

## **Fear of Shopping Clothes**

Shopping remained for me an impossibly difficult task, with dire consequences for mistakes. Despite the friendly jibes of friends and neighbors at the patches on my pants, I continued to find excuses not to buy new clothes. I even resisted the offers of female neighbors — and of the woman in Flamingo Cleaners in North Berkeley which I patronized until her mother, who did the sewing, lost an ancient pair of pants of mine I treasured — resisted the offers of these women to come along with me to the store. For several years, if it became absolutely essential that I buy some pants and shirts, I would call my Personal Shopper, Linda Curyea, at Nordstrom in Palo Alto. I would make an appointment, tell her what I had to buy and how much I could afford to spend, then bring most of my wardrobe, so she could match the new clothes with what I already had. I would drive to the store (even after I moved to Berkeley, a distance of some 50 miles one way), hang my clothes on a hanger in a dressing room, and sit there while she selected, and brought back, what she thought would best meet my needs.

It was no consolation for me to discover, in 2006, that the number of people who suffer from a fear of shopping is so low that there isn't even a term for this fear in the list of more than 60 phobias on Google.

On the other hand, my shopping phobia saved me a fortune over the years.

My son was completely at home in clothing stores. He surveyed what was available, asked questions, tried things on, went from store to store if necessary, and then made his decision. He was, and is, the consummate shopper.

I was at my worst when it came to electronic equipment. My computer agonies are described in the next file of this chapter, under "Computer Hell".

## **TV**

The neighbors knew that they could always get rid of old TVs and VCRs and other equipment at my house — I would do anything to avoid having to go to the chain stores and be forced to deal with the know-nothing refugees from the Third World who worked as clerks. Furthermore I despised the idea of adding to already-overburdened landfills with equipment that still worked. In the early 2000s, the 1988 Montgomery Ward TV I had been given by a neighbor began to show annoying horizontal static lines. I took it to Albany Video Service, run by Allen Cain, one of the best repairmen in the business. He was able to fix it so that it ran properly in his shop, but not so that it ran properly when it was back in my house. Since the problem all but disappeared in the summer, I assumed it was related to temperature. So in winter I began trying to let the heat from the fire in the fireplace warm the room sufficiently. I would sit on the floor, poking the fire, waiting, half-looking, half-not-looking at the TV — "Are there fewer lines now? Yes!...No, not really. Throw another log on the fire. Wait." One hour, two hours of torture. Then I decided to try to speed matters up by turning on the house heat an hour or so before watching a program. That worked for a while, but then the static lines reappeared, always driving me crazy because they almost but not quite could be ignored, the image being otherwise perfectly clear.

So, using my head, I put an electric heater behind the set and turned that on in addition to the house heat while watching programs (or DVDs). That too worked for a while, although the smell of hot plastic from the back of the set filled the living room and kitchen when the heater was on. One day in late 2006 I for some reason looked in the back of the TV while it was on, and casually ran my hand over the cabinet. Then I saw that the heater had melted the plastic cover and that

bare metal terminals were exposed. I don't know how close I came to being electrocuted by that random movement of my hand.

I later found out that, on evenings that weren't very cold — weren't, say, in the 40s — if the TV was left on day and night, the static lines were gone. I had heard somewhere that TV sets don't consume all that much electricity, so I explained to my housemate why the TV (which I set to a non-receiving channel, so that the screen only showed a solid blue, not unlike the Blue Screen of Death on my computer, to be described below) — why the TV was on all the time. She was bothered by the waste of energy, so I said, "OK, I will leave it on for only 12 hours a day, and give you a break on the utilities bill." She reluctantly accepted. Then I wondered about six hours, then three, and found that if the set were left on one or two hours before viewing, and the house heat was turned on an hour before viewing, there were usually no static lines.

Being young, and coming from a wealthy family, my housemate couldn't quite understand why I didn't just go out and buy a new TV and, while I was at it, get cable, so that she could watch the Comedy channel and CNN. I made an all-out attempt to do this, offering to pay Allen to handle the purchase and installation. He declined, saying he had done that once and the TV he had bought for a customer (a Toshiba with 50-inch screen) turned out to be defective. So I called a neighbor who had just bought a TV; she tracked down a Toshiba for \$300 at Best Buy, then looked up the web site address of a company offering monthly cable for \$15.

But I simply couldn't bring myself to travel half a dozen miles to Emeryville and deal with the Third World clerks. Furthermore, what was the point, if my TV worked perfectly well if you turned it on two hours in advance and heated the entire house for an hour before using it?<sup>1</sup>

But still there were those evenings when, as I sat down to watch Nova or Masterpiece Theater or a film on DVD — something English or French — those annoying lines were back on the screen. Since I had already checked with the neighbors to see if they had a TV they wanted to get rid of, and none of them did, I began using a little psychology. I would call Steve and say, "Steve, you know, you have worked hard this year. Right?" And he would laugh and agree. "Don't you think you deserve a reward? Be honest." And again he would laugh, knowing that something was coming. I: "Why don't you buy yourself a nice new TV — one that you and Jane can enjoy together, Steve. One that will bring you smack dab up to the cutting edge of modern TV technology and make you the envy of all the neighbors. And I will be glad — completely happy, Steve — to take your old TV off your hands for just about any amount you want for it". And again he would laugh, and tell me he would think about it.

I used the same ploy on him regarding his and Jane's cars as I confronted ever bigger bills in the maintenance of my '88 Toyota Camry. No success.

Then, in early February, 2008, I hit upon another solution to the static lines problem, and I regard it as one of my most brilliant ideas. I found that, if I left the blue towel in place that I used to cover the screen so I wouldn't see the lines while the TV warmed up — if I left the towel in place *while* the program was on that I wanted to watch, *I couldn't see the lines on the screen!* I found that in most cases, you don't *need* the image in order to watch TV, or at least not in order to understand what is going — you certainly don't need it for news programs or political documentaries or even some TV dramas. Once again, a little creativity saved the day (until I began hankering to see the image, too).

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1. Sometimes, except on very cold days, I could dispense with heating the house, and just turn the set on two hours in advance.

## Books and CDs

The only shopping I ever did with complete confidence was for books and records (now CDs). I walked into a book store, particularly a used-book store, or into a CD store, knowing I was the master of all I surveyed. I didn't much care if a book was paperback or hardback so long as the print was not too small — that is, so long as it was around 12 pt. — and the binding was strong. I could even accept occasional broken letters, as in my copy of the Modern Library edition of the *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Milton*. I liked the underlinings and notes of previous readers. I had no qualms about picking up books from the street, where they would be discarded by students desperate to get out of Berkeley for Thanksgiving or Christmas vacations — or for good! I got my copy of R. R. Palmer's excellent *A History of the Modern World* this way.

I never had much interest in the ever-increasing fidelity of recordings. The only reason I welcomed CDs was that they seemed not to acquire the pops and scratches and hisses that always plagued my LPs. The high-tech Party line was that CDs “couldn't be damaged, only broken”. But every once in a while, I came across one, usually a rental from the Public Library, that skipped or got stuck in one place. Sometimes, but not always, the problem could be solved by cleaning the underside of the CD with a moistened clean handkerchief. I had no idea how much, if at all, this harmed the longevity of the surface.

## Woodcarving

In September 1997 I watched a PBS show on Channel 60 (KTEH) about wood carving, but the carving was done with proper carving tools, not merely a pocket knife, as I had always done it in my childhood. The carver made a whale and an American eagle emblem. The wood was like butter. He talked to his daughter as he worked, relaying anecdotes about his previous carving experiences. He made no mistakes, and I remembered that, in my childhood, the only aspect of carving that I didn't like was that I could, and often did, make mistakes. Hence my desire, years later, of wanting to have computer programs to play games and solve problems. I didn't want to win just one game, or solve just this problem, I wanted to have a program for winning all games of that type, and solving all problems of a given type. When I looked back on my carving days, I always thought about the machines that had been developed for carving decoys for duck hunters, in which the carver moved the end of a rod of some sort over the surface of an existing carved duck, and the machine then did what was necessary to remove the wood on the block it was carving until it was at the same height and angle as the wood that the rod was touching. I had heard that such machines could carve several ducks at a time. I hated one-at-time solutions to problems — solutions that depended on the skill of the solver — and so in this respect I hated craftsmanship.

## Gaby

After the disasters with Danielle, the composer, and Jackie in late 1999, as related in the previous file, I filled out a Personal Profile for the Classical Music Lovers' Exchange (CMLE) and sent it in. This was an organization like Single Book Lovers. A summary of your Profile, which you also had to fill out, was sent to other members as part of the monthly list of new members. If the summary appealed to a member, she could send in for the Profile, and if she liked what she read,

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she could contact you. In late January of 2000, I received a letter with a hand-written address. The letter itself was written in aqua-marine-colored ink on yellow stationery in a small, forward-slanting, clear, professional hand.

January 16, 2000

Dear John Franklin,

The catalyst connecting your name to me is The Classical Music Lovers' Exchange. It seems to be a great institution with a commendable purpose. Out in California, from my recall, having lived in San Francisco for two years, meeting like-minded people was a given — very easy, but then, I was out there in the late 50's and the West may have changed, but I doubt it. Here in New York one rarely turns to fellow concert goers and strikes up conversations. Despite New York's reputation as the world's center of the arts, which it probably is, meeting men with similar interests is somewhat problematic. The city's size creates automatic barriers to casual interchange except amongst the very young & college students.

It's ridiculous to be writing to you, way out there in beautiful Berkeley, but I harmonize with most of your interests. How many people today would list Proust<sup>1</sup>, Montaigne & Colette among favorite authors.? Nietzsche, why him? I think his thinking darkened the minds of some of history's most threatening figures. I recently joined a Proust Society here, however they're into the latter chapters of *Guermites* Way and I'm only midway through a rereading of *Du Côté de Chez Swann*. The group is fascinating and very sophisticated. Somehow I have problems sitting down with large blocks of time to immerse myself into that very refined and sensitive world. Once there though it's hard to pull away.

However, our other world is so very much with us and makes huge demands which act as a constant pull, making it difficult for me to lose myself for great stretches of time with Proust who was for me for many college and post-college years a great favorite.

Are you of German descent? None of my business, but your name indicates that you might be. All the Germans I've known have been very drawn to & knowledgeable about classical music. Just wondering because my background is German.

I love that — your preferences in a companion state that lawyers and psychotherapists are outside the arena of possibilities. I would readily concur in regard to the psychotherapists having been married to a psychiatrist. I concur, for that matter, with all your interests and favorites with the exclusion of Mr. Nietzsche.

I have been chatting on and on and must excuse myself for the indulgence. I would have

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1. I had begun reading *Remembrance of Things Past* around 1998. By the time I sent in my Profile to CMLE, I had read all seven volumes twice. If asked to describe how the prose first struck me, I would say that it was as though the book were written in small, elegant handwriting.

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preferred XVIIIth century France when Les Belles Lettres abounded. E-mail is hardly a substitute but this is the price of progress — speed over substance and inquiry. Anyhow, thank you for the indulgence, in case you've read this far.

If you ever come to New York you might like to give me a call — 212-... or send me an email: — ...@aol.com.

Wishing you well.

Kind regards,

Gabrielle ...

I responded immediately via email, and quite a few days later, received a reply. Thus began the relationship that has been the least unhappy of my life.

At first she responded to my emails only after several days. Then, one day, several weeks after we began communicating, I came home to find a message from her on my phone. The voice appealed to me immediately: soft, intimate, a bit husky, with an obvious shyness about calling without warning, but at the same time an obvious desire to make a good impression. She apologized for intruding, I need not call her back, but if I wanted to, and only if I really wanted to, here was her number. I called her back immediately, we began phoning twice a week at least. I saved her message, thinking to have it forever. But I had forgotten that within a few days, the phone company deletes all saved messages. So I don't even have a written transcription of what she said.

### **A Modern Madame de Sévigné**

But we also kept up our email communication. I complimented her on her writing style, calling it elegantly 19th century. She said that her freshman English teacher at Barnard, Miss (Rosalie) Colie, had always been appalled by it, saying it was florid. Rosalie, she said, was scrawny, unattractive, had a high-pitched voice, a strident laugh, and was clearly unhappy. Her standards were too ambitious for the students. (She had been a star student at Wellesley.) The following spring, she killed herself by deliberately capsizing a rowboat she was in.

I said Rosalie had been wrong — that she had bought the 20th-century Party line about plain Anglo-Saxon words, but that Dickens and Proust, to name just two great authors, showed how foolish it was. I told Gaby that she was a modern Madame de Sévigné even though that master of the art of letter writing had lived in the 17th century, not the 19th. I reminded her that Madame de Sévigné was the favorite author of Marcel's grandmother in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Her standard closing (unless I had temporarily fallen out of favor) was *Je t'embrasse*, which always made me feel good. (My closings when I was feeling warm toward her were "All my love", "With much love"; otherwise merely "Love".)

### **The Cast of Characters**

It soon became clear in our phone conversations, which sometimes lasted more than two hours (she: "You're so easy to talk to!"), that she was a non-stop talker and a constant interrupter. I probably spoke less than ten percent of the time. In the first few months, most of her talk was

about her ex-husband, J.. She went on about him at such length, and with such intensity, that I assumed that she had been divorced only a couple of years ago. Eventually she revealed that the divorce had taken place 35 years earlier. Her ex-husband, who was Jewish, as she was, had been, and still was, a psychoanalyst. (He was mentioned in a number of *Who's Whos*, she said.) He was from a lower middle-class family from the lower East side. The story was that a few years after they were married, her sister, then in her late twenties and a marvelous painter, was diagnosed with manic-depressive illness. Gaby's husband made it clear he didn't want to have an invalid on his hands, and that he resented the time that Gaby put in caring for her.

She later revealed that she had been previously married to a young professor named Joe R. who she said was arrogant and who seemed to enjoy humiliating his freshman students. When he lost his temper and shouted at her in response to her expressing a desire to move a piano into their small apartment, she said to herself, "That's it. This marriage is history." And soon it was.

She and her husband had had twins, which, before they were born, she and J. had named Michael and Raphael (I don't know how, in the sixties, they were able to learn the sex of the unborn); in any case, they decided that the first to be born would be named Michael. Sadly, the second, Rafael, was stillborn. As she lay in her bed after the birth, deeply depressed that one of the twins had died, Gaby said to her husband, "Do you love me?" He turned on his heel and walked out. She decided then and there that the marriage had no future.

But the marriage had its pleasures, too. There were dinner parties with various cultured and intellectual friends and colleagues of her husband, there were trips, to Europe and New England., and although he wasn't very talkative, she still enjoyed them, being a born traveler.

But eventually his cold indifference to her sister's plight led her to ask for a divorce. Their son, Michael, was then aged 2½. In retaliation for her ending the marriage, J. drew swastikas on the envelopes containing her alimony and child support payments. Then, when Michael was about seven, his father remarried and soon had a son by his new wife. Suddenly, without warning or explanation, he broke all ties with Michael. As a result, the boy spent his life trying to figure out what he had done to drive his father away. As a teenager, though already a regional chess champion, he proved rebellious and began hanging out with bad company, including, at least according to Gaby, a boy who was related to one or more members of the Mafia. In her exasperation, she sent him to a military school, which, surprisingly, he did not complain about. Eventually he became a certified public accountant — disappointing to a good Jewish mother who wanted her son to be a medical doctor or professor or financier.

In his late thirties, Michael got married. He invited his father to the wedding, but his father refused, making it clear that the main reason was that Michael was marrying an Italian woman of the lower middle class who wasn't Jewish. Michael continued to make attempts at a reconciliation, often writing his father letters. At one point his father agreed to have dinner with his son. It turned out to be at a run-of-the-mill Chinese restaurant. After dinner, his father said that he had a present for Michael and handed his son a packet of Knorr's soup.

His father, as I have said, was a psychoanalyst. All the psychiatrists, and the one or two other psychoanalysts, in Gaby's circle of friends had dysfunctional families. We both agreed on the utter worthlessness of the profession, and that this worthlessness was largely due to the fact that it attracted profoundly disturbed people, and that it had no scientific basis.

Her own family had been anything but dysfunctional. Her parents, whom she had dearly loved, had died in the early '80's, her mother only a year or so after her father. Both were in their eighties.

## Her Father

Her father had been a family doctor in Yonkers, New York, where Gaby and her sister grew up. The family had lived in Mainz, Germany, where Gaby was born, but had fled the Nazis in the mid-thirties. As she wrote in an email, “My father had no alternative. With no income, since his practice was closed [by the Nazis], and with two stints in solitary confinement, what other choice was there? Yes, he wanted to go to Israel, ... but the British made that impossible, as they did his entry into Britain.”

Her parents had that love of learning and culture that was traditional with Old World Jews. Her father had been a demanding parent, but Gaby said that she loved pleasing him, even though he was not inclined to put up with things he regarded as trivial. She might be in her third-floor bedroom, which she loved, listening to Frank Sinatra on her Emerson portable radio (no doubt similar to the one we had at our house), and he would march into her room and switch it off: “You don’t want to listen to this ridiculous music!”

But he had a sense of humor. Since her talkativeness had already appeared in her teens, he would say, “Wenn sie nicht mehr hier ist, muss mann den Mund zweimal schliessen.” [“When she dies, they will have to close her mouth twice.”]

He loved classical music, and although he didn’t play an instrument, he made sure she took piano lessons. Her teacher was the well-known Viennese, Paul Emmerich, one of whose students was Julius Rudel, who became director of the New York City Opera. Emmerich was nearly blind but had a phenomenal memory of some 3000 pieces including all the dynamics (words and symbols indicating how the music was to be played). She was eventually able to play many of the Beethoven piano sonatas, among other pieces. When she was 13, she appeared at Weill Recital Hall, on the third floor of Carnegie Hall, with five or six other students. She played the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with an elderly woman teacher playing a second piano representing the orchestra part. Gaby said that she remembered “19/20” of it, but couldn’t remember a part at the end; the teacher covered for her. The audience consisted mainly of family and friends. During the same recital, she participated in a round-robin in which each of several students would play about 15 bars of a piece, then the next student would have to pick it up and play the next 15 measures, etc. She said she had been so frightened that she was almost unable to walk out in front of the audience; she remained in the same state throughout both her performances.

Her father may have been a demanding parent, but he would sit with her, hour after hour, helping her with her high school Latin. She found her science courses utterly daunting, and he apparently accepted that.

He had a rule that German was not to be spoken in the house, but once in a while things just slipped out, often proverbs like the one quoted above about her talkativeness. One which Gaby and I both laughed over every time one of us uttered it was: “Faulenz macht müde!” [Idleness makes (you) tired.]; I think she first heard it on one of their annual summer vacations to a little cottage near Pemaquid Harbor, Maine<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes I would quote it when one of us yawned during one of my visits, and we would both laugh.

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1. “Oh, Maine! ...Pemaquid Harbor... to which we went religiously.... I love to recall some of the images of those years — my infatuation with Danny Furman, whose mother taught at Bronx Science and made great fish dinners, the rollerskating rink where I had a phantom boyfriend, Keith, who didn’t know of my existence, the moonlight car rides in which I would drown myself in romantic fantasies, the lobster forays, the walks and swims, the easy interaction of everyone on vacation. Mama reading Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers*, which she adored and so highly recommended that I read [it too].” — email, 3/22/07

He had a stroke at 72, but continued his practice for a few more years. They moved to New York City so he wouldn't have to climb steps. He became more religious in his final years, but was accepting of his fate. "The price of the great gift of life is death", he would say.

### Her Mother

Her mother was a beautiful woman, as is evident from her photos — tall, slim, graceful. She had been raised in Frankfurt, which, in the thirties, was a cultural city; she was not happy about having to move to Mainz after her marriage. "Gäule können mir nicht nach Mainz bringen!" she would say. ["Carthorses can't drag me to Mainz!"] But a husband could, and did.

Gaby often said that her mother "sacrificed her individuality" for her husband, giving up all serious attempts to develop her talent for poetry. Although the family had help as needed throughout the week, she still ran the household, did most of the cooking, and in addition was her husband's receptionist and assistant in his practice. Her mother, like her father, was fond of proverbs. For example, "Man kann nicht über seinen Schatten springen" ["One can't jump over one's shadow" — Gaby wasn't sure of the exact words in German.]. At the dinner table, if Gaby ate too quickly, her mother would say, "Iss mit Verstand!" ["Don't eat so rapidly that you can't pay attention to what you are eating!"] When Gaby lost a key or other item in the house, and was racing around in a panic trying to find it, her mother would attempt to soothe her with the words, "Das Haus verliert nichts!" [The house loses nothing!]

