

Dancing Graffiti

Stories from My Life



Sam, June 2018

Dancing Graffiti

Stories from My Life

Sam Gill

Dancing Graffiti: Stories from My Life

Copyright © 2020 by Sam Gill

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author.

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

ISBN (XXXXXXXXXXXXXX)

Printed in USA

*May these graffiti remind that
Sam passed this way once*

*These stories are for
Corbin and Jenny
Fatu, Shay, and Leon*

*May they add depth and richness
to your own living stories*

Contents

Graffiti: An Introduction	1
1. Time's Relentless Melt	5
Invention of the Past	5
Bio-Bits	9
Septuagenarian's Pandemic Quarantine Folly	11
Time's Relentless Melt	13
2. Stories	17
Uncle Sam and My Dad: My Eponyms	17
Carnival Trash	22
Working for Uncle Howard	24
"The Place" and the Gore Scholarship	25
Plain Country Fare	28
Mom said, "Major in Math"	30
Harry Corbin: How I Got to the University of Chicago	32
University of Chicago: Arrival and Master of Arts	35
Meeting Jonathan Smith	39
Converse College Interview	41
Oklahoma State University	43
Native American Religions	45
Chasing Navajo Singers	51
Water and Life: Journey to the Hopi Sipapuni	58
Arizona State University	60
Mother Earth	63
Rocky Mountain Dome	67
Careening Toward Death	69
Beyond the Primitive	70
Mid-life Beginning of Dancing	73
Friday Night Hip Hop	76
Hip Hop in Boulder	77
Divorce	79
Australia and Aborigines	80
Australian and Asian Travel with Emily	85
Late-night Arrival in Thailand	90
Chang Mai	92
Annapurna Trek: Recalling, Remembering, Reflecting	94
Religion and Dance: The Origins of a Course	98
Dark Decades in Midlife	99
Ghana West Africa Trip with Jenny	103
Cowries on an African Bracelet	106

Dome to the Niwot House	107
TheStrip	110
The Bantaba Vision	113
Bantaba's Successes and Failures	114
High School Salsa, Rueda Competition, & Salsamigos	119
Bantaba Babies	122
Jogjakarta Java	125
Borobudur	128
Sam's Club	129
Potato Salad	132
Mali	133
Mom's Death and Funeral	135
Days the World Changed	137
Burning Dome	139
Salsa Dancing and Teaching	141
Dancing at Boulder Creek Festival	143
The Nutcracker Ballet Tradition	146
Fatu and Broadway Shows and Ballets	147
Grandfather Nights with Fatu	148
Fatu's Entrance into Dancing	149
Colorful North Boulder House	151
Dominican Republic	154
Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand Cruise	155
Sydney Opera House	157
Grantham China	159
Remembering	161
Fatu's Dancing Reshaped my University Teaching	164
Seventieth and Seventy-fifth Birthdays	166
Dancing with the Boulder Stars	167
A-fib and Heart Attacks	169
Gym-world Dancing	171
Friends in a Storybook House in the Virginia Woods	172
Dance Moms	174
Chicago with Fatu	175
Judy's Death	177
Norway, Iceland, Sweden	179
<i>Djúpalónssandur</i>	180
<i>Fonteng Studenterlund</i>	181
<i>Bakklandet</i>	181
<i>Björvika & Harpa</i>	182
<i>Björketräd</i>	183
<i>Kirkjufellsfoss</i>	183
<i>Tromvik</i>	184
<i>Nidaros</i>	184
<i>Helgafellsveit</i>	185
<i>Arnarstapi</i>	186
<i>Tulipan</i>	187
<i>Nidelva</i>	187

<i>Vatnajökull</i>	188
<i>Stortorget</i>	189
3. Reflections	191
Arting: Making Beauty	192
Books: A Love-Hate Relationship	194
Feeling Young: Exertion, Exuberance, Ebullience	196
Do-Over? Of course, Maybe?	198
Regret: An Emotion with a Story	199
I'm a Damned Misfit!	201
Misfit: Incongruity Gives Rise to Accomplishment	203
Big Risks, Big Failures, Big Gains	204
Fear of Loss and the Loss of Lightness	207
Work May be Pathological	208
<i>Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit</i>	211
Academic Alchemy	214
Regret Related to Race, Gender, and Ethnicity	216
Academic Writing Becoming More Personal	217
Made Over by Moving	219
Recognition Enigma	223
Teaching: When I Felt Most Natural	225
Retirement: A Bathetic Ending	228
Remarkable Suchness of Living	229
Spooked on Halloween	230
Slide Rule Nerd to Metahuman Cyborg	231
Diverse, Yet All Connected	237
Corbin	239
Jenny	242
Let's Talk About Stuff	246
Apple Watch Life	247
Getting Old and Being Old	248
On Dying: Death Overcoming Death	251
Who Am I?	253
4. Persistent Preoccupations	257
Appreciating the Distinctively Human	258
Biology and Two Fundamental Questions	261
To Risk Meaning Nothing is to Start to Play	264
Hopi Initiation: Calculus of Impossibles	267
How to Do or Think Something New	268
Gestural Naturalization: The Core of Identity	269
Story: Lies that Tell the Truth	271
Proprioception: To Perceive Ourselves	274
Making and Tomorrow's Eve	276
Making Photos	279
Jonathan Z. Smith: Mentor	284
Movement and Vitality	286

5.	You Only Pass This Way Once	289
6.	Autobiographical Chronology	293
7.	Publications	299
	Books	299
	Articles	300
8.	Family History Notes	305
	Sam's Seventieth Birthday Message to his Family	305
	My Mother's Story of How My Parents Meet	314
	My Mother's Mother's Avey Family History	315
9.	Photos	321

Graffiti

An Introduction

Graffiti are like potsherds, found decorated broken bits teasing of untold stories. They are discarded scraps or marks left by someone who passed this way once. Given enough time, trash and defacements become treasures and art. The term vignette—indicating a decorative vine graphic as well as a small bit of writing or music or art or a photo—expresses something of this transformation. With remembrance and imagination life's debris becomes decorative vine. *Dancing Graffiti* encourages the play among a gathering of found fragments with all manner of possible outcomes. Still a couple words might serve as signposts.

Since I had no idea what I was about as I began to write all these scraps, not that I have much more now, I needed to think with my fingers through some possibilities for and limitations of the process. These meditations are located in "Time's Relentless Melt." Hopefully they provide context and some revving up. Then I get on to jotting fragments, sherds and tracks, ink sprayed tags. These anecdotes and remembrances are collected in "Stories." As I engaged in the remembering, surprisingly not an easy task for me, I simply couldn't resist now and then stepping aside to engage in reflection. What has my life amounted to and why have I taken the trouble to live it? These deliberations, I suppose especially appropriate to one my age, are gathered in "Reflections." They amount to a different sort of story, maybe stories about stories, perhaps a bit like the cave drawings (graffiti?) at Lascaux with paintings running into and across one another.

Perhaps few know this, but my academic and personal lives have always been intimately entwined, partners in a dance. As I wrote accounts of personal events in a familiar and hopefully easy narrative voice, it was but a seamless shift into a different key, perhaps a minor one with the occasional dissonance, to write parallel stories, essays really, that are to me no less personal yet they bear a bit more of my academic and intellectual voice. This voice, and the subjects about which it speaks, may not be of interest or accessible to those closest to me,

regretful because these sherds express me every bit as much as anything. These essays précis the concerns that have preoccupied me throughout my life, those notions that receive more energy and attention than anything else, save my concerns for the wellbeing of my family. While knowing they may lie fallow unread, I couldn't resist the pleasure of reviewing and summarizing the big themes and engagements of my life. They are tossed together like colorful graffiti tags on the side of a building called "Persistent Preoccupations."

To conclude this motley collection, I do several things mostly for utility. In "You Only Pass This Way Once" I offer some ending comments as much as anything to release me from the task that I might move on. Then, in what might be classified as "back matter," I include an "Autobiographical Chronology" accumulated as an aid to my remembering and reconstructing. A different sort of chronological accounting is "Publications" listing both books and articles published to the present. My diggings through old documents turned up a few narratives that I felt might one day be interesting to someone, so I reproduce them in "Family History Notes."

It is odd to me that we tend to exist as little rafts floating in a vast blood river system comprised of hundreds of branching generations. Our very existence literally depends on all those who have gone before us. Their blood and DNA are our blood and DNA. Yet we commonly are personally aware of but a couple, maybe three, generations preceding our own. I charted a family tree, but I have decided that the stories best present the lineage. There exist only a few photos of me through high school. I couldn't resist including one photo of me as a tot and a couple more that connect me with persons in my history. Beyond these there are a few other "Photos" that for some reason fascinate me enough that I want to include them.

Discovering that I was writing stories of my life without initially setting out to do so, I asked myself, "Why am I doing this writing and for whom?" Plainly put, I discovered I was writing stories of my life because I couldn't stop doing so once I got started; runaway writing. It is just what I do. It is who I am. I recognized the writings might be late-life inquiries asking what has become of me through all those decades? What has my life amounted to? What have I done for others, for the world, for anything of value? These issues are engaged, but became less than central. Threading through the stories I can recognize my own effort to discover insights and clarity amidst the complexity and chaos of my experience. As the process developed, I came to fervently hope that these findings, these writings, might somehow free me from the burden of my own history that I might live the life I have remaining feeling some new lightness of being, a gateway to a fresh start of a new phase more than a do-over. The readers I've occasionally imagined through my writings have been my kids and grandkids, with glimpses of a few possible others. As an occasional realist I make these

writings available with no expectations beyond that of the graffitist who, alone under the darkness of night, tags a Roman wall or commuter train declaring, “I was here.”

There is some sense of the progression from start to finish, yet I’m no fan of linearity, so random samplings may, for the occasional reader, create new story tracks. I’m also no fan of meaning, so I am quite satisfied with these stories being interesting and perhaps a bit of fun to read without needing to mean anything at all.

The title *Dancing Graffiti* emerged after the consideration of many others. It emerged as I practiced what, through the process of writing this book, I’ve learned about myself. I have often found myself confounded when I asked, “What would I do, given the opportunity, to have fun?” I could never answer, yet now I have a clue. I absolutely love to write. My whole being hums with vitality when I come somehow on an idea and engage in its exploration and development through writing. I have discovered that, in a sense, the mere existence of this book, even if used as a doorstop, is a clear enough statement of who I am. I also love to dance and through moving and dancing I’ve come to appreciate that the attraction for me is in the action, the doing, the arting, the making, the dancing, the writing rather than in the thing made, the product.

The word “graffiti” comes from the Italian word *graffiato* meaning “scratched” yet has deeper roots in the Greek *graphein* meaning “to write.” The etymology has the fascinating complexity of conjoining literacy with medium—writing exercised by scratching or the like. Indeed, ancient graffiti is commonly the scratching of words on stone walls. Graffiti implicates both an act of vandalism and an abiding mark of presence. Defacings become, in time, historical records, even art. Graffiti is often comprised of simply a name and a date, yet it might also be a declaration of love—hearts encompassing the initials of lovers—or social and political messages. Graffiti sometimes is elaborated to the extent of several lines of poetry often expressing a strong message of love or protest.

The history of graffiti is long—doubtless as long as human history—and graffiti has varied in style and substance from period to period and place to place. With the rise of modern graffiti that is strongly connected with spray paint and the 1950s rise of hip hop culture interesting facets have developed. I’m particularly fascinated by the type of graffiti, expressed in several styles, that is comprised of letters that are entwined and embedded in geometrical design elements. This graffiti often seems to obscure the message, if there be one, especially to those outside the graffiti writer’s community. The stylization of the lettering, rather like Arabic script in Islamic art, is the distinctive aesthetic marker. This graffiti is at once revealing and obscuring, public and private, vandalism and art; wonderful examples of the sort of human distinction I sometimes refer to as

the double-face. It seems to say something while being seductively opaque and obscure.

Graffiti invariably carries the implication of vandalism. If it is art it is unwanted art, defacing art. How can that be? The history of the tagging of subway trains in New York City plays out this complexity. While the authorities in NYC spent decades devising ways of discouraging graffiti on subway trains, they were never successful. These graffiti are tags sent out from unheard and overlooked and ignored people as creative proclamations of identity to be read by every level of New York society. They speak for those without voice. Furthermore, graffiti has progressively become sought as art, especially anonymous street art. Perhaps the most famous graffiti artist is Banksy. It is now common for wall murals to be commissioned in the style of graffiti.

What emerges that endlessly fascinates me, through the long and complex history of graffiti are issues of classification and interpretation. Is it vandalism or art? Is it writing or decoration? If it is writing, what does it say? If it is art what does it express? To whom is graffiti intended?

This mobiotic character of graffiti is connected with my choice of the term for my book title. One of the most important things I learned about myself in writing these accounts is my lifelong gradual progression from one view of the world to another. As a youth and young man, I held a rather black and white, reasoned, logical, objectivist, orderly worldview. Then, steadily over my lifetime, I have experienced a deepening embrace of a complex, entwined, indeterminate, dynamic, complex understanding of the world. This shift has been accompanied by my profound appreciation of the distinctively human capacities, born biologically and philosophically, for metaphor, language, art, reflection, story, poetry, ritual, mythology. In my lifelong exploration of this magic of being human—using such terms as copresence, chiasm, mobiotic, play, and metastability—I have found it inseparable from movement, from human self-moving. An organic oscillation. The humming bodied vibration of vitality. Being human is moving through space and time with awareness and appreciation and reflection and agency. It is dancing.

Chapter One

Time's Relentless Melt

Likely it is the academic in me, perhaps it is sheer vanity, that I should feel the urge to reflect on how my stories might engage the larger traditions in which others have told their stories. Why are life stories written down and what possible value might they have beyond a graffiti tag, beyond leaving a bit of oneself for the kids, beyond attempting to justify taking up space and resources for so long? Not surprisingly, my consideration of these questions turned into several writings. I explored what sorts of framings and organizing principles might be relevant. The following are more essays than life stories, yet they are personal. I have wanted them to report on my serious explorations and ponderings about the genres and history of personal storytelling. I include them here to function a bit in setting the context. They do not answer my motivating questions, yet they might serve as a warmup.

Invention of the Past

I have never considered trying to write in the memoir genre. The very word seems fitting only for the known and renown, otherwise it implies something presumptuous, self-aggrandizing, egotistical. Yet, its Latin root is *memoria* indicating “to remember” and comes more directly to us from Anglo-French *memorie* indicating “note, memorandum, something written to be kept in mind.” A collection of sticky notes. Beginning in the 1670s the word began to refer to a person's written account of his or her life. Memoir differs generally from

biography in being less complete and perhaps more an account of memories, anecdotal and incidental.

My kneejerk response to an incidental issue that arose in conversation initiated these writings. Formulating my ideas as shaped by my life's history fueled wide-ranging reflection. My better and more creative thinking is done as writing. I was surprised that my self-inquiry took the shape of remembrances of things past. A simple question about value was my madeleine. I began to accumulate remembrances in my efforts to discover and articulate my values, even my identity. Then there was my delight in the process of writing itself, in how writing aides and abets remembering. Through much of my adult life I've found myself unable and unwilling to remember much of my past. I have been little interested in it. I never imagined that anyone would be interested in what I remember, even if I could. Still can't. A few disparate and unplanned occasions accompany the initial accidental motivation and here I am trying to set context for a large collection of writings. Despite my skepticism about the appropriateness of doing so, one bit led to another engendering a growing drive or passion whose energetics I have been unable to quell. The result, this pile.

Over many years, my thinking about time and memory and hope and life has developed a notion I call the "fat present." The basic idea is that, contrary to the scientific rational linear mathematical regular time stream in which the present is but the virtual meeting of past and future with no dimension itself, my reckoning is that the present of our human experience is actually the copresence of all that we have been and done and our imaginings of all that might be. The past is, at least in our experience, what is presently remembered, a time that exists only now yet is marked as having happened in the once upon a time. The future exists in our experience yet as a time marked as being not yet, the imaginings that inspire or terrify. A fan of "Doctor Who" I have recognized that my fat present is analogous to the TARDIS that appears as a blue British police call box sitting idly on a British avenue. Fans know that when one enters the TARDIS, it is, as the Doctor says, "bigger on the inside." Indeed, the TARDIS provides access to all of space and time. On a global level, reckoned by physics, I acknowledge that time marches along with no graspable now. Where's the fun in that? I suggest however that, as locally experienced by a person (akin to each episode of "Doctor Who"), the present moment, the now that we experience, resounds, echoes, reverses, eddies, and whirls. Our memories seem to magically appear in the present always as dialogues of the actual and the imagined. Our memories echo across our lives tipped off by the *re-* prefix of remembering. The experienced present is overly filled with all of our existence, fat enough that we have space and time to remember and imagine and reflect and experience and feel.

The remarkable Argentine Nobel Laureate Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) wrote a short story called "Funes the Memorius" (1942) that has long been one

of my favorites. Funes simply couldn't forget. His memories were total and perfect. He was able to remember whole days of his life at any time, yet it would take him a whole day to do so. Borges shows the limitations and even tragedy of our common wish that we had perfect memory, demonstrating that, to be of value, memory requires forgetting, selecting, organizing in the making of stories. The jumble of the actual of the past, which we seem so often to want to recover perfectly, is simply a chaos of data. Funes had to stay in a dark room to dampen the stimulation (everything to him being a madeleine) that might set off his recall of this madness of momentary factoids unrelated to one another. Borges seems to be telling us that whatever might have existed in something we might call the real past or the objective past has no value save as episodic memory, inventions, and the cumulative effect of experience. Memory is image or story made relevant to the present. Cumulative experience is skill and acumen, perhaps wisdom.

The fat present is, in sensory terms, more akin to sound, whereas scientific linear time bends toward sight. Consider the effort to get the most realistic image, as in *trompe l'oeil* painting or photography. We all know that in photography the fastest shutter speed, the shortest exposure, is how we approach the knife edge of that nothing moment that joins past and future to give us the greatest clarity, even if it is a now that can never be fully captured. However, what happens when we use the same strategy to record sound? As we approach a zero-length sound capture, we approach emptiness, the sound of silence. Sound, like the fat present, requires openness and interaction and time and space to reverberate, resonate, resound, echo. Even the term "sound bite" suggests something rich enough to chew on. Sound has a built-in time machine. To exist, sound must have a backward referral in time as its waves interplay and encounter the vibrating architecture of the ear of the other.

We might then think of the remembering that comprises memoir also as song or story sung, with themes and variations on a hymn or paean. There is a hint of foreknowledge with each story, yet also the unexpected and unknown. As themes and variations emerge from the entwining of the harmonics of story upon story, perhaps larger themes but also finer tuning might occur. A collection of stories is something on the order of the choral group technique of vocalizing, sometimes used to warm-up voices, as central to the Swedish film "As it is in Heaven" (2004). As stories are told one upon another they accumulate, emphasize, interact, gradually shaping something beyond individual stories sometimes mesmerizing with discord and harmony. Collected, these stories are worth reading only if they are heard as belonging to "everyman," the soundings among members of a chorus, as they also belong to the writer.

Fat present is a personal present, a present of someone who has a body that resides in some place and time. Like a blue British police call box sitting on a London street, the fat present, the now, provides entry into the expansive life of

a person. For me, the accumulation of experience has built some writing acuity. As a dancer or an artist gains skill and naturalness of performance over thousands of hours of practice, I have practiced writing for much of my life. I know that in dancing, where my skill is small yet my experience is sufficient to offer insight, an accomplished dancer dances with her attention on the creation and enacting of the art not on the components, relying on the mastery of technique to afford her this freedom. What has happened with me in this exercise of remembering is the continuing practice of the still-developing skill by which words flow onto the page seemingly naturally as dancing graffiti, yet perhaps more due to the many decades of practicing, to make memory into story, to make stories that interest, perchance. And then as one memory is seemingly manifesting itself I have so often caught a glimmer of another that wants me to make it into a story. As, throughout our lives, we build a character, an identity, a sense of personal coherence that we feel is “me,” we, and especially writers and speakers, describe this as developing or finding voice, a sound term. Perhaps the remembering and recording of our life stories is a kind of resounding exploration that gives rise and shape to one’s own voice, the deep identity that we have become, or, better, are still becoming. Stories hopefully advance to dancing rhythms.

This collection of stories identifies me in a couple senses. It is the current iteration of the seeming natural process of practicing my writing skill, which is in a sense the accumulation of who I have come to be in my life, evidence of my voice. I am my skill It is also a collection of stories, narrative remembrances and explored concerns, odd-shaped bits contributing to a mosaic, yet unfinished, that is my life.

Biography suggests a chronology, birth to death. Yet memories don’t occur or seem worthy of remembering in anything other than as a random splash, something like splats on a Jackson Pollock painting. Colorful tangled graffiti on a wall. Among the ideas I’ve entertained over the decades, my appreciation for the nonlinear, the random, the incidental and accidental has persisted, indeed, increased. A totally predictable life is a boring one absent of creativity and the trials that build character. Yet, language has a certain implicit linearity, letter follows letter, word follows word, sentence upon sentence, all marching along like disciplined soldiers never daring to step out of line. Hup, two, three, four. Gertrude Stein’s experiments with stream of consciousness writing broke something of writing’s linearity, seemingly invoking the hoard or the swarm, challenging or daring a reader to defy this affront to coherence. Yet, few of us break the code of linearity knowing full well we don’t have the artistry to get away with it. My strategy has been to try to confound the linearity of writing by making independent yet interlocking stories, casting them about, like throwing a handful of corn to the chickens, with only a little concern about maintaining an overall purposeful sequence. I hope that anyone with some spare time and a bit

of interest might peck about for whatever grains of corn seem possibly tasty or nourishing. Let reign nonlinearity, the random, the accidental.

I've finally identified something of an understanding for my shyness and hesitancy in writing these stories. It is that writing about myself is a very subjective process that necessarily foregrounds my feelings and impressions and evaluations. Yet in these writings I am usually the object, the thing being memorialized, whether deserving or not. This process is one that necessarily turns me inside out by giving objective material existence in the written word to what is internal and virtual. Turning my living being into the stable object freezes what is living as a strategy for defeating death. It is to publicly display the private, an act of intimacy (what is more intimate than a battle with death?) that requires careful judgement on my part so as not to be uncomfortably or inappropriately intimate, or worse maudlin, while also needing to trust that readers, should any exist, will find something of enduring value not some inappropriate uncomfortable confession.

I still think and fear that the process of making these writings available to others is a rather embarrassing indulgence and I have no illusions that they will be of interest to anyone at all. Yet I'm wise enough to know that my concern is a false one. One makes. One turns himself inside out. Others find and read and use and enjoy, or not.

Bio-Bits

I often write text messages to my daughter and teenager granddaughter. I have noticed my texts are invariably at least the length of a good sentence and actually usually are sentences. They are often paragraphs that I try to keep brief. In response I get a few alphabetic or numeric characters (U R 4 K 2, as examples that I understand, there are others I don't) and tightly abbreviated words (thx) and perhaps an emoji, emoticon (heart, thumbs up, hands clapping). Not so long ago I recall saying to my university students "you all don't read," meaning that I was aware that most of them understood any academic reading to be optional or, more likely, irrelevant. I was surprised that their response was "we read all the time!" And many of them held up their phones as evidence. Ahhhh!

I've just finished my fourteenth book and there are several more that seem like they want to manifest; incubating idea eggs awaiting their hatching. I have wanted to attempt to harness my penchant for extensive exposition often accompanied by abundant tangential inquiries (thankfully usually dropped into footnotes that can rival in length the main text), that I might learn to write brief (briefer, at least) pieces, each carefully honed (starkly edited and prose-poem inspired). Having traveled to Norway and Sweden in separate trips, but both in

the span of a few months and both including a brief visit to Iceland, I had a trove of photographs. I decided to write some brief pieces to accompany a selection of these photographs to comprise a book. I did it in two versions with the title *On Reflection: Vignettes and Images* (2019). I concentrated on the writing and editing of these little pieces for a couple of months. The results, although read by almost no one, were satisfying to me both in the process of writing them and in my own sense of the creative success of the results. Brevity, at last ... although dense. I'm including them herein.

Since these brief pieces, I have found myself jotting down other petite bits, the result of a memory or my surprise at my reaction to something. And these notes have just kept coming. This collection is the accumulation of these jots allowed to swell as a sponge in water. Rather than prose poems, which I think are too dense, I have aspired to write stories or story-lettes or vignettes hoping to be both present and anecdotal, yet also reflective and expansive beyond the personal. I would like them to be more expansive and elegant than the beloved emoji-rich text messages and yet not so long and tedious as to be uninteresting or just plain boring.

Initially I thought of these little pieces as bio-bits. The bio syllable reminds of my strong interest in biology, over the abstractness of mind or soul or spirit, but also life story as in biography. Bio means life. The bits syllable suggests limited in size, a collection of tads or dabs or brief notes or story-lettes. Yet the syllable also reminds of my interest in and recent publications on technology. In techno-lingo, bit indicates binary digit. Binary code is the basis of all electronic computing and the rise of the information age. My first job, in the 1960s, was to install and program some of the first computers used in businesses. Digit indicates both integers, whole numbers, as well as fingers and toes. I have written extensively on the evolution of the human hand focused on the dexterity of the fingers and especially the opposable thumb. I'm currently obsessed with videos of the pianists Yuja Wang and Lang Lang, whose finger dexterity in their playing is a testament to the incomprehensible heights of human evolution. Our concept "to grasp," which when applied to ideas or propositions indicates "to comprehend," is the result of the evolution of the human thumb and it accompanies the shift to upright posture, bipedal movement (where the toes play more than a bit part), and the development of much-enlarged brains. Thus, bio-bits is a dense gem. Still, it seemed few would get the nerdy bio-bits term, at least with the implications it has for me, and it is rather inelegant and techno-babblish as it is confronted.

Septuagenarian's Pandemic Quarantine Folly

In 1918 my parents were both of them living in a rural community in southeast Kansas. Although one of the theories was that Kansas was the point of origin of the influenza pandemic of 1918, I imagine that a rather isolated Kansas farm community would likely not be one of the hot spots for influenza infection. Not until the presence of the current novel coronavirus had become a pandemic did I become more than generally aware of the one a century ago that killed millions of people around the globe. In the process of working on this set of somewhat autobiographical writings, I became more attentive to the biographies of my parents. I suddenly realized that they had survived that pandemic. From what I can tell, like the current pandemic, that early twentieth century pandemic affected children to a lesser degree than adults. I don't really understand why. It made me think of the many times I've visited old cemeteries in mining towns in the Rockies, observing a whole line of tiny headstones with the inscriptions telling a story of tragedy with several babies and kids in a family dying in quick succession, surely from disease. Had one or both my parents not survived the 1918 pandemic, been but first names on a small stone in a family graveyard, given the many millions of people who died, their death wouldn't even have become a statistic of note. Yet, had that happened neither I nor my siblings nor any of our children or grandchildren would now exist. None of the lives that descend in my parents' lineage would have been born as also all of the lives in the expanding lineage. I don't even know how to think about this scenario or comprehend the impact. It does however offer some terms by which to empathize with the vast loss of life presently occurring, much of it needlessly so, as it applies to each and every one of those hundreds of thousands who have died.

Perhaps this novel coronavirus pandemic will be remembered across the century as the Pandemic of 2020. As I write this mid-summer 2020, tens of thousands are still dying and hundreds of thousands are suffering in hospitals. The impact of the virus is getting worse not better and the future is uncertain for many and assuredly disastrous for many others. I have deep concerns for the millions who are suffering and dying and who have relatives who have been sick or died. I worry for the millions who have lost their jobs and face dire economic ruin. I can't begin to imagine their anguish and agony. I have fundamental fears for the future of our country which seems in steep decline and for all life on the planet whose existence seems threatened. I can't imagine or guess how long this pandemic will last, yet for my immediate family I have many worries: Corbin's health, Fatu's dance and school experience for her senior year and how it will impact her options after high school graduation and her attitude toward life, the

impact on Shay and Leon as they want to go to school and be with their friends. I am grateful that, so far, everyone in my immediate family has health and life.

I recall the feeling I had and the actions I took several months ago, mid-March, when it was announced that there would be a quarantine. In a day or so everything was to close and no one was to go anywhere indefinitely. My first thought was to get basic food supplies so I rushed to the grocery and fought the crowds grabbing anything left on the shelves. I was able to acquire some staples that would last a week or two. I then stopped at the liquor store even though I don't drink all that much where I purchased a couple bottles of wine and a bottle of rum. I do occasionally buy wine to contribute to a family meal, but never hard liquor of any kind. I went home thinking that I had no idea when I'd emerge into the virus-ridden world again. It was at once terrifying and kind of exciting.

