

## **Temptation**

Marcella was away for a day and a night, I forget the reason: possibly a business trip. She left instructions for taking care of the cat (“Feed cat love cat”, followed by details on where the cat food was. She had introduced the phrase earlier, and I immediately made it into a noun: “Do you want me to do a couple of feed-cat-love-cats while you’re gone?”), and for doing other minor chores. Jane Wilson, down the street, the mother of Jeff’s friend, John, taking pity on the temporary bachelor, invited me over for dinner. Throughout the conversation about kids and jobs and neighbors, I sensed that something was going on. Her eyes had that sparkle. I had always found her very attractive, with her short, glossy black hair, and her musical voice, and perky way of always seeming to be glad to see you and to be talking to you. After dinner, it being still light, the kids went out to play, and somehow she and I wound up in a bedroom or a den. Not a suggestive word had been said, the conversation bubbled on, but there we sat, and I couldn’t get it out of my head that she wouldn’t have been mightily offended if I had moved over next to her and given her a kiss. I thought to myself, “You’re getting balder by the month, there won’t be many more opportunities like this, she is sensible enough to know that it would only be this once, and she has no reason to tell Marcella.” The moments were passing, the unspoken offer was there. But I decided against it: first, because, for all my anger at not being able to meet Marcella’s needs, I had absolutely no reason to suspect she had ever cheated on me, and second because, no matter how exciting it was to think about having sex with Jane, I knew that the act itself would just be a repetition of the ordeal that sex with a woman had always been. So then I would have to bear not only the guilt of having tried to betray Marcella, but also the shame of having failed at it.

## **My Mother and Marcella**

It would be wrong to say that my mother always criticized Marcella, but she let it be known, by an expression probably not much different from what she would have shown if someone in the room had had gas, that Marcella was probably on the verge of doing Something Wrong as a mother. The fact that Marcella went back to work within 2½ years after having Jeffrey indicated she was all too obviously an American woman, hence likely to disregard the Proper Way of doing things.

Marcella made an attempt to act the dutiful daughter-in-law but it soon became obvious that nothing but the strictest adherence to Swiss values, plus obsequious adoration of my mother, would have done any good. A few veiled remarks from my mother about Marcella’s deficiencies as a mother were all it took to make Marcella hate her.

## **Pneumonia, Dr. McKenna, and Starting to Run Again**

Our family physician was Dr. William McKenna, who lived and had his office in one of the old residential districts in Palo Alto. In the early seventies — I can no longer find any record of the month — I began coughing and soon it became my only occupation, day and night. Marcella insisted I see Dr. McKenna. He examined me, may have given me some pills, told me to call if the cough persisted. It did, and got worse. He examined me again, and this time announced I had pneumonia. He ordered me to go directly to the hospital — Hoover Pavilion, the ancient, original building of Stanford Hospital. I was put in a ward with some half a dozen other patients. Late the first evening, a nurse whose previous employment almost certainly was at Buchenwald, came up to my bedside holding a large hypodermic. “Roll over,” she said. I asked her what she was about

to inject. No answer. But six hours later the cough was gone, leaving behind only a slight rash on my arms. Dr. McKenna later explained that she had given me penicillin. It was my first direct experience of Fleming's great discovery.

In the ward was an old man who was dying of emphysema. We learned that he had been one of the laborers who had helped build the Pavilion many years earlier. Now, his days were numbered as a result of a lifetime of cigarette smoking. Every few hours, his nurse (not the one who gave me the injection) would roll an oxygen tank up to his bed, put a breathing mask over his mouth, and for a few minutes let him get the oxygen that his lungs were no longer able to drag out of the air in the necessary quantities. When she came back, wound up the hose and prepared to roll the tank away, she would shake her finger at him and say "Now no cigarettes, Mr. — ." He would nod, and as soon as she was gone this skinny old man would hop out of bed, go into a closet, emerge with a pack and sneak onto an outside porch to have a few puffs.

Marcella never forgave Dr. McKenna for not diagnosing a disease as serious as pneumonia the first time. I told her that I didn't want to go to a doctor who had a reputation for never making a mistake, because that meant he was hiding something. So I continued to call him whenever I was ill. He was a GP in the old tradition, with a modest office in part of his house, and with his wife, Mary Ann, acting as receptionist. She was an attractive woman with glasses, long hair, and a reassuring manner. When she answered the phone, she always said, "Dohhhctor McKenna", the voice rising on the long first syllable in a way that said, "Now, no need to worry. We're always here." He was a barrel-chested man, hair neatly combed, always with a ready laugh. His father and his grandfather had been doctors. His son started as a dentist, but then became a dental surgeon.

Once I found that I had white spots in my mouth, and pain when I swallowed. He diagnosed it as Candida ("Candida albicans"), also known as "thrush". He took a swab from the roof of my mouth, dragged out this ancient microscope — black tube, brass adjustment knobs — put some of the swab on a slide, positioned it under the lens, turned the knobs, looked for a few seconds, then beckoned me with his finger, "Come here. Take a look." I saw only a fuzzy white background and some small black blotches, but he eagerly explained what I was looking at. (I have long since forgotten.) He welcomed all my questions.

He had what is generally called "an inquiring mind". He told me that one of his ideas of a good time was to go over to Stanford and listen to the PhD oral presentations. He read the science magazines, would comment on the latest remarkable discoveries, always with that bemused laugh that said, "Who would have thought of that? Remarkable."

At one point I discussed the question of a national health care plan with him. He said that one day a week he provided free medical care at a county hospital. I used to tell people that if every doctor in the country did that, we would probably not need a national plan.

When, in the eighties, news began to appear of the increased rates of cancer in people who had received X-ray treatment for acne in their teenage years. The cancer began appearing around 23 years after the treatments, which meant I was already overdue. I wrote to Dr. Frank in White Plains expressing my concern. He wrote back saying there was nothing to worry about and that he would be glad to send the record of my treatments to Dr. McKenna. I asked that he do so. When I next saw Dr. McKenna, he shook his head and said, "You had enough radiation to wipe out the city of Menlo Park." The only thing that saved my life, I strongly suspect, was that throughout the treatments I had insisted that I be covered with lead aprons from below my jaw down to my thighs.

Quite early on I told him of my lifelong fear of injections. He said that many of his patients

had the same fear, and as a result, when his children were young, he would let them first practice on oranges, then he taught them how to administer injections to each other.

His wife, in her tolerant way, told me that he couldn't bare to throw anything out, and so their yard was full of old cars and appliances which he always promised to start working on as soon as he retired.

At least once I commented on my anxieties about sex, and said words to the effect that making love to another person is for me too public an act. He said that he too has some shyness in this area, and so do many people, but that he and his wife had not yet reached the point of putting the dog out of the room when they made love.

One time I brought up the subject of death, and speculated on what might happen afterwards. He listened respectfully, then said he couldn't buy into any of those possibilities. He laughed and said, "When you're dead you sit alone in a dark hole forever. That's it."

I called him a couple of times after I moved to Berkeley, just to say hello and tell him how much I appreciated his care and his approach to medicine. In June of 2007, he answered the phone: "Talk to me!" He said he and his wife were sitting around the kitchen table. In the course of conversation, he revealed that he was then 85. I said hello to his wife, and then he and I talked for 20 minutes or so. He had not lost that bemused laugh. He said he had retired in '89, which seemed early for a physician in good health. But one of us seemed to be suffering a loss of memory, because he didn't remember the old cars in his yard or the doing charity work one day a week. He said his son had become a specialist in maxillary surgery, and was now a professor. A grandson was a physicist who sometimes sent him textbook problems he was having difficulty solving. Dr. McKenna couldn't solve them either, he said with a laugh. He revealed, with some embarrassment that his daughter had become a Mormon, but one compensation was that she was doing extensive research on the family genealogy.

Dr. McKenna died in December, 2017 at the age of 95.

After my pneumonia, Marcella asked me why I didn't return to running, I having told her during our early times together that I had run cross-country in high school and college. So I began running around Eaton school, across the street. I guess that once around the grounds was about half a mile. Eventually I managed twice around, and thought that quite an accomplishment. Then I went up to four times around and from there started to run in the streets. Marcella bought me a pair of running outfits: tank top and shorts, one red, the other green. There is a photo of me showing my new-found feeling of vitality and strength in my new outfit. Thereafter I was a runner for the next 25 years or so, once running a 5-minute 45-second mile around the Los Altos High School track with Jeffrey holding the stopwatch.

## **House and Yard Duties**

Around the mid-seventies, Marcella decided to convert the back yard into a vegetable garden. Knowing I had no interest in gardening, she did all the reading and planning for it. It was to be a raised garden, with vertical planks along each side of the paths. All she asked was that I prepare the soil for the topsoil which she ordered. Even that I hated, and the only way I could get through the job was imagining that with each thrust of the shovel into the soil, each swing of the pick, I was breaking the backbone of a corporate executive.

When the roof over the laundry room in the back of the house needed fixing, she made it clear that our only option, given the cost of hiring someone, was for me to put on a new roof. By sheer will power, I read the minimum I could learn enough to do a job that might last for a few years, then bought the shingles, put the ladder in place, and destroyed one Saturday in laboriously laying down new asphalt shingles over the old. Despite measuring, at several points, the distance up from the edge of the roof to determine where the next row of shingles should go, they didn't line up properly, and the cutting of the extra material on the sides of the roof was a botched job. So I hated myself before, during, and after the job.

Another time, it became necessary to get at the furnace. This could be done only by crawling several yards through the crawlspace under the house, then under a beam to the furnace itself. For some reason, possibly in order to bring a repair part, or tool, to the furnace, I decided I would have to dig away some of the earth underneath the beam. Now this, strangely enough, was not a labor of hatred, because, since the ground under the house was bone dry and very hard, the only way to dig it away was by chiseling the dirt loose using a hammer and chisel from my toolbox. But I was able to imagine myself as Michelangelo working on a statue, and thus get through the job with far less misery than usual.

## **Jeff A Hat**

For Jeff's fifth birthday, I decided that he should start wearing a hat. He thought it rather strange, didn't really want one, but went along with the idea. So we walked down to the shopping center on the corner of Los Altos Ave. and El Camino, and I bought him a cloth one, with a narrow brim, and some kind of dark plaid pattern. I could sense how uncomfortable he felt wearing it, but I felt proud as we walked back up Los Altos Avenue. My little man. Marcella gave me a quizzical look at my whim, and so we let the hat disappear into the oblivion that in a household devours all things that no one wants to pay attention to any more.

## **Dirty Jokes (Among Kids)**

On summer days, Jeff and Scott Connor would sit on the dining area floor, playing cards or trucks or something, but stopping sooner or later to tell dirty jokes. They would sit there, saying nothing for a while, barely able to contain their giggling, then one would say, "Pee-pee!" and they would both burst into laughter, rolling on the floor. Then, after they had stopped laughing, and another silence ensued, the other would say, "Pooh-pooh!" and off they'd go again, slapping the floor, laughing hysterically.

## **Childhood Accidents**

Jeff had two bad accidents as a child. The first occurred on a Saturday or Sunday — I say that because I was home at the time. There was a scream from across the street, then feet running up to the front door, and a wide-eyed kid barely able to speak but letting us know that something had happened to Jeff. The next thing I remember is that my son was being half carried to the front door, his mouth and chin covered with blood. Marcella ran out. I called the ambulance, feeling lightheaded and near to fainting. We followed the ambulance to El Camino Hospital. By this time we had learned what had happened. Jeff had been climbing one of the little trees over in

Eaton playground. A couple of other kids were standing around below. The question arose of whether he could jump down from where he was, and in the ensuing discussion, one kid said, "Jump, Jeff, I'll catch you!" and then, when he was in mid-air, he decided he wouldn't be able to catch him after all — "No, I don't think I can!" — so Jeff hit the wooden bench below the tree.

We waited in the emergency room. Then the nurse told him to go in. Marcella helped him and they had him lie down on the padded table. He was still crying. We continued to try to calm him, but I couldn't bare to look closely at his mouth. Marcella had said that several teeth were badly damaged. Then, suddenly, the white curtain on one side of the room was thrown open and a figure in a dark green gown and a face mask emerged. The boy let out a scream of terror. Both Marcella and I were appalled at the lack of sensitivity of the surgeon, for that is who it was. I thought, with tears in my eyes, *All the universe must wring its hands in anguish when a child suffers.*

The other accident occurred when Jeff slipped out of Webb McKinney's grasp in a little tug-of-war they were having, and Jeff fell on the coffee table. He cut himself across the bridge of his nose, as I recall. Webb's remorse and self-recrimination were all too obvious, and I felt how badly a super father like him must feel at a time like that.

### **Preface to the Jeffrey Journal**

I did my best to be a good father to my son, and this meant, above all, I felt, never revealing to him my deep depressions. When the time came for him to get a model railroad set, we bought a small layout for him, and, naturally, I was saddled with the job of assembling it, a task I hated. I lay on the floor, screwing tracks onto a piece of plywood, on the verge of losing my temper and throwing down the screwdriver and stomping out of the room, wanting nothing more than to be able to escape to a book. Somehow, I managed to maintain my self-control. Jeff was lying on his stomach, watching me intently. Eventually, the job was done, the plug was plugged into the wall, the little engineer's throttle was pushed forward, the locomotive began moving along the track. My son looked at me and said, "John, you're a genius." I told him I wasn't, but that it was nice of him to say that, and then I somehow found an excuse to leave the room, lest he see the tears in my eyes.

One day he announced that he preferred to be called "Jeff", not "Jeffrey", and so, after a few weeks of getting used to it, that is what we called him thereafter.

I was pleased to observe that, unlike his father, he was almost indifferent to losing things. He would look briefly for a lost toy car or truck, then forget about them. Of all the hopeful signs that he would not be like me, I considered this one of the most encouraging.

He had lost interest in *Sesame Street* by the time he started first grade, but I continued to be a loyal viewer, and still watch it occasionally now, some 25 years later. My favorite character was, and is, Grover, with Bert and Ernie a close second. I also loved Herbert Birdsfoot, the supercilious, bored, teacher whom Grover was always trying to please. H.B.: "And now we will learn about 'near' and 'far'. Grover is going to help us understand these two words." G. (running off into the distance, panting): "Look, Herbie! I'm going far!" H.B. (with a bored sigh, looking to the heavens): "We'll wait, Grover."

When Jeff was still watching the program, we would sing snatches of "Conjunction Junction" together:

“Conjunction Junction, what’s your function?  
Hooking up words and phrases and clauses...”

the song being sung, on the program, in a deep, resonant, black man’s voice. We would also sing

“George, George, George of the jungle  
As live as he can be!”

and sometimes recite a few lines of “I am the Lorax”.

There are days in this life that we must call immortal days, and one of them was the afternoon over at Eaton school that he and I flew a glider I had bought for him . I don’t even remember now if it was made of balsa wood or plastic, though I am quite sure that the hook under the fuselage on which you attached the rubber band for launching was plastic. If you aimed the plane at just the right angle when you launched it, it would perform the most magnificent loops and turns, and then had the remarkable characteristic of soaring a few inches above the grass for many yards, so that he and I could run after it and jump over it. For some reason he, and then I, decided this was an incredibly funny thing to do; he would laugh so hard he couldn’t stand, and would just sit down on the grass, his belly heaving. Then we would launch the glider again, watch it do its loops, and begin its long, leisurely flight over the grassblade-tops, seeming to look for a landing place, or just try to keep us amused.