In response to Gaby's endless talk at the dinner table — usually about cultural matters, since she had no patience with what she regarded as trivial subjects — her mother would say, "When you are married, *then* you can talk about Bach and Beethoven all day long."

### Her Sister

As I mentioned above, Gaby was able to get along with her father's at-times-demanding personality, but this was not true for her sister, Marion, who from an early age was in a state of rebellion. As a teenager, she sometimes came home at 2 a.m. instead of the required 12 M. She didn't do exceptionally well in high school, and so was unable to get into a prestigious college; she wound up going to Hunter. But she settled down to her studies and graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a major in History.

She started painting, I think in her late teens, and was definitely talented — her paintings hang in Gaby's apartment; I have two of them in my living room, and five others in boxes that have not been opened. I took the latter ones because Gaby was afraid that her son and daughter-in-law, having little interest in the arts, would simply put them in a box and store them in the attic above the garage.

At age 24, she had her first mental breakdown, and was diagnosed as suffering from manic-depressive illness. When she was around thirty, her doctor said she would have to make a decision: he could give her drugs that would probably control her condition, but they might cause her to lose her desire to paint; if she didn't take the drugs, she would continue to paint, but she would probably be dead (presumably a suicide) within a few years. She chose the former, and never painted again.

She had died of cancer only a few months before Gaby wrote me her letter.

I often telling Gaby how much I wished I could have met Marion; I was convinced we would have gotten along. (Like me, she loved *Rumpole of the Bailey*.) Gaby agreed. I also told her many times how I much I wished I could have met her parents.

### **Friends, Relatives, and Apartment Neighbors**

Gaby's chatter was usually about her friends, and the people in her apartment building, and her son and his wife. As I did with Nellie, a poet I pursued for a while in Berkeley around 1980 who also talked endlessly about her family, I began writing down what I called "The Cast of Characters", because I knew that remembering these people would make her like me more. Following is part of my list; the order is alphabetical by first name:

Alix, a woman in her nineties who had had a leg amputated, and was living in near poverty, her daughter and the rest of her family ignoring her; Gaby occasionally volunteered to accompany her to Central Park, Alix traveling in her electric wheel chair; she died in 2005;

Anna, a Polish woman who took care of Gaby's sister during her final illness, then did cleaning for a living, her son residing with her in a tiny apartment, he interested in computers but unable and apparently unwilling to apply himself enough to get a job;

Ann B., an old friend, former social worker, a woman of immense reading in literature and the arts, but whose idea of a friendship included an hour or two on the phone each day, and who had a habit of making unwarranted criticisms of Gaby's friends, with the result that Gaby terminated the friendship around 2004, resuming it briefly on occasion thereafter until Ann's non-stop talking became too much;

Blanche and Aaron, both in their eighties, she a former concert pianist who, with her sister, had once played for President Truman in the White House; her husband a former professor of electrical engineering at Rutgers; Cousin Dede, a woman in her eighties who lived in London and who loved to have relatives come stay with her;

Cousin Eugene, who lived in Bethlehem, Penna., where he and his wife owned several houses that they rented out;

Cousin Mary, in her 80s, who lived in Chicago, and came to stay with Gaby once in a while;

Flavia, a beautiful blonde who directed documentaries, including one about a 105-year-old musicologist, Joseph Braunstein; another about the lawyer Lynne Stewart who defended Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, the blind Egyptian cleric who was convicted in 1996 of plotting terrorist attacks against various sites in New York City, one of these attacks having been the World Trade Center bombing in 1993; in 2005 Stewart was found guilty of conspiracy, providing material support to terrorists, and defrauding the U.S. government; another documentary about an extremely wealthy man who was an incompetent businessman (his money all inherited) and who was also a thoroughgoing ass who openly cheated on his wife, and then was diagnosed with cancer; he commissioned Flavia to make the film; she also made a film about a couple in Brazil who were forbidden by the Catholic Church to marry because the man was a paraplegic and therefore would be unable to consummate the marriage; and a documentary about relatives of Cezanne;

Helen and Hans W, Gaby having been friends with Helen since they met in camp at the age of twelve; Hans had been a mathematician with Bell Labs in N.J.; they lived in Summit, N.J.,

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for many years, then moved to an apartment on the upper West Side of New York City, in 2005;

Jane, who lived in the apartment next door; a very attractive woman in her late forties whom I was hot for from the start; she and her husband had an adorable son, Stephen, who was about four when I first visited Gaby; she was very fond of him and for a while read *Babar* to him; she also took him to one or two children's events at local museums, and also a film, but for whatever reason, he seemed to lose interest in coming over to her apartment to visit as the years progressed. Nevertheless, on a couple of occasions he invited us to visit him in the new playroom that his parents had had converted from an unused bedroom;

Gaby said that Jane's family, who were Jewish, had been in the fur business, which Jane now carried on; she was very wealthy; her husband was in some sort of business having to do with labels, I think, but also had money. Her husband said very little on the few occasions I met him. I didn't notice it, but Gaby said he was bald and that Jane had insisted he wear a toupée;

For a while I thought that Jane liked me, because she would usually greet me with a warm hello, arms extended for a hug. But since, if I met her in the hall or the lobby when Gaby wasn't there, I always told her how good she looked, I came to the conclusion that all she was doing was making sure that my compliments about her looks continued; I always hated myself on the rare occasions that I forgot; one of these occurred during my visit to Gaby in July, 2009, when I happened to meet her at the elevator; she had her golf clubs, and was perfectly dressed for a day on the links; we talked, I asked where she played. She said at the new Trump National Golf Club in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. (annual dues \$18,000, according to the web site); Trump had bought the old Briar Hall course where I had caddied several times in my teens; in any case, I forgot to tell her how good she looked, and so, as the elevator neared the ground floor, she turned and, it seemed, standing a bit close to me (suppose I had just grabbed her and given her a deep French kiss), she began primping the mirror at the back of the elevator; still I said nothing, being too involved in making admiring talk. In my dejection afterward, I thought: well, maybe she would conclude I didn't find her as attractive as I had previously, and be all the more determined the next time to get her compliment.

Their wealth allowed them to completely redo their apartment around 2007 at a cost of several million dollars, and they were able to send Stephen to the best private schools and camps; but her revealing that she was a member of Trump's pretentious country club made me suddenly think of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which he coined the term *conspicuous consumption*; it suddenly seemed clear that she felt that one of her *duties*, as a person of her wealth, was to play golf at what was probably the most expensive country club within two hours' drive of New York City; I was certain her level of skill did not demand such a course; any public course would have offered a more-than-sufficient challenge; but that was irrelevant; the point was not *to play golf* but to be seen playing at the most expensive club around;

Lynn, music publicist, agent to the American composer Steve Reich for 17 years, then to David del Tredici and to Bang on a Can; her son was the president of a hedge fund in

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New York City, at age 35 already worth several hundred million dollars; all other members of the family likewise super-achievers; Lynn herself a formidable student who sometimes taught courses in music;

Marcy, who lived on the floor above hers, mother of the brilliant and beautiful Gabriella, whose summer employment during her junior and senior high school years at Stuyvesant, one of New York City's (and the nation's) premier high schools, was doing DNA-related research at Rockefeller University; she had a 100% average until her senior year when she was not informed that a French course she was about to take was only pass-fail, and thus she could not receive her usual 100% grade, which lowered her average to 99.5% by the time she applied to Harvard and Yale; making matters worse was the fact that an incompetent member of the high school administration forgot to forward the school's recommendation when she submitted her applications, and when it did, listed her junior and senior summer activities as "horseback riding in Germany"; she was not accepted by either Harvard or Yale; after a frenzy of sending out other applications, she finally got into the University of Chicago. In conversations with Gabriella, I had no doubt about her extraordinary intelligence, but I had considerable doubt about the value of an education system that was so bizarrely centered on grades that the difference between 99.5% and 100% was even remotely important. I wondered what the teenage Einstein would have thought of such a system, especially if it had prevented him from studying physics at a good university.

Muriel and Jerry, who lived on a lower floor in Gaby's apartment building, he with kidney problems that eventually killed him, but still a ladies' man, the two going on ocean trips, flying to Europe despite his need for a dialysis machine throughout;

Rita, her stockbroker for many years, who was also an accomplished classical pianist who gave occasional recitals for small audiences and arranged for recitals by lesser-known concert pianists;

Rosalie, her friend from high school, where she had been a cheerleader; all her life a woman of beauty, but who, in the early nineties, contracted multiple-sclerosis, and eventually needed round-the-clock care, which she obtained from women immigrants from Eastern Europe, who would be willing to work for the wages she could afford to pay; she devoted her energies to raising funds, via phone contacts, for Pegasus, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward's charity organization; she lived in a little apartment in Stamford, Conn., barely able to pay her bills, virtually ignored by her daughter; then, in 2005, a wealthy brother finally told her that he would make sure she had enough to live on; in 2006, for Christmas, I sent her a check for \$150, she called back to thank me profusely; her courage and refusal to complain very much in evidence;

Sue and Jerry, Gaby having been friends with Sue, as with Helen, since the three met in camp at the age of nine;

and many others.

## **Our First Meeting**

Our first meeting occurred at the Andrews Hotel, 624 Post St., in San Francisco on Monday, May 22, 2000. I don't recall how she decided she wanted to stay at that particular hotel for the night after her arrival from New York; perhaps she had remembered it from the year she spent in San Francisco in the fifties, after she graduated from Barnard. We had exchanged photos in March. There was lots of breathless excitement in my emails and phone calls throughout May. I parked in a nearby parking lot, found the hotel, asked the person at the desk to announce me, and paced back and forth, thinking about all my failures with women. Then I heard movement on the stairs, perhaps some cheery words, and there emerged two rather shapely legs descending the stairs in a careful, placing-of-the-shoe-tip manner — the graceful walk of the upper middle class lady — then a little black dress, and she emerged smiling from the stairwell into the lobby. I probably said something like, "Well! We meet at last!" I went up to her, gave her a big hug, and she, sensing my emotion, said, "Now, no tears" and then we looked at each other, both beaming.

I took her to the tea room at the St. Francis Hotel for a snack, then that evening we ate at Cafe Claude, located in an alley and having tables on the uneven sidewalk. During the dinner, one of two young women sitting at the table next to us seemed to feel that a cell phone conversation wasn't really a conversation unless it disturbed everyone in the vicinity, and so Gaby turned to her and asked if she would mind lowering her voice. It turned out she would mind, and an interchange developed. I think I joined in, being in no mood to allow American rudeness (although the women were Asian) to wreck the first dinner with the woman I wanted to become my true love. Had I been alone, I would, after a certain point, have simply used the most vile profanity while showing no emotion. As it was, I controlled my temper, the woman quieted down, and on we went with our dinner.

We stayed at my house for the rest of the time she was here.

On Tuesday, I took her to Chez Panisse, the famous restaurant in Berkeley (chilled asparagus soup and asparagus salad with duck prosciutto and fresh ricotta; hand-cut pasta with morels and capers; slow-cooked Pacific king salmon with spring peas, Meyer lemon, and sage blossoms; strawberry-hazelnut meringue (needless to say, I saved the menu). In mid-week we took a leisurely drive down the coast, past sunny; flat, wide meadows, to Carmel. On Saturday, I took her to a recital by Sarah Cahill<sup>1</sup>, the nationally-known proponent of avant-garde classical piano, at Sharon Mann's beautiful house in the Berkeley Hills. Elegant polished wood interior, Sharon's little speech about how the room where Sarah would be playing was like those in which Chopin played, that he usually played for intimate groups, seldom in concert halls.

A memory that remains clear is her sitting in the lawn chair in my back yard on a sunny afternoon, the roses in full bloom, and an expression that was half smile, half quizzically raised eyebrow that said, "Well, the house could do with some work, and the neighborhood is not beautiful, but he is certainly not an uninteresting man..."

When she left for New York City, we were still tentatively together.

## **Together Though Apart**

We wrote emails to each other virtually ever day, and at least twice a week talked on the phone

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1. The program: Leo Ornstein's "Suicide in an Airplane", George Antheil's Second Sonata, "The Airplane", second movement; Ornstein's "Solitude"; Antheil's Toccata No. 2 and Ornstein's "A Morning in the Woods"

for at least an hour each time. Sometimes she called me on her cell phone while she was taking her daily walk, often in Central Park, which she loved and which I came to love through visits to her (in my youth, it had been a place you avoided if you valued your safety). She would begin, “How d’ye do...” and then ask if she was interrupting me, always wanting me to tell her if she was. Or she would say, “Hello John, I can’t stay on long because I am at Lincoln Center...” and then she stayed on long. But I loved these midday phone calls even though once she had been given the go-ahead, she would be off into her usual monologue. In the early months of our relationship, she had cell phone problems, as Danielle, the composer had had. I would have to tell her, “You’re breaking up! I can’t hear you!”

She had certain endearing verbal mannerisms. When telling me something she knew she had told me several times already, she would try to shorten parts of the story with “Buh-buh-buh: “They have two daughters, one is a lawyer, the other talks about becoming psychiatrist, buh-buh-buh...” Whenever she talked about performers at a concert or recital, or about some notable appearing in the news, or even just about someone she knew, she would always comment on their looks first, if they were attractive, — “Such a handsome man, he is seventy but he looks twenty years younger...” — If she happened to know that the man was kind, she would always add, “And so humane...”

She had no idea how much she talked. Once, after she had allowed me to speak for a few minutes — I think so that I could give her an explanation of something technical, to which she listened attentively, even admiringly, as always — I asked her to estimate the average percentage of time she felt that I talked during our conversations. She laughed and said, “At least 80%! Ninety-percent!” I was astounded. The number was closer to 20% at most.

I had wanted the emails we exchanged, numbering close to two thousand by October, 2004, to constitute the final volume of this autobiography, but that now seems impossible, for a variety of reasons. Each year, I sent her a card for Hanukkah, one for Valentine’s day, one for her birthday, which was on Feb. 12, and one for our anniversary, which I considered to be the day, Jan. 16, when she had written her first letter to me. In 2007, the Hanukkah and Valentine’s day cards were returned by the Post Office: I had addressed them to 600 15th Ave. in New York City, the street address of my mother when she lived in San Francisco.

As I have said, she was a compulsive talker and routinely interrupted me, but she was the only woman I ever met who had such a deep and passionate love of classical music. She had that good Jewish love of literature, painting, sculpture, drama, was a regular museum goer, which was considerably helped by the fact that she lived only a few blocks from the Guggenheim and Metropolitan Museums, in the upper East Side. She admired me for what she regarded as my exceptional memory (I consider it to have been barely above average), but the reason was that she sometimes had trouble remembering a word or a name, and hence was inclined to overestimate the memories of those who did not have the problem to the degree that she did. (“What would I do without you?”) Having no ability in science or mathematics, she also admired me for my technical knowledge, and for my willingness to explain things to her in the simplest possible terms, without any of the scorn and impatience that had been all-too-evident in other technically-knowledgeable men in her life who had no sympathy for people who lacked their talents. She would always say, “What a shame that you didn’t become a professor, you are so good at explaining things.”

Sometimes, as she was particularly enjoying a part of one of our conversations, she would suddenly stop and say, in an almost girlish voice, “Do you still like me?” Or, “Am I still your

friend?” Or, “Am I still your favorite person to talk to?” And I knew that, at least for the moment, I was still in her favor. Once in a while, she would comment on how youthful my voice always sounded.

Especially important to me — and a sign of her fundamental quality as a woman — was her never-failing support for me during my deep, often suicidal, depressions, which continued to be the rule rather than the exception in my life. She never became angry at me about them, never threatened to end the relationship over them, although she did sometimes badger me to return to the search for drugs that would help me. I felt I had made a sufficient effort along those lines, and so always managed to postpone resuming that fruitless search.

But the non-stop talking and constant interrupting frequently got on my nerves. I went to the therapist, Joanne Howell, whom Yolanda and I had gone to in the early nineties. She had always impressed me as having a realistic view of matters psychological, free of the rubbishy theory that hampered most therapists. The result of our first session was that she told me to openly, politely, respectfully, tell Gaby of my complaint. This I did. Gaby was receptive and apologetic. But the only change was that she now employed a variety of formulas that she inserted into her rush of words:

“I don’t want to monopolize the time so I’ll make this short”;

“I know I’m not letting you finish”;

“I promise not to interrupt after this”;

“I’m not going to spend any time on this because I want you to talk”;

“By the way, and that’s the last thing I’ll say...”.

After each one of these, on she would go for ten, twenty, or more minutes. Sometimes I would try to interrupt her interrupting by simply continuing with what I had been saying. It made a good exercise in concentration to keep my sentences following one after the other while she continued to speak, but it was useless, even though she must have known that I couldn’t possibly be listening to her when I was talking at the same time. She was unstoppable. So in exasperation I would sometimes pick up a book that happened to be lying on my bed — a side-by-side Latin-English translation of one of the Roman classics, a paperback on relativity, anything — and read while she rambled on, just as I had done with my mother.

And yet when somehow we came to the end of the evening’s conversation, I would always say, “We’ll talk soon,” and she would always say, in a voice I loved, “Take good care”.

I asked Joanne what causes compulsive talking. She said she didn’t know. Her sister had the same problem. Eventually, Joanne simply resigned herself to it, at the same time not being shy about terminating the monologue whenever she couldn’t take any more of it.

I should mention in passing that the same Yes-but-No that she applied so expertly to my request for a reduction in the non-stop talking, she applied with equal skill to her doctors’ orders that, because of her incipient diabetes, she severely restrict her sugar intake. She would tell me over the phone how she had enjoyed a restaurant lunch with a friend and had been unable to resist a few bites of a pastry or some fruit she had always loved. “It was full, full, full of sugar. I shouldn’t have eaten it. Well, I’ll be blind soon ...” or “I had leg pains afterward and I know it was because of all that sugar. Dr. — is going to warn me, I know it. My weight is too high already. My — [and she would name the blood constituent] was above — last time. I just have to discipline myself.” If I ordered an ice cream, she would look longingly at it. “Oh, I always loved vanilla. When I was young I could eat as much ice cream as I wanted without a second

thought.” I: “Well, maybe just one bite won’t hurt.” She, with the spoon already in hand, scraping a little off the scoop in my dish, tasting it, loving it: “I simply must stop. This is no good for me.” But the spoon was already back, taking another little scrape.

### Her Financial Status

Gaby went to Barnard College in New York City in the days before Columbia University became co-ed. She majored in French, and then earned a master’s in French literature. She spoke French fluently. After her second marriage, she taught fifth and sixth grade at a public school in the City, but the daily battles with unruly students, many of them black, eventually wore her out. In her last year, she had to begin the day with a tranquillizer, but even so went to work in fear. She told me of the kind of behavior she had to deal with: a black student would knock over a flower vase, then taunt her with, “Look what you did, Mrs. L.” She gave up teaching in the late seventies and went into publishing, working for many years at Random House. At first she worked on a survey educational project for marketing, then worked with a professor on a book about Gallup polls. But, as she said, “in the publishing business you have to keep moving around in order to advance”, and she didn’t like that, so the final years of her working life were spent in advertising, where she managed ad campaigns in Europe.

Starting in the early eighties she began learning about finance and investing in the stock market. We never told each other what our net worth was, but with her own savings, plus the half of her parents’ estate that she inherited, and then her inheritance from her sister, and considering that the period 1980 to 2000 was one of major growth in the stock market, I estimate, based on some of the things she said about her stocks, and what she regarded as a “significant” loss (she was badly hit by the dot.com crash, not to mention the recession that began in 2008), and given her modest lifestyle — I estimate that her net worth prior to the 2008 recession was at least \$6 million.

### Visiting Her

Three or four times a year (later, only once or twice) I endured the agony of travel<sup>1</sup> and visited her for a week or two. In the summer, we usually went to the Tanglewood Music Festival in the Berkshires, always a good experience for me. We also made a couple of driving trips through New England. But on several occasions we traveled to Europe, and I spent much of the time eyeing bridges and hotel balconies and trying to calculate the number of seconds it would take for a body to hit the ground (mine, not hers). She never came to California after our first meeting, having developed a strong dislike for California culture during the year she spent in San Francisco in her early twenties. And the truth is that I much preferred the limitless cultural bounty of New York City to the genteel second-rate that San Francisco had to offer.