What I soon discovered was that the quarantine wasn't a huge change for me. I am a retired academic who spends most every day, seven days a week, reading and writing interrupted only a few times a week by trips to the gym to take classes. The gyms closed but I soon found live classes available online via ZOOM and many more that were pre-recorded and available on YouTube. In my kitchen the island is twelve feet or so from the counter along the opposite wall so I have a smooth hardwood floor area a good 12 by 14 feet which is plenty of room to do my beloved Zumba and hip hop classes.

At the beginning of the quarantine I had just finished reviewing my book manuscript on movement and vitality. It is more than a good-sized book at this point, but, especially at this time in my life and having produced so many books recently, I did not want to rush this one to publication. What I want to do is to reread lots of sources since I've evolved my thinking on this complex topic a good deal in the last several years and I have a stack of works I want to read to enrich this book.

Before doing more work on that book, I felt the need to write my thoughts, mostly for myself, in response to an almost incidental conversation I had with Jenny and Fatu on the importance of shaping one's life pursuits around one's passions rather than money or material gain. As I thought about that writing, I realized that it could amount to the telling of many of the stories of my life. Money and material gain have so often in my life been associated with pain and loss and stress and disappointment. The lack of adequate means forced me to have money-concerns constantly in mind until I was at least 70 years old. Still, my passions, even vaguely comprehended, have led me to do the most unexpected things and to take huge risks and to commit myself to impossible tasks. I've tilted at many a windmill. These tensions demanded that I write. I didn't have a clear position on what I really wanted finally to say. I had a bunch of emotion-laden stories. The more I reflected on these interconnections the more it became evident that the proper response to my initial concerns was to

engage a project perhaps oddly suited to the novel coronavirus quarantine, especially for someone 77 years old. Why not make telling these stories and reflecting on my life a quarantine project for an old man? Knowing that all of these writings may be read by perhaps no one is a mildly humorous and ironic testimony to my preference to engaging my passions as a process of being who I am over doing much of anything based on any expectation of results, particularly financial or material ones. I'm happy to risk meaning nothing, gaining nothing. Thus, properly understood, this project is folly. A small counterpoint with regard to outcomes is that, while I have no idea if any of my kids or grandkids will ever have any interest in their heritage as it runs through me, this book includes not only my stories but also a few traces of the longer and larger family history.

I have spent a few hours every day of the quarantine writing and rewriting with breaks mostly to do daily dance classes in my kitchen. I'm now approaching 250 days rarely missing a day of exercise in my kitchen and never missing a day writing this foolishness. Obsession seems something of my character as well.

A surprise for me, and I suppose it amounts to a personal outcome, beyond the joy of the process (which is more than enough), has been that my remembering and reflecting have changed or recreated my past and my identity as well. I've seen myself, or reimagined myself, more clearly or fully in the process. It is not that I now understand myself all that much better although I admit a little more, it is that I now see and can engage more fully the traits, habits and gestures, passions, heritages, and influences that have shaped what I have done and who I am. There has arisen a bit of hope that resulting from my efforts on this project I might actually free myself of some burdens of my past that I might live the balance of my life in ways I'd prefer, that is, feeling more lightness of being. Folly might be re-creation.

As these writings have emerged in the midst of a coronavirus pandemic quarantine, I'm not so sure how the world health situation has impacted the writings, yet it seems inevitable. The nature of the writings engages that Janus trick of looking both backwards and forwards at the same time, as I attempt to see a bit more clearly from whence I have come that I might assess who I am and, with these insights, to hopefully write with style and content that inspires others in the future. It seems fitting to attempt to engage positive activities during a pandemic quarantine and I'm hoping this work might accomplish this goal in some measure, if for those unknown to me and at a time I'll likely not see.

Time's Relentless Melt

All photographs are *momento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.

Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1973) 15

For many decades I've thought often and intensely about time. The scientific and mathematical understanding of time is a numbered sequence of virtual spaceless (even timeless) points that are indeed relentlessly and regularly marching along an uncompromising irreversible vector. Time moves or so it seems yet it is the ruler that measures movement itself in both the physics of cosmology and of human life. As I have gained some bit of skill in and understanding of photography, I have so often leaned toward grabbing the thinnest sliver of time, holding it still, that I might expand it in space opening the gorgeous intricacies of reality we almost never see or adequately appreciate, indeed, biologically we simply cannot do so. As Sontag notes, the capacity of photography to slice out a moment and freeze it seeks to subvert, as it also testifies to, time's relentless melt.

The human experience of time however, as also attested by the cherishing of a photograph, is ill presented as marching infinitesimals of a virtual sequence. For there to be experience there must be what I've come to think of a fatness to time, a duration in which there is backward referral and a sort of eddying or swirling. Sontag's use of the word "melt"—an ice cream cone in the hot hand of a child—suggests a dripping dispersion. She understands time as a fading away, an evaporation, a softening. The richness of human experience requires time's relentless passing—dripping on our britches. Human experience, as we are aware of experiencing, occurs only in the present. It is the very mark of what is present, yet experience is a present fattened in the company of memory and imagination, past and future. It is comprised of interwoven complexities.

For this book I've thought about how, in contrast with the distinction of photography, I might honor time's relentless melt in terms more fitting to the human experience of time. My writing in recent years has sometimes taken form in short pieces, stories and vignettes, certainly not always for I have a penchant to elaborate and decorate and ruminate. An important distinction of writing is that, while it is, as is time, a vectored linear marching sequence (letter after letter, word upon word, beginning to end) it bears a time-bending magic that churns sequences into ingredient-rich time stews. In reading, as also writing, there is some implication of foreknowledge. As we select and begin reading any bit of writing we have a sense of, an informed imagination of, a taste of, the whole. Somehow, we know already, if partially, what is to come. Yet, we also don't know at all even the next word, else we wouldn't need to read. Stories and vignettes (but of course all writings) have this quite remarkable distinction. Reading engages and triggers memories and imagination drawn from the reader's life in the constant interaction with the unfolding story being read, the story of another. Reading adds to the reader, but also invokes from the reader nuances and deeper

understanding of self while reading. While I have prepared books that attempt to present experience in sequences and juxtapositions of photos, here I experiment with short writings as nuggets, pearls, coral beads of my life and my work and my experience that they might be more fitting in some sense than photos to time's relentless melt by describing the unfolding yet melting away of my life. A grouping of stories is like a photo album of time-fattened images. Stories are artifacts of time, yet they plump up the moment. Made of words, writings have a necessary linearity yet the very acts of reading and remembering cannot exclude the backward referral of time, the echoing resonance characteristic of a cistern or well or box canyon.

Memento mori, a Latin term that means "remember that you have to die," is an artistic reminder of the inevitability of death. Sontag perhaps surprises us in describing photographs as *memento mori*. Yet, the urgency to take a photo is a desperate strategy to resist time's relentlessly passing. Photographs, think of family albums, surprise and delight or horrify by their magic folding the past to bring it adjacent to the present. Shay and Leon, my grandkids, love to look at the picture books made annually at Christmas of their family, ceaselessly amazed by how they looked as babies. Stories perform the same trick, yet they have the advantage of being brought into existence as remembrances and as reflections, the real past yet aged and mellowed like wine and newly spiced with each telling. Yet, they too are *memento mori* in that they come about, at least in part, by a felt urgency posed by the inevitability that the remembering writer (storyteller) must die.

As something akin to art, *memento mori* in the form of story are appropriate only following an abundance of life. For me I have made these writings because as a septuagenarian I tend to obsess about preparations for the end of life, the very act threatening to wring any joy from what time, like Greenland's ice sheets, has yet to melt. I have little expectation that those for whom these scratchings are most immediately intended will find them of much present interest. Through my experience writing many books I realize that I write largely because I must. Leave it there. In arting *memento mori* I seek to serve my family with some depth of their heritage, to entertain and perhaps provoke others with stories about life for living and dying are experienced by all. More so perhaps I seek my own liberation from the obsession of preparing to die, so that I might live out my life somewhat more freely, more ironically. Clearly, I have also found much joy in the process.

While I've given some consideration to organization, I've not been interested in memoir or autobiography, at least as forms or genres. To retain the inspiration of Sontag and photography I think of this book more as several boxes, call them chapters, containing piles of stories and short writings, not unlike cigar boxes of photos, to be opened and spilled out on the living room floor on a chilly

afternoon for a random perusal. They don't make a whole, but rather an unfinished mosaic.

Many of these writings memorialize like the eye or the lens, yet I prefer they also engage the fingers and heart, that they touch and affect; that they move the reader. I have attempted for each story or essay to hopefully invoke a sense of mystery and wonder, to serve as an invitation to deduction, speculation, and fantasy. I hope that by way of suggestion they hide more than they reveal. The collection is less a summing up, more a teasing forth. Many of these stories witness to something that is no more, yet hopefully in being read they find new breath. What have I chosen? Nothing more than the arbitrariness of my remembering and reflecting.

What makes these writings stories rather than descriptions? Not the factual accuracy, although the detail and its truth are important, but the associations that are made now as something of the accumulation over a lifetime that sees a fragment of an accidental remembrance as an opening to be enriched through a telling that it might speak now. The resound of long-ago fragments played with the skill of writing and storytelling about life's experiences made urgent by time's relentless melt.

Chapter Two

Stories

An alternative to telling the story of one's life, which suggests that there is some coherence, some plot, is to simply tell a few stories that can be read, or not, in any order on any occasion with no expectation other than curiosity and perhaps a few moments of distraction or entertainment. Chronology and completeness be damned, well, mostly. Just a scattering of stories. That's all I've wanted for myself and I offer them here for others should they have time and interest. There is some slight sense of organization based on chronology, yet stories overlap and refuse to align in some principle of progression based on calendar or age. The idea of progression in any other terms seems presumptuous. I decided, for my own curiosity and interest, to present an outline of chronology. It is located near the end of the book. I've used it to help me remember as well as to recognize persistent continuities and significant disruptions.

Uncle Sam and My Dad: My Eponyms

In his memoir *The Names* (1976) N. Scott Momaday wrote that "a man's life proceeds from his name in the way that a river proceeds from its source." In his Native American context this likely refers to the importance to many Native Americans of constantly tracing their lineage through generations and clan affiliations. Meeting someone commonly begins with each person offering an

extended recitation of lineage, traveling the flow of the river back to its source. Sometimes this is necessary so that each person knows if he or she is related to the other and, if so, how. A number of kinship, generational, age, and gender markers often determine the specific language forms such as pronouns that must be used in even informal conversation. I deeply respect those whose identity is never far removed from the long line of their ancestry. I fear that for my progeny lineage is of little concern. For many, I suspect, there is no awareness of the stream that gives identity beyond the living.

A few years ago, my Uncle Don Avey, my mother's cousin, contacted me about information in old family Bibles that I'd somehow acquired upon the deaths of my mother's aunts. Dates of births, deaths, and marriages were commonly recorded in family Bibles. He was of the generation older than me and, as is a common activity taken up in retirement (ahem!), he was tracing his ancestry. I provided him what information I could and a couple years later I received from him a narrative summary of his family history, some of it obviously overlapping with mine. I found it fascinating, yet somehow I didn't know what to do with it other than put it away. I've included his account of his family at the end of this book. I regret that my name in the sense of being the story spanning generations has never been experienced by me as flowing from some distant source. Yet, now I recognize my name tells something of a story I had not until now recognized.

My given name, Samuel, was, I believe, given me by my mother with the intent to honor her mother's brother, Samuel Earl Avey. Her mother, Ocy Lenore Grantham, had several sisters Alice (Alu), Florence (Flora), Elizabeth (Betsy), and Sally and brothers Benjamin (Ben), Samuel (Sam), Edward (Ed), and Charles (Charlie). I include a lovely old photo of this family at the end of this book. It is strange that I never asked my mother why she named me after Uncle Sam. I don't remember her having a special uncle-niece connection. As I'm thinking about this now, my naming may have been motivated by the fact that Uncle Sam was wealthy and successful. He lived a life of prosperity and prestige that I think would have been utterly foreign to my mom's experience, yet a life about which she would have chosen for me.

Uncle Sam sent a Western Union telegram to me on January 7, 1943, the day after my birth, in Saint Francis Hospital Wichita. It read: "Glad to hear of your safe arrival. Also proud and highly honored you have selected my name to carry through this old world and it is a fine world regardless of present conditions. Much love to you and mother. Uncle Sam and Pat [his daughter]." He typed a letter to my mother a few days later on January 11 in which he commented further on being my eponym, "Lelah, there isn't much use in me saying any more about how swell it was of you to name that Little Guy after a big lug like me. I expressed my feeling in the wire—but it kinda does something to you when you

stop and think about that fellow being named after you.” It’s been nearly 60 years since Uncle Sam died and I hope that I’ve carried his name through “a fine world” in a way that he would have been proud. What does it say about the world that he made a reference to the state of the world—“regardless of present conditions” referring of course to WW II—that would be apt today’s present dire conditions?

Equipped with but a sixth-grade education from a tiny Kansas farm town, Uncle Sam was well-known and respected in Tulsa, his home, and he was successful by any measure. Uncle Sam owned a large performance venue in Tulsa called The Coliseum that sponsored hockey teams, and presented ice follies, professional wrestling, and many other huge public events. See the photo at end of book. He also owned a radio station with studios located in the basement. He owned the First National Bank and Trust Company in Tulsa. I was told that Uncle Sam made his fortune during the depression by buying this huge arena and having constant entertainment available there at affordable prices. As that story goes, despite how much people suffered economically, they could still scrape together enough for the low price to enjoy great entertainment. He apparently constantly packed the arena building his wealth, yet, of course, he’d have had to have been already wealthy to even purchase such a grand venue.

An exciting experience of my youth was to attend in The Coliseum an Ice Follies Show starring Sonja Henje. I recall one night watching in grainy snowy black and white images the venue burn broadcast by the Tulsa television stations. Apparently, the transmission tower for the radio station that was installed on the roof was struck by lightning starting the fire. What I did not know until doing some research to write this account is that Uncle Sam had purchased the building for \$800,000 and the cost to replace it was over two million dollars. Not having the money, he had to declare bankruptcy and turn the space into a parking lot. I wish I had known this setback for Uncle Sam before now. It would have been nice to have identified some of my failures with those of Uncle Sam, especially my business failure of a dance and music studio that involved a huge financial loss including allowing foreclosure on a building. Both his losses and mine were associated with providing art and entertainment to the public. We both persisted and survived to enjoy abundance, wealth for him, a suitable living for me.

Uncle Sam sponsored the promotion of professional wrestling which my dad and I would often watch on late night television. He was connected with the Tulsa ice hockey team, the Oilers, whose games were broadcast on his radio station and were played in The Coliseum. He was a well-known local philanthropist. The philanthropic effort I remember is that during WW II he started “the baby milk fund” to provide milk for so many babies in need during the war. His philanthropy extended to his family as well. I remember on holiday occasions that he’d arrive at my Aunt Alu’s tiny house on west Clark Street in his

giant black Lincoln town car and opening the trunk he, like Santa Claus, distributed goodies. He had bags and bags of groceries. One item I know was treasured by all the women was his gifts of nylon stockings. They came folded in little flat boxes and all the ladies got their share of these expensive and hard to acquire treasures.

Likely, in being given the name Samuel, my mom was thanking Uncle Sam for his generosity yet also choosing traits and qualities, generosity and material success, that she would have wanted for me. Had I known his fuller history, he would also have been an inspiring example for his tenacity and persistence in the face of failure. And, indeed, throughout my life my mom was most pleased by any signs of my material success. She loved it that my first career was in business and that I made lots of money. She was distressed and disapproved when I gave up that career to go to graduate school to study religion. Perhaps, her disappointment was due to her being formed so powerfully during the Great Depression when she would have been ages 15 to 19.

I was always aware when Uncle Sam was around that I had been named for this esteemed man. He exuded a presence deserving to me of something like awe. I don't recall any sense of him expressing anything suggesting any specialness to our relationship. For my high school graduation, he gave me a one-hundred-dollar bill with which I was to buy a suit. I also recall his death and funeral in 1962. The eulogy was "well done my good and faithful servant" Matthew 25:21.

My middle name is my dad's middle name, Chester Dale Gill. Somehow Dale was never a name I strongly connected either with my dad or myself. And now my grandson Leon has been given the name, kindling for me some interest in it. I have no idea why my grandparents chose that name for my dad. I'm supposing that I was given the name primarily to honor my connection with my father. Since my mom was the more dominant decision maker perhaps she chose Dale connected with my dad to complement choosing Sam connected with her side of the family. I've noticed that over the years I've often defaulted, without much thought, to my simple seven-letter first and last name for publications and legal matters.

And, of course, the family name Gill should actually tell the story of heritage in Europe and perhaps something of the reasons for arrival in America. Yet in my upbringing I have no memory of anyone even mentioning any of that history. Almost all of the anecdotal history of both sides of my family seemed pretty deeply rooted in the southeastern Kansas soil extending to a few nearby towns and farms. I know that my mom's family had come west most directly from Zenia, Ohio. The wedding photo, that I include at the end of this book, of my mother's grandparents was taken in Zenia.

Growing up I loved the occasions of huge family gatherings that occurred in both my mother's and father's families. Huge meals with dozens of people of

every age. Great gatherings with lots of games and social interaction. It is easy for me to remember many specific events and the places where they took place. Perhaps the last one was for my parent's 50th wedding anniversary. On that occasion I think that every living relative of both my parents (save maybe one odd cousin) traveled whatever distance necessary to attend this event.

My parents eventually moved to Lubbock Texas so that my older sister Karen could help care for them since they had grown old. I was shocked to hear that when they left Cherryvale for that move my mom said, "I don't ever want to come back here." And she didn't. This is the town where she was born. I thought I knew my mom well, but in the last few years there are hints that perhaps I did not. To say such a thing, I'd think she would have had to have accumulated some pretty bad memories and experiences. I don't know what those might have been.

So far as I can tell there are only a few people, all part of my dad's family, left in the Cherryvale area. Distant cousins who likely wouldn't even know of my existence. While I have a tiny bit of curiosity about that Kansas area, like my mother but for perhaps different reasons, I don't have enough interest to motivate me to actually go back there. In 2010 my high school graduating class had its 50th reunion. I couldn't bring myself to go. When I saw the photos of the group taken on that occasion I remembered almost none of them and I was glad that the shock of seeing so many funny old people was not one I had personally experienced. I'd have had to admit that to them I'd also have been a funny old person. I wonder if any of them survived should the 60th anniversary have been celebrated last spring. I have some nostalgic regret that with me and Corbin the branch of the river bearing the Gill name will run dry. As my life has proceeded from my name the headwaters seem to have mostly dried up as well. The river that flows on from my life must now come from tributaries well downstream bearing other names. Why does this make me sad? Names.

Yet, clearly themes and drives that have given shape to my life have proceeded in some sense from my name. Throughout my life, perhaps in contention with the model my mom chose by naming me for her wealthy generous successful uncle and my poor but generous hard-working dad, I've chosen passion and personal value over making money, yet as a result money, or better the lack of it, forced me to live much of my life with stress always feeling the necessity to work to make ends meet. Work was surely the example set by both Uncle Sam and my dad. Still, I believe Uncle Sam was creative in his life and creativity has been a trait I've cherished and sought to develop. He was philanthropic and I have never engaged in either the broad public interests he had nor in philanthropy. My generosity, should the label even apply, has been with my family, my kids and grandkids, for whom I'd do anything. Herein I have followed the example of my dad. And I believe I was a caring and inspiring teacher. Had I better known his story I might have identified with Uncle Sam's

failures followed by his tenacity. I shared these traits with my dad. I think I have always been slightly ashamed that I hadn't become a wealthy man driving a big black Lincoln. I have felt a certain sense of the failure to my eponyms. I regret that. I don't much regret not becoming wealthy but I do regret having lived most of my life with financial and material measures of success being what I felt others expected of me.

I think from my dad and from his farm lineage I came to identify work, hard work and never giving up on work, as core to an authentic life. Work to provide, if often just the barest of necessities. I recall one year when my father made only a few hundred dollars for the entire year. Work to allow things for one's family what one denies oneself. Seems the Gills understood Max Weber's notion of the Protestant ethic, yet, unlike Uncle Sam, most of their work never produced enough beyond necessities to enjoy the fruits of one's labor. My life, proceeding from my name, has been work, shaped more by passion and loving duty than by an interest in material rewards. My life has been to provide for family by denying all but work for myself. There is, I suppose, something mildly noble about such a lifeway. Sort of a salt-of-the-earth decency. Yet it is also a life inseparable from the regrets of missed joys, the overly disciplined focus and duty, the constant fear of loss, a sense of the need to grub for mere survival, an overattentiveness to things small, the sourness that is so common to such a narrowminded focus and the absence of abundance, and the bafflement experienced when even attempting to imagine having fun. In my retirement I've so often asked myself without any answer, "what do I want to do today to just have some fun?"

Carnival Trash

Every year a carnival would come to Cherryvale, the town where I grew up. Until I was in the fifth grade we lived at 424 West Fourth Street, just a couple blocks from the city park where the carnival would set up. For me it was one of the high points of the year. I'd plead with my parents to give me some money that I might be thrilled by some of the rides: the Tilt-a-Whirl, the Ferris Wheel, the spinning thing with swings, the Octopus. I dreamed of how much fun riding these would be. My dad was a dirt farmer and worked constantly often taking non-farming jobs to help pay the bills. They didn't have money to spare. I never heard of an allowance, so there was no way for me to save money. I was allowed to go to the carnival grounds and wander around to imagine myself having fun and maybe to see some friends, yet little cash was available to actually enjoy the rides.

One evening—I suppose I was at most nine or ten years old—while I was wandering around the carnival grounds I was approached by a man, my parents called them "carnies," who asked me if I'd like to earn some tickets for the rides.

All I had to do was spend a couple hours picking up trash around the grounds. Seeing the opportunity to work for reward I quickly accepted the offer and spent a couple hours picking up trash. I was indeed rewarded with a strip of tickets to use however I wanted.

As I recall, my parents showed up in the evening to take a stroll around the carnival to chat with friends and enjoy the evening. Seeing them I ran up to proudly show them the tickets I'd earned. Asking how I got them I told them the work I'd done to earn them. I was greatly surprised and deeply hurt that they berated and shamed me for picking up trash. I fled them running across the park finding myself near my Aunt Alu's tiny little house across from the park on Clark Street. I ripped the tickets in many pieces and threw them on the ground and stood sobbing in the alley near her house. I was ashamed when she came out on her porch and, recognizing me, asked me if I was alright. I hid my anguish and walked away.

Remembering this experience, I know that it deeply shaped my childhood from that time on and no doubt my whole life. I didn't really understand at the time beyond the depth of the pain. I thought I was doing the honorable thing by working to earn something that I considered of value. I thought that I was helping my parents who apparently couldn't afford to give me money for carnival rides. I felt shame that I somehow wasn't able to distinguish honorable work from dishonorable work like picking up trash; at least that is what it seemed was my parents' main concern. Perhaps now I might imagine that my parents' upset was also related to their own feelings of shame that they couldn't provide for such a simple childhood desire. But, placing this event in the context of what I knew of their values, I think it was also a reflection of their sense of pride. A sense of the discernment of what appears socially proper and having a sense of class and their disdain for those things that were lowbrow and marked those who are down and out.

As I recall so many things about my parents, it seemed an abiding message was that they wanted to appear higher class and of greater wealth than their social level and financial means actually were. They always wanted a house and car that would be owned by someone with more wealth and status than I think they had. I regret that this carnival experience so deeply impacted me. The pain of it scared me like a brand with the markers of value that seem somehow to always wed the choice of work with the possibility of shame, to always strive to achieve an appearance that surpassed reality, a fundamental sense of a hidden internal dishonesty about work and money (filthy lucre).

Working for Uncle Howard

When I was in fifth grade my parents moved from West Fourth Street to East Fourth Street. My dad was a dirt farmer, but as the youngest of seven kids, the last of the George and Mattie Gill flock, by default he was left to take care of his aging parents and to keep the family farm going. My Uncles Ralph and Howard (who was also the local school superintendent) had farms adjacent and my dad's older sister, Bernice, and her husband Russell Hilts, also had a farm nearby. I missed out on the joys of living on a farm and being around the animals and doing farm boy activities. I didn't miss out on the work. While we lived in the little town of Cherryvale, from an early age I was expected to go to the farm to work. During haying season, from age eight, I drove a tractor pulling a wagon through the fields so that my uncles and other neighbors could load it with baled hay. By my teens I was expected to operate farm machinery to plow, harrow, and harvest. I worked long hours and missed out on summer activities like playing pee-wee baseball and hanging out at the local swimming pool.

In this setting, living this life, I learned about work and money. Work endless hours; have no money. I recall one day that I happened to be home, Uncle Howard called to ask if I'd go with him to his farm to help him with some work. Of course, I'd go, no choice. When we finished up and he dropped me at my house he gave me a couple quarters as pay for my work. I was surprised and delighted. I showed my parents my bounty for my work and was shocked by the anger expressed by my dad. He didn't think it was appropriate to take money for working for a relative and he made me walk to my uncle's house to return the fifty cents.

There came a time when I was in high school that I was able to do the work of any adult. I asked my dad to pay me since I felt my work was worth something, but he refused; he probably thought that one didn't pay one's kid to work, but maybe he didn't have the money anyway. I went to work for my uncles operating farm machinery and for a neighbor who hired me to ride the wagon behind his hay bailer to stack the hay as it came out of the machine. I got one dollar an hour. I remember one week earning \$67 and I thought I was rich.

Throughout my entire life to at least age 70 I never had enough money to avoid concerns about how to pay for the basic needs. I'd learned as a kid that the solution to not making ends meet was to work more hours and to work harder. And, of course, to be as tight fisted with money as possible. No frills at least for me, so that my family could at least have a bit of something special now and then. I'm sure that these hard-knock lessons are ones I should value and appreciate, but I deeply regret them, even resent them. Not only did they drain much of the joy from my life, they also isolated me by my sense of the necessity to work all the time. I lost relationships and I know that my marriage as well as

my role as father suffered greatly as a result. The patterns formed so many decades ago didn't really go away, although I've modified them maybe just a bit. I've published three books and lots of articles in the two years since I retired at the end of my 75th year. I still labor daily, every day all day, and feel like I've let the world or someone (but who?) down if I don't work hard seven days a week. The lesson I learned by having to return that four bits to my uncle so many decades ago has lasted a long time.

“The Place” and the Gore Scholarship

My granddaughter, Fatu, is entering her senior year in high school, a year focused on one of the greatest transitions in life. Thinking of her whole lifetime and my ever-changing relationship with her I'd love to freeze time for a bit to let us catch up. I need more time to savor each transition as well as all of the periods between in her glorious emergence as an amazing woman. Knowing that she is facing remarkably complex decisions on what she will do after high school, I've reflected a bit on my own efforts when I was her age. As I remember and reflect I'm shocked and amazed by how the smallest and seeming most incidental events or happenings can be determinative, or seemingly so. What I once thought of as fate I now think of as opportunity offered by the accidental, the nonlinear, the random. The ever-present possibility of surprise is what makes life so interesting and lively; the unexpected and unanticipated ironically being what makes life worth living. This realization makes me at once nervous about tending to the tiniest and seeming most incidental things since every one of them has the potential to reshape the rest of one's life while also trusting that we cannot plan for the nonlinearity, the accidental, the surprises that motivate our creativity and initiate change. Surely it is the play among these opposing felt forces that allows us to live sanely and open to the full creative possibilities of life.

I loved high school and desperately wanted to go to college. My parents had no money to send me to any college other than a community college in a nearby town with me living at home and working. Better than nothing, that was my base option, but it wasn't nearly what I wanted. I contacted the guidance counselor at my school for help. Thinking back now I'm frankly surprised that my high school in the small town of Cherryvale Kansas even had such a position. I can certainly remember what she looked like, but at the moment unfortunately I can't bring her name to mind.

She had a collection of college application forms from various schools around the state and offered them to me. Going to college out of state wasn't something I think anyone even thought possible. She showed me applications for scholarships which were clearly essential; without financial assistance there

was no way I could attend any of these schools even if I got accepted. Among these scholarship applications was one for the Gore Memorial Scholarship at Wichita University, now Wichita State University. When I learned that it was a four-year scholarship in the amount of \$5,000 and was the largest college scholarship in the state (remember this was 1959), I told the counselor that I was sure that being a kid in a small rural high school I had no chance. She took a more pragmatic approach telling me that it was the longest and most complicated application and should I fill it out I'd have gathered all the information I'd need in order to fill out all the other ones. I took her suggestion and filled it out, followed by all the others. She then noted that I had nothing to lose if she sent this scholarship application in with my application for admission to Wichita University.