Later on, I bought a red tetrahedron kite — all plastic — which I assembled and we sometimes flew together, though I think I was more intrigued by it than he was, not the least reason being that I felt it was the best kite I had ever flown. But I showed him how to fly it, how, when it started to sink, you had to run away from it, pulling on the string, and how, when it started to go into a series of downward loops, you had to move forward, easing up on the tension in the string, and how you could cut a slit in a piece of cardboard, hang the cardboard on the kite string, and let the wind blow it all the way up to the kite.

He pronounced virtually all words correctly, although he pronounced “hurts” as “orts” (“How is your hand?” “It orts.”), and he called the TV Guide, “the TV guy”. (His friend, John Wilson, down the street, used to pronounce the town where his divorced father lived, “Sam Anselmo” instead of “San Anselmo”.)

His standard expression for having to urinate was “I gotta take a whiz.”<sup>1</sup>, for having to do the other, it was “I gotta take a dump.”

I made every effort to resist using the script that I believe is genetically part of all parents — the words that just roll off a parent’s tongue: “How many times have I told you?”, “Why don’t you listen?”

His love of sports, especially baseball, showed itself at an early age. Long before he was five, he would stand in front of the TV, imitating the way the pitcher went through his windup, then pretending to throw the ball. It is no exaggeration to say that he practiced relentlessly. Later on, as will be described, he had me hit flies and grounders out to him at one of the local playing fields. Perhaps because of his strong interest in sports, he never had the slightest interest in guns and war toys (unlike his father when he was the same age). Saturday morning cartoons were violent in the normal American way, and Marcella and I may have had to invoke some censorship<sup>2</sup>, but I cannot

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1. In my childhood, the most common expression was, “I gotta take a leak.”

remember him ever asking me to buy a tank or artillery piece or jeep or other military toy when we went to the toy store (which was typically Toys “R” Us).

I tried to maintain a sense of humor with him and his friends, but sometimes I overdid it. For example, whenever I came upon him playing on the floor, either alone or with Scott, I would say, imitating, without the New York accent, a line from a movie: “So, uh, what’s the story?” At first he replied, “There is no story!” but after the tenth or twentieth repetition, he would hang his head and say, obviously resigned to the fact that he would be subjected to this question forever, “There is no story.”

He developed an amusing concept of what I did when I went to work. Marcella told me that one day, after I had left for work with my usual collection of books — math, literature, philosophy — he appeared at the back door with a pile of *his* books. “Where are you going?” she asked him. “To work,” he said. He thought that what his father did at work was read books. Which was true — both the ones that the company wanted him to read, and the ones *he* wanted to read.

Strangely enough, I can remember only two of the books of my son’s early childhood: Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax* and *Green Eggs and Ham*, both of which I read aloud to him many, many times as we sat together and he looked at the pictures.

“Sam I am  
I am Sam  
Sam I am  
That Sam-I-am!  
That Sam-I-am!  
I do not like that Sam-I-am!  
Do you like green eggs and ham?  
I do not like them, Sam-I-am...”

At first, it was clear he didn’t understand how I was able to repeat the same words every time we got to each page. I would see him looking over at the lines of print. I would often move my finger along underneath the words as I read them, so that he would get the idea that each of those black things on the page corresponded to what I was saying.

But it was Marcella who taught him how to read. In an email of September, 2012, she said:

“I taught Jeff to read phonetically, by sounding out words from a set of flashcards. You probably ‘played’ too. Words on one side, pictures on the other. Then ‘sounding out’ was transferred to his books, mostly Dr. Seuss. He was reading (the sounds, maybe not the whole understanding) in about 6 weeks. When I took him to register for Kindergarten, he was carrying one of the Oz books. Teacher (principal? clerk? who knows) signing up kids put him in first grade right on the spot.”

Marcella and I talked once or twice about the books of our own childhood. She was somewhat shocked to learn that I had never read any of the Winnie-the-Pooh books<sup>1</sup>. But apart from the Oz books, I don’t recall any commonality in our childhood reading.

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2. In 2009, Jeff told me that Marcella prohibited *Speed Racer* because it had too many car crashes.

Barb G., a fellow programmer during my first programming job<sup>1</sup>, told me many years later<sup>2</sup> about a few occasions when I brought Jeff to the office. I had forgotten these.

“I remember little Jeffrey visiting Rick Pering’s section at HP [Pering was our boss] and loving to wind up the paper tapes with the electric tape winder. Since programs were on paper tapes then, it was a job that needed doing often and I remember we let him do it as long as he was interested. He always was. If the winder spun too quickly, the paper tape could tangle at your feet and even rip rather than wind up on the spinning reel. We taught Jeffrey to go slowly and to be careful but mostly I remember watching and letting him try on his own, waiting to leap forward to untangle tape, cheering him when he wound up a tape without mishap. We wanted him to have a good experience. Clearly he wasn't going to be doing any coding. The tape winder he could do. He was having fun and he was doing something we actually had to do, too. He was helping us.”

### **The Jeffrey Journal**

When he was five years old, I decided to keep a journal of his progress in learning numbers: I was curious as to what he found difficult and what he found easy. Soon, however, I found myself recording other goings on in his life as part of my own journal at the time. Entries concerning him were not made on a regular basis, as the reader will see. Most of this material would certainly have been forgotten had I not written it down at the time. I have deliberately retained the mixed-tense style of the original, even though (or, rather, *because*) I am well aware of the teeth-gnashing anguish this will cause in the English majors among my readers. The following is a slightly edited version of the original text.

In the first entry he was in first grade at Portola Elementary School.

#### **Sunday, Dec. 9, 1973**

Two or three days ago, he suddenly seizes on the Number-Blox Exercise Book, which came with the blocks we gave him some months ago. These blocks are also used in his class, they having to form numbers using the one cubes, ten-sticks, 100-squares, then write them down. If I understand him correctly, they created number tapes from 1 to over 1000 this way [I do not recall what these tapes were]. Now, evidently, as soon as they complete the current work (don't know what it is exactly) they can go on to learn addition, subtraction, etc. So he goes through the book, doing all the exercises. He can add numbers like 23 and 56, similarly for subtraction. (That is, using the number blocks.) The following surprised me:

(1) He very quickly saw that, e.g.,  $11 + 35$  was the same as  $35 + 11$ . No problem at all there.

(2) At one point he had to add, e.g., 5 and 8. The next problem was to add 5 and 9. He very quickly saw that it was the old sum plus 1.

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1. I tried to make up for this shameful gap in my reading by reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* in Latin when I was 75 (*Winnie Ille Pu*, translated by Alexander Lenard, E. P. Dutton, 1960; I had the English version on hand, of course).

1. See “First Programming Job” in third file of this volume.

2. In an email of Jan. 11, 2010



(3) A problem of subtracting, e.g.,  $17 - 6$ : he tried to count 17 on his fingers (for these simpler problems he prefers using fingers rather than the unit blocks). I said, “No, 17 is too big to count on fingers.” In a moment he said, “No, it isn’t. Hold up your hands.” I did. Then he proceeded to count 10 on his fingers and then to 17 on mine.

(4) Another time, the problem was subtraction:  $15 - 7$ . He made a start at doing it on his fingers, then laughed. I told him to use the number blocks. He didn’t want to. Then, laughing, he began, “14, 1; 13, 2; 12, 3;” (he paused because he had to remember that 11 came next). He continued this way down to 9, where he lost it. But this seemed truly remarkable for a boy still three months short of six.

(5) He proceeds through the book thoroughly; does not like to leave a page or an exercise on a page unfinished, even though the exercises are easy for him. He is very insistent, the past two evenings: wanted to work on the problems even with “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and some other kid show on TV.

Over the past several months, he shows a great interest in games. He wants to play Monopoly every night. (They evidently play sometimes at Mrs. Frances’ [child-care woman’s] house during the day.) Likewise, at Nanna’s [affectionate name for Marcella’s mother] over Thanksgiving he spent practically the whole time playing cards or trying to get people to play cards with him. He is good at Concentration<sup>1</sup>. Liked Poker best. Also can play Go-Fish, War, Solitaire (Nanna taught him this last). During the past year I taught him Chess. We occasionally play together, although he needs coaching on the rules now and then. Once or twice I notice him using a strategy: he picks out one of my men, then works his bishop or whatever around to capture him. (I am usually bored or thinking about something else when playing this game.)

In the past, when I wanted to give him a little mental exercise, I usually put the question like this: “Oh yeah? I bet you don’t even know how to spell ‘cat’.” The whole thing takes place in play mode. I then mumbled in my beard, “No, he won’t know how to spell ‘cat’, no, I’m sure of that, yep, nope, he can’t spell it.” Since it was a word I knew he could spell, he would pipe back with the answer. From there I would proceed to harder words, until he didn’t want to do it any more. But telling him, “Jeffrey, spell ‘cat’” would have gone over like a lead balloon. I don’t think he has ever responded to that approach. I use the same approach now with numbers. But when he becomes bored, or doesn’t want to play, we stop.

This Can-You-Do-It? approach seems to be healthy. I want to put the whole enterprise in exactly the same mode as climbing trees, running, building a tower of blocks. I do not even bring up the subject of numbers: no “Numbers are important!”, “Numbers are good!” I try to make it purely a private challenge for him. Then praise when he is successful, help when he is not.

### **Sunday, Dec. 16, 1973**

During the past couple of months, he tries to understand what “infinity” means. I don’t know

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1. Explained under the entry for the date Sept. 28, 1974.

where he picked up the term. Possibly from me. After he had passed 1000 on his number tapes, I remember him saying, “That’s almost infinity, huh.” (He usually pronounces it, “affinity”.) I replied, “No, infinity is much, much bigger.” And then it begins: “Bigger than 5000?” “Yes.” “Not bigger than a hundred million hundred!” “Yes, even bigger than that.” (Both he and his friend John Wilson know the trick of expressing large numbers: either they create something like “a hundred thousand million billion thousand”, or else they coin a term, e.g., “a jillion”, “a dillion”.)

At other times: “Is infinity bigger than from here to Hawaii?” “Yes.” “Is it bigger than from here to Pluto?” (While we were looking at pictures of the planets in *Conquest of Space*<sup>1</sup> after he saw a movie on the planets in school, I had told him that Pluto was the most distant planet.) “Yes, even bigger than that.”

While we were driving to San Francisco for a Christmas party my mother was taking him to, I did something I think was rather stupid: I began trying to explain to him that infinity wasn’t a place, it just meant going farther and farther. So Pluto couldn’t be infinity because we could go farther than Pluto, and the same with Hawaii. And infinity couldn’t be a particular number because you can always count one number higher. He tried to handle that, but kept coming back to trying to pin down the place it was. The expression “farther than infinity” means for him a very great distance.

His interest in bugs: today, after playing Frisbee at the playground, he says, “Let’s go look for bugs.” He tries to find his magnifying glass, can’t, tells me to get a couple of shovels, we will dig in the flower beds. He gets two paper cups from Marcella to keep the catch in. We begin turning over the soil near the tomato plants, find half a dozen worms. I tell him they’re good for the soil, we don’t want them to die. He puts them in a cup, with some dirt, after a while puts them back in the dirt. He calls them bugs, I correct him, tell him they’re not really bugs. He says they’re really snakes, then. I say no, they’re just worms. Snakes are not the same although they *look* the same (a phrase I have used many times with him, I’m afraid).

### **Tuesday, Dec. 18, 1973**

Last night, playing Monopoly, his piece in one corner of the board, he rolls a ten and immediately moves his piece to the opposite corner. “How’d you know that?” I ask. He proceeds to show me by counting ten spaces between each corner. But I suspect he picked this up from the older boys he plays with at Mrs. Frances’. Later, again with his piece on a corner, he rolls an eight, looks at the row of spaces, then moves directly to the eighth spot. I can’t remember what he said as to how he did it — whether it was by “counting in my brain” as he sometimes puts it, or by mentally going out 10 and subtracting two.

### **Wednesday, Dec. 19, 1973**

When he was about three (am not sure of exact time) we began watching *Sesame Street*

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1. I still had the book from my teenage years — *The Conquest of Space*, with text by Willy Ley and illustrations by Chesley Bonestell (Viking Press, N.Y., first edition 1949).

together. I first became interested in the show when I learned the Muppets were in it. Eventually we would go on walks and read the letters and numbers on license plates, manhole covers. I remember one time he spotted a dribble of white paint on the street. “M!” he said. Then, walking around behind it, “Now it’s W!” I did a lot of random pointing out of letters, e.g. in newspapers: “What letter is that, Jeffrey?” Then, with *Sesame Street* help, we moved on to the sounds of the letters, I showing him via kids’ books Marcella and I read to him, how, e.g., “cat” was spelled: a completely phonetic approach. One of the first words he learned was “bird”, which he initially spelled “brid”. Also “walk”: I would say, “Let’s go for a ‘w’, ‘a’, ‘l’, ‘k’, Jeffrey.” Then “milk”, “cat”, “dog”. We occasionally fooled around, and still do, spelling some words while we are speaking, as above with “walk”. For example, “Want to fly our ‘k’, ‘i’, ‘t’, ‘e’, Jeffrey?” Because he was antsy in restaurants, I introduced him to the game of Hangman, then soon regretted it, since for several months it was what Monopoly is now. He: “Wanna play Hangman?” I don’t remember when this was: age four or early age five, probably. Initially, he would run to Marcella after each guess of mine and whisper, e.g., “Is ‘u’ in ‘lantern’?” (This must have been around October, 1972, then, since I remember numerous Halloween words.)

Among his favorite early books (we read him these, with an occasional pause to ask him to try a word): *The Cat in the Hat* (probably the one he liked most); *Green Eggs and Ham*; later *Hop on Pop*, which was one of the first he eventually learned to read. Initially “reading” was memorizing, i.e., after hearing it read to him so often, he began to “tell the picture” in words closer and closer to those on the page. Then after that we would coordinate pronouncing with looking at the word. Marcella bought at garage sales a couple of decks of flash cards with pictures on them, and we practiced him on these, which he seemed to like. At one point I offered him a McDonald’s hamburger and Coke if he could do the entire first deck with 10 or less mistakes — a total of 60 cards, I believe. He did this around age four I think. Then I offered him the same to do the whole bunch, some 250 cards (I seem to remember there being about 230 different words, counting, e.g., “walk” and “walked” as different), and with work he was able to do that. On Marcella’s and Webb’s advice, I stopped offering these prizes.

On[c]e he got started reading, his interest in *Sesame Street* faded, although for a while he watched *Electric Company*<sup>1</sup>. We haven’t watched it for nine months or more. In the past year or so, Marcella has taken over full effort on reading. Her technique, she said, was to wait until just around bedtime, when he will do anything to stay up, and then they read a book together, sharing pages, i.e., he reading one, then she reading one. He now looks forward to this, I think. Marcella is also the prime mover in Nature matters, having helped him to plant his vegetable garden this year — radishes, lettuce, and tomatoes. His two or three plants have provided us with tomatoes for some three months. He also planted pumpkins along the side of the house, but they didn’t grow. She also has taken him many times to the beach to explore tide pools, etc. Also camping. In this entire area, I contributed nothing.<sup>2</sup>

In past six months or so, his extreme interest in money: he constantly asks for pennies, nickels, etc. At first he had a piggy bank, but somehow it got broken, then he spent most of his money

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1. [added later] and occasionally *Mr. Rogers*, whom he always referred to simply as “Rogers”.

