley and asked if anyone wanted to hear him speak. I said I would and she then offered me a ride. On the way across the Bay Bridge I asked her what her religion was. She was a white, middle-class American and I expected that she would be Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish. She said she was a practicing Buddhist. Anyway we both enjoyed hearing Tillich and talked about him on our way back to San Francisco. That was the only personal contact I ever had with her, but I really appreciated her as a teacher. I habitually turned in late papers and she was the professor who finally got me to turn papers in on time. She was very strict with her rule that she would not accept late papers and she made that clear from the beginning of the semester. She let us know that we could mail her the papers as long as it was postmarked before midnight of the day it was due. She kept to her word not to accept late papers and we all learned that after the first assignment.

I became friendly with Don Graham, who also worked at Discovery. Don was very nice but very strange. He was some kind of fundamentalist Christian and had trouble refraining from discussing religion. He always had a sad look on his face. I got along well
with him and we avoided religious topics. I remember him giving friends of his some books on religion but first ripping out pages he disagreed with. Much later Fred had to let Don go. He stayed around North Beach for a short while but then disappeared. I liked Don, despite his fundamentalism. A few years after I left San Francisco a mutual friend told me that Don had committed suicide.

At Discovery, we kept many of the new books (it was primarily a used book store but we usually carried some newly published books) on a big table in front of our desk. A middle-aged man came in bookstore and began looking at the titles. I was sitting behind the desk and as he read the titles aloud he would stop after each one and asked me if I had read it. Now I always read a lot and felt proud at how well I had educated myself, even before I started college. However, when he would read a title of one of the new books and ask me if I had read it I would say I hadn’t. Since the books he mentioned had only been recently published, naturally I hadn’t read them yet. After about four or five of my “No” answers, he finally said, with a note of frustration in his voice, “That’s the trouble with you booksellers, you never read.” I tried to explain that these were new books which I hadn’t had a chance to read yet. He wasn’t buying that, or any books either.

In addition to dealing with customers like the one just mentioned, Frederick had warned me to watch out for book thieves. A lot of books were stolen and not necessarily because the thieves were avid readers. The books could be sold at other bookstores. One man, who always wore a long overcoat, would come in occasionally and walk around the store. Frederick had warned me to keep an eye out for this guy. He had been caught walking out of another bookstore with six books in his coat, which had specially made pockets in the lining to conceal books or whatever else he had taken from various stores. I don’t think he ever got anything from us while I was there because I would focus almost exclusively on him when he was there, and he knew it so he wouldn’t stay long (after all, there were probably easier pickings elsewhere).

One young woman, about my age, came into the bookstore once and began talking to me. We talked for about fifteen minutes and then she suddenly asked me what my sign was. I asked her what she meant and she said “your astrological sign.” When I said it was Capricorn, she immediately said, “I knew it, that’s why I connected with you right away.” We talked a few more minutes and then she left. It didn’t occur to me at the time that her
comment may have been meant to lead to a firmer connection. It makes me think of other times when I was too dense (some might say too naïve; I always liked to think I was more sophisticated than I actually was) to realize that perhaps I was being given an invitation but didn’t realize it. In fact many years later when I was already married with children, I was in San Francisco I met a woman I had known in those early days. She told me that in those days she really liked me and had tried to get to know me better but I was always “too far away.”

I, occasionally, did get to visit Ferlinghetti’s bookstore, City Lights. One employee, Shig, the Asian guy who was Ferlinghetti’s right hand man, did most of the every day work in City Lights Bookstore. Although Shig was there every day, Ferlinghetti was often in the bookstore. Shig sat on his high stool behind the small counter and was friendly to everyone but not especially talkative. Ferlinghetti, on the other hand, was quite willing to engage in a discussion. One time I joined in a discussion with him when he was arguing with someone I didn’t know. It was about Cuba. I don’t remember much about the discussion except that it was just after Castro took over and I agreed with Ferlinghetti that Castro would be good for Cuba. The other person (he was obviously a foreigner, but I didn’t recognize the accent, perhaps he was Cuban), thought that Castro was unlikely to succeed in bringing about change in Cuba. We talked about how important it was for people to have the right to protest, which was, under Batista’s rule in Cuba, non-existent.

About a year after I moved to San Francisco I met Doris again. She had moved to San Francisco a few months after I did. Although I knew Doris when she was at Wayne, I only knew her casually. At that time I was glad to see her get together with Don O’Farrell, since she, like Don, was very bright, but she shied away from groups.

When we met in San Francisco we had coffee together and talked a while. We did get to know each other a little better and it was she who got me interested in ballet. She asked me if I liked ballet. I told her that I had never been to a performance but doubted that I would like it. She said she thought I would like it once I had seen a live performance. I didn’t tell her that growing up as I did I, like all the guys I knew at that time, thought that ballet was only for women, sissies or homosexuals. Doris sensed that about me and she, craftily, waited until one of the best ballet groups of that era, the Royal Danish Ballet came to San Francisco. She then told me she had two tickets to the ballet and invited me to go with
her. It was a revelatory experience for me. I really enjoyed that performance and told her so. She said she knew I would enjoy it. I had told her that I had never seen any ballet before. She seemed to know that before I told her. When we did go I really liked it; the movements, the music, everything about it. Doris was very smart, she picked one of the best ballet group for my first ballet. I really did enjoy it despite my hesitation about going. After that experience with Doris I did go to the ballet occasionally.

After I left the Discovery bookstore, a young poet, David Meltzer, was hired. Years later David became a well-known poet. When I knew him he was a pleasant but very shy sort of guy. He got married to Tina shortly after that and moved outside of the city. About twenty years later David was giving a reading at University of California, San Diego. I contacted him and asked him if he would come to Ramona High School and read poetry and talk to my class, which he readily agreed to do. My class was excited to be able to hear and talk to a published writer. I think it was probably the first time a published writer gave a talk at Ramona High School.

“They’re the people that you meet when you’re walking down the street” (from Big Bird and the Sesame Street chorus).

Richard Brautigan was on the beach quite often. I only knew him casually. He always seemed to keep his distance from most of us on the beach (although he did know some people there). I would see his tall lanky figure walking around the beach, seeming not to look at anyone directly. I always had the feeling that he was too busy taking notes for his next book to talk to any of us.

Evan Connell had just published his first novel (I think it was Mrs. Bridge), which had been well received. We met in a small café that had just recently opened at the bottom of Columbus Ave and we had a nice one on one conversation. I told I had read his novel and enjoyed it and then asked him who had influenced him in his writing. He said that one author that had a big influence on him was William Styron. I had read Styron’ Lie Down in Darkness (which I think was Styron’s only full-length book at the time) and couldn’t see the connection. I should have asked him, but, unfortunately, I didn’t.

One of the other regulars around North Beach was Jerry Kamstra. When Jerry was broke and came into Mike’s place (a restaurant and pool room where I was working as a short order cook and counterman) I was able to help him out with a meal now and then.
Years later I was reading his first book and there was a section where he was wondering what happened to his San Francisco friends and began listing them and I was pleased to find my name in his book.

North Beach was an exciting place, even though it was already becoming crowded with tourists (by that time it had been written about in Time and in Life magazines, as well as newspapers and other magazines all over the country). There were always jazz and poetry readings, the Jazz Cellar had both, the Coffee Gallery had primarily Jazz, and The Place had mostly poetry. It was in The Place where I first heard Brother Antonius (aka William Everson) read. It was in the Jazz Cellar where I met Kenneth Rexroth.

It was also in North Beach where I was able to hear Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee play in a small café. There were probably only about thirty of us there and it was a great venue for those of us that wanted to hear them, although I think they should have had a larger place to play.

Although I met a few of those who were famous (or on their way to being famous) I never took photos or asked for autographs. I thought of the artists in North Beach (even the well-known ones) as being one of us, i.e., trying to make it as a writer, a painter, a photographer, etc. In fact, most of us were more concerned about making enough money to live on and/or we were going to school to finish a degree. It was only the dedicated (and/or lucky) few, like the ones I just mentioned, who actually were publishing or exhibiting their work.

Jack Kerouac would come to North Beach occasionally. At that time he was living in Big Sur (that’s about the time he was working on the book which would come out later as *Big Sur*).

Herb Gold also came around occasionally, as did Evan Connell. I met Evan Connell in North Beach, but I had known Herb Gold since my Detroit days.

There were certain favorite places for many of us in North Beach. For example, the Coffee Gallery, which always had good jazz, The Co-Existence Bagel Shop, but everyone that lived in North Beach just called it the Bagel Shop (“co-existence” was a given) where we could have a coffee and conversation, or just sit around, or play chess. We also went to Vesuvio’s for beer and conversation, The Jazz Cellar, and The Place for drinks, poetry and
jazz. For dinner there were many Italian restaurants and for light meals there was Mike’s Place (which still had the name “Dante’s” on sign outside, the name of the original owner).

One of the many jobs I had while I lived in San Francisco was as a short order cook and counterman in Mike’s Place. It was an interesting place (Jack Kerouac mentions it in his book, *Big Sur*, as a place where he would meet his friends). It was near the Jazz Workshop and on the other side of the street was Finnochio’s, a famous transvestite place. At Mike’s Place we would get people from those places as well as the after theater crowd and a few tourists, all mingling with the old Italians who had been coming there for years to play cards. The clientele was very eclectic. One day I was able to talk briefly with Cannonball Adderly when he came there on his break from the Jazz Workshop. I know that other famous people came there but, unfortunately, I didn’t recognize them (I didn’t watch TV then and very seldom went to the movies).

It was a slow night at Mike’s Place when a well-dressed middle aged man came in, sat at the counter, looked at the menu and said, “I see you have side orders of Gorgonzola cheese, is that real Gorgonzola?” I assured him that it was and that not only our American customers but our Italian customers as well loved it. He said okay, so I brought him the cheese.

He took one bite, seemed to be savoring it a bit and then looked up and said, “This is not Gorgonzola.” I said yes it was. He insisted that it wasn’t and I decided not to argue about it (“the customer is always right”) so I offered to give him something else instead. He said no, he would eat it because “it is not Gorgonzola but it is a very good domestic blue cheese.” I humored him and said I was glad he liked it.

When Mike, the owner, returned that night I asked him if the Gorgonzola was real Gorgonzola. He said of course it was and wanted to know why I asked. I told him about the man who questioned it. That was the end of it – or so I thought. After the bar crowd had left and things were quiet again, Mike motioned for me to come with him to the cellar. On the way he asked me if I knew who this man was that questioned me about the cheese. I said I had never seen him before. He said that in the thirty two years he had been working here (and as owner) he had sold a lot of Gorgonzola but no one had ever questioned it until now. Then we went down the stairs to the cellar and he showed me huge wheels of cheese plainly
marked, “Blue Cheese” - from Wisconsin! Mike said all his blue cheese was from Wisconsin.

He said he trusted me not to tell anyone. I never did until many years later, after Mike was dead. I still think about that man who ordered the Gorgonzola and how amazed I was that anyone could have such refined taste.

So the customer was right, it was a domestic blue cheese. It was being sold as authentic Italian Gorgonzola. What fascinated me about this was: (1) That anyone could have such refined taste which allowed him to differentiate where no one else could, and (2) That Mike (and possibly the previous owner as well) could fool the public all those years.

I am still fascinated by people who have such specialized knowledge. A few years ago my wife and I were, very briefly, in a group that met to discuss rugs. We only went to a few meetings before we decided that we couldn’t afford to be in that group (whose members would fly all over the world to buy rugs). Anyway, one week we all brought rugs from home for others to see and talk about. We brought one of our Persian rugs which had been in Antonia’s family for many years. Two of the guys in the group were admiring it. After looking at it for a very short time, one said, “Southwest Persia”, the other said, “Yes 1927.” That was the year my wife’s parents were married and the newly made rugs have been given to them as a wedding present from a Persian rug dealer friend of theirs. Here, again, I was fascinated with that special kind of knowledge.

I was also working on a special kind of knowledge, i.e., philosophy. Most of the time that I lived and worked in North Beach I was taking classes at San Francisco State. Sandy Joseph had quit going to sea and was also going to S.F. State. I had a good group of friends there.

Another friend from Detroit, John Dearman came to S.F. for a visit. He said he was thinking about moving to S.F. and I talked to him about what a great city it was and encouraged him to move. Years later, at John’s 60th birthday party, Willie Brown (formerly Speaker of the California State Assembly and, prior to that, John’s law partner) gave a speech and said that he had finally met the man who brought John to San Francisco. He mentioned my name and said I was president of the San Diego Teachers Union. Actually I was president of the Ramona Teachers Association, so Willie gave me a big promotion.
One of the San Francisco group was Oscar Berland who was in his early thirties. He had graduated, at least a decade before, from City College in New York with a B.A. degree in history. He then learned a trade as a machinist. He said he enjoyed his job because there was always a demand for machinists, which enabled him to work whenever he felt like working. He would work for a while, save some money and then quit and do his own thing (whatever it was at the time) until he ran out of money and then find another job for six months or a year. Oscar was an intelligent guy who, unlike many college graduates, did spend time reading and writing. He, like many others his age, especially the ones in New York City, grew up in the co-ops and joined the Communist Party. Most of those young people were Red Diaper babies (i.e., children of Communist or Socialist parents). A few times when Oscar and I were drinking together I tried to convince him that he should go to S.F. State to get a Master’s degree in history. He finally decided to do it and became another regular at our gathering in the college cafeteria, where, as at Wayne University, much of my learning took place.

Oscar remained a political lefty, although his sojourn with the Communist Party was very brief. He made just enough money to live on and was quite comfortable with temporary or part-time jobs and with living on the fringes of society. Oscar and I are still good friends and he is another person I always go to see whenever I am in San Francisco. I always enjoy visiting with him and his wife, Paulette; they live in the East Bay, just a short ride from San Francisco.

Those years at San Francisco State were very good years. Not only did I enjoy the classes but I also made some good friends there. I also was able to hear some outstanding talks by visiting speakers.

One of the speakers who came to S.F. State was Aldous Huxley. This was just a couple of years before he died. He was a tall man with a very aristocratic bearing and a very humble manner combined. He gave a talk to a large group. I don’t remember specifically what he said, but the talk was about an important problem of our time. The only thing I remember distinctly about that talk was his ending. Here was one of the leading novelists and intellectuals of our time and we students were all anxiously awaiting his solution to this problem that he had been talking about. So he comes to his conclusion with a final sentence: “I don’t know the solution to this problem, but I’m sure, with our collective intelligence we
can solve it.” Many years later, when I assigned Huxley’s *Brave New World* to my classes, I would tell the class that story and give them that quote to think about.

While I was at San Francisco State I was involved in several relationships. Several of those relationships were with women in the San Francisco State group, like Felicia and Becky, and others were outside the group, like Patty.

Patty was one of the most interesting of the women I knew at the time. She was about five years or six years older than most of the others. She had been married, had lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts and had owned one of the first espresso coffee shops in, or somewhere near, Harvard Square. We got along very well together but, unfortunately, she decided to move back to Cambridge. We parted amicably. I never saw her or heard from her again.

Felicia was a stewardess for one of the major airlines. She was the one from whom I learned the term “lap time” (this was a long time before “lap dance” entered the popular vocabulary). She said each new stewardess had to spend some time on the pilot’s lap during her first flight (this was during the time that the airlines discriminated against any female who wasn’t young and pretty). She said she was so frightened by the fact that the pilot had his hands all over her instead of on the plane that she didn’t pay much attention to him.