A few weeks later she received notification that a recruiting team from Wichita University would be visiting high schools in the area and that they had seen my application and would be happy to stop by my school to meet me for an interview and to give me more information on Wichita University. Thrilled by the chance I still remember that two of those present were Katherine Griffith, who was Assistant to the President, and Laura Cross, who represented Admissions and would later become Dean of Admissions. It turns out I would come to know them both well over the next several years. I enjoyed meeting them and telling them about my interests and activities as well as hearing of the opportunities at Wichita University. Seemed like a dream.

More weeks passed and then, along with an acceptance letter to Wichita University, I received an invitation to attend a day of on-campus interviews of the finalists for the Gore Scholarship. I think there were something like 40 of us. I couldn't believe that I would have such an opportunity, but I discussed it with my parents and they agreed to take me to Wichita so that I could participate in this day of interviews.

On the big day, as we left Cherryvale early in the morning to drive about 100 miles to Wichita, the weather was turning bad. As we neared the scenic flint hills—yes, in flat Kansas there is an area of hilly country that is quite beautiful—it was snowing hard and the roads were getting slick. My dad was driving and my mom was clearly feeling doubtful that we'd actually be able to continue the journey much farther. As we drove around a curve in the road the car began to slide and we wound up in the ditch on the side of the road. The snow had piled up against the downward side of the car so there was no damage, but we were clearly stuck.

While my mom seemed convinced that this was the end of our effort to get to Wichita, my dad was not. He told us to stay in the car. He left the car and started walking, soon disappearing from sight in the heavy snow. This was rural

Kansas and it is a long distance between tiny towns. There was simply nothing out there. We waited.

It wasn't more than half an hour before my dad returned riding on the tractor with a farmer. He'd found a tiny gas station called "The Place" just a quarter mile from our car and it was run by a farmer who had a tractor. He pulled us out in a jiffy and refused compensation, although I doubt my dad had much to give him anyway. And my dad insisted that we continue on.

Still in the flint hills, it wasn't long before we came to a long hill where a number of trucks and a bunch of cars were unable to make the steep climb because the road was slick. We were sitting at the end of the line. Once again, it seemed like my Wichita dreams were fast fading. As we sat there an Edsel pulled up behind us (this was the infamous Ford fiasco car that so many joked about; it was new at the time) and the driver walked up and asked my dad if he'd like a push up the hill. The Edsel had the power and the proper tires to do so. Accepting the offer, the Edsel contacted our back bumper and we pulled out on the wrong side of the road and up the hill we went passing all these stuck vehicles. At the top, the Edsel driver gave us a friendly wave and drove away down the road.

We made it to Wichita and remarkably just in time for me to be present at the beginning of the interview day. The main thing I remember about most of that day was that there were a number of meetings with all 40 finalists sitting around a square-shaped table arrangement with a number of faculty asking questions and monitoring discussion. I have little memory of what I said if anything, but I remember being terribly conscious that most of these kids were from large Wichita high schools and had opportunities and experiences that I couldn't even fathom.

The final part of the interview was a more personal and up close one in which two of us finalists at a time met with a group of faculty and administrators. I recall it was in a small cozy room in the Campus Activities Center and that I enjoyed the conversation since it was an experience unlike anything I had ever had. When the meeting was wrapping up they asked us students if we had met everyone. I'll never know if this was just a courtesy or part of the interview, but I had noticed a gentleman who came in near the end and stood to the side of the room. I had no idea who he was so I said, "No, I haven't met this person." I walked over to him extending my hand and introduced myself. His response, "Hi Sam. I'm Ted Gore." Realizing that he was the donor of the scholarship that honored his father, I somehow managed not to faint and told him that I was most happy to meet him.

Leaving the building I found that the weather had cleared and my parents were waiting for me. I suddenly had a horrible headache and couldn't even tell

my parents much about my day. I recall lying in the back seat on the way home trying to sleep and get rid of my headache.

Home at last, as we walked in the door the phone was ringing. It was my guidance counselor informing us that the Wichita people had called her when they couldn't get hold of us and that amazingly I had won the scholarship.

My reflections on these remembrances now 60 years later contain a surprise. It now seems clear to me that it was my dad's quiet persistence and tenacity that kept us going toward Wichita and toward an amazing future for me that day. He refused to let adversity and challenges keep me from having a chance at that opportunity. Now I believe that I can see that my mom, perhaps due to the death of her mom as a small child and her dad when she was a teen and her being raised by an overly protective aunt in the midst of the Great Depression, had high expectations for me yet perhaps she was more likely to accept loss and defeat, even on my behalf, in the face of accidental situations.

In the many years that I drove back and forth between Cherryvale and Wichita I never failed to notice "The Place" which had become just a ruin, a reminder of the old days when gasoline pumps had glass containers at the top. But it was also a reminder that this was the place that marked one of the most important events determining the course in my life.

Plain Country Fare

Sitting down to watch a Netflix food travel show called "Somebody Feed Phil" I had just put in the oven a frozen pepperoni pizza, yum. My choice was a last-minute shift from a microwave baked sweet potato and a basic salad comprised of spinach and left-over pasta. I have lived alone for almost 30 years and while I try to generally eat a healthy diet, I find eating alone to be one of the occasions in my daily life patterns that threaten to turn aloneness, which I don't so much mind, into loneliness, which is the painful awareness of living alone, of being alone. My daily diet is coffee in the morning, toast with avocado for lunch and a rotation among spaghetti, a potato and green salad, an occasional hamburger, and an occasional frozen pizza which lasts two meals. Lunch is eaten at my kitchen island while reading fiction on my iPad. Evening meals are invariably eaten while watching television. On holidays I love to fix meals for the larger family, yet that's but a couple times a year. I thought about taking up cooking as a hobby, yet that seems utterly depressing. I picture myself sitting down alone to a meal I've spent hours preparing and it is a picture of regret and sadness. Pathetic.

As I watch the Phil food show I marvel at how common it is in cities around the world that people in every country in the world, it seems, spend a great deal

of time and effort producing and preparing fresh healthy delicious foods distinctive to their culture and subculture and how much they enjoy eating together as extended families and with groups of friends. I've traveled to a few cultures and have had this experience everywhere I've gone. Packed open air food markets with hundreds of vendors are common to many cities, villages, and neighborhoods. Thousands in most cities frequently eat freshly made food from street vendors many of whom have long prepared their specialties in the same locations in generations-worn stalls. Restaurants are gathering places for friends and family to eat, drink, and socialize. Many meals are colorful delicious works of art lovingly assembled with extensive and detailed preparations.

As the grease drips on my tee shirt from my pizza, my heart aches. I regret that for decades I have mostly eaten alone. I regret that I have so little experience learning and practicing the making of beautiful delicious food. I regret that my cultural heritage, rural farm midwestern America, has little by way of a distinctive diet with its skewing towards the hearty but bland. As a kid I worked with my elderly grandmother in her huge garden. We had fresh vegetables of many kinds and she and my mother (all the farm women) canned the excess that couldn't be eaten fresh or even given away so we would have these vegetables year-round. I recall my grandmother's small cellar filled with shelves loaded with Mason jars of goodies. My parents bought sides of beef and raised chickens so we had fresh meat. Yet we used no spices beyond salt and pepper. And I recall with a bit of a shudder that refined sugar was added abundantly to most everything. And I remember that the farm ladies often bragged about new recipes that involved such ingredients as Jell-O, cans of cream of mushroom soup, cool whip, boxed cake mixes, and Velveeta cheese (I never understood it wasn't even cheese) or pressurized cans of cheese spread. The favorites were those recipes that combined four prepared items from cans or boxes. Yet this was the same family and community that had frequent "ice cream suppers" where everyone brought hand-cranked homemade ice cream made with fresh cream so thick it required a spoon; and yet they loved Cool Whip. I regret my food heritage. I regret that food for me is not a regular pleasure to prepare and eat either in terms of its taste or the occasions for eating. I regret not going to local food markets, not having distinctive spices that mark my cultural identity, not having the pleasure of seeing and eating beautiful tasty food with friends and family.

In many cultures I have visited one's reaction to their food is a major test. I watched a Navajo family kill a goat and butcher it. After much time with chatting and food preparation they served me goat stew and then it was their time to watch me to measure my reaction. Arriving very late one night in a Mali village with no electricity I watched as they killed chickens and made chicken stew with vegetables and spices and then they watched for my reaction an hour or so later. When I guest taught English in a Thai school in Chang Mai the students asked

about two things: Do you know Michael Jackson? Do you like our spicy food? My “no” to their first question was met with their incredulity and disappointment. My “yes” to their second question saved me from being banished. Friends visiting me from Africa and from India have taken over my kitchen to prepare food they like; they have no interest in any food I might prepare. They often bring their own spices or expect that I must immediately take them to their ethnic grocery. I do not begrudge them doing this and I enjoy the delightful food they prepare. I do regret that I could not reciprocate and please them with cooking from my culture in a way that was distinctive and tasty. Would they like canned green beans with cream of mushroom soup topped with canned weird onion rings? Much to my horror, that I kept mostly secret, this dish (which many of my relatives consider a traditional one for Thanksgiving) is what I was asked to bring to family gatherings twice in the last several years. I couldn’t keep myself from at least adding extra sautéed mushrooms and a bit of spice rather than following the recipe on the can (such a practice itself says it all) and everyone raved about how they loved the green bean dish. I tried to be gracious.

It seems so utterly strange to me that the finest freshest farm grown foods that were available to my family were generally prepared in the blandest version and then complemented with Jell-O and Cool-Whip and Miracle Whip and box cake mixes. The food traditions carried on by me and my kids have thankfully eliminated most of the fake prepared foods and much of the refined sugar. Put most positively our food heritage is just plain country fare.

Mom said, “Major in Math”

When it became clear that I would actually be able to attend university, somewhat like the career advice “plastics” that Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) received in the 1967 film “The Graduate,” my mother advised “math.” As a dutiful son who knew next to nothing about either university or the world, not to mention that while my mom graduated from high school she’d probably been on a college campus but a time or two, I did as I was told. I liked math and science in high school so it seemed logical to me.

Physics was my minor. For several years it didn’t register that the courses in my major as well as many of those in my minor were what might be categorized as theoretical rather than practical, that is, theoretical mathematics and theoretical physics. I finished the requirements for my major and minor and most of my undergraduate core curriculum in three years, so I suppose it must have been when I was a junior that I began to realize that an undergraduate degree in theoretical mathematics does not prepare one for any job at all. One’s only path

forward was the pursuit of a PhD and eventually an academic career in math. I had to pursue some alternatives.

It was decades later that I reflected on my unquestioned following of my mother's advice. I began to wonder what on earth she'd had in mind by her beseeching me to major in math. She knew nothing about math or college majors and certainly not academic careers requiring a PhD. It finally, and rather suddenly, dawned on me that what she had intended by math was actually engineering. She wanted me to prepare myself for a high paying job in which I would use mathematics. Born in 1914 and coming of age during the Great Depression, her life was powerfully shaped by the lack of money. Married to a farmer whose economic and family circumstances meant he had to forego college and who worked day and night to scratch out the barest living for his family, she had few concerns in her life where money was not critical. She wanted a different life for me. She wanted me to be an engineer and make plenty of money.

It is oddly funny that I so readily and thoughtlessly took literally my mother's advice. Over the years, when desperate for saving justification for my major, I have considered that theoretical mathematics might be distantly equivalent to having studied Greek or philosophy. Occasionally, I have seen that in some strange way doing math shoved me along the labyrinth that delivered me where I am now. Yet, I regret that I devoted so many college courses and so many hours to that study when now I can think of so many other things I wish I had explored and been introduced to as an undergraduate. Whereas I suppose that I received some acumen in reasoned processing that I have relied on all these years, I certainly wish that I had studied areas more grounded in human and humane concerns. I wish that I had found my way into the arts and more creative enterprises. There was a brief period when I was taking choral music that I was so inspired by the teacher, Dr. Foltz, that I wondered if I might major in music. Am sure that would have been a disaster, but perhaps there were arts and creative areas I might have at least experienced. I also remember taking a literature course that focused on Hemingway and Faulkner, a core requirement taught by Dr. Kennedy. To that point in my studies I had a highly negative view of fiction, considering it foolish made-up fluff with surely no actual value. My forced reading of some classic American writers served to change my mind. I absolutely loved them both and began to appreciate the possibilities of fiction. Isn't this what undergraduate education is supposed to do? So many of my interests today that center on fiction and story were likely birthed, or at least conceived, in that class and yet it has taken decades to evolve. I could have been a physician, a dancer, a musician.

There is some irony here as well. While my mother was actually saying "do something so you can earn lots of money," it would be only several years after

graduating as an undergraduate that I would choose to go to the University of Chicago to pursue a PhD in religion, so far from theoretical mathematics yet not so far from the academic life that pursuing it would have led me. Academics do not make much money, especially considering the amount of investment made in preparation and work that a career requires. Adding to the irony, I was leaving behind a career in business in which I was earning lots of money.

On various occasions through my professional life, I presented my parents with a copy of a book I'd published. They would smile and say something I suppose was intended to be a compliment. "Oh, isn't that nice." They often expressed their incredulity at having a son doing things they found incomprehensible. I now understand that behind these awkward occasions was the fact that what they really longed to hear from me was concrete evidence of my growing wealth, things like salary levels, career promotions, house sizes, luxury clothing and automobiles, exotic vacations and travel. They talked endlessly of my cousin, Gene Gill, who was a wealthy veterinarian working for ranches that produced race horses. I even remember one conversation I had with him in which he expressed utter bafflement that I'd become an academic when I could have chosen a career in which I'd have made a lot of money. What my parents may have connected with these publications indicated my hard work, yet they didn't care to read them and perhaps knew they couldn't understand them if they tried. Likely they also understood that these publications made me no money and found that incredulous. A fair question, why would anyone do so much work without earning anything for it? I now recognize that in matters related to money I was to them always a bit of a disappointment.

Harry Corbin: How I Got to the University of Chicago

As a student at Wichita State University I was active in student government. The Campus Activities Center (CAC) had a student board that managed the building and arranged many extra-curricular activities for students. It had several student activity coordinators, each specializing in a particular activity type. As a junior I applied for and received one of these positions. I enjoyed the work and being at the hub of student life. As a coordinator I had a position on the student governing board and learned how the whole organization worked. As a senior I became president of that board and learned how to lead. In this capacity I had the opportunity to work with university administrators. Favorite among them for me was Harry Corbin, the university president. It was at the end of my junior year that, under Corbin's guidance, Wichita University, which had been a municipal institution, was accepted into the Kansas State system of higher education becoming Wichita State University. As a student campus leader, I was

closely involved with this major transition. Corbin had been president of Wichita University from 1949 to 1963 and he ended his leadership term with this major accomplishment. At that time, he left campus for a year or two to renew himself as an academic. I found him to be an extraordinary man, intelligent, adept at leadership, inspiring, and a true gentleman.

I finished my math major in three years and switched to the business school where as a senior I started to work on an MS in Business. My first year in graduate school I taught a course in the business school because, as one trained in math and working at the time in industry at the Coleman Company, I understood computers that were new to business better than anyone on the business school faculty.

As I was finishing up my MS and working full time at the Coleman Company I learned that Harry Corbin had returned to Wichita and was teaching a world religions course. His PhD was in political science, yet he had an abiding interest in religion. While such a course had nothing whatsoever to do with my MS in Business I approached my advisor to see if I could get Corbin's course approved for my degree requirements. I'm rather sure that it was approved only because Corbin was so respected that it would be unconscionable to say that any course he offered would not be appropriate to any major or degree.

I think the only C grade I got in my undergraduate studies was in a required world history core course and I had taken only a few required humanities courses. I didn't have great expectations that I'd do well in the course, but I really wanted to simply be in the presence of this man I so admired. As it turned out this course was a stunning. I can say it was a life-changing, experience. As a farm kid from Kansas I had little understanding of the world beyond the Kansas state boundaries. Indeed, I think that other than a brief vacation that my parents took driving to Bakersfield California to visit my dad's sister and her family (the only vacation I think we ever took), I don't think I'd ever been beyond Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. I'd flown on a plane one time, probably when I was a sophomore in college, to visit my sister in Kansas City Missouri after she had a baby. I had attended a student conference of some variety in St. Louis. That's where I was when JFK was assassinated on November 22, 1963.

Dr. Corbin's world religion course was like entering the TARDIS in Doctor Who. It was like walking through a door into never-ending worlds of wonder. Countries and ethnicities, histories and stories, beliefs and practices by people of every imaginable variety. It was mind-blowing and life-changing. I think I got a good grade in the course but this was likely due to Corbin's generosity stirred by my constant display of wonder and awe rather than my solid scholarship. I remember that for the final exam he actually wrote an exam just for me. I don't think I did so well on it, yet perhaps it demonstrated my enthusiasm.

I finished my MS degree and continued working for the Coleman Company. I was fortunate to land an awesome position in the company, but that's another story. After several years working and expanding what could only be termed as my power in the company I began to feel some need to be certain that I wanted to yield to the forces that seemed to be sucking me towards a lifelong career in business. I felt that I was rapidly approaching a tipping point after which there would be no going back. Some of my reluctance to be fully absorbed in this career was due to my own success and the consequences of the exercise of my own power in the company. I was in a research group of just two that was assigned to the company president to do various kinds of research. Some had to do with the acquisition of other companies, others with internal company efficiencies. I was responsible for the automation of whole operations and departmental sections that resulted in those workers being either reassigned or fired. I was present at the removal of upper managers before their preferred time for retirement simply because they were technologically outdated. I found that while I loved the challenge of the work and the results to company profits and my own salary, I hated the part of my work that resulted in serious disruption to the lives of other people. I didn't really want to be a ruthless businessman.

I decided that the best thing I could do was to take a sabbatical from my work in business so that I might gain perspective on the course of my life. I hadn't a clue what to do for this sabbatical, but I thought that Harry Corbin might have some suggestions. I remember meeting him in his beautiful office—he'd retained the office he'd occupied as university president—to tell him about my situation and to ask him for suggestions.

Dr. Corbin's graduate work had been done at the University of Chicago and, knowing that I'd much enjoyed his world religions course, he suggested that I go there for a term or two or a year. I truly remember being shocked by his suggestion asking him "Oh, do they have a university in Chicago?" I had no clue that the University of Chicago is one of the most prestigious schools in the world. I also was utterly naïve about the Divinity School there and it being among the most elite graduate schools for the study of religion in the world. Dr. Corbin said I should go there, so that's what I set out to do.

I'll save the details of my Chicago studies for another story, yet I did apply and was accepted. I did go despite being terrified of Chicago's south side and the whole enormous city. I was totally intimidated by everything there. I wasn't prepared. I knew absolutely nothing about the study of religion. I didn't fit. I had no clue what to do when I was there. Yet, within the first term I realized that, despite my deep despair, I could not return to Wichita or to a career in business.

It would be decades before it dawned on me what odd circumstances were at play in me even being admitted when I was. As I now look back at my half-century career I see that the pattern was set from the outset. I have always been

an outsider, a misfit. I have always done what most would advise against, but what was suggested by someone I deeply respected. I have never felt quite prepared or properly focused for most of what I've devoted myself to. Yet I have published a good many books and have a fairly solid international reputation as a scholar. I think there is no question that my success, such as it is, is inseparable from being a misfit.

In the 1990s when I was teaching at the University of Colorado I received a letter from Harry Corbin. I believe that he had cancer at the time and didn't expect to live much longer. He indicated that he wanted to encourage me to consider returning to Wichita State and seek a position as an administrator. I recall that he indicated the institution's presidency was going to be available and encouraged me to pursue it. We exchanged a few letters. I looked into his suggestion, but knew that I had no interest in administration. I dedicated a book to him after he died and sent it to his family, but never heard from them. In 2011, I was invited to do a lecture at WSU and had the opportunity to visit the Harry Corbin Education Center designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and to see the plaque in front describing Corbin's contribution to the university. Yet, of course, none of the faculty who hosted me or were current teachers there had ever met him or knew anything about him other than that his name was on a building. I also found my name on a little brass plate on a large plaque remembering the many student presidents of the Campus Activities Center.

University of Chicago: Arrival and Master of Arts

Before fully committing to a life-long career in business I felt that I needed to take a sabbatical from my thriving business career to assure myself that this was the right choice. Having the recommendation to go to the University of Chicago by Harry Corbin and getting accepted to the Divinity School there, I was set to start in October of 1967. I'd never been to Chicago or any large city for that matter so we decided to drive from Wichita to Chicago sometime that spring to check it out. As we got close I remember heading into Chicago on the Dan Ryan Expressway which was the largest and busiest highways I'd ever driven on. The University of Chicago is south of the city so we exited the expressway to take a street east that would directly lead to the campus.

I remember it being early evening as we drove through the dense neighborhoods of south Chicago. The streets were full of black people and they seemed to be pouring forth from the endless rows of Greystone homes. Mile after mile we drove across this area, a totally new experience to me and one that both excited and terrified me. We finally arrived at our cheap motel somewhere near the Museum of Science and Industry close to the University of Chicago.

The next day we went to visit campus. The only university campuses I'd ever been on were the sprawling grassy open campuses of the Midwest. We had the address for the University of Chicago and could see it on a map, but at that address all we found were large gray buildings whose multi-story walls were right on the sidewalk like buildings in a downtown area. It took us quite a while before we realized that these buildings faced inward onto an open grassy quad. Once inside the campus it was like a quiet restful haven surrounded by a noisy busy urban area. However, to a rural Kansas person these buildings felt intimidating with their elaborate European appearance to me, gray and gothic.

I have to say that being a farm kid from Kansas my familiarity with the campuses at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and Wichita State did not prepare me for this plunge into the vastly different conjunctions of the south side of Chicago that felt like a ghetto with these old European-feeling buildings that felt like they exuded brainpower. No sports stadium. No towering dorms. No bustling student center. I felt totally out of place and utterly uncomfortable in part due to my awe. My reaction was that I was in the wrong place, it was visceral. I didn't belong there. I couldn't possibly find this campus a place I could tolerate, much less feel comfortable in, even more unlikely I'd ever excel as a student there. I expressed these views to Judy and suggested that we leave right away and head back to Kansas where I'd just get on with a career in business. I've long reflected on her response and, in many ways, it has always seemed a bit uncharacteristic of her. Without hesitation she said that I had to give this school a try and should I not do so I'd always regret it. Her comment was like a sobering slap in the face, but I took it to heart and set about trying to understand what I'd needed to do to be able to be in Chicago and to study at this world-renowned prestigious terrifying university. I'll always be grateful to Judy for her insight, courage, and decisive stance.

That fall we found ourselves back in the Chicago area living in a suburb, Hickory Hills, far from campus with me commuting to my part-time job as a systems analyst in the University of Chicago administration and to the Divinity School where I was a new graduate student. I had no background for the study of religion and every other student I met had at least a master's degree in religion or the culture area he or she planned to study. They all had extensive knowledge of languages and histories. They knew what they were studying in the courses they took. I had none of this preparation and hadn't a clue what most of the faculty were talking about in the courses I was taking. I really didn't know how to read or study this sort of material. I didn't know the vocabulary that seemed to be assumed by everyone. I remember taking a course that first term from Charles Long, a well-known and highly popular black professor. He had authored a widely read book on mythology and the course I took from him was on myth. I remember sitting in his class listening to the special way he

pronounced the word “myth” and tried to practice saying “myyyyythhh” with a powerful resonance, always comically failing. After a few classes my confusion seemed to compound. It seemed everyone in the class used this word but no one seemed to be saying anything about what was meant by the word. One day I screwed up my confidence and finally raised my hand. “Mr. Long, what is it exactly that you mean by this word ‘myth,’” not even trying to add the special resonance. His response was unforgettable and in hindsight shaped in an odd way a good part of my own academic work. “If you don’t know, you can’t be told,” was his response. My sense was that this was no way to conduct a course, yet, as I look back over the history of the field, I think this attitude and approach to be prominent. My career has been shaped by attempting to offer alternatives to it.

I was utterly lost in all my classes and felt disenchanting. I wanted to go home but didn’t have a home to go to. I somehow knew that what I was exposed to here was such a quantum leap into a magnificent world I could never have imagined without this experience, yet I didn’t even really know what that world was or how to enter it in any way. I was certain I couldn’t return to business but I was about as certain that there was no place for me going forward.

There was a beautiful huge library reading room in Swift Hall at that time. When I returned to campus for a brief visit a couple years ago this beautiful library had been turned into a kind of open carpeted multi-purpose room destroying the beauty and gravity of the space it had when it was a library reading room. I often went to this reading room to study. It had long tables in two rows. Each table had a book shelf in the center where you could put your books and the table was slanted slightly to facilitate better angle for reading. I remember putting my head down on my books and simply crying. I was stuck and didn’t know what to do or how to do it.

Many years later I came to realize how isolated and out of the know I was in my first years in Chicago. It was worse than I’d even known. I started in the fall of 1967. The American Academy of Religion, the national professional organization for the study of religion with many thousands of members, held its national meeting in Chicago in October 1967. As a new student I didn’t even know it was taking place. Then the summer of 1968 was the occasion of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago famous for the protests of the Vietnam War and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. that had occurred in April of that year. I had little awareness that all this was going on all around me.

In many PhD programs, and Chicago was among them, the MA is not intended as a terminal degree. It doesn’t really prepare you for anything. It corresponds with a point in the PhD program when students are assessed to determine whether or not they should continue. At Chicago the examinations

were not extensive. I recall that they comprised a written exam of several questions followed by a faculty-hosted oral defense. When I finished the required coursework for the MA I signed up to take the exams. On the appointed day I wrote the exam realizing that I had little sense of even what the questions meant much less how to write essays in response to them. I was given an appointment for the oral defense. I wasn't confident. When I entered the room, I was told that should I take the oral exam they were certain that I would fail. However, they said that, should I choose, they were giving me the option to simply leave and they would not even acknowledge that I had attempted these exams. This would give me a chance to better prepare and to take them at a later date. I've often wondered why I made the choice I did, but as deeply humiliated as I was, I thanked them and chose to try again later. Was that the best choice? I don't know. I had no options and I hadn't a clue what I would do should I not go on. I think that I simply didn't have the character to willingly fail. Whatever were the reasons I chose to try again later.

I didn't know much about how to better prepare but I tried my best. When my exams were rescheduled I had become increasingly attached to the phrase "there is freedom in failure." It was almost my mantra. Indeed, I was anticipating failing so that I might finally be cut free from this endless struggle at something in which didn't seem to have any hope for success. I wrote the exams and knew that they would not give me a choice for a third try and I wouldn't take it if they did. I struggled awkwardly through the oral exams and was dismissed to wait in the hallway for them to discuss my situation and give me their results. Typically, I don't think such faculty deliberations take long, but I sat in the hallway for what seemed a long time. I was on the edge of being gleeful by the almost certainty that they would call me back in the room and be gentle in telling me that I'd at least have an MA for my effort, which wasn't negligible being from the University of Chicago, but that they all felt pretty certain I had no future and would never be able to complete a PhD. I would politely thank them and get on with my life, even if I hadn't a clue what that would be.

They did eventually call me back and I believe it was Jonathan Smith who gave me their results. He said that none of them had confidence that I had much of a chance of actually finishing a PhD, but that they also didn't feel that they wanted to cut me from the program. It seems odd, maybe not, but I was deeply disappointed. I'd hoped to fail so that I'd be forced to seek my future elsewhere. I was told I likely couldn't succeed but they were not failing me at this point.

I think I actually went to my MA commencement in Rockefeller Chapel. How grand, if also oddly empty given my confusing plight. I didn't return to classes and didn't tell anyone that I wasn't continuing. Too embarrassed, too confused, too little confidence. I needed something more to keep me going than I had at that moment.

Meeting Jonathan Smith

I entered the Divinity School at the University of Chicago fall 1967 utterly unprepared by my math and business degrees. The experience of being out of place, a misfit, that I felt from the very first day has, to this day, never totally disappeared despite my having built a fair reputation as a scholar. I had intended to stay at most a year on this sabbatical from a business career, yet by the end of that year I realized that I couldn't go back. I was a lost soul floundering in a challenging environment, with little to no clue what I was about. In the winter of 1968-'69 I was encouraged to look up Jonathan Z. Smith (seemed everyone persistently included his middle initial) who was a new young star member of the faculty. I found my way to his office and in a brief introductory appointment I said something totally idiotic like "I was told to come meet you; that maybe I should work with you." He immediately responded, "Why would I be interested in working with you?" Not even really knowing what I was there for, I didn't have a clue, doubtless obvious to him. Yet, he said, "Write me a paper and get it to me in a week." Seeing him return to his work, I found myself awkwardly dismissed, and unsure as to what I was supposed to do. I managed to write a paper, drop it off, and arrange an appointment to get his comments on the paper.