She had a charming little one-bedroom apartment on E. 87th St., near Madison Ave. which she had occupied for 30-plus years. The dark green awning over the sidewalk in front had the address

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1. My son, who enjoyed travel, said that I should start flying a new airline, Jet Blue: I: “You mean because it’s so safe?” He: “No, because every seat has its own TV!” So thereafter I flew only Jet Blue and always thought it an outstanding airline, even after several of its planes spent upwards of eight hours on the tarmac due to weather in 2007. I was impressed by the concern for passengers *and* for employees exhibited by the CEO, David Neeleman, and by the willingness of the Mormon ladies who took flight reservations to engage in unhurried conversation. (Neeleman, a Mormon, apparently let them work at home, which made them especially appreciative of their jobs, and willing to work for less pay than they would have received at the other airlines.)

written in elegant white script letters. When I entered the lobby, I would ask the doorman to call her and tell her I had arrived. Sometimes I would ask him to say, "You have a gentleman caller", but since most of the doormen were from Eastern Europe, and this was not a phrase they had heard before, they would indicate their not understanding what I had said. I would then write down the words, but it was only with difficulty, if at all, that they were able to read them, haltingly, when Gaby answered the phone. As soon as I stepped out of the elevator on the sixth floor, there she would be, coming out of her apartment and walking toward me with open arms and a hearty laugh about my unnecessary politeness in having the doorman call her first. And even before our first warm embrace, she would be telling me how good I looked, how handsome I was, and she would repeat this several times after we had entered her apartment and I had put my things down.

There was a little dining table straight ahead, a tiny kitchen on the right, then, beyond the table, a long living room with a grand piano at the far end. On the right, just beyond the kitchen, a short hallway lead to the bathroom and, to the left of it, her bedroom study and library, with a tall armoire filled with her parents' books, mostly German. Her sister's paintings hung on the walls throughout the apartment: street scenes, portraits, landscapes, the whole in a soft yellow orange light. A small ancient TV on the lower shelf of one of the bookshelves, its lack of prominence an indication of how little TV meant in her life.

I always felt as though I had come home when I entered her apartment and was bathed in her praise and admiration, and in the sound of classical music from her stereo. She would have dinner on the stove, would offer me a glass of Drambuie which she knew I liked, then have me open one of the wine bottles that she had bought awkwardly, uncertainly, since she drank very little wine or anything else as a result of her incipient diabetes.

For the first few visits, I was worried that she was wearing a wig: her hair was dark brown, almost black, with only a few strands of gray. But it didn't have the brittle coal-black color of dyed hair, so I kept imagining, with some distaste, a skinny old-lady's head covered with thin gray plastered-down hair underneath the wig. Yet she made no effort to prevent my touching her hair, and she gave no other signs that she was hiding anything, and so eventually I came to the conclusion that she was one of those rare fortunate women whose hair remains dark into old age. (I didn't want to know how old she was, since although she looked fine, I gathered from a few things she said that she was older than me, contrary to what my ad in the Classical Music Lovers Exchange had stipulated. It wasn't until a visit in July 2007, some 7-1/2 years after we met, that she let slip that she had been born in 1932, and so was some four years older than me.)

But as I began to eat the dinner she had prepared for my arrival, her instinctive need to control things would manifest itself: first, she not only carefully positioned the plate on the place-mat before me, and the wine glass, the metal coaster underneath it, and then adjusted the place mat itself, but throughout the meal, she would not hesitate to re-adjust the position of any of these items, included. She would not hesitate to arrange the food on my plate as I started eating and was shocked when I cut up the various items she had served, meat or fish or turkey, vegetables, potatoes and mixed them. That had to stop, and it did. But then, later, I found out that even cutting up a single item, say, the meat, any more than was absolutely necessary, elicited an exclamation from her. "No mish-mash! Why do you make such a mish-mash?"

Like my mother, she always served me first, and then spent most of the meal going back and forth to the kitchen, bring the next course, or the salad, or fruit. It is no exaggeration to say that we almost never shared an entire meal at her place, because of this endless going back and forth to the kitchen. But unlike my mother, she did not accompany her efforts with unending sighs to

show how much she was suffering. It was just something a properly-raised Jewish woman did for her guest.

She had an obsession with healthy food, and I had to resign myself to the fact that, throughout the day, I would have to keep saying “No thank you” to her never-ending offers and cajolings. “Would you like some melon? It’s delicious. I bought it from ...” and she name the grocery store. “No thank you.” Then, a few minutes later, “Would you like some strawberries? They’re fresh and very good at this time of year.” “No thank you.” “How about some blueberries?” After a while, in a vain attempt to stop the constant offers, I added, “Maybe a little later.” but it did not good. To get me to try something new, she would say, “This continued throughout the meal. Her obsessive fastidiousness was present even away from the dinner table. She would straighten the doilies on a living room chair after I had sat in it. She pounced within seconds after I had placed a banana peel on a side table (“No banana peels on furniture!”) If a few hairs at the back of my head were standing up and we were on the verge of going out, she was clearly made ill-at-ease, and would try to press them flat, saying “You have to brush...” Once, she cleaned my ear with her finger.

On the other hand, she never hesitated to praise me when I managed to carry out a task that she deemed important. I slept in the bed in her study (she slept in the fold-out bed in the living room) and, in the morning, I made a point of making the bed as soon as I got up. By the time I came back from breakfast at Nectar of 82nd Street or Le Pain Cotidien (she was not a breakfast person), she had re-made it, smoothing away any wrinkles I had left, but giving me lavish praise for my conscientiousness. “Your mother raised you well You’ve been so good about the bed and everything. I have not *a* complaint.”

She also frequently expressed admiration for my teeth, always adding how unfair it was that I had such good teeth even though I “never” cleaned them. (In fact, I cleaned them every other day.)

When we were both in the apartment, and she wasn’t asking me if I wanted something to eat, she chattered away about whatever was on her mind: the world situation, instances of anti-Semitism, the stock market, neighbors in her building, and her friends. If I went into the study she would continue talking. I often thought: You could go out and get a college degree and when you came back, she would still be at it. But if I told her I needed to lie down, she was always respectful of that. I could close the study door, and read in the quiet. She always tried to allow an hour in the afternoon for my nap when she was planning our day.

Eventually, in exasperation at trying to deal with her controlling nature, I began developing a list of do’s and don’t’s, in part because I simply couldn’t remember them all, but also because I was curious as to just how many there were, and because I felt that, viewed with the proper sense of humor, such a list would enable me to deal with what might otherwise have been an intolerable situation. I showed her the list, she laughed, was briefly a little ashamed that I had been driven to such lengths. The list as of early 2007 was as follows:

### **The Gaby List**

#### *Apartment*

No wearing shoes in her apartment;

No leaving the apartment before 9 a.m., so as not to wake her up;

Turn knob quietly when closing door in morning, then push door closed. No clicks;

Lock at least top lock (there were three) when leaving apartment if she is sleeping;

## *Retirement*

Lock at least center lock after coming in;

Wash hands whenever returning to the apartment (not a bad idea); I must say that she was almost apologetic when asking me to do this after we came back from a walk);

Knapsack must be put on floor near apartment door;

Wear pajamas she gave me (she would say, when the subject came up, “You needn’t wear the pajamas [I gave you]”, but that meant, “I would like you to wear them, but I suppose I will not insist upon it.”);

### *Bathroom*

No leaving toilet seat up;

No using small blue towel to dry myself after shower; use large blue towel;

No using washcloth that is used to clean shower; use other washcloth;

No merely rinsing hands after using toilet; must use soap; (When she first brought this up, I asked her how she knew I hadn’t used the soap, then answered my own question: “You check the soap to see if it’s wet.” She: “I never go out of my way to look for it. It just strikes me.” And so thereafter I did as in my childhood<sup>1</sup>, namely, rinsed my fingers in the tap water, then drew the soap through the water so it would be wet in the upcoming inspection.)

No saying “I have to go to the bathroom”; say “I have to be excused”;

### *General*

No calling her “my dear” (too common an expression);

No saying “c’est moi” about beautiful houses;

No talk about listening to the sound of the hundred dollar bills stacked in wealthy neighborhoods;

No making up stories about houses (“You may make up whatever stories you like about houses, anytime, anywhere. It’s just that your tendency is to equate the beauty of the exterior with the anticipated lives of the inhabitants. That I question.”)

Only very occasionally can say “You’re sweet”;

No holes in gloves or other clothes;

Always wear the things — shirts, gloves, hats — she and her friends have given me (“You can always wear your own things too, if you prefer.”);

No mixing together different kinds of food on plate;

No getting up from the dinner table without it being clear that she too has finished eating;

No asking stupid questions of people (“You seldom ask ‘stupid questions’ of people. Granted, sometimes you ask what you definitely know.”);

No criticism of blacks in company;

No joking about riboflavin, and so forth, being in alcoholic drinks;

No saying “thank you” all the time;

No sad, depressed voice when answering the phone;

No saying how tired or hungry I am in emails;

Ditto in phone conversations;

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1. See Vol. 1, chapter 1, section “His [i.e., my father’s] Daily Schedule”.

## *Retirement*

No using absurdly big words on phone or in emails (see more in the first paragraph following this list);  
No asking if we can get together with women she knows (“You may request that any of the ladies I know join us — anytime.”);  
No talking about cooking shows on TV;  
Must have \$1 in change for bus at all times; know avenues, streets, subway rules;  
Must have proper tokens, passes, etc. for subway at all times, and know what the rules are regarding these;  
No complaining when she insists on shopping with me for shoes, clothes, and so forth;  
No passive resistance, that is, sullenly going along with her demands but making sure she sees how much I hate it; it is OK to go along with her demands, but must hide all actual feeling;  
On every trip, always invite her for *modest* lunches and dinners (offering to pay, of course), being prepared for her dismissal of such invitations; (On a visit Feb. 11 through 21, 2005, she made what I regarded as an unforgivable accusation of my never inviting her out to lunch or dinner. When I returned home, I sent her an email containing the following:

“I hereby offer to pay for any breakfast, lunch, dinner or snack for you any time we are together. Furthermore, if you should ever be willing to take a cab, I hereby offer to pay for it.

“Furthermore, I hereby offer to pay for both or one of the tickets you buy for any concert, lecture, play, movie, or other performance.

“This email thus renders impossible your ever saying in the future, ‘You never offer to ...’ if the subject is food or taxi travel or tickets.)”

No smelly feet;  
No calling her, leaving a message, or replying to an email without clearly indicating that I have read her latest email;  
No thanking her for “letting” me talk because this implies that she sometimes hogs the conversation;  
No silent treatment during fights;  
Call a taxi when she is sick or cold even when she says not to;  
When she is being exceptionally bossy, I should say so.

As I indicated above, she would not tolerate my using, or even mentioning, big words that she felt had no use — words that one would be unlikely to find in, say, *The New Yorker* or Proust. Of course, she liked the word that may fairly be described as every literary woman’s favorite big word, namely, “crepuscular”. Words like “abjure”, “conflate”, “nugatory”, “tergiversation”, “screed”, and “persiflage” were all right. Even words like “velleity” (because T. S. Eliot used it). On rare occasions she would allow me to point out an occurrence of a word or phrase for which there was a rhetorical term — that is, instances of, for example, “antiphrasis”, “prolepsis”, “asyn-deton”, “tmesis” (I was always trying to memorize these). But just about any word out of *The Superior Person’s Book of Words*<sup>1</sup> — “kedogenous”, “mephitic”, “procellous” — made her genuinely angry. For example, in an email of 3/20/009, I wrote:

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1. Bowler, Peter, *The Superior Person’s Book of Words*, Dell, N.Y., 1982

## *Retirement*

Some words for you. You probably know the first two:

"enarque" -- a graduate of the elite French school, Ecole Nationale d'Administration.

"terroir" -- soil, ground

"assuefaction" -- a beautiful word! It means habit. The following is a passage by the greatest lover of big words in English literature, namely, Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682):

"The received story of Milo, who by daily lifting a Calf, attained an ability to carry it being a Bull, is a witty conceit, and handsomely sets forth the efficacy of Assuefaction."

"psephology" -- the scientific study of elections

"quant" -- an ugly word: it is the name now given to mathematical types who come up with formulas and computer programs in the world of finance.

Her reply:

In reference to your word addiction, I find that "assuefaction" a pompous and aggressively[sic]-flaunting word which doesn't even have a sonority to compensate for all its pedantry. I don't like pedantry in any form. I'll never remember it, not to mention, use it. As for Sir Thomas Browne I find his writing incredibly pompous and foolish in the process. How can you actually find this rewarding and praiseworthy? What kind of a word is "quant"? I don't find it ugly, certainly not beautiful either. I think you assail it because of its association with its particular realm.

I did my best not to mention the kind of big word that I knew she hated, but, as the reader can see, sometimes I misjudged. When a month or two had gone by without my having brought up a single word that she disapproved of, I would sometimes say, "Haven't I been a good boy recently? Not one big word!" To which she would reply that she wasn't against big words, just absurdly big words that no one uses.

We had three fights in the first seven years we were together: the first one occurred when, on the morning after the evening I had arrived for a week's stay with her, I went to a florist a few blocks from her apartment and bought her a dozen roses. When I entered the apartment and gave them to her, she became furious: hadn't I checked to see if she had any empty vases? She didn't. I was so angry at this rebuff of a gesture of love that I walked out, returned the roses, and sat on park benches in Central Park for several hours. When I returned, she apologized, but in a manner that indicated that only with considerable effort had she figured out why I might have been angry at her rejection of the roses.

The second fight occurred when she decided I needed to buy some new shoes. I told her I didn't want to then, but that I would go out and get my shoes shined and as soon as I returned home, I would buy a pair. But she asked me just to come to the store and try on a few pairs — I could always say no. I allowed myself to be dragged to the store, tried on the pairs, and reluctantly agreed that one pair was less bad than the others. I carried the bag containing the shoes,

which had cost close to \$100, onto the subway. When we got off and had walked a few steps down the platform, I suddenly realized I had forgotten the bag. The train had already left the station. I was made even more angry and depressed at the thought of the blacks who would find the bag and not think for five seconds about trying to return it.

The third fight occurred over the subject of taxis vs. subways. I hated subways and buses, liked taxis; she hated taxis, liked subways and buses. We were in the Village at the end of several hours' pleasant walk. I was very tired. I asked that we take a taxi back to her apartment — I would pay, of course. But she wanted to take a subway. Back and forth we went. Finally, to keep the peace, I reluctantly consented, but then got into a fight with the Asian clerk behind the cage, who refused to accept my tokens for some reason. I stalked off in a fury after calling him several foul names. When we got back to her apartment, I called JetBlue with the intention of returning to California two days early. But the cost of changing flights was too great, so I stuck it out. We eventually made up.

When we said goodbye — the Carmel car in front of her apartment, my garment bag in the trunk — I would embrace her, but sometimes, when I went to kiss her, she would turn her face so I could only kiss her cheek. On the way to the airport (JFK), I would wonder if she really was worth all the trouble. But one time, as I was walking through the terminal after checking in, there came over the loudspeakers the lyrics of an old song: “Dance with me, oh, baby, won't you dance with me...”, and I suddenly saw her in my mind's eye, looking at me with that smile when I first arrived at her apartment. Tears came to my eyes, I had to go over near wall and pretend to be fussing with my luggage. I phoned her because I wanted her to know what I had felt just in case the plane crashed. But I could hardly talk because of my sobs. She seemed to understand, seemed to be genuinely touched, and just before she hung up, said, for the only time I could remember, “My love to you”.

### **Trips Together**

She loved travel, I hated it, but I forced myself to go to Europe several times with her. (Our week in Tanglewood, Mass., each summer was far less depressing.) Only the knowledge that I could commit suicide at any time — by leaping off a bridge, or from an upper story of a hotel where we were staying — got me through these trips.

On bus tours, she chattered away as usual, pointing out every house, every roof tile, every leaf. I tried to nod off but couldn't. I often felt I wouldn't be able to stand up when the bus reached a destination, so bent was I under the tonnage of her non-stop words. A few memories of those trips:

In Prague, we walked up the long narrow street to the Castle, past the tiny apartment where Kafka's sister had lived. I understood immediately the source of his novel.

Since we were members of a tour sponsored by WQXR, the New York City classical station of my youth, the organizer, Jeff Spurgeon, arranged for an afternoon concert, in our hotel in Prague, by a local woodwind quartet. After they had performed several works from the repertoire, they announced that they would now like to improvise on a melody submitted by a member of the audience. I think they handed out small sheets of blank music paper and told us they would make a random selection from all the responses, and improvise on that melody. Naturally, I couldn't resist. I came up with something and did my best to write it down without benefit of a way of checking that the notes on paper corresponded to what I heard in my mental ear. They gathered all the slips of paper in a box, had one of their members close his eyes and reach in and, amaz-

ingly enough, he picked my entry. They announced my name, there was a round of applause, and I sheepishly half stood up. I thought the group did an excellent job with my little melody.

In one hotel, I think in Salzburg, there were several Iranian families, the men in shorts and sandals, the women in their cloaks, their faces barely visible. This dreadful hypocrisy only increased my contempt for the Muslim cultures. I thought: “You sons-of-bitches can’t stop proclaiming your hatred of us, but as soon as you get a little money, you flock to our cities and stay in our best hotels.”

In Paris, we were late for a flight to Dublin, from which we were to fly home. We ran through the terminal, got on board just in time. Within a couple of hours, there was news that the ceiling of the terminal had collapsed over the part of the terminal we had been running through.

In Dublin, we spent a little time in one of the most beautiful parks in the world, St. Stephen’s Green. You couldn’t believe that mere mortals had built such a paradise. We visited Yeat’s grave in Drumcliff Churchyard, near Sligo. It was nothing like the image that the lines of his last great poem, “Under Ben Bulben”, called up. There was a small church next to a main road, the barren, uninspiring brown mountain, Ben Bulben, off in the distance. The lines of the poem were true enough, but it was as though the church and the grave and the mountain and the surrounding land had been put there as an afterthought by a bored team of workers hired by the town.

The memorial of another great poet was also a disappointment, namely, Emily Dickinson’s house in Amherst, Mass. It was next to a main road, the house substantial, with a big lawn on one side, and a grove of trees nearby. In the sound of traffic I tried to imagine the clip-clop of hooves. We never got to see her room, or any of the interior of the house, as the place was closed.

### Why We Stayed Together

At this point, the reader may well be wondering why I continued our relationship. The answer is that first of all, she was the only woman I had ever met who had a profound love of classical music. We could go to concerts together and I would know that she would be deeply moved by the music — the occasion wasn’t just a demonstration of her upper class status. When I stood up to applaud after the performance of a work, as I usually did, and shouted “Bravo!” and “Yeah!”, she would always say, “I like the way you show your appreciation like that.” I could give her CDs and know that almost always she would listen to the music again and again and tell me repeatedly how much she had enjoyed it. Certainly this was the case with the Sonata No. 5 in C by Baldassare Galuppi on a CD of performances by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli that I gave her; and a CD of the late piano music of Brahms, which I gave her after we both heard the Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel played on WQXR (I told her many times that the Intermezzo No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 117, exactly expressed my feelings for her); and a CD of Hilary Hahn performing the Bach violin concertos<sup>1</sup>; and a CD containing the Brahms Clarinet Quintet, the second movement of which, I told her, was an example of music written while the composer was talking to No. 1; and Alfred Brendel’s performance of the Bach Fantasy and Fugue; I told her the story related earlier about my first hearing of this performance; and Ravel’s Sonata Posthumous for Violin and Piano (she in turn gave me *Ravel: Complete Music for Solo Piano* as performed by Abbey Simon). She loved Sharon Mann’s privately published CD of the Bach Partitas. (The reader will recall that Sharon was my housemate Nami’s piano teacher<sup>2</sup>.)

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1. Her performance, with Margaret Batjer, of the Concerto for 2 Violins was the best I ever heard, particularly the last movement, but Gaby felt it was played too fast; I understood why she said it, but to me the rapid tempo made the performance all that more irresistible.

## *Retirement*

She also loved the two Swingle Singers CDs I gave her (Vols. 1 and 2 of *Jazz Sebastian Bach*).

She would say again and again, "You have given me such beautiful music!"; "You have such exquisite taste." The only time I failed (and she would not allow me to say that) was with a CD of works by Gerald Finzi, she having no particular love for the English composers of the first half of the 20th century, and a CD of Reynaldo Hahn's songs as sung by Susan Graham. She only marginally liked a CD of Graham singing some songs by Ned Rorem.

Among the other CDs she gave me were one of the Ravel piano concertos as performed by Alicia de Larrocha with Leonard Slatkin and the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra; one of Bernstein conducting Mahler's 5th Symphony<sup>1</sup>; one of piano performances by the remarkable Brown family, and one of John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk.

I always loved her descriptions of the concerts she attended.

Subj: Re: Too much to write -- only the concert this evening, and a few other matters

Date: 4/5/05 12:29:08 AM Pacific Daylight Time

From: ...