My affair with Becky was short (and somewhat sweet while it lasted). She was always looking for another conquest, so we didn’t stay together very long. She was twenty at the time and had graduated from Palo Alto High School two years before, where she was part of singing trio. One of that trio was Joan Baez. Sometime after we had broken up, Becky found out I was going to Europe and would be driving to New York. She saw me on campus and said she planned to move to New York and asked me if she could go with me. I agreed. We had some good nights together on our way to New York and in the city before I left for Europe. She later married the brother of a friend of mine and I ran into her again at my daughter’s wedding thirty years later.

**SNAPSHOT – THE BAGEL SHOP IN NORTH BEACH**

*There were Grey Line Buses which always came by the Bagel Shop to point out the quaint places where the Beatniks gathered and did who knows what kind of weird things. The tourists always had their faces pressed against the windows of the bus looking like high*
school kids watching soft porn and waiting for something exciting to happen. One day, as the bus was coming up Grant Ave, someone said let’s go outside and point at the busload of tourists. So we all ran outside, pointed at the tourists and made loud comments about all those strange people on the bus. Most of those tourists were shocked and realized they weren’t in Kansas anymore, but there was one man who was up to the challenge; he smiled and waved to us.

One day two policemen on the beat (they still had foot patrols in those days) stood in the doorway of the Bagel Shop and sniffed the air. They knew that some of the regulars there smoked Gallois the French cigarette. This was the time before the police departments got wise and started to give policemen classes in how to recognize marijuana plants, and the smell of marijuana, etc. The air that day in the Bagel Shop was heavy with the smell of marijuana. The cops sniffed again and then one said to the other, “Those Beatniks are smoking those stinking French cigarettes again, let’s get out of here.” Fortunately, all of us, even those that were a little high, held their laughter until after the cops left.

Peter was a painter who also was a regular in the Bagel Shop. Two policemen, for no apparent reason, decided to question him. They asked him a few questions and then asked him for his ID. He showed them his army discharge papers. When they found out that this Beatnik painter was a former captain in the U.S. Army Rangers, and saw combat in the Korean War, their jaws dropped. They cut their interview short and left.

I had another short-term job checking IDs at the Jazz Cellar. Although twenty-one was the legal drinking age, I made it a point to check anyone who looked under twenty-five, just to play it safe. One day two young couples came in. I asked for their IDs, which three of them gave me. I then asked the fourth person, a woman who looked about twenty-five but I thought I should check her anyway. She laughed and said “sure” and handed me her ID. She was forty-one years old. I did a double take on her and her driver’s license and said thank you. She said, exuberantly, “Thank You!” I expect that she, like me, has told that story many times.

Kenneth Rexroth, the famous poet and essayist, sometimes called the daddy of the beatniks, was a regular there, but I didn’t know him at the time. He walked right by me like I wasn’t there and I stopped him and asked him who he was looking for. I don’t know why I stopped him, since he was obviously old enough, maybe because I didn’t like anyone
walking by without even acknowledging that I, or anyone else, was there. He looked surprised that anyone would dare question him in the Jazz Cellar. Just at that moment, Sonny, one of the owners (the other was Bill), came over and said, “That’s okay Dante, this is Kenneth Rexroth.”

Another thing I enjoyed about the Jazz Cellar was the weekend beatniks. These were those who worked regular jobs during the week (Montgomery street business people, school teachers, clerks, etc.) but pretended to be North Beach people at night or on weekends. Some would come to the Jazz Cellar and ask me questions, trying to use what they had probably read somewhere was the Beatnik jargon. They would say things like, “Hey man, who’s blowing tonight?” I knew they weren’t referring to oral sex, but to the musician playing that night, but I pretended not to understand. Then they would try with another expression they had probably learned from the Sunday supplement section of their newspaper. “You know man, like whose gig is it tonight?” Then I would try to look a little puzzled and say, “Oh, you man who is playing the saxophone tonight?” They would look relieved and say, “Yea, man.” They seemed happy that their turtlenecks, their sandals, and their list of strange phrases had finally gotten them into the inner sanctum of the Beatnik world.

There were many interesting characters on the beach. One was Patty O’Sullivan (possibly a made up name) who always went around wearing boots and a green cape. He had long hair, a short beard and a feather in his cap. He was a sort of a cross between Robin Hood and Batman (at least insofar as his costume matched). He would approach tourists with saying he would show them around North Beach or just make some innocuous remark to get them to talk to him. When they socialized with him they usually bought him dinner and/or drinks. The tourists enjoyed seeing such a flamboyant character. Unfortunately, a few years later, I was told, a man who thought Patty was after his girl friend, cut Patty’s face with a knife. It was sad to hear that, especially since, as I have indicated, Patty was a harmless character.

Then there was Alex, either walking around the beach or sitting at window in the Bagel Shop watching the people walking by and muttering to himself. The interesting thing about Alex was that his long string of sentences seemed senseless until you listened for a while and then you realized that sometimes they did make sense. Just a quick cutting and pasting was needed to see that mental picture.
In 1960 came the civil rights sit-ins at Woolworth’s lunch counter (in Georgia?). Bob Kaufman, the jazz poet who was nominated for the Guiness Award in England (which was won by T.S. Eliot that year), was also a regular at the Bagel Shop, though he wasn’t as conspicuous as Patty or Alex; he would just sit in the Bagel Shop and talk. He was a good poet, although, at that time, not nationally known. One of his remarks came as a response to the sit-ins at the lunch counters in Georgia. These were sit-ins which protested the “whites only” policy of the store. As a few of us were discussing the sit-ins, which had made national headlines, Bob, in the caustic way he sometimes exhibited, said, “Who the hell wants to eat at Woolworths anyway?”

Two or three years ago I was invited to give a lecture on the Beat Generation at a Lycee in France. Since it was near graduation and they had spent a large part of that term reading and discussing Kerouac and Ginsberg and other well-known poets, but not Bob Kaufman, I decided to talk mainly about him. I explained to them that Bob had only in recent years been fully appreciated. I reminded them that the French critics had called Bob Kaufman the American Baudalaire (or sometimes, the Black Baudalaire) I read and discussed some of his poetry and gave them that quote about the Woolworth sit-ins. I explained to them that he wasn’t criticizing the protesters, he was just saying something like, “Who wants to eat with a bunch of honkies anyway.” Of course, I hadn’t adequately considered the language and cultural difficulty (the lecture was in English to English teachers and advanced students of English), hence I had to spend a little time explaining.

There were other special characters in North Beach, like Doctor Bill. Everyone on the beach called him “Doctor” or “Doc” but he wasn’t a Medical Doctor or a PhD, in fact he told me once that he had never finished high school. He had a short beard (more of a stubble) and was very friendly to tourists. The tourists were always happy to meet him since he really did belong to North Beach and would show them around as long as they would spring for drinks and/or dinner. One weekday morning (tourists usually came in the evenings or on weekends) I ran into Doc on the street. He had a Chinese newspaper conspicuously sticking out of his jacket pocket. I said I didn’t know he could read Chinese (since he was obviously Caucasian). He said he couldn’t but it would catch the eye of the tourist and get him an invitation to dinner. “They are always happy to speak to North Beach intellectuals”, Doc informed me. He never finished high school but he was bright enough to be a good con
man. I hadn’t seen him for quite a while and ran into him one day on Broadway. He said he had checked into his winter home and just returned. I asked where his winter home was and it turned out it was a mental institution (I think it was in Napa). He said he would commit himself to different institutions every winter because he got a good bed and enough food. One day he disappeared and no one seemed to know what happened to him.

My bookstore adventure began after some discussion with two friends, Walt Donley and Pierre DeLattre. Walt worked on the docks and had saved quite a bit of money and asked me, along with Pierre (who the press had dubbed “the Beatnik Priest”) to help him open and run a bookstore. Pierre was the pastor of the Bread and Wine Mission in North Beach. He had his first article in The Atlantic published about that time. I had learned something about the bookstore business when I worked in Discovery, so Walt said he would put up the money for the rent and the initial stocking of the store if we would agree to be partners with him in the business. Pierre and I agreed. We had a total of $1600 to rent a store, get the necessary papers, and buy books, so we started on a shoestring (of course today that shoestring would probably be at least $10,000, if it could be done at all). There was a warehouse in San Francisco where we would go to get our new books, at the standard wholesale price of 40% less than retail.

Walt was a longshoreman who read a lot and was very bright guy. He had worked with Eric Hoffer, who at that time was just starting to make a name for himself. Hoffer’s first book, The True Believer, had already been published and was fairly well known. He may even have published his second book by that time. Walt didn’t like Eric Hoffer as a person. He claimed Hoffer was a phony, but I don’t know what his reasons were and, since he was so vehement in his denunciation of Hoffer, we didn’t talk about it.

Pierre had received his Masters in Theology in Chicago, he moved out to San Francisco and was invited to give a talk at a church. In that talk he, evidently, chastised the clergy for not knowing what was going on in the streets and told them they should go out and see. After that talk he was asked by the church officials to take a position of ministering to the Beatnik community. In other words, now that he had talked the talk they wanted him to walk the walk. They said they would give him and his wife a place to stay and a small stipend. Pierre took up the challenge and began ministering to the North Beach community.
He was very good at it. He was well liked and he seemed to enjoy what he was doing. He did hold irregular meetings at his mission building.

Pierre’s wife Lois was a great help to him. Their living quarters were an extension of the mission. I was invited to their house, along with a few others, for dinner one evening. Their place had been burglarized a few nights before and Pierre was visibly upset by it. He said the thieves had taken some valuable books and other items which he was sure they would sell for very little just to get money for drugs or liquor. Lois, his wife, in true Christian fashion, told Pierre that they probably needed it a lot more she and Pierre did. Her generous spirit impressed me.

I suggested the name of “Logos” for the store (later this name was used by some Christian bookstores, which, I think, are no longer in business). I liked the name because it was a Greek word with interesting translations, one of which was “word” and another was connected to giving an account of something. Our bookstore was a modest one which carried new paperbacks and some used books and a very few, specially selected, hard covers (few because they were too expensive for our limited budget). We wanted to make it a cultural center so we had occasional poetry readings in the store. It cost us business on the nights we had poetry readings but we saw that as our contribution to the community. Unfortunately some others saw those crowded readings as a contribution to them, i.e., an ideal time to steal some books.

One of the few hard covers we had at that time was a best selling book that had just been published, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich by Shirer. It was a ten-dollar book (quite a bit at that time) and I guess someone there on poetry night decided that they needed that book more than we did. Of course the fact was that we probably had less money than the thief. A few thefts during the poetry readings made us decide to stop having those readings.

In our bookstore we had a large table where someone entering the store could see the books that were the bestsellers in North Beach. On one side of the table all the books were on Existentialism and on the other side all the books were on various types of Buddhism. One day a middle aged couple and their daughter came in the store. The daughter was looking on one side of the table and the mother and father came in the store. The father was looking at the title of the first book and, slowly emphasizing the first word, “Ex- is- tent- ial- ism, what is that?” Then he looked at the next one and said, “Another one on this Ex- is- tent
ial-ism” and then a third, holding it delicately, like a possibly poisonous insect, and almost screamed, “What the hell is this ex-tent-ial ism anyway?” The words came spurting from his mouth as if he had found some hitherto unknown, though obviously dangerous, insect. In the meantime his daughter had quietly picked up one of the books and had started to surreptitiously read the introduction, while her father was becoming increasingly frustrated. She was happy to have the chance to solve the paternal problem. “Here it is Dad” and she reads, ‘Existentialism is a protest against traditional philosophy.” The father listened, was quiet for a few seconds and then asks, “What the hell is traditional philosophy?” By this time other people in the store overhearing them have turned to look at them. The trio fell into silence, hastened to the door and back to Kansas.

One slow Tuesday morning a young man and woman walked into the bookstore. I heard them talking quietly in an English accent. When they came to the front to buy a book I asked them where they were from how they liked their visit in San Francisco. This was my first meeting with Penny and David; they were from England, had just arrived in San Francisco the day before. They were students at Cambridge University but had taken a few months off to visit the United States.

They told me that they were paying for part of their trip by writing regular reports, on their travels across the United States, for the New Statesman. They also supplemented their income way by doing various types of work like working in restaurants, washing dishes, waiting on tables, etc. Obviously, they were not the normal type of tourist, which was one of the reasons I liked them right away.

They only planned to spend a few days in San Francisco and wouldn’t be working while they were here. They just wanted to enjoy the city and the surrounding area. They said they didn’t know anyone in San Francisco, so I told them that I would be going to Big Sur with some friends the next day and invited them along. They exchanged brief looks of surprise, their eyes sparkled yes, and said they would love to go with us. So while they were in San Francisco I showed them around. A short time later they decided to head for the East Coast and then back to England and I, reluctantly, said goodbye. We got along very well together in the short time they were in San Francisco and I knew I would see them again.

Our bookstore adventure didn’t last long for various reasons. We didn’t sell enough books (the main reason) and there was also the theft of books to contend with. We also had
situations like people coming in with boxes of used books to sell and expecting a lot more than the books were worth. I was in charge of the buying since I was the only one with the experience. I would try to be fair and offered as much as possible for used books and when the person would balk at the price, I would suggest that they take the books to the only other used book store in the area, Discovery Books, and if they offered more they should take it, if not, come back to me and I would still give them what I said I would. Unfortunately, what generally happened is that they would take the books to Discovery Book Store and Frederick would offer them a lot less than I did (which I knew he would, since he always offered the lowest price he could get by with). The person would then tell Frederick that I had offered them more, so Frederick matched my price, knowing that he would still make a reasonable profit. They would accept his offer since they didn’t want to bother taking the books back to me. So although I was being honest with them and offered them a fair price, I lost out because it was easier for them to sell to Discovery and not carry the books back to me. I found out about this later. It didn’t always happen, but it happened often enough so that I lost out on some good books that would have sold quickly. Of course the other bookstore, Discovery, was a much bigger bookstore with more capital, but Frederick didn’t like the fact that I was offering a much better price than he liked to pay, so he opened a second bookstore across the street from ours. He would have special book sales and try every way he could to undercut us, even if it cost him money in the short run. He knew that if he could run us out of business he could then raise his prices again. His was the only other used bookstore in the neighborhood since City Lights, although much better known, did not sell used books. Logos bookstore closed after less than six months due to the factors I have just mentioned. Discovery Books, now that their main objective had been achieved, closed their branch across the street soon after we went out of business.

I don’t know what happened to Walt Donnely, but at least he had a steady job on the docks and Pierre still had the Bread and Wine Mission. I was out of a job again. Within two or three years Pierre went on to get at least two books published. He lived in Mexico for quite a few years and is now living in New Mexico.

It was in North Beach that I met Karen. She was a beautiful and vivacious twenty-one year old painter from Canada. She had come to San Francisco to live for a few months and planned to go on to France since she had a scholarship to study painting with Andre Lott.
Lott was already old, one of an original group of painters, which included Picasso, in Paris in the twenties and thirties.