Showing up I was directed to sit down across the desk from him and I noticed my paper on his desk covered in red ink. He got right to business commenting on every one of the dozens of red notations he had written. Somewhere in the midst of this I still remember Smith saying, "You describe Dwight L. Moody as 'infamous'. Do you have any idea what that word means?" Not waiting for me to answer which was probably good since I mistakenly thought it meant really famous or maybe oddly famous, he continued. "You should never every use that word to describe such a figure as Moody." After what seemed an eternity, he was still on the first page. Why didn't I just get up and leave? I had slid down in my seat to the point I was about to fall onto the floor; perhaps more the description of my self-esteem than my physical body.

I sat there and listened and took notes and tried to keep from thinking about what I might do with my life given this state of obvious failure. Yet, then a voice, Smith's voice, that now seemed so faint and far away, penetrated my awareness. As he stood up extending me the paper he said, "Not a bad paper really. Revise it and get it back to me by next week." What?!

As I found myself outside of his office I experienced the strangest sequence of thoughts, more so feelings. Did he just say, "Not a bad paper?" Did he just ask me to revise it and get it back to him? Surely this means that he hasn't sent me away for good, drummed me out. He wants a revision! Oh, my god, maybe it wasn't that bad! As I walked along it began to dawn on me that I had just experienced a whole new level of academic learning. This man thought enough

of my work to take it totally seriously, even my choice of every word. It mattered to him what I wrote, even the smallest detail.

It was a moment of awakening and transformation. To have someone take my work seriously enough to give it the full measure of criticism in service to my learning, to my education, was something I'd never experienced before. I knew that from that day forward I had to take myself and my subject of study as seriously as did Smith. He had somehow seen something in me I hadn't seen in myself. Potential perhaps? For Smith the paper wasn't just a school boy's exercise, it was an important activity and it mattered how it was done, what it said.

What we do, everything we do, in life matters! Not only did this experience, this encounter, set the course of my education, it also established the course of my career as an academic and an educator and it shaped many core values of my life. Many of my students have experienced my detailed scrutiny of their work; a few came back, lots did not. All of my students have heard me say that everything they write must make a difference, must engage something that matters. My first encounter with Smith was not unusual; there were many others of the same pattern, yet eventually I came to appreciate that if I could defend my work to Jonathan, I could be pretty confident in it.

Now, reflecting on my career and life endings, it is remarkable to me how much the course and character of my life has been set by seeming accidental and unpredicted encounters. I've but hinted at a few here, there are so many others. It stuns me how much the courage to change and the energy to pursue what seemed impossible has come from even brief interactions with those I respect, all creative encounters. I owe my life—its path, values, and contours—to all of these people. I am deeply grateful to every one, none more than Jonathan Smith.

Jonathan Smith died in December 2017. His serious illness and death have occasioned for me much reflection on the fifty years he was my mentor. At Chicago I took many classes from him. Over the years I have read most of what he published. I carefully studied many of his writings and I have returned to them again and again for inspiration and resource, always finding them freshly insightful. Many times, I heard him deliver lectures and offer critiques at professional meetings. I was fortunate enough to have invited him to visit and deliver lectures and participate in conferences I organized. His presentations were always provocative and powerful. In the time since his death I have had the pleasure to honor him by presenting papers and lectures as well as writing a book, *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (2020), all to appreciate and advance his legacy.

Converse College Interview

Dropping out of school at Chicago at the end of the spring term 1971 after a disastrous, if not failed, master of arts exam experience I retained my job as a systems analyst for the University of Chicago administration. My office was located in the basement of the administration building which overlooked the main quad. It was odd walking past the Divinity School daily on my way to work, but I at least had a job. I was in a difficult situation. I had been gone long enough from business and had had enough eye-opening experiences to make returning to Wichita in an attempt to recover my job and former way of life seem out of the question. I had struggled for several years as a grad student in religion and learned that basically I didn't know what the hell I was doing. Every other student I knew seemed far more prepared and had a clear sense of direction in the field. And now I wasn't even a student. But then where to go? What to do? Although I was given outsized responsibilities for a part-time student worker as a systems analyst, it was a shitty job compared to the job I'd had at Coleman. I didn't know what to do so I just kept working because we had baby Corbin at that point and we needed income.

One day the following fall, leaving work I scanned a bulletin board while awaiting the arrival of the elevator. I happened to notice an announcement for a conference on the use of computers in education. In the early '70s this seemed quite the innovation. (As an aside, at the present when, during a pandemic, schools at all levels are conducted partly or fully online, one might expect that in these fifty years we should pretty well have this educational technology down, yet all the experience I have had and heard about is that the educational technology, especially for remote learning, is clunky and inefficient. We are discussing the creation of a robotic/AI sentient being and we managed to make it to the moon for a landing over 50 years ago, but ZOOM works for shit.) I snatched the conference flyer and gave it some thought. I knew loads about computers and I had two graduate degrees. Perhaps my future was in this field. Although we had no money, I decided that I had to attend this conference. I think it lasted just two or three days and was held at the Pennsylvania State University at College Station. I don't now remember where I stayed, but I drove our little orange VW square back.

I remember the conference was held in one of those large lecture hall rooms with curving rows of desks rising toward the back. I know I was energized by this conference and while there I met and spent some time with at least two university faculty. One was from California, if my memory is correct. I remember one thing about his presentation that stayed with me throughout my entire teaching career. He had charted knowledge retained as it correlated with the traditional educational method of offering several exams during a course. He

displayed a chart showing little rise in knowledge until a day or two before each exam. Surprisingly, rather than this sudden rise in knowledge maintaining until a further rise after the next exam, his graph showed that within a few days of each exam knowledge dropped back to little more than the pre-exam level. And so on through the course with the biggest rise coming at the time of the final exam, but then within a short time after the course ended the retained knowledge fell back to almost pre-course levels. With this information always in mind, throughout my teaching career I have explored how I could thwart this seemingly failed model of education so that my students not only had a steady rise in knowledge throughout the course, but actually had a continuing rise after the course ended. My theory and practice based on it were that if you change who a person is and how he or she sees and engages the world, then this second model is possible, at least for some students.

The other contact I made at that conference was a faculty person in the humanities at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, a small private liberal arts women's college with a small co-ed graduate program. I really wish that I could remember this man's name because he had an enormous impact on my life. We chatted and exchanged contact information. Later in the fall or perhaps early spring, he contacted me to let me know that they had a faculty position open for the following fall and they wanted to interview me for that position. I was utterly stunned and, of course, accepted the invitation. I went to visit them and I remember attending classes and eating in an elegant student dining room. I don't remember if they asked me to teach or make a presentation. Surely, I did both. I remember leaving having experienced a profound change in my life. Being considered for a faculty position at this beautiful small college simply thrilled me. I could see myself there engaging smart students and faculty and enjoying the lifestyle of a faculty person in such a beautiful environment. I wanted this position and I wanted it badly.

After a few days I heard from my friend who informed me that although they were interested in me they had decided that because I didn't have a PhD I wasn't their wisest choice. Although deeply disappointed I completely understood. To have gotten that position with only an MA and not even being in progress on a PhD would have plagued an entire career. I immediately recognized two things. The first was that I wanted to be a college or university teacher. The second was that I had to have a PhD to do this properly. And, of course, these revelations meant that I had to go back to the Divinity School and beg them to re-admit me so that I might pursue a PhD.

I remember going to Jonathan Smith to assess my possibilities because he had been the most active and trusted faculty person involved in my MA disaster. He told me that my unexplained disappearance hadn't been looked on kindly and that given my MA performance there was but a small chance for my success. Yet

he said that I might return. I'd need to pay full tuition without aid and, he assured me, they would be looking carefully at me and my work with no guarantee they'd let me continue.

I returned to do coursework in fall of '72 and by fall of '75, a period of only three years, I had taught a semester at Concordia College in Moorhead Minnesota, I had taught a year at Oklahoma State, I had done fieldwork on the Navajo Reservation, written my dissertation, finished my PhD, and had started a tenure track position at Arizona State. While it may take much struggling and floundering, if we can clearly feel the passion and commitment for something we imagine, we can accomplish more than we likely would have imagined was possible and to do so in short order. Who knows what I would have wound up doing had I not seen that flyer, had I not met the faculty person from South Carolina, had I not been considered but rejected for a faculty position at Converse College? Perhaps I'd have done exactly what I did by following some other path, yet I doubt it.

After all these years I've come to accept the odd outsider/misfit role I've had throughout my academic career and to appreciate that it has had the advantage of allowing me to see and think things others could not and thus to likely have accomplished and achieved more than I would have had I been properly prepared and followed the normal course and expectations in developing a career. I wonder what else I might have been and if I'd have somehow had a richer life, perhaps one in which I served people more directly and obviously. I think I would have liked that. I know that teaching impacts the lives of others, or at least has the potential to do so, yet we teachers often don't know what happens to our students. I would have preferred a life course that did not leave me alone with no close friends or a long-term relationship.

Yet even in the academic career I have had, I think I would have preferred to spend at least some of my career teaching at a small liberal arts college like Converse College in Spartanburg. I think I always coveted the idea that in the later years of my career I would take a position at such an institution and enjoy my last decade or so having intense engaging seminars with bright young people. My last ten years at the University of Colorado were the opposite. Still, I remember the commitment and passion I felt after going to South Carolina for that job interview and I am grateful that what I have done has been persistently motivated by the passion and images I felt at that time.

Oklahoma State University

The early years of an academic career are often pretty chaotic. After years of intense research with the sometimes-tedious process of writing one's dissertation

trying to abide the standards and tastes of one's advisors and the academic community in general is often paired with one's first experiences teaching college freshman. These young kids just out of high school are taking their first college class from you usually because they are fulfilling core requirements rather than because it is a subject of great interest to them. Many do not want to be taking the class you are teaching. It is near impossible for a fresh PhD teacher to avoid expecting freshmen students to have the skills and interests at the level of a PhD student. We often expect too much of our first students and not enough of ourselves to become engaging teachers of uninterested undergrads. Almost no PhDs are trained to be college teachers.

I was fortunate to land a fill-in teaching position in the Humanities Department at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater Oklahoma as I was doing the final work on my dissertation. I don't recall now how I even got the job or whether I went to Stillwater for an interview. I remember that I was assigned to teach American Religious History, World Religions, and something like an American Humanities course that had components of literature and art and who knows what else, probably music. I was not allowed to design my own version of these courses, not that I had either the knowledge or time to do so. They handed me selected text books and text materials, a syllabus, and for the American Humanities course, packets of slides. I frankly didn't know anything about any of these topics.

I was finishing my dissertation at the time which meant I needed to spend lots of time finishing the writing and, once the draft was approved, the arduous task of actually typing the whole thing. It was between four and five hundred pages bound in two volumes. The typing was acceptable only when done on specific dissertation paper and with each page including no more than two corrected typos. I spent many hours banging away on my IBM Selectric typewriter, with its little jiggling font ball, trying to get pages with the acceptable number of errors.

I well recall that my teaching preparation time was extremely limited. I often read what was assigned for the students the night before I had to teach the material. When the assignment was a novel I consulted Cliffs Notes just to know a bit about the whole work since I didn't have the time to read all of it ahead of starting to teach it. When I taught the art portions of the course, the department gave me descriptions and highlights of what should be emphasized for each of the works of art. I usually had only time enough to scan these descriptions, but I didn't have enough time to load the slides in trays to project them. I remember one day I was going through these images during class glancing at the notes and trying to sound authoritative and confident as I pointed out the important features of each work of art. As I was in the process of describing one painting, I couldn't seem to match the notes with the image I was looking at. Stumbling

about trying to figure what the hell was wrong, one of the students spoke up to say that she had actually seen that painting and that she believed the slide was upside down. Bingo.

I wish I could look at the course syllabi so I could determine if I've learned anything about these topics over the decades. Likely I haven't and I wonder what that says about life. About higher education. I regret that my students had to struggle along with me through required courses that none of us particularly wanted to be taking/teaching.

Finally, typed and bound, my dissertation was finished and approved without me returning to Chicago for a defense. I regret that I didn't have the money to go to my graduation at the University of Chicago Rockefeller Chapel. It seems now that a PhD is a major accomplishment in life, particularly given that I entered the process with degrees in math and business and virtually no knowledge of religion, history, or world cultures and nothing about the higher intellectual demands of a University of Chicago graduate program. Not that I knew it when I entered, but Chicago is one of the world's great universities. Here I was a small-town farm kid who completed a PhD at a prestigious school and I didn't have the money to go to graduation nor a family who recognized the high measure of such accomplishment and subsequently would urge me, even pay for me, to go to graduation. I wish now as an old man that I could retroactively gift to the young me the funds to travel to Chicago to formally graduate with a Doctor of Philosophy degree. I never ever had the opportunity to wear the impressive academic garb that designates a University of Chicago doctoral scholar. Damn!

Native American Religions

My choice to study Native American religions was not encouraged by the faculty at the University of Chicago. "They have no texts" I was told. I doubt I quite understood this concern at the time. I hadn't really chosen the field known as the history of religions. It was rather a default based on not having the language and educational background required to study any of the Christian-based fields or those that focused on some disciplinary perspective, such as psychology of religion or sociology of religion, and I didn't have the background for things like religion and literature. Most of the students in the history of religions focused on Middle Eastern or Asian religions and had years of study and often degrees in the histories and languages of the cultures they were studying—Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Chinese religions, and so forth. I didn't feel I had much choice since I was the ill-prepared misfit. I had no personal affinity (or experience) for any culture particularly because my education and personal experience had been

so limited. I knew no other language and frankly I couldn't easily locate lots of these cultures on a world map. My choice to study Native Americans was based largely on my familiarity with their geography. Native Americans were the cultures that lived in and whose histories unfolded in North America and I knew that area of the map, at least better than any others. We shared the same landscape, even though, as a white male, I represented Native Americans' oppressors. I know that my rationale for choice was lame, yet it's what mattered to me at the time. Some basis for familiarity.

There obviously were no courses on Native American religions in the Divinity School. I took one course from Fred Eggan (1906-1991), a renowned scholar in the anthropology department, on some aspect of Native America. I don't now recall the specific course topic, perhaps the American Southwest. And I took a course in linguistics from Michael Silverstein (1945-2020) who I think was also in anthropology, but that course was not really focused on Native Americans. This one course constituted the total formal training I had in Native American cultures. The rest I had to acquire on my own.

Realizing the vast published resources for Native Americans I began the labor of learning all I could. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the Bureau of American Ethnology published huge tomes on specific Native American cultures covering all of the standard aspects of these cultures. This collection of literature filled several whole banks of shelves in the library. Beyond that resource there were thousands of volumes written about specific Native American cultures focused on endless issues and concerns. The periodical literature was also huge.

At this time in graduate school we lived in a townhouse in Park Forest, a designed suburb near the end of the commuter train line south of Chicago. I commuted to Hyde Park several days a week getting off near the complex for the Museum of Science and Industry and walking a mile or so to the University of Chicago campus. The townhouse had a kitchen, dining room, and living room on the ground floor and two bedrooms and a bath upstairs. The bedrooms were for Corbin and us. The only place that I could use as a study was the unheated unfinished basement. I set up a card table as my desk—we were poor students—and spent endless hours down there studying. In the winter I often put a blanket across my lap to stay warm. I think I also used an electric space heater. In this space my study of Native Americans amounted to lugging these huge books home and plowing through them day upon day, writing notes on 5 x 7 cards on what I believed to be important. Although even now I'm a terribly slow reader, I forced myself into different styles of reading this seeming endless literature. It was disciplined reading requiring that I read, in whatever fashion necessary, at least one of these books a day. Tribe by tribe, region upon region, this was my education in Native Americans and it was all done without guidance or anyone to talk to about any of it. There were no other students studying Native American

religions and no faculty willing to direct my studies. Thinking about this process now, I really cannot understand what motivated me, where the hell I thought this work might end up, or how I felt I had any hope at all of even finishing my degree much less getting a job. Yet, this go it alone, take on more work than would seem possible, drive forward even if you don't know where you are going approach seems to be the standard I've practiced throughout my life.

During this enormous process of mastering the literature, I began to develop an interest in the American Southwest and particularly the Navajo. I don't recall now with any clarity what led me to the study of Navajo religions for my PhD dissertation, but I remember what it was that led me to focus on Navajo prayer. In the process of reading of the classic works on Navajo religion, I ran across a little book on Navajo prayer by Gladys Reichard, titled *Prayer: The Compulsive Word* (1944). Reichard's thesis was that the repetitive and structural character of the long Navajo prayer recitations that occupied hours daily during the multi-day healing ceremonies had a compulsive effect. Her suggestion that the efficacy of prayer was not limited to the meaning of the words spoken, but likely more so due to the rhythmic repetitive cadence of the prayer as a speech act. What really got my attention was a set of what could only be called flowcharts in the back of this book suggesting how the structure of these prayers might be charted.

I was a systems analyst working part time in the University of Chicago administration at the time and in those days, flow charts were used as a tool to design computer programs for business systems. I recall a treasured tool of a system's analyst was a plastic template that had shapes representing various logical and computer functions that could be used to lay out a flow chart. I was adept at flowcharting as an essential heuristic for analyzing and designing the structure of business computer applications. Flow charts were translated into operational computer programs.

Seeing Reichard's prayer diagrams, I immediately saw how my whole background in business and math could serve my study of religion, specifically the study of Navajo prayer. I immediately began to collect the recorded examples of Navajo prayers finding them all highly formulaic and all associated with one of the several particular types of healing ceremonials. This connection shaped my study of the prayers. I charted the structure of the prayers for each of these ceremonial types correlating them with the structure of the ritual processes for the ambient, usually multi-day and night, ceremonies (up to nine days and eight nights). I wanted to demonstrate that the structural character of each specific type of healing rite was consistent including the ritual techniques and the prayers. I wanted further to show that each of these types was associated with extensive and complex mythology, whole bodies of rich and engaging stories that helped comprehend the purpose and concern of each ceremonial type.

Eventually I accumulated something like 20,000 lines of prayer. At the time I didn't appreciate how inappropriate is the very statement "lines of prayer text" in a culture that doesn't write, yet doubtless this body of material written down could offer some response to that reason given by faculty who warned me not to study Native Americans because "they have no texts." Here they were, texts aplenty as recorded by ethnographers and I could not only write them all down, I could analyze them every which way from Sunday especially guided by my sense of how they might be flowcharted. My PhD dissertation was to chart the parallel and interdependent structures of prayers, rites, and mythology for each of the many rich Navajo ceremonial traditions focused on healing to demonstrate something of what Reichard had indicated by the word "compulsive," but also to show how the coherence at so many levels was shaped to offer explicit ambience of order for the specific causal factors of each type of ceremony. The person being treated had this cosmic order literally applied to her/his body in ritual and the prayer sounds, both heard and repeated, instilled the same coherence over days of repetition.

Somehow, I got Jonathan Smith to agree to be my thesis advisor, yet he felt I needed someone in anthropology as well to offer advise more relevant to the specific topic, so I got Michael Silverstein to be co-advisor. I haven't a clue why these busy and remarkable renowned scholars would have even taken a meeting with me. I don't think they even knew each other. But here I was with amazing co-advisors for a dissertation on Navajo prayer. The speed with which I researched and wrote my dissertation was possible only because both of these advisors immediately read and commented on and supported my work as I was able to draft it.

Corbin was a tot in diapers when I got a tiny grant from the American Philosophical Society and we headed to northern Arizona to do fieldwork with me not even knowing what on earth that was. I'd taken a course on Navajo language —I think it met one night a week—from Ozzie Werner at Northwestern University north of Chicago. Navajo language is a tonal language. It has several phonemes not occurring in English language and it is verb dominant. I don't have much skill at learning languages and I found Navajo language overwhelming. Someone has said there are two hundred fifty-six thousand conjugations of the verb "to be" which I still don't really understand, but surely it is a measure of its complexity. I was able to learn how to hear the sounds, pronounce (sort of) the words, and write down the words (given time) using a developed standard orthography even if I didn't understand them. I'll save for another story the account of the fieldwork.

Coming out of a summer living on the Navajo reservation and a semester teaching at Concordia College in Moorhead Minnesota, we returned to Arizona and moved into a little stone cabin on the grounds of the Museum of Northern

Arizona in Flagstaff and over the spring and summer I wrote my two-volume dissertation. I snagged a temporary teaching position at Oklahoma State University where I finished my dissertation and completed my PhD.

During that year at Oklahoma State, I learned that Arizona State University in Tempe was starting a new department of religious studies and that they had received a grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation to include, as particularly appropriate to the southwest region, the study of Native American religions. I couldn't believe that such a program could even exist since I knew of no religious studies department in the country that included a single faculty person whose focus was Native American religions. Perhaps because of the simple fortuity of me finishing my PhD with my research focused on a Native American culture that existed largely in the State of Arizona and ASU's receipt of this grant, I was probably the only person they could find qualified for the faculty position that was funded by the grant. I went to Tempe to interview for the job and I believe they hired me at the end of the interview and I didn't hesitate a second to accept. My OSU job was for one year, so the ASU job was perfect.

As I look back now at this beginning to my career I find it in so many ways utterly remarkable, a symphony of impossibles. I was a business and math person who was not particularly religious that shouldn't have been studying religion at all. I was told not to study Native Americans yet I did. I chose Navajo without any plan. I finished my PhD—and I don't even know how I deserved the guidance of two renowned dissertation advisors—at a time precisely correlating with the development of a new religious studies department and the inauguration of the first Native American religious studies position in the country. My most elegant response is perhaps “Holy Shit!”

As fascinating, if not more so, is that now 50 years later I have just published a book titled *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (Oxford, 2020). Jonathan died in December 2017. My current many interests in moving, gesturing, repetition, body, coherence, performance, biology, and philosophy are now recognizable, to me anyway, in that first study of Navajo prayer. Throughout my career my interests have developed in terms of specific areas of application—Native American, Australian Aboriginal, Indigenous religions, dancing, movement, body, senses, technology, futurism—as well as in the broad terms of religion theory. It is something of a wonder to me that from those early naïve misfit days I have at this late career stage written a book that brings forward all of those early outsider themes and interests in the presentation of a formal theory of religion that is distinct and mostly unprecedented for the study of religion that also engages some of the most distinctive positions of Smith, arguably the most influential religion scholar of the last several decades. I expect this book to be widely read and discussed by current scholars and students in the field. No doubt it will be controversial as it will also be influential and inspirational.

I taught at Arizona State focused on Native American religions through the 1970s into the early '80's. I frequently went to northern Arizona to visit the Hopi, Navajo, and sometimes Zuni and the eastern Pueblos over in New Mexico. Sometimes I took students. I occasionally hosted a visiting scholar to experience Native American communities. I published my dissertation, *Sacred Words*. I was asked to write an introductory textbook on *Native American Religions* which I later revised and I think it is still used in some colleges. I was asked to put together a collection of texts central to this study, *Native American Traditions*. I wrote a book on *Mother Earth*, that I'll describe in another story. I wrote a *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*, joined by a former graduate student. I was asked to write a volume on Navajo religion, *Songs of Life*, focusing on a collection of photographs for a European series published by E. J. Brill. I was also invited to write an introduction to religions of small-scale cultures, today most commonly labeled "indigenous," *Beyond the Primitive*. And, of course, I regularly published articles for academic journals.

When it came time at Arizona State for me to take a sabbatical I sought a part-time teaching position at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Whereas a sabbatical leave is usually funded for only one semester, getting paid to teach part time at CU allowed me to stay in Boulder for a full year. My publication of a few books and lots of articles made me a person of interest to them and they were developing Mesoamerican religions at the time. They had a faculty position funded for another area of specialization, but changed it so that my credentials would qualify so they could hire me. Although because of the terms of my ASU sabbatical I had to return to teach there for one more year, I was hired by CU as tenured full professor beginning in the fall of 1983. The misfit who was told not to study Native American religions, had in a decade become a tenured full professor at a class one research university.

A decade teaching Native American religions eventually became tedious and personally confining. My publication of the book *Mother Earth* was controversial and, even more, the subject of political battles. As the Native American area grew, as a white scholar, I became the political target of a few Native American scholars who had taken the few teaching positions that had developed. Increasingly, I felt that I had published and contributed what I wanted to and was capable of in this specific field. Since I'd chosen not to become a specialist on a particular Native American culture, learning its language, and spending extended time in that culture, I was a generalist by necessity. I realized that my interests were not actually specific to Native American religions but rather to the shape of the whole field of the academic study of religion although I always believed that the general and the specific have to be copresent.

It was in 1992, the five hundredth anniversary of the first voyage of Columbus, that I formally announced that I was moving on from Native

American religions. Now almost thirty years later, many still identify my work to be foremost about Native American religions and I have returned from time to time to write more on this topic, even recently a new essay focused on Navajo prayer as gesture. Yet that year marked my public transition to other concerns. I have never regretted this shift in the focus of my work.

Chasing Navajo Singers

My study of Navajo culture required me to read much of the published work on Navajo culture and religion. It is extensive particularly since the Navajo Nation has one of the largest reservations and populations in the country. The literature was created by a long and respected history of well-known ethnographers, curious visitors with a devotion to recording what they encountered, and a variety of Christian religious people who learned the language and spent lifetimes in residence there, especially the Franciscan Father Berard Haile and various Mormons.

I focused on studying the prayers, many of them taking an hour or longer to recite, that are an essential part of rituals in multi-day healing ceremonials. I collected every example of the recordings of these prayers compiling some 20,000 lines of prayer. I had studied these prayers in the context of the rites of which they are a part as well as the great body of mythology associated with each ceremonial type.

My thesis was to show the efficacy of the prayer recitations, or acts of prayer performance, as they corresponded structurally with the various rituals and myths. The theoretical support for such an effort was speech act theory and structuralist theory then commonly pursued by anthropologists. I had discovered a limited number of constituent prayer passages or parts of prayers that could be combined and modified in various ways to serve the particular ceremonial type in which they played a role. Commonly the several types of healing ceremonials were distinguished on the basis of the causes attributed to the sick person being treated described in cosmic and religious, rather than in medical, terms.

I had applied to the American Philosophical Society and received a small grant—I think it might have been \$ 800—to fund an effort to study prayer on the Navajo Reservation. I had driven up to Northwestern University one night a week all that spring to take a course on Navajo language, largely focused on transcription. With my coursework finished in the spring of 1972, with a contract for a one-semester fill-in teaching position for the fall at Concordia College in Moorhead Minnesota, we headed to Arizona. I had only the name of one Navajo person as a contact with absolutely no other fieldwork preparations. Judy and

Corbin, who was still in diapers, accompanied me in our orange square back VW, stuffed full of our stuff.

I well remember arriving at Tuba City on the southwestern region of Navajoland and setting up camp near a lake just north of town. The next morning, leaving Judy and Corbin at camp I went to the clinic in Tuba City to find my contact. I don't recall his name, but he was a middle-aged man. We chatted a while in the highly reserved style of many Navajos. He then told me that he had a nephew who had been in the military with solid knowledge of English who could use some work. He told me that this young man could also take me to visit this man's sister who might have a place where we could stay for the summer.

I was directed to drive north on the highway toward Cow Springs, where there was a trading post, and somewhere near a distinctive rock formation called Elephant Rock I was to turn off the paved road and follow a track that would lead me to the house where his nephew was staying. I did as directed and located a little track-style house and found the nephew. We engaged in the long slow process of getting to know one another and for me to express my needs and business. He took plenty of time thinking about my situation and we then discussed how much I could pay him to serve as my guide and interpreter. I don't recall how much it was, but it couldn't have been much given the small size of my grant. Coming to an agreement the discussion turned to where we might live. He told me that he had an idea where we might find his aunt and we got in my car and headed off to find her. Returning to the paved road we drove on further north nearer to Cow Springs. Heading west off the road on a frequently branching track we eventually came to a group of Navajos along the side of the road. As we parked nearby he told me to stay in the car and he left to go visit with his aunt and other members of her family. I watched as they killed a goat and started the butchering process as well as other food preparations.

My interpreter would occasionally return to the car to ask me a question and then returned to his family. This process went on and on for a long time as I watched the goat parts entering a huge pot on the open fire with a range of vegetables and other ingredients. It cooked and cooked as the negotiations slowly continued.

Eventually my guide returned and told me it was time to get out of the car to meet his family and to settle the housing arrangement. I met the auntie, Mrs. Betony, and the others. They asked me if \$15 dollars a month would be too much rent for a hogan which would include them bringing us water every few days, since there was none available otherwise. I quickly agreed, they served me a bowl of fatty gristly goat stew and we shared a meal. I was told where to come the next day to find the house and I delivered my guide back to his house and return to the camp ground near Tuba City where Judy and Corbin had spent their day.