Dear John,

I believe I must subscribe to your rubric as subject matter as well. Yes, there's too much to write, particularly if one is commencing at 2:00 a.m. I may just write something and either continue in the morning (the veritable morning when people have breakfast, go to work and make angry grimaces in the subway) and when Proust perks up his ears from his pillow to determine what kind of day it is and what the shopkeepers and maidens at their storefronts are talking about. Remember?

...Let me first say that the concert was quite sublime -- a young maiden from Wales, Catrin Finch by name -- tall, lanky, well-poised conversationally with the audience and a tribute to harp players. My my, how beautiful that instrument looks, how elegant and unique. She played exquisitely, small wonder for anyone whom Susan Wadsworth and Committee select as winners of The Young Concert Artists. The program consisted of Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D minor (which I played and which is magnificent, as I'm sure you know.) Obviously it was transcribed for harp, but you would have been fascinated by the impact of the sonorities on this instrument which had never been Bach's intention. Seemingly it was written in Bach's 20s for Duke Johann Ernst in Weimar whose taste was insatiable for preludes, fugues and fantasies which the composer served up with regularity as he did Cantatas and a plethora of other Church music later on.

There was a piece by Gabriel Faure entitled "Une Chatelaine en sa Tour" (lady of the manor) Opus 110 (written to poetry of Paul Verlaine.) How lovely. A Sonata for flute, viola and harp by Debussy was another absolutely beautiful work -- all members belonging to this star-studded group. Eugenia Zukerman the still lovely-looking flutist (I'm not sure whether she was the wife of Pinchas Zukerman at one time<sup>2</sup>) joined the successful finalists in 1970. There were other interesting and wonderfully played works, one of which called "Bugs" by a Paul

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2. See third file of Vol. 4 under "Naomi".

1. After hearing Mahler's Symphony No. 3 at Tanglewood in the summer of 2007, it dawned on me that Mahler's symphonies were really operas without voices.

## *Retirement*

Patterson (b.1947 in Chesterfield, U.K.) and commissioned to write it by the Royal Academy of Music's Harp Dept. of which I believe he was head. Well, it won't go with your bucolic English music as described in today's e-mail, as it is unique in its quirky, but still most interesting form, particularly the last movement -- mosquitoes. You cannot imagine what such an instrument can do to bring out their very special almost lethal sounding "string-sting." Ms Finch made many appropriate, but very subtle facial grimaces (seen mainly through my opera glass) which enhanced the humor. It was great fun, as was a rag which she played as an encore -- also on the harp. Imagine?

It was all in my favorite Weill Recital Hall (next to Carnegie) which I so prefer to that Zankel Hall to which I took you. In fact, I don't like that cold Zankel Hall (underground by three floors) one bit and may not go this coming year to the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble to which I took you. Susan Wadsworth's group shall now be playing there instead of at the Y which is much more demanding for me cf. walking up the street several blocks....

...

John, I very much enjoyed your comments about Sir Hubert Parry's "Lady Radnor's Suite" when you stated "if Lady R. didn't allow Sir Hubert to have his way with her after he presented this music to her, well, she should have been ashamed of herself." Absolutely delightful. I laugh each time I read it. You do have a charming sense of humor, even if it whizzes right by me sometimes in the day, sometimes in the night -- so sorry, just think what I'm missing.

Gotta go. With much affection et un baiser de fraises qui sont en pleine saison, comme tu sais. Il faut t'en acheter des boites, et quand tu les manges, chalque[sic] une, pense a moi!

Arrive merci, (How should this be spelled?)

Gaby (Gabrielle is nicer; my mother was right.)

Although most of her descriptions of music were about concerts and recitals she attended, sometimes she would write about a CD I had given her. I will quote most of her email, because it shows how affectionate she could be.

Subj: Re: Des opinions differentes, Your anniversary card, Devonfield, Tanglewood, Bach  
Date: 1/22/2007 11:46:55 PM Pacific Standard Time  
From: ..

.Non, je n'ai pas tort, mais nous avons tous nos gouts et nos psychologies differentes. Qu'est-ce qu'on peut dire sur ta reaction? C'est a toi. Si tu te trouves dans ton ame une atmosphere tellement sombre, je comprends que la vie doit etre extremement dure et difficile et que la lumiere est quelque chose tres rare. Mais, il y a des roses, des oisiseaux, des jolies fleurs de

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2. "Eugenia Zukerman ... who also was music correspondent for the CBS Sunday Morning Show until contracting an incurable lung disease, was indeed married to Pinchas Zukerman from 1968 to 1983; they had two children. Eugenia attended Barnard for two years ... before transferring to Juilliard. Her maiden name was Eugenia Rich, her father being Stanley Rich, a pioneer in sonar technology for submarines during WWII." — J.S.

## Retirement

toutes especes, et il y a des jours quand ils peuvent te donner grand plaisir -- tu le sais et moi, je le sais aussi.

(No, I am not wrong [in her opinion about the film *Jane Eyre* shown on PBS; I had said that I liked its depressing atmosphere], but we each have our tastes and our different psychologies. What can I say about your reaction? It's yours. If you find in your soul an atmosphere so somber, I understand that life must be extremely hard and difficult and that the light is sometimes very rare. But there are the roses, birds, the beautiful flowers of all kinds, and there are the days when they must give you great pleasure — you know it and I know it, too.)

Amazing and so cruel that someone with your sensitivity and intelligence should be so heavily burdened, but, as I've noted again and again, it's people like you who are the poets, the writers, the painters, the musicians -- not across the board, but frequently.-

Well, that being the case, I'll simply have to watch the second half. I do hope there will be somewhat more light upon the subject, other than conflagrations. So interesting that you really felt close to the rendering of *Jane Eyre* in all its obfuscation. Yes, it does bear a resemblance to the dark and dank quarters in which so much of Dickens takes place. A veritable netherworld which I glimpse from afar.

Now, to other matters...

Your absolutely lovely card, commemoration of our seven years, just arrived. I had quite forgotten that it was in early January that I wrote you the first time. I simply cannot believe that seven years have passed since then. It seems utterly impossible that such a large block of time simply whisked by -- poof -- now you saw it and now you don't. It's scary to think that the next seven might go as fast, or faster, most likely. I'm not even sure that I'll be around by then, but it's something preferably not placed before me to contemplate. There's enough time for that.

You wrote so sweetly, with so much appreciation and perfect recall. Yes, it's been good and rewarding for both of us -- the many aspects of our companionship, and yes, it's a great pity that we don't live closer. Do you have any notion when Jeff and Karlin will start looking for a place in the City? That'll all take time. Thank you, Peter, for your thoughtfulness and kind words. The card itself is beautiful. I'll cherish it.

I haven't forgotten Bach [I had sent her a CD of Alfred Brendel performing several of his works]. I love the Fantasia of the D minor Fantasia and Fugue as much as the Fugue. It is so rich, unusually so for Bach, with lengthy sonorous, flourishing arpeggios that sweep one up with them. As for the Fugue, as is his wont, the simple theme to which he returns from time to time segues into so many registers -- upper, middle, base which is particularly sonorous; sometimes the theme can be heard simultaneously in the treble and base; the fugue when appearing as third chords takes on a wonderful richness and fullness, then returning again to the simplicity of the initial single-toned voice. The contrasts are particularly dramatic, keeping us so aware of the transfer of voices. There is a constant conversation between the fugue as it works its way simultaneously into the treble and base registers. Very beautiful, very

## *Retirement*

sophisticated and sounding so utterly simple. A constant well-heeled conversation. Listening to that in a beautiful drawing room, brandy in hand, gorgeous vistas through the latticed windows would be utter perfection. But, one really need none of these accoutrements. The music stands totally on its own and is a great piece of art. I also love the Fantasy and Fugue in A minor (Number 8 on the Brendel disc.) A wonderful present from you. I value it highly. Brendel plays masterfully.

Je t'embrasse et te remercie pour toute ta gentillesse,  
(I embrace you and thank you again for all the nice things you said)

Gaby

But music was not the only art she loved. She was an inveterate museum goer and knew enough about the history of painting to have qualified as a docent. She was a member of a little group that would go and see what used to be called “art films” and rare documentaries, sometimes made by friends of members of the group. Afterward, she would sometimes write a review — really just a highly articulate expression of her reaction to a film — and send to the members. I remember she thought the German film, *The White Ribbon*, which she saw in October, 2009, was too depressing and the characters one-dimensional. An email discussion then ensued. She would say to me in one of our phone conversations, “I wish you were in New York. What a shame you are not. See what you are missing?” (I had told her that in all my years in Berkeley, I had never attended a showing of a film, for example at the Pacific Film Archive or at the Hillside Club, after which any of the attendees had the slightest interest in discussing the film.)

Another reason I stayed with her was her loyalty — her not only putting up with years of emails from me with Subject fields like “Can’t go on”, “At the end”, and text about the universe crying out that I commit suicide, but her calling me during the day when she knew I was in very bad shape, and her always trying to find arguments why I should continue living. When I talked about trouble with Debbie, the young woman who was a housemate for more than four years, starting in 2005 (she will be introduced later), Gaby would say that Debbie must realize what an outstanding landlord I was, always concerned for her well-being. “You are *kind*.”

I felt instinctively that loyalty such as she exhibited toward me, and toward her old friends Helen and Sue, and toward poor Rosalie, and others, was proof of how exceptional she was.

A third reason I wanted us to stay together was that wonderful Jewish love of books and art and all things cultural. From the time I knew her she was a member of the Proust Society, which met monthly at the Mercantile Library to discuss the assigned reading of some 30 to 50 pages. She frequently praised me for my memory and the fact that I knew something about literature as well as a little mathematics and at least some of the main ideas in physics (far fewer than she realized). Sometimes, when she asked me the meaning of a word, and I happened to know it, she would say, “You know everything!” Sometimes, after I had explained something about physics or mathematics, she would say, “What a terrible shame that you did not become a professor. You are so good at explaining things.” She would say this even though she knew the reasons why I had never wanted to spend my life in the academy. On my visits, when we were staying in her apartment, we went to plays (she loved Shaw), concerts, the ballet several times, museums, films (she loved Woody Allen). Usually, she paid for the tickets.

A fourth reason — and this will sound strange to some readers — was her often reminding me, when I was in the depths of despair over my lifetime of failure, and the hopelessness of the world situation, of how much we both had to be thankful for. Like her loyalty, to me this was a sign of a woman of distinction.

Still another reason was her avid interest in the affairs of the world. She praised me for what she regarded as the rational way I analyzed problems, for example, the Middle East.

Finally, she was a person I could talk to, for however little time she actually let me speak in each conversation. (But I must be honest here: if God is just, there are no non-stop talkers in the Afterlife. I would love to find her there, but only with this habit permanently gone.)

## **I As Conversationalist**

One of Gaby's most consistent compliments was about my conversational ability. It was the first time anyone had ever commented on it. "You can talk to anyone from a street cleaner to a physicist!" she would say. "You should be on the radio!" and she would encourage me to make inquiries at local radio stations that had talk shows. When I would complain about the neighbors having no interest in conversation, she would say that she couldn't understand it. "You are such an amicable person — so easy to be with."

And the truth was that, for me, a conversation that was a real exchange always made my depressions go away. But sometimes I would initiate conversations with almost anyone because I knew this would alleviate, however slightly, these depressions. And as often as not, the poor souls — workmen, tradesmen and tradeswomen (the Rose Lady, the Lady Plumber), waitresses — were so glad to have someone actually express an interest in their lives that they brightened and became animated and talkative.

But I had learned at an early age that no one had the slightest interest in what I was reading or thinking about or what music I was listening to, and so, being always desperate to be liked, I learned the secrets of good conversation — or, more correctly, the secrets of getting people to want to continue to talk to me. These secrets were simply: (1) always make the other person's interests the focus of attention (if you do this, people will say, "How interesting you are to talk to!"; if you don't say anything at all, they will praise you even more for your conversational ability); (2) have a good sense of humor.; and (3) Avoid making conversation itself the subject of conversation, as it bores most people to death. Even so I had to be constantly on my guard against putting people to sleep when I talked. I saw the yawns start as soon as I allowed myself to elaborate on something I had been reading, or when, out of nervousness, I said in different words what I had already said. (People are amazingly sensitive to what is unnecessary in other people's talk.) Sometimes I would tell Gaby or my hygienist Rochelle, "I am embarked on the The New Taciturnity!", promising from then on to be a man of few words, in fact, of no words at all. But my resolution always failed.

Talking to Chet was good practice, because here you got at most five seconds to have your say, after which your job was to listen for at least five or ten minutes to what he had to say. Conversing with political activists was even easier, since most of them were non-stop talkers, so that all you had to do was say something like, "So how is it going with ...?" and then name a cause they were working on, and you didn't have to say a word for fifteen minutes or more because they

then set out to tell you every word said in every meeting they had attended for the past month. All you had to do was nod your head and make sounds of agreement at the appropriate places, and at other places shake your head and make sounds of incredulity at the stupidity of the Opposition.

Talking to Steve was different, and often quite pleasurable, because we both had a good sense of humor, and because I could make a game out of pretending to be engaged in an ongoing struggle to understand and possibly agree with Marxism, while at the same time raising the objections to it that occurred to me. Some of these are described in the section, “Conversations With a Marxist” in the first chapter of Vol. 4.

But like all lonely old people, I tended to talk too much, and so I was always on the lookout for signs of boredom, yawning being the most reliable, in the person I was speaking to.

A sense of humor was always a good way to get through the boredom and frustrations of daily life. In restaurants, when the waiter or waitress had forgotten about me, I would signal him or her: “Excuse me, but I’m just wondering if you’re still working on my ...”<sup>1</sup> and I would name the dish. I would do it in a tone of voice and manner that was meant to convey my awareness how little I understood about the workings of restaurants and how embarrassed I was about my ignorance and my bothering a member of the staff who in turn would have to bother the experts in the kitchen. Furthermore, it is certainly true that throughout my adult life I have believed that there is always a reason why food takes so long to be delivered in restaurants — and I am not talking about quality restaurants — a reason involving such intricate, arcane, extended effort that I will never in a million years be able to understand it.

Naturally, I always wanted a smile and a few friendly words from waitresses, but being old and bald I had only my sense of humor to win these. And so at Steve and Jane’s restaurant, where they had a breakfast dish called The Mid-Week Combination consisting of eggs, bacon, and a couple of small pancakes, I would say, “Well, let’s see, Oh, what the hell, might as well live dangerously: I’ll have the heart-attack-on-a-plate.” Their low cholesterol breakfast, consisting of Egg-beaters and a tiny bowl of fruit and a couple of slices of whole wheat toast, I naturally called a non-heart-attack-on-a-plate. There was a beautiful, black-haired waitress at The Musical Offering on Bancroft Ave. at the south end of the UC campus. Bright, flashing eyes, soft breasts in black sweaters, and a look that said, “I know you’re thinking about making love to me.” Given the a-little-too-affectionate, a-little-too-let-the-world-think-what-it-wants manner she kept her arm around a blonde she was with one day while being a customer at the counter, I think she was a lesbian. I enjoyed kidding with her. I would arrive around lunch, since they had excellent soups, and when she looked at me with that teasing, questioning expression, ready to take my order, I would say: “I walked a mile just to have one of your soups!” She would smile. I: “It’s the truth! You can trust me, because I am an older man.” She, eyes suddenly wide, sparkling, with perhaps a trace of a blush, and a little surprise and shock: “No, I can’t!” And it seemed clear she was talking from long experience with older men who proved anything but trustworthy. But I stopped going there as often as I did — went only once a month or so — because I couldn’t concentrate on my reading when she was there walking around, collecting plates from other tables, standing in profile in those maddening tight black sweaters. I saw her sometimes on the street in South Berkeley, those bright eyes and that teasing smile.

When someone whose house or apartment I was visiting would ask how I would like my coffee, I would always reply with what seemed to me the only correct answer one could give:

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1. A waiter or busboy routinely asked, “Are you still working on this?” when he came to remove dishes and some had food on them even though he no doubt had observed you no longer were eating.

“Black, with cream and sugar”.

I stayed away from anything but the blandest expressions of admiration when a beautiful young woman walked by while I was talking to one or more males — I never said, as I heard one desperate guy once shout, “I want to have your baby!” . And I never went to the extremes of another guy I heard about, who told a woman he had always been hot for, but who didn’t want sex with him, “Denise, as long as I have a face, you will have a place to sit.”

In order to try to overcome my usual sense of hopelessness when a presidential election approached, I began to tell people I was promoting Lisa Simpson for President. “There is nothing in the Constitution that says a cartoon character can’t be President.” People laughed. But then I found I was writing campaign speeches for myself, and so, considering her inexperience, I decided it would be better if I ran for President with her as Vice President. People said she was too young, since she was perpetually nine years old, but I argued that she had been around since the eighties, and there is nothing in the Constitution that says that the minimum age 35 rule for President applies to cartoon characters. In 2006, I felt I had to face reality and accept the fact that she had better name recognition than I, so I put her back on top of the ticket.

At my favorite breakfast place, the Kensington Bistro, where for an hour or so each Saturday and Sunday I had a family, I would try to keep one blonde waitress in particular amused, who seemed to enjoy the attentions of the older man who regularly left her a \$3 tip: I: “Is it OK if I linger over another cup of coffee, as long as I hurry?”

And while we are on the subject of restaurants, I shouldn’t fail to mention an opportunity for humor that was provided in the nineties by the Progressive movement, which decided that it was sexism to call a woman who served customers in a restaurant a “waitress” because the term was gender specific, and implied there was a difference between female servers and male servers, when in fact the Workers are one, united in their struggle against the Capitalist oppressor. Various alternative designations were sought. The two that came out on top were “wait-person” and “waitron”. It was an opportunity I couldn’t resist. I would say, when I didn’t get my bill, “Excuse me, but I’m trying to find my waitress — I’m sorry: my waitron — or should I say ‘wait-person’? Or —” Often the person addressed would say she preferred “waitress”, because “waitron” sounded too much like a robot. Other times, when I knew my waitress had a sense of humor, I might ask questions like, “How long have you been engaged as a waitron in this establishment?”

By the start of the new century, the whole business had ceased to be a concern of the waitress class in the restaurants I patronized. “‘Waitress’ is fine”, they would say with a laugh.”Or ‘server’.”

I assume that psychology has a term for the overcoming of absurd rules by making oneself a nuisance through trying scrupulously to obey them. If it doesn’t, then I propose “aggressive obedience”. (Now that I think of it, I employed exactly this technique with the Secret Service agent when I was put on probation in the sixties for having written a letter to President Johnson that used profanity in criticizing his Vietnam policies (see the section, “Manny’s Courage”, in the first chapter of Vol. 2).)

But the conversations I craved were virtually non-existent. In my early years in Berkeley, I would once in a while post an ad on the bulletin board of a book store: “Looking for good conversation with people who enjoy books, classical music, film. Meet in coffee shops or wherever you prefer. Call ...” No one ever called. The eccentric artist who was instrumental in rescuing my life’s savings from a crooked real estate investment firm (details below under “I Almost Lose My

Life's Savings") always seemed interested in talking to me over dinner as long as I was picking up the bill. Around 2005, a neighbor<sup>1</sup> who seemed to enjoy good films, suggested that she, her husband and I get together once a month or so, have a nice fire in the little white-brick fireplace in their second-floor condo, and watch a film, then talk about it afterward. I thought it a terrific idea. We discussed several possible films to start with. She said she couldn't make it that week, but she would let me know. She never did. Nor did she respond to my emails. Later, exactly the same thing happened regarding books. She seemed to enjoy discussing poetry with me (she liked Stephen Dunn), her eyes bright and eager, and so I suggested that she, her husband and I get together once a month or so and discuss a mutually-agreed-upon book that we would read. She seemed enthusiastic, so I asked her when she would like to have the first meeting, so we could decide on what to read. She said she was busy that week, but that she would get back in touch with me. She never did. Nor did she reply to my emails.

Her looks had suffered in the early 2000s as a result of a chronic illness induced by a botched operation on her uterus — the surgeons had accidentally mixed two drugs that they shouldn't have. Thereafter she suffered chronic pain in the stomach area and other debilitations such that, in periods of prolonged cold, rainy days she couldn't leave her bed. She entered in a class-action lawsuit against the San Francisco hospital where she had had the operation. She was no longer able to hold a job, and so spent her days in the little second floor condo of the duplex she and husband owned.