A few weeks after we met Karen and I moved in together in an apartment on Laguna. It was a great, but brief time together since she was determined to go to France. I did learn something about painting from her. I noticed that whenever we went to an art museum she would immediately go to the modern painters, especially Mondrian, who seemed to be her favorite. I preferred to look at more traditional art like Rembrant, Reubens, etc. I asked her why she liked the moderns so much. She said she also liked traditional art. Perhaps, she suggested, I preferred traditional art because of the landscapes and portraits, but I had to look at modern painting as saying something about painting, not necessarily about people or landscapes (this reminded me of the time in Detroit when David Ditterline showed me the connection between jazz and classical music).

When she left for France, I stayed in the apartment for a while and then moved briefly to the Mission District, which was as Irish at that time as North Beach was Italian. I lived there with two young women (in a Platonic relationship) who were also going to San Francisco State.

Karen, after about a year or so in Paris, moved to London, which is where I would meet up with her again. She was one of the artists in a special exhibit at the Tate Gallery in London. The exhibit was called something like “Young Artists of 1963.” She was a very good artist and had taught me quite a bit about painting in the short time I lived with her.

I didn’t have a phone when I lived in North Beach, so the only time I had contact with anyone, besides an occasional talk with one of the old Italians in my rooming house, was in the streets and hangouts of the neighborhood. One day, however, I received a surprise when I walked into the bookstore and Pierre told me that my brother had called from Connecticut and left a phone number for me to call back as soon as possible. I immediately assumed it was because I hadn’t written or called home in quite a while and they wanted to know if everything was okay. It didn’t occur to me that something tragic had happened.

I called my brother Val and asked him why he had called. I still hear his dramatic opening words, “Dave was killed in a gun duel.” Dave, my brother-in-law, was a policeman married to my youngest sister, Rose, and they had three small children, Doreen 5, Diane 4, and David 18 months. Val said that Dave was trying to stop a hold-up man from escaping
and followed him to the top of the roof of the bar that had just been held up. Dave shot him once in the leg and the guy shot Dave in the chest. Before the ambulance came he was lying down smoking a cigarette and talking to his partner. He died before they could get him to a hospital. Dave was a motorcycle policeman, but on that fateful day a friend wanted the day off and asked Dave if ride the squad car with his partner. Dave agreed and took his place. When Dave and his squad car partner got the call of a hold-up in progress they hurried to the bar (sadly, it was a bar my friends and I used to hang out in, The Skipper, in Stamford). When they got there his partner asked Dave to go around the back of the building and he would go in the front. When Dave got to the back the hold-up man was on the roof and Dave climbed up there and they exchanged gun fire. The hold up man was shot in the leg and Dave was shot in the chest.

This sad news made me want to return immediately, but those were the days without credit cards. Everything had to be cash and I didn’t have any. I was broke, as usual, so I had no way to return for the funeral. As soon as I could, I called Rosie to express my sorrow and said I couldn’t get back just then but would come back as soon as I could to see her. Rosie got in touch with me about two months later and said she was coming out to San Francisco and asked me to find her a house or apartment where we could all live together. Rosie and her children, Doreen, Diane, and David came to San Francisco and we rented a big house with four or five bedrooms. This was the unforeseen event which would turn my life in a completely different direction.

Rose decided to enroll in San Francisco State (I had to get accustomed to calling her Rose, instead of Rosie, since this was how she always introduced herself to people). We enrolled the girls, Doreen and Diane, in school and found someone to take care of David when neither of us was home. I was a Philosophy major and Rose was an Art major. I introduced her to the people I knew at S.F. State, one of whom was Sidney Johnson, another philosophy major. She and Sid hit it off well together and were soon seeing a lot of each other.

All my friends liked Rose and she enjoyed her time at State. She would come home and work on an essay and then give it to me to comment on. Later she told me that she always hesitated to give me her papers because I would sometimes just shake my head and say something like, “you can’t say that.” I made comments not only on what she said in her
papers but how she said it. However, she did tell me that she learned a lot from me and was glad that I didn’t pull my punches.

The art world was Rose’s cup of tea. She enjoyed doing art, as well as learning about it. While she was at S.F. State she did quite a bit of work and even had her own show on campus. It drew quite a bit of attention on campus. Now I wish we had some of the literature about that show.

The connection between Rose and Sid had gotten much stronger and eventually they decided to get married. I lived with them for a short while after their marriage while I looked for another place.

After talking to my friends, John Dearman and Sandy Joseph, we agreed to look for a large apartment that the three of us could share. We found one on Clement Street above a store. It was a large apartment where we each had a bedroom and shared the kitchen, living room and the two bathrooms. It was a great place for parties since it was above a business, which meant no one was there at night, so no one to complain about the noise. It was here that George Troutt would come when he had a big argument with Bobbye and it was here Bobbye came for their reconciliation. It was here that Ina captivated John, which led to their wedding, which led to moving again.

John was studying for the bar exam while working as a social worker. He had been a lawyer for two or three years in Michigan but still was required to take the bar exam in California. Sandy was also working full time and he was still taking classes at the university. I was working again at the Rancho restaurant and continuing to study philosophy at S.F. State.

Two friends from our Detroit days came to stay with us for a while at our Clement St apartment. Both Ed Barnes and George Lee had been students at Wayne when we were there. While they were visiting, John and I suggested we all go to the racetrack. When we got to the track we went to the paddock where the horses parade before the race. In one of the races there was a white horse and George Lee said, in a loud voice, “that’s the horse to bet on, they always told me ‘if you’re white, well all right’”. Since George Lee was African-American, I’m not sure what the whites around us thought but all of us just started laughing because we immediately recognized the quote (probably originally from a song by the
folksinger Leadbelly, “if you’re white, well all right, if you’re brown stick around, but if
you’re black, stay back brother, stay back.”).

It was while living on Clement Street that I got a call from my best friend, George
Troutt. He sounded very down and said he wanted to come out and visit me. He flew out
within a day or two after that phone call. He said he and Bobbye had a falling out and he
wasn’t sure what he was going to do. I told him to just relax for a few days until he could get
a better perspective about things. About a week after he came out he said he had talked to
Bobbye and things were better and she would be coming to San Francisco in a few days. He
told me not to worry because he had explained everything to her and she didn’t harbor any
bad feelings towards me. When Bobbye arrived everything seemed to be as always and we
all had a few nice days together before they went back to Detroit.

After George and Bobbye returned to Detroit, John did manage to get some studying
done, despite all our parties and all our visitors. He passed the bar exam on his second try.
He told me that the California bar exam was especially difficult because there were so many
differences with other states. He said that in law school they were warned that “this is the
law in every state except California and New York.”

While John was working as a social worker there was a young woman (also a social
worker) who came to visit him quite often. Her name was Ina and she pursued John until he
turned around and caught her. They were married shortly before I left San Francisco.

Within a year of their marriage Ina was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Ina is a
fighter and has been fighting MS all these years. Today, she still gets around with a cane and
a wheelchair. Whenever I talk to her on the phone and ask her how she’s doing, her response
usually is, “Well, I made it to another day.” John has always taken good care of her. He did
hire someone to be with her during the day while he is working but he still does all the
cooking.

After John began practicing law in San Francisco, I would meet him after work for a
beer or two in Vesuvio’s bar in North Beach. It was especially interesting when he would
bring two or three of his law colleagues with him. At the time I was taking a class in the
philosophy of law, so we would have some great discussions, with the lawyers talking the
letter of the law and I would respond with the spirit of a given law, e.g., the intent of the law.
They would quote case law and I would quote philosophers who had law degrees. Mutual respect for different types and sources of knowledge made for good discussions.

Finally got my B.A. (after nine years and three universities) from San Francisco State. Rose and Sid urged me to go to Europe with them. They had planned to go to Salzburg and rent a house. However, John Dearman had made me an offer which I found very tempting.

Just as I was finishing my last semester at SF State John told me that under California law (at that time) it was possible to become a lawyer without going to law school. To do this one would have to work in a law office for at least six months, get a lawyer’s recommendation, and then pass the California bar exam. He said he would sponsor me and I could work in his law office for six months, take the bar review course while I was working and then take the bar exam. If I passed the bar exam, which he was sure I could, we would become law partners. It really sounded like a great deal.

As I said, I was tempted by John’s offer, but I also wanted to go to Europe, travel around and visit with Rose and Sid and the kids. I thought I would just go for a few months, come back to San Francisco and take John up on his offer.

That Christmas Rose and Sid gave me a present of a thousand dollars and told me that now I had no excuse for not going to Europe, since I would be getting my degree the following month.

I told John that I would probably go to Europe for about a month or two, depending on when my money ran out, but I was really interested in doing what he suggested. I asked him if we could put it off for a couple of months and he agreed. I was really looking forward to that possibility. I never dreamed I would live in Europe as long as I did. As it turned out I lived in Europe for two years and by the time I got back John was a partner with Willie Brown.

Missing the chance to become John’s law partner was another one of those situations where I wondered where life would have taken me, if, at that fork in the road, I had taken the other road. I had to make another decision like that some years later which also would also have changed my life in a major way. That was when my friend, George, asked me to become his partner in a business venture. I’ll get to that later.

Willie Brown later became a very powerful figure in California politics. He was Speaker of the Assembly for many years. I think that if Willie were white he would have
easily become a senator or governor of California, but, as it was, since he was too popular to lose whenever he ran for re-election, he was finally forced out when California passed term limits law. It was so obvious that the term limits law was pushed through with the specific purpose of getting Willie Brown out of office that it should have come under a Bill of Attainder prohibition (although it would have been difficult to prove that the legislation was intended to get him out of office). It’s interesting that in case law, the name of the litigant in the 1965 Bill of Attainder case (where the ruling was against “trial by legislature”) was Brown (a different Brown of course).

In 1992, when I was running for the California State Assembly, I was asked several times about my feeling about term limits. This was a proposition on the ballot to place term limits on the members of the state legislature and it was very popular, especially in conservative San Diego County where I was running. It was one of those questions that was meant to put me on the wrong side of the issue since I was running in a district which had more than twice as many Republicans than Democrats, and everyone knew that the Democrats, in general, were against term limits. The answer I gave when I was first asked that question became my standard answer. I said that I would be for term limits when term limits were also placed on lobbyists. I went on to say that if we had term limits then the people with the most power would be the lobbyists and they would be only too anxious to “help” the new legislators understand the workings of the legislature. The Republicans saw this as their chance to get rid of Willie Brown (since they couldn’t beat him in a fair fight). The proposition passed and only now are some people beginning to understand the ramifications of that law.

Willie Brown is not one to be kept down for long, after leaving the legislature he went on to become mayor of San Francisco. John went on to become a Superior Court Judge (and stayed on the bench for over thirty years).

One of the advantages of John being a close friend of Willie Brown’s was that, over the years, whenever I went to visit John I would always get the latest inside information on the political scene in California.
MAKING NEWS IX

- PRESIDENT KENNEDY ASSASSINATED.
- LYNDON JOHNSON SWORN IN AS PRESIDENT.
- EARTHQUAKE IN SKOPOJE, YUGOSLAVIA, OVER ONE THOUSAND DEAD.
- RUSSIAN WOMAN FIRST FEMALE ASTRONAUT.
- POPE PAUL VI SUCCEEDS JOHN XXIII.
- ROBERT FROST DIES.
CHAPTER 10

BACK TO EUROPE

So, with my newly acquired B.A. in Philosophy and feeling happy and free (and proud to be part of that eight percent with a college degree), I flew back to Connecticut and visited my family before my trip to Europe.

It was a cold winter on the East Coast and the Cunard line ship, as an incentive, included a one day stop in Bermuda, so I enjoyed a sunny day in Bermuda. After a somewhat bouncy crossing, we stopped in Ireland and Scotland briefly before continuing on to Liverpool where I disembarked. Just before the ship arrived in Liverpool I received a telegram from Karen saying that she couldn’t make it to Liverpool but would meet me at the train station in London if I would wire her my arrival time (which I did). In London she met me at the train station (I think it was Victoria Station). The next day she introduced to some of her friends and in a day or two I had found a room in Chalk Farm, which is between Camden Town and Hampstead. It was only one pound, one shilling a week and electricity was run by meter. I always had to make sure, when I came home from the pub at night, that I had enough coins to feed the meter or I would be without lights and without heat.

Karen and I were no longer a couple although she didn’t have a boyfriend at that time. However, we did have one night together. That night, both of us probably knew, at some level, would be the last night we would ever sleep together. We kept up our friendship while I was in London, but not our romance.

I saw William Burroughs while I was in London. I had read his book The Naked Lunch, so I was quite ready to go when Karen invited me to a small art gallery where he would be talking. I was surprised that there was such a small turnout, probably no more than 30-40 people. He had set up a performance with a young painter but instead of the jazz and poetry I was used to, this was painting and poetry. The painter would show slides of his paintings on a screen and Burroughs would read one of his poems while standing beside the painting. I was disappointed in the whole exhibit and decided it wasn’t necessary to meet
either the painter or the poet; I actually did want to talk to Burroughs but he was surrounded by idolaters so we left.

Karen had introduced me to Pam and Harry; they were an unusual couple about ten years older than I was. I became good friends with them over time. It was the second marriage for both of them. I did meet Pam’s two daughters later, but never met her son or Harry’s son. Both sons were estranged from their parents, I never knew why.

Pam was a good painter and had already had exhibits (one person or group shows) in England, France, Denmark and Germany. She had grown up in Kenya on a coffee plantation and was part of the white upper class (British and European). She said most of the white population knew each other since they weren’t a very large group. She was a friend of Karen Blixen (aka Isak Dinesen, author of *Out of Africa*) and Beryl Markham (author of *West With the Night*), both of whom had also lived in Kenya.

Harry had a very different kind of background. He grew up a poor Cockney boy in London. He was a tall, nice looking man and people often compared him to the actor, George Saunders. He had various jobs before he met Pam (working booths in the markets, salesman, etc). Harry played the saxophone and, at one time, had played jazz with George Shearing. When I met him he didn’t seem to have a regular job, but spent most of his time helping Pam with the house and marketing her paintings.

A few years after I first met them, Pam and Harry began making travel films on India. They made seven trips, in their camper, to India, Nepal and Burma. Whenever they returned from a trip they would put together shows in London. At one point they had an interview with the Dali Lama. Harry had a pleasant, sonorous voice and he was the narrator for their travelogues.

I had stayed in touch with Penny and David and, had written to them and we made plans to get together when I came to England. They had also finished their degrees at Cambridge. She and David later went their separate ways. David practiced medicine in Wales and Penny married Julian and they bought an old mill house in Goudhurst, Kent.

When I think of the class distinctions prevalent in England at that time, I remember a walk with Julian to their favorite cheese shop. This was after I had married Antonia we went to visit them in 1968. We stayed with them while we were in London. Serenella was about
two and a half years old and Nino wasn’t born yet. Their son, Ingo, was about a year old at the time and the their twins weren’t born yet.

Julian was a painter and sculptor and he was working in his studio when Penny asked him to go to the cheese shop. He asked me if I wanted to go and, naturally, I did. Having been working all morning, Julian was wearing his paint splattered overalls and an old t-shirt. When we arrived at the cheese shop it was interesting for me to see how he was treated. In the U.S. someone dressed like Julian in such a nice shop in such a high-end neighborhood, would probably not be given the attention usually given to his or her customers. In this shop, however, when they asked Julian what he would like, he responded in his normal English public school, Cambridge accent. They immediately became very deferential. Another one of my lessons in comparative cultures. Class consciousness is part of both countries; in England it just has a longer history and different manifestations.