The next morning, we packed up our camp and headed back north to the road near Cow Springs and then made our way three miles, as I recall, on a rough frequently branching track to find Mrs. Betony, who spoke no English. She lived in a cribbed roof style hogan with her bed-ridden husband who had, I believe, rheumatoid arthritis and was barely able to move. She took us down the road from her hogan to one built of lumber with an actual door, but the floor was fine loose dirt about an inch thick. We learned that some of her relatives would come by later with some beds and a container of water. Later that day a truck arrived with a couple of bed frames with wire springs and no mattresses (thankfully) and a 20-gallon ammunition can full of water. This can was a sort of rectangle shaped container with a round metal screw-on inset lid. To get water you opened the lid and reached in to dip out what water you needed. As the water was used, the bottom was a good arm's length down so it was a reach. We weren't sure how often they would bring refills of water so we had several two-and-a-half-gallon plastic containers we filled with water when we went to the trading post every few days. And, of course, we conserved.

We unloaded our gear such as we had and set up an area just outside our east facing door, as are all Navajo entry doors so oriented, under a little awning we had. After dark that night we were hanging out in the hogan with our Coleman lantern lighted. Throughout the evening we were surprised several times with Navajo men just walking in the house. They were at least as shocked as were we to see white folks. They looked around and then promptly left. We couldn't figure out what was going on until one of these surprise guests who spoke English told us that we were living in a Peyote hogan. The hogan was not built for anyone to live in, but as a place where peyote meetings were to be held. Peyote religion is a Native American religious movement focused on the consumption of peyote mushrooms that come from south Texas and Mexico. The religion promotes conservative social values and is nothing like a drug cult. I'd studied it in my readings on Navajo culture. Seeing a light in this hogan, these men assumed that there was a peyote meeting going on and stopped by to participate. Word soon got out that white folks had disrupted their religion and they stopped coming by.

A quick Mormon story. On one of the first days our residence in the Peyote hogan and I walked out of the hogan only to encounter a couple young white men in dress pants, white long-sleeved shirts, and neck ties. On a hot day in the middle of Navajoland in Arizona's high desert these guys were the last folks I expected to see. But then, even more shocking, they spoke to me in Navajo language. Mormons are notorious for their capability to learn languages. I recall a book I studied on Navajo language by a Mormon named Irvy Goosen (I think) with the title *Navajo Made Easier*, as though it was easy to begin with.

One of our daily family rituals was to take our aluminum folding chairs up on a little knoll near our Hogan to watch the sunset. White mesa was a long light-colored mesa far to the west of us and it was a beautiful land feature. Sometimes when we were sitting in our evening spot a Navajo would come by and inquire what we were doing there. Interestingly none of them seemed to be impressed or, frankly, even to understand why one would sit and watch the sunset.

Many of my days that summer amounted to me picking up my guide and heading out across Navajoland. I'd wanted to interview "singers," the medicine man healers that knew and recited the prayers and conducted these complicated ceremonies. I don't now remember what I actually wanted to learn from them. I was armed with a nice tape recorder although thinking of that now is funny since, by today's micro standards, it was a fairly large machine that recorded on cassette tapes. I still have those tapes somewhere and should check them out to help me remember what I actually did. What I mostly remember is that we'd drive for hours to where there was supposed to be someone that knew something and would talk to me. We'd finally arrive to be told that the man we were looking for had left the day before and that we needed to go to another area. Each of these efforts included doing things in the Navajo way. We'd come to a house. If the door was open we knew someone was likely there. But we'd sit in my car until those at home would finally make themselves available to us. It could be quite a wait. Then the first part of the conversation would be this slow process of introductions and other formalities before eventually getting around to business.

In my country and farm tradition there were stories of novice carpenters who, upon trying to help others build something would accidentally cut short a piece of lumber. Consequently, this person would be sent to find a neighbor to retrieve a tool called a "board stretcher." Of course, the neighbor would be in on the joke and send this novice on to another neighbor claiming that it had been recently borrowed. I think that the bulk of my time on the Navajo Reservation was chasing the Navajo equivalent of a board stretcher. Still, I learned much about Navajos and visited many areas of Navajoland.

One day I volunteered to go with the family to their corn field to help them work. Traditionally Navajos herd sheep and goats. They have both winter and summer homes. The summer homes are often near fertile areas where they can grow patches of corn and a few other crops. I thought that this was one area where I could really help out since I was the son of a farmer and had worked with my grandmother many summers in her huge garden. In my excitement I told them I'd be delighted to help them "hoe the corn." That phrase was a mistake and one they could easily attribute to the stupidity of a white man. They understood the phrase literally, thinking that I was intending to actually chop down their growing corn. In my farm environment it means to hoe the weeds

out of the corn patch. After watching me carefully for a long time, they eventually decided to trust me to do the work they wanted.

On those occasions I was able to see the Navajo side of the visitor arrival decorum. During mid-day we'd take a break from working and spend a couple of the hottest hours of the day in the shade of an arbor. It was maybe a quarter mile from a nearby road. I was astonished to observe that any time a pickup drove down the road everyone ran over to the side of the arbor to see who was going down the road and obviously to gossip about who it was, where they were going, and for what reasons. One time one of these pickups turned off the road and came towards our arbor. I found it amazing that just as the pickup approached everyone quickly sat down with their backs to the pickup and found something to occupy them like the dirt under their fingernails. The folks in the pickup stayed there and time passed and passed. Eventually the man got out and stood by the pickup door and spoke quietly to our group, "yá'át'ééh," "hello." Our folks quietly responded. Then slowly he entered the arbor and went from person to person, including me, and quietly exchanged greetings. That done, his wife and child got out of the pickup and came to do the same round of greetings. This was followed by a long slow conversation. After this progressed I was eventually told that they were quitting work at the field for the day so they could fix a meal for their guests. I was taken back to my hogan by those sent for supplies.

Mrs. Betony was a weaver, as are so many Navajo women. Historically the Navajos learned weaving from their Hopi neighbors, but the men are the weavers at Hopi, suggesting some interesting inter-tribal relationships. We commissioned Mrs. Betony to weave us a rug of her design. She worked on it most of the time we were there finishing it up just before we left. We were able to observe her carding the wool, spinning the yarn, dyeing the yarn, setting up her traditional loom, and the long careful and complicated process of weaving. There are patterns distinctive to the various weaving regions on the Navajo Reservation. Our rug, which I still have, was woven in the design of the storm pattern. It is clearly not the most refined of weavings, compared to the great many I've seen over the years, but it is special in my personal connection with it.

Judy's younger sister, Kim, came to stay with us for a couple weeks which was good since I was gone most days. And Corbin in diapers added his own contributions to the joys of the adventure. Every few days we'd drive to the Cow Springs Trading post where we could purchase a few groceries, fill our plastic water cans, pick up mail, and sit in front of the place on the long benches there pretending to be "real Indians."

I recall that my expectation in doing fieldwork would be to find some highly knowledgeable man who would confide all sorts of Navajo secrets to me. I knew of a few ethnographies of this sort. I recall one day meeting one old Navajo man,

his name was Doc White Singer, and pitching him my idea arguing that when he was gone all his knowledge would be lost unless he told it to me and I put it in a book that would last. He didn't hesitate in his response informing me that should what he knew die with him, if it were ever needed it would return. That was a kind of confidence in the permanence of culturally based knowledge and wisdom I had not encountered before. I'm well aware that my writing these stories as in some sense a record I'll leave betrays my lack of confidence that extant knowledge is somehow always present.

Looking back now I don't regret not accomplishing some amazing discovery of secret or special knowledge or even making some enduring relationship with some eccentric old wise one. I've done what some might call fieldwork in a number of cultures since and, looking back, what I most appreciate is that being in the place, walking in the land, interacting however awkwardly with the people, and feeling the discomfort of not knowing the language or the lifeways or the food or the fashion of those you may know lots about from books is a remarkable way of learning and experiencing that can't actually be documented. Yet, as one goes on after these experiences, things not known or recognized to have been learned by being-in-the-presence-of kind of experience can emerge, can come to awareness often to one's surprise and delight. I can now see that my recent articulation of theories of experience in my book *The Proper Study of Religion* is the extension of the time I spent on the Navajo Reservation so many decades ago.

There are also traces of Navajo influence on my decades of studying dancing culminating in my current work on a book tentatively titled, *Moving and Vitality*. I've struggled with bringing attention to the actual experience of moving, the in-process dynamic that isn't equivalent to any place. To be in a place is to be stationary, not moving. My work is located in biology (including neurology and physiology) and philosophy in order to develop ways of exploring the ongoingness of self-moving, moving that is the result of biological engagement. Part of the problem is that English language is so noun focused; it wants to halt everything by naming it. We want to name things as objects, often inanimate objects. Navajo language is verb oriented, which means that the language reflects a dynamic understanding of the world with everything always moving and relating one to another. To try to approximate the world corresponding with English, Navajos have to make constructions like "that moving dynamic process of a certain character isn't somehow moving; is that even possible?" I now realize that it is perhaps my exposure to Navajo language a half century ago that planted seeds that mostly sprouted and grew outside of my conscious but then to have blossomed in my current research.

In my interest in the biological distinctiveness of human beings that developed over the long haul of evolution I often focus on the conjoined

evolution of hands with their opposing grasping thumbs, big brains that enable self-reflection and language, and upright posture that correlates with upright bipedal movement. It is these biological gifts of evolution that I've explored as enabling the agentic, behavioral, capacities that distinguish humans. Perhaps the most common principle I have developed to explore these distinctions of being human is one I call an *aesthetic of impossibles*. By this phrase I try to attend to our distinctly human capability to hold together two things, and connect them as somehow the same, all the while knowing they are not the same at all. For example, consider the common metaphor which is the foundation of language. Metaphor is to understand one thing in terms of another (we identify the two) that we know all along are clearly not the same. Biologically I trace this human capacity to the evolution of the hand focusing on the dexterity and separateness of the fingers. I have claimed, that in my imagination, the first act of the practice of an aesthetic of impossibles was when an early human being stretched out a finger pointing to a thing to designate it. There is in this action a connection made with the aid of sight between the pointed finger, which is *here*, with a designated object, which is *there*. The finger is not the object, but it connects by reference to the object. It is the evolved biological character of the finger that allows this referential relationship to develop. This opens the door to language where the words we speak are not the things to which they refer, yet, of course, they are. Words are, in some sense, like fingers. Fingers open the door to art. And to symbols. And to ritual. And to most every capability and capacity that distinguishes us humans from our animal kin.

When I was learning about Navajos and being around them absorbing something of their distinctive life ways, I discovered that Navajos don't point with their fingers to designate objects. They point by puckering their lips and directing them in a general direction they intend. Perhaps in so doing they connect spoken language with the act of designation usually assigned to the pointing finger. They also do not make eye contact which I always found confusing since I could never tell if they were talking to me or someone else. These Navajo experiences raised for me the issue of how we refer to and interact with the environment, the world in which we live. The differences I experienced with the Navajo, certainly not fully conscious at the time and only gradually emerging since, led me to my current work which incorporates these concerns in my studies of perceiving and knowing, the senses as active knowing encounters with our environment. These differences may also underlie my persistent interest in gesture and posture.

In my new book *The Proper Study of Religion*, I write extensively on what it means to scholarship to have in-the-presence-of kind of experience, such as being for a while around Navajos in Navajoland rather than simply reading about them in books. And I also broach whether or not this kind of experience is

valuable even if one doesn't collect data or write formal descriptions or uncover something previously unknown. My mentor Jonathan Smith was well known to be totally satisfied with learning from books with no direct experience of his subject of study. Of course, many things he studied were in the ancient past or the physically distant exotic of the recent past, yet it was clearly his preference to rely on intermediate sources. I wrote of my contrast to him, feeling the importance for me of traveling and dancing and walking in the landscape of my subjects. In my book I raised these questions in a way that I thought would be impossible to resolve or answer, at least as a rule followed by the academy. But I can appreciate that my early physical encounter with Navajos and Navajoland, as trivial and inconsequential as it seemed now to be, along with my travels to many other cultures to learn their dances, gave me an important foundation for raising very fundamental academic questions that have not been yet adequately engaged.

Water and Life: Journey to the Hopi Sipapuni

Flagstaff Arizona is a fascinating town. Located at the foot of the San Francisco Peaks it is a lovely forested area with a diverse culture and so much of interest close by. The south rim of the Grand Canyon is not far north of Flagstaff and picturesque Sedona is but a short drive south. The Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Yaqui, Apache, Pima and Papago, and many other Native American communities are nearby. It is the home of Northern Arizona University.

While researching and writing my dissertation on Navajo prayer at the Museum of Northern Arizona I met Karl Luckert, a German who was studying many aspects of Navajo religion, and Arne Hassing, who was studying Norwegian Methodism. Both taught at NAU. Karl was highly adventurous connecting with Navajos all over the place and had a courage and boldness in his field studies that I never had. We were in Flagstaff through the spring of 1974. Karl came up with the idea that Arne and I should join him for a hike into one of the many branching canyons that surround the Little Colorado River that branches off the main Grand Canyon through which flows the Colorado River. He believed it was the canyon containing the actual sipapuni, the Hopi emergence place as told in their stories of origin. It is a geologic dome built up from the mineral deposits of a spring. Hopi people make annual pilgrimages to the sipapuni to collect yellow clay which is used in ritual. They continue on to a Grand Canyon cave along the Colorado River to gather salt. In their kivas, partially underground ceremonial rooms where secret societies meet and practice and perform rituals, the sipapuni is represented as a hole in the kiva floor.

Karl believed he knew the location of this particular canyon and thought he could take us to the canyon rim and the start of the trail accessed from the north side of the Grand Canyon. I finally agreed to the adventure and we set the date for Easter weekend. The plan was to drive to the north rim and hike as far as we could the first day searching for the sipapuni and climb back out of the canyon the second day, Easter Sunday.

Equipped with sleeping bags, food, and a good supply of water we drove north toward Navajoland, crossing the Colorado River near Cameron and continued on north until we found a rough road to the west leading us out onto the flatlands surrounding the canyons. Karl followed his research through branching roads that became fainter as we continued finally following a barely visible track that ended at a canyon rim. No parking lot, no evidence that anyone had parked there before, but Karl was confident. We packed up our gear and searched for something that would indicate a trail. As I recall we finally plunged into the rocky canyon following something that seemed to be a possible trail appearing here and there as we made our slanting descent into the canyon. I was never quite sure we were on the right trail, but I did find several potsherds which would have likely been from broken ceramic pots used to haul salt from the salt caves below.

We spent many hours fumbling our way along the canyon descending slowly yet debating how likely it was that we were on the Hopi trail. By late afternoon I began to feel physically drained and weak. I found myself disoriented and light headed. As we traveled on and on I felt worse and worse. Karl and Arne noticed my condition and we finally decided to camp for the night. As they went about setting up our little camping place I didn't have the strength to help. They encouraged me to just lie down and rest, hoping I'd begin to feel better. I didn't feel any better and began to think that surely I'd simply die in this canyon. Lying there thinking of dying I began to realize that I was thirsty. I'd been strictly conserving my water feeling to do so was necessary in order to have enough to get me out of the canyon the next day. There were certainly no sources of water in the canyon. As I lay dying, or thought I was doing so, I finally decided that I might just as well die without feeling thirsty. I picked up my water jug and began to drink my fill. Like a miracle, almost instantly I began to feel better and within but a few minutes I joined Karl and Arne at the camp. Later I learned that many people who die of dehydration on hikes do so with water still in their canteens.

The next day we continued on down the canyon, but never located the sipapuni. I'll never know if we just didn't go far enough or if we were in the wrong canyon. As we hiked up out of the canyon, our own emergence journey in honor of the Hopi, with me drinking water and feeling healthy as we trekked upward, I couldn't help on that Easter Sunday from occasionally breaking into a

refrain of the old hymn “Up from the Grave He Arose.” Hopi life on the high desert sings its own paean to the identity of water and life.

Arizona State University

In the midst of finishing my PhD dissertation while teaching at Oklahoma State University (1974-'75) I learned of a remarkable opportunity. Arizona State University was founding a new religious studies department and a distinctive element of that new department would be the inclusion of Native American religious studies. Richard Wentz (1928-2011) was in charge of developing the department and he'd been awarded a multi-year grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation to start a Native American religions program including paying the first three years' salary for a faculty specialist. I thought that likely they wouldn't have applied for such a grant unless they already had someone in mind to hire, but I applied anyway. I was invited for an interview and at the end of the interview I was offered the position, which I of course accepted on the spot. It was a fantastic opportunity since there were no Native American religious studies programs in the USA and I had been warned not to specialize in the area in part because there would never be a job for me. Thus, the very first semester after earning my PhD I had a tenure-track full time teaching position in a new religious studies department that included a program focused on my specialty and with grant money to present programs and to promote the field of study. I started teaching at Arizona State fall 1975.

The Native American work I did was complemented with the equally exciting work to create and establish a new department. Several other faculty members were hired at the same time. Delwin Brown (1935-2009) was a bit older and his area was Process Theology with strong background in philosophy and a love of Alfred North Whitehead. I don't really understand why this specialization would have been of much interest to a new department in a secular university, yet I found Del to be a fine colleague and close friend. He would later take a position at Iliff School of Theology in Denver about the same time I moved to the University of Colorado. He later became Iliff's Dean. Richard Martin was hired in the area of Islam. Richard later went on to Emory to finish his career. James Foard was hired and he studied Japanese religions. Richard Wentz's area was American religions. I believe both James and Richard stayed at ASU until they retired.

In the early years of this department we met regularly to chart the establishment and development of the study of religion. We also were personally and socially close as a group, often meeting in various of our homes for dinner and drinks and good conversation. It was lots of fun and fulfilled, in Arizona

style, what I had imagined an academic career would be like. These few years were the only ones in my entire career where I had close relationships with my faculty colleagues. When I moved to Colorado I fully expected there to be close relationships among faculty, but they didn't exist and I found myself isolated and again an outsider.

It is fascinating to me now that in those early days of my career at ASU we were struggling to understand and define what should constitute the study of religion in a secular university. Del's background in theology and philosophy and Richard Wentz's seminary training and closeness to the church contrasted with the rest of us who were not religious nor had we studied in seminary or anything related to theology. Despite his powerfully critical and philosophical mind, Del still held some sense that the study of religion ought to contribute to one's salvation, although I'm quite sure he wouldn't have put it that way. He was invested in trying to find the appropriate way that theological studies might fit and contribute to secular studies of religion. I think this interest was one of the factors that made him a good dean at Iliff and certainly he was an important figure in the professional organizations in his eagerness to bridge intellectual divides. With Lynell Cady he edited a volume *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain* (2002) in which I contributed a piece titled "Embodied Theology." My only published reference to theology in my whole career. My argument was that the very furniture and architecture of modern academia shapes everything that occurs in academic spaces in ways rooted in Western and Christian understandings of reality. Thus, Western academia is in some covert way Christian as imprinted by the gestural patterning that comprises the learning space and style. Now nearly 20 years later (and 45 years since those early ASU conversations) I am publishing *The Proper Study of Religion*, a book that lays out an extensive program for how a study of religion appropriate to a secular setting must be based on the biology and philosophy of human bodied self-movement.

Arizona State was where I got a chance to publish my first piece in a work that would gain wide attention. While at ASU the regional American Academy of Religion meetings were commonly held at the University of California, Santa Barbara. While attending one of these I met and made professional friendships with a number of the UCSB faculty. Walter Capps (1934-1997) was an established scholar widely known in professional circles. He edited a volume titled *Seeing with a Native Eye: Contributions to the Study of Native American Religion* (1976) for which he invited me to contribute a piece "The Shadow of a Vision Yonder." This publication gave me some academic standing in building my career. I well remember writing this piece sitting at a tiny desk that my parents had bought for me in junior high school scrunched at the foot of our bed in our little track house in Mesa Arizona.

My years at ASU included frequent trips to Hopi and Navajo and Zuni to experience as fully as possible the religious and cultural lives of those folks. I learned a little bit about teaching through endless experimentation. I hosted a major conference on Native American religions which gave me the chance to establish professional relationships and friendships with some important scholars and resources. Among those who attended were Barry Lopez who has since become well-known for his many books; Hopi author and artist from Hotevilla Emory Sekaquaptewa (1928-2007) with whom I would later co-teach courses and assist him in publishing one of the great accounts of Hopi clowns; Joann Kealiinohomoku (1930-2015) who introduced me to dance anthropology and who stirred controversy in referring to ballet as an ethnic dance; Del Hymes (1927-2009), the renowned folklorist, who had introduced the idea that every telling of a story recreates it; Barre Toelken (1935-2018) who was a wonderful speaker with loads of folklore experience the world over especially Native American; and Joseph Epes Brown (1920-2000) who had spent a lifetime studying Native Americans and was author of the widely read book *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (1953). These folks became valued and inspiring colleagues shaping my reading and experience and outlook in ways that departed from the standards at that time for the academic study of religion and many of their influences can be traced to my current work.

ASU is where I tried to learn how to be an effective teacher. I experimented my way through the slow evolution that never stopped. I don't remember much detail other than that the actual feel of the room where I taught was important to me. I remember going to check out assigned rooms prior to teaching in them. My Native American religions classes often included lots of Native American students. Some of them came from their reservation homes while others came from families that lived in places like Los Angeles and Phoenix who had not allowed their kids to speak their native languages or learn much about their heritage. In these classes I think I began to appreciate a teaching principle that I always practiced which is that education is always a collaborative process with everyone effectively contributing. A young woman student named Lenni Benson and I became friends and that connection has continued with occasional renewals since. She is currently Distinguished Chair in Immigration and Human Rights Law at New York Law School.

I taught at ASU less than ten years, yet those were important years during which I established a reputation in the study of Native American religions and what now would be called Indigenous Religions through a number of publications and my regular presentations and participation in national conferences. Perhaps I established a nascent reputation as well for contributing to the development of religion theory. I began to show that an outsider and misfit might offer enriching alternative perspectives on a range of important topics. I

developed foundational professional relationships, yet mostly outside of the study of religion. I developed somewhat wobbly teaching legs but I loved the practice to improve.

ASU was a foundation building period in my academic life and I had two kids and owned a home in the effort to become something of a responsible adult. I believe that that time was also one of the more enjoyable times in my academic and personal life.

Mother Earth

Choosing Native American religions as the focus of my doctoral studies, I found only one course in the University of Chicago anthropology department that would provide me with the background knowledge of this vast field. Thus, I had to do almost all of my learning on my own with no formal course work. I spent endless hours reading many dozens of huge volumes from the collection of annual reports for the Bureau of American Ethnology. Each of these reports focuses on a single culture, usually written by a renowned author who spent considerable time living in that particular culture. The reports have a bit of a check-list feel to them in that they all include roughly the same range of topics that ethnologists had agreed were the fundamental elements that comprise a culture. While my dissertation research was on the Navajo, I knew that, should I ever be lucky enough to land a job, I'd be asked to teach general courses, perhaps something like Native American Religions.

My first tenure-track position was at Arizona State University in Tempe and I was extremely fortunate that the position was funded by a grant to start a Native American religions program. While clearly being in Arizona the cultures in the Southwest were focal, I felt I needed to teach introductory courses on Native American Religions that would include many different cultures.

Arizona State University is in a state that has extensive Native American populations so, as I'd hoped, a considerable number of students in my classes had Native American heritage. What I hadn't anticipated was that many of them came to my classes to learn something about their own cultures. There was a cultural movement mid-twentieth century that affected many of their parents. Many young native people left their home reservations to go to cities like Phoenix or Los Angeles to work. This generation felt their Indigenous heritage was a disadvantage and that the best thing they could do for their kids was to encourage English language rather than their native languages and to limit their exposure to their grandparents and the ancestral lands and cultural ways. That voluntary assimilation strategy was understandable, yet tragic. Consequently, while a few young Native Americans in my classes were fully knowledgeable of their own

language and traditions, there were quite a few Native American students who spoke only English and were hoping to learn something about their heritage from me. This formed a rich and challenging course contest.

These were the late '70s with post-war concerns (the Vietnam War ended in Spring 1975). Ecology and the environment were important concerns for many young people. I began to notice so many of my students, of both Native American and European-American ancestry, expressing their admiration for "Indian religion" because it, usually singular, centered on, as they noted, Mother Earth. I remember a student even giving me a bumper sticker that said "Love Your Mother Earth." Sometimes these comments also included reference to Father Sky or maybe the Great Spirit, but Mother Earth predominated. At first, hearing these comments I appreciated that students were connecting Native Americans and ecology and I was grateful that they expressed their interests to me. I kept hearing the Mother Earth references from my students and I began to notice frequent references to the same notions—monolithic native religion centering on Mother Earth—made by popular media, other scholars, and even some Native Americans themselves.

Having, not so long before, spent endless hours reading about many different Native American cultures, I began to reflect on the implied universality among Native Americans regarding this belief in a common figure. I was confounded because I couldn't recall such a figure appearing in any of the ethnographies and other works I had read. An even more fundamental concern for me was that I clearly knew that there existed deep and fundamental differences among the many cultures native to North America. Despite the tendency of white Americans to project on all these different folks a monolithic identity, it just didn't exist. What were all these people referring to by the proper name Mother Earth? Was it the supposition of a common universal deity, a reference to an ecological bent, a metaphor? It was difficult to tell. I began to take notes on the references to Mother Earth I encountered as well as to begin searching the ethnographic records for the existence of a common figure, or trait, or metaphor or anything that would help me understand what was being referred to. Of course, I knew I would not find a single figure common to all these many varying cultures, but I wanted to collect specific cultural references that might in any way suggest a common figure. This collection grew over the years and my thinking on it became more urgent. It demanded an exploration if not an explanation.

In the meantime, I had been asked to write a textbook on *Native American Religions* (1982) that was part of a series focused on the major world religions. The same year I published for a similar series a book titled *Beyond the Primitive* (1982) that perhaps ought to be the subject of its own story. In both of these books I understood my challenge was to introduce a category of cultures and religions where the classification was mostly imposed and the diversity among

the hundreds of individual cultures included in it was, to me anyway, much more interesting and important than some concocted commonality. Re-stated, Native Americans, even confined to North America, comprise six to eight hundred cultures each with its own language and lifeways, its own mythology and ritual, its own history. Language was a fundamental marker of difference to me. Even in the Southwest several major language families (similar to the familiar categories like Romance languages and Germanic languages) and the differences between languages spoken by some peoples living adjacent to one another might be no less than the difference between Chinese and English. Historically many of these cultures were in constant conflict with one another. My goal, then as now, was to appreciate cultural distinctiveness and difference and diversity while finding ways of being categorically inclusive without destroying these fundamental differences. As I consider my whole career, these stated goals practiced in the writing of those first books characterize one thread that is prominent throughout most everything I have done.

With these text books as context, it makes sense that my approach to furthering my Mother Earth studies had to be to comprehend and embrace the existence and importance of Mother Earth, whatever this name referred to, while making it very clear that Mother Earth could not be understood as a primordial goddess, or any other category of entity, universal to all these many cultures whose distinctiveness and diversity must, above all, be honored and respected. I traced historical references to Mother Earth or anything seemingly relevant and discovered that most of them arose in the context of native people trying to defend their relationship to their land, that is their retention of their land, against the encroachment or outright theft of it by European-Americans. They seemed to seek some common human relationship, explicitly the love and respect a child has for his or her mother, to appeal to the sympathies of their oppressors. Since the threat to ancestral lands was experienced commonly by most Native Americans, this strategy had general appeal and I showed that it gained broad usage among people of different cultures, even if it did not have reference to a specific figure in the mythology and rituals of any of these specific cultures. The name Mother Earth was used most commonly in the political arenas of encounter, often in courts of law. Mother Earth then, according to my studies, was an important and real figure, but her origin and history were inseparable from the creative encounters of Native Americans and European-Americans, mostly focused on the importance of land to both. Thus, when I wrote the book I subtitled it *An American Story*.