2. Added in 2007: Marcella liked to take trips, I didn’t. I remember one trip to Ft. Bragg, a town on the coast a couple of hours or so north of San Francisco. I had decided to take up photography and, since it was an art form, I knew I had to be original. I thought I could get a particularly dramatic and original shot if, while standing on the edge of a cliff with the ocean far below, I took a picture of my feet. Marcella laughed at the ridiculousness of it, and soon after I gave up photography.

on a toy, I think. He now carries around with him the few coins he gathers, but he usually loses them. I and Marcella occasionally use his interest in money to teach him counting, adding, subtracting. He sometimes hangs a sign on his bedroom door, "25 cents to come in". Sometimes he comes to me with coins in his hand, "I got 40 cents, see?"

**Saturday, Jan. 25, 1974**

His interest in finding dinosaur bones: he and John Wilson dig a hole in the flower bed in the back. He often asks me, "Not all the dinosaur bones have been found, have they?" I say no. "There could still be some underground, hunh." He also has been asking me, during the past couple of months, to build a tree house and a raft, and, often, "to make an invention". I put him off, telling him we have no trees which could hold a tree house and we have nowhere nearby to float a raft. But in reality I simply don't want to get involved with one of these big projects.

**Thursday, Feb. 7, 1974**

Marcella provides the smart solution: we set up an old aluminum step ladder in back of the garage so he can climb up to the roof. He is allowed to have a hideout there, with chair, wall, etc. This seems to satisfy him.

**Sunday, Feb. 10, 1974**

Several weeks ago we were at our neighbors', the Connors', for dinner. Dan C. tells us about how, one day, having heard Jeffrey use the word "weird" all the time, he asked him what it meant. This took place in their dining room, where they have a painting of surf crashing on a beach at night in a storm. Jeffrey, looking at this, replied, "Well, it means there's a lake, and a tremendous storm, but the lake is calm."

**Monday, Feb. 18, 1974**

Past few weeks, he and John play Batman and Superman: he is Superman, John Batman, Scott when he is occasionally with them is Aquaman. They tie towels around their necks for capes.

**Tuesday, Apr. 9, 1974**

Past few months he is very interested in caves, buried treasure, digging for fossils, hideouts. He, John, and Scott have a special pine tree at Eagan School which they get behind or under. He asks me several times to build a treehouse, I say no, too dangerous, etc. At the beach, he finds a hole in the rocks, climbs inside, wants me to come in with him. Always, "This can be our hideout!"

Also has started climbing trees, I feeling good about this since it reminds me of my own boyhood. I encourage him. Marcella is a little reluctant, tries to dissuade him. But I tell him about

the cherry tree in the woods behind our house, which I always climbed. He goes up the pine trees at school, climbs the pepper tree in our back yard and from it goes onto the neighbor's shed. He has a definite *need* to climb trees, asks if he can climb the ones on the side of the house even though there are no branches for some seven feet or so above the ground. He wants me to boost him up. When I am cutting branches off the trees in the back yard, he climbs around on the trees as I work.

**Friday, Apr. 12, 1974**

He springs the following riddle on me:

He: "I bet I can make you say 'how'."

I: "How?"

Also:

"Bang, bang, you're dead,  
Fifty bullets in the head.  
Brush your teeth and go to bed."

He says he tried it the other way:

"Bang, bang, you're dead.  
Brush your teeth and go to bed.  
Fifty bullets in the head."

but it didn't sound good.

Because I have been going biking with him, and bought him a kickstand after weeks of putting it off, and a safety flag for the back of the bike, he has been very affectionate toward me.

Nicknames — our first nickname for him, when he was a baby, was "Small". Then, during our trip to Mexico around 1970, when he was about two (we left him in care of Marcella's mother), I began calling him "Heffey", then "El Hefe" (the chief). Then, sometimes, "lumpkin-dumpkin". When he started talking, he called us "John" and "Marcella" because that is what he heard us call each other. We liked it, so he has continued, using "Mom" and "Dad" only in cases like "My Mom said so." Then, for a while, I called him "Bif Boffer", an outcome of our wrestling on the floor. Also "Boff Biffer". But later he asked not to be called that. Sometimes, beginning around age three-four, when we were teaching him to read, I would address him as "J", "e", "f", "F". Also, beginning at this time, I began calling him by the name I most frequently use now, namely, "Sweet Jeffrey." During the past couple of years, I often call him "J. Franklin" (as, likewise, "J. Wilson" for his friend down the street). Also starting about this time, "Jeffrey-Peffrey". This is the situation now.

No question but that Marcella does 90% of the unpleasant kind of disciplining, e.g., saying no,

he can't go over to Scotty's house, no, he can't ride his bike right now, etc. She resents the fact that most of the time I can appear to be the good guy. But all in all, I think that, as of today, I haven't done him any grave damage. But his seeing my rages will probably have a lasting effect, as will my not doing the unpleasant disciplining. On the other hand, when we are out together biking or playing ball, I have no trouble guiding him, telling him when it's time to go home, etc. I do not do enough with him, as when he asks if we can make an "invention" or build something and I shuffle off mumbling "Maybe later, not now." But he seems a happy child, has no trouble playing with other kids, seems to enjoy school and does well at it, is on the whole obedient. (Several weeks ago, one Saturday afternoon, Sue C. and I were looking for Scott and Jeffrey. We walked and rode up and down the streets, calling. I biked over to Portola School, didn't find him. I called John's house. I was very angry at him, ready to give him a spanking, when Sue found them over at Egan School collecting pine cones under a tree. I told him how angry I was, but that since he had stayed on Egan School grounds, he had been a good boy. He should just listen a little better in the future.) He phones when he and Scott are going somewhere with Scott's mother.

One reason for this good behavior, I think, is the fact that Marcella has none of that "Don't-do-" such-and-such "-but-know-you-will-just-to-spite-me" in her voice when she tells him something. I can remember reading somewhere about the mother who tells her child not to fall and hurt himself, full well expecting, perhaps even wanting, him to, so she can then say, "See? I knew it would happen." Marcella is completely free of that tone of desperation which really says to the child, "See what a burden you are to me?"

### **Sunday, Apr. 14, 1974**

He and I were sitting on the front porch, he shooting rubber bands, when he mentions shooting an apple off someone's head. I tell him the William Tell legend and, not sure he has understood, I say, "And so William Tell was very worried that maybe he would miss the apple and hurt his son." He understands. Then he pokes his finger into his forehead, in imitation of the arrow going in, laughs and says, "But then William Tell could eat the apple!"

Tonight on Wild Kingdom they show a bull elk with a large rack of antlers. He says, "Hey! He could carry pencils and books and coats and hats there!"

If he has nothing to do, neither Scott nor John being around, and I come downstairs, my mind a million miles away, he pops out of his room and says, "So, John, what do you want to do?" The scene is repeated at all times of the day: I bike home from work, am padlocking my bike, going into the house looking forward to doing some reading, and there he is: "Hi, John, so what do you want to do?"

### **Sunday, Apr. 28, 1974**

Over the past few months, he has been set on becoming a policeman when he grows up. Marcella said he told her that when he is 25 and John Wilson is 26, as soon as they graduate from police school, they are going to meet by the stop sign on the corner and go up to the woods in a police car and live in a cave. Do their police work up there. Have shelves made of branches,

build a fire, etc. The appeal of police work is apparently a result of watching *Adam-12*.

His favorite TV shows: *Beat the Clock*, *Adam-12*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *Disney World*, *Lassie*, *Gomer Pyle*, *Emergency!*, plus all cartoon shows, in particular, *Kimba*. Earlier he liked *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family*.

### **Sunday, May 5, 1974**

A goodbye I remember from my teenage years, and which he uses occasionally: "See you later, alligator." Response: "After a while, crocodile."

While teaching him his first words, we began spelling out "bye" when leaving. He still does this now, often as "b", "y", e.g., "Well, 'b', 'y', 'b', 'y'." He tells me that they play kickball during P.E. (physical education) and that he sometimes pitches. He says the kicker can ask for a variety of pitches, including Fast Rollies, Slow Rollies, and Slow Baby Bouncies.

He and John came home one day singing this song:

"Jingle bells, Batman smells,  
Robin laid an egg.  
The Batmobile  
Lost a wheel,  
And the Joker got away."

Today he pops out with this little verse:

"Teacher, teacher, I declare,  
I see someone's underwear.  
Maybe it's red,  
Maybe it's white,  
Maybe it's filled with dynamite!"

Several days ago I tell him one we used when trying to rattle the opposing pitcher at Mohawk Day Camp:

"Up the river, down the lake,  
The pitcher's got a belly-ache."

Taught him how to multiply by 10 today, i.e., by simply adding the zero at the end.

He completed the Number-Blox book several days ago. We worked on it in the mornings before school. Toward the end, he was more anxious to *have finished* the book, than really enjoying the problems. I tried to keep him using blocks for adding, but one or two kids in school have brought in versions of regular addition with carries. It is a sort of underground knowledge, as

Miss Bergen said she didn't want them to start that yet. But the kids persist, usually getting it wrong, sometimes adding from left to right, forgetting about carries. A couple of months ago I gave up trying to force him to use blocks and simply taught him the rules, which he picked up quickly for two-number addition. Subtraction was a little harder (borrowing, etc.). So we completed the book that way. The beginnings of multiplication we did using rows of blocks, e.g., four rows of three each, per the text.

Because they are working on simple equations in class now, e.g.,  $4 + 4 = 6 + ?$ , I have begun asking him some of these even when there is no paper and pencil around. He is able to do some of them in his head that way.

### **Sunday, May 14, 1974**

“John, John, leprechaun,  
Went to school with nothing on.”

“‘X’, ‘Y’, ‘Z’,  
Examine your zipper.”  
(What they say when someone's fly is open.)

### **Monday, May 20, 1974**

He talks frequently now of running away. The first time was a couple of months ago, when he took flashlight and knapsack and a couple of toy cars over to some bushes at Egan School. Last night, following punishment of no bike for a week because he went to Safeway in Los Altos on his bike with John, he begins gathering paper plates, forks, puts them in his knapsack, says he is leaving forever. Neither Marcella nor I make much of this, we both merely let it stand. Sometimes I ask what he is going to do for food, clothes, whether he will still go to school, etc.

Then somehow we were informed that he and Scott were seen in Safeway, buying food and talking about running away. Marcella got him to return home. I wasn't angry with him. I asked him where they were planning to go. He said at first it was to Canada, but then they changed their minds to Philadelphia, because Scott said there were lots of forests there.

### **Monday, May 27, 1974**

Last week after dinner the subject of school work and, in particular, numbers, comes up. He says, “I know how much 16 and 16 is: 32.” I ask how he figured that out, he gives some explanation which I don't understand. Then he says he can add 45 and 45. The answer is 90. Again I ask him how he figured it out, this time he says that 40 and 40 is 80, and 5 and 5 is 10, so 80 and 10 is 90. I now try a few other doubling sums, e.g., 27 and 27, 33 and 33, 48 and 48, he gets them all, doing them in his head, no pencil and paper. Then I try, e.g., 27 and 35, 58 and 65, etc. He only misses one. I ask him where he learned to add that way, he says he “planned it up” (figured it out himself).



**Friday, June 7, 1974**

Past week-and-a-half or so, he and John play with two small teddy bears which he has had on his shelf for years. They talk to them, carry them around in a box. This is the first time he has shown any interest in any of the stuffed animals he has, though he usually sleeps with his red dog or black teddy bear.

**Saturday, June 15, 1974**

Last night he says, "I wish I had a combination [lock] on my belly button. Then I'd open it, put in dirt and some seeds and pretty soon a leaf would come out. Then a tree would grow out of my ears and mouth and nose."

**Sunday, July 28, 1974**

While he and Marcella were in Hawaii, he wrote his first letter to me:

"From Jeff I hope your haveing a nice time at home. Well if you are Marcella got me a raft and a snorkle and a net. I hope your dinners are good. I might bring you some shells for you to keep. It is nice here at Hawaii. Call me when you get this letter."

During the trip (I think: it might have been immediately before or after) he writes a poem (breaks put in by me):

"dern dern do whats that flower you have on could it be a painted rose have days gone wrong that's why I'm here to say come with me to the meneion [mansion] in the sky" (I found out later from Webb that this is essentially a transcription of lyrics to a current popular song.)

Several weeks ago on Sunday morning, he cooks two fried eggs for the first time, does it with virtually no help. That evening, giving him his bath, I compliment him on how well he washes his face, tell him he can do almost everything now. He: "Yup, I can blow my nose, I can wipe my bottom, and I can fry two eggs."

One night at dinner, just fooling around, we begin asking each other the meaning of words. Marcella or I ask him the meaning of "ridiculous". He (looking out the window and seeing a bird): "A bird flies down on a rock. He crawls under the rock and goes to sleep: ridiculous!"

At his summer school (Keys School in Palo Alto) they read C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He talks enthusiastically about it, so Marcella buys him a copy. He is genuinely taken by the story, reads it aloud to us, sometimes sits on the kitchen floor or in the living room reading it silently. When he reads aloud, he reads slowly, word by word, and I begin to doubt that he is understanding it. But at the end of a passage he often pops his head up and explains what something means, what has happened, and I am amazed at how much he seems to

understand.

**Friday, Aug. 2, 1974**

Several weeks ago, he and John recite this poem while they play on the swing.

“[boy’s name] and [girl’s name] sitting in a tree,  
‘k’, ‘i’, ‘s’, ‘s’, ‘i’, ‘n’, ‘g’,  
First comes love, then comes marriage,  
Then comes [third person’s name] in a baby carriage.”

They sing it with any two names in the first line, e.g., “John” and “Jeff”.

He has now completely memorized the order of the planets, can rattle them off without hesitation: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. He says that two other kids in his first grade class can do it also.

He comes home from Keys School today with a crayon drawing he has made of the sun and the planets, a rocket, a loop around the sun, the moon, a strange-looking object which turns out to be a chimney, the loop finally leading to the word “Boom!” He tells me in passing that Pluto is the smallest planet. Then, explaining the drawing, he recites:

“First around the sun  
Then around the moon  
Then around the chimney pot  
In the afternoon.  
Boom!”

**Sunday, Aug. 18, 1974**

When he was about four, we went on a family hike with the Sierra Club. When the little group of families was ready to start, we all lined up. He ran to the front of the line and shouted, “I want to be leader!” Other kids were also running around. Marcella and I said no, we have to let so-and-so be the leader because he knows the trail. He ran back to the other end of the line and said, “OK, I’ll be the leader behind!”

He can now (1) wink one eye, (2) whistle through his teeth, and (3) snap his fingers.

Thursday, as we are about to go out to eat, he begins spelling: “L”, “e”, “t”, “s”, “g”, “o”, then does a few words backwards: “e”, “r”, “A” “u”, “o”, “y”, “y”, “d”, “a”, “e”, “r”. I am impressed by this so today I show him how he can send secret messages to John that no one else can read. I write out a table of replacements for him: “A” = “Z”, “B” = “Y”, etc. But at present this is a little over his head, I think.

When writing, he still often spells “Let’s” as “Its”: “Its go fishing.”

His two main interests now: to build a clubhouse and to go fishing, particularly the latter. This a.m., after being outside a while, he comes in and says he is trying to build a clubhouse but can’t: things won’t stay up. I again don’t want to get roped into a big project, but the chips are down, he is really asking his father for help, no ifs, ands, or buts. So I hunt around for some scraps of wood, lean a pole against a big board, buy some nails, and put together a flimsy something that he accepts as a clubhouse, he hammering in a few nails. He brings out his little chair, puts it inside, sits there for a few seconds, then goes on to play with Tommy, doesn’t give his new house a second thought.