Americans tag you by what kind of car and/or house you own, the English tag you by what kind of accent you have. In general, the English see family background and education as defining you, in America it is material possessions which define you. This is not to say that Americans are not concerned with family background and education, or that the English are not concerned with wealth, those elements are part of the equation for both groups. I am just mentioning what seem to be the dominant concerns in the two cultures.

Happily, that class distinction in England seems to be fading, or at least the signs I’ve seen recently seem to indicate that. The earlier time that I was talking about (almost a half century ago) was when England still had private and public sections for every pub. I always gravitated to the public section (read cheaper, lower class section).

I really liked London even though it was a little dingy and dreary and lacked central heating in most places, but it was possible to live on very little money (all of this has changed considerably since then). Despite these negatives, London did have a certain charm about it,

I tried to get a job so I could stay in London, but couldn’t find a suitable one. After a few months, with no job in sight and my money running low, I knew it was time to leave. Sid and Rose had rented a house in Salzburg-Parche, which was a just a few kilometers from the center of Salzburg. so, naturally, that was my next move.

Salzburg is such a beautiful Baroque city. It is always crowded with tourists, but it is one of those cities with such beautiful architecture that the amount of tourists is irrelevant, it
is still beautiful (Florence, a Renaissance city, is another example of a city which can not be ruined by too many tourists).

I spent about a month in Salzburg and visited, among other places, Mozart’s house on Getreidegasse, the fortress, Mirabelle Gardens, and the Salzburg Cathedral. When the cathedral was built it was meant to hold the whole population of Salzburg, supposedly 10,000 people. It was a large cathedral, but I found it hard to believe that it could hold 10,000 people. Maybe it was a misprint in the brochure; maybe it should have said 10,000 prayers.

Those days in Salzburg were very relaxing. I would usually spend my mornings sitting in the main local café that was right on the Salzach river. They kept newspapers on large poles which customers could take down and bring to their table to read. So I would sit there, have my morning coffee (after already having had breakfast with Rose, Sid and the kids), look at the Salzach, look at the newspapers (didn’t really learn German until later at the Goethe Institute, but with the help of my German-English dictionary and my old GI German, I could sometimes understand a little), write a little, and then go for a walk in the city.

Salzburg is a city of music. Rose, Sid and I went to a couple of chamber concerts that were in those Baroque buildings with huge rooms for concerts. The rooms were filled (at least when I went) with perhaps 50 or 60 people. Sitting in that room, listening to the music of Scarlatti, Corelli, Telemann, and others transported me back to the 18th century for a few memorable moments.

In addition to our sightseeing, concerts and cafes, we did have some interesting adventures. One of these adventures started on a clear, warm Sunday morning in April and, lacking a New York Times to keep us busy, Rose, Sid and I sat around the kitchen table having coffee and thinking about something interesting to do. It was as if we were on a long vacation. We settled on making a day trip somewhere, brought out a map of Europe and started looking at what seemed close and interesting. We had been to Vienna and Munich so we wanted to go some place else. Rose said, “Look how close Venice is, let’s go there.” Well, it did look like a possibility, perhaps no more than a four or five hour drive. We could enjoy Venice that afternoon, get a hotel for the night, and drive back on Monday. Sounded like a good plan, so we packed our little VW bug with sandwiches, sodas, kids, and ourselves and started on our adventure to Italy. It looked like it would be a nice springtime jaunt to Venice. Of course we were thinking of California freeways, not Alpine roads with snow.
After driving for quite some time, following the roads on the map, we realized we were very high up, there was snow on the ground and we could see skiers below us. Fortunately we didn’t run into any April snowstorms. We, oblivious to the fact that there were very few cars on that road, kept on going. The kids were okay, but after about six hours of driving, the three adults began to get a little nervous. We joined the kids saying, “Are we there yet?” We had left Salzburg about 9AM and finally arrived in Venice about 6PM. We had never given a thought, when we were calculating how long it would take, to the fact that we would not be traveling anything like the California freeways, nor did we take into consideration that it was spring in Salzburg but it could be Winter in the Alps.

We all loved Venice, although Diane and Doreen did suffer a little panic attack when a bunch of pigeons swooped down on them as they were feeding a few pigeons in Piazza San Marco. They yelled, dropped the bird food and ran towards us. They, with the help of a little gelato, recovered quickly.

We, with our snap decision that morning in Salzburg, had never counted on such an adventure. We were thinking of a nice pleasant ride in April in the Alps.

After enjoying three days and two nights in Venice, we checked the weather forecast and then made our way back to Salzburg. That was my first time in Venice and, over the years, I have been to Venice at least six or seven more times, usually to visit the famous international art show, the Biennale. Many countries send their best artists and during the Biennale art is everywhere in Venice, in the parks, the museums, the churches, etc. I think it was at one of these shows where I first saw Rachel Whitehead and Judy Chicago. It was also the first time I had seen any of the work of Joseph Beuys.

While I was in Salzburg Sid’s younger brother, Stewart, came to visit. He was stationed with the U.S. Army in Germany. One night Stewart and I were drinking in the local gasthaus and decided to take a train to Athens. After enough German beer to make grand plans, I asked Stewart if he had ever been to Greece. He said no, but he would like to see Greece. I suggested that we hitchhike there. I asked Stewart if he had a passport. He said he didn’t need one because the military had a special pass which they were able to use as a passport.

When we got to Klagenfurt, Austria the border patrol bordered the train and began to check passports. When Stewart showed them his military ID they asked for a passport.
Since he didn’t have a passport they put him off the train. When I saw them putting him off the train, just as it was starting to leave, I jumped off the train. There was a young Greek woman who was also put off the train. She asked us, in English, if we were Americans. She then told us that they had a place in Klagenfurt where everyone goes for special papers to cross the border and that’s where she would be going in the morning. She said she would meet us in the morning and we would go together. The next morning we went into Klagenfurt and tried to get special visa for Stewart, but no such luck. He said he would go back to Salzburg and I should just go on to Athens.

So Stewart went back to Salzburg and the Greek woman and I went to the train station to wait for the train to Athens. I don’t remember her name but I do remember her as warm and spirited. It was early summer and the trains were crowded. As our train pulled into the station I could see people jammed into the second-class cars (we both had second class tickets). I told her it was no use trying to get on this train and that we should try a later one. She said we should just wait and see. Just then one section of the train came by with many young men hanging their heads out of the train windows. As it was rolling to a stop, she yelled out to them in Greek and they yelled back to her. She said to me “Come on, we have a seat.” When we got on the train there were four of the men in one compartment holding two seats for us.

That whole section of the train was filled with Greek men and only two or three women. The woman I was with explained to me that they were Greeks who were Gastarbeiter in Germany and were on their way home for a vacation. The Gastarbeiter (literally, Guest Workers), mostly from Turkey, Italy, Greece and Spain, were the men who provided cheap labor for Germany industry as it was building its way back to becoming one of the strongest economic powers in Europe.

We had a good time with the four men and the other half dozen or so who would come by to talk to “the Greek lady with the American boy” (as she explained to me). They didn’t speak English so “the Greek lady” did all the translating. One of the men asked me if I liked wine and I told him I did. He then asked me if I had ever tasted Greek wine and I said no, but I had tasted American, Italian, French, Spanish, German, and Austrian wine. He said, with all the others nodding in agreement, that I must taste Greek wine, it, according to him and all the others, was the best. They said that the dining car would be put on when we
arrived in Belgrade and then we would be able to purchase Greek wine. When we got to Belgrade we waited for over an hour but no dining car was put on and no one seemed to know why, so they said not to worry they would get wine as soon as we crossed the border. The first stop in Greece was Thessalonika and some of the group got off there but by the time the train started up again they were all back and all these bottles of Greek wine suddenly appeared. Glasses materialized from somewhere and were immediately filled with wine. They were all looking at me and were waiting for me to taste it. As I looked at the white wine I thought it probably was something like a Riesling or perhaps a dessert wine. I wasn’t ready for the strange taste of Retsina. It was so different from what I expected that had I been alone I probably would have spit it out right away. Obviously I couldn’t do that while they were all watching me and waiting for a response. After I swished and swallowed, they asked me how I liked it and I used that old weasel phrase, “very interesting” and hoped that would satisfy them. Well they took that as a strong endorsement and immediately poured me another. So we talked, played cards, and drank all the way to Athens, which was, as I remember, about a ten-hour trip. By the time we arrived in Athens I thought their original judgment about Greek wine was right, it was the best, at least at that time, in that place, with that crowd.

The men went off to their homes in Athens and other parts of Greece and the young woman said she wanted to stay in Athens for a few days before going to her home in some exotic (for me) place like Sparta. So we stayed together for those two or three days and she took me to my first Taverna and even taught me some basic words and phrases (“please, thank you”, and, the phrase that got me in the most trouble, “I don’t speak Greek”, as soon as I said that in Greek the other person always answered me in Greek). She walked all over Athens with me. One day, as were walking along on the bottom of the hill where the Parthenon stood, she pointed over to a particular spot and said to me, “that’s the path that Pericles took every day on his way home.” I was fascinated (and thankful that I had read Herodotus, as well as Plato). We had a fantastic three or four days together and then she said she had to return home. So we parted, both of us knowing that our brief fling was over. Our joy over those few days was somewhat offset by our sadness at leaving, since we both knew that we would never see each other again.
When I returned to Germany I decided to look for a room in Munich. I had heard that Schwabing, a section of Munich, was like North Beach in San Francisco. I got a cheap room (as I always did, in San Francisco, in London, and now in Munich) on Isabella Strasse right near Isabella Platz on the edge of the Schwabing area. I visited the main street in Schwabing (Leopold Strasse) which had outside cafes and a lot of young people, about my age, sitting around talking. Many of them were wearing the obligatory beatnik uniform; turtleneck sweaters, berets, beards for the males and long hair for the females and, of course, sandals. That old cliché’ about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery seemed to apply here. They loved what they knew of San Francisco and the Beatniks.

The University of Munich is in Schwabing, so I visited the university bookstore, looking for a copy of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus in English and German (which is how it was published in the states, e.g., German on one page and English on the facing page). The young woman in the bookstore spoke English very well, so I had no trouble getting the book. She walked me to where the book was and talked to me. She said she was surprised to have an American asking about Wittgenstein because not many German students even knew who he was. I assured her there were not many university students in the U.S. who knew either and that I only knew because my B.A. degree was in philosophy.

We talked for a while and she told me that she was trying to get the Arab and Israeli students together to sit down and talk to each other. She had been briefly married to an Israeli and was always bothered by the fact that the Israelis and Arabs would seldom talk to each other. If they did, she indicated, it was perfunctory. She asked me if I would like to come to a gathering at her house with a few Israeli and Arab students, as well as some German students. The students planned to talk about the political problems facing their countries. I said I would be happy to join in a discussion.

At the meeting there was another American there. He was an official from the Amerika Haus; a U.S. Information Center for the people of Munich, run by the U.S. government. The discussion was in English, the only common language of the Arab, Israeli, and German students (fortunately for me and the other American since neither one of us knew more than a few words in German). The discussion was a little slow because of the language difficulty, but there was civility and some communication.
As the discussion progressed the Amerika Haus representative would grow impatient with the students’ hesitation in trying to find the right words in English to express their views. He would constantly make comments like, “Say what you mean, get it out” “Come on, come on, what is it?” and other rude comments. I finally asked him if he spoke German and he said no, so I told him that, in case he hadn’t noticed they were speaking in their second (or even third) language and he was speaking in his first language. He, reluctantly, got the message. People like this Amerika Haus official helped perpetuate the idea of the ugly American. Many years later, when I was in the Peace Corps, I saw young Americans display the good side of America which helped compensate for those ugly Americans around the world who, supposedly, represent our country.

We had a good and heated discussion that night but, as in so many universities all over the world, we didn’t manage to solve all the problems, despite the lubrication of the brain with wine.

I did meet an Egyptian student at Ursula’s house and we became friends and spent some time drinking and talking together. Ali was from Alexandria, Egypt and he was working on his PhD in one of the sciences (I think it was physics). His German, as can be imagined, was very good. After listening to him carrying on a conversation the night of the meeting with the other students, I asked him if he had lived in Germany a long time before going to the university. He said no, but he had studied at the Goethe Institute before going to the university. He said no, but he had studied at the Goethe Institute before going to the university. He had never heard of the Goethe Institute so he filled me in on it. This made me think about the possibility of going to the Goethe Institute also.

Once I told Ali that I was surprised about how difficult it was for him to speak to the Israelis, because I knew he was very intelligent and yet became very emotional in the discussion, and sometimes not very rational. He acknowledged that and said, “Dante, you don’t know the Israelis and Israel like I do. The world doesn’t know Israel like we Arabs do. Israelis don’t want to hear our side. He then said, “The Israelis are unreasonable [which, of course, is what some Israelis say about the Arabs]. They have no respect for our people, but want us to respect them.” He said it was impossible to explain this to someone who had never lived in the Middle East. I told him that I thought the Arabs had some legitimate points, but both sides had trouble listening. He seemed to agree but also seemed to be resigned to everything being unchangeable.
Much later, when Ali went back to Alexandria, he did write to me and I answered him but, over the years, we lost track of each other. This was one of those rare cases where I actually lost contact with someone I liked.

A short time after meeting Ali I did enroll in the Goethe Institute. It was relatively inexpensive, one thousand marks for the entire eight week program. This included not just eight weeks of intensive language training but room and board as well. Most of the Goethe Institutes language schools are located in small towns and the one I went to was in Arolsen, near Kassel, (the nearest large city). We were put up with a host family, who were instructed to speak to us only in German. There were only two students with that family: the other student was from Iran; we each had our own room in the house.

Since all our meals were at the Gasthaus associated with the Institute, we did not have any meals with the family, but occasionally would watch TV with them. During the first two days at the Institute we were given instructions on what the program was about, where we would have our meals, etc. These instructions were given in German, English, and French for the first two days. On the third day only German was spoken. So if we wanted information or wanted to use the bathroom or anything else we would have to learn how to ask in German.

The lessons included talks on German customs and culture. We went to school Monday through Friday from 8AM to 5PM and then to the gasthaus for dinner. Even at dinner, we had an instructor with us and could only speak German. After dinner, we were free to do whatever we wanted to do. Although we were asked to only speak German in the evening, most of the time the language of the evening was English. There were students from all over the world, and English was the only language which almost everyone knew, so that became the lingua franca. Some of the students were being posted to their country’s embassy and some were going to study at German universities. These students would take a sequence of three courses. Each course was eight weeks long and proceeded from where the one before left off. Most of us were there for the one eight-week course, which was enough to carry on everyday conversations in German. The students going on to their embassies and to universities in Germany needed the more advanced courses. The fact that those students would then be able to go to the university, understand the lectures, take notes, etc., is indicative of how good the Goethe Institute was, and, I assume, still is.
As always, when one is ready for it, there are always interesting people around. My housemate tried, unsuccessfully, to teach me some Farsi. Then there was the young Italian girl from Milan. I liked to listen to her speak German because she had the same kind of accent in German that Italians have when speaking English, putting that Italian inflection and an occasional a or o sound on the end of a word.