Several times over the years she remarked, in a tone of amused awe, that her husband was a genius. (They had met while they were both students at UC Berkeley. Both were of Italian descent.) He had a PhD in chemistry, plus another in psychology, and had worked as a therapist in a drug treatment facility in San Francisco. Then, around 2005, he apparently left his job temporarily to devote full time to creating computer art, composing music, and investing in the stock market. He seldom emerged from his study to talk to visitors, and when he did, it was clear from the start that he regarded himself as the type of genius who above all cannot tolerate wasting time and breath on inferior minds. I was flattered that on one occasion, he deigned to spend twenty minutes or so outlining some of his stock market strategies, and then to give me a web site reference where I could see some of his paintings. After he withdrew to his room, I told his wife that I had written an essay on music, and I wondered if he would be willing to read it. She said of course he would, and that I should send it to her as an email attachment. This I did. I never received a word in response from him. His paintings, I found, were well-crafted and interesting, and I wrote an email to his wife praising them. No word in response from either of them.

But apparently the marriage had problems, which may not be surprising, given that the two of them were cooped up in the same flat 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year round, except for a few weeks when she went to visit relatives in Florida. But then the rumors were that they couldn't afford to get divorced and so had resigned themselves to continue living together until they could.

In 2007, her class-action lawsuit was successful, and I gathered from talking to her that she had received more than a token payout. I proposed celebrating by taking them out to dinner at a restaurant of their choice. She seemed to eagerly accept, said she would get back to me regarding where and when they would like to have the dinner. I never heard a further word.

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1. The same one who had said she couldn't afford to spend more than fifteen minutes a month on political activities (see "Political Indifference and Tree Wars" in the first chapter of Vol. 4). Before her illness, to be described below, she had been a very attractive blonde in her thirties, with a manner, as she approached you on the sidewalk that said, "Let's put aside my beauty for the moment. Let's talk about *you*.", her concerned eyes looking at you, her voice like a hand caressing the side of your cheek.

My search for conversation continued. In 2007 I was allowed to place an ad in the monthly newsletter of a North Berkeley social club whose events would lead you to believe that members (I was one) enjoyed discussing books, music, films. I had asked the social chairman if members who attended the monthly film ever stayed afterward to talk about what they had just seen. She laughed, thought it a rather odd question. No, that almost never happened. My ad proposed forming a group that would meet in a local restaurant to talk about current books. I received exactly one reply out of a membership of several hundred. I emailed the woman, said we didn't need a lot of people, she, her husband, and I could at least make a start. She replied that she preferred to wait until there were more people, which there never were.

The leader of a small group of citizens who were fighting yet another incursion by our corrupt city government, told me in passing that his brother had taught psychology and philosophy at the college level. Soon after, at a meeting, I introduced myself, talked to him on the way to his car, and told him I would appreciate his view on a philosophical idea that seemed important to me, though it was certainly not original with me. He nodded, made sounds as though he was willing. A few weeks later I sent him an email repeating my request and suggesting we meet at a restaurant, though we could also just talk on the phone. He never replied.

Gaby became more and more bothered by the fact that members of concert audiences never seemed to have any interest in talking to each other after a performance. She said that there were people in her box at one of the concert halls whom she saw several times during the season, but who didn't even give a nod of recognition when they arrived. I wrote to a well-known classical piano teacher in North Berkeley and asked her what she thought the reason might be. She wrote back, "...listening to music is a solitary experience. For some, there is nothing to talk about. Especially, if the music was wonderful, or important." Both Gaby and I thought it was a stupid reply.

The national indifference to good conversation was yet another reason for my contempt for America.

## **Florence**

Florence, my babysitter in Valhalla, was still alive in 2002. I called her in 1995, when I was 59. She told me that her sister Millie, whom I vaguely remember, died at the age of 51 of cancer; and that her other sister, Anna, died at around 64 of heart disease. I had visited Florence once, probably in the seventies or eighties. I seem to remember that my mother was there. We stood in front of her neat little house in Kensico, she with her devoted husband — I think his name was Andy — whom she clearly loved. He had stridden forward to shake hands with me when we arrived. She spoke of playing the numbers, something she had done all her life, routinely paying the amount, whatever it was, each week. She had recently won a TV set, and firmly believed that, in the long run, you were ahead.

## **Death of My Mother**

Throughout Mar. 6, 2001, as usual I kept all the phones off the hook in order not to be pestered by my mother's phone calls (which were always made by Kay, of course). I arose as usual around 6 a.m. the next day, Mar. 7, and, prior to going online to read my email, checked to see if there were any phone messages, since, having only one phone line, I could not go online as long

as the beeping that indicated I had phone messages was present.

The first message was from Kay. “John, this is Kay, please call, this is urgent, please, this is Kay, please call.”

The voice on the next one was serious, formal. “Mr. Franklin, this is —” I didn’t get the name, but the word “medical” came after it. I was asked to call a number, which he then gave.

I called him before I called Kay. He explained that he worked in the San Francisco Medical Examiner’s office.

He: “Mr. Franklin, I’m afraid something has happened.”

I: “To whom?”

He: “Well, I’m afraid it concerns your mother”.

I: “Is it serious?”

He: “Well, yes, I would say it’s rather serious.”

I: “What happened?”

He: “I’m sorry to tell you that your mother has died.”

The event I had waited for all my life had finally occurred. My first thought was, “I’ve won! I have achieved the greatest goal of my life!”

Further conversation revealed that she had probably died of “natural causes”, which in this case meant some sort of heart failure. The death was peaceful. Kay had been with her.

I called Kay. She seemed remarkably in control of herself, though it was clear she was quite nervous. She had slept in the same room with Mummy during that night, as Mummy was clearly not feeling well.

Amazingly, apart from emails to Gaby, I have no written record of the details of this event that I had waited for all my life.

I called Janet L—. The reader may recall from the section on my mother in vol. 3 that she was the wife of Fred L—, son of Emil, my mother’s second husband. I told her the news and asked for a recommendation of a funeral home. She said that Halstead and Gray in San Francisco had handled all the L— funerals. She gave me the name of Dane Stanley, and said I would be amused at his voice, which is the perfect, always sympathetic, always soothing, undertaker’s voice. And so I called them, arranged for the body to be delivered there from the Medical Examiner’s office, and be cremated, per my mother’s instructions. I then arranged for a memorial service to be held at the house. I don’t remember everyone who was present, though I know it included Dieter, Kathy, an elderly couple couple that had befriended my mother and to whom my mother bequeathed two chairs. Possibly Janet was there also. I didn’t shed a tear throughout. Afterward, I served some wine and snacks that I think Kathy had brought. My lifelong humpback had been removed, but the pressure of settling her affairs and getting Kay taken care of left no time for further self-congratulation.

I called her lawyer, Charlie Jonas, told him the news, asked him how much I was going to get. After contacting Shufro & Rose, who handled her money, he said that her total estate was about \$680,000. \$50,000 was to go to Hoolihan, the crooked lawyer, as we had agreed, to discourage him from suing for more; \$50,000 to my son; a mere \$15,000 to Kay, and \$15,000 to Armando, the man who had performed manual labor for her over the years. Not a dime for Dieter, which I thought outrageous, although my outrage did not prompt me to give him anything on my own. Taxes were minimal, since the total value of the estate was only \$5,000 over the then-deductible \$675,000 for estate taxes. So for all those years of misery, I earned \$530,000 — not the \$1 million-plus I had been counting on, and that Jeff believed I would get. There would be no house in the Berkeley Hills. On the other hand, I could have done worse.

In accordance with Emil's will, the house returned to the L — family on my mother's death. The L — s made it clear that they wanted to sell the house as soon as possible. They gave me a date in April by which it had to be emptied. I endured the agony of arranging to have the furniture and pictures sold that she indicated should be sold. Charlie said a client of his had been satisfied with Harvey Clars, an auction house in Oakland, but the representative turned out to be an out-and-out liar, virtually promising that he would be able to get around \$20,000 for all the items, and then the firm sending me a check for about \$7,000.

The remainder of her furniture, plus linens, pictures, and so forth, I had stored by a firm in Danville, later sold to Chipman, and in a AAAAA storage facility in North Berkeley. My total monthly storage bills were close to \$500. I regarded them, and continue to regard them, as the price of the inheritance.

Then began the work of helping Kay to pack her meager belongings. She had nowhere to go, so I told her she could stay with me until we could find her another job.

As the April date that the family had stipulated approached, I could see that I was going to be a few days late. I called Dale, Emil's granddaughter, whom I had been dealing with, and asked for a few days' extension. Despite the fact that for 40 years I had acted as go-between between the L — s and my mother, not telling them the nasty things my mother said about them, and not telling my mother the nasty things they said about her, accepting Fred L — 's calls each month during which he, in so many words, asked me if she was dead yet, and whether the house was in good order, and I always telling him what I thought he should hear, meantime enduring the ongoing battle to get my mother to pay her annual taxes and insurance, and to repair damage to the house, for example, a fallen ceiling in the downstairs den, decaying wood under the front windows — despite the fact that I had shouldered this burden for the family for 40 years, Dale said no, I could not have even one more day to empty the house. I don't remember what I said to the bitch in reply, except that I insisted on dealing from then on only with her husband, who I had gathered was a much more fair-minded person. After the house was emptied and the keys left for him to pick up, I never again spoke a word to any member of the family except Heidi, Fred's daughter, who had always seemed to have some genuine sympathy for what I had gone through, and who I would see once or twice a year walking her dog in North Berkeley, where she lived with her husband, an optometry professor at UC.

We packed Kay's meager belongings in cardboard boxes, loaded them in my car, then said goodbye to the house where she had lived for ten years, and she and I drove to my house in Berkeley. I let her stay in the downstairs front room; she slept on my son's futon. Zoe was my housemate then.

Kay seemed to spend her day going through her belongings, as the homeless do. Her diet consisted primarily of white beans which she overcooked, so that soon the house smelled of them all day, and soy milk. For some reason she wore rubber gloves much of the time, and the smell of the rubber added to that of the cooking beans. Several times a day I endured the exhausting work of trying to carry on a conversation with someone who had no interests. One evening I asked her what TV programs she liked. She seldom watched TV programs, she said. How about movies? She seldom watched movies. Well what movies did you like when you were young? Eventually she named one, or perhaps it was just an actor or actress, and I rented a film and played it for her. She was appreciative, but nothing more.

There was no question but that this strange guest was beginning to scare Zoe, and so I found myself in the exasperating position of having on the one hand to show Kay that she wasn't being ignored, and on the other to soothe and sympathize with Zoe.

But the main effort was now directed to helping her find a job, since I felt I had to keep my promise to her and myself that I would take care of her after my mother's death. She had several phone numbers of departments in Catholic Charities in San Francisco, the agency she had worked for prior to her time with my mother. Dr. Satten, my mother's psychiatrist, gave her the name and number of someone in Jewish Family Services. I drove her to interviews. One was in a shabby little tract house next to a parking lot somewhere in Oakland. A family was looking for a caretaker of a mother who was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. I remember a covered back porch, cheap plastic furniture — a house that people are trying to get away from.

Then there was the B — family in Nob Hill. At first, this looked like the opportunity of a lifetime. A beautiful ground-floor apartment with a little garden in the back; an elderly woman who seemed friendly; a son and daughter-in-law eager to find someone more capable and caring than the unreliable South American young women they had used till then. I gave Kay a top recommendation, the family hired her, and we loaded the car with her cardboard boxes and I drove her to her new home and helped her move in.

A few weeks later, I received a call from Kay. The woman had thrown a phone at her and was screaming threats at her. She had called the police. When I talked to the son, he said yes, he had hesitated to reveal it during the interviews, but his mother was in the initial stages of Alzheimer's.

So I drove back to Nob Hill, we loaded Kay's boxes into the car and resumed the search for another job for her. By then I had found out how completely ignorant of the world she was, and so I tried to get her to at least read the first page of the newspaper each day, telling her, and I think truthfully, that it would help her get work if she was able to converse about the day's events. She nodded agreement with everything I said, as always, but made no effort to read the paper. Somehow or other she found an apartment she could afford not far from where my mother's house had been. Jewish Family Services found her a position with another old woman. It didn't last.

In the winter of 2002, Fred died of cancer, and less than a year later his wife Janet died. With the death of my mother, they had lost their purpose in life, namely, outliving her. I, too, had outlived her, and people who knew me asked me, once in a while, what my thoughts were now that I had succeeded in this lifelong goal. I told them the things I had repeated to myself so often down the years: "I am the son of a monster and a genius," and "If you're going to have a mother like mine, then you'd better have a father like mine," and "If you want to be remembered, torture your children."

Whenever I hear people talk about "negative thoughts" being bad for your health — how so-and-so got cancer and died because she always had negative thoughts — I delight in bringing up my mother, a woman who was severely depressed for most of her life and who seemed to thrive on misery and hatred — yet lived to the ripe old age of 95.

Among her papers was a small leather-bound journal in which she had written or typed the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people she wanted me to know about — former neighbors, current friends (or, more precisely, people she knew), doctors, her accountant, the crooked lawyer who almost stole my inheritance, various people from the past. Many items are repeated two or three times, including the name and address and phone number of the cemetery — Bremgarten Friedhof in Bern, Switzerland — where my father's and my brother's ashes were buried, and where she wanted her ashes to be buried. I reproduce a couple of items:

Mr. and Mrs. Anton Tedesko  
26 Brookside Circle

## *Retirement*

Bronxville, N.Y. 10706, Phone: 19142713280

Anton Tedesko was a close friend of your father [and] very much interested in your father's work, several years ago he suggested to me that his various publications, should be — [sic] as well as his samples should be on exhibit in the Institute of Structural Engineering, Zürich to give access to Students interested in the prestressing of Concrete. My help was much needed — and appreciated. [that is, her helping my father with his inventions; I never found out exactly what that help was]

Frau Anna Weber-Kaeser  
Bruehlstrasse 75  
4500 Solothurn  
Switzerland

Anna Weber mentioned in this list of friends started School with me and we are friends all this [sic] years by correspondence. We were at that time 6 years old and have met several times at classreunions [sic] — the next one will be on 26th. April 92 in Solothurn. 80 years since we started school at the age of 6 years old. It is hoped that I will join them but I have little or rather no hope due to financial and Health reasons.

[At the end of one sheet of paper with some 12 names, she says:]

P.S. These old friends should be notified of my Death.

I notified perhaps two or three in the list.

## **Losing Things**

It is no exaggeration to say that the one constant in my lifelong depression has been the fear of losing things. The reader may recall the unbearable anguish I suffered from the loss of my electrician's knife when I was around nine years old (see first chapter of this autobiography).

My most frequent dreams concern the loss of luggage or items of clothing or my car despite my having taken every precaution, in the dream, not to lose them. (See the section, "Dreams", in this file.)

The loss of letters was especially painful. During the Music Days, and for a few years thereafter, I had written numerous letters to David R —, the sax player in my band, The Christmas City Six, at Lehigh University (see last file in Vol. 1). I had revised each letter until it was as good as I could make it (each revision of course, in those days, entailing the retyping of several pages), believing the letters would be part of my immortality. David wrote back at equal length, though with less concern for literary perfection. We discussed music, art, literature, philosophy, the importance of going it alone. I kept copies of my originals, and his replies, in folders. Unfortunately I put the folders in the damp basement of my house when I moved to Berkeley in 1988. In the mid nineties I found that most of this archive had been destroyed by mold. Later I asked him if by any chance he had kept any of my originals. He replied that he was quite sure he had, but didn't know exactly where they were.

Marcella had taken many photographs of Jeff and me when he was a child. Several of them showed us playing chess on the patio of the Los Altos house. One of them that I loved showed him just finishing a clever move and leaning back, laughing, and pointing his finger at me — “There, gotcha!”. I wore a deliberately surprised, chagrined look. One day around 2000, the blonde who lived next door was in my house. I was showing her photographs when something on the treasured photo caused it to stick to the back of another one. In my eagerness to have the blonde continue to want to look at my photos, I tore the treasured one off the back of the other, ripping away most of my face. A moment that had lived until then, now barely lived at all.

The loss of a cheap ballpoint pen or mechanical pencil I had used for many months was the occasion of days of mourning. I imagined the object trying to cry out to me to tell me where it is, yet not being able to do so because it was an object (like the electrician’s knife). Stroke victims know what I am talking about. I thought how awful it must be to be a pencil and suddenly not be in the knapsack where you belonged. But if I later found the lost item, I was suddenly that rarest of things for me, a (briefly) happy man; the sun came out, I was (briefly) a human being.

Techniques for finding lost things is a problem that should have a high priority in research circles. For me, its importance is second only to that of learning the nature of death.

I often wondered what happened to the books I used to own. I have memories of New World Writing paperbacks, the essay titled “The Pornography of Death,” Shirley Jackson’s story “The Lottery” about ritual killing, one of Thomas Wolfe’s novels, I enviously reading over and over again his description of the storm breaking inside him and the words just pouring forth. I remember the look and feel of the pages of these paperbacks. I sometimes think of all the textbooks I sold after each semester because I wanted no part of school to be anywhere near me during the summer. Now I would give my right arm for those books, so I could see and remember what I found difficult.

## **I Almost Lose My Life’s Savings**

In the early eighties, soon after I started work at HP Labs, I found out that Lee Duley, the wife of Jim Duley, the head of our Lab, was a broker for a local real estate investment company in Los Altos called “Jim Ward Associates”. The company made loans to local builders of homes in upscale areas like Palo Alto, Portola Valley, Tiburon, and the better parts of San Jose. In those high-inflation times, the company was paying something around 16% interest to investors, and so I began giving Lee a few thousand dollars at a time to invest. By the mid-nineties, all my life’s savings were invested with the company, which had consistently paid around 7% above the inflation rate. I felt the money was safe because the company was small and local and had been in business since the mid-seventies; furthermore, Lee knew all the principals and was certainly an honest person herself; my money was diversified in that it was loaned at any given time to half a dozen or more different builders of homes in different parts of the Bay Area, so that it was very unlikely all of the builders would fail to repay their loans on time; in addition, the company advertised that it observed a strict policy of never lending more than 60% of the value of the property, so that even if real-estate values dropped by 40%, which was highly unlikely in the Bay Area at that time, investors would still get their money back. Finally, the name of every lender was on the deed to the property, and so if the builder failed to repay a loan, the lenders could foreclose and retrieve their money. Jim Ward said that his company performed that function when necessary. We heard no rumors of anyone losing money.

Kathy began investing some of her and her mother’s money with the company while we were

living together. Later on she recommended the company to the elderly father of a close friend, and he invested a significant amount of money. Marcella also invested.

Around the mid-nineties, Jim Ward sold the company to one of the principals, Susan F —, a woman who, according to rumor, only had a high school education and had once been a prostitute in Montreal for a year. According to rumor, she had been Jim's lover for a while, and had earlier been the lover of a real estate investor in Marin County who was prosecuted for fraud. But since she had lived in the area for many years, and her mother worked in the company, we all managed to convince ourselves nothing would go wrong. Then the California Dept. of Real Estate brought charges against the company for violating a number of rules, including one that required that investors be repaid after each loan was repaid, instead of the company merely keeping the money on hand and re-investing it. We investors thought this a rather petty rule, and so we went along with the company's decision to change itself into a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) named "Primecore", which would then be allowed to keep investors' money on hand in between loans because the money would always be pooled, thus lowering the individual investor's risk. At annual meetings in the late nineties, the company announced it had more than \$220 million in investor funds.

Meantime, Lee had begun to suspect some of the goings-on behind the scenes. So after the company became a REIT, she was informed that her services would no longer be needed because she didn't have the right real estate license. She pointed out that the company was wrong about this, but that she would be glad to go and qualify for the license. It did no good. She was crushed, having taken a great deal of pride in the job she had done for, in many cases, friends of twenty years and more, and now began a vendetta against the company, joining another investment firm and trying to get investors to follow her and leave Primecore.

Around 2,000, the word began to circulate that investors were having to wait longer than the company's stated 90 days in order to withdraw funds. The explanation the company gave was that some of the builders had been unable to sell their properties as fast as they hoped. Also, Lee's taking investors away had created a sudden unanticipated rush on funds, and the cash simply wasn't at hand. When the dot-com bubble burst, more investors tried to retrieve at least some of the money, and the company fell further and further behind.

Susan, meantime, had built, or moved into, a large multi-million dollar home in Atherton, one of the two or three most expensive communities in Northern California.