Keys School has them work pages of addition and subtraction problems (old-time drill). He brings home some of his workbooks. I compliment him on what he has done. Among the books is one he hasn’t completed, so I try to drum up enthusiasm for finishing it. But after he has done three-fourths of a page, I can see he’s bored with it, is only doing it for my sake. I have still not been able to figure out a way to make number problems “inherently interesting” for him as, e.g., playing Hangman and Monopoly, spelling words back and forth to each other, are “inherently interesting” for him.

Swimming at Lost Altos High pool last Sunday, both of us with masks, we throw a nickel in the shallow end so he can dive for it. Am amazed at how well he swims underwater: no fear, he goes right to the bottom. I have fins, swim the length of the pool underwater, come up at the far side, he is ready and willing to follow me. He does pure dog paddling on the surface, though he can do a few strokes of the crawl as a result of swimming lessons he took last year. But he is far more interested in swimming underwater.

#### **Thursday, Sept. 20, 1974**

Until he was four, we referred to his penis as his “peenie”. For example, in the bath, “Now we have to wash the peenie and the bottom.” We have used “bottom” for buttocks and anus throughout his life, and still do. Then, one day — I’m sure it was before he was five — remembering the recommendation in a book, I told him that actually the proper name for it was “penis”: that that was its real name and since he was becoming a big boy, we should call it by that. At first he thought it was funny — “pee-niss” — but then gradually began using the word.

Unlike me, he has almost no self-consciousness about going to the bathroom. When he was just getting old enough to start going by himself, Marcella reminded me that I was perhaps best fitted to teach him how to take a leak in the toilet. So we would stand, he on the side, I in the front, and make cross streams. “Look, an airplane!” he used to say. And we still do this occasionally, when we both need to go at the same time. It is a cordial event. He has no hesitation about leaving the door open when he is taking a crap, talks to us throughout. Whereas I, since elementary school days, have always hated toilets which were open to passersby. There were no doors on the stalls at Valhalla School. I heard from the other kids that the reason was so that the teachers could catch anyone who was playing with himself. Even now, when asleep at night and needing to take a crap, I have dreams in which I am hunting through huge bathrooms for a stall

that is not in full sight of everyone, or where there is no one in adjacent stalls. But he thinks nothing of talking and laughing with John and Scott, they running in and out while he is sitting there.

A few months ago, growing tired of having to clean him, I began to teach him to do it himself. Prior to that, when he was done, he used to sing out, "*Wipe —*" (long pause) "*my bottom!*" He can now do a fairly good job himself.

Only once or twice have I heard him and John joking about these matters. As [Dr.] Spock says, the whole joke consists of saying, or better, alluding to, the names. They look at each other and say, e.g., "...and then he fell on his —" and both laugh uproariously, rolling on the floor. Then the other will make a gesture, or say a word containing the syllable "pee" and again they are convulsed with laughter.

Several weeks ago, noticing the birthmark under my right nipple, he said, "Hey! You've got three boobs!" I said that, actually, when we're talking about men, we don't use the term "boobs", that I didn't know what the correct word was, but that we refer to the whole area on men as "the chest", whereas "boobs" usually refer to those things on a lady's chest, which we normally call "breasts". He listened very quietly to all this, then said, "I've only got two boobs."

He was curious about the birthmark. I told him that I remember our family doctor (Dr. Gartner, Valhalla) telling my mother and me that the birthmark proved I was descended from the apes. (To this day, I don't know how he arrived at this idea.) "It's like another boob," Jeffrey said.

Another time, I having just gotten out of the shower and come into the kitchen, he standing there, half undressed, he said, after a while, "Your boobs are bigger than mine." I told him, yes, but that's only because he hasn't grown up yet.

He gets a spanking last night from Marcella for not coming in after repeated calls for dinner. She continues to do all of this kind of disciplining.

### **Friday, Sept. 28, 1974**

He is learning subtraction with borrowing. Says it's hard. I tell him that I know it's hard, but that each time he tries to do it, it gets easier; remember how hard he used to think carrying was? I try to get him to work a few problems. He makes mistakes, becomes cranky. I let it go at that.

His truly amazing ability at the game of Concentration. (Spread cards face down on the table, players alternate turning over two cards at a time; if both cards are the same, player keeps them; if not, cards are returned to face down position and next player goes. Requires memorizing where cards previously turned over are.) I played him last week at Nanna's. He beat me three straight games almost without effort. I become angry with myself: I cannot memorize a picture of the table with the card faces showing so instead memorize a sequence of eye motions and names, e.g., (moving head and staring at each card's back): "King, Jack, 2, 6, King, Jack, 2, 6," over and over. Am able to raise my score somewhat but it takes real effort. Meanwhile, he never seems to forget where a single card is, even after several intervening turns. At home we continue playing with a 36-card Donald Duck deck Marcella bought him. I use abbreviations for the pictures, e.g., "T" for Donald Duck on a train, "L" for Donald Duck with an old lady, etc. Am able to beat him pretty consistently now.

John Wilson, who lived two doors down the street, and whom he has played with since age three or so, moved to Chicago on the 23rd, his mother having remarried. During the last few days before his leaving, Jeffrey is clearly troubled: he puts down Chicago, then wishes we could go there this winter.

His continuing need to build forts. He and Scott today go over behind the school, bring apples, a jar of milk, crackers. He tells me excitedly about this fort they have made, wants me to see it later. As we come into the yard after I have picked him up from school, he says, "John, I know you'll say no to this but I'm going to ask: can we build a tree house?" "No." "See, I knew you'd say no." Mrs. Frances, his day-care person, has a tree in front of their house which Mr. Frances trimmed the branches on. He put a couple of boards in the top branches for the kids to climb on.

If building a fort is his first choice of what to do at any given time, a close second is watching TV. He watches several hours a day on weekends, sometimes with Scott: cartoons, *The Little Rascals* films, *The Three Stooges*, and others. In the evening he loves to watch quiz- and give-away-shows. Once in a while, I try to drum up interest in reading, take him to the library to get new books. He goes along to please me, but reading as of now is no fun for him. I tried to get him to like reading the comics in the Sunday paper with me, but the occasional unfamiliar words put him off. Given no forts and no TV, his next choice would be drawing. He tries to draw Snoopy and Woodstock from the Peanuts strip. Also rockets, space ships, the Star Ship Enterprise from *Star Trek*, which he occasionally watches.

### **Wednesday, Oct. 23, 1974**

A week or so ago, he asks me to help him make an invention: a spoon tied to a string, the string tied to the knob of the door to his room, the spoon suspended over a pail so that when the door is closed it falls into the pail

He said, one evening in the bath, "We could be a farm! 'Nostril' rhymes with 'mole': 'nos-trole', 'mole'. And our toes could be piggies."

In school they are on the subject of borrowing, which he still finds very difficult. But he can do subtraction using number blocks. Asked me to teach him multiplying, so, using the number blocks, I lay out, e.g., 2 rows of 2 blocks each, and say, "That's 2 times 2. How many blocks are there?" He counts, I say, "2 times 2 is four." Then I do, e.g., 3 times 2, 4 times 3, etc. I introduce him to the idea that 4 times 3 is the same as 3 times 4, show him a few other examples of this property of multiplication. Later try to teach him, on paper, to do subtraction with borrowing, but the difference between handling the 1 and the carry in addition still confuses him. Soon I show him how we can simply add up a column of figures to do multiplying, e.g., 7 times 3 means 7 3's to be added. He sees that, adds a few. Once, after a problem involving 3's, I then give him, e.g., 9 times 4. He wants to make the units answer be 1 more than the units answer was for the 3's problem, because 4 is one more than 3. I tell him this was a good idea, but unfortunately not quite right in this case.

## *Working at Hewlett-Packard*

He sprains his thumb playing kickball Monday, is taken to the hospital by Marcella for an X-ray. Nothing serious.

They play chess and checkers during games period in school, an idea Mrs. Thompson got from the math adviser. Sometimes he and I play, he every once in a while developing what he calls “my plan” to get one of my men. But his favorite game without question is Monopoly, which I too loved as a kid. I liked its epic nature. Now have grown sick and tired of it, but I play with him on condition he be banker, for more math practice. After several times shuffling through the deeds to find a given one, he gets the idea of laying out the deeds in separate piles by color. His only difficulty is in making change. I try to teach him the normal cashier way of counting up from the price, but this is not making sense to him so far. We played for five or six hours last weekend.

I don’t know where he got this idea, but several times when, having gotten up at 6:30 a.m. to prepare for class, I am shaving, he gets a spoon from the kitchen, comes into the bathroom, puts soap on his face, and pretends to shave with the spoon. Almost every morning, as soon as I’m downstairs, he pops out of his room, says he wakes up at 6 but stays quiet until one of us gets up. He has always been an early riser.

### **Saturday, Nov. 2, 1974**

Last Sunday he falls out of a tree at the school, lands on a bench, knocks both front teeth out, cuts his lip badly.

He recites this poem to me:

“Chinese” (pulling corners of eyes up)  
“Japanese” (pulling corners of eyes down)  
“Dirty knees” (holding both knees)  
“Look at these!” (pulling sweater out at nipples)

### **Monday, Nov. 18, 1974**

Says George in his class made up this poem:

“Tarzan, monkey-man,  
Swinging on a rubber band,  
Along came Superman,  
Kicked him in the garbage can.”

### **Saturday, Nov. 23, 1974**

Annual parent-teacher consultation last Tuesday: Marcella and I are scheduled to see his teacher, Mrs. Thompson<sup>1</sup>. She says there is nothing she can say about his academic progress: he's in an advanced reading group, stays in from recess many times to do his math, with the result that now she has started him on multiplication and division, even sending him off to learn parts of it on his own. (I am not clear exactly what this last means: presumably doing exercises after minimum explanation.) She says he is at third and fourth grade level, her only worry being how hard he pushes himself; she's afraid he's going to burst one of these days — simply stop and say that's it, I can't do any more. Says he is deeply sensitive to being reprimanded, even when he knows he deserves it, as when, after completing his work, he goes around and talks to others. She says she can see how desperately he tries to control himself, but it becomes too much and soon he's talking to this one and that one. Plays very hard at soccer and other recess games. She is bothered by how she sometimes sees him sitting alone, looking sad. She sometimes asks him what's bothering him but he is reluctant to reveal his feelings. (This evidently happened both before and after our separation.) He described my leaving to the class during Show and Tell, almost crying initially. But then some others in the class said their parents were separated too, and Mrs. Thompson gave a whole hour over to discussing it, saying sometimes parents just reach a point where they don't want to live together even though they still like each other — just as some kids probably wouldn't want to live in the same house day after day even though they might play on the same team together.

I of course feel good about the report, but a little uneasy about what a fanatical student I seem to have made of him already at the age of six. I tell Mrs. Thompson that I am going to do what's possible to get him to tell me, and maybe others, when things are bothering him<sup>2</sup>. When I next saw him (Wednesday), he immediately began badgering me to help him buy a bike. He said he had saved \$1 for one already but couldn't wait to get a paper route. (Initially, he thought you could simply go down the street and knock on people's doors and collect money like the paper boys do. [One of the neighbors called our house to ask if ours was the little boy who was going down the street, knocking on doors or ringing the door bell, and when someone opened, saying, "I'm here to collect." I should also report another case of Jeff's visiting the neighbors, this time their mailboxes, in the company of Scott. They had apparently become curious about what exactly is in the envelopes in mailboxes, and happened to open an envelope that contained cancelled checks. Seeing the dollar signs on the checks, they assumed that the checks were real money and took them. Once again, a neighbor called, and we made him return the checks and apologize.] Later in the evening I took him aside and after preliminaries said, "Now, Jeffrey, even though I'm not living at home with you and Mom, I want you to know that if at any time you don't feel too good, like maybe you feel sad about something, that you can talk to me about it: you can just call me on the phone." He nodded, then said, after a few moments, "Well, there is something I've been feeling sad about." "What?" "I need a new bike."

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1. Mrs. Thompson was a remarkably advanced, and dedicated, teacher. The kids had workbooks, she briefed them on what they had to do, then they did the problems and brought them to her. If any were wrong, she had them do them over till they were right. Each kid worked at his or her own speed. Jeff would often tell me how far he was in his math workbook. Once, during a conversation, she said that the school had so little money that she had been buying twenty-year-old science books for the students out of her own pocket. That June, when Jeff was no longer her student, I sent her a check to cover some of these costs.

My feeling was that despite such disgraceful shortages of money, the public schools he attended did a good job.

2. I asked her to let us know if Jeff showed any sign of trouble as a result of our divorce. She said she saw no sign.

[Added later] Marcella and I kept an eye out for signs of psychological damage that the divorce might be causing to Jeff. I went to his third-grade teacher and told her to let me know if she noticed anything. As far as I could tell in my visiting times with him, he treated the whole thing as rather strange, but nothing more — the kind of thing adults are likely to do. One evening, as we were walking to my car outside the apartment, he took my hand and after a few steps looked up at me and said, “Why don’t you come back and stay with us?” I was on the verge of tears. I replied with something like, “I’m afraid I can’t, Jeffrey. But we can always see each other and do things. Just like today.”

Today I buy two recorders and an instruction book. We come to my place and begin learning the instrument together. It is difficult for him, his fingers never quite covering all the holes properly, but he is a determined student, keeps trying. Finally he can do two or three notes. Then we take a break, go to my office, where he plays on the computer console. When we come back, he picks up the recorder and wants to start practicing again. With less difficulty than before, he plays the three notes.

### **Sunday, Dec. 22, 1974**

Took him to my mother’s today for two-days’ stay. As usual, he wants me to pass other cars on the road. I tell him I don’t want to go faster because it uses more gas. Later, he says that he bets that the small car passing us is going at exactly the same speed as we are, only he can pass us because he is smaller. I tell him, no, speed is how fast you’re going, regardless of how big the car is. But since the other car is smaller, it is probably using less gas to go the same speed. This explanation goes nowhere: he remains convinced that the other car’s speedometer is also at 50, just as ours is, although the other car is passing us.

His new interest in collecting stamps: he asks me to save envelopes I receive. He is still pre-occupied with money: when we go to my mother’s, he wants to walk along the curb at the bus stop to see if there is any change in the gutter. He always tells me how much money he has when he sees me: \$1.45, \$1.50. He often mentions that he has \$136 in the bank (from gifts from relatives).

When I call him on the phone, the conversation often goes as follows:

I: “Hi, Jeffrey! This is John!”

He: “Oh, hi!”

I: “How are you doing?”

He: “Fine.”

I: “Did you win your soccer game today?”

He: “We almost won, but we lost.” (He gives the score.)

I: “Oh, that’s too bad. Did they have all the big kids again?”

He: “Yeah.”

I: “Why don’t you guys get the big kids once in a while?”

He says his team doesn’t mind too much because this way it’s a bigger accomplishment when they do win.



I: "How's school?"

He: "Fine. I got a gold star today and I'm almost finished with my second math book."

I: "Oh, boy! That's great, Jeffrey! Boy, I'm glad to hear that. I bet you're multiplying and dividing and everything, aren't you?"

He: "Yes." Pause. Then he says, "Do you have anything else to say?" He seems to know that many of my questions are routine, so sooner or later, more often sooner, he tires of the game and ends it with that question.

Sometimes the conversation is very short:

I: "Hi, Jeffrey! This is Dad!"