There were also three other Americans there. One was a teacher from Baltimore who was about my age and I became friendly with. Another was the spoiled son of a doctor; he and I would get into discussions about health care in the U.S. I said we should have some form of socialized medicine and he, of course, was definitely against that. When I asked him what he thought we should do with all the people who couldn’t afford health care, he said that there were public clinics and many doctors, like his father, who sometimes took care of people without payment. I said something like, “Yes, and I’ll bet he talks about how generous he is at all his cocktail parties.” That remark, naturally, did not set well with the doctor’s son, but, by his expression and his lack of a response, I think it hit home. He stopped talking to me about health care in the U.S. after that discussion. Another American student, who seemed fairly bright and pleasant, was a young woman who was a Yale undergraduate and was there to prepare for her language exam which she would take on her return to Yale.

There was one Ethiopian student who was one of the few who arrived at the Institute not knowing any German (most of us knew a little German when we arrived) or English. He only knew his native language and some Italian. He was generally quiet, but friendly, and would always sit next to me when we went to the gasthaus for our evening meal and ask me what was on the menu. One night the waiter came to our table (each table had about ten students and an instructor) and said that they had either fish or meat as the main course. The Ethiopian student turned to me and asked me, in Italian, what the choices were and I told him. Unfortunately, since the Italian word for meat (carne) and dog (cane) are similar, he thought I said cane. He looked at me with an astonished look on his face and said, “cane, i Tedeschi mangiano cane?” (“dog, the Germans eat dog?”). He, obviously, had not heard the “r” in “carne” and so had misunderstood. I quickly alleviated his fear by explaining he had misunderstood me. His puzzled expression changed to one of relief and we both had a good laugh.
In general, the Goethe Institute was a great experience. I had my Volkswagen, which my sister, Rose, had brought from California. She bought a new VW Rabbit when she settled in Austria and sold (gave) me the VW for one dollar. A few times a group of us (we could squeeze six of us in the VW) would go off on a short trip to another watering hole. One night, when we were almost finished with the course (it was the seventh week and we only had one week to graduation), the teacher from Baltimore and I were busy drinking more than we should and decided to get in the VW and go off to Holland. When we got to Amsterdam, we enjoyed it so much that we never did receive our graduation certificate from the Institute, but stayed in Amsterdam for a few days and eventually made our way back to Munich.

Shortly after returning from the Goethe Institute, I applied to places in Italy and Germany for teaching positions in English. At the beginning of September I received an offer from Catania, Sicily for a full time teaching position at a place called The European School (since this was during the pre-internet days, I could not go to Mt Google, to ask the oracle about this school). They said I would need an answer immediately since school was to begin on September 15th. About the same time I had also received an offer from the Berlitz school in Hamburg, Germany. I thought Italy would be the more inspiring place for me. I immediately sent a letter to Catania, saying I would accept the position and would arrive in Catania the week before school started.

The European School was a school set up to provide interpreters and translators for the European Economic Community (EEC), also known as The Common Market. The students were required to learn English as the main language (their first language, of course, was Italian) and German or French as their second (third) language. They were mostly young women between the ages of 18 and 25, all of whom some university background (a few already had bachelor degrees). They were required to spend at least 5 hours each day and a half day on Saturday in school. It was a very small school located in downtown Catania on Viale XX Settembre, the street name comes from September 20, 1870, a very important date in Italian history. It commemorates the unification of Italy, when Italian troops invaded Rome, after Pope Pius IX refused all offers of peaceful settlement, and thus ended papal rule.
The other English teacher was Mrs. Chamberlain from England and there was a French woman in her forties and a German man in his sixties teaching the other classes. The salary was hardly enough to live on, about $100 per month, but I was happy to get the job. I thought that I finally would be able to learn proper Italian, since what little Italian I knew was mostly in the Calabrese dialect. In fact, at that time, if people asked me if I knew Italian I would say no. It was only after I lived in Catania did I begin to realize that I understood a lot more than I thought I would (perhaps because the Sicilian dialect is close to the Calabrese dialect).

Since we were required to speak only English at the school and since that is where I spent most of my time, I obviously didn’t have as much time to learn Italian as I thought I would have. I did pay for some private lessons from one of the male students. Female students, of course, wouldn’t be allowed by their parents to be alone with a male who was not related. In fact, in many ways Sicily was still living in the 19th century. Walking through the park I would often see young couples walking and talking and right behind them would be the ubiquitous aunt or one of the other female relatives, guardians of morality. There were other examples of this 19th century environment and morality, some not so good, which I will show later.

That first semester at The European School went very quickly. I learned very early in the semester that a male teacher could not fraternize with a female student. There was nothing written or said that prohibited such fraternization, it was just understood as an unwritten law. It didn’t really matter to me when I realized there were other places in the city where sexual relations were more liberal, although not necessarily free.

During this first semester I met a young man who was studying at the University of Catania. He was a journalism student with whom I would remain friends with for the rest of his life. His name was Tony Barlesi. I was introduced to him by a woman, Amelia, who was an English teacher in one of the local schools and a mutual friend. I had met her when she contacted me for English lessons. Her English was very good but she said she needed more help. She was at least five years older than Tony (he was only 18 when I met him). She was very independent.

Tony would go on to be a reporter and a feature writer for the largest newspaper in Sicily and later become a well respected TV Anchor Man bringing the evening news every
weeknight – a sort of Dan Rather of Sicily. Much later he became semi-retired and would interview famous movie stars, politicians, etc. Tony, Amelia and I would sometimes go out to parties together or meet for coffee.

Within a year after I left Catania, Amelia died in an airplane crash. She had been teaching in Northern Italy and was returning to Sicily for her Christmas vacation.

Tony and I kept in touch over the years and when he married, a few years after I left Sicily. As I learned later when I met his wife, Pina, she was very gregarious and a good counter balance to Tony’s introverted personality. It might seem strange for such a public figure as Tony to be an introvert, but since then I have met other public figures who could also be described as introverts. Tony was a heavy smoker and, although he had quit smoking, he died of lung cancer a few years ago. My wife and I are still friends with his wife, Pina, and see here quite often, either here and in Sicily.

On my Christmas break I went to visit Rose and family and, when it was over, I took that long train ride back to Sicily. On my first day back, the day after my birthday, I met our new German teacher. Quite a refreshing replacement for that other German teacher, an old German man who the students didn’t seem to like. Not only was she a better teacher, but also much better looking. Her name was Antonia.

Antonia and I got along well together from the start. Catania had a series of concerts during the winter season and we would go to those concerts together. This arrangement was especially good for her because young women needed an escort on the streets, especially after dark. My rooming house was near the school and the house of the family Antonia lived with was only a couple of blocks away, so I would always drop her off at her house and then walk to my rooming house. Women that walked alone after dark were considered either prostitutes or foreign women and, in either case, the stalking men considered them fair game.

Since we were both cigarette smokers at the time and cigarettes in the shops were expensive, I introduced her to the local black market where she could get cigarettes for about a quarter of the price charged in the shops. I also showed her the best espresso café in Catania, my favorite restaurants, etc. Our schedule at school gave us a long lunch break. We generally would teach from 9AM until noon or one o’clock and then we were free until three or four o’clock, depending on whether we taught until noon or one that day. Most of the time we went out to lunch together and had a glass of wine (occasionally we would have more
than one class of wine, but then we had enough time to go back to our rooms and take a nap before returning to the classroom. After lunch we would usually go for a walk around the city or to the zoo. Since the climate is very temperate there were very few days when we couldn’t walk around in the afternoon.

Just about a month into the new semester Catania had the biggest celebration of the year. It was the Festival of St Agatha. The whole city was lit up and in a festive mood. The festival goes from February 3rd to February 5th and the crowds, many of whom stay and celebrate all night long, are estimated at hundreds of thousands of people. Although St Agatha is celebrated all over Italy her birthplace is Catania, Sicily and she is considered the patron saint of Catania. This celebration of St Agatha has, supposedly, protected Catania from being destroyed by Etna and the volcanic eruptions.

On one of our long holidays (there seemed to be quite a view of them, usually religious), I thought it would be a good idea to try to contact my cousins in Calabria: I knew the village was Rose and it was near Cosenza. Our family name, Cosentino, means, literally, a resident of Cosenza. Naturally, I wanted to see that area as well as visit my cousins.

I talked to the English woman who was teaching at the school and, since she and her husband had a car, asked her if they would be interested in driving to Calabria to visit my cousins. They were very happy to get away for a few days. I then asked Antonia if she wanted to go also. I told her she could help with the translations since she had just finished studying Italian at the University of Perrugia and art at the University of Florence and her Italian was very good. She seemed happy to be asked and said yes right away. So the four of us left the next day for Calabria.

The village of Rose is in the mountains near Cosenza. We arrived there late in the afternoon. Some of those mountain villages in that part of Italy had a reputation that tended to keep people away. In fact, shortly before we made our trip there were reports of tourists disappearing in those mountains. When the local residents were asked if they had seen the missing tourists it seemed that they not only had lost their sight but their memory as well. When they were told that the police had traced them to a particular village the people in the village would swear they had never seen those people. I was aware of these recent events and we had talked about it in the car on the way to Rose. So it is understandable that when our little car pulled into the center of that little village, we were wondering what the reaction
would be. As soon as the car stopped a crowd gathered around it, everyone quiet and were just looking at us. The silence was eerie, there seemed to be tension in the air. I stepped out of the car, told them my name, and asked them if they knew where my stepfather’s nephew lived. Since he owned the only bar in the village I assumed they would know him. As soon as I mentioned my name and my stepfather’s name the whole atmosphere changed. An older man shouted to one of the younger men to go and get my relatives. Others began to ask me what town I lived in Connecticut. When I told them they immediately began to ask me if I knew the Chippettas, the Borchettas, etc. When I said yes, since I knew most of the people in the Italian community at home, they became more excited and asked me about them. The next thing I knew they had taken us to my relative’s bar and ordered wine for all of us.

It was while we were all sitting at tables in the bar that the most interesting exchange took place. I asked Antonia to help with the translating because I knew her Italian was better than mine and also better than the English teacher and her husband. Even though the people there used the Calabrese dialect in their every day interaction they all understood proper Italian. So I would speak in English, Antonia would translate into Italian and they would respond. When they responded Antonia seemed confused, but I understood them, so I told her, in German, what they had said and gave her my response so that she could tell them in proper Italian. When she asked me how I knew what they said I suddenly realized that they were speaking primarily in the Calabrese dialect, which made it easier for me to understand, while Antonia and the English teacher were completely lost. After all, even though my Italian still needed a lot of work, I had grown up hearing the Calabrese dialect all around me. That was part of the reason that I could understand quite a bit, and in this case I was able to combine the Italian I knew with what I knew of the Calabrese dialect. So we had this strange three way conversation going. Antonia would speak to them in Italian, they would respond in Calabrese, I would tell Antonia in German how to respond to them. We all got along well together and Antonia was very impressed that I understood them. We talked for a while and then we told them that the four of us were staying at a motel in Cosenza and would have to go back. My cousins were disappointed and said we would have to come back the next day and have dinner with them. We said we would. These were my first cousins, since my father and one of his sisters were the only ones in his family who had emigrated from Italy to the United States. The others had remained in Italy and he still had one brother and two sisters
in Italy. One of the sisters was married and had moved to Torino (Turin) and the other never married and lived in Cosenza. My aunt in Torino just died recently; she was one hundred and three years old.

My father’s brother’s family all lived in Rose, but his brother, Valentino, was dead. The children of Valentino were the ones we talked to that night. We asked them about my aunt who lived in Cosenza and they promised to take us to see her the next day. My father’s sister in Cosenza evidently had a history that made her something of a pariah in the family (but I never did find out what the story was).

The next day two of the sons of Valentino, Michele and Orlando, took us to visit my aunt in Cosenza. The English couple were back at the motel, since we told them we were going to visit my cousins and they decided they wanted to stay and rest at the motel. My aunt lived in two rooms in the basement of a lawyer’s house and worked as a domestic for the lawyer and his family. When Antonia and I arrived there and knocked on her door, my aunt opened it, immediately hugged me and cried. She obviously knew who I was because she said things like she never thought she would ever see any of Jerome’s (my father) children. She invited us in with my cousins. We sat down and she opened a little wooden, cabinet-like box which had bottles of Fernet-Branca, Anisette, (both of which my mother liked and also had at home) and other liquor. It looked like some of those bottles had been sitting there gathering dust for years, I suspected that she seldom had visitors. We took a little Anisette and talked to her for a while. She wanted to know how everybody in the family was (of course she hadn’t seen my father since he left Italy as a young man and he had died some years before my visit). I asked her if everything was okay with her and she said she was fine. My cousins hardly said a word after the initial hello. The visit was brief and when we started to leave she gave me some religious cards to take with me, blessed me and started crying again. The last I saw of her she was crying and waving to me as the car pulled away. Naturally, I was a little depressed as the car started to move, I waved to her as I was thinking what a lonely, desperate life she had. I don’t know if she could read or write but I did write to her once but never received a reply. We never even received a notice when she died (whenever that was).

That afternoon the cousins took us for a walk and as we were walking up the mountain there was a woman coming down with a big bundle on her head. As she
approached us Michele said that’s your cousin, our sister. As she approached me she held her bundle with one hand and with the other reached out and gave me a hug. I didn’t know what to do. I thought I should take her bundle but her brothers made it clear that she didn’t need any help, so I just hugged her.

That night we had dinner at the family home of Michele and Orlando. There were other relatives there as well. It was a big feast with pasta, chicken, fish, and wine. It was clear that they had just caught the fish and just killed the chicken. It was also obvious by the looks of the little children around the table that this was a special feast. At one point before dinner, Antonia asked for the bathroom and one of the women led her out to the field. An open-air bathroom. After dinner we said our goodbyes and they gave us their address and asked us to write. We said we would (and did).

On our Easter vacation we decided to take a train to Palermo, spend a day there and then take a ship to Sardinia. Many people, including Americans, consider Palermo the home of the Mafia, but we didn’t give that a second thought.

When we arrived in Palermo we noticed posters all over the city saying, in Italian of course, “After a thorough investigation, it can be reported that there is no Mafia in the city government of Palermo.” Doeth the lady protest too much? I didn’t own a camera at that time and didn’t see the need for one. I reasoned that usually all one does with a camera is take pictures of the city they are in or the landscape around them or, if they are with people, pictures with others. Since I had, until that time, always traveled alone, I saw no need for a camera since I didn’t want photos of myself and I could buy postcards of the landscape. Seeing these posters in Palermo was the first time I wished I had a camera with me to record those classic posters.

Palermo is a beautiful city with a bay as beautiful as the celebrated Bay of Naples. We took a bus up to Monreale, which is on Mount Caputo, above Palermo, looking down on “La Concha d’oro” (the Golden Shell). While we were on the bus a man stood up (part of the way) and sang for the passengers and accepted gratuities at the end of his arias.

The Cathedral of Monreale is considered one of the best examples of extant Norman architecture in the world. Only in Ravenna have I seen a larger display of Byzantine mosaics, but that is to be expected since Ravenna is considered “the city of mosaics” and was a very important center of Byzantine culture in the 6th century.
After touring Monreale we returned to Palermo and the next day took a ship to Sardinia. It was a rough sea and Antonia was seasick most of the way. The next day we arrived in Calgari, Sardinia. It was raining all day in Calgari, so we didn’t do much sightseeing. The next day it started to rain in the morning again so I suggested we go somewhere else. Antonia asked me where else could we go and I said let’s pack up and go to the bus station because I had a good place in mind. She was surprised but went along with my plan. When we got in line at the bus station I had no idea where we would go, so I just listened to what other people said. The man in front of me asked for a ticket to Carloforte, so when my turn came I, unhesitatingly, asked for two tickets to Carloforte. Antonia asked me where was that and I just told her she would like it.