Although I started the book while I was at Arizona State, I didn't finish it until I was at the University of Colorado. It was published in 1987 fortunately by the prestigious University of Chicago Press and immediately became the subject of controversy, at once praised and subject to rather vicious attack. While not

actually bothering to read the book, many who attacked it, thought incorrectly that my thesis was to deny the reality of Mother Earth for Native Americans. Others believed that, as a white man, I was attempting to steal Mother Earth for white folks. Many of these were hostile attacks especially the one spearheaded by Ward Churchill who gathered a bunch of his political allies to join in attacking me. This is the same Churchill who would be fired from the University of Colorado after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 when he wrote that those who had lost their lives had deserved to die. In addressing me as a scholar, some young Native American scholars raised the remarkable thesis that “you have to be one to know one” positing some idea that there exists a Native American ontology (understandings of reality) comprehensible only to those who are genetically Native American. This was somehow to argue that anything I wrote on the topic of Native Americans was thus racist. I attempted to respond in print to some of these attacks—after all this position of “you have to be one to know one” to me inarguably presumes fundamental ontological distinctions based only on race—but I soon discovered that this effort to defend my work was useless since the basis for the attacks was not even close to being an academic issue that might be discussed and debated. It was a political argument through and through, based on my color and race, and no amount of academic discourse would make a difference. I don’t deny that there is a strong connection between the political and the academic. Much of my career has been to highlight and critique this very point. Yet, when a work is attacked without even being read (and at some level I can understand the strategy), I couldn’t find a way that I might engage in what was being said and written about *Mother Earth*. My interest in developing the field of Native American studies also encouraged the inclusion of Native American scholars, thus it was simply inappropriate for me to push my academic assessments in a highly charged ethnic and racial political environment for which I had considerable sympathy. The time in history was simply not right.

After I formally stopped my studies of Native Americans in 1992 to go on to things I was more interested in, some scholars thought that the hostile responses that I received for *Mother Earth* were my reason for this change. Certainly, the high politicization and the abandonment of anything remotely academic persisted and cast its shadow on all my work making for a hostile work environment. I have never regretted writing that book and believe that it stands up well academically and serves American history while also revealing something of the highly subjective aspects of scholarship. The reputation of the book has held up over the decades and I’ve been surprised to learn that many scholars now see it as a ground-breaking work. I was invited to Umeå University in Sweden in the fall of 2019 largely on the basis of the book. It gave me an opportunity to return to this topic to write a new lecture now decades later. In my paper presentation I found that several scholars at Umeå studying various cultures

seemed to expect me to do some lauding of a universal earth mother for they found this figure in the cultures they studied. Doubtless they were irritated that not only has my view not changed, but that now I believe that Mother Earth might best be understood as a widely held meme, as well as other options. Richard Dawkins introduced the term “meme” in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, defining it as a “unit of cultural transmission.” The title of that Umeå lecture is “What is Mother Earth? A Name, A Meme, a Conspiracy.” My point is that what Mother Earth offers is a quick and convenient meme to embrace a well-intended, romantically-inspired, commonality among all, but especially indigenous, peoples. Yet, as meme it is a thoroughly contemporary development that is comprised of little more than a name invoking a strategy to protect land and identity.

Looking back, I think all this Mother Earth controversy negatively impacted and shaped my career and in some of its more public dimensions I regret that it took place that way. I was widely vilified by some for a number of years. However, I am fully satisfied that my work was done with the greatest integrity and the sincerest efforts including taking the utmost care not to offend or harm others. One cannot control how others read and understand one’s work, that’s simple modern literary theory. I now recognize that core ideas in that work persisted and developed in ways I would then have never anticipated. For example, last year I published a book titled *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference* (2019) that argued in broad terms the very idea I worked with in *Mother Earth*, which is that history and change unfold through the encounters among those who are different from one another. Thus, rather than hoping we might merely tolerate those who are different from us, I argue that we should rather discover how to appreciate and treasure them and seek interaction with them. Such is the source of the richness of life through change over time. And, of course, I have lived much of my life, especially the whole Bantaba experiment (which I’ll describe later), guided by this standard.

Rocky Mountain Dome

My first academic sabbatical came in 1981 and I was fortunate enough to arrange a half-time teaching position at the University of Colorado in Boulder so that I could extend the one-semester leave to a full year. We had enjoyed camping vacations in Colorado and as a Kansas flatlander who had endured the Phoenix heat for years, it was a delight to have a year in the Rocky Mountains. We rented a house in the mountains from a CU faculty person who was on leave for the year. We loved every minute of mountain life. It was like being on vacation for a year without the inconvenience of a tent.

As the academic year progressed, it became clear that CU was interested in hiring me for a tenured full professor position and I was excited by the opportunity. To fulfill the obligations of my ASU contract I had to return to Arizona for a year before beginning the new position. Before leaving Boulder, we began to realize our dream of mountain living by searching for land in the foothills west of Boulder. Throwing caution and every ounce of good sense to the wind we purchased a three-acre plot of land that had no developments other than access by a very steep one lane dirt road that zig zagged up the mountain side to the property about a mile off the paved road. The lot saddled a south facing ridge with views of the Arapahoe Peaks and the Continental Divide to the west and downtown Denver to the southeast. Trees covered the three acres and a suitable building site was located at a sharp turn in the road.

We had consulted an architect or two about designing a house for the location, but we had absolutely no money. We owned a home in Tempe and would have a bit of money when we sold it. The question was, how to have a home that took advantage of the environment, that gave us magnificent views, and was somehow affordable? As I think back on this process now, I can't begin to imagine what the hell I was thinking in buying land with no idea about what was involved in building a house on such a spot. Even thinking about it now feels stressful. I have known of many who attempted this foolishness but just couldn't finish it having to walk away and abandoned it.

I recall visiting my folks in Cherryvale Kansas sometime during this interim year and my dad knew of a dome house that had been built in a nearby town. To even show interest in such a modern structure seems so out of character for Dad that I question my memory, but I'm pretty sure it is at least somewhat accurate. We arranged to go see this dome home and even get inside for a look. I loved the openness of the space. The dome is self-supporting so there are no interior obstructions. My imagination was excited by the geometrical design of the triangles, the pentagons, the hexagons, the great arcs. Buckminster Fuller was genius in his design of this shape. In that first experience I recognized the challenge of creating a living space was necessarily linked to the shape of the dome. There was much possibility for awkwardly acute angles to occur when vertical walls intersected the dome, yet this challenge only excited me more.

Studying the building process, I found companies that built kits for domes of various diameters and that the space could be modified, effectively enlarged, by setting the dome on short vertical walls. I located a couple of funky hippy type guys that were builders and one of them actually lived in a very rough dome on Sugarloaf Mountain and was interested in helping with the initial construction of the dome.

We moved to Boulder in the summer of 1983 living in married student housing and broke ground for the dome that fall. I spent every extra minute for

a year and more working to complete the house to the point it could be occupied, even if nowhere near finished. We moved in on Memorial Day weekend in 1984 (almost exactly 36 years ago as I write this on May 23, 2020). As we were on our way to spend our first night at the dome I recall stopping along Four Mile Canyon where, near the road, I located an enormous lilac bush just about to bloom. I cut a huge batch of lilacs for us to enjoy in our new home and to infuse the environment with a lovely fragrance.

I hope one day to write the stories of the homes I've lived in throughout my life and how they reflect who I was and what I was interested in at the time. This dome christened our move to the Rockies, my advancing academic career, the realization of creativity of design and imagination, the exhausting physical labor of building most of a home with my own hands while holding down a full time job, the decline of my marriage which was in part due to my distraction and exhaustion related to the house, the raising of my kids who loved the mountains and the house, the return to the home when I thought it had been lost in a divorce, the realization that after a 20-year history it represented parts of me I needed to move beyond, and, after leaving the home, seeing pictures of it on television burning in a forest fire. The house was an extension of me, an expression of me, a fruit of my love and labor, and a witness to a period when I was a dark and angry person coincident with being a popular teacher, productive scholar, and creative person. I had, and maybe still have, a love-hate regret-gratitude relationship with the dome house and my emotions related to it so many years later are still a raw jumble.

Careening Toward Death

It must have begun in the fall after we moved in the dome house, that would have been 1984. Although we were living in the house, it was far from being complete, so I continued to work evenings and weekends on construction while I taught at CU and did the preparation for teaching as well as ongoing research and writing the rest of the time. Regularly Judy and the kids would go to bed at normal bedtimes and I'd often stay up until two a.m. As I recall it was the hours after kid bedtime that I devoted to my research and writing, necessary not only to establishing my professional creds, but also to exercise my passion.

I began to find myself, at two a.m., simply turning to my computer and resting my fingers on the keys and allowing whatever wanted to come out of me to do so. I still often find myself, over 35 years later, doing much the same thing (as evident in these writings), yet not so late at night. These were often the most creative and honest of all my writings. Some were highly personal, others pertained to my research. Despite the late hour, these were important times for

me. Quite frequently as I delayed going to bed and turned to writing, I was met with the feeling of overwhelm I began to label “careening toward death.” I felt that to allow myself to let the day end by going to bed was somehow a defeat, a loss, a giving way to the subtraction of one more day from my life.

Now at age 77 I still feel this way every single night. Although I am no longer finishing construction on a house or building a career, I am still working consistently on research and writing. Although I’ve lived alone for almost 30 years so there’s no kid or spouse bedtime with which to coordinate, I dread going to bed. Although I often spend a few hours watching mindless television in the evening and I always read every night until I can’t keep my eyes open, I hate turning off the lights and going to sleep.

There is a favorite photograph of my parents on my bedside table and I often reflect with them on how long they have been gone and what they are missing out on in the world. Most recently with the coronavirus quarantine, I’ve been reflecting on my new realization that, born in 1914 and 1915, they survived the so-called Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. Had they not lived, I and all my family would never have existed. But these brief reflections give way at the end of day to regrets that one more day has passed and I experience with anguish the acceleration of my life toward its end. The only thing that is slightly consoling is if I can acknowledge that I have accomplished something notable during the day. I often take a minute before sleeping to do this accounting.

In what is the ultimate canceling—or I suppose that would be self-canceling—I find myself increasingly living in anticipation of my death. Such a mood forces me to ask: Why do we exist? What becomes of our lives? Is there any sense in it at all? Every morning and evening when I glance at the photo of my long-dead parents. I know that my older sister also still thinks of them, yet I realize that when the two of us are gone nothing of my parents will be retained in the memories of any living people. They will effectively disappear into some impersonal ether. I’ll not be far behind. In such a relatively short span of years following death most of us become canceled, existing only as a datum absorbed in the vast evolutionary flow of biology and history. A nit in the plethora of abundance digested by process. A droplet splashed briefly above the flowing surface to be quickly reabsorbed into the immense sea of existence. I feel shame and sadness that the world I’ll leave will surely threaten the freedoms and possibilities, if not also the very existence, of my kids and grandkids.

Beyond the Primitive

In the early days, mid-twentieth century, of the development of an academic study of religion suitable to a secular university, considerable attention was given

to what were then commonly referred to as “primitive people” or “primitives.” I think this inclusion was due largely to the heritage of anthropology and sociology, fields whose major theoretical territory was charted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing heavily on small-scale cultures whose languages were not written and who lived subsistence lifestyles, that is, folks that were often called “primitives.” This designation reflected academic and modern Western values more than anything and it often implicated two quite distinct and even opposing images projected on them. Primitives might be imagined as brute stupid beings barely above animals in sophistication that were inclined to violence and crudeness. Yet, primitives might also be considered original, primal, pure, natural ecologists, nature lovers, close to animals, caring, generous, and wise as expected of those not ruined by history. In terms of theories of religion, the primitives were either those who practiced the magic that existed prior to religion or, imagined as god’s earliest creations, they held belief in high gods that represented the purest form of religion. These polar characterizations remain widely present in popular literature and film and even in academic works and are applied to folks indigenous to the Americas, Africa, Australia and many other areas. We are all very familiar with these images if we may not always be so aware that both are projections representing Western, usually Christian, values.

By the 1970s it was not so common to develop religion theory based on the primitive, yet it has been common practice during the last quarter of the century up to today to write books, especially text books for college students, that include chapters on the major world religions supplemented by a seemingly obligatory chapter on all the others, that is, on those who had earlier been called “primitives.”

As a student of Native American religions (one group that would have been included among the primitives) with there being almost no other religion scholars studying Africans or Australian Aborigines or South Pacific Islanders or Native South Americans, I was called on to fill this gap. Quite the order given that I believed that, in most senses, each and every one of these cultures was as complex and interesting and notable as are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, even if their religions had no holy books or written histories. There are thousands of these cultures in areas all over the globe. I considered it an insult to clump them together in a default “and then there are all these weird others” kind of category.

I no longer recall who asked me to write a book on the religions of these folks. I’m sure it was for one of those series of books that followed the pattern of representing the major religions, often referred to as “world religions,” plus the primitives. I always accepted these invitations knowing full well that I wasn’t actually prepared to do the work, yet I was passionate about what should be avoided which were the usual romanticized generalizations.

Since it was the early 1980s it seemed imperative to boldly shift our attention away from the projections of primitivism, however valued, onto these actual people and to find new ways of encountering them, the actual people, that were more open and honest. We remain today still searching for some satisfying way of doing this work. To set the general parameters of this study I needed to figure out what we should call these folks, what is an appropriate category label? I recognized that whatever term I used would likely shape all that would be written about them. I found myself thinking lots about the media and modes of communication, being influenced by Walter Ong's work *Orality and Literacy* (1982). I believed that a major distinction between *us* and *them* is in terms of distinctive modes of communication, literacy and orality—we write, they don't. Yet the terminology of not writing is treacherous. The terms “illiterate” or “pre-literate” imply stupidity or the undeveloped. I settled on nonliterate as a compromise. The title became *Beyond the Primitive: Religions of Nonliterate People* (1982). I did my best to show that even attempting to approach the study of these folks was fraught with difficulties, yet I offered a few ways, illustrated with examples, to attempt to do so. As the book took its place in my history, it had a strong following, but I grew increasingly concerned about it. Literacy might not be the best measure of cultures and religions and it finally dawned on me that it is wholly inappropriate to describe groups of cultures by a trait, literacy in this case, that they do not have. Duh!

On that point there is a funny story. A long-time close colleague of my mentor, Jonathan Smith, was Jacob “Jack” Neusner (1932-2016). I knew Jack and he invited me to contribute to some of his projects over the years. Jack is perhaps the greatest genius and most accomplished scholars I have ever met. He published over 900 volumes in his career which works out to about one every six weeks for 60 years. I had a chance meeting with him at a professional meeting one year. I was reading a book when he came up to greet me. He snatched the book from me and as we chatted, he went through the book turning pages as fast as he could. When we were wrapping up our conversation he gave me a critique of what he thought of the book and made several specific references that he identified by page number. Jack was well known to be cantankerous and demanded loyalty and attention from his many former students. He didn't hesitate to write rage letters to those with whom he disagreed. Sometime later, one day I received a letter from Jack. He told me that he had read my book *Beyond the Primitive* and found it to be a fine work. He went on with details. This was the period when I had become disenchanted with the book myself and I felt slightly guilty receiving this praise from Jack. But to have the great Jacob Neusner even note that he'd read my book was an honor. While still unsettled by his letter I received another letter from him a day or two later. In this one, Jack indicated

that he'd reflected further on my book and realized it had a serious flaw, naming, of course, the very one that had bothered me.

The last note on this topic is that as I began to put together my recent book *Creative Encounters* I realized that I really wanted to return to this issue of how to indicate by way of label or name those folks scholars study. Even in the case of Native Americans the history of naming started with Indian and then American Indian and then Native American and First American and First Nations. With the primitive, the names cycled through primal, original, among others to finally arrive at the currently popular term "Indigenous." All these names, yet it has seemed to me that each is another layer of a failed strategy. Indeed, so much of my recent work has been to show that the presumptions that underlie the issues we think we are trying to resolve actually make any resolution of them impossible and fraught with undesirable implications. I included in *Creative Encounters* an essay titled "Not by Any Name" to offer a different strategy based in the proposition that the identities of both ourselves and those we study are shaped, if not largely determined, by the ongoing encounters we have. There is no final or correct solution, there are only the ongoing encounters and the continual generation and evolution of identities, theirs and ours. That's a good thing, if perhaps also unsettling.

Mid-life Beginning of Dancing

I was forty years old when we moved to Boulder and between teaching full time and maintaining a research and publication program I spent every spare minute working on building our home. Regretfully, I was not the husband and father I should have been. Almost all of the work related to homebuilding was done alone with Judy not much interested in participating. The result was my growing anger and resentment. I'm pretty sure that our marriage was not great from the start due perhaps to very different personality types and personal goals.

Once the house was finished enough for us to move into it, I still had enormous demands on my time and energies, but the pressure to make us a physical place in which to live was a bit reduced. I suppose it is natural that at this point rather than rediscovering a marriage relationship that was good, if too long ignored, what we discovered was a relationship that seemed to be likely irreparably damaged. I regret that I didn't have the courage then to simply say, "This isn't working for me and surely isn't good for anyone in our family" and take the measures to end it. Yet the kids were still at home. We had just moved as a family into a new home, if unfinished. I felt I had no choice but to make the marriage work, at least to the point of civility and manageability.

Couples' therapy seemed essential. I don't know how we discovered or selected a therapist, but I remember that it was a man and that his office was in a tiny little red brick house on the south side of West Pearl Street. I remember that one of the first things he suggested was a trial separation. He described it as requiring that I move out and that I would have access to my kids only on the weekends. My reaction was an immediate rejection. The rules seemed sexist and disgusting to me and I'd have none of it. There was no way I would allow myself to have such limited access to my own kids. I now regret I didn't get up and walk out, but I didn't know anything about therapy much less about adult relationships. I've long wondered whether this suggestion by the therapist was a strategy to get me to state my values more so than an actual proposal. I pressed for things that we might do to repair and rebuild the marriage. He suggested that we find things to do together as a couple that were new to both of us. That seemed plausible. I knew that there was an inequality built into the relationship because I was working, building a career, experiencing success, doing things I loved, making the money (even though it was never enough) and being around people, while Judy was not working, had no sense of what she wanted, felt isolated by spending her time in a remote mountain home, and having almost no friends. Yet, what might we do together that would be engaging, challenging, and give us a common shared experience?

Jenny was maybe eleven or twelve years old at the time and she was taking a jazz dance class. As I look back on that, I have no memory of why she took that class, who discovered the opportunity for her, or even how much she liked it. What I remember with crystal clarity was her recital. The little studio was in an industrial strip mall on Thirtieth Street in Boulder. It had two studios; one at the front and another towards the back. The recital was in the front room and Jenny performed with the other kids. At the end of the recital the teacher of course thanked us for coming and supporting our children and then mentioned that she was teaching a beginning adult jazz dance class and a new session was soon to begin. She invited any of us interested to take the class. Ha! Perhaps this was our shared opportunity to do something together totally new to us both.

As I look back now, this very moment changed the remainder of all of our lives. It led to an enormous shift in my career, to the end of my marriage, to much international travel, to a range of new relationships, to events that would eventually result in the existence of my grandkids, and to Fatu's life centering around dancing. It would lead to many publications, to businesses, to whole communities, to a generation of multi-ethnic/racial kids, and to the character of my current life. Surely there are times in all our lives that are pivotal. Indeed, I suppose in some sense these are more commonplace than we recognize. Yet, it is perhaps a bit rarer that we can identify very specifically the precise moment

(although I can't place the date beyond being sometime around 1987) that everything took a distinctly different course from the preceding moment.

I was overweight, out of shape, physically exhausted, and had practiced for decades the movement-discouraging sedentary lifestyle common to an academic. I had exerted much physical labor in building the dome, but I still lived more in thoughts and ideas than in actions. Judy was not physically active at this time, as I recall, yet I remember that at some point while we lived in the mountains she became devoted to daily walks. I think she started walking in the late '80s or early '90s.

We had friends who were a couple. Bruce was a fine art craftsman and she (no longer remember her name) was a teacher I think. We discussed taking this adult jazz dance class together and agreed we should give it a try. I was 44 or 45.

From the first class all of us felt awkward and uncomfortable, but it was fun in our stumbling ungracefulness, that is, all of us except Judy who pretty much hated it. I knew that she was not necessarily athletic, yet the very physicality of the dancing was so uncomfortable that she had a strong dislike for the class. I don't recall if she finished taking the session or if I wound up doing it alone with our friends. What I recall with crystal clarity was my own response to it.

I knew I was terrible, awkward, clumsy and had difficulty remembering the choreography much less actually executing it. I also knew that, quite suddenly, I had the experience of being bodied. Of course, we are always bodies, but this dancing connected me with the sheer pleasure of moving. It was a raw powerful physical experience. I well remember, at that time, that as I walked daily from my office to my car, I experienced a new aliveness I'd never before felt. Despite the soreness of my muscles, as I walked I was constantly amazed, enthralled, by the very human capability to walk. My body seemed to hum with vitality and newfound awareness. I could feel my muscles and my bones and my connection with the sidewalk and everything else. Attempting to find the words and ideas that allow me to articulate this feeling has preoccupied my academic work from then to the present.

I'm sure it wasn't long after I started that first jazz class that I became aware of my extreme lack of physical fitness. In high school I worked out with weights in some of my friends' garages now and then, but I didn't know much about fitness gyms. I had heard that in Boulder there was some sort of place where mostly women went to do fitness dancing like jazzercise. I decided to go there to see what it was about. It was closed, but I accidentally came on a new fitness club called "The Pulse" and gathering my courage I parked and entered the place. Once I did, Karen Woodard, the owner, escorted me on a tour of the gym and I was absolutely blown away. The place was beautiful and new and loaded with equipment. They had a huge room for group exercise classes. By their names I

didn't really even know what these classes were about. I was pretty much overwhelmed.

Karen took me into her office to discuss membership plans. She said that they had a promotion going that involved the prospective member picking objects randomly out of a fish bowl and each had a number on it from 1 to 12. Whatever number was drawn would be the number of free months added to a one-year membership commitment. Fortunately, I drew a pretty high number and totally surprising myself (since I never did anything for myself) by actually signing up for a membership.

I learned that they had a low impact aerobics class, whatever that was, on the schedule for late that afternoon. I went to Target and bought gym shorts, a tee shirt, and shoes so I could take the class. When I entered the room terrified of what I'd gotten myself into, I was stunned to find my jazz dance class teacher as the teacher of this class. That too had to be a sign from the universe, I mused. And since that moment I've pretty much been a gym rat taking multiple movement classes every week. I became instantly addicted to aerobics and step aerobics classes and arranged my academic schedule so I would be able to take the classes I most loved.

I'd heard that one might expect a month of working out for every year of dormancy to get into shape. It did take that long, a good two years. Before I had much fitness I so loved the exertion of the classes I took that sometimes during class I'd have to run to the locker room to throw up from over-exertion.

At some point, maybe a couple of years after I joined that gym, they offered a new class on Friday evenings. I think it was called Cardio Funk and it was taught by a guy named Lee Klinger who was a scientist at NCAR (National Center for Atmospheric Research). His mother had owned a dance studio and Lee had grown up dancing. When he traveled to various cities for his work, he'd find a dance studio that taught this new emerging form of dancing that we now know as hip hop and he would learn a routine. The Cardio Funk classes centered on the choreography for a single song and we would spend months learning a single dance. The idea of a Friday night class was that after the class a group would go out dancing. I felt it was taking liberty enough in my marriage to spend the early part of every Friday evening at the gym dancing, so I didn't go with the group after class.

Friday Night Hip Hop

Several years after becoming a gym regular, in the spring or summer 1992 I think, Lee Klinger, who had taught Cardio Funk classes at The Pulse Fitness club, opened his own dance studio located where Mike's Camera had been for many

years on Pearl Street east of the Boulder Mall. He called it Dance West and the studio offered many forms of dancing, but Lee's Cardio Funk class carried over to this studio and by this time was probably called Hip Hop. I'm pretty sure he taught at least one other hip hop class each week and I was always there, although I was about 50 years old by then and I shocked some of the other dancers in these classes by being their parents' age.

My love of and obsession with dancing corresponded with my realization that my marriage had failed. I wanted to stay in it until Jenny was out of high school which would be the spring of 1993. I didn't make it and moved out of the dome in March 1993. Hip hop classes at Dance West became the high points during my week. Local dancers at that time didn't know much about the historical and cultural character of hip hop. In those early years it was a dance form for the community, including people of many age groups and abilities. It was a joy for everyone. I discovered a few years ago that the mother of one of my granddaughter's good friends, Diane Sandstrom, danced hip hop at Dance West at the same time I did. We discovered this connection 20 years later. After hip hop class on Friday nights I found myself feeling utterly reborn by being able to walk up Pearl Street to a restaurant on the Boulder Mall to enjoy a sandwich. In those days, one of the most common activities to do if you lived in Boulder was to "walk the mall" on weekend nights, maybe including a meal at one of the restaurants or hanging out in a bar for a drink and always enjoying the many buskers performing.

Adding dancing in a dance studio to my fitness dancing in a gym, further energized a life that ever since has been devoted to dancing and movement. A life that has been accompanied by endless accomplishments and consequences that before this time I could never have imagined even existed. Though at that time there were many things to regret—the pain and failure of a marriage, the change in family that impacted Jenny at such an important time—the developments that ensued from that moment of learning about an adult jazz dance class are sort of amazing to me as I reflect on them. I think it is pretty unusual for a male in mid-life who had never before danced to begin an academic track and even a dance-teaching career that would endure through the remainder of his life and in which he would gain some stature.

Hip Hop in Boulder

When I was dancing hip hop regularly at Dance West, none of us dancers knew anything about hip hop or the cultural and historical context in which it developed. Now 30 years later having taught dance history and culture at CU for decades and realizing how central hip hop culture (focused on music and dancing

and graffiti) is to popular cultures the world over, it is almost incredulous that in the early '90s, in a city as supposedly hip as Boulder, no one really understood. I've studied and taught hip hop history dozens of times. Fatu's favorite dance form for much of her dozen years dancing has been hip hop. Yet, in those early days we knew next to nothing about the dance.

Our choreography was initially tied to Lee Klinger's travels as an NCAR scientist. He'd go to dance studios in the cities he visited as a scientist and learn new hip hop routines. He then taught us these routines where, week upon week, we'd slowly add a few eight-counts and string together choreography to a specific song. Everyone loved it.

Lee seemed to frequently visit a dance studio north of San Francisco where he met a hip hop dancer with Filipino heritage named Kenny Jiménez. Lee and I were talking one day about how to develop hip hop in Boulder and we came up with the idea of inviting Kenny to visit Boulder for an extended period of time to guest teach at Dance West and to see if he would be interested in moving here to develop hip hop dancing. At the time, it must have been 1994, I was living in the dome with Emily and I offered to host Kenny at my house. Lee extended the offer, Kenny accepted, and I soon had a new house mate and a new hip hop dance teacher.

Having Kenny living at my house was a blast and we did lots of imagining about how to develop dancing in Boulder. Ken accepted a position at Dance West and soon moved here. Under Kenny's influence hip hop quickly transformed from a community dance form to a much more elite group of dancers comprised mostly of teen and early twenties white girls. Kenny was a cute slightly exotic great dancer kind of guy, so this dance demographic made perfect sense. I don't think any of these white girls knew anything of the history of hip hop in these early days. As I was learning this history myself it became oddly ironic that its roots were largely black male dancers embedded in a Bronx New York subculture that was, needless to say, almost the polar opposite of Boulder. As hip hop developed and some greater awareness of its roots became known, a few young black guys started turning up as teachers and great dancers. These dark exotic talented hip guys were also obviously popular among the white girl dancers.

After teaching at Dance West for only a year or so (I think), Kenny opened his own hip hop dance studio that he called Motion Underground. His objective was, in his endlessly repeated phrasing, "to take hip hop to a whole new level." He established hip hop companies with troupes distinguished by age and ability. It soon became a thriving business with hundreds of dancers who performed widely including putting on a couple of annual dance shows. The shift from street dance to performance venue was part of taking hip hop to a new level that was happening across the country at that time.

While this was a major step forward in Boulder dancing, it created tension between Dance West and Motion Underground that wasn't always healthy. Later after I opened Bantaba World Dance & Music there was also a bit of tension, at least to me, because Bantaba struggled financially while Dance West and Motion did quite well I think. These many decades later I'm still not cured of the stress and suppressed anger that is associated with all that.

Decades later I sometimes reflect on this local history of hip hop dance in which I played an important role. And now I think it's only right that Fatu has for a decade been a part of hip hop dance. Now it is a staple dance form for studio-trained young dancers. As an extra-curricular activity, youth studio-based dancing requires enormous devotion by the dancers, involving often more than 20 hours a week, and also an enormous financial cost to families. The high cost of this kind of dancing self-selects so this dance community is comprised mostly of kids, the majority girls, from families, mostly white, with considerable financial means. Thus, hip hop, as it was introduced in Boulder so long ago, remains in many parts of society a mostly teen white girl dance. Fatu is almost always the only brown girl to be seen. She stands out both because of her appearance and also because she has, despite her white privilege environment, noticeably more swag than most of the ballet-bodied white girls.

What a local history that I think is known to no one except me!