He: "Oh, hi!"

I: "How are you doing?"

He: "Fine."

I: "Are you having lots of fun?"

He: "Yes."

I: "Oh, that's good. Boy, I'm glad to hear you're having fun."

He (after pause): "Do you have anything else to say?"

### **Monday, Jan. 13, 1975**

He calls me on the phone. "Hi, John!"

"Oh, hi, Jeffrey! How are you doing?"

"Fine. Guess what's in my mouth."

"What's in your mouth: let me see ..." (I thinking chewing gum, a lollypop, a button) "OK. I give up. What?"

"A missing tooth."

During the past few days, he works on another invention, this a board with a lawn chair and his old bicycle basket on it. Basket and chair are held in place by clusters of nails. At the front of the board is another cluster of nails, a string tied from this to his bike. He says, showing it to me, "This (the chair) is where you sit, and this (the basket) is where you put your lunch." Very important for him is the fact that a balloon is tied to the back of the chair, to help stop the whole thing. (We had been to Sky Sailing Airport in Fremont and saw the dragsters from the airport. I told him why they had parachutes.) He is anxious to find wheels to put under the board: the first question he asks me when I see him or talk to him on the phone is: "When can we get wheels for my invention?" He wants to wash cars to get money for the wheels.

At Foothill Planetarium yesterday, we look at little mechanical models of the solar system. I am surprised at how quickly he understands the gearing mechanism that makes the moon rotate around the earth. He says, e.g., "This wheel turns this wheel, then this wheel makes this go around."

I am now trying to find a shop where I can take him a couple of days a week to work on his inventions. Last week, he tells me about a car which can be made into an airplane. Yesterday, Marcella and I talking, he bubbling over, keeps trying to tell us how he would use parts of an old sailplane we saw at the airport. Finally, I tell him he's interrupting, that he has to wait till Marcella and I finish. This hurts him deeply; he cries, goes into the bathroom, but won't take his bath until we promise he can finish telling us about his idea.

Most of these ideas, I believe, come from the fantastic variety of machines, planes, rockets, cars, gadgets, on Saturday and Sunday cartoon shows. But there is no denying his excitement about making mechanical things.

When walking on sidewalks:

“Step on a crack,  
Break your mother’s back.”

**Wednesday, Jan. 15, 1975**

We receive the following letter:

“Dear Parents:

“Your child, Jeff Franklin, is in the superior range of scholastic ability as measured on an individually administered test by the district’s psychologists. This identification of your child as a mentally gifted minor enables the school district to receive additional funds from the state to provide an enrichment program which is qualitatively different from the regular instructional program.

“This enrichment program will vary somewhat, depending on the age, school and the number of similarly identified children at his school. The program emphasis is different at each grade level. The district provides a literature program in Grades One through Eight, and general enrichment activities in a number of areas within the curriculum.

“The fourth grade program is focused on the “Exploratorium Unit” which is designed to identify your child’s interests in a number of fields and to foster his research and study skills. The “Exploratorium Unit” is also designed to give children an opportunity to work independently and to investigate their interests in mathematics, poetry, creative writing, science and many other fields. During the latter part of the fourth year, the children will be introduced to a formal individualized mathematics and science program which will be continued in the fifth and sixth grades.

“The seventh grade program will focus on mathematics and literature as the program expands other subjects will be introduced. [sic]

“This year the program is supported by four full-time resource teachers to assist the classroom teacher, along with consultants in math, science, and art.

“Please feel free to contact the principal of your school if you have questions relating to this enrichment program.

“If you wish your child to participate in this program, please return the attached form so indicating. Your prompt consideration in returning this form to your child’s classroom teacher will be appreciated.

“Sincerely,

“L. N. Andrews, Principal”

[I was feeling good about this until someone told me that the district gets extra money for each gifted student it identifies, so naturally the district is motivated to call just about any student “gifted”. On this subject, I should not fail to mention Kuhn Ho, a Korean kid in Jeff’s second through fourth grade classes, who was so smart that he was rumored to read dictionaries for fun.]

### **Sunday, Feb. 8, 1975**

Marcella told me a week ago that one afternoon she found him on the patio, pumping the bicycle pump, though it wasn’t connected to a tire. She asked him what he was doing. He said he was pumping more air into the air. She then asked him where the air was coming from that he was pumping out, and with the help of a few more questions, led him to understand that he might not be accomplishing what he had in mind.

Last week he tells me a riddle which he says he made up after three adults came to his class and showed paintings, one of which had pigs in it.

Question: “When is a pig gold?”

Answer: “When it’s been painted.”

When we are riding around in the car, he frequently says “I know how...” such-and-such works, such-and-such is made. Usually he has a home-made explanation. He told me yesterday that the headlights in a car don’t work by electricity because there is no cord running from the car.

I show him, in a restaurant, a trick I remembered from my boyhood: get a drinking straw, open the paper wrapper at the top, then push the wrapper all the way down, compressing it like an accordion. Then slip it off the end, lay it on the counter, put a drop of water on the tip of the straw, and touch it to the wrapper, which immediately starts growing and moving like a worm. After watching it a while, he asked why the water does that. I said I didn’t know, and began an involved story about paper fibers and moisture. He interrupted. “The water pushes it.” I said, “Well, no, I don’t think that’s exactly right.” He said, “Yes, it is, Weeter<sup>1</sup>, the water pushes it.”

Yesterday played soccer with him plus half a dozen of his classmates and Dan C. at Egan School. It is unquestionably much harder, physically, than jogging. Playing as hard as I can, with Jeffrey, Scott C., Steffan on my team, against three or four kids his age, plus Dan, we lose 5-2.

### **Monday, Feb. 16, 1975**

Almost since the separation, his great demonstrations of affection toward me: holds my hand, kisses it sometimes when we are walking somewhere. Almost every time I see him (twice a week) he will say, at least once, “Guess who the best person in the world is. It begins with ‘J.’” When I leave him at my mother’s in the city for a couple of days’ stay, he wants to hug me again and again on leaving, says over and over, as though to make sure I know how much I mean to

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1. His nickname for me, after I told him that the kids called me “Wheaties” when I was a boy, because my biceps stuck out on my skinny arms whenever I made a muscle. (Wheaties was then advertised as the “Breakfast of Champions”.) And he knew that I was sometimes called “Peter”, hence the nickname.

him, “Goodbye, Weeter!” He wants to sit next to me at the dinner table when we eat or when I am talking to someone; also interrupts constantly to make sure I keep paying attention to him. Here at the apartment, when watching TV, he wants me to sit in the chair with him. “Sit here, Weeter.” He gave four or five Valentines to Marcella for Valentine’s Day, two to me. He kept a box for them for more than a week before, got all the free ones he could from McDonald’s. Yesterday, Marcella very friendly toward me, I eating lunch in their (formerly our) kitchen, I hear him saying, half to himself, “We have three people in our family, there are three people in our family.” I discuss some of this with Marcella a few days ago, she agrees he’s probably very afraid that if he doesn’t keep telling me how much he loves me, maybe I’ll go farther away. Last night he sleeps here for the first time. In the a.m., he is up before seven as always. He tries his best not to wake me. I hear him get up, then go back into his sleeping bag. I drowse off again, soon he is at my bedside, whispering: “Weeter!...could I have breakfast now?” I say yes, just a minute. He goes out, watches the clock for one minute, comes back. I meantime have gone back to sleep again. “Weeter!...it’s a minute now.” I: “OK, Jeffrey, I’ll be up in just a minute.” “Another minute?” “Now, listen, just give me ten.” He goes back and watches the clock for ten minutes, comes back. Finally I remember he can make his own cereal, tell him to do it, I feeling angry at him for not letting me sleep, guilty about stringing him along (why doesn’t he get the message to leave me alone and let me sleep?).

In a letter to John Wilson, he calls my apartment my “impartment”. Pronounces “vomit”, “vonick” — “You better watch out, I’ll vonick on you.”

Last night, the two of us watching TV, an ad comes on for hosiery, the model reclining wearing only panties, stocking, and bra. He says, “Look at that. *Sexy*.” Then he says he wishes she didn’t have anything over her bottom, wants to see her bottom and her “d”, “i”, “c”, “k”. I tell him ladies don’t have a dick.

Last year when he and I spent a day in San Francisco, we passed an artist’s stand near Ghirardelli Square. There was a picture of a nude blonde on a motorcycle. He said, “Hey, Weeter, look. *Sexy*.” Then he told me he wanted to see her from the front, wanted to see her “p”, “e”, “n”, “i”, “s”. I told him that women don’t have one.

One time previous, also in San Francisco, we passed a bunch of newspaper dispensers, some with near-porn sheets. He whistled, stopped, wanted to look at the pictures of the girls.

### **Saturday, Mar. 14, 1975**

A couple of weeks ago, we riding somewhere in the car, he having offered me some gum and I replying “No, thank you”, he says, after a while: “‘No, thank you’ was invented after ‘Thank you’.”

I: “How do you know that?”

He: “Because first they had to invent ‘thank you’, then they had to invent ‘no’, and then they could invent “No, thank you.”

### **Wednesday, Apr. 16, 1975**

We pull into the parking lot at McDonald's this evening, I am about to park in a parking place near the street, he tells me no, park at that other spot closer to the entrance, so we won't have to walk so far. This I do. As I am shutting off the engine, he says, "Wait! It wouldn't have made any difference, because if we had parked in the other spot, we would already be out of the car and walking, whereas now we're closer but we haven't gotten out of the car yet." He holds his two index fingers side by side, pointing forward: "We would both get there at the same time." (I.e., in both cases.)

After dinner, he asks me if they had Tutti-Frutti chewing gum when I was a boy. I tell him no.<sup>1</sup> He asks me what my favorite kind of gum was. I tell him Doublemint. He begins reciting the Doublemint ad, tells me that in it, a pack of chewing gum is picked from a tree. But he says that's not real because if gum really grew on trees where would be (spreading his fingers apart) "things in it spread out" from the branch (i.e., veins, as in a leaf), but instead the gum is just flat and smooth.

A couple of weeks ago, Sunday a.m., we here reading the paper before going off to do something, he flipping through the TV channels to find cartoons, he says at one point, "I don't like those God shows."

One rainy Saturday, we here with nothing to do but watch TV, he watches portions of a Japanese horror film in which an oil-like ooze flows across walls and floors, attacking and killing people. He is very frightened by it, and though this was some four or five weeks ago, he still asks me, on the way home Wednesday evening, or at times on weekends, if there is a machine which can make you not think of something. I say no, I don't think there is. He says he's afraid the stuff will get him when he is alone. I tell him it was only a movie, not real, but I hope he's learned not to watch things that scare him, etc. But he is still frightened.

Sunday at Ruth's [Marcella's mother], where he spends a few days, this being a week's school vacation for him, he tells me that if I promise not to tell, he'll tell me a secret. I promise. He says he and Scott are planning to run away. I ask him why. He says because Marcella is mean to him: she won't let him go to the store to buy Dynamints (a breath freshener advertised on TV), and she didn't let him stay at Scott's while she went to her tennis lesson but instead forced him to go along (she apparently not wanting to ask Sue [Scott's mother] to baby-sit on no notice in the middle of a Saturday or Sunday). I say I hope he won't run away because I will miss him. Then I ask where, incidentally, is he planning to go? He can't quite pronounce it, but it turns out to be "Philadelphia". I tell him Philadelphia is a big city. Why do they want to go there? He: "A city! Scotty told me it was a forest with lots of animals!" Well, he says, then they are going to Canada. He: "Which way is Canada?" We are walking near the beach. I point north. "That way." He: "Oh." I tell him I'll be worried about him. How is he going to live, what is he going to eat? He says they're planning to bring a tent and camp out. Later, he says, "I know you might say no to this but..." I: "Go ahead and ask." "Would you take us to the airport when we go?" I don't know

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1. "They did have it when you were a boy. It was invented in 1888, amazingly, by Thomas Adams, who lived in Staten Island and had invented the chewing gum machine in 1871. Reportedly, Adams got the idea of chewing gum (add flavoring to chicle) from the famous Mexican General Santa Anna, who was living in exile at the time. I picture the Mexican troops at the Alamo chewing gum while they waited for the Texans to surrender." — J. S.

what to say and instead mumble something and change the subject.

This evening, as I bring him back home, he is looking forward to watching half of *Little House on the Prairie*. (He can only watch half because it starts at 8 and 8:30 is his bedtime. He has never once, I don't think, actually seen this show in its entirety. On nights when Marcella is out for a while and I baby-sit, I am inclined to let him go past the 8:30 mark, but she becomes angry when she returns and sees this.) But Marcella is watching another show. She says he can't watch TV until he has had his bath. Since it is now five after 8, this means he will miss the show. He starts crying. I ask Marcella to change her mind, his coming back that late was my fault. She seems in a rather cold mood, says nothing. He calls me over, whispers in my ear, "See! That's one of the reasons I'm running away."

His chatter in the car: most of it is excited descriptions of what happened in various cartoons. I barely listen to it. But then occasionally (e.g., this evening) it is something like the following: he tells me that he thinks that when you die, God makes it so you become another person; you have different skin, clothes, hair, etc. He says he told this to the kids at school but no one believed him. He asks me what I think. I tell him that a lot of people have thought that. The whole trouble is, there is no way that we know of yet to find out if it's true or not. We just don't know. He says you're probably a boy one time, then a girl, then a boy, then a girl. But he doesn't think it can go on for more than three times. I ask him, why three? He says he doesn't know, he just thinks it can't be more than three. Then, regarding my statement that we just don't know yet if it is true, he says, that's right, because people go up to Heaven when they die (i.e., we can't ask them). He asks me (in so many words) if they physically rise up into the sky. I say no, people believe that only their souls go up to Heaven. "What's a soul?" I try to explain that it's not your arm or leg or body, but the you that's inside. It's your spirit. "What's my spirit?" I am unable to explain it, so I steer the conversation elsewhere.

His affection, his frequent holding and kissing my hand, which is almost embarrassing sometimes. When we are shooting baskets at the school and I miss a basket and shout to myself, "You dumbhead!" he runs, gets the ball, says, "You're not a dumbhead, you're nice." He wants me to sit next to him when we watch TV, always pleads with me not to go when I bring him home or leave him at Ruth's. At the same time, I am often merely presenting the shell of a father to him because my mind is preoccupied with school. I am often bored and impatient over the time I must spend with him. I feel bad about my mind constantly being elsewhere while he dances and chatters to keep my attention on him. A bad business. I don't like fishing, hate killing the worms and trying to catch the fish, but go along with him like a sack of lead because he likes it and I feel guilty about not giving him my full attention so often. But he senses my lack of real interest in the fishing, so this doesn't work either.

### **Friday, Apr. 18, 1975**

He has had a fever a couple of times in recent weeks. He will say, e.g., "My fever is 100", "My fever is down to 99". Normal 98.6 he calls his "regular fever": "My temperature's down to my regular fever."

**Wednesday, Apr. 30, 1975**

He had measles last week (the milder, week-long variety). Dr. Kirn says apparently the batch of measles vaccine they used when he was inoculated in 1969 was no good: many kids who were inoculated that year are coming down with it.

**Saturday, May 24, 1975**

Last Wednesday, driving back from my apartment, he chattering away as usual, he asks, "How come the clouds move with the world?" He says that since the world rotates (as I have told him), how come the clouds keep up with it? I think about this, am at a loss to explain it. Wind is certainly not the result of the earth rotating through a stationary sphere of air. I tell him I'll need a few days to think about it, look it up in a book.