It was a long bus ride to the other side of the island. The bus arrived at the end of the line, right by the sea and there was a ferry waiting there for those going to Carloforte. So we ended up in a little fishing village on a little island off the big island of Sardinia.

We arrived in Carloforte on the Easter weekend. We found a small hotel which had only two other couples staying there. Since it was Good Friday there wasn’t much to do there, so we wandered around the town. The following day we sat in a café on the Piazza and watched all the young women parading around and the young men ogling them and, in some cases, talking to them. Sunday was more of the same. We left on Monday morning to catch the ferry and make the return trip to Catania. We boarded the ferry about 10 minutes before we were to leave. As we stood on deck and waited, a man came pedaling up very fast on a bicycle waving and yelling. As he got closer we saw that he was a man who worked at the hotel and was calling to us. He ran up to the ship and handed us Antonia’s purse, which she had left at the hotel. We gave him a good tip. Eventually I told Antonia that I didn’t know anything about Carloforte had and just made a decision on the spur of the moment.

In early May we decided to go to Agrigento for a weekend. Agrigento is famous for its Valley of the Temples. Its Doric temples go back to the 6th Century B.C. and are better preserved than many of the ancient temples in Greece. On the Friday we arrived we were able to get a cheap hotel but after spending Friday there we decided to get a hotel closer to the Valley of the Temples. It cost a bit more but it was a much nicer hotel with a great view. We toured the city on Friday and saw the temples on Saturday after breakfast. On Saturday morning I suggested to Antonia that we make use of our terrace and the great view we had by
having breakfast served on the terrace. She thought that might be too expensive but I talked her into it. I knew I had enough money because I usually kept an extra twenty dollars worth of lire in reserve for unforeseen events, but I didn’t tell Antonia about my reserve fund. I also knew that she was very careful with money and I was fairly certain that she had reserve money as well. On Sunday when we received our bill, it was more than we expected, so when I was counting my money Antonia asked me if we had enough. I said no because the breakfast was more than I thought it would be (about ten dollars more). She said, “What will happen if we don’t have enough?” I told her not to worry about it, we will probably just have to clean the kitchen or wash dishes or something. I didn’t tell her that I did have enough to pay the bill because I wanted to see if she did have extra cash. She was not too happy with me at that point. She reached into her purse and came up with the rest of the money we needed to pay the bill.

Despite our Agrigento hotel bill problem we still got along well together. At the end of the school year we agreed to meet my sister and her family in Rome. My sister, Rose, had given me the name of the hotel in Rome where they would be staying. When we got to Rome they weren’t at the hotel and so, after we registered I called Rose to see what happened. It turned out that one of the kids was not feeling well and had a fever (I think it was the baby, Jessica), so they had cancelled at the last minute and asked the hotel to give me the message (which the people at the hotel never mentioned). Antonia and I decided to make the most of our time in Rome, so we spent that first day checking out the usual tourist sites. As we were walking around Rome, I noticed a sign in the window of a travel agent which advertised cheap trips to Sorrento and Capri. We stopped a talked to the man in the agency and he set us up with a bus trip to Sorrento. The tour included an early morning bus trip along the Almalfi Coast, a hotel in Sorrento for two nights, side trips to Pompeii and the Isle of Capri (sometimes called “the Island of Dreams”). Total cost was unbelievable, but I’ll talk about that after I relate all the details.

The bus ride along the Amalfi Coast alone was worth the price of the whole trip. It was a fabulous ride along a long winding road hardly big enough for two cars, but a beautiful view of the Mediterranean. When ever the driver came to a blind spot in the road (which consisted of many curves) he would blow his horn and then go merrily along expecting the cars to stay out of his way when he turned to corner, and they always did. If it was a bus
coming from the other direction they always seemed to know who had sounded the horn first. A slight turn of the steering wheel would have put us over one of the cliff for a drop of five hundred feet (according to the driver, although it looked like a lot more to me). So, after overcoming our initial fear of what seemed to be reckless driver (but actually wasn’t) we delighted in the ride.

The hotel was very nice (probably four stars). The next day we went to Capri, a short boat ride away. Probably the most famous tourist attraction there was the Blue Grotto and, naturally, our boat went right into the Blue Grotto before depositing us at the little town on the island for a few hours of walking around and enjoying the sights.

The next day we went to Pompeii, which was another fascinating place. It was buried by a volcanic eruption of Mt Vesuvius in the first century A.D. The eruption was so sudden and violent that it, quite literally, stopped the town in its tracks. One of the amusing incidents in our tour of Pompeii was when the tour guide asked the men to come with him and asked to women to please wait for a few minutes. I didn’t know what was going on, but went along with the program. He took us to see the erotic frescoes of Pompeii which, at that time, women and children couldn’t see. The idea of women not be allowed to see those frescoes reminded me of Sicily, which, as I will show in my “Sicilian Tales” (see Appendix A for “Sicilian Tales” and Appendix B for “Italy as Living Theater”), was, in many ways, still living in the 19th century. That was in 1964; my understanding is that it was finally opened to women in the late sixties.

After Pompeii we returned to the hotel and back to Rome the next day. The total cost of the trip, including the excursions to Capri and Pompeii and two nights in the hotel cost us (in American money) fifty dollars each. I imagine today that same mini-vacation would cost at least five times that much.

From Rome we returned to Germany and went to Rose and Sid’s house in Rosenheim, where they had moved to after they left Salzburg. We stayed there for a couple of weeks.

We left Rosenheim to visit Antonia’s oldest sister and her family in Munich and Antonia’s other three sisters (there were no brothers) and her parents in Karlsruhe, Germany. When we arrived in Karlsruhe in the early afternoon. I, naturally, parked my car right in front of their apartment house (they had kept their house in Schnittenbach and were renting
this place in Karlsruhe). I was sitting on the couch in the living room (Antonia and her mother were in the kitchen) when her father came home. He had seen my VW out front with the California license plate and the big U.S.A. sticker (which I guess Rose got when she brought the car into the country). When he came in he saw me in the living room and asked Antonia who owned that American car our front. Her father always told her that Americans were “kulturlos”, i.e., without culture. She said, “It belongs to Dante” and pointed to me. He said, “Does he speak German?” Before Antonia could respond, I said, in German, “Of course I speak German.” He was so surprised he was temporarily speechless. We shook hands and from that day on we got along very well.

Since my in-laws live in Northern Bavaria it is just a short trip to Czechoslovakia, so we decided to drive to Prague, which is just a few hours drive. On our way to Prague we stopped for lunch in Pilsen. Czechoslovakia had meatless days once or twice a week and we happened to hit Pilsen on a meatless Tuesday, so we had to settle for a vegetable dish which was quite tasty. However, when I asked the waiter for one of those famous Pilsner beers he said they didn’t have any. I said that Pilsner beer was famous all over the world, how could they not have one. He said since it was because they export so much. I believe him because we had just seen some indications of scarcity there in Pilsen. For example, there were long lines of people waiting, not just to buy food, but even for things like toilet paper.

When we arrived in Prague we tried to get a hotel room, but every hotel said they did not have any more rooms available. We then went to Cedok, the Czech tourist agency (the only one) and we were told the same thing. I said that if there were no rooms anywhere in Prague we would sleep in our car parked next to Cedok. They said we couldn’t do that, it wasn’t allowed. I told them that we had no choice and would have to do that. They said to please wait a few minutes and they would check again. Miraculously, they came up with a dorm room at the University of Prague. It was a nice room in a beautiful setting.

The next morning, as we were getting ready to leave our dormitory, we looked outside and saw a few people gathered around our car, talking and taking photographs of our California plates and our big sticker with USA printed on it. When we came outside the observers and photographer had left. We then went into the city and parked at a café and went in for breakfast. We were sitting there when a man, who had heard us talking in German, came to our table and asked, in German, where we were from in Germany. Antonia
told him we were from Munich. He talked a while about how he loved Munich but unfortunately could no longer go there since he didn’t have a passport. After some more small talk, he whispered to us (actually most of the conversation had been whispered) if we could take a package from him to his cousin in Munich. He said she would really appreciate receiving this package because it was a family heirloom. Antonia and I hesitated for a minute and then told him we couldn’t do it because the customs people always check us since I had an American passport. He left shortly after that. We often wondered who that package was really going to and what was in it, or was it a set-up?

That night we went to a nightclub and met some East Germans from Berlin. Even in this nightclub people kept their voices very low, as if they were afraid that someone might hear them, except for these three young men from East Germany. They were Communist Party delegates to a youth conference. Two of them were originally from Hungary but living in Berlin and one was from East Germany. We got into a discussion with them. As we talked we heard the usual propaganda about the West and how those in the West are not really free, etc. I then asked them why did East Germany feel the need to put up a wall in Berlin (it had just been put up two or three years before). Their answer was that the wall was put up to protect the people from the propaganda in the West and that the people needed time to realize how good the new socialist state would be, that it was still in the process of building this new society, thus it was necessary to keep the people in until the socialist state was completed. How’s that for an argument?

When we returned to Rosenheim we decided to apply for other teaching positions. We received offers from Spain (Barcelona) and Finland (Helsinki). The offer in Spain was for both an English and a German teacher, but the one in Helsinki was only for a German teacher. So we considered both possibilities. If the pay had been the same we would have chosen Spain, but the pay in Finland was twice what it was in Spain. Also the one in Helsinki was a relatively short train ride away (I think it was about ten hours) from Leningrad, which we also wanted to visit. We figured that once we got to Helsinki I could probably get a teaching position there, so we would have an extra salary, since Antonia’s salary looked like it would be enough for two people.

Fortunately for us, Swedish was the second language in Finland and many signs were in both Finnish and Swedish. We were able to make out some words on signs, posters, etc.,
which were similar to German. Every day I went looking for a teaching position. I soon ran out of schools that taught English. I started to think of other possibilities and began asking at any place where I thought I could get by without knowing Finnish, e.g., restaurants where, if it was like the states, one wouldn’t need to know the language to work as a dishwasher or to sweep or clean up. But even with these reduced expectations, there was nothing for me. I then went to the American Embassy to see if they had any suggestions. Their only suggestion was that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for someone who didn’t know Finnish or Swedish, the two languages of Finland, to find any kind of job. I thanked them for their remarkable grasp of the obvious and went on my way.

I did go to Stockmanns, the biggest department store in Finland and talked to the manager who spoke English. He asked me if I spoke any other languages and I told him I could get by very well in English and, to a lesser extent, in German and Italian. He asked if I were able to speak Finnish, Swedish, or Russian, he would be able to help me but otherwise it was impossible. The director of the Berlitz School had offered to share her apartment with Antonia, but Antonia refused. She told me that she thought the woman liked only women. So Antonia decided to stay with the French teacher, even though it was a small space. While I was looking for a job, a position did open for an English teacher at the Berlitz school. Antonia had told the director that I was looking for a position as an English teacher, but she didn’t offer it to me. Instead she wrote to Scotland advertising for someone who would teach English in Helsinki. I guess she really didn’t care for men – or maybe she didn’t care for Americans, or maybe it was both. When Antonia and I talked about it and wondered why she would choose to advertise in Scotland when I was available, had experience with English as a second language, and needed a job. At first I thought it was because of her preference for women, which, in fact, may have been part (or all) of the reason but I think there may have been more to it than that. At that time, in Europe, many people believed (and some, perhaps, still do) that the English spoken by Americans was not as good (or as proper) as that spoken by someone from the U.K. In fact, it was during that time that some countries (especially Japan) realized that the English used by American businessmen was the English that should be learned, since the United States had the largest economy, by far, than any other country. However, the director of a small language school in Helsinki was not exactly on the cutting edge of changes in the larger linguistic world. Given these two possibilities,
i.e. her preference for women and her preference for “English” English, she decided to hire a woman who had a strong Scottish accent (which is at least as far from Oxford English as American English). Until the time the director hired a Scottish woman to teach English, we had thought that she would give me (or at least consider me for) a position when one came open.

Once I understood I would never get a job at the Berlitz School in Helsinki, a new direction for myself seemed natural. I decided to either go to Germany, where I could probably get a job teaching in Munich, or go back to the states. I didn’t tell Antonia about my decision right away because her birthday was coming up and I thought I would tell her after that. I suggested to her that we go to Turku for her birthday weekend. Turku is considered the oldest city in Finland (13th or 14th century) and is the site of Finland’s first university (17th century). She was all for the idea, so we went to Turku where we had a pleasant weekend. We did have a bit of a language problem, especially when we went to a restaurant that first night for dinner. Since Antonia had been taking Finnish lessons at the Berlitz School, I told her now was the time to put those lessons to use. What Finnish she knew was okay, she could say things like, “I speak Finnish”, “The wall is yellow” and similar phrases, none of which contained food in them. As a result of not being understood, we went to that famous international language, pointing to what you need. They gave us the opportunity to point to which dish on display we wanted and we were able to get a satisfactory meal.

When we returned to Helsinki I told Antonia that I would be leaving Helsinki, would go to Munich for a while and then probably go back to the states. I told her if she wanted to come with me she was welcome. She said she had a contract and couldn’t leave. I said she could just break the contract since the director hadn’t done her any favors she shouldn’t feel obligated. She didn’t seem very receptive to my idea so I just dropped it and told her I would say goodbye in the morning.

The next morning when she came to meet me at the ferry she had her luggage with her and said she decided to go with me. I was surprised because I knew she was very concerned about not breaking her contract with the Berlitz School. I asked her if she was sure she wanted to go with me and she said yes.
We visited Stockholm, Oslo, and Copenhagen and then returned to Antonia’s parents’ house in Germany. From there I booked passage on the S.S. United States leaving in December and passage for Antonia, leaving in January, since she would stay home for Christmas and then come to the states.

When Antonia arrived in the states we visited family and friends in Connecticut and New York and then went to Joplin, Missouri to visit Rose and Sid. Sid had bought a nightclub there and wanted me to help him get started in the business. We lived in Joplin for about two months and one day, without fanfare, we drove to Miami, Oklahoma and got married. It was a rainy day in Joplin, but we were happy with the wedding ceremony (a justice of the peace and two custodians as our witnesses), the lasagna dinner that Rose had made for us when we returned from Miami, and our drive to Kansas to celebrate.

In the years that followed people would ask us how we met and whether it was love at first sight and neither of us said yes. That’s because it wasn’t. In any case I think that the romantic notion of love at first sight is just that, a romantic notion. To answer that question about love at first sight one would have to define love and I think that would be as difficult to define as a sense of humor. In both cases most of us think we know what it is, but would be hard pressed to give a definition.

One interesting thing I have noticed over the years is that fanatics seem to have little or no sense of humor. Does this perhaps relate to a lack of love in their lives? Unlike lust, which rushes in quickly at first sight and takes over, physically and mentally, love moves slowly, with the gentleness, intimacy and complexity of a ballet dancer. Love is the tissue connecting two souls, the chalaza of the spirit.
CHAPTER 11

SUMMING UP

It is difficult sum up eighty-two years of living a full life in 150 pages, so all that can be done here, now that I have given about half the story, is to try to give a brief summation up to this point in my life. Even at this age, I think there are still many possibilities and I like to assume, as Tennyson did, that “some work of noble note may yet be done.”