Around 2001, I asked to withdraw \$150,000 out of the roughly \$500,000 I then had invested. Ninety days passed; 120 days, half a year. The company lawyer, Ben H —, said I would have to be patient. I began talking to another investor with whom I had gone to several of the annual meetings, an eccentric Oakland painter named Milton K —<sup>1</sup> who I sensed was an unusually smart investor. Rumors were now circulating that Primecore was somehow finding out which

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1. Milton had originally been a philosophy major, then turned to art and became a college art teacher until the early eighties, when he retired. At the time I knew him, he was working extensively in computer-generated paintings — beautiful, very organic-looking abstract works. I bought one and wanted to buy more, but had no place to hang them. He lived in a little gray wooden house possibly going back to the 19th century, in the heart of the Oakland black ghetto near San Pablo Ave. Every room of the house was filled with all sorts of toys, he being a dedicated collector. He never had had a burglary or any vandalism, despite the fact that the large studio in the rear of his property had thousands of dollars in computer equipment. I once asked him what he attributed his luck to. He said that years before he had become interested in snakes (harmless ones), and on summer evenings would let some of them crawl around on the pavement outside his house. The black kids saw them, ran away screaming, and thereafter referred to him as the "Snake Man". His house was safe.

investors were speaking badly about the company and then putting them at the bottom of the order of investors who had asked for refunds. Milton advised me to always appear calm in my dealings with the company, and to do everything I could to let the company know that I still believed in it and that I had no fears about not getting my money back and that I was still telling people what a wonderful investment opportunity the company offered (I did no such thing, of course). I then put in a request to withdraw all my remaining funds. Throughout, I told Kathy what I was doing. She said she had decided to keep her money with the company. Marcella had managed to get all of her and of her sister's money out a year or so earlier.

Eventually, I got my \$150,000, then, about a year later, the rest of my \$500,000. The reader should have not the slightest doubt that if I had lost all or most of my money, I would have ended my life. I was so thankful to Milton for his advice that several times a year for several years, I bought him a dinner at some of the best restaurants in the East Bay. He was a successful investor who, beginning with the meager savings from his art professor's salary, and, blessed with that remarkable Jewish skill with money, had accumulated a portfolio of \$2 million. One day, in a phone conversation, I wondered aloud if it might not be possible to arrive at a set of rules that, with high probability, would enable an investor to obtain a steady, good, but not great, return on his money. He laughed and replied, "That's a stupid question." I told him that one thing I do not tolerate is for anyone to call a question of mine "stupid". I hung up and never spoke to him again<sup>1</sup>.

Kathy, and something like 1,000 other investors, lost at least 70% of their money<sup>2</sup>. Feeling enormously guilty for not having forced her to withdraw when I did, I began helping her and other investors to try to recover their money. I contacted the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). By that time, the *San Jose Mercury News* had run two articles about the troubles at Primecore. The woman lawyer I spoke to at the SEC said they would consider the case, but that she would not be allowed to reveal their decision, nor anything about its progress if they did take it on. One investor amassed a huge amount of information about the company, including transcripts of court hearings, but he decided none of the investors should share it and that in any case he knew best how to proceed. (He was a professional violinist.) And so other investors were forced into a huge duplication of effort. Some attempted to find legal firms to sue the company. All but one or two firms turned them down on the grounds that there probably wouldn't be anything left to collect when and if they won the suit.

After 2005, the company was in business under another name<sup>3</sup>, and had offered to repay the remaining investors around 20% of their original investment. Susan and her cronies walked off with something like \$150 million and will almost certainly never be prosecuted. There were times when I was making detailed plans to wait for her and — , her right-hand man, in the company parking lot, and kill them both. I had the gun. What made the whole thing very nearly unbearable for me was that this was a case of neighbor robbing neighbor. I knew Susan's mother, had sometimes talked to her on the phone or visited her in person in her office. She lived in a little house in

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1. Just as I never again spoke to two clerks in the video rental store "Movie Image" in South Berkeley who told me my question about how the new parking meters worked was stupid. Until then, I had enjoyed conversations with both of them (one was a black woman named Paulette). Thereafter, I spoke only the minimum words necessary to rent a video. Paulette stayed with the store when it moved to the second floor of the Wells Fargo building in downtown Berkeley. I remained on friendly terms with the owner, Roland De La Rosa, who knew more about film than anyone I had ever known. But I never so much as said hello to Paulette when I visited the little office.

2. In Sept., 2009, Kathy told me she had lost \$200,000.

3. Buena Vista Capital Management

Menlo Park, next to Palo Alto. In fact all the principals lived in the mid-Peninsula and had known some of the investors personally for twenty years or more. And yet the principals had had not the slightest compulsion about stealing what for many was their life's savings.

Sometimes, when I went for Sunday breakfast at the Inn Kensington, I would see Susan's former right-hand man, who had grown stouter with the years, sitting at one of the tables with several people, one or two of them elderly, talking, smiling, his face flushed — I don't know whether because of modest embarrassment at being the center of attention, or because he had recognized me (though I didn't see him look in my direction). I thought about going up to the table and saying, "Do you people realize you are sharing a meal with a man who stole millions of dollars from hundreds of hard-working people? Do you realize that if he pays the bill, it will be with the money of people who may well be spending their old age in poverty because of him?" Or, as my anger increased, I thought about going up to the table and saying to him, "You fucking lying thieving son-of-a-bitch. How can you live with yourself? Do all those sitting at this table know what you did?", then throwing a cup of hot coffee into his face and ripping the tablecloth off the table, and smashing my fists into his face until I was stopped. But I said and did nothing.

## Music

The years were passing and I continued to listen to music — almost only classical now — at home and in the car every day. Thanks to the extensive collection of CDs at the Berkeley Main Library, I was able to listen to a wide variety of works without having to buy more CDs than I could afford.

I bought more Albinoni oboe concertoes until I had the complete collection. I already owned four of the Bach concertos for the same instrument, including the immortal Concerto in D Minor as performed by Steven Hammer.

In 2009, I was able to buy a decent CD recording of Bach's Triple Concerto, which previously I had only on a damaged cassette tape.

Several years prior, I bought Dvorák's *Romance in F Minor*, a piece I am convinced he wrote after a night of passionate sex with a beautiful woman he loved (how else explain the descending theme on violin trills in the middle of the piece?).

Just as I always enjoyed the quacking of the oboes in a concert piece, so I always liked the comic lugubriousness of the bassoon. I had all the available Vivaldi bassoon concertos on LPs, but in the early 2000s (or earlier) I first heard the Gordon Jacob Suite for Bassoon and Strings as performed by Daniel Smith<sup>1</sup>. This was on a CD with the Anton Reicha Grand Quintet for Bassoon and String Quartet, I liking especially the jaunty passage in first movement. Also the Franz Danzi Quartet in B flat, Op. 40

I had a rule that every once in a while I should listen to a composer I had never heard of.

"In music as in the other arts, we have been badly conditioned to the 'masterpiece syndrome' or what the American composer Aaron Copland condemned as 'a special stupidity of our own musical time; the notion that only the best, the highest, the greatest among musical masterworks is worthy of our attention.' He had 'little patience with those who cannot see the vitality of an original mind at work, even when the work contains serious blemishes.'" — Dubal, David, *The Essen-*

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1. Coull String Quartet, ASV CD DCA 613

*tial Canon of Classical Music*, North Point Press, N.Y., 2001, pp. 4-5.

And so in 2007 I picked up a CD in the Berkeley Main Library that contained *Quintet* by the American composer John McLennan<sup>1</sup>. I was so taken by it that I tracked down his phone number in Tyringham, MA and called. A woman answered. It was his widow: she said her husband had died more than ten years ago. I told her how much I enjoyed *Quintet*. She was obviously pleased. I told her that Gaby and I came to Tanglewood each summer. She invited us to visit her, since she lived not far from Lee, MA, where we always stayed at the bed-and-breakfast, Devonfield. We visited in the summer of 2008. She lived on the beautiful grounds of Ashintully, which was the name of the estate her husband had inherited, and where the two had spent their married life together. After her husband's death, the estate had been donated to The Trustees of Reservations of Massachusetts, and was open to the public.

Mrs. McLennan was a tall, thin, elegant New England lady probably then in her eighties. We sat in her kitchen and talked, not only about her husband's composing (he had been a close friend of the American jazz/classical composer Gunther Schuller), but also about the estate, and how, when her husband was young, the beautiful family mansion where he had been raised, burned to the ground. She showed us her husband's large studio, where chamber music concerts were still held occasionally. On display were the three CDs that had so far been made of her husband's music. I bought all three. The studio building, with its dark wood interior, and her house, were modest, single-floor wood structures just off the narrow, two-lane road that wound through meadows and woods near Tyringham.

During the early 2000s, I continued my campaign to understand atonal, or at least twelve-tone music, but made little progress. Some of the details of the struggle are given in the "Atonal Music" section of the chapter, "Music", in my book of essays, *Thoughts and Visions*, on the web site [thoughtsandvisions.com](http://thoughtsandvisions.com).

## Death of Kay

At three in the afternoon on Monday, Sept. 22, 2003, as I was lying in bed reading, the phone rang. The caller said his name was Felipe and that he was with the San Francisco Medical Examiner's office. He said he was very sorry to have to report that Kay Summers had been found dead in her hotel room. She was estimated to have been dead for two days. He said her only possessions were the clothes on her back, plus some boxes of cocoa. She had put socks on all the door handles and bathroom faucets. The boxes that held the meager possessions that she had had when she moved in were gone. She left no will, no papers, nothing except a note with my name and phone number. Later he said she had apparently starved herself to death after another resident of the hotel had tricked her into giving him joint access to her bank account (despite my repeated instructions never to do this), and then stolen all her money.

It was only in the course of this conversation that I learned that the hotels where she had been living were both in the Tenderloin District, one of the worst in San Francisco.

The Medical Examiner said that when they found her body, they had estimated her age at around 95. I told her she was only only 65. After I called Dr. Satten, my mother's psychiatrist, and he gave me the name of the Jewish family organization Kay had worked with, I passed this

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1. Composers Recordings, Inc., 1991; the CD also features music by Wayne Peterson and Martin Brody.

information on to the Medical Examiner, who apparently then obtained from the organization her Social Security No. and medical records, and confirmed what I had told him about her real age.

### **Her Early Life**

My tax man, who had done her taxes for a couple of years, since she was scrupulous about being honest with the government even though she had next-to-no income to report, was able to provide more detail. He said she was born on Sept. 23, 1937 in the Bronx under the name Mendelsohn. So she was Jewish, something I never knew. Nor did I know that she had once been married. I did know, from talking to her over the years, that she had worked as a secretary, then quit to take care of her ailing mother in San Francisco, a city she loved, until her mother died. Then she had gone into taking care of the elderly. She had only taken care of one or two elderly women before Dr. Satten recommended her to my mother. She was with my mother for around ten years, until my mother's death.

Throughout the long, gruelling years when she took care of my mother, I used to tell her how after my mother died, we would go to the Carnelian Room at the top of the Bank of America building for a drink and dinner. But I never got around to it.

### **Her Life Prior to Her Death**

Zoe, my housemate during 2000-2001, seeing her plight, made a phone call to her uncle Eli, who owned several parking lots in San Francisco, and who knew a lot of people, including Mary Ann — the manager of the Olympic Hotel. Kay was given an apartment on the top floor at a cost of \$1,000 a month, which she told me she could pay for out of her Social Security. (I was suspicious of that because I didn't think she had worked sufficiently many years in her life to be granted that amount in retirement.)

At first she had no phone, but then she got a cell phone. But I could never reach her at her number. I called Mary Ann every once in a while to find out how Kay was doing. Mary Ann said that her behavior was becoming more and more bizarre. Kay had had all the electricity turned off in her apartment because she said her doctor had told her it causes cataracts (which was also the reason she gave for refusing to use a cell phone any more). When I heard this, I pleaded with Kay, via surface-mail to let me talk to her doctor, but received no response.

Mary Ann said that Kay continued to be as kind-hearted and appreciative as ever. But now her apartment was full of paper bags and she refused to close, much less lock, the door. One day she went out and bought 300 sandwiches.

Then in Feb. 2003 I got a phone call from Mary Ann. She was furious. She said that Kay had been smoking in the bathroom of her apartment and a stray ash had set the shower curtain on fire. The fire spread through the upper floor. Kay was all right. But Mary Ann had never bothered to repair the broken sprinkler system, so the Fire Dept. had to drench the entire building with water. Apart from the damage to the building, this meant that Mary Ann and the owner were now subject to large fines for not having the sprinklers in a residential hotel in working order.

Mary Ann said that Kay had been collecting bags of old food and storing them in the apartment, and that the place had been full of flies. Nevertheless, someone from one of the city agencies managed to get her an apartment at the Empress Hotel.

Throughout the time she lived in San Francisco, I kept promising that I would come into the City and we would have our drink in the Carnelian Room to celebrate the death of my mother, and then I would take her out for dinner. But I had not kept my promise. Despite the sense of humor we always shared, being with her was hard work, since she had no interests, no goals. I put off

calling her as long as I could, but when we talked, she would always ask me when I was going to come to visit her. I would make up some wretched excuse about problems with housemates, or being overburdened with work, always concluding with “I promise we’ll have a nice dinner together, don’t worry.” It was unforgivable treatment for a poor soul who had saved me from a life that would truly have been unbearable, namely, a life of one way or another caring for my mother, day after day, week after week, year after year.

### **Futile Attempt to Catch the Thief**

Following is part of a letter I sent to Lt. Ken Lee of the San Francisco Police Fraud Section. I have deleted all or part of some names for obvious reasons.

First, some background: from about 1991-2001, Kay was a live-in companion to my very elderly mother, Mrs. Elsy L —, who lived in San Francisco. When my mother died in March, 2001, I helped Kay to find a place to live in the city (Olympic Hotel) and to find other work caring for the elderly. I did this by way of expressing my appreciation to Kay for her long years of service to my mother. She later moved to the Empress Hotel.

As of approximately Sept., 2001, Kay had received \$15,000 as a bequest from my mother’s estate. She also had about \$22,000 in an IRA... She told me that she was receiving \$600 a month in Social Security. I estimate that she was able to earn at least \$400 a month in part-time care for the elderly. (She worked through Catholic Charities and Jewish Family and Children’s Services.)

Her rent at the Olympic and Empress hotels was around \$1,000 a month.

Since she lived very frugally, it is reasonable to assume that her net outflow from her savings was on the order of \$400 a month.

But after her death, she was found to have some \$500 in one bank account. All the rest of her money was gone. \$400 a month for two years amounts to \$9,600. So it seems legitimate to say that some \$27,000 of her money disappeared.

Angela S—, who lived in the Empress up to a few months before Kay’s death, and was a good friend of Kay, **firmly believes that a desk clerk at the Empress, —, was stealing Kay’s money. Angela is willing to give you all the details, including eye-witness accounts.** I consider her a reliable witness (she is a manager for a hotel chain). She said that at least one, and possibly more, workers and residents at the Hotel, are willing to give similar testimony.

She also said that a man at the Olympic Hotel [full name given in original letter], had somehow gotten Kay to make him a trustee of her Wells Fargo Bank account. He was seen on several occasions handing money to her. Apparently, he had convinced her that if she made him trustee, that would save her having to run to the bank all the time (!) He has not responded to numerous phone calls from the City Administrator. Someone who might know how to contact [him] is Andrew Hawkins ..., a manager at the Olympic Hotel.

## *Retirement*

At the very least, therefore, it would seem that your department is justified in: (a) having Wells Fargo give you complete information as to withdrawals from Kay's bank account (when and by whom); (b) talking to Angela and other workers and residents at the Empress, and then questioning [the clerk].

**Note:** Angela informed me that the Empress has been recently sold, and that [the clerk] will probably lose her job, at least temporarily. **So it seems important that you move quickly,** before she moves away.

I have promised myself that when I know that I only have a few months to live, and if I have completed all of my life's work that I know I am able to complete, I am going to track down the thief and kill him.

### **Preparation for the Memorial Service**

I was not about to see Kay cremated by the City and her remains dumped into a Potter's Field, and so I paid for cremation and a funeral service at the Catholic Cemetery in Colma, south of San Francisco, and then her burial there, next to the chapel. I was low on cash at the time, and so asked Kathy, my former girlfriend, if she could loan me \$3,500. She said she could, but it turned out I was able to manage on my own. The total came to about \$2,600.

After much anguishing, the best I could come up with for the inscription on her grave was:

In loving memory of Kay Summers  
Sept. 23, 1937 [picture of Cross] Sept. 22, 2003  
She gave to others,  
Always with a smile

### **The Memorial Service**

The memorial service was held at Our Lady of Peace chapel at Holy Cross Cemetery at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2003. Angela — was there. She brought a bouquet of beautiful flowers, something I had completely forgotten to do. Also Robert Flores, manager of the Empress Hotel. Also his wife and his brother, these latter two saying almost nothing. Angela complimented me several times on how nice a service I had prepared. Once she asked me quietly, "Are you OK?"

I carried the box containing the urn into the chapel. I managed to get through perhaps two-thirds of my prepared speech, but then I couldn't go on. All I could say was, "Thank you for coming." Then Father Greene of Saint Monica read the service.

The Burial Supervisor carried the box containing the urn to the pre-dug grave, which was only a hole in the ground just large enough for the urn. With ceremonial slowness, as though he were patiently counting through the required number of seconds, he placed the box gently into the hole, then slowly, methodically filled it in. Then he placed round stones on top of the earth and I think placed Angela's flowers in the flower holder. I was on the verge of tears throughout.

After the ceremony, and some further small talk, it became clear that the guests were losing interest. Robert excused himself, said he needed to get a cigarette. I understood. Then they left. I stayed a while at the grave, the tears now coming down. Then I touched a stone, then on the earth that covered the urn. I said, in my mind, "Well, kiddo, I have to leave. Don't worry, I'll come back and visit. Please forgive me, old girl...."

When I got home, I found a stack of firewood in the driveway that had been dropped off by Bruce the Carpenter. He lived several blocks away on Blake St. and always gave me his scraps, saving him a trip to the landfill and the dumping fee, and saving me the cost of buying firewood. I was convinced Kay had sent the wood by way of thanks for the service.

I have since gone several times to visit her grave and talk to her, each time finding it impossible not to shed a few tears. To this day, I have never shed a single one for my mother.

By the time Kay died, I had read and re-read Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*. The reader will recall that after one of my fights with my mother, I was on the verge of copying down Father Arnall's description of hell and sending it to her with the words, "This is what is waiting for you, bitch." But after Kay's death, I had no doubt that Father Arnall's words described my own after-life — not only because of the way I treated Kay, but because of the two other unpardonable sins of my life: bullying my brother when we were kids, and killing Marcella's cat with the car. For these, there can be no forgiveness.

## Jeff's Wedding

Jeff and Karlin were married on Saturday, Oct. 11, 2003, at the Basin Harbor Club, Vergennes, Vt., on Lake Champlain. For reasons I don't understand, this has been one of the most difficult sections of this book to write.

Gaby and I drove up from New York in a rented car on Friday, the weather beautiful, leaves turning into their fall colors. Jeff and Karlin had done everything right: picked a charming lake-side resort for the occasion, made sure there were ample guests and ample rooms for all the guests (Gaby and I had a little cottage with a fireplace), sent everyone a weather report via email a few days before, plus detailed instructions from Burlington (Vt.) Airport, from Boston, from Hartford, Conn., and from New York. Marcella and Bill<sup>1</sup> were there, having flown in from Texas, she weak from chemotherapy for her breast cancer, and wearing a neck-length black wig, but still with her youthful beauty. On Friday evening, at the Red Mill, a bar on the Club premises, red and white checkered tablecloths, was the rehearsal dinner, even for those of us who hadn't rehearsed. The wedding was the following afternoon, in beautiful, sunny weather. I wore the only item of dress clothing I possessed, namely, my ancient blue sports jacket which I could no longer button in front due to my noticeable belly. Parents and best man and best woman had to stand behind a little stage in a grassy garden. I tried to hold my stomach in, squinting in the sunlight that was, I knew, gleaming on my bald head, beside myself with anxiety, fighting back the tears. Gaby sat in the seats near the front.

Much waiting for the ceremony to start, but the crowd was in a joyful mood. Then, at last — I suppose to the accompaniment of appropriate music, which I have forgotten — Jeff and Karlin came down the path, a handsome couple if there ever was one, Karlin in white, my son in a new beige jacket. A retired Vermont judge read the ceremony. He came to the crucial part and said, "Do you, Karen...?" Everyone laughed good-naturedly, because it was the wrong name. Jeff and Karlin told him her correct name. He re-read it. But then he said, "And do you, Steve...? Again everyone laughed, and Jeff and Karlin and others corrected him again. And so, with smiles all around on a sunny afternoon, Jeff and Karlin were eventually married under their proper names.

Then the congratulations, handshakes, hugs, my son as usual handling the event with aplomb.