His main interests: soccer, football, baseball. Today I take him and Scott swimming in the pool at the apartment here. Again I am amazed at and very proud of his spunkiness. With face mask, no flippers, he several times retrieves a penny from the center of the deep end (nine-foot depth, perhaps eight feet from the side). He tells me his ears hurt sometimes. I try to show him how to equalize the pressure by holding his nose and then blowing into it. He can't make it work; tries again and again, is on the verge of tears. I say don't worry, you'll get it soon, it took me a long time, etc. He asks me if any other seven-year-old ever dove to nine feet; will he be famous?<sup>1</sup>

Several times recently, he asks me, if he does such-and-such, will he be famous, will he make a lot of money?

I took him and Scott to the Coors recycling plant in San Jose this morning so they could cash in the cans and bottles they have been collecting. Jeffrey has collected by far the most, so I am in a bind. Total revenue is \$2.52. I give Scott \$1.05, Jeffrey the rest, emphasizing to Scott that if he collects more, he will get more money. They seem satisfied. Jeffrey often asks for ways to make money. He wants to wash cars, take care of people's gardens, etc. Recycling seems a good idea, something the two of them can work at on a daily basis, with a good principle at the bottom of it. I tell him how, when I was a boy and we needed money for popsicles or soda, we always went to Kensico Reservoir after a weekend, picked up bottles, turned them in for a refund.

**Sunday, June 15, 1975**

The object is to choose one person who will be It, e.g., chase the others in a game of Tag. Some of the schemes they use:

They stand in a circle or line, then one person says the following verse, pointing successively, with each word, at each person, including himself:

"Inky Dinky Bottle-a Stinky  
Cork fell out."

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1. Apparently I did not tell him about my dive to 60 feet in Kensico Reservoir when I was 19.

Whoever is pointed to on “out” is out. They keep going round the circle or back to the start of the line until only one person is left. He is It.

Another:

“Engine, engine, Number nine,  
Going down Chicago line,  
If the train falls off the track,  
Do you want your money back?”

Whoever is pointed to at “back” must answer “yes” or “no”. If he answers “yes”, they continue pointing at successive persons while saying, in the case of “yes”:

“‘Y’, ‘E’, ‘S’ spells ‘Yes’”.

The person pointed to at “Yes” is out. (Or sometimes It.) Similarly for “No”.

Another one: here, it is the feet which are pointed at.

“Cub Scout  
You’re Out.”

Whoever’s foot is landed on at “Out” has to pull that foot back. The rhyme continues. Last person who has one or two feet in, is It.

Another one:

“Bubble gum, bubble gum, in a dish:  
How many pieces do you wish?”

Person pointed to at “wish” can reply with any number. That number is counted up to, starting at 1, with the pointing continuing, e.g., “1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and you are not It.” That person (foot) drops out and the rhyme resumes from the start.

Yesterday we go fishing. He asks me to help him make an invention before we go. It is a fish net with handle such as is used for aquariums, small ponds, the whole attached to a board. He wants the net to be submerged so that it can catch fish. He wants a nail driven into one end of the board so it can be drawn in from shore.

### **Thursday, July 3, 1975**

He calls me on the phone.

He: “I have to ask you something. It’s a secret.”

I: “OK, I’ll whisper. What is it?”

He: “Is there a Santa Claus?”

I (at a loss what to say; there is no folk-lore on this that I know of): “Well, why do you ask just at this time? Were some of the kids discussing it?”

He says no, he was just thinking about it. He doesn’t believe that Santa Claus could live in the North Pole or that reindeer can fly.

I: “Well...”



He: "Is Santa Claus really Mom?"

I: "Well..." Then, after more fumbling and trying to get out of it: "Well, sometimes Mom and I do help Santa Claus out, yes, Jeffrey."

He: "Is there a tooth fairy?"

I: "Well..."

He: "I believe there might be fairies, but I think Mom puts the money under the pillow."

I: "Did you just lose a tooth?"

He: "No."

I: "Well, Jeffrey, you've asked me, and you have the right to know the truth. Yes, Mom — and I when I was there — put the money under your pillow."

He: "What time are you coming tomorrow?" (I promised to take him to my apartment to set off fireworks.)

I: "Seven o'clock. Then we'll swim or play a game or something until it gets dark."

He: "Oh. That's all I wanted to ask you. Bye."

I: "Bye, Jeffrey. Listen, you're right, Mom and I are the ones who put the gifts under the tree, it wasn't really Santa Claus. But don't worry, there will still be presents under the tree for you, you know."

He: "I know. Bye."

[The above is what I wrote in the Jeffrey Journal on the date indicated. Yet I distinctly remember that, when I was still living with him and Marcella that one evening he said to me — I remember we were standing near the entrance to the living room — "Weeter, I need to talk to you."

I: "OK. Shoot."

He, in lowered, serious, voice, as though to insure confidentiality: "If I didn't believe in Santa Claus, would there still be ... presents under the tree?"

I, after a pause intended to give the impression that I had to think about this for a moment: "Well, sure, Jeffrey. Marcella and I would still give you presents at Christmas."

He: "OK — then I don't believe in Santa Claus. I think he's really you and Marcella."

I: "Well, yes, you're right, Jeffrey. But can I ask what made you stop believing in him?"

He: "I think he's too big to fit down our chimney."

I: "OK..."

He: "And I don't think that reindeer can fly."

I: "OK..."

He: "And I don't think there's time for him to come to every house in the whole world on one night."

I: "OK... Well, Jeffrey, those are good reasons. Don't worry: there will still be presents under the tree."

I like to believe that I put my hand on his shoulder, maybe even kissed the top of his head, and said something like "You're a smart young man, my boy." I didn't know it at the time, of course, but his cautious approach to revealing what might have been a costly revelation, Christmas-gifts-wise, was an early sign of a remarkable financial talent which bloomed already in his early twenties, as we will see. ]

**Sunday, August 10, 1975**

As of last week, I cut out the whole business of mentally exercising him behind his back. Up till now, while we are driving somewhere, I frequently pose math problems for him: "If three kids are walking down the street and each has four softballs, how many balls do all the kids have?" Much of the time he simply doesn't want to do mental work like this at those particular times; yet he also wants to please me and so he gives it a kind of desperate try. But he becomes furious, starts crying, when he can't do a problem. I have made perfectly good times together go bad via this enterprise, so last week I decide to stop it, once and for all, the only exception to be if he, on his own initiative, out of a clear blue sky, pleads with me to give him a problem. The impetus behind my effort has been the worry that I only have six or seven years to get his IQ as high as possible. (I read somewhere that IQ stops increasing at age 13 or 14.) But now that I have seen the effect it has on him, screw it, if it costs the world another Newton, too bad.

The problem of my growing boredom with him. Have argued with Marcella: "It is not natural to plunk a kid down with an adult 1½ days a week in an environment where there are no other kids around." I tell her how I feel I have to keep entertaining him for eight or nine hours on a weekend day, while at the same time not wanting to do what he wants to do. I argue that what would be natural would be if I lived in another community where there were kids he had come to know, and then came to play with. Then, for two or three hours during the day, he and I would do something together, or else I would join in some game (softball, etc.) with the kids. But it is thoroughly bad business to expect an adult to keep a kid entertained all day, or else to expect that the kid will go off in a corner and amuse himself for hours on end. She disagrees. "This is your time with him," etc. I feel guilty then about being bored almost beyond endurance kicking the soccer ball back and forth, or hitting fly balls out to him. But she makes one valid point, namely, that it will go better on both our sides if I plan a day, put some bazazz into an event like a hike, let him help make lunch, rather than, as I now often do, simply drift from one half-hearted activity to another. ("What would you like to do, Jeffrey?") What can I say? I don't want him to suffer simply because my idea of a great afternoon is to go to the library or read in the woods. So the same ability at concealing my feelings that led to the trouble with the Gadols [a couple I got to know at HP] may do some good here.

### **Friday, Sept. 5, 1975**

Took him to Santa Cruz boardwalk last Saturday, which included a ride on the roller coaster. He went through the initial tunnel OK, but was growing a little nervous as we climbed the first big grade. I tried to reassure him, "Now, don't worry, Jeffrey, it'll get steep for a while but nothing can happen." We reached the top and dropped over and before we hit bottom he was screaming at the top of his lungs: "I don't like this! I want to get out! Stop this, stop this, I don't like this!" His eyes were wide with fear, hands clenching the bar. I tried to comfort him as we went whipping around the curves. Eventually, near the end, I just put my hand over his eyes. His crying and fear continued for about ten minutes. I picked him up, talked to him. I was feeling very bad. It made him feel better to go back and do what he liked to do most of the time during the day, namely, throw balls at bottles and try to win a prize. In a variation of this game at one booth, in which you toss half a dozen ping-pong balls, one by one, and try to get them into thin-necked jars filled with

colored water, he succeeded with one and won a goldfish. We brought it home to my place, called Marcella and asked her if she still has the old aquarium. She said no and furthermore would not be stuck with feeding the fish again as before, and having to clean the aquarium. No fish allowed. He was saddened by this. I agreed to keep the fish here if he'll clean the bowl when he visits. We buy a bowl, fish food, etc.

He is OK on the ferris wheel and the Sky Glider (an overhead chair ride like a ski lift). But if I playfully swing back and forth in the seat, he becomes serious: "Don't do that, Weeter. It's dangerous." This strange seriousness and earnestness about him the whole day as he works on his project of winning prizes, of trying to hit the targets with the guns in the arcade, trying to knock down the pins in the bowling game. His attraction to prizes of any kind, including, of course, the silvery, flapping prizes that swim in lakes and rivers and occasionally choose your worm and hook.

Wednesday he says there's something he can't tell me. After much tugging I say, "Well, Jeffrey, I probably won't get mad, you know, if you tell me. Is it something really bad?" "No." "Did you hurt someone?" "No, nothing like that." He had cried Saturday on the way to the park because on his birthday [Mar. 20] we tried to take him to Frontier Village but it rained: "It always rains on my birthday. It's never any fun." His voice has a sadness like, "If only my birthday could be here to enjoy this with me." But it's not about that. More tugging and eventually it comes out: he doesn't like his home. Marcella is mean to him. He wants to go and live in the house in the woods near where Scott used to live. Says that there you can pick blackberries, keep frogs, there's a stream nearby. Marcella won't let him have pets, she says no all the time to things he wants to do, won't let him call me when he wants. He asks me if I'll help him to move to the woods. I walk on thin ice and push the answer No at him a half-inch at a time. Then, when it's obvious, I tell him I can't let a seven-year-old do that. For one thing, the police wouldn't allow it. Also, he needs three good meals a day and requires money.

This is the first time since the separation that he has complained about Marcella to me<sup>1</sup>. I tell him I will talk to her. Next day I call her at work, ask if she'll be in that evening, she says yes. In the evening, trying to fix a bug in a program, I forget. Today I call her at work, she asks what it's about. I tell her. She suddenly becomes short with me.

Last weekend I extract the promise from him that we will read together 15 minutes each day I see him: any book he wants, including comics. Wednesday we go to the library, but it's a hopeless effort. He wants a book on how to be happy. I make an attempt to find a story about kids who run away from home and live in the woods. He says no, that's not what he means. We find books on camping. No good, that's not it either. I try comics. No. It becomes clearer and clearer that if I don't want to repeat the mistakes of my father, then what I should do for this boy is take him fishing, camping, bug collecting, as often as I can. There is no lack of clear messages here. But I have zero interest in plants and animals except on my own peculiar terms, which are not at all his.

He tells me, during one of our rides to or from his house, that the first thing that made him think Santa Claus might not be real was that he couldn't believe he would want to slide down the chimney and land in the ashes. So then he thought he must come through the door.

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1. Not true: see Apr. 16 entry.

**Thursday, Sept. 25, 1975**

Last week, as we are driving along San Antonio Rd., he sees some writing on a fence, asks what it says. I, looking over, can just make it out. I tell him it says, "Jesus loves you."

He: "Not me!"

I can't help laughing. I explain that some people believe that Jesus loves everyone.

He: "Oh!" He explains that he thought the sign was talking about some girl named Jesus whom you might see riding along on her bike. Says he doesn't know any girl named Jesus. He didn't realize the sign referred to *Jesus*. The different accents make all the difference in the world to him, they distinguish between two entirely different people.

**Sunday, Sept. 28, 1975**

Despite no planning on my part, we have a good day yesterday. Nine a.m., first game by his soccer team, the Dolphins, against Jaws. Dolphins win, 1-0. The coach only lets him play two quarters. Then to Stacey's where I am able to exchange paperback edition of *The World of Mathematics* for the hardbound edition, paying merely the difference in price. I erase all my check marks and drawings from the paperback edition, bend back all the dog-eared pages, before giving it back to them. Fuck the publishers, they've got more money than me. Then lunch at a diner, then in the paper we find a church carnival going on in Menlo Park, go there, ride the rides, toss pennies, etc. Then to his swimming lesson, then home for a brief soccer game with Scott, Ty, before dinner, which Marcella's mother cooks, she there for the weekend because Marcella is out camping.

In the afternoon, having a cup of coffee in a restaurant, in order to keep him amused, I propose a game of taking a word and seeing how many anagrams he can make. He turns on to this, we spend half an hour working on "Jeffrey", "John", "Franklin". A truly good time together, I feel, he enjoying it as much as I do.

After dinner, he wants me to stay, asks if I will watch TV a little with him. I do, then, when I come back from saying goodbye to Marcella's mother in the kitchen, he asks, "Why did you and Mom have to get deevorced?" (He always uses this pronunciation.) I tell him because we couldn't get along together, and it's no fun when two people are not happy living together. (I am tempted to say, "It had nothing to do with you, you know that, Jeffrey," but I decide it would do more harm than good.) He is on the verge of crying. I do my best to try to make it seem like it's not much, but I feel angry at Marcella as I leave. In all honesty, however, his feelings were probably brought on more by the fact that neither Marcella nor I are there with him this weekend, only her mother, hence a feeling of strangeness and aloneness on his part.

**Saturday, Oct. 25, 1975**

For several days now he pleads with me to stay with him when I bring him home [this is after my separation from Marcella]. Today Marcella is sleeping when we arrive. He begins to cry: "...But there isn't anything to *do*." I, like any parent in the same spot, begin to name all the things there are to do: work on his new jigsaw puzzle, watch TV... He: "Come with me and watch TV!"

I: “No, Jeffrey, I have to go have my dinner. We’ve been together all day.” He: “Just come and watch for a few minutes.” I kiss him, try to comfort him, go with him and turn on the TV, but he waves goodbye with tears in his eyes.

Am surprised at this affection on his part after the second day in a week (last Sunday and today) in which we have had arguments. Sunday it was over my making him leave Foothill Park lake with only one fish after six hours of fishing. I was growing angry at his accusations: “You made me throw them all back, now I have only this one and it’s not enough for a meal.” In these situations he sinks to the ground on his knees, covers his eyes with his arm or hand and remains motionless. I begin swearing, truly angry at him for not understanding how good I have in fact been: bored stiff the whole morning yet trying to keep up cheerful appearances for him; teaching him that we don’t keep everything we catch, that we throw back the little ones, etc. Mere minutes before I was congratulating myself on my discipline, giving myself an A in fatherhood for the morning. Later in the afternoon another argument.