Divorce

In 1993 I had been tenured full professor at CU for a decade, I'd built a home, I'd established a strong career, Corbin had graduated high school and was away at college, Jenny was nearing high school graduation, and I was facing the obvious failure of a marriage. Judy and I had tried couples' therapy and taken other measures to try to save our marriage, none of which seemed, at least to me, promising. Absent much hope for a workable marriage I had joined a fitness club and was in the midst of discovering myself as a moving bodied being. I experienced it as a new birth in an almost literal sense. My body was coming to life as evidence by powerful physical feelings. I was utterly baffled by what to do about my marriage. I'd built the dome and my identity was inseparable from it at that time. How could I leave a marriage given that it would mean losing my house and thus a core aspect of my identity? I acknowledge how deprived it sounds that my connection to a house was in some sense more important to me at the time than my connection with my spouse.

Emily came into my life at that time. She'd been a student in a class I'd taught a couple semesters before and she seemed interested in being around me. She was 27 years younger than me so it was at once exciting and complicated. What

I began to realize that I had missed out on almost all the aspects of my social development for much of three decades, that period being consumed by graduate school, career, and providing for a family. In a way my social development was more akin to a 20-year old than to that of my own age peers. I was dancing, working out, and discovering something of my social self in my late 40s, rather than in my mid-20s. Emily, in this sense, was my peer and my guide.

I began to spend more and more time with Emily and realized that I'd started a relationship with her that I couldn't give up or limit. Seeing how I was gaining a sense of vitality and engagement with the world, I felt that my very life depended on it. My failed marriage in contrast with this budding relationship precipitated a crisis that forced me to seek therapy to help me figure out what to do. The therapist I chose was also an academic who had written a book on Sartre and psychotherapy and I respected her. She used gestalt techniques which involved assessing one's body feelings in conjunction with reflection and talk. This approach also was compatible with my newly awakening body. I had only several therapy sessions since I was utterly motivated to deal with this situation. The pivotal experience came during a session when the therapist asked me to locate in my body the feelings I had related to this relationship/marriage crisis. I responded that I felt it in my chest. She asked me what it felt like. I sat with it a while and responded that my chest felt like there was something inside me that was trying to get out. She asked me to describe what this thing was. I found myself thinking of that strange creature in the first Alien movie, a little creature with a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth that bursts out of a character's chest. I described it to her. She allowed me to feel this pain for a while and then asked me, "can you identify this creature?" I immediately responded totally shocking myself, "It's me." And that immediately and decisively convinced me that I had to move on.

Australia and Aborigines

When I wrote *Beyond the Primitive* (1982) I had a relatively thin background given the vastness of the topic. There are, after all, thousands of cultures that might be classified under the old rubric "primitive" or other ways of designating them such as small-scale or primal or traditional or indigenous. My teachers at Chicago, Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Smith, were prepared as no others in the field. Jonathan had written his Yale dissertation on Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* which took him over 25 years to write and in its third edition spanned a dozen large volumes including 100,000 references to materials from these cultures and had a 5,000-entry bibliography. Smith's dissertation, titled "The Glory, Jest, and Riddle: James George Frazer and *The Golden Bough*" (1968),

required him to read most of the original sources on which Frazer relied in order to check the accuracy and character of his massive work, *The Golden Bough*. I deal extensively with Jonathan's Frazer studies in my *The Proper Study of Religion* (2020), but the point here is that Smith had a vast knowledge of the many hundreds of cultures that Frazer referenced. Eliade was known for many works in which he accumulated examples from cultures around the world, especially his books *Shamanism* (1951) and *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (1949). When I was asked to write this book on these traditional or indigenous religions I had to rely largely on the works of my mentors.

Eliade was well known for his work to establish a theory of religion in which the character of the place on which people stand is at the core of their religion. Eliade however frontloaded this notion. Based on his vast studies he had come to believe religion was marked by anything designated as a world or cosmic center, often replicated by a pointy church steeple or a mountain or a tree or a stupa, or anything accounting for the beginning or creation of the world or people. In his terms, religion equals placement at the *axis mundi* or world center or at the beginning, *in illo tempore*. Based on the Eliade's influence, which in those days I had yet to seriously question, I included in my writing of this book, a discussion of Eliade's notion of place distinguishing religion as common among the peoples I was writing about. To illustrate the point of the importance of the center and the beginning, I offered Eliade's own favorite example which came from Central Australia and which I now refer to as Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole. It is a clear account showing that these aborigines (aboriginal meaning of the origin) relied on a pole that was initially part of god's creation of the world and subsequently the means by which these people gained continuing access to god who had climbed the pole into the sky. In a dramatic part of the example, when the people broke the pole they were so disoriented and confused by their loss of connection with their creator that they lay down and died. In some of his presentations of this example Eliade allowed this stunning event to be part of aboriginal mythology, but in other instances he suggested that these actions were those of people observed by ethnographers. The example clearly shows the religious importance of God establishing a center place of orientation in the acts of creation of the world and also that the subsequent lives of the people depended on this center as essential to their lives.

After my book was published when I was teaching at the University of Colorado I received a letter from Professor Carl Ernst. He wrote that he was using my book in one of his graduate courses and that his students much enjoyed the book. He explained that they did have a question about the Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole example. He described that his students had looked up the cited ethnographic source on which the example was based and found significant differences between the source and my presentation. I was immediately stunned

by the implications of this letter and it would take me a while to sort through them. It did not however take long for me to comprehend that what I was about to discover would change the rest of my academic (and tangentially my personal) life in fundamental ways. Now with decades of experience I can appreciate that my hunch about what I was about to embark upon was completely accurate, even more influential than I could have then imagined.

To offer a bit of insight—not sure it deserves to be called wisdom—here is a general account of this process. We never know what small, perhaps seemingly insignificant, thing will change our entire lives. Furthermore, we do not know what small thing we might do or encounter that might change in fundamental ways someone else's life. Recognizing the importance of the accidental encourages us to pay attention to even the smallest things around us because in our awareness we might find and express life-shaping passions. What I'm referring to is my delight in, if also the accompanying terror of, the random, the unpredictable, the novel, the accidental, the nonlinearity of life. Anything at any time might happen and, especially if we are open to taking these small happenings seriously, they may become highly consequential. It also assures us of the importance of holding the power of our own agency.

What did I realize related to Ernst's letter?

First, as a student of Jonathan Smith, I was embarrassed, dumbfounded really, that I had apparently not applied Smith's most fundamental academic technique. His entire study of Frazer was an illustration of the importance of checking the sources of the literature you rely on. I had accepted that Eliade would have been careful to accurately present his most powerful example supporting and illustrating his theory of religion. This despite evidence that he often took liberties with his sources. Immediately I realized I hadn't taken seriously enough the importance of Smith's fundamental academic technique of always checking sources and I would never again make this mistake.

Second, as it soaked in, the more substantively important issue emerged. If I couldn't rely on my own world-renowned teacher to accurately present his key cultural examples, then what on earth does that mean? Is he a bad scholar, as I had been? Was this a simple moment of carelessness? To what extent had he made up this example to serve the establishment of his own theory? How could he do so in good conscience? Since this example was one of Eliade's most important in establishing his theory of religion, why had no other scholar checked Eliade's sources and criticized him for it? Is this sort of treatment of sources exceptional, the shortcoming of one scholar, or is it typical of the academic enterprise? If it is typical, then what are we academics doing that justifies our work? Seems that it might be more accurate to describe ourselves as propagandists or irresponsible essayists. What is the role of source examples? Are they necessary and how do we select those that should play such a central

role in our theorizations? And what about the subjects, the real people whose lives we are appropriating for our academic theories? Do they care? Are they impacted? Do we really care about them?

Third. If Eliade's principal example that supported his theory of religion was concocted, then what impact does this action have on the status of his widely embraced theory? In those days the academic study of religion aligned closely with Eliade's religion theory. In embracing Eliade, were we all wrong about religion?

From one tiny question raised in a single brief letter focused on but a couple paragraphs in a book I'd published, and a general textbook at that, I now questioned my own education, the reliability and integrity of my world-renowned mentor, the use and role of exempla in theory development, the broadly accepted theory of religion at the time, the ethics of concocting examples as representing real people, and the very nature of the whole academic enterprise.

From the perspective of decades later I suggest that the best thing I did then was to take all of these questions utterly seriously and to believe that I had the power and means by which to pursue these issues to some advancement at least in my own life, if not also to resolve them for the whole field of study or broadly the nature of the academy in general. It would not be difficult for me to show how most everything I've done since is, in at least some respects, shaped by this shocking letter from Carl Ernst. I'm sure I responded to Carl. I now wonder what it was I wrote.

As I was trying to imagine and plan how I might pursue these fundamental concerns, I read Jonathan Smith's new book at that time *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987). There in the first chapter, much to my utter surprise, Smith took on Eliade's use of the Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole example. While it dealt with some of the issues that I was struggling with, it complicated and enriched all of them. Indeed, it expanded my concerns beyond Eliade's treatment of this Aboriginal example to Smith's as well, who offered an alternative interpretation to the same, if modified, example. Now, because of Smith's work, I was assured that my concerns were absolutely fundamental, yet now I had even more incentive to engage them in a serious way.

As for my own research on Numbakulla, my first thought was to do what I began to realize almost no scholar actually ever does (exceptions occur perhaps in some established traditions in Biblical studies) and that is to check the sources, not just limited to looking up a citation and comparing it, but to making every effort to actually find the living source—in this case the specific Aborigine—and to assess this source's credibility and knowledge. When Jonathan critiqued Eliade he looked up Eliade's published sources and made some adjustments based on what he discovered, but he didn't go any further to attempt to get at the fleshy Aborigines. What I decided to do was to look at those published sources and to

see if I could assess their authors and the sources, supposedly actual Aborigines, that they relied upon. This effort took me to Australia and a multi-year effort that included an exhaustive effort to turn every stone to get to the actual source. My book *Storytracking: Texts, Stories, and Histories in Central Australia* (1998) recounts my effort and conclusions. Yet, here the important point is, in a nutshell, that the closer I got to an actual Aboriginal source the more complicated I found the many-staged process involved in actually inventing the example on which Eliade based his theory of religion. My book was an account of this effort as well as the outline of an academic method that I called “storytracking.” I believe that *Storytracking* has been widely read in the field. I also assessed the seeming concoction of primary examples by notable academics. Rather than simply declaring them to be bad scholars, I found that storytracking their examples revealed the story behind who they are/were as scholars and how their interests shaped the way they read and interpreted, to the point of invention, their sources. I concluded that scholarship is a creative enterprise with many levels at which novelty is involved.

This book did not however resolve the other issues raised, most notably “what is a proper theory of religion and how might it be studied in the modern secular environment?” In many ways I’ve continued to work on this issue, even when I was not fully aware I was doing so. This process is just now coming to some fuller expression in my most recent book that builds on some of the work of my mentor Jonathan Smith who died December 31, 2017. The title of that book is *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (2020).

Similar to my Navajo field studies in 1994, I traveled with my friend Emily to Central Australia to be in-the-presence-of this wonderful history to not only better imagine the settlement of the area beginning in the late nineteenth century but also to experience something of a landscape that had been the home of peoples for tens of thousands of years. It is a landscape like no other I’d ever experienced. It was not an occasion of fieldwork explicitly. It was a time of traveling about to places that had been central and important in this history: Alice Springs, Hermannsburg Mission, lots of named gaps and mining areas, the telegraph station where events took place that comprised much of the most important (in my view anyway) ethnography ever written, Uluru (Ayers Rock), and simply the feel and mood of the land. It was a time comprised of many days of magical exploration allowing a name on a map or even a whim to follow a track to be our guide.

Australian and Asian Travel with Emily

Having moved out of the dome in March 1993 I did a short-term rental of a little one-bedroom apartment near CU. I had nothing material other than a futon that I tossed on the floor. I might have purchased a couple of kitchen items so that I could fix minimal food, but that was it. I had received a sabbatical from CU for the following fall and I believe that I had also won a CU Faculty Fellowship grant that allowed me to extend the sabbatical to a full year.

My research focused on what would later be published as *Storytracking* (1998) took me to Australia. I needed to go to the University of Sydney to recover the only English version of a classic German multi-volume ethnography written by the early missionary Carl Strehlow, then to Melbourne to the university there to trace down the field notes and journals of W. Baldwin Spencer who established biological studies in Australia. I visited the building he designed on his ship voyage to Australia around 1890 to take this academic post. He traveled with the Horn Expedition which was the first scientific expedition into the interior of Australia. Along with Francis Gillen, a telegraph station manager near Alice Springs, he wrote among the most important of all ethnographies cited extensively in the development of the body of social scientific theory that shaped twentieth century scholarship. That book was *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899). From Melbourne I needed to go to Adelaide to locate the manuscripts of Gillen and to be in the location where the Hermannsburg missionaries set off for their long voyage into the interior. They were the first missionaries in Central Australia and were instrumental in forming the earliest Western understandings of Aborigines. I included a stop at Canberra, the capital city of Australia which was designed by the American Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937), to search Aboriginal archives for important unpublished materials valuable to my research. Finally, I wanted to go to Alice Springs to see and be in the presence of some of the most important historical locations mentioned in late nineteenth and early twentieth century histories and ethnographies. With such an exciting itinerary across some important areas of southeastern Australia and in the center, I began to think about the expansion of the places I might travel so as to take advantage of already being half way around the world and having spent the money to get there.

After moving out of my house and starting divorce proceedings my relationship with Emily developed and we began to consider traveling together. She believed that she could take time off from her graduate program in psychotherapy at Naropa. We began to not only explore what more we could do in Australia, but also how we might extend the trip beyond Australia to Bali and southeast Asia. We decided that if we could manage the airfare then we could do low cost backpacker style travel. We made no reservations because we wanted to

simply go where we wanted and to stay as long as we wanted. Of course, that meant most every meal and night's lodging involved searches and decisions and often inconvenience, sometimes a bit of danger. I don't really remember now how we both came up with the money, but by this time in our dreaming we were eager to travel and to experience many new and exciting adventures together. It was only later, after our long travel, that I heard horror stories of other couples attempting foreign traveling together.

In early September 1993 we headed to Australia and would not return to the USA until late January 1994. We flew to Sydney and stayed a few days with a cousin of Emily's. Then we took a trip into the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. We spent time in downtown Sydney especially around the Sydney Opera House. We visited the University of Sydney and then went north to Carnes to experience the Great Barrier Reef. We didn't care for Carnes so we took a bus south to the little coastal town called Mission Beach where we rented a cottage for a week or so. From this base we had plenty of time to walk the beach, to take a wonderful day trip out to the reef where we snorkeled to experience the wonders of the reef up close. Snorkeling was at once among the most terrifying and also magical experiences of my life. I was okay swimming, having loved swimming as a kid and even trained and worked as a life guard in high school, but the snorkeling was new to me and made me feel panicky. Yet, what I was able to experience, the indescribable beauty and abundance of exotic life in and around the reef, was deeply moving. I was a long way from the dirt farms of Kansas. Emily and I spent much of the snorkeling time swimming along holding hands to keep together as well as to share the specific wonders of the reef.

After a few days each in Melbourne, Canberra, and Adelaide we flew to Alice Springs. Beyond what we would ever have dreamed it was raining when we deplaned and it continued for a couple days. Rains like this rarely occur in Central Australia. When they do, the desert landscape comes to life with the rapid growth of plants many of them instantly flowering filling the land with color. We went to the telegraph station north of Alice and walked to the top of the hill to overlook the area where Spencer and Gillen had for several months observed and recorded a major Aboriginal ceremonial which was actually put on as a favor to Gillen. It was this ceremony that was documented in their influential ethnography. Little did I know that I'd be writing about the events of this spot off and on for decades. We traveled in every direction from Alice on day trips in a rental car. We explored many famed gaps and water holes, mining areas, gem mining areas, Hermannsburg Mission where we saw the first church in Central Australia, an ancient palm grove that had somehow survived over the many millennia since this area was once a coastal region. We visited the Strehlow Museum which is a fascinating structure built of compact earth. It features within it a ramp that one descends to suggest going back thousands of years in time.

I've always been a bit stunned, sometimes amused, that anthropologists can place the folks they are interested in, the folks they are living with and talking to, at a time in the distant past. The very term that has become their general name, Aborigine, is the Latin *ab origin* which means of or from the origin. This museum and, in a sense, the surrounding vast desert, which is actually abundant with life, is considered something of a wrinkle in time and our expectations and imaginations forged by what we had read and heard made it easy to experience something as original and primal.

From Alice we drove across the desert to Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock) which is the magnificent iconic single rock that protrudes from the fairly flat landscape. Our first glimpse of Uluru was itself remarkable. With huge fields of flowers along the roadside we followed our urge to stop, now and then, along the road and walk among the flowers. On one of these stops we were walking along and came to a little rise in the land and as we walked up it, Uluru magically appeared to rise from the flowered landscape in the distance. How could a first experience of something so magnificent be any more dramatic and surprising?

We spent time walking the five or so miles around the perimeter of Uluru to experience it from every angle. We ventured to the recommended spots at sunrise and sunset to get the best views of the rock in the dramatic golden hour light. We hiked up the rock and walked around on top, a privilege that is no longer allowed. We went on to the Olgas (Kata Tjuta), another dramatic rock formation, yet composed of composite rather than solid rock. And it was along this road that we pulled off into the desert to watch a dingo, one of the wild dogs of Australia similar to a coyote, trot about the landscape. I remember thinking, as a tour bus blasted by with surely no one on the bus even seeing the dingo, of a title I might want to name my trip journals should I ever assemble them. I recently discovered these journals all typed, so perhaps it is time. The title I thought of was "Busses Don't Stop for Dingoes."

From Alice we flew up to Darwin where we stayed a few days. We saw "Phantom of the Opera" live in Darwin and visited museums in this "up top" city. Then on to Bali. Arriving in Denpasar we avoided the tourist beaches and traveled directly to Ubud which is known as a cultural and arts center. We had no reservations but found a bungalow in the center of a rice paddy in a little village called Penestanan just outside of Ubud. To get to the bungalow we literally had to walk a path on the ridge between flooded paddies. It was a lovely location and we were well cared for with fruit snacks and a thermos of tea delivered every afternoon. It was a short scenic walk over a bridge to Ubud where we attended Balinese dances, looked at the goods in the many shops, went to the outdoor markets, and booked trips around the area for cultural events such as Balinese cremation rites. We also had plenty of time to just hang out in our private paradise and enjoy life.

I recall one day at this location when we realized that Emily and I had not been apart from one another for more than a short while for many weeks. Much of our time included the constant stress of finding food, arranging transportation, and locating someplace to lay our heads at night. While, as I recall, we were getting along fine, I remember taking a long walk to talk about our relationship, the effects of such constant travel, and that we had months of travel yet to go. Perhaps we were both thinking about whether at some point our relationship would fall apart due to the stress of travel. In my recollection we talked about it, realized things were going well, and made a conscious commitment to keep things as healthy as possible. I think much of my travel prior to this long trip was shaped by my odd and confusing experience of at once loving the challenge of the adventure while also wanting to be home. I think that what I discovered around this time in our trip was that there comes a point when you can finally simply be present to the experience and be pretty much free of thinking home would be more comfortable and safer. It was also around this time that we began to meet travelers who lived more or less on the road, always on their way to the next country. For several months we were sort of novices in this community. It was clear that many of these folks had traveled so long that their identity was inseparable from this lifestyle and they found it difficult to go home or once home to stay there long before getting back to traveling. I began to think about there being a couple of extreme types related to travel to unknown territories. There are those, actually almost all the people I knew, who simply couldn't imagine traveling the way Emily and I were. And there are those, many of whom we met on the road, who had traveled so much that they couldn't go home. There are more of these people than I had imagined. It seems that from Bali and our travels beyond we frequently met these traveling people. I decided, and still feel this way, that neither group is particularly healthy. One of the greatest rewards of travel, especially of the style we were doing, is finding home to be foreign upon return and realizing that you have been fundamentally changed by your travel experience.

Just before we had left on this trip I had met a Balinese man, I Made Lasmawan, who was a master musician. His spouse was a classical dancer. They lived in Denver and were teaching Balinese music and dance throughout the front range. He had told me of his home village, Bangah, in central Bali and urged me to go visit his family. I kept the name of his relative and the village name. One day Emily and I hired a driver to take us to visit Made's relative. I have no clue what I thought would come of this, but after a great deal of driving while looking for the village our driver finally located it and then it was easy to locate the home of Made's relative. The family was prominent in the village. We introduced ourselves with the help of our driver because no one in Made's family spoke English. They were pleased that we knew Made, but then we had no clue

beyond that why we were there. As is the customary hospitality of all Balinese they served us tea and snacks. After some awkward silences they introduced us to a teen-aged girl, Komong, who they then asked if we might sponsor to move to the USA. We didn't have a clue about any of this and somehow after a while we were able to leave with pleasant good byes. Little did I know that years later I'd spend much of two summers in this village and get to know Komong and all of these people quite well. Near Bangah we experienced vast valleys of terraced rice paddies, a ceaseless unfolding of magnificent sights.

Emily and I also went to the north coast of Bali, a much more relaxed area than the tourist areas around Kuta Beach which is near the airport. We stayed a few days in a bungalow run by a German ex-pat and enjoyed the local people. Around this time I began to have a few signs of getting sick, but plowed on. We headed back to Denpasar and took an overnight bus to Java including a late-night ferry crossing between islands followed by an all-night rainy terrifying ride to Jogjakarta. We went to the Sultan's Palace to see classical dancing and hear court gamelan performances. We travelled to see Borobudur and Prambanan, ancient massive religious structures both magnificent beyond words. We had lots of experiences in Jogja. I don't really remember how we got back to Bali, but likely it was by bus. Then on to Bangkok, Thailand.

Our late-night arrival and efforts to find Riverview Inn were high drama; I'll write this story separately. We took ferries down the river to the main part of Bangkok to visit the temples and get a bit of experience in this amazing and vast city. Then we took a train to northern Thailand to Chang Mai. I'll write more about this experience as well. We were there for Loi Krathong, a festival of lights featuring beautifully little decorated banana log offerings floating down the river, and also for the King's birthday which is a major event. We rented a car so we could visit the country around the city. I especially remember visiting amazing Watts, that is, Thai temples, and an elephant preserve. We also visited some of the local tribes in the area known as the Golden Triangle where Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos come together. Again, I don't recall how we got back to Bangkok, presumably by train, but then on to Kathmandu, Nepal.

Everyone has heard of Kathmandu, an ancient exotic city at the foot of the Himalaya and the point of departure for Mount Everest. Most certainly it was a city I never thought I'd visit, yet here I was. As the airplane approached Kathmandu an electric buzz went through the cabin as Mount Everest came into view. It was one of those moments that you never forget. Everyone was excited. I was on the side of the cabin opposite the view, but those on the other side were gasping and waving us over so we could see the highest place on earth out their windows. It was truly an indescribable moment, deeply emotional somehow, reexperienced even now as I write this. We stayed a few days in Kathmandu at a cheap hotel in the city and went to trekking shops to rent and purchase gear for

a trek around the Annapurna circuit. These shops collect the gear left behind after expedition climbers are done with it. While we wanted to carry our own gear, we decided that we should hire a local person to go with us as a guide and to help us find lodging along the way. It was a 200-kilometer trek over an 18,000-foot pass, so we thought it might be best to not be totally on our own. Once outfitted to trek, Emily got sick and we simply stayed put until she recovered. Then, finally, we stored our extra luggage and with backpacks took a bus to a village where we began the trek. Around three weeks later we'd find ourselves in Pokara, at only 4,000 feet elevation, having finished the trek. Although I suffered from what was likely giardia through much of this time, it was clearly the most amazing experience of my life. I'll write a separate account of this trek.

Back in Kathmandu, Emily and I found ourselves reluctant to go home. The immensity of our travels left us wondering if we could even adjust to being back home. Having been constantly together for five months and relying on one another to get through so many difficult situations every single day had created a fiercely strong bond between us. We had been tested and we had not only survived we had thrived. How could we go home? Who could even imagine what we had experienced and how we had changed? Still, the day came when we had to end the familiarity of the foreign and head to the unfamiliarity awaiting us back home.

Late-night Arrival in Thailand

A major center of Buddhism, Bangkok is a massive city that can be as terrifying as thrilling. I arrived in Bangkok with my friend Emily well after midnight on a much-delayed flight from Denpasar. It was early December 1993. We planned to spend a few days in Bangkok then travel north to Chang Mai for a few days then return to Bangkok to fly on to Kathmandu. Having been traveling for several months we wanted to slim down our luggage for convenience while we traveled in Thailand. Collecting our bags, we found a space in the airport and spread our belongings out on the floor to select what we wanted to keep while in Thailand and packing the rest in backpacks shoved into duffel bags so we could check these bags long term in the Bangkok airport.

Before leaving Colorado, I had met with a colleague whose research was in Thailand and asked him to suggest a place in Bangkok for us to stay and things to do. He recommended a hotel called The Riverview Inn. I thought this surely a great advantage to know where we were going since it was the middle of the night and Bangkok is an enormous city. Arriving at any foreign airport is stressful. Getting transportation without being ripped off was the most immediate concern. Fortunately, Bangkok airport had set up a ground

transportation system that avoided what is common other places I've traveled which is being assaulted by dozens if not hundreds of cab drivers and hotel people trying to get your business. They often try to grab your luggage and start off to their cab. Here a taxi stand charged us a fee based on our destination and assigned us a taxi.

Getting in the cab we handed the driver a paper on which we had written, in English, the name and address of the hotel. As we entered the highway I began to appreciate the possibility of difficulties we might experience. Thailand, formerly Siam, is one of the few (maybe the only) Asian countries not colonized. As a result, few Thai people know English and all of the street and business signs use Thai script without adding the English language or even the Arabic alphabetical equivalent spellings. Unfamiliar with written Thai, one cannot even begin to guess at a pronunciation.

As we arrived in the city at three or four in the morning it was clear that our taxi driver didn't have a clue where this hotel was. I had been told it was near a major fancy hotel, maybe the Hiatt, I couldn't remember. The cab driver began to ask us questions. We hadn't any idea what he was asking but could guess that he wanted us to tell him where to go. I found myself in that horrible, but somewhat hilarious, mode of trying to talk to him. Somehow we have the inclination to draw out our words and to speak louder when we know we are not being understood. He was doing the same.

He kept just driving and driving. Surprising to us, the streets were alive with people. Many street vendors were making food. Lots of people on bikes and scooters and on foot were out in the streets. At one point our driver pulled over to the curb and gestured for us to wait. What else could we possibly do? Likely he was trying to get directions. Eventually he returned and we drove on. And on. Later he pulled over and left us again and when he came back he had another man with him. We drove on. And on.

Finally, we entered a very dark area with few people around and headed down what seemed to me an alley. There were large heavy car parts behind some of these buildings. I began to get frightened. Images of robberies and murders of tourists would not leave my head. Eventually the car stopped. The driver and the other man got out and gestured for us to get out. I was pretty sure this would be our bloody end. He led us to the trunk which he opened. We pulled out our bags and I had nothing but the worst of expectations of what was about to happen. He walked us around to the front of the car and pointed up to a small sign about 20 feet up the pole. This sign, in English, read The Riverview Inn and had an arrow pointing down a narrow walkway between buildings.

As I remember this experience the only thing that could have increased my panic would have been had I read prior to this experience Dan Simmons terrifying novella, *Lovedeath* (1994) set in Bangkok. Relieved like I'd never been

before, we bid a thankful goodbye to our driver and made our way through a labyrinth of walkways finally arriving at the hotel. A night clerk sleeping on a sofa in the reception area checked us in and we made our way to our room.

The next morning, we learned that on the top floor of the hotel was a restaurant. When the elevator doors opened we found a lovely open-air restaurant with delicious food and a magnificent view of the Chao Phraya River and the vast expanse of Bangkok. Later we discovered the short walk through an industrial area that suddenly opened to the beautiful Royal Orchard Sheridan Hotel where we were able to board a river taxi to take us to the heart of the city. We had arrived in Thailand.

Chang Mai

Thailand became a place to spend a few days during the Asian travels I did with Emily when we discovered that all flights that would connect Bali and Nepal went through Bangkok. We didn't want to cut much from our time in Nepal, so we allowed only a few days in Thailand. This country, never colonized by the west, has, as I remember yet it could be a fiction, the longest longitude of any country. To the south of Bangkok are some of the finest beaches on the planet. To the north is the Golden Triangle area where Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), and Laos connect, perhaps best known as being a major opium growing area. Our interest was in the cultural richness including many amazing Watts (Thai Buddhist temples) and the presence of indigenous Thai cultures: Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Akha, and Lisu. What we didn't know was that we would be present in the area during Loi Krathong, the Thai Festival of Lights, as well as the celebration of King's birthday on December 5. Krathong is the Thai term referring to a circular cross-section of a banana plant trunk. The two-inch disk section is a platform decorated with flowers, banana leaves often folded in intricate patterns, candles, and incense so as to become a tiny raft. Loi is the Thai word referring to floating. Thus, a distinctive feature of the festival is the decoration of these beautiful little circular arrangements and at night they light the candles on them and place them on the river or other waterways to float away. It is a spectacular sight to see the river flowing with candle lighted little banana log rafts all floating in streams with the current. Also accompanying this beauty are the release of a paper hot air balloons with trays loaded with burning coals suspended below them to heat the air inside. These balloons glow in the dark reflecting the fire below and are simply spectacular. Of course, endless fireworks are also a constant threat to body and sanity.