We eventually returned to New York where we lived until 1968. Our daughter Serenella was born at Flowers of Fifth Avenue Hospital in Manhattan. When President Lyndon Johnson set up the National Teacher Corps I joined and taught in Harlem for two years. I also flew to Memphis the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated, as one of the representatives of the New York City Federation of Teachers, to participate in a Southern Christian Leadership march to honor Martin Luther King; marching while troops blocked the side streets and helicopters hovered over us.

From New York we moved to Santa Barbara where I taught (as a substitute) in the public schools and entered a PhD program (at University of California, Santa Barbara) in Philosophy. I finished all the course work, had an argument about my dissertation and left with an ABD, i.e., all but dissertation. That’s a story that may deserve a hearing, so perhaps I will include it as an appendix (see Appendix C). However, the dissertation paper was later published in the Philosophy Research Archives (making me feel that I won the argument with my committee, but, nevertheless, lost the PhD and my chance to teach philosophy).

We had a second child, a son, Anthony, born in Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara, three years after Serenella was born on the other side of the country.

After weighing various possibilities, I opted to continue teaching. I had enjoyed my teaching in Sicily, Harlem, and teaching small classes in philosophy at UCSB, as a T.A. However, positions teaching English were scarce in the Santa Barbara area, which was one of the reasons I had decided to go back for another graduate degree. While I was in this new program, George Troutt formed his own consulting business and asked me to join him. He said he already had a contract with a county in New Jersey. I said it sounded good and
agreed to do it, but would need a little time to work out the details of making such a big move. He said he would call me in a few days and we could talk about how to get it all started.

Unfortunately, the phone call I received about a week later was not from George but from his wife, Bobbye, telling me that George was in the hospital and would probably be going into surgery in a couple of days. I asked if I could call the hospital and talk to him. She said he could talk and gave me the phone number. I immediately called the hospital and talked to George. The doctors had said that he had a brain aneurysm and it would have to be operated on as soon as possible. He sounded optimistic about the operation and said he would talk to me after the operation about making me a partner in the consulting firm. The operation was scheduled for the next day and I told him I would call as soon as I found out when calls would be allowed. When we said goodbye I didn’t think (didn’t want to think) that it would be the last time I would talk to him. When I called Bobbye the next day to see how the operation went she said that George was in a coma since the operation and it didn’t look good at all. I told her I would take the first flight I could get to New York. It took me another full day to raise the money and book the flight. When I arrived in New York I was told that my best friend, George Troutt, had died just a few hours earlier.

After George’s funeral I returned to Santa Barbara. Since I had decided to return to teaching, I enrolled in another program and received another Masters degree in Education and a certificate as a Reading Specialist. We then moved to Ramona, California where I had a position teaching American Literature and Advanced Placement English in high school. I also taught Philosophy at Palomar College (part-time) for six years. I believe in life-long learning (which may have been my greatest enjoyment, outside of enjoying my family and friends) and did enroll in seminars at San Diego State University and eventually enrolled in a special program called MALA (Master of Arts in Liberal Arts) and received my third Masters degree. I have been taking college courses for about sixty years now.

In addition to my degrees, I also received, over the years, various NEH grants including: Hollins College, Roanoke, Virginia (on Freud and Nietzsche), New York University (for eight weeks in Italy, studying Dante), Oregon State University (The American Transcendentalists), and Boston University (Aristotle). I gladly accepted an invitation by Professor Charles Hamilton of San Diego State to join an NEH summer session
on culture of Ancient Greece. I also received an NEH special grant one summer to just stay home and write on my dissertation topic, Self-Deception.

This second half of my life has been filled not only with the pleasure I have had of watching my children grow into wonderful adults with beautiful children, but with the pleasure of studying, reading and writing (and not only having my paper accepted in a philosophy journal, but also having some poetry published). I’ve been blessed (if an agnostic can be properly blessed) with, in addition to my family, some very good friends.

There was the joy of travel and living in foreign countries. After my retirement my wife and I joined the Peace Corps and served in Ukraine. Our Peace Corps time is a whole separate story. We have also lived in Italy and Germany. I have been to every country in Western Europe and some of those in Eastern Europe. My wife and I have also been to much of Southeast Asia, China and Taiwan (where my daughter-in-law is from), South America, as well as Australia, New Zealand and the Middle East.

Among the happiness, of course, there were also the tears. Not just the tears over my mother’s death (she lived a full life until one hundred and one), but also the death of my oldest brother at sixty-one and my older sister at seventy one, and the tragic death of my youngest sister, killed by a teenage driver crossing over and crashing into her head-on, ending her life in her first year of retirement. The killing of Rose’s husband, Dave. The loss of my best friend, dying at age 38 of a brain aneurysm and the loss of my niece’s husband in the World Trade Center disaster. All of those account for some of the tears shed.

In general, because of the happiness, and despite the tears, it has been a good, interesting journey and I look forward to the rest of it. I can hear Yeats saying, “surely some revelation is at hand”, only I don’t think I will see the one he expected.

There, of course, is much more to say, but not here, not now.
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APPENDIX A

SICILIAN TALES – TWO PARTS OF SICILY –
1963-1964
PART I – BELLA SICILIA

Sicily is a fascinating place. As in Rome, ancient history is around every corner. There is Agrigento, with its Greek temples, dating back to the 7th century B.C., and in better condition than some of the ones I saw in Greece.

There is Syracuse where the cavernous Ear of Dionysus echoes through 2,400 years. The Ear of Dionysus was a huge space surrounded by large rock formations. This is where the Greek prisoners were put during the battle of 415 B.C. The 60 foot high wall allows sounds from below to travel to the top where the guards could hear what the prisoners were saying. It was Caravaggio who named it after the tyrant Dionysus, who would listen to the prisoners below. Walking through the Ear of Dionysus one imagines the sounds and sights of the victory of Syracuse over the mighty Athenian Navy during the Peloponnesian War, the destruction of the Athenian fleet of one hundred ships and the killing or capture of the small army that the fleet had brought to the battle. Although the war went on until 404 B.C., this devastating blow to the Athenians may have been the beginning of the end of the dominance of Athens in the ancient world.

In the 3rd century B.C., another famous native son of Syracuse, Archimedes, would build machines which would hold off the Roman army for three years.

The towns in Sicily still carry the legends and rituals of the many countries which invaded and left some of their culture carved in Sicilian legend, language, and stone.

The legends of Sicily are many. Among them is the legend of the stones of Cyclops. One can still see the three large boulders off the coast near Acitrezza, which, according to the legend, Cyclops threw at Ulysses after Ulysses escaped from the cave.

The Sicilian language includes traces of many languages, including Arabic, Greek, Latin, and Norman-French.

The beauty of Sicily’s landscape is legendary. The magic of Sicily is captured by Goethe in his lines: “the land where the lemon trees bloom…the gold oranges glow; a soft wind hovers from the sky…do you know it well? There, there, I would go…” (22). Sicily is beautiful, with its mountains, its beaches, the sea, and its remnants of an ancient world.
PART II – THE DARK SIDE

But there was also a dark side to Sicily; a side that includes the Mafia, which everyone knows about. Another element of that dark side which is not as well known is the plight of women in Sicily. This was the Sicily where women had little or nothing to say about the direction of their lives.

Fortunately, that Sicily is fading away, but it was very much in evidence when I lived there in 1963-1964. Sicily then was still very much in the 19th century in many ways. The best brief description of Sicily at that time was given to me by one of my Sicilian friends, Tony Barlesi. He said that in Sicily the problem was one of “ambiente chiuso” That translates as a “closed environment”, which is a fairly accurate description of Sicily at that time. Sicily today is very much in the twentieth century. I don’t know if the customs which I am about to describe are still being practiced, but I am sure they are less frequent, if not completely eliminated.

In the evening young couples could be seen walking in the park with their chaperone (usually an older female relative) a few feet behind them, keeping an eye on their every move. Women did not go out alone after dark. A young woman should not be seen, even in daytime, on the street with a male who was not a relative.

Any woman alone after dark was considered a foreigner or a prostitute, which, for most males, meant fair game; someone who, supposedly, would welcome their advances and/or a surreptitious pinch on the butt.

The Sicilian women were subject to all the strictures while the men had all the privileges. One of the major obligations of the men was to uphold the family honor, which, many times, became a very violent undertaking.

An incident which took place at the University of Catania while I was there is a typical example. This involved a young female student who was getting low grades in one of her classes and was pressured by her family to bring up her grade in that class. She did begin to improve and eventually received a top grade in that class. Her family was proud of her until one day her father discovered that she had been having an affair with the professor of that particular class. The father came to the university and asked for the professor. He was told that the professor was in the process of giving exams and they gave him the name of the building and the room number where he could find the professor. Another student who knew
the father and saw him on campus and realized that he was very angry, ran to tell his
daughter that her father was asking for her lover. Her father went into the room where a
committee of three was giving oral exams and asked for the professor by name. The
professor stood up and identified himself and those were his last words before the father shot
and killed him. As he left the building, amidst the chaos that followed the shooting, his
daughter and her friends came running up to her father and she said, “What have you done?”
The reports said he just looked at her and calmly said, “I just saved your honor.” A crime of
passion.

These “crimes of passion” as they were called, were usually treated very leniently.
Sometimes a sympathetic jury would refuse to convict. If a conviction did result, it usually
meant a light sentence. A murder conviction might mean three to seven years in prison.

Another case: One day, about noon, as I was teaching one of my classes, I heard a
series of shots coming from the direction of the courthouse, which was only a block or so
away. I discovered later that those shots were connected with a trial which was taking place
that morning. A man had filed for an annulment of his marriage (divorces were not allowed
at that time) on grounds of adultery, saying that his wife had slept with other men. Two
witnesses were called to the stand, both of whom were friends of the husband, and they
testified that they had slept with his wife. When the two witnesses were leaving the
courthouse the wife’s three brothers were waiting for them. One of the brothers called out
their names and when they turned to respond the brothers shot them several times. The
witnesses never lived to recant their testimony. This restored the family honor, since now
there was no one alive, except her legal husband, who could say he slept with their sister. The
insult to the family honor is erased if there is no one except her legal husband, who can say
he has slept with your sister, or any female member of the family.

There was another Sicilian tradition practiced when I was in Sicily, which,
fortunately, no longer exists, thanks to the courage of a nineteen-year-old Sicilian woman. It
is a practice which was anathema to most of us who had not grown up in that culture. The
tradition is called “fuitina” and was practiced while I was living in Sicily.

When a man wanted a young woman to marry him and she refused, he could, with the
help of family and friends, kidnap the woman and bring her to a secluded place, usually in
the mountains, rape her, and then bring her back home. The rapist would then tell the family
that he wanted to marry her and preserve her, and the family’s, honor. The father would tell
his daughter that she must marry the rapist to restore the family honor. The result was a
“matrimonio riparatore”, a “rehabilitating marriage.” This was the tradition of fuitina. There
were some cases of collusion between the young couples to force the parents to agree to the
marriage, but most cases were as the one I just described.

This tradition of fuitina ended a few years after I left Sicily. The ending was brought
about by a nineteen-year-old woman who was kidnapped and raped but refused to marry her
rapist, who was the son of a local Mafia don. Despite her family’s pleas and threats, she
remained adamant. Eventually, the family accepted the inevitable. The man was convicted of
rape and sentenced to prison for ten years. His accomplices in the kidnapping were sentenced
to lesser terms.

One more crime of passion which was a little different. This didn’t take place in
Catania but I read about it in the newspaper. This was a case in Messina, Sicily where a man
had a mistress for seven years. He kept promising her that he was going to get an annulment
and marry her. She began to doubt him but, nevertheless, invited him to have a picnic with
her. It was not clear if this was to be a picnic for an amiable parting of the ways or it was to
talk about their future together. As usual, she prepared a nice picnic of prosciutto, provolone,
rolls, olives, wine and even dessert. The dessert was his favorite, the famous Italian Baci
chocolates. So in springtime in the verdant hills above Messina, he ate all chocolates, and she
enjoyed watching him enjoying the chocolates. That was his last lunch, he died shortly after.
Somehow she had managed to give him poisoned chocolates in a Baci box, thus ending seven
years of deception.

**ADDITION TO SICILIAN TALES**

There is a story about how the Mafia was eliminated and resurrected after WWII.

Mussolini made a trip to Sicily in the 1930s. He supposedly gave orders that he didn’t
want any Mafia people sharing the stage with him on his visit. When the Mafia bosses heard
about Mussolini’s order they sent word out all over Sicily saying they didn’t want anyone
except the very old people and the village idiot to attend any of Mussolini’s speeches. When
Mussolini realized what was happening he returned to Rome and ordered his secret police
and the Army to wipe out the Mafia. Evidently they were very successful in killing or imprisoning most, if not all, of the Mafia leaders. The Mafia seemed to be finished in Sicily.

The rest of the story begins during the Second World War when the American army smuggled American soldiers of Sicilian ancestry into Sicily before the invasion. They were soldiers who grew up in America but spoke the local Sicilian dialects of their parents. They were scattered throughout Sicily, put on civilian clothes, and mingled with the local population which included, in many cases, their cousins or other relatives. When the American army captured a town in Sicily the commanding officer would call in the Sicilian American who had been working with the locals and asked him who could be trusted enough to take charge of the local government while the Army moved on. The commanding officer was, in many cases, told that a particular person was shown in prison records to have been an enemy of Mussolini, so he would be the person put in charge of the town government. This person may have been someone who may, or may not, have been known to the soldier and who may or may not have been a relative of that soldier. In any case, he was put in charge and the word spread throughout Sicily that the Mafia had strong connections to the American government and had been put in charge in many villages.

So the story was that Mussolini eradicated the Mafia and the U.S. government put them back in power. Is this apocryphal? Chi sa?
APPENDIX B

ITALY AS LIVING THEATER
I have often heard people speak of Italy as “one big art gallery” or “one big museum.” There is some truth to that. There are works of art everywhere, from the small villages to the big cities. A church in Venice houses a Titian, as well as a Donatello, a Veneziano, and a Bellini. Another church in Padua gives us a Giotto, and dozens of other churches all over Italy hold other surprising art works. The bi-ananale in Venice shows us modern art from all over the world; Ostia Antica spreads out fantastic mosaics from the 4th century A.D. But, as I have told people for years, we must also see Italy as living theater. The paintings, the sculpture, the opera are part of the picture. If we don’t latch onto the living theater, played out every day, we have missed much of the picture, and much of the joy of Italy. The Italians are both the actors and the audience in this theater.

The living theater I am talking of includes the small crowd that gathers around your car when you stop in a small village to ask directions, all anxious to give you their directions. In Italy they are so nice that they will give you directions even when they are not sure where you want to go.

Then there are the drivers caught in a traffic jam, horns blaring, and fingers extended in the appropriate gesture, with the occasional shout of “cornuto”, as you look in amazement (although I must say I haven’t seen much of this shouting in recent years).

In Rome one day a friend of mine from the states went for a ride with his cousin. When his cousin went through a red light my friend asked him if he realized he had just run a red light. His response: “In Rome a red light is just a suggestion.”