Then today we play ball, I hitting the tennis ball out to him with the bat, but unable to always or even often place it near him, he having to run all over the field to get it. He sinks to his knees, crying about all this running he has to do. I again grow angry, having waged I thought a good fight against the almost physical pain of the boredom of the activity. My behavior in all these instances is to swear, though not at him — “Well, I’ve had enough of this fucking game...” — and march off to the car, leaving him to follow as best he can.

Two weeks ago, I bought him a butterfly net, killing jar, and book. We go to the foothills on a rainy day, catch a few moths, I thinking he might enjoy this since he enjoys collecting things (coins, stamps). He does enjoy the day, but he doesn’t want to kill the moths, so we don’t. But next week, no great interest in the activity any more. Each weekend it seems to grow a little worse: I cannot think up enough to do for eight hours. He dislikes coming to my apartment because there are no kids, no toys, nothing to do. I think of myself as a desperate entertainer. Yet even after the arguments and crying during the day, he wants me to stay with him in the evening. “When will I see you again?”

We spend most of any Saturday in the car, traveling from soccer game to stores to restaurants to playing fields, he already learning to know the boredom I knew at his age, the separation of things and activities, in his case the absence of woods, fields, the natural places of interest which make it possible for a child’s days to be something other than the moping passage from one escape from boredom to the next.

[Starting at age 7½, every fall he played soccer in AYSO (American Youth Soccer Organization). This was important business for him. For one thing, all the kids got uniforms to wear: jerseys with the name of the sponsor on the back — this or that insurance company or fast food restaurant — and shorts and woolen socks and running shoes. All these little guys then ran around the soccer field for an hour or whatever, playing their hearts out. The second or third game, his team lost, and only by a few points. A sad young man with tears running down his cheeks trooped off the field. It was the end of the world. Why continue? I put my hand around his little shoulder, Marcella and I tried to console him. We told him how well he and his team had played, how even the best teams lose a game, how there would be another game next week. Neither of us, thank God, lapsed into the typical reprehensible parent line of “Oh, it doesn’t matter, it’s only a game.”]

He plays with kids his own age in a soccer game from 9 to 10 a.m. Today he kicks his first goal for his AYSO team, the Dolphins<sup>1</sup>. But then all the kids disperse. If there were another game at 3:30, they would all appear then, and afterward disappear into their various middle-class cul-de-sacs until Monday. Compartments, separation, nothing possible without an automobile. He has one friend, Scotty, down the street, whom he plays with all week, since he goes there after school, whereas there should be a flock of kids around all the time.

This is his first year on the AYSO (American Youth Soccer Organization) team, which means more to him than anything else at the moment. They get uniforms and shoes with cleats, which he loves to walk around in after the game.

A month or so ago, Marcella takes Tina's [her sister's] Labrador retriever in, so Jeffrey now has a dog<sup>2</sup>. Marcella names him Roshi-Mon, after some Zen Buddhist priest.

[End of "Jeffrey Journal"]

## **Ice Cream**

I sometimes kidded with Jeff and Scott. For example, I would come into the kitchen, see them busily playing on the floor with toy cars and trucks, and say, "OK: How many kids... [long pause to build dramatic interest]... would like... [another long pause]... to go [all eyes on me now]... and get... [another long pause] *an-ice-cream-cone?*" Hands flew up into the air. "Me! me! me!" I usually took them to a little ice cream shop on a corner in downtown Los Altos.

One time, Scott not having been around, Jeff and I came out of the shop and sat on the curb to enjoy this delicious refreshment on a hot day (I no doubt having ordered, as always, a coffee cone, one scoop only, please). Webb came by, was clearly amused, said something like, "Well, the Franklins, father and son!"

## **At the Dinner Table**

During the writing of this book, I occasionally asked Jeff to confirm a recollection I had, or to add any of his own. He was happy to do so. One thing I had completely forgotten was Marcella's rule about liver, namely, that he had to eat it whether he liked it or not. In fact he hated it. He tried smothering it in ketchup, but he still hated it, so he would sit at the table, staring at it, while we finished our dinner. When we got up and went to sit in the living room, he had to sit at the table until he somehow managed to summon the will power to finish it.

I remember very little about what Marcella cooked for our meals but I do remember that one day, I think for lunch, she served us what she called "s'mores". It is the name that has stuck in my mind, I have no memory of what they tasted like — in fact, I have had to go to Wikipedia to find

1. During my writing of this book, he told me how his team arrived at the name, "Dolphins". At first, they chose the "Sharks", but then someone pointed out that dolphins are much smarter than sharks, and know how to protect themselves against sharks by cooperating with each other. So they became the Dolphins.

2. When I was with him, I tended to refer to dogs by the type of sound they made — a woofy dog, an arfy dog, a growly dog.

out what they were: “a traditional nighttime campfire treat popular in the United States, consisting of a fire-roasted marshmallow and a layer of chocolate sandwiched between two pieces of graham cracker.” I asked her where she had learned about them, she said in the Girl Scouts.

### **British Comedy**

Just as my father had introduced me to the films of Laurel and Hardy when I was a boy, so I considered it one of my duties as a father to cultivate my son’s sense of humor, and so I tried to get him to watch British comedy on PBS with me. We watched many of the episodes of *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, *Fawlty Towers*, and *Rumpole of the Bailey* together. *Fawlty Towers* was about the misadventures of one Basil Fawlty, the inept, often out-of-control, toadying-to-the-upper-class owner, with his wife Sybil, of a small hotel in Torquay, in the south of England. Fawlty was played by John Cleese of *Monty Python* fame, Sybil by Prunella Scales. The series was written by Cleese and his then wife Connie Booth, who played Polly, the long-suffering waitress at the hotel, and was without question one of the best pieces of comedy writing of the second half of the 20th century. (In an interview, Booth said that at the time, Cleese in real life was a lot like Basil.) Each episode began with a shot of the hotel as seen from the road. On the right of the driveway entrance was a sign that was supposed to have the name of the hotel on it, except that for each episode the letters were scrambled. I was amazed at some of the things the BBC allowed Cleese and company to get away with: at the start of one episode, I remember, “Fawlty Towers” had anagrammed into “Flowery Twats”.

I would sometimes imitate the opening of some of the Monty Python episodes, the quivering, out-of-breath voice of the old man (Michael Palin) who staggers up the beach and collapses before the camera, able to gasp only “It’s...” and then the smooth, BBC announcer’s voice (John Cleese) “*Monty Python’s Flying Circus*”, the voice lowered for “Flying” in the best BBC professional manner. Then I would sing a few bars of Sousa’s “Liberty Bell” March which was the theme for each episode. “De-dump-de-diddely-dump-de-dump de-dump-de-dump-de-duh...” I am sure this whole business soon became rather less than amusing for the young man.

I never asked Jeff, in adulthood, what he thought of those films. I think *Rumpole* was a little beyond him at that age. This early training, however, did not produce a young man with any deep and abiding love for English comedy, I’m afraid. His father, on the other hand, by the time he was in his sixties, had probably seen some of these episodes ten or fifteen or more times *each*. *Monty Python* became my Shakespeare. Again and again in the course of my life, incidents, problems have occurred which were perfectly expressed in some *Monty Python* episode or another — or in some movie by the same team. For example, the immortal “What have the Romans ever done for us?” scene in *The Life of Brian* whenever I had to listen to members of the far left rail against capitalism.

### **Keeping Promises**

For some reason, possibly because I had a vague memory of my father emphasizing it to me, I felt that I should make sure that my son understood the importance of keeping promises. This was I think one of the very few points I lectured him on, and not because I noticed the slightest tendency in him to break promises. It just seemed a fundamental value for males of the aristocracy. And so I told him, on several occasions, “It’s very important to keep promises. No matter how much you might want to break your promise, or forget about it, you keep it. That doesn’t

mean you have to promise to do everything that people want you to do. N. O.! But once you give your word, then you must keep it.” I remember him listening to what I said, and seeming to take it seriously.

### **The Reincarnation of My Brother**

One day, certainly before Jeff was five, I suddenly realized that since his birth I had been treating him as though he were my brother. God had given me a chance to make up for the terrible, unforgivable tyranny I had exercised over my brother: he had reincarnated him in my son. There was no doubt about it: my concern to be kind to him, to play with him, to encourage him, never to be angry with him, were my response to this extraordinary second chance that God had given me.

There is a photograph of Jeff taken at the time that looks almost identical to one of my brother at the same age. To me, at least, you would be hard-pressed to decide if they were two pictures of the same boy or not. Jeff has the same blond hair, though not as wavy, as my brother; the same serious smile for the camera, the same build, the same features.

Over the years, I have had to remind myself every once in a while, “He is not your brother!” Because much of the time there is no question but that for all practical purposes, he is.

### **Little League**

When Jeff was seven or eight, he joined Little League, all the while continuing to play soccer in AYSO. In those days, the first Little League reforms had already been put into effect: no longer was it possible, as Webb told me it had been when he was a boy, for a team member deemed an inferior player to be made to sit on the bench for an entire season without playing a single inning. Now, the rule was that everyone had to play at least two innings out of each six-inning game and during those innings must somehow have at least one turn at bat. Neither I nor Jeff remember precisely how the latter was managed consistently.

Jeff’s first team was sponsored by Pontillo’s Pizza. The sponsor’s main obligation was to pay for the red jerseys the team players wore, each jersey, of course, with the name of the sponsor on the front and the back in big letters. The rest of the uniform was ordinary jeans. I think the members were somehow provided with spiked shoes (“cleats”), possibly also paid for by the sponsor. But being able to wear those jerseys was one of the main attractions of Little League.

A variety of businesses in the area considered it a good advertising idea to sponsor a Little League team. Among the teams that Jeff’s played regularly was one sponsored by Nishimoto’s Nursery.

Another reform was that girls were allowed to play<sup>1</sup>. There was only one girl on Jeff’s first team. Her name was Adrian<sup>2</sup>, and to this day I can see that brave young thing standing at the plate on a sunny late afternoon at a field in Los Altos in her little uniform and her enormous protective dark green plastic helmet. I can see the pitcher as he sized up the situation, knowing that the goal here was to let her get a hit. I can see how he lobbed the ball across the plate as gently as he

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1. This reform, I understand, has since been abandoned, by mutual consent between girls and boys, since the fact was that most girls tended to be less good than most boys. Another much-needed reform, that of forbidding parents from making monsters of themselves in their determination to get their kids to excel at the game, or at least to be on a winning team, has yet to be successful.

2. I thought her name was spelled “Adrienne” but Jeff told me, during the writing of this, that it was “Adrian”, same as the boy’s name.



could, how she watched it float past, and then, having decided now might be a good time, how she gave the bat a mighty swing. By that time, the ball was resting comfortably in the catcher's mitt. Her expression said: "Well, the ball seems not to have hit the bat that time." Everyone groaned, "Ohhhhh..." Then, "Come on, Adrian!" The coach's voice was patient, encouraging: "It's OK, Adrian. Just keep your eye on the ball, atta girl."

She settled her helmet on her head with a downward poke of one finger, went *tap-tap* with the end of the bat on the plate, then lifted it to her shoulder and went into a crouch, bouncing her legs a little, the way the boys did. The pitcher, doing his best, floated another one toward her, past her. Another swing, far too late. "OK, Adrian, take your time. Atta girl." Next time, the pitcher took a few steps forward before he pushed another one toward her. And suddenly there was the sound of bat meeting ball. By far the most surprised person of all assembled there was Adrian. Everyone shouted, "*Run! Run!*" She carefully dropped the bat and took off, a little uncertainly — Do you run to the base behind the pitcher, or to the one on the right? I think it's the one on the right... — and down the baseline she went, hair streaming out from under her tank-commander's-sized helmet, and, breathless, pulled up at first base, to the applause of the onlookers. "Attaway, Adrian! Good hit! Attaway!" She was too shy to look at anyone in her triumph; she placed one foot carefully against the bag, leaned forward, crouched, bounced her legs a little, put her hands on her knees, and made it clear to one and all that she was ready to play this game.

The teams for players aged 10-12 were called "the majors". Jeff's team was the Pirates, and it was sponsored by Fremont Liquors. The sponsor of a team in the majors was faced with a greater expense, namely, that of paying for not only jerseys but also pants and socks and, I assume, cleets.

The regulation number of innings was now seven instead of six. As before, each player had to play at least two of the seven innings and have at least one turn at bat.

I took Jeff to see *The Bad News Bears*, an outstanding comedy about Little League, with Walter Matthau as the pool-cleaner with a drinking problem who takes over a rag-tag team (and their out-of-control parents) and goes on to accomplish the impossible with it. (The best that the Bears could do by way of a sponsor was Chico's Bail Bonds.) I may have enjoyed the film more than Jeff did.

## **Going for a Master's Degree**

Around 1973, when I was 36, I decided, largely because of John Allen's influence, to get a master's degree in computer science. I felt it would get me a higher salary and allow me to do more interesting programming. I was furious at my mediocrity as a programmer, and, as a consequence, I was driven to find a way to prove that my programs were correct or incorrect other than by the laborious trial and error which I hated and distrusted so much. I wanted to do something important. Daily programming in industry threatened to become a bore in the way that accounting was a bore: you had to get the details right, the consequences of not doing so were severe, but you sensed that you were working way too hard, that much of this work could be done by a machine, if only ...

I began making inquiries at San Jose State. Eventually I got an interview with Professor William Michael in the Math Department, a bald guy in his forties, with a quiet, very articulate manner, who had once worked, I think, on disk technology for IBM. By the time I first stepped into his office, I had already given him some idea of what I wanted to do. He managed to conceal his incredulity: here was an English major with 2½ years of courses in electrical engineering at which he had not done particularly well, who was proposing to a member of a mathematics department

to earn a master's degree in what was then the most mathematically advanced (and may still be) branch of computer science, namely, the Scott-Strachey denotational semantics. Here was a person who, on paper, had no knowledge of set theory or mathematical logic or the basic mathematics subjects like linear algebra, analysis (apart from freshman and sophomore calculus), much less topology or computation theory. Here was a person who said he was self-taught, a term which in academia has but one meaning: fool. And here was a professor of mathematics who probably knew as little as the prospective student did about the proposed thesis subject, and yet was being asked to act as the student's adviser. But for some reason, Prof. Michael was willing to do just that. He had none of the usual academic arrogance. Perhaps what motivated him to give me a chance was my showing him that I had completed all the exercises in Bittinger's *Logic and Proof*, and my telling him about my tutelage under John Allen. Perhaps my remarking on my love of classical music helped too, since he was an amateur cellist, playing in a chamber music group. In any case, we put together what was called a Special Master's Program, in which I would take certain math courses (including some undergraduate ones), and then do an expository thesis on what John called "Scottery".

My manager, Mike Whitney, considered it a matter of course that the company encourage employees who wanted to work toward a higher degree. He let me have time off for classes. Furthermore, the company paid my tuition costs (which, since San Jose State was a state university, were very low by national standards.) So, in the afternoon, two or three days a week, I would leave the plant, get onto Route 280 and drive to the shabby neighborhood where SJS was located. (A third-rate school in a fourth-rate city, or was it the other way around? A city fit only for engineers to live in.)

I took a course in finite-state machines under Jack Kurzweil. To me he always seemed the epitome of the Jewish intellectual from humble origins who had made good: he was bald, with full cheeks that I always thought gave additional resonance to his deep voice; a strong Brooklyn accent, his every sentence as though spoken only after careful deliberation, with every sound articulated. He wore big, light-brown work shoes; I remember him one time talking about them, saying how comfortable and durable they were. He was a Communist, and was married to Bettina Apotheker, daughter of Herbert Apotheker, secretary (or historian) of the American Communist Party. Some of the other professors didn't like his politics at all: the office next to his had paper decals of American flags and various patriotic slogans on the door. These professors apparently made his life as difficult as they could without breaking university rules. But I soon got the impression that he was a man of principle, and, as it would turn out, he saved my master's degree.