The Thai people consider their royalty as being almost godlike. At the time we were in Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927-2016) was king and his birthday

is December 5. He was the world's longest reigning monarch when he died having ruled Thailand for 70 years. I believe that his birthday is still celebrated. What we noticed most prominently were the presence of huge banners depicting pictures of the king hanging on the sides of many buildings and candles burning everywhere.

Interested in dancing, we visited one of the state-supported dance academies in Thailand. Here young people chosen for their looks and potential for music and dancing go to school including academic subjects as well as endless hours of dance and music training. When we visited the school, we were conducted on a tour to see classes in many different academic subjects as well as music and dancing for ages from very young kids to young adults. They invited us to come back the following day to visit English language classes so that the Thai kids might have the opportunity to converse with us as speakers of American English. Their teacher spoke fine English, but he was Thai and had a Thai accent. It was a delightful day spent with young people who had endless questions about America, most frequently if we knew Michael Jackson and if we liked spicy Thai food.

While these major events make Chang Mai memorable, it is a psychological awakening that remains distinctive in my mind. Emily was studying psychotherapy at Naropa at the time of our travels. We spent a good deal of time reading and discussing a book, *Sartre and Psychoanalysis: An Existentialist Challenge to Clinical Metatheory* (1991) written by her teacher Betty Cannon. Emily never attempted to practice therapy on me, yet after many intense and probing discussions with her, especially related to this book I trusted her insights. Through a couple of decades prior to my relationship with Emily I'd developed a pretty much severed pair of personalities or ways of being in the world. One was related to my professional and public life where I was confident, happy, optimistic, and outgoing. The other was related to my marriage which was increasingly withdrawn, unhappy, glum, and unfeeling. I think these were simply the development of tendencies that had existed even when I was a teen. The difficulty I had, once I recognized that this disorder was present, was to actually work on changing it. Over decades I'd become gesturally naturalized to just close down in certain circumstances and once closed off I could not even recognize what was happening.

What I remember so well occurring in Chang Mai was that something caused me to shut down. Later Emily and I were walking. I believe that given the opportunity I might be able to go back to that very street which bordered one of the many canals in the city. Emily noted that I had disappeared, shut down, yet I just couldn't comprehend what she was saying. I can no longer remember what Emily said, yet somehow, she got through to me that what I was doing was to so dissociate from all feelings and that I was totally incapable of even knowing I

had checked out. I finally comprehended that I had no feelings at all when I dropped into this state and that it would then take hours or days for this numbness, like Novocain, to wear off. Writing about this now seems trivial or obvious, yet at the time I experienced it as a shocking revelation. Importantly, I felt it. I realized that I could allow myself to feel, even if it was painful. While I can't say that this zone-out never happened again, it never happened again when I couldn't feel that it did. Progress or the start of it.

Nearly 30 years later, looking at the way my academic and artistic work and life have evolved, I can appreciate that feeling, that experience, that knowing through feeling—all parts of being human yet are routinely avoided and damned by academics—have colored, even largely shaped, all that I have done since. It seems that I am now able to identify a great many specific things occurring at precise moments that I recognize as totally changing my life. I don't think this is hyperbole. I consider these many occasions as great gifts to my life. This opening to feeling correlates closely with my experience of moving and dancing and being bodied. I might date at least one moment that energized and has driven this long development to that conversation I had with Emily on the streets of Chang Mai.

Annapurna Trek: Recalling, Remembering, Reflecting

Wanting to refresh my memory in order to describe and reflect on the trek in a bit more detail I found and read the trip journal I contemporaneously wrote. Generally, I trust my memory is pretty accurate on most things in the past, even though I often bemoan that I don't have much of a tendency to make present these past things through actively remembering. I also am eager to acknowledge that we often reconstruct our past with every remembering. Starting to write about this amazing trek, I wanted to refresh myself mostly on place names. I have had several thoughts recently about trying to recover the original trip journal writings to see if I might put them together in some more permanent form. After some panicked search that turned up nothing on my computer, I found a printed set of pages revealing my efforts to edit some of the journals, but it stopped before the Nepal writings. I felt a bit of desperation that likely the original journals were lost, but then they turned up as a typed printed document. I had somehow taken the time to type the entire trip journal, yet the electronic files haven't survived. I also managed to find the handwritten journal for the trek as well. Whew! My constant head-shaking response to reading the trek journal was how much of the details of that experience I had forgotten. I was shocked at the almost constant process Emily and I engaged to stay positive through the difficulties of a long hard trip. While reading I was also surprised at what, after all this time, my remembering now omits and what aspects of that trek I now

emphasize reshaping it as a present experience. Even a basic account of this experience must be done elsewhere—I am thinking I really do need to edit the whole journal and get it in a form available and more permanent—thus, my writing here centers more on my reflection on memory-reality compared with at-the-time reality as recoverable by my contemporaneous trip journal. It is a study in the creativity of remembering.

My first comment is that I am now astounded by how detailed and reflective are my journal writings throughout the entire Australia Asia trip. I somehow found time every day or two to provide detailed descriptions of what we did, what we encountered, how we felt about what we were experiencing, how we were getting along and how our relationship was deepening. I even wrote my larger reflections on life as framed by travelling. So much information and so much detail. I don't remember spending the enormous number of hours while traveling to do all this writing and I'm shocked at how much the writing surpasses simple description of facts to engage various kinds of reflection. I'm also rather stunned that I treasured all this writing enough to type it at some later date.

Reading the Annapurna trek journal, I found enormous contrast between my general current remembrance and the granular detail that I wrote. I remember a few of the inns where we stayed. I remember the magnificent mountains (yet only a few distinctly) and rivers and scenery; this is the Himalayan mountain range with hundreds of the highest mountains on earth after all. I remember struggling with stomach sickness. I remember a couple of dicey encounters that we survived. I remember Christmas Eve as especially sad, yet bittersweet, and Christmas day as rich with spectacular views of the Annapurna Peaks. I remember the day we crossed the pass near 18,000 feet in a snowstorm and the adrenaline rush that likely saved me from freezing to death and fueled my body to get over the pass. A summary of my present memory of the trip would be that it was a trek up one river valley to cross a very high pass in a snow storm and the last half of the trek downhill along another river valley. It was remarkable in the encounter with Nepalese culture, in being amongst the magnificence of the most beautiful mountains on earth, and a bit of insight gained about folks who travel all the time. I remember it being physically hard at times due more to health issues than to the difficulty of trekking. A mantra I repeated for years perhaps still pertains, "It was the hardest thing I have ever done, but, given the opportunity, I'd do it again tomorrow."

This lasting capsule of memory is most certainly accurate, yet reading the journal reminds me how utterly hard the trek was due to being physically punishing, constantly dirty, food deprived, tired and sore to the bone, and seriously ill accompanied by severe weight loss and the discomfort of feeling constantly cold. Reading the details now I am frankly amazed, and more than a little bit proud, that we made it, especially me at age 50. My recent remembering

clearly left behind most of the granular detail of how incredibly hard was this trek. Reading the journal, I could appreciate and recall that the trek was physically punishing, psychologically challenging (especially being away from my kids for so long and at Christmas time), relationship testing and building, and all of these factors compounded because they came all at once while the traveling had to go on. Yet, reading these sobering descriptions of how utterly hard was this trek, I have been equally astounded by clear and constant evidence that every single day I was able to be present to the magnificence of the place and to the singular amazement and privilege of even being able to have such an experience. Evident in my writing is that I clearly felt that this experience was an enormous gift and I felt the deepest gratitude at simply being there and being with someone both to share it with and also that we were able to support one another to survive it. As now I literally shudder at the recall of the difficulties I experienced and think how amazing it is that I endured such discomfort and so many hard challenges, I am equally amazed that my current memory is predominantly of the beauty and comradery and privilege of having such an experience.

Perhaps only now, almost 27 years later, am I able to begin to appreciate what a profound impact this trek has had on my life and I now realize that I must re-read and reflect more deeply on that time in my life. I also believe there is much insight to gain by further considering the differences of at-the-time reality and my current memory-reality to appreciate what I have to learn about myself by considering what survived and changed in the memory story over the decades. At this time, I mostly feel overwhelmed, an almost disbelief that I had that experience, an almost certainty that it shaped me in ways that I have yet to appreciate, a deep gratitude that my life has included something so utterly challenging as well as rewarding.

My reflections on the trek on its last day might be appreciated as something of a beginning of what has emerged in me and my work since. On January 4, 1994, I wrote the following passage to mark the end of the trek.

Now we've come to the end of a 200-kilometer trek. When I look at the map and see where all we've been and think about the days walking and places for the night's lodging (most of them bedrooms that were like large packing crates) I am amazed at what we have done. It has been a very long walk with many physically very difficult days. We rested really only 2 days—Manang and Muktinath—and on one of those I took a long hike. If one added all the meters ascent and descent it would be many thousands. The peak experiences for me have been many—to cross a pass, in winter of all times, that approached 18,000 feet and for me to feel great enough to dance at that altitude. But even more the peak experience has been to see and try to grasp the enormity, the grandeur, the power, the

unfathomability of the snow peaks. They stand silent but moody. They appear eternally frigid but they thaw the spirit and inspire the imagination. They are there, just there. They don't give a damn who looks on them or attempts to climb them. The very idea of "conquering" these mountains, as is the term often used for those who ascend to their peaks, is ludicrous. Nothing, save time itself, can conquer these mountains. The very thought of human conquerors is the height of silliness. We stand before them humbled as few other natural experiences can be so certain to do. Yet in our infinite smallness, our sense of the infinitesimal time the courses of our lives occupy, we nonetheless go away happier, more human, more accepting of our condition, more inspired to give our best to the tiny bit we've been given in the scheme of things. Then too, realizing that as the Himalaya grows and is worn away, as the great flat desert of central Australia was once the location of its own Himalaya, we realize not to take ourselves too seriously, not to overly worry about things we make, about the little efforts we make to try to achieve a tiny measure of immortality. For me this has shifted my personal priorities to building and maintaining close personal relationships. Feelings, good relationships, love, friendship—these things are all for the moment, for the present. Nothing about them must endure. Thus, we needn't much worry about durability, about immortality. We have, as the Himalaya, only the present. Seems I had something of the same response to Ayers Rock. It is interesting to compare these experiences. We walked around Ayers Rock, 9 kilometers, and it took 3 hours. We walked around part of the Himalaya—it took 19 days. We climbed Ayers Rock to the top. We did so with hundreds of other people. It took perhaps an hour. We crossed a high pass—Thorung La—in the Himalaya, but from the pass we looked up thousands of feet at mountains all around. Only the very few of all those who visit here even do this pass crossing.

The Himalaya are much grander, much more inaccessible than Ayers Rock. Still, perhaps for this reason, Ayers Rock is even more important as a natural object to inspire. Our emotions, our imaginations, our fullest human capabilities are thrown into such an overload by the Himalaya that we can't even just sit and wonder, we're overwhelmed. Yet I remember so well the better part of a day with my eyes and heart trained on the Rock, it attracted as it inspired wonder. This doesn't mean I like Ayers Rock more than the Himalaya. To me they are finally incomparable experiences. I'd never give up either.

I'm rather surprised by my having some urge on the final day of the trek to immediately reflect on this experience and even to frame it in comparison to having experienced Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia. Now, more than a quarter century later, I am rather saddened at my failure to realize those "personal priorities to building and maintaining close personal relationships. Feelings, good relationships, love, friendship—these things are all for the moment, for the present."

Religion and Dance: The Origins of a Course

When I became a fanatic gym rat in the late 1980s I discovered that I was scheduling as much of my life as I could around the times of my favorite gym classes. At first my favorite classes were low impact aerobics. Later, when I was a bit more fit, I moved up to high impact (jumping). I added step aerobics classes and finally cardio funk (hip hop). I discovered that the ones I loved most were the more dance-oriented classes. I selected times to teach my classes at CU so they fit with my gym schedule. I even found the temptation to skip faculty meetings that conflicted with my gym schedule and sometimes I actually did.

By 1992, the quincentennial of Columbus's first voyage, my research program was shifting away from Native American religions. I found myself interested in broader theoretical and ethical issues related to the study of religion. As I considered how to reposition myself in the study of religion it dawned on me that I should attempt to resolve my tension between my academic life, teaching and research, and my gym or movement life. A brilliant solution would be to reshape my academic research to consider the religious importance and significance of dances in cultures around the world. My research revealed that the only academic study of dancing parallel to ethnomusicology was a tiny subfield in anthropology. Despite dance anthropology having a world scope, I found that it was strongly skewed to Western dances and that most of the scholars in the field were former dancers in these Western forms, especially ballet and modern. There was next to nothing in the literature about religion and dancing. It was also clear that the broadly held Christian view on dancing tended to reject it as religious. My reading revealed that religions the world over, save for most northern hemisphere Christianities, include dancing as an essential part of ritual and ceremony. Some religions see dancing as cosmogonic (cosmic creative). My brief inquiry suggested the possibility of an entire subfield in the academic study of religion focused on dancing.

Excited about the possibilities of this study, I decided to focus a summer course on dances associated with religion in cultures around the world. I think this course was offered in the summer of '92 or '93. YouTube didn't exist until

2005 and it was remarkably difficult to find video resources so that my students and I could actually see what these dances were like. I assembled a large collection of writings on various dances into a reader about three inches thick as the text for this course. I'd skimmed, at best, these materials and often knew next to nothing about the various cultures represented. My intent was to use the course, hopefully with the students' patience, to explore this rich topic with the goal of exploring how such a study might develop.

In class we watched what few videos of those dances I could find recorded and we plodded through all sorts of published materials about dances all over the world. It was exciting to get a glimpse of these rich dances traditions and to do some additional readings to develop more context. Most of these writings did little to offer a rich description of the actual dancing or much of an interpretation. Most described events—ritual, ceremonial, cultural, entertainment—that included little more than the statement “and then they danced.” Despite it being a bit of a slog, I think the students enjoyed it, especially when they could see videos of some of the dances.

A major breakthrough for me with transformative consequences came one day when studying a dance associated with Greek Orthodoxy. A student, her name was Mimi, said that she knew this dance and, if we liked, she could teach it to us. I was instantly thrilled and insisted that we immediately push aside the chairs—we were fortunate to be in one of the rare rooms where chairs are not attached to the floor—and learn the dance. This was the direct connection with my gym life and why had I not thought of it? We spent the balance of the class time learning this dance much to the delight of everyone. I immediately envisioned my future teaching of a course on religion and dance that would include, where possible, guests, who knew the dances we were studying, demonstrating and teaching the dances to the students.

I soon offered this course and taught it every term for over ten years. It soon grew to enroll 90 students with lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays and studio classes in a huge gym-sized studio every Friday afternoon. It eventually became a two-semester course sequence covering around 30 dance traditions with studios taught by dancers of the respective cultures. It was a wildly popular course and eventually led to me founding a world dance and music studio.

Dark Decades in Midlife

For decades I have caught myself saying in response to questions about a book I've written or some other achievement, “Oh, that was the result of one of my mid-life crises.” The statement was, of course, made with humorous intent, yet, as we all know, humor often works because it speaks truth. There are two points

I'd make here regarding crisis. One is that creativity is often directly connected with crisis. The other is that in mid-life I was privileged to have more than the one crisis, so I reaped the benefit of multiple painful sparks of creativity.

I've written often about creativity in the attempt to understand how it works. In my recent research and writing, I have given much attention to what I call "nonlinearity" by which I mean the aspect of life and reality that is simply not predictable, that doesn't seem to follow any rule or law, that doesn't conform to a line. One of my most important criticisms of academia is that it seems premised on the elimination of the nonlinear, the unexpected, the random, and thus the creative. In the sciences, for example, labs are constructed as controlled environments, meaning that they set up situations where all of the variables are under control. This approach allows the manipulation of one or more variable to articulate lawful behavior. Yet, when I was a science student in college I could never get my lab experiments to produce the lawful data. As I recall they were often close, but not totally as the formulas predicted. I sometimes fudged data to ensure a good grade. But what I've learned to appreciate over the decades is that we can't really control all the variables—we can't fudge reality—and even if we could, the aspects of reality that are the most interesting would be removed. It is the assumption of science, and the academy generally, that reality is lawful and predictable and explainable, yet it is the common experience of life that assures us that novelty and creativity come from the random, accidental, unexpected, and inexplicable. Even in the humanities, reality is given order by means of description that is designed to explain and illuminate. We prefer text or book to lived reality or the actuality of our subjects perhaps because the reality of a text is fixed in some sense. While experienced reality is a sensory *mélange*, the very words in a book are all lined up.

It is common in our culture to think that the goal of life is to achieve happiness, balance, pleasure, brightness, order, and control. Certainly, these qualities can be occasionally nice to experience. Yet, life isn't a science lab or a humanities book. Should life be found utterly orderly, controllable, happy, and balanced, surely it would soon also be boring and uninteresting with creativity pretty much missing altogether.

There is no major or universal point I'm wanting to make here—that would be to reinsert the linear—beyond beseeching that we remain open to surprise, even that brought to us by crisis, sadness, chaos, imbalance, marginalization, darkness, and the novel coronavirus. I've built whole theories and written many a book chapter on how essential is surprise to creativity and change, invoking most centrally the late nineteenth century American philosopher, some say the first American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. But that's not my concern here.

I think that I have a personality that bends now and again toward the dark side. I think I've been a silent sufferer, wondering why my world, my life, seems so rarely to align with things easy and happy. Doubtless this tendency was wholly unnecessary, yet it is only at this point late in life that I recognize it has been a frequent coloring. It's a bit like those years that many teens go through where they focus on death and angst and take on goth style and write dark poetry, but for me it has never been so creatively dramatic or in some ways just plain fun as I think it often is for teens. I think my darkness has been more attached to constantly committing myself to unrealistic tasks, to thinking I have to do everything myself, to then resenting that I'm overworked and have no one to help or even recognize what I'm doing.

I graduated college in 1964 having already begun a graduate degree and acquired a fulltime job. I got married in 1965 but then spent the next full decade completing a graduate degree in business, a masters and PhD in religion, working a great deal to keep a marriage going and having Corbin. This level of committed activity is no way to have a happy successful marriage or family. The following decade, 1974-'84, was consumed by starting a career, doing fieldwork, writing and publishing frequently, having Jenny, and acquiring a new job and moving to a different state. The next decade, 1984-'94, began with me teaching fulltime, doing lots of research and publication to establish myself in a new job, building a house mostly alone, and taking on every possible extra paid opportunity because we were struggling financially. This decade wasn't finished before I got a divorce.

What became clear when I did get divorced was that the better part of two decades might be characterized as dark, bowed-neck, head-down, elbows-out, muscle clinchingly stressful, and bitterly resentful especially as it pertained to my personal life, to my role as husband. But this same period was one of great personal growth and achievement, extensive publication, the building of a widely recognized academic reputation, the building of a house, and the realization of something utterly authentic in myself as manifest in my love and practice of teaching.

Over time these markedly different experiences drove an increasingly large wedge between two different aspects of my personality, my life. I remember driving home from CU, where I'd been excited teaching and doing research, when I'd start the ascent up the steep curvy road, Arroyo Chico, to our dome house I would feel the life drain out of me and a pall of deadness would settle over me. In practical, if not clinical terms, I was schizophrenic. I think the roots of this personality disorder, as perhaps it might be termed, existed when I was a teen still at home. I remember having experiences, those that I'd now describe as nonlinear, that would initiate some sort of personality withdrawal. I remember feeling dark and moody and yet not knowing why. I remember my mom often

noted that this was occurring—she used the odd phrase “he’s as queer as a two-dollar bill” (this was when the word queer simply meant odd)—and more or less accepting it as who I was. I do know that as a kid I thought that I always had to be the best and achieve the highest in order to please my mother, to deserve her love. I often felt frustrated that no matter the achievement, she always immediately suggested something else, something more, that I should strive for. I suppose that, while these memories are likely of my own construction and had little really to do with my mother, it might be said that I constantly took on more and more and tried harder and harder to earn my mother’s love, yet this was never, in my experience, possible. Quite likely as an old man now I’m still chasing this impossibility, yet now adding my family and my professional and social acquaintances to my mom as people I think I need to serve and please. I think I’ve spent much of my life trying to get those closest to me to just notice me. Isn’t this odd?

Certainly, the crisis that precipitated divorce was an opening to a new life, one less determined by this dual personality and to the gradual realization of what I’d now refer to as a healthier balance of incoherence and coherence. One where the darkness is not so debilitating and not so obscured to my own awareness, as was the case for decades. I have over the decades learned a bit how to turn the darkness, not to light necessarily, but at least to creativity, to a new project, to more work.

The greatest period of darkness was however when my relationship with Emily ended after I’d experienced the joys and close connection of a relationship developed and tested through five months of foreign travel and a couple years of joy and happiness. Having emerged from decades when at least part of me was numb and dark, to see the potential of relationship, friendship, connection, and, yes, unconditional love, only to lose it all was utterly devastating to me and it took a long time for me to gain much sense that life was worth living. Even now I see that the positive nature of that relationship and that time set a standard and an expectation that I have never been able to match, thus leaving me now alone.

Now I sometimes think that I am experiencing a series of end-of-life crises. These are, for obvious reasons, not so promising, likely less creative yet, as I am making the effort in this very writing, perhaps not totally void of the novel. There is now an urgency to expression and exploration because this much is clear: if not now, never.

It is in the presence of incongruity and challenge and crisis that vitality is most powerfully experienced perhaps because it is threatened. My response to life crisis has invariably been, once able to function again, to turn to making something, to immersing myself in a creative process fueled by the very dynamics of crisis.

Ghana West Africa Trip with Jenny

Jenny had been introduced to African cultures as a student at Fort Lewis College in Durango, an interest that turned into a passion. She found that her long-term plans to explore her interests would likely not be adequately served by Fort Lewis and, with her rise of interest in ethnic music, she discovered the ethnomusicology program at the University of Washington in Seattle. To gain admission to the program as well as to resolve the issue of affordability she needed to live for a year as a Washington State resident to acquire in-state status. She decided to go to Bellingham for a year where she might work but also snowboard at Mount Baker, one of the great ski areas in the northwest. In preparation for her studies at UW, she took some courses at Shoreline Community College that would fulfill core requirements.

Just prior to beginning this process of studying ethnomusicology at UW we decided to travel together to Africa so that we might experience some African cultures and their arts, dancing for me, music for Jenny, not that music and dancing can actually be separated. For me it also included the possibility of continuing the development of my relationship with Jenny as she was in the midst of finding her life as a professional woman. I knew that it was sort of a last chance at this sort of opportunity. Without much research we chose to go to Ghana because British colonization had introduced English which served as a lingua franca across a country that includes more than fifty separate cultures each with its own language. We reasoned that it would be easier to travel in the country if we could count on quite a few Ghanaians knowing at least some English. We were off to Ghana for a month in July and August 1997.

As I had done on my travels to Asia in 1993-'94 I wrote fairly detailed daily journal entries describing what we did and experienced including some reflections on how my own experience was impacting me. I recently found and read that Ghana journal. As with the Australian/Asian journal it perhaps deserves being somehow preserved in a somewhat edited fashion, but any extensive engagement with this Ghana trip is not appropriate or possible here. Yet, some reflections and comments are valuable particularly from the perspective of the present, so many years later. In my present reflections I find myself buffeted about by the reality of the reported experience of being in Ghana over 20 years ago with Jenny banging into my current remembrances supplemented by my shocked reactions as I read the contemporaneous journals of the trip. Such a complicated and emotionally fraught jumble.

Recovering something of the experience-at-the-time from journal reading, I am shocked by the physical demands and discomforts of the trip. We traveled much as I had with Emily several years prior, a way that might be called backpacker style. We had but the barest of a plan for where we wanted to go and

no reservations or arrangements of any kind beyond the air travel to and from Accra. Thus, every day involved negotiations and decisions regarding food, transportation, and accommodations. From my easy chair perspective as I write this, I am nearly overwhelmed that we had the courage and strength to travel this way. I am also shocked that I elected to travel in Ghana in the same style I did just several years earlier in Asia. What was I thinking? I suppose I was at a time in my life when I had the strength and sense of adventure to do so and perhaps that I accepted the economic motivations of travelling cheaply to have benefits worth the discomfort. Our accommodations were often super-cheap low-level places, often without electricity or running water. Bucket showers were the best we could hope for. Some had no protection from mosquitoes throughout the night. In the little beach town, Busua, Jenny got bitten so badly that a photo of her body covered with bites has barely any areas not swollen with red bumps. Yet I was the one who came down with malaria several months after we had returned home. We both, but me more so, suffered occasional upset stomachs and at one point I started taking Cipro thinking that I might have bacterial infection and that helped me recover.

We often used the local form of transportation known as tro-tros and these were nasty old vans crammed full of people with enormous piles of goods stacked on top. They were dusty dirty and unbelievably uncomfortable. There were a few times we all had to get out and push the damned things up a hill. We also saw tro-tro accidents where people were trapped in them bleeding from injuries. On one bus trip the bus broke down and everyone piled out on the roadside. The men jumped into passing pickup trucks to continue their journeys, but the women brought out their pots and pans and started cooking. I just can't fathom that we traveled this way, yet, of course, if you are interested in local people and something of an experience of life as lived by the folks in Ghana, this is the best way to do it. My journal is filled with examples of personal interactions, often long conversations, with all sorts of Ghanaians, men, women, and loads of kids. We of course were hustled by many, but constantly I described the people as sweet and helpful and generous. We finally learned that when approached with some annoying scam, we could simply say "no, not interested," but then ask the person about himself and his life and he often shifted to a different style of relating to us. Still, reading how we struggled with attaining necessities and how much we suffered physically, I am just astounded that we traveled this way as our choice.

Finding local music and dancing was a central interest for us and, based on my other travel experience (Bali in particular), I thought they would be simply ubiquitous. We were mostly disappointed, finding that dancing and drumming were accessible primarily at tourist-oriented cultural centers. In Kokrobite, a coastal village near Accra, we were able to arrange for Jenny of have a drum

lesson. We also found a dance and music performance, intended mostly for tourists. We were able to find distinctive local crafts such as drums and cloth. We went to craft villages where we saw Kente cloth—which now in the USA seems to have become something of a signal marker of Africa, but is made by the Akan-Ashanti in the Kumasi area—and other forms of cloth being woven and made. Carved pieces were also easy to find.

For Jenny, this was her first foreign travel to a third world country (Judy and Jenny had gone with me to Australia for a research trip in 1992), and it included being away from her friends on her 22nd birthday. Traveling for a month with no clear itinerary is especially difficult. We both experienced emotional swings during the trip. I can tell from my writing I was focused on trying to assure that Jenny had a good experience and that I was constantly concerned about her. There were times when she was bummed out and depressed, missing her friends and feeling uncomfortable, but I was surprised and delighted by my frequent journal comments indicating how easy she was as a traveler and how she adapted to all the issues and challenges in good humor. She enjoyed meeting the people we encountered, especially those her age and the women, but also, of course, the kids.

I found a few places in my journal where I reflected on perhaps taking some drumming lessons when I returned home. There was no hint of me having, at that time, any idea of opening a dance and music studio, yet it would be less than two years later that I would do so.

Starting at Accra we slowly worked our way west along the coast visiting Kokrobite, Cape Coast, and Busua. In these coastal villages we experienced the fishing life of the people and we saw plenty of evidence of the slave trade that connects Ghana's Gold Coast, sometimes also called Slave Coast, to the history of sending captive Africans to the Americas as slaves. The prominent old buildings—usually referred to as castles, but were more explicitly forts, located on the water's edge—served as collection points for captured Ghanaians to be sent to the Americas. These were forts with canons pointing seaward with prisons or more accurately dungeons. We saw the underground rooms that temporarily held hundreds of slaves at a time and the tunnels that narrowed to a passing point—the point of no return—that led to these people being loaded on ships bound for the Americas. In the USA I think we focus most on African slaves located in the south and the divisions regarding ownership of slaves that led to the Civil War. The experience we had in Ghana placed the emphasis on Ghanaians being captured and imprisoned in horrible conditions in these forts and then placed on ships headed