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1. Her second husband, whom she married in the late '70s.

I wanted to say something to Marcella— wanted to thank her for having been my wife and such a great mother, and to praise her for coming to the wedding in spite of her illness (I only learned later how much it had taken out of her — what an act of will power it had required of her). But I was too close to tears and so instead I merely gave her a warm hug and mumbled a few words. I have never forgiven myself. After we had all returned home, I wrote her an email telling her what I had wanted to say, but I knew it was no good.

The reception dinner was held afterward in the main hall, with a view of the lake. In memory it began in late afternoon, as the sun was finishing the day. I stood talking with Karlin's father and other guests as the the sweat droplets ran down my stomach. After dinner Jeff said a few words, he not at all the nervous wreck his father was, then the parents had to offer toasts. The best toasts were given by the two mothers. The worst was given by me. I doubt if I spoke for a minute, heart thumping, face red, as I tried desperately to find platitudes that would please. Marcella, despite her illness, gave an excellent one, exactly the kind of toast you would want to give.

After the dinner, everyone went dancing in Red Mill. Gaby, who was rarin' to go, invited me to dance, but I was wooden with fear, and declined. Instead I got into a long, delightful conversation with Alison, wife of Jeff's friend Jim, a salesman of expensive liquors, Alison one of those women who belong in the Force-of-Nature category. Filled with self-confidence and energy, she was so good at her job of investment counseling that her company let her work at home part time so she could take care of her two children. I have a photo of her and Gaby on the dance floor, Gaby looking like a woman half her age. Afterward, in talking to Jeff, Alison gave me what I considered one of the highest compliments. "Jeff, I like your father. He's an odd duck, like me."

Then, back in our little cottage, I built a fire in our fireplace.

Gaby and I took a walk down the country road leading out of the hotel grounds, vast fields on both sides, up ahead a cluster of two or three houses, then more fields. We turned off the road into a barnyard and struck up a conversation with a guy overseeing his cows. There were about a hundred, and he said knew each of them. In the course of the conversation he told us something that neither of us had known, namely, that unless cows are milked, they die.

Jeff arranged two boat rides for his guests. In one, I talked to a Rumanian girl who made it clear how much she appreciated being able to get out of her country and work in the States, even if only as a helper on guest boat at a hotel. The young guy who was at the wheel kept calling me "sir". Shouting over the roar of the engine, I thanked Bill for being so supportive to Marcella throughout her illness. Thereafter, I always bought the special postage stamp a few pennies of which the Post Office donated to research on breast cancer.

Jeff and Karlin were living in their apartment in the 30s in New York City but since Jeff's bank, like many others, had moved to Greenwich, Ct., they soon moved to an apartment in that city, the bank paying all moving expenses. In 2006, they bought a house in Westport, Ct.

For their wedding gift I gave them the Chagall lithograph of two entwined lovers that David R —, our sax player in the Lehigh University days, had given me as my wedding present.

They sent everyone a card with two photographs of them, the handsome groom and beautiful bride, and pressed inside, a red-brown leaf.

Although in the first few years of the marriage I joked with friends and neighbors about how my son and daughter-in-law had so far not delivered any grandproduct, I never brought up the subject with Jeff and Karlin because I remembered how Marcella and I had resented my mother nagging us (in that case, to have a second child).

## The Tristram Shandy Problem

I had originally set out to make this book as complete as possible, which meant not only going back and filling in details as they occurred to me, often as a result of my reading or of seeing something on TV — I have had far more madeleine experiences than Proust did, though most were not occasioned by tastes and smells — it meant also that I would record events that happened during the writing of the book. But as the number of pages increased, it dawned on me that I was facing exactly the same problem that Tristram Shandy had in Sterne's novel:

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume — and no farther than to my first day's life — 'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it — on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back — was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this — And why not? — and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description — And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write — It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write — and consequently the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. ...write as I will, and rush as I may into the middle of things, as *Horace* advises — I shall never overtake myself...<sup>1</sup>

So I decided to set a time at which the narrative would stop. Except that I couldn't. I said to myself, "OK, only the most important things from now on. No more details of daily life. No more about battles with mathematicians or with neighbors." But I knew that if I didn't record these things, no one else would, and so it would be *as if they never happened*. All this struggle and living through them *wasted!* So I kept trying to do the impossible.

Then, in February 2007, an idea I had thought of during the long, tedious, frustrating, never-ending labors of working on this book appeared in an article in the March *Scientific American*. Written by Gordon Bell and Jim Gemmell and titled, "A Digital Life", it described how "new systems may allow people to record everything they see and hear — and even things they cannot sense — and to store all these data in a personal digital archive." (p. 58) The caption for a photo read, "Daily journeys can be documented with the SenseCam [hanging from Bell's neck in photograph above], a camera that automatically takes pictures when its sensors indicate changes in light levels or the presence of people nearby. A Global Positioning System device continually tracks Bell's location, enabling the creation of visual diaries of his travels." (p. 62)

The autobiography was soon to become an obsolescent literary form. Had I been born a hundred years later, there would have been no need for all my labors.

## Yuppie Muzak

In the nineties there were three classical music stations in the Bay Area: KKHI, KDFC, and KQED FM. None of them came even close to New York City's WQXR (the classical music sta-

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1. Sterne, Laurence, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, Penguin Books, 2003, Vol. IV, Chap. XIII, p. 256.

tion I grew up with), but they were acceptable. KQED FM used to run fairly challenging contests, in which callers had to identify not only a work, but the particular performance. Egl won so many times that the station eventually asked him not to participate any longer. Then, for reasons probably financial, KQED FM stopped broadcasting classical, and soon KKHI went out of business. That left only KDFC, which was taken over by a company that decided that classical music had to make money, and not merely the marginal profits it normally made. The result was what I and the hard-core lovers of classical soon came to call, “Yuppie Muzak”, a dreadful repertoire of all the most overplayed standards, a few of which are listed in the letter below. Even worse, the Marketing Dept. decided, perhaps on the basis of actual research, that entire symphonies and concertos were really beyond the capacity of their 30s-to-young-50s target audience, so they began playing only *movements* from these works. An announcer would announce Brahms’s First Symphony, and play only one movement. Similarly for Beethoven’s symphonies and concertos. Furthermore, the announcers, with perhaps one or two exceptions, often pronounced names wrong. I began to keep a record of their blunders, and finally, could stand it no longer. On Oct. 3, 2003, I wrote the General Manager the following letter.

Mr. Bill Lueth, General Manager and Program Director  
KDFC  
Suite 2300  
455 Market St.  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Lueth:

I put off writing this letter as long as I could, hoping that my anger would wear off, but it hasn’t. Your station continues to insult the intelligence and taste of Bay Area classical music lovers, and I think you need to hear about it — again, since I wrote you several years ago on the same subject.

First let me give you my complaints, then let me try to prove to you that it *is* possible to improve the quality of your programming without (as you seem to think) going broke.

At present, your programming is an abominable day-after-day repetition of what is often called “Yuppie Muzak”: the Canon in D, Handel’s Water Music, a few pieces of Telemann, the Brandenburg Concertos (mainly no.s 3 and 4), a few Vivaldi concertos, “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” (it is a credit to Mozart’s greatness that not even your mind-numbing repetition of this work has been able to destroy its appeal), Beethoven’s 5th, maybe (parts of) the Brahms symphonies, some Tchaikovsky, some Khatchaturian, “Appalachian Spring”, etc.

Your announcers are musical illiterates<sup>1</sup>. Here are just a few of their truly embarrassing blunders in pronunciation:

“Kuvantz” instead of “Kvantz”;

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1. With one exception: Rick Malone. But, as we might expect, he seems to have the shortest time on the air.

- “Edward *Elger*” (no doubt a distant relation of the famous English composer, Edward *Elgar*);
- “La ci darem la mano” (the music sounds a lot like that for “La ci *darem* la mano”);
- “*Nicolla Paganini*” (presumably the sister of the famous 19th century violin virtuoso, *Niccolo Paganini*);
- “Johann Sebastian Bock” (presumably a composer from the well-known German beer family);
- “Moozio Clemente” (Ah yes: shmoozio with moozio. His mom, however, called him “*Mootzio*”, and so do most educated classical announcers.);
- “Lyebes leed” (“Body song”, apparently. The tune is very similar to the well-known “Liebes Lied” (*leebes leed*, or “Love song”) by Fritz Kreisler.);
- “Milan Moonlinger” (no doubt a would-be epigone of the well-known conductor whose last name is pronounced “*moonschlinger*”);
- “The *Down Land Suite*” (not to be confused with the *Up Land Suite*, much less the *Downl’nd Suite*, which is the way they pronounce it England, but what do those silly English know about their language?);
- “*Wakeeno Rossini*” (Spanish brother of “*Jockomo Rossini*”, no doubt)<sup>1</sup>;
- “chakones” (one chaconne, two or more chakones);
- “Geed’n Kremer” (never heard of him before, but presumably he is related to “*Geedon Kremer*”);
- “Carl Friedrich Emanuelle Bach” (he — or was it she? — starred in a well-known erotic film of years ago, didn’t he (or she)?);
- “Bokearini” (Don’t poke the boke! The Italians, and educated announcers, pronounce it “*Bockarini*”, but what do they know?);
- “Oatorino Respighi” (Worked on a farm in his youth, while his brother *Ottorino* became a composer);
- “*Caldara*” (Or, as he is known in the music world (not to mention in his homeland), “*Calderah*”);
- The violinist *Joahchome* who was a friend of Brahms (closely related to that other violinist, “*Yo-ah-keem*”);
- Pianist *Christyanne Zimmerman* (Nice kid: they call her “Anne” for short. Has a musical relative whose first name is pronounced “*Christiyahn*”)
- “Al Berti” (You know Al: he runs the meat market down at the corner.).

But not only does your squad of incompetents screw up on pronunciation. They can’t even get their quotes and their grammar right:

- “...going to you-know-where in a handcart” (Er, it’s “going to you-know-where in a *handbasket*”);
- “a piece that Grieg wrote for he and his wife” (In my high school (or was it jr. high?) we learned that the preposition “for” takes the objective case: “for *him* and his wife”.);
- “the Red Priest, el prète rosso” (...as the Spanish used to call him).

Your staff of dopes doesn’t merely mispronounce the names and screw up basic English

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1. I was dead wrong here: the correct pronunciation of his first name is *Wakeeno*.

grammar, they also seem to be unclear on the nature of the basic musical forms of the classical composers. Perhaps the reason is your unforgivable policy of often programming only single movements of works. So, beginning in ignorance, and not having the motivation or intelligence to study the subject that earns them a living, these dolts seem actually to believe that, for example, the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth is somehow "equivalent to" the entire four movements of the symphony (those other three movements being, presumably, "extra" ones he just tacked on, for the intellectuals). Similarly with concertos.

Appalling ignorance is the norm. Not too long ago, I heard Dope 1 or Dope 2 on the day shift refer to the "always cheerful music of Bock". *What?* The music of the greatest composer of church music in the history of mankind *always cheerful?* Holy Christ!

As if all this weren't enough, early in the game you got rid of all the programs that could give your station at least a trace of quality and interest. Gone is the always informative Karl Haas, gone is the excellent "St. Paul Sunday", gone is the always fascinating Jim Schweda, and the always amusing Peter Schikele. True, you program (or used to program) "Classical Kid" on Sunday — at an hour when no kid would even *think* of being awake. And you have an hour show at 9 a.m. Sunday presenting the performances by talented teenagers. Fine. Out of the 168 hours in the week, you devote exactly two to anything that could be remotely called "educational". (But, I know, you don't want to offend all those dim bulbs in Marin by presenting anything that might sound (God forbid!) *intellectual*.)

I can well imagine that you are going to reply with something along the lines of "quality doesn't sell". And you would be dead wrong. I grew up listening to one of the world's great classical music stations, namely, WQXR in New York. It is still in existence, and still making money — I checked while on a trip to Europe last summer sponsored by the station. I talked at length with one of their announcers, who was the host for the trip. Not only does he, and every other announcer on the station, get all the names and the grammar right, each announcer is also a lifelong student of classical music.

I dare you to listen to WQXR a few hours this week. You can hear it on your computer, on [www.wqxr.com](http://www.wqxr.com). In addition to the regular music programming, I dare you to listen to David Dubal (7 to 8 our time on Wednesday evening).

But now I can hear you saying that WQXR serves a much larger, wealthier, more sophisticated audience than KDFC, and that this accounts for their being able to make a profit from quality programming. Once again, you are dead wrong. Anyone who travels in upper New York State and throughout New England — even in rural areas — always has available at his fingertips at least two absolutely first-rate classical music stations.

I know of not one classical music lover or music teacher or musician who has anything but profound contempt for your station. When I last wrote you with a similar criticism, you replied that KDFC is making more money than virtually any other station in the Bay Area. So what? Jerry Springer's show makes more money than most other TV programs: do you

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urge your family to watch it?

Aren't you ashamed to be represented by such an incompetent bunch of announcers? Aren't you ashamed to accept money for the daily debasing of the works of the great composers — for always catering to the lowest common denominator in your audience?

KDFC is a disgrace, and you need to be told that, often.

Sincerely,

John Franklin

I must give him credit: he called me back obviously wanting to explain his point of view. We talked for around half an hour. He asked me what I thought the dollar value was of the FM frequency on which his station broadcast. I guessed \$10 million. He said I was off by a factor of ten: it was actually worth \$110 million. So the owners had to get a commensurate return in order to make their investment worthwhile. A rock-and-roll station would have no problem making a profit on that frequency.

When I told him that I thought that WQXR was the best classical station in the country, he said he hated it, his one goal when he took over the station having been to get as far as possible from appealing to the "geriatric" audience that WQXR appealed to.

In my mind, Marin County — too much money in the hands of too few brains — epitomized the audience he was aiming at: the shallow upper middle class for whom classical music is a means of demonstrating how exceptional one is, and for whom the main appeal of concerts is that they allow one to be *seen*.

KKHI came back to life briefly, the owner claiming that he didn't need to make a big profit from it, that he wanted to do something for the community. The station soon went off the air again. Then, on AM, there appeared another station, KMZT ("K Mozart"), which clearly wanted to exploit the disgruntled classical music lovers in the Bay Area. It played entire symphonies and concertos, and the announcers at least were able to pronounce most of the words properly, and seemed to have a brain in their heads. They even broadcast the superb Sunday morning program *St. Paul Sunday* in which the host, Bill McGlaughlin, had as his guests various individual soloists and small performing groups. But the station had trouble with its signal, so that, throughout the day, you had to suffer brief blank spots in the sound. The commitment to playing entire works began to wane. In November 2004 the station went off the air, to be replaced by one playing the most God-awful rock I had ever heard.

I tried to rely on my own small library of CDs, and those I took out from the extensive collection at Berkeley's Main Public Library. My computer and/or its software wasn't capable of bringing in WQXR without frequently causing the computer to crash. So I would sometimes turn on KDFC. The stupid announcer mistakes continued, and so on 8/2/04 I sent the following email to the station's Feedback department:

Dear KDFC:

Around 4:40 p.m. today (Monday, Aug. 2), one of your announcers, I believe it was Linda

## *Retirement*

Cassidy, once again demonstrated the extraordinary ignorance that characterizes all your announcers except, possibly, Bill Lueth and Rick Malone. She pronounced the word “homage”, ohMAJ (no doubt she was strongly influenced by the Jonathan Winters ads for garbage bags ("garBAJ bags") many years ago), whereas every half-educated fool knows that the correct pronunciation is AHmij (tell her to open a dictionary once in her life).

I wrote a long letter to Bill Lueth several months ago, listing all the dunderhead mistakes his staff of know-nothings makes. Nothing changed. Since then we have had, among many others:

the “Kindersennen” of Schuman (it's “KinderTZAYnen”)

“Adore-mus” te (Christ! May that announcer be damned to hell! It's “AdorRAYmus”)

One of the staff idiots had Sibelius writing his Fifth Symphony during WW II (Sat 7:20 6/19), when everyone knows that he stopped writing music in 1926, even though he lived for thirty more years.

And then there's the perennial “La chi drem la mano” (instead of “La chi DArem la mano”).

Instead of perfecting the smiles in their voices, the announcing staff should start learning something about the art form that pays them so well. If they want to hear intelligent, knowledgeable classical announcers, they should listen to KMZT (which is what I and many other classical music lovers listen to most of the time), or WQXR in New York City ([www.wqxr.com](http://www.wqxr.com)). Yes, I know, Bill Lueth considers it an old-fogey station. On the other hand, at least all the announcers are competent.

In disgust,

— John Franklin

I couldn't stand Dianne Niccolini, whom I dubbed “The Breathless Wonder”. It turned out — she appeared in several television ads for the station — that she was a beautiful blonde, which made her even more insufferable, because her voice said, with every sentence, “It's so wonderful to be alive when you're famous, and beautiful, and wealthy, and happily married, and associated with such an important thing as classical music!” When she said anything that had the vaguest suggestion of being humorous, she would give a little apologetic choke — no that is too strong a word — a little apologetic catch in the throat that said, “Oh, I hope you will forgive that, I know that you are all such sophisticated people, but when one is so happy with one's important station in life...”

The contrast between her and Nimet Habachy of WQXR, with her superb pronunciation, and, most important of all, her extraordinary knowledge of classical music and classical composers, made me furious.

## Affluent Dopes — PBS TV Stations and Their Audience

But KDFC was just one indication of the (to me) alarming superficiality of the affluent in the Bay Area. Another was the programming on the PBS TV stations, especially during pledge drives. These stations, in their early years, had been part of an admirable attempt to provide viewers with something other than the trivia of the commercial stations. Everyone with taste and intelligence loved KQED (Channel 9) during the sixties, when it was managed by James Day. One of the never-to-be-forgotten programs of those years was the series of conversations that he had with Eric Hoffer, the so-called “longshoreman philosopher”. They sat facing each other on a circular dais. Day asked questions and Hoffer replied as he sat there, this big gnome of a bald man in his plaid lumberjack/longshoreman jacket, leaning forward, his thick, gnarled hands folded (he was missing part of a thumb and maybe another finger). When Day asked him a question, he would close his eyes, and begin, in his thick German accent — he had been raised from the age of five by a German woman in New York City after his parents died; and from the age of five until 16 he had been blind — “Ah, Meester Day, thees is very interesting...” and then gesturing sometimes with one hand, he would lay out the result of years of thinking in complete isolation while he spent his days as a migrant farm worker, and then a loader and unloader of big ships on the San Francisco waterfront. I remember Day having asked him something about the recovery of Europe after World War II. Again that squint, the big hands moving, “Meester Day, I asked myself, which countries are going to be the first to recover? And then I thought: look for the broom hanging on the wall!” his point having been that the countries with an instinctive sense of order and cleanliness would be the most industrious. He was right.

In the nineties I called KQED and asked if the tapes of those conversations might someday be rebroadcast. The clerk at the other end said she would check, then came back and said that the station had been running short of tapes, and so they had erased them all in order to record new material over them. My rage knew no bounds. I came very near to telling her that I was coming over there with a gun and would kill as many of the overpaid management as I could. The same thing happened to the kinescopes of the early *Tonight Show* broadcasts in the fifties when Steve Allen was host, and which I used to watch when I was staying at the YMCA in White Plains that one summer. Several years later, Eric Sevareid, the TV news reporter, did another series of conversations with Hoffer, but they weren’t as good as those with James Day. I don’t know if the tapes have been preserved.

And so you would assume that the programming during pledge drives would be aimed at the most affluent, most socially aware, most responsible (and most charitable) portion of the viewing audience. You would therefore be inclined to assume that this programming would be primarily devoted to, say, classic films, symphony, opera, and perhaps some ballet performances, *Nova* and *Nature* programs, documentaries and historical programs, etc. But you would be dead wrong.

As one qualified observer remarked in a history of KQED (now called, by many of its disgusted viewers, “The Evil Empire”), “the viewers have gotten dumber. Programming on public TV had to go down market to find audiences.”<sup>1</sup> He mentioned Deepak Chopra, Suze Orman<sup>2</sup>, and *Yanni Live at Royal Albert Hall* as examples of the down-market shows. There were many more hope pushers besides Chopra and Orman, not only on KQED but on the other Bay Area PBS TV station, KTEH, in San Jose<sup>3</sup>. For example:

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1. [www.kqed.org](http://www.kqed.org), online reproduction of 4/29/04 article, “KQED at 50”, by Adair Lara in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

2. The financial so-called expert known to many of us disgusted viewers as “the blonde screech-owl”.

Dr. Wayne Dyer and “The Power of Intention” (*Intention*, don’t you see? Who would have thought it?). On the stage was a big globe made of some kind of crinkly paper-lantern paper. This was the globe of Being, from which we get our energy in order to implement our Intentions. (You see how simple it all is? ) The faces of members of the audience — smiling, absorbed — the faces of the affluent, educated class. A thoughtful guy who might have worked in software for his day job, chewed on the stem of his eyeglasses, so thought-provoking was the message being delivered.