Kurzweil's course I respected. I had no respect for some of the other courses I was required to take, including one that used Donald Eadie's *Modern Data Processors and Systems*. I think it was taught by an Indian, Prof. Loomba. Once, prior to an exam, a student asked what parts of the chapters we were to be tested on were most important. He replied that *everything* was important, then went on to reveal that he had a photographic memory and so it was difficult for him to understand why the student had asked the question. I had nothing but contempt for him after that.

I still have binders containing notes and homework and test papers for most of the courses. (Prof. Michael gave one on Computability Theory (Math 271).) Looking at this material now, I am amazed at how dutifully I plodded through the dull assignments, how carefully I wrote up my homework. I had studied point-set topology on my own in the early '70s. I studied it again, under Prof. William Giles. I told him that I already had some knowledge of the subject, and so he very kindly let me take the course as "directed reading". But despite my previous labors, I found it difficult — I remember headaches and flu symptoms that I feel were a direct result of my feeling that

understanding was always just out of reach.

But I found everything difficult. I would come home and after dinner start slaving away at the problems. There is no question but that working for the degree was a major contributing factor to my divorce. My marriage was failing, but if I could get this degree, in this subject, then I would be safe, and still have a right to go on living.

I should mention that already at this time, the Environment idea was in my head — a way of organizing the contents of a subject alphabetically instead of linearly, as was done in all classrooms and textbooks. The idea rose from my own struggles trying to teach myself subjects in mathematics and computer science, and my realizing how much more efficient my learning would be if I could look up what I wanted when I wanted, without necessarily having studied and memorized all or most of the preceding material. In order to test my idea, I volunteered to be a tutor for a professor's LISP class (not John Allen's). The professor agreed, but within a matter of weeks we came to a parting of the ways: the students wanted no part of such a departure from the standard way of learning a subject, I didn't know the subject well enough to be able to help them from what I had memorized, and the professor didn't like the rumors he was hearing about my disparaging his way of teaching the subject.

The classes had a large contingent of Asian students — mainly Chinese, I think. Some were recent immigrants from Hong Kong, barely able to speak English, yet there they were, bent over their notes, turning in their homework, taking exams, helping each other. I had enormous respect for them. I am sure they did not spend time, as I did, thinking about what should or shouldn't be taught in the courses. One Chinese young woman, very attractive, infinitely polite, upon hearing that I worked for Hewlett-Packard, asked me if I would buy a calculator for her using my employee discount. I said I'd be glad to, not mentioning to her that doing so would be a nuisance. HP employees were frequently asked to do the same for friends and acquaintances.

Another Chinese student was Samson Chung. He said his father was a rich Hong Kong businessman, and that his father was paying for his apartment where Samson lived with his beautiful wife. He seemed to want to be friends, and so I visited him at his apartment several times.

In my conversations with Prof. Michael, he revealed that he was having hearing problems. It soon became clear that he was going deaf, so that, toward the end of my work on the degree, I had to speak exceptionally slowly and clearly. In order to get a Special Master's, I had to make a list of all the courses I would take, and then describe the thesis I proposed writing. But the degree had to be pursued under the auspices of some department. The Computer Science Dept. was willing to accept me as a student, but unfortunately they did not allow Special Master's degrees, so my only choice was to be accepted as a student in the Math Dept., which did allow such degrees. In the summer of 1974, Prof. Halteman said that, since I could offer no past evidence of my mathematical ability — apparently I either failed to come up with the necessary records showing my 2½ years of electrical engineering math courses, or else Halteman chose to ignore them — I would have to demonstrate that ability by taking a course of obvious importance for my proposed thesis, namely, Linear Algebra. (Readers with any background in mathematics will immediately recognize that this subject is as unrelated to the theory of computation as it is possible for any mathematical subject to be.) If I did well in that course, and in Prof. Michael's Theory of Computation course, well, that should be sufficient to enroll me as a student in the Math Dept.

I took the two courses in the fall, got A's in both of them.

But when I reported to Prof. Michael that I had done what Halteman recommended, and Prof. Michael reported this to Halteman, Halteman said no, there must have been some misunderstanding, the only way I could be accepted as a student in the Math Dept. would be by taking all the

courses required for an undergraduate degree in mathematics (which would have required years more of work). Furthermore, this would mean that the Linear Algebra course I had taken could not count towards my master's since it was, in fact, an undergraduate math course.

Up till then, Prof. Michael had always responded, when I called him about the status of my application, with "Everything looks fine, John — you have nothing to worry about." He had apparently not done any checking with Halteman to make sure that everything was, in fact, fine.

He suggested I talk to Prof. Dolby, who was the Math Dept. representative in the Computer Science Dept. Dolby said that I had become famous among faculty and administrators as the student "whom everyone wants to see get a master's but whom no one quite knows how to fit in under the rules." (He lived not far from us in Los Altos; his daughter used to baby-sit for us.)

Dolby decided that the way to settle the matter would be to have a meeting with the Dean of Graduate Students. Unfortunately, the Dean was notoriously against Special Master's degrees. Furthermore, Dolby said, he would almost certainly say that the courses for my degree look like the courses for the master's in Computer Science/Math, so he might ask me to compromise a little and take a few courses I hadn't planned on. I told Dolby that I was sick and tired of being strung along. What guarantee did I have that he and everyone else would sign if I agreed to the compromises? Dolby replied, "I'll bring the application and sign it then and there, and we'll have the Dean sign it also and that will be that." He said he would set up an appointment with the Dean for Prof. Michael, himself, and me.

The following Thursday, we met in the Dean's office. He was puffing on a cigar and kept stretching his neck skin up through his tight shirt collar (like Rodney Dangerfield).

"Well," he said, "just looking at it..." (my application) "I would perhaps want to see a course in methods of research... Why couldn't a straight master's in mathematics fill the bill here?... Well, whatever you fellows have decided..." And at last I got the signatures.

It took me until May 1976 to complete the work for the degree. The truth was, I simply didn't have the depth of mathematical knowledge to do justice to Scott and Strachey's theory (because of Strachey's death, it was really mostly Scott's). In my opinion (and, I think, in the opinion of a number of other computer scientists) the theory remains one of the towering achievements of computer science. Once in a while in the years afterward, when I would hear a mathematician remark that computer science was low-level mathematics, I would always mention Scott's theory and say without the slightest hesitation that it was the highest level of mathematics.

After the course work, there were two major steps to complete: finishing the thesis and getting the required signatures. I hired a repro typist named Jo Ann Vine in Los Gatos to type up my manuscript, which was probably written in typewriter. She lived in an ordinary-looking tract house, was a chain smoker, thin, nervous, but turned out to be an excellent typist. She delivered the job on time, and I bound it as required and delivered it to the Graduate Office. A woman behind the counter, who clearly was not happy with her life, looked it over, turning the pages, and then began shaking her head. "I'm sorry, this is not acceptable."

I, in a panic: "Why not?"

She: "Your references are enclosed in parentheses."

I: "But that is exactly the way the Style Guide recommends!"

She: "Which Style Guide did you use?"

I told her.

She: "We do not recognize that one. References must be enclosed in square brackets."

I: "So what should I do?"

She: "You will have to have it retyped."

I: “But I can’t do that before the deadline!”

She shrugged. By now she had come around to the front of the counter, apparently leaving on a break. I was beside myself. Let no reader doubt for a moment that I was on the verge of killing her. I saw my hands around her neck, my thumbs pressing into her throat, backing her against the wall. I saw myself with a knife in my hand, stabbing her, trying to cut her heart out. She must have sensed my rage, because she revealed that an extension of a few days might be possible. I raced back to the repro typist, she was able to retype only the pages with the references, and I raced back with it. It was accepted.

But that still wasn’t the end of the process. A piece of paper had to be signed by the Dean of Graduate Students stating that I had completed everything I said I would complete — courses and thesis. Unfortunately, the Dean — not the pompous fool I had originally dealt with, but a woman who had apparently succeeded him — was away, and another professor had been chosen to handle her duties — a professor of English, as it turned out. Prof. Michael came with me for the signing. We entered the professor’s office. He was standing behind his desk as we entered. He looked nervous. As I recall he had some papers in his hand, presumably a description of my Special Master’s Program. He seemed reluctant to put the crucial paper on his desk and sign it. There was academic back-and-forth between him and Michael regarding my thesis.

Finally, the acting Dean shook his head and said, and I will never forget his words, “I don’t know. I don’t think it’s theoretical enough.”

Both Prof. Michael and I couldn’t believe our ears. I think we both blushed and looked at the floor, so embarrassed were we for the colossal ignorance that lay behind that statement. The truth was that this English professor probably couldn’t have passed an easy exam on high school mathematics, much less did he have the vaguest comprehension of the basics of computer science, still less of the theoretical problem that Scott’s theory had solved, and even less of the topological concepts he had used to solve it. I was so flabbergasted that I was beyond rage for the moment. Prof. Michael tactfully said that he would discuss the acting Dean’s decision with me, and we bowed out of the room.

Prof. Michael was appropriately sympathetic, and by no means suggested that three years’ work had just been dismissed by the appalling ignorance of an English professor. I went over to see Kurzweil, who happened to be in his office, and told him what had happened. He listened, then said, “Stay there.” He reached for the phone, dialed, and got the acting Dean. A few pleasantries, then he said that he had just heard about the acting Dean’s decision. “Franklin is one of the best graduate students we have ever had, and I’d like to see him get his degree. So I think I’m going to call in that IOU.” (To this day, I have no idea what the IOU was.) He listened to words from the other end, then said, “Thank you. Bye,” and hung up. He looked at me and said quietly, “He’ll sign.”

And so he did. I had them mail me the degree, since I hadn’t the slightest interest in attending any graduation ceremony.

I was always apologetic about the thesis, particularly among PhDs, always making sure I said it was only an expository thesis. Looking at it now, some 27 years later, I am surprised to find that it is not as bad as I thought it was. It may have been written from only the shallowest understanding of Scott’s theory, but it is clear and well-organized. And it was about a fundamentally important subject.

Prof. Michael’s hearing continued to deteriorate. A few years later, I heard that he had resigned from the university. I tried to reach him several times, just to see how he was, and to

thank him again for what he had done for me. But the university had no record of his whereabouts. He had simply disappeared.

## **A Healthy Attitude Toward Words and Notation**

By this time, thanks to computer science, and to working on Scottery, with its emphasis on the difference between syntax and semantics, I had broken myself of my old superstition regarding writing — that the words were the beginning and end — and now could see that, rightly or wrongly, there was the something you visualized in your mind, and then the words you found to describe it. I allowed myself to believe that it was all right if I visualized the thing first, or had the concept first, and then found the words. It was enormously liberating.

From the start, I liked the computer scientists' attitude toward notation. It seemed healthier, more robust, less reverent than mathematicians'. You had a clear idea of the difference between notation (symbols) and denotation (what the symbols represented). You used, or created, the notation that best served the task at hand. In succeeding years, when I began working on the most difficult mathematical problems I could find, and running into the almost impenetrable wall of subtleties in style that had been erected by the mathematics specialties to keep outsiders out and enhance the prestige of the insiders, the attitude toward notation that I had learned from the computer scientists brought endless frustration even though I thought it was far healthier. Studying computer science was the best preparation I could have had for studying mathematics. But more about that later<sup>1</sup>.

## **Death of Uncle Gus**

Around 1974 or so, my mother told me that Uncle Gus, the beloved friend of the family from my childhood, was dying of cancer, and shouldn't I go to visit him before it was too late. She said that he and his wife Claire were now living in Portola Valley, a wealthy community north of Palo Alto. She gave me their number, and I called them. As I write this, I am appalled that I did not make any attempt to keep track of them over the years, especially as I knew they would always be delighted to see me. Why did I never bring my wife and child to meet them?

Claire confirmed what my mother had said, and invited me to come visit them. She said that Gus couldn't have visitors for more than an hour or so, but that would allow time for us to talk and have a drink.

So on a sunny, fall, weekend afternoon I drove out to their house. It was on a winding two-lane asphalt road with tall grass and stone walls on each side. The house was a ranch-style, modest by the standards of that community. A short steep driveway led up from the road. As I parked, Claire came out the side door to greet me. She had become old, but she still had that aristocratic manner I remembered from my childhood, and spoke in that irresistible upper-class Irish accent.

She showed me into the comfortable living room. We talked for a few moments, then I heard something at the doorway, a deep voice said "John!", and there entered, with uncertain step, a man whom only with effort could I recognize as the man who came to visit at our house. He had the same haunted, skeletal look my father had had in his final weeks, the same darkness around the eyes, and an expression of being preoccupied with something other than the meeting that was taking place. But his grip was still firm and he seemed pleased that I had come to see him.

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1. For example, in the section "Consultants" in the first file of Vol. 5.

I tried to make the usual encouraging remark about the miracles that the doctors were performing, but he shook his head impatiently, making clear that he knew there would be no miracles for him. We had a drink, talked, I seem to remember Claire saying at one point that until recently Gus had been running a power company near Portland, Ore. I am sure they asked about my wife and son, I am sure I apologized for not having brought them to visit at an earlier time. When it was time to go, I shook hands with Gus, repeated again how much his and Claire's visits had always meant to my brother and me, promised to come visit again soon, and this time bring Marcella and Jeff.

But there was no next time. Not more than a month or two later, my mother called and said he had died. I did not attend the funeral; I don't even recall if I was invited.

Claire then married a Dr. Dresel whom I remember as a large, friendly man. But he died a few years later. Thereafter she braved it alone for ten, perhaps twenty years. My mother would every once in a while report that she had become "difficult". I no longer remember what that meant. The two women did not become close friends in their lonely widowhood. Claire moved to another ranch-style house, this at the edge of a country club golf course near the top of Rte. 17, which was the main road from San Jose, over the range of hills that separated Silicon Valley from the Pacific coast, to the seacoast town of Santa Cruz. I still have her address in the black book that I kept from my days as bandleader at Lehigh: "Claire Dresel, 16 Hollins Drive, Pasatiempo, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060 426-6397". I made no effort to visit her, I suppose because I didn't want her to start depending on me. But I knew that her life had ended with Gus's death.

I think it was in the eighties that she called to invite me to a dinner party she was going to give for "the young people". I remember clearly admiring the elegance of her house; she introduced me to the young man who took care of it for her, and I sensed the sad enjoyment of an elderly woman in the presence of a strong, handsome young male. We all sat outside on the patio as the sun set. I asked if she had any trouble with golf balls flying into her yard. She didn't. I don't recall who the other guests were; there seemed to be more men than women. Then, it was time for dinner. I think she had it catered. She sat at the head of the table, and did her utmost to show how eager she was not to be a typical old lady; trying so hard to talk about her guests, their interests (not her pains and worries and loneliness) that it almost brought tears to my eyes.

My mother continued to be critical of her, complaining about this or that which she didn't do. Then, one day, I think in the nineties, my mother called and said Claire had died.

She and Gus had no children. I recall my mother having once said that they had informally adopted a young man after his parents, who had been close friends of theirs, had died. In writing this section, I tried to find some mention of Gus on the Internet: not a word.