In Sicily there was always a long line for cigarettes. I was still smoking then and every morning I, and many others, would stop at a local shop, in downtown Catania, for cigarettes. We could buy any amount, from one or two cigarettes to a pack or more. Having lived in England and Germany, I was accustomed to waiting my turn to get waited on. In England if they have more than one person waiting they form a queue, but the Italian custom was quite different. Every morning that little shop was jammed with people stopping to buy something on their way to work. I would go into the shop and people would push past me to get to the counter before me. It would usually take me a while to slowly make my way to the counter, since I hadn’t yet developed the art of pushing people aside and shouting out my order. After a few days of this wild show I got tired of it and, impulsively, pointed my finger at the crowd and yelled, “Aspetto, uno momento! (wait a minute!).” I didn’t even say
“please”. Suddenly, like a frozen scene from a movie, everyone looked shocked and stopped immediately. I quietly asked the lady for my cigarettes. I saw the flicker of a smile on her face, perhaps she was thankful for the ever so brief respite from that every day madness. She handed me my cigarettes, I thanked her, paid her, and left the shop. As soon as I paid and turned to go everything came back to life again, the bodies were moving fast and the sound came on. Normalcy reigned. I left but later felt bad about it because I had broken the rules of the game. After that day I made another shop my daily stop and learned to play by the game.

The story of the cigarettes brings to mind another incident which, as it was happening to me, made me think of an old joke about an Italian immigrant to the U.S. This immigrant made enough money to send for his younger brother to come and join him. When his brother arrived the older one told him he had arranged for him to work in a local factory. The younger one was worried because he couldn’t speak English. The older brother told him not to worry, it was an easy job running a punch press. All he had to do was listen for the noon whistle when everyone went to lunch, go to the restaurant next door and ask for “apple pie and coffee.” So he did that for a few days and then asked him brother to give him words for something else to eat, so the brother told him to ask for “a ham sandwich.” The younger brother was very happy and the next day, upon hearing the factory whistle, he ran to the restaurant, sat at the counter, and asked the waitress for a ham sandwich. She immediately said, “white, rye, or wheat?” He looked at her, not knowing what she said, and finally responded with, “Apple pie and coffee.”

That little joke came to mind one day when I was on the ferry between Calabria and Sicily. I went to the coffee bar where everyone was, as usual, shouting out orders to the guy behind the counter. When he came to me I asked him for a cappuccino. He asked me again, I told him again and still he looked puzzled, so I said it again and, since he didn’t seem to understand me, I began to feel like that Italian immigrant in the joke, and finally yelled out “un espresso, per favore”, and he said, “Si, si” and immediately made me an espresso. I couldn’t figure out why he didn’t understand my order for cappuccino, since I was sure I said it right. Then I noticed how everyone was yelling at him and realized that this man behind the counter was practically deaf, which is why he only understood me when I yelled out my order for espresso.
When I lived in Catania I would sometimes eat in a restaurant near the school where I was teaching. One day I went there for lunch and ordered pasta a forno ((a baked, layered pasta dish). As I cut through the layers I found a dead insect in it. I called the waiter over, expecting (as I would in the states) him to be very apologetic and offer me my money back, or a different dish, etc. When I told him what I had found, he came close to the table, bent over, cast a scrutinizing eye at my pasta for a minute, stood up and loudly announce, as if I had made a great discovery, “Si, e’ vero, e’ vero” (“Yes, it’s true, it’s true”). He did offer me another dish, but I had suddenly lost my appetite.

Another time in Catania Antonia and I had been visiting some friends and when we left it was late and most places were closed, but I suggested we stop for something to eat. We finally found a little trattoria that was still open. We walked in and I looked at the food they had on display and asked the young man behind the counter what he would suggest. He said the fish was very good, but I said I really didn’t want fish, so I chose a special dish (called “farsumagru”) which is a Sicilian specialty. It is something like a meat loaf, with a hard boiled egg and some slices of lunchmeat at the center. As I began eating it and got to the center, I realized that some of the meat in the center, the mortedella, was bad. I told him that the meat was bad. By this time we had been speaking to him long enough in Italian for him to realize that we were not from there. He then informed me that the meat was called mortedella and sometimes foreigners had to get used to the taste. He was younger than I was (probably in his early to mid twenties and I was already in my early thirties), so I responded, “Don’t tell me about mortedella, I was eating it before you were born.” He was briefly taken aback, but quickly responded with, “I told you to have the fish.” It’s hard to get upset when you’re laughing.

Another time, crossing the Alps by train in the summer. The train was fine when we left Munich but late at night in the Alps it began to get quite cold. It was obvious that they hadn’t turned the heat on. When the conductor came by I told him that the heat was off. He said, of course, it’ summer, nobody puts the heat on in the summer.” How foolish of me to think that there was correlation between the temperature and the need for heat when everyone knows it is the month and not the temperature that determines the need for heat. Again I ran up against that impeccable Italian logic.
After five years in graduate school studying philosophy the department gurus set up a new policy. Under this new policy all M.A. and PhD work had to be finished in five years. Those of us who were already there five years or more were given maximum of one year to finish all our PhD work, and that I wasn’t ready for. Although I had finished all the course work for the PhD, I hadn’t even come up with a good idea for a dissertation. I was still in the process of going over seminar notes, doing research, etc., looking for a suitable topic for my dissertation. When news of this new policy came out I knew I had to get started on the dissertation, ready or not. I immediately threw together the first pages of a dissertation on Wittgenstein. Joe Ransdell was the head of my dissertation committee. I chose him because I knew him as a friend and knew he would be fair. Unfortunately, Joe hadn’t read enough of Wittgenstein and, consequently, was not much help in putting the dissertation together. He was a nice guy and did read my paper for internal problems, but didn’t know enough about Wittgenstein to challenge my interpretation of the role of images in his writings. However, a professor on the committee who knew Wittgenstein fairly well, said that there were problems with my interpretation and pointed out some mistakes and ultimately I was told that the dissertation, as written, was unacceptable. I think they were right. That attempt was hasty and poorly done.

In a case where the first attempt was found unacceptable we were given one more shot at a dissertation. If we passed that preliminary scrutiny we would be allowed to go on, finish the dissertation and then receive the PhD. If our second attempt failed we would still have an M.A. in Philosophy, but not the PhD.

Realizing that I would have to do something exceptional, I decided to develop an idea that had been floating around in my mind for quite a while. This idea would be a new theory of self-deception, which, quite understandably, would have to deal with, at a minimum, not only the philosophy of mind, but epistemology as well. I knew it would be risky because the only book in philosophy on self-deception, which had become the textbook on self-deception, had been written by a philosopher in our department at UCSB, Professor Herbert Fingarette.

My theory would challenge the accepted wisdom, viz., Fingarette’s book, as well as other theories of self-deception. I didn’t see the risk as too great, since I had been thinking about this and doing research on it for some time. The reason I hadn’t brought it up for my
first attempt at a dissertation because I thought it would take too long and, given the time line we had to finish it, my plan was to save it and get it published as a book at a later date. Now I didn’t have any choice except to depend on the objectivity of a new committee and hope they would avoid being swayed by the fact that, if accepted, this would mean the accuracy of Fingarette’s theory would have to be questioned.

It is interesting to note that as late as 1975 there was some work done in self-deception in philosophy, but practically nothing in psychology. I had originally thought that there would be a plethora of facts and views in psychology that I might be able to draw on, but I was sadly disappointed. Outside of Freud’s work, many years before, on repression, there was very little of consequence in psychology, which surprised me.

I worked on the s/d paper constantly, without asking for help from my dissertation committee, since I knew that outside of Fingarette’s view they would have little of value to offer. I used all my time for research and writing. It took me about eight months to finish.

Since Joe Ransdell and the first committee could not serve again, I had to choose a new group. Unfortunately, I didn’t do what many graduate students did, i.e., choose one professor, as a mentor, early in the program, cultivate a good working relationship (and/or friendship) and then have that person head your committee. I had known Joe Ransdell since we were undergraduates, so I thought that was all I needed, i.e., a sympathetic hearing, but didn’t really have a working relationship with him nor did I see him as a mentor, but as a good friend. As it turned out Joe didn’t know Wittgenstein as well as I did and he just expected that I could handle it myself. I agreed with him, but, unfortunately, it didn’t work out.

When my second paper was finished I confidently gave it to my dissertation committee. The new head of my dissertation committee was Professor Wienpahl. I chose him because I had been his TA (teaching assistant) and I thought he would be fair. What I didn’t think of was that he was Fingarette’s good friend and he and Fingarette were two of the three philosophy professors (along with Professor Grivetze) who had started the UCSB philosophy department many years before.

A short time later I had an appointment with my chairman, Professor Wienpahl. Instead of the praise I expected (for what I considered a completely new, and valid, theory of self deception), we had a discussion along these lines:
Prof Wienpahl: This is a well written paper, but it isn’t a theory of self deception.
Dante (shocked): Why not?
W: What supports your theory?
D: I just gave you 65 typewritten pages supporting my theory.
W: But this isn’t really about self-deception. It is more like some sort of self-delusion.

I could see this argument wasn’t going anywhere so proposed that we send the paper to three philosophy professors outside our department; I was hoping that would get it away from the politics of the department. I said that I could suggest one philosopher (I was thinking it would be Frank Cioffi, from the University of Kent in England, who had read and liked it. I had met him at a philosophy club meeting and he and I got along so well that I asked him to read my paper, which he did and later wrote to me about it). The committee could choose any two others to see what their opinion would be. If it came out favorably would they be willing to reconsider. His reply was, “That would be like telling other philosophy departments that we couldn’t judge it for ourselves. Obviously we can’t do that.”

D: Shall we go over it page by page?
W: There’s no need for that. This won’t work. But since you have an M.A. in Philosophy you can probably get a good position in a community college. I could even write you a recommendation, since you did a good job as my T.A.

D (ignoring the “get rid of my guilt” offer): In other words, you won’t reconsider.
W: There’s nothing to reconsider. The committee has made a decision on this paper.

I walked out of his office and seldom saw him, and never spoke to him again, but I was determined to get the paper published, if possible. I was, naturally, very disappointed with Wienpahl’s lack of objectivity, especially since, when he was a graduate student at UCLA, he had been a student of Bertram Russell. One of the things I always liked about Russell was that in one of his books he had a footnote, giving credit to one of his students for a major idea which he was writing about. That student naturally received quite a bit of attention after that and went on to become one of the major philosophers of the 20th century. His name – Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Unfortunately, later, when my paper was published in the Philosophy Research Archives, I didn’t get to send Prof. Wienpahl a copy of it. The editors had accepted with
only two slight corrections, i.e., at one point in the paper I had stated “he would hold” when it should have been “he would not hold”. The other was a misspelled word. Outside of those two minor corrections the paper was accepted exactly as I had written it.

The reason I didn’t have a chance to send my published article to Wienpahl was because he died about three months before that issue of *Philosophy Research Archives* came out. I probably should have sent it to the two other professors on the committee. I think that the fact that Wienpahl and Fingarette were among the first members of the philosophy department before it graduated to the big leagues, was probably enough to make junior professors hesitant. In any case, I should have sent the published paper to them, but I didn’t.

More notes on the doctoral dissertation incident:

After it was rejected by Wienpahl, I went to Professor Fingarette. I was still naïve enough to believe that maybe he would accept criticism of the theory that made him famous. I should have known better because, if my view were accepted, it would not be just a criticism of his theory but a total repudiation. However, even that, I felt, should not have stood in the way of a real philosopher. Of course, I was, foolishly, thinking of someone like Bertram Russell.

When I went to Fingarette’s office and asked him to read my paper and give me his comments, he happily agreed. I made an appointment for the following week. When I returned, a week later, he was very pleasant and told me he enjoyed reading my paper. He thought it was very interesting and made some good points. He went on to say, “Although your paper is interesting and well written, unfortunately, it is not about self deception. It might be more like self-delusion. I would have to agree with your committee on this.”

Of course he would.

The other note is about one of the philosophy journals and their response when I sent my paper to them. I had started with what was considered the best philosophy journal by many philosophers and then went to the second one, intending to go to as many as necessary to get it published. However, after the second rejection I took a different tack. One of the journals, of the two I had sent it to, responded by sending me the notes of the referee who had rejected my paper, naturally without the referee’s name. However, I knew immediately who the referee was because he used the exact words Professor Fingarette had used when he told me that the paper was not about self-deception. Then I understood how difficult it
would be to get this paper published. It would be natural for them to send it to the person who was suppose to be the leading authority on self-deception, viz., Professor Fingarette. This made me go in a different direction. I found a philosophy journal, *The Philosophy Research Archives*, which cataloged the papers sent in with a number which would identify the author but no name for the referee to see. As a result the journal published exceptional papers by well-known philosophers, as well as papers by unknown PhD students. I thought this would be my chance to get an unbiased reading, so I sent it in. In a short time I was informed that the paper was accepted (with the minor corrections I indicated above). With that kind of official sanction, I felt vindicated in my belief that it was an exceptional paper.

An additional note: Years later I took a sabbatical from my teaching position and, with the help of an NEH grant intended to make a book out of my dissertation paper. I went back to UCSB to talk to the chair of the department at that time and he said that if I completed the book he would call a meeting of the department to consider the possibility of giving me my PhD. Later, when I went to see one of the professors from my committee, Professor Hubert Swiyzer, his statement was, “We couldn’t do that, because that would be admitting we were wrong in our original judgment.” I found it hard to believe that this man who I had always considered reasonable, even though I sometimes disagreed with him, should be so closed to re-examining his former decision. Naturally, if it ever got to the point where the faculty would reconsider his remarks, as the only remaining member of my committee, would have been a major consideration for the faculty.

After losing the PhD battle we needed a break, so we visited our friend, Bob Salzman, who was a lawyer and the head of legal aid in six counties in upstate New York. This was the same Bob I taught with at JHS 43 in Harlem. I told him the whole story about the PhD debacle. Bob came up with a way to proceed. Here’s a brief excerpt of our conversation (according to my old notes):

Bob: You should sue the department
Dante: On what grounds?
B: Breach of contract.
D: But I had no contract.
B: There is what is called “an implied contract”.
D: Meaning?
B: Meaning that you fulfilled all the requirements for the PhD up to that point. You passed all the course work with a very high GPA. You then submitted a paper, which they refused without any strong argument and without submitting it to any other review, as you had suggested. That’s called an arbitrary and capricious decision. It’s clearly a breach of contract.

D: Well, in any case, I couldn’t afford the money for a lawsuit.

B: That’s the beauty of it. You wouldn’t have to put up any money. There are lawyers who would gladly do this pro bono because it involves the whole idea of questioning authority and the arbitrary decision they made. This type of case is very much on the front burner now and lawyers are anxious for the publicity which would cover a case of graduate student versus the university. I don’t think it would even go to trial. They would probably settle if they see you are serious about this. They might offer to reconsider or, another possibility, they would just accept that as your dissertation and give you the PhD.

This sounded like a solid plan to me. Later, when I talk to Antonia about the possibility of bringing, or threatening to bring, a lawsuit against the department and the university, she was very resistant to the idea. She said she didn’t want to get involved in a long legal battle like that. I explained that Bob had said the philosophy dept might not even go to court. She was adamant about not wanting to do it. After some discussion I agreed not to pursue it.