Dr. Andrew Weil, with his huge, white, ridiculous beard (what was the point? why did he *need* this?) who, though an M.D., did not like much of Western medicine (What has Western medicine ever done for *us*?) promoting spontaneous healing through good thoughts and the right diet and just letting Nature do the healing. (*Nature*, don’t you see?) How silly of all those cancer patients to go through all that surgery and radiation- and chemotherapy, when all they needed to do was put their trust in Nature!

Dr. Nicholas Perricone, with his greasy hair, looking like an actor in a Grade-B Italian film, selling various creams and diets and what-not which were practically guaranteed to keep the ladies young because he did *research*, don’t you see.

Barbara Scher, a sweet little middle-aged lady, by no means the worst of the lot. In fact, who could not like someone who kept telling you that you have it in you to do *anything you want!* (And you thought you had limitations! Silly you.)

And the insufferable Suze Orman, whom I always called the Blonde Screech-Owl, though some women have told me her financial advice is sound.

And a medical doctor whose name I never learned, apparently a surgeon, who gave his lectures *in his operating room scrubs* — so that we would think, Now this is a *real* doctor. Why, he just came over in the middle of an operation — without even taking time to change his clothes! — to tell us how to improve our health. What a wonderful man! How confident we can be that everything he says is true! How important that we pledge a contribution to a TV station that is actually able to get surgeons *in mid-operation* to come and talk to viewers!<sup>1</sup>

And then, after all that hard intellectual work of listening to the endless hours of good news from these snake-oil salespersons, why, the middle-aged affluent viewer needed a break. Their beloved PBS station had just the thing: a trip back to the naughty, daring days of the viewers’ youth, with hour after evening hour of good old rhythm and blues and country and western. No viewer could say that success has made him or her stuffy or old or snobbish. No, by God, we still enjoy music with a beat, just like the Common People. And as a special treat for the middle-aged ladies, we have Andre Rieu, the handsome Dutchman with the violin and long hair who can play the same Strauss waltzes more times, with a smile, than was previously thought humanly possible. And even more handsome is the trumpeter Chris Botti, with his poor little sad little melancholy tone (no vibrato — that would be entirely too happy) designed to go straight to a middle-aged woman’s yearning heart. It is a measure of the ignorance of the audience that this sentimental pap is billed as “jazz”. (I should mention in passing that the vibratoless tone has its source in Miles Davis and Chet Baker in the fifties, both of them great jazz musicians who I am sure would be appalled at what the crass commercialism of pop drives had done to their innovation.)

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3. The one good PBS station for many years was KCSM, owned and operated by the College of San Mateo. But in 2004, it went off the air because the rent for its antenna facilities had been tripled.

1. The only reason that the PBS program managers resorted to such a dreadful gimmick was that they knew it would bring in money. My contempt for the affluent Americans who responded was without limit.

I thought to myself, watching these shows: The audience for this drivel is not only the economic elite but also the voting elite. These affluent dopes, who don't even understand the difference between anecdotal and statistical evidence (if it was ever taught to them at all — your public schools at work), the former being the only kind that the feel-good doctors ever used in their lectures — these fools were the *best* (not the worst) the nation could hope for in the way of its citizens — its voters. God help us.

## A World War II Vet

Every couple of weeks, I backed up my word-processor and email files and put the CD in my safe deposit box in the basement of the main branch of Wells Fargo bank, which was located in the center of downtown Berkeley. A friendly old-timer named Phil occasionally worked as the safe deposit clerk. Although he was past seventy, the bank allowed him to keep working, part-time. He was short, with most of his hair gone, walked with a slight stoop, and had a strong Brooklyn accent. Because he had a good sense of humor, we got along well. He, when I came down the stairs: “Hey”, laughing, “how's it going, man?” And he repeated it as I began to reply. I: “So you're still working!” He would laugh, and I would say something like, “Well, they're keeping you because you're the only one who knows what's going on!” And he would laugh and say with the cheery resignation of the working stiff, “Cheesh<sup>1</sup>! Yeah...” the unspoken sentiment being, “These people don't know what they're doing half the time, but so, you make the best of it.”

Somehow I found out that he had piloted torpedo bombers<sup>2</sup> in the Pacific during World War II, and I made the most of this opportunity to pick up a little history that soon would be available only in books. He said his plane carried two torpedoes. He had a machine gunner in the back to try to stop Japanese fighters (Zeroes), although he never mentioned being attacked. He said he flew low, just about the wave tops, got as close to the side of an enemy ship as he could, then launched a torpedo and turned away as rapidly as possible. I asked him how successful he had been. He said that in the several years he had flown, only once did a torpedo he had launched actually lead to the sinking of a ship.

He discussed these matters quite casually, almost with indifference, as though his memory of them had already been put away permanently. He didn't think he had done anything heroic.

Whenever I left, he would say, “Good to see you, man, hey, good to see you!”

## The Dangers of Eating at Cheap Breakfast Places

In the late nineties and early 2000s I ate regularly at a place on Center St. in downtown Berkeley called the Bongo Burger, where you could get a complete breakfast — two fried eggs sunny-side up, string potatoes, whole wheat toast, and coffee — for \$3.50. Since you ordered at the counter, no tipping was necessary. This price contrasted with upwards of \$8, including tip, at other breakfast places, among them the one owned by my neighbors, Steve and Jane (see first file of Vol. 4). Bongo Burger was owned and run by Iranians (for some reason, every Iranian I ever knew in Berkeley always referred to him- or herself as “Persian”). There were two other Bongo Burgers: one on Durant off Telegraph Ave., in the seediest part of the blocks of Telegraph near the

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1. A euphemism for “Jesus”, uttered through the teeth

2. TBMs, made by Martin, and TBFs made by Grumman

campus; and another about half a block north of campus on Euclid, a much nicer area, with pepper trees along the sidewalk and the coffee shop Brewed Awakening on the corner (a graduate student locale, unlike most of the coffee shops immediately to the south of campus).

One morning, as I was eating breakfast at my usual table near the window at the Center St. location, a guy was having trouble getting his bike out the front door. He was short, thin, probably in his forties. I got up, went over and held the door. He became furious. "Leave the door alone! There is too much attention being paid to doors!" I was so taken aback that I merely stood there for a few seconds as he wheeled his bike onto the sidewalk. Then I said, loud enough so that he would hear it, "Asshole!" He threw the bike down, said "*What?*" and came at me with fists swinging. There was no doubt about his determination to hit me, so I felt it was better to come out on the sidewalk rather than let him bring his rage into the restaurant. I put both hands up protectively, hands flat as though ready to administer rabbit punches, and danced backward, dodging his fists. I was convinced this was what I ought to do, since I knew that if I came into physical contact with him, I would try to beat him to death. I kept calm imagining slamming his head again and again into the sidewalk, breaking his skull and seeing the blood pour out of his nose and mouth. Eventually he stopped swinging, returned to his bike where it lay on the sidewalk, picked it up and pushed it along the sidewalk in the direction of the campus.

Another time, when I arrived for breakfast, a black guy was standing in the doorway shouting at the terrified women behind the counter, and threatening to kill them. "You gonna get off you shift and you gonna be *daid!*" His girlfriend, one of the most truly ugly women I had seen in years, was standing on the sidewalk screeching at him. "Git you ass out here! Git you ass out here!" After they left, I talked to the women. They said that they had told the two blacks that they would not be served because of the noise and disruption they had made on previous occasions (I had witnessed a couple of these). So the man had marched into the back and tried to tear the back door off. Apparently he had seen one of the women calling 911, and had retreated out the front door, threatening to kill them.

## Dreams

I slept more than eight hours a day including naps and never regarded the time as wasted, since for me, dreams had always been one of the most creative parts of my life. Keeping in mind the general attitude regarding other people's dreams —

"Did you have a good night?" asked [Lola's] hostess with perfunctory solicitude.

"Quite, thank you," said Lola; "I dreamt a most remarkable dream"

A flutter, indicative of general boredom, went round the table. Other people's dreams are about as universally interesting as accounts of other people's gardens, or chickens, or children. — Saki, "A Bread and Butter Miss"

— it nevertheless seems appropriate to include a few in an autobiography, provided the author makes every effort to keep the descriptions as short as possible. I will concentrate mainly on dreams that have recurred many times over the years, and which always take place in the same surroundings. But first —

## Going to Sleep

Trying to go to sleep is a good way not to go to sleep. PBS TV programs with the sound

turned way down often provided sufficient distraction to get a night's fitful sleep. But in old age, I developed a few scenes that usually helped me to nod off.

One was that I was in a black dirigible that was parked, like a compact cloud, next to the cliff at Mission Peak in Fremont, where I used to sailplane. Below was the one white farmhouse at the base of the cliff that I always wondered about as I flew back and forth in the ridge lift above. Who lived there? Why did they choose such a strange place to live? Did they hate the sailplanes overhead? Did they hear the wind rushing over the wings? Did they have any feelings at all about the planes?

Another scene also involved a plane, this time a sleek, black two-engine one that is piloted by a man named Carleton. It is parked, at night, with engines running, at one end of a grassy airstrip with cliffs dropping off on two sides. I have a comfortable bunk in the back, along with a black machine gun. I turn the little electric light on briefly as I get settled, then turn it off because we know that bumping along down a dirt road along the left-hand side of the airstrip are half a dozen cars full of shouting Muslims with guns. We can see their headlights. Carleton turns all the plane's lights off, and as the Muslims start shooting, he starts the plane down the airstrip. I meantime aim the machine gun at the first car and fire, keeping up a steady sequence of bursts, knowing that if I can stop the first car, then all the other cars will be forced to stop. Usually by the time we are airborne, and the Muslim bullets are flying past us in the dark, the engine of the first car is in flames. Then, as we disappear into the darkness, I rake the rest of the cars with gunfire to kill as many of the Muslims as I can.

Another scene was a second-storey room with a polished wooden floor and bookshelves from floor to ceiling on all four walls except where a small fireplace is. My little bed is near a window which looks down on a sidewalk in a country town. The branches of a large tree touch the window; there are similar trees all along the sidewalk. I can lie in bed during the day and observe the occasional passer-by. At night I can listen to the rain on the leaves. The scene is derived from the description of the invalid Aunt Leonie's rooms in the *Combray* section of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Another scene: A girl between the age of ten and twelve and I travel around the country looking for beautiful houses whose owners are on long trips. We find a way inside and live there until we hear the owners return, at which point we run out of a back entrance. Sometimes we leave a note on the kitchen table thanking them for the opportunity to enjoy their home, and making clear that we have done no damage and that indeed we can be regarded as house-sitters who have prevented burglaries.

To get to sleep I imagine the girl and I lying in our blankets before the dying fire in a big fireplace that is on a raised hearth. She is thin, shy, and after several years on the streets glad to have a protective older male as companion who makes sure she has a place to sleep. I don't know her name. On her other side is our big dog who is thankful to have a couple of humans to feed it and provide a place for it to sleep. I never have sex with the girl. When it is time to go to sleep, I sometimes kiss the back of her neck, but in any case I always ask her, "Did you kiss that dog?", at which time she strokes its fur and gives it a kiss, even though it is usually asleep already. Sometimes, as we are about to drop off, she asks me in a plaintive voice, "Will we always be a family?" And I assure her we will.

Starting in spring of 2009, another dormative scene made its appearance. Ever since childhood I had wanted to live underground — recall the trench huts we built, and the imagined trap door next to the cherry tree with the little colored spindles — so I began imagining that I had a house that was built below a grassy meadow above a cliff overlooking the Pacific, north of San Francisco. (I spent a lot of waking time worrying about the earthquake risks of living in such a place.) At times I made the house be cut out of solid granite. But in any case, the side of it facing the ocean was a long window, the grass hanging down over the upper edge. Inside, in the living room, was a telescope, and, needless to say, a fireplace. The other rooms were dark and tunnel-like, reminding me of the Badger's snug den in *The Wind in the Willows*. The garage was likewise built into the hill. A long, winding road led to it. And so, by imagining myself on a bed next to that big window, I was able to get to sleep.

### **Dreams of Working at Hewlett-Packard**

Variations of the same dream have recurred for years. They always take place in a large second-story floor of an HP building on Deer Creek Rd. in Palo Alto, CA. There is nothing but desks in rows and thick square pillars at regular intervals. No interior walls, no cubicles — everyone working in the open. It is a sunny day, the office area is filled with California light. In the dream I have been working at the company for 20 or 30 years (in actual fact, I worked there for 21 years). I am a technical writer and have been accomplishing nothing — an outsider who knows that all the other employees want to be rid of him.

Sometimes I know that management is getting ready to fire me, and I make yet another attempt to convince them that my new way of doing manuals is a vast improvement over the present one. But I usually can't find the email address of the manager I need to communicate with. At other times I know there is another company located about a mile away, on the other side of El Camino Real, and that they are always considering hiring a publications manager. I go there, make my pitch, but they never get back to me.

Sometimes I am working in the Cupertino Division, and must use their program for designing integrated circuits. I have learned as little about it that I can get away with, since it is complicated and difficult to use. But when something goes wrong — when my normal working screen disappears, and I am faced with a screenful of gray squiggles on a darker gray background, and strange postcard-like pictures at various angles, or a map of the country, or the display slowly becoming a kind of board with sides, and two animals, otters or woodchucks, looking over the top back, and then the board bending forward and plunging into the bottom of the screen, this being the amusing way that the programmers had designed the message that the computer has crashed hopelessly — then I grow desperate. Sometimes I ask another employee to help me get back to where I was, but they often say no.

Once, I was trying to return a collection of old manuals I had written, but the uncomprehending engineers laughed. I tried to argue that the manuals might be useful when they got old instruments to repair. But it was no use. All these dreams are end-of-the-world dreams; everything is hopeless, there is no place for me anywhere.

Sooner or later in each HP dream, I am convinced that the company has not paid me for several years. I know that I have around \$780,000 saved, so if I can get the company to pay me what it owes me, I will be able to live without working. I never get around to pursuing this with the payroll department, however.

And then, equally inevitably, is the conviction that I have about \$10,000 on deposit with a Savings and Loan company in southern California (the name begins with "P"). I listen to reports

about interest rates, realize I have made money, want to call them and tell them to withdraw it all. But I know I will have to go home and look in the bottom of the (real-life) filing cabinet in the closet in my study to get the address, and I remember that last time I couldn't find the information sheet on the company. Will they send me my money anyway, eventually? Sometimes I attempt to drive to the company after work, but now the company is located in San Mateo, just south of San Francisco, about 40 miles away. I have car trouble on the way, become lost among the vast free-ways.

### **Dreams of Losing Things**

Year after year I dream of losing things. Sometimes I am on a skiing trip to a resort just north of the Canadian border (the name of the town begins with "W" or "O" but I can't remember it now). I realize in the train station that my skis are gone, also my sleeping bag, my shoes, various toiletry items. In other dreams I am in a crowded building, carefully keeping an eye on belongings that I especially do not want to lose, then realizing that other belongings are gone. I am often in a panic, running around, shouting, demanding the return of my things. I recite the list of lost items, not only the ones lost in this dream, *but also those lost in previous dreams.*

In other dreams I am outside a cluster of rectangular impressive buildings in the Palo Alto area, not Stanford, industry or university, as I emerge from the building, I realize I can't remember where I parked my car. I know it was on a hill, but I can't find the hill. I decide to call the police, but I have no phone.

In another dream, my car is continually in need of repair, against my better judgement I keep buying new ones, I remember I had an old black Ford, brought it to a gas station in Thornwood, a few miles from Valhalla, my home town. I remember the garage was under dark, old trees at a V in the road. The owner is possibly dishonest, and it's been so long since I brought the car in, he has probably sold it.

### **The Parachute Dream**

This was probably the oldest of the recurring dreams, having begun already in my forties, I think. I am in a plane such as sky-divers use, and for what reason I don't know, I have to face the challenge of parachuting to earth, something I have never done before. There is nothing but fog and clouds below, I can't see the ground. But realizing this is a life's challenge, and that if I don't accept it, I will never be able to live with myself, I jump, remembering that I have to count to ten before pulling the rip cord. Now I am descending through the cold and swirling mists, trying desperately to see the ground below. I know that I am above mountains, and so have all the more reason to be fearful.

And then, suddenly, I am below the clouds, my white parachute swaying above me, and there below is a sloping meadow covered with snow, like a ski run, and surrounded by a forest. I am supremely happy. I descend, release the parachute harness and start running around through the snow, shouting in triumph.

### **Houses**

My obsession with houses extended to my dreams. There was one house I repeatedly returned to that on waking I had to remind myself was *not* a house I once owned. It was on an open hill with an expanse of water nearby, probably an inlet from the sea. Golden grass and a few dark green bushes here and there. Other houses, some white with dark trim, on the same hill, but the

area is by no means built up though the residents are affluent. Even in the summer, it is windy. So far, I have not been able to recall a place in real life that this place is a memory of.

My house is really two houses that have been somehow built into one. It is unstable structurally, but it has possibilities if only I had the skills and the time. The floors are uneven (as in my real house in Berkeley) but, worse than that, they are at odd levels: you go up a few steps to one floor, then turn and go up many steps to another. The reader will recall that I had had trouble with the fireplace in my real house in Berkeley from the time I bought it in 1988 to February 1997. The house in the dream has a kind of double-living room, with low ceilings. There are *two* fireplaces, one small, one large, but they are in the wrong places, namely, next to doorways. Potted plants grow next to each. Otherwise, there are only a few items of shabby, old furniture. The other rooms are nearly bare. The roof of a large room in the back leaks badly in several places. I am always trying to postpone having it fixed because of the cost, but am relieved to know that I can call a carpenter I have used in real life.

I live somewhere else, but when I am depressed (in the dreams) I remember that I still have this house if only as an investment. Marcella is often present when I go to visit the house. It is not clear if we are still married or not. Jeff is never in these dreams, because he would be an element of happiness and there is no happiness here.

The house is usually unoccupied. I don't know why I don't rent it out. When I return to it, I tell myself, "This place could be fixed up! The living room has two fireplaces!" I try to like the place, try to convince myself it is the one I have been searching for all these years, but I am never successful in this.

### **Playing Jazz**

Every few months or so, I dreamed I had started up my old band. We played at a jazz club in New Jersey. On our opening night, I knew we had barely had time to practice, but I resolved to institute weekly practices, several hours a week even if I had to pay the band to attend the practices. I would have a recording machine, and we would listen to ourselves, and improve.

The club is located somewhere in the suburbs. The interior is dark, the night outside black. As in real life when I actually led a band, I am ashamed of my improvisations, keep trying, during the playing, to make them better. But I often make a complete fool of myself, not the least reason being that my lip is always on the verge of giving out for lack of sufficient practice. (As I play, I resolve, "Two hours a day from now on. No matter what!") But once in a while I come up with a solo that I know is quite good — it is what I have been trying to achieve all along.

### **Blind Bicyclists in the Sky**

And then there were the unique dreams, virtually all of them forgotten on waking. But one I remembered long enough to describe in an email to Gaby on 10/1/04.

I forgot to tell you about a beautiful dream I had last night. We are out in our back yards at night, looking for UFOs, which in these dreams always appear, often only as moving lights behind clouds. No one knows what they are, but we know they are controlled by intelligent beings. ... But after seeing a few misty lights behind the clouds, we suddenly see the outline of a huge plane -- perhaps a bomber, perhaps a passenger jet. The outline is composed of little colored lights -- red, green, yellow -- and this huge outline moves silently across the night sky.

## *Retirement*

The next thing I know, we are surrounded by guys in biking outfits — colorful tight jerseys and shorts, those cleated shoes — and everyone is talking to these guys. They each have a light on their handlebars, and it then becomes clear that they are the ones who formed the outline in the sky. They were biking in formation. (Only later do I begin to wonder how exactly they were able to stay up in the air like that.) But now comes the amazing revelation: all the bikers are blind! And so I begin wondering, in the dream, how in God's name it is possible for dozens of blind bikers to maintain such a perfect formation. I think that perhaps the leader was sighted, and each of the bikers had a little earphone through which to receive instructions. But meantime, everyone, neighbors and bikers, is milling about and talking. I look at the eyes of a biker near me: sure enough, they are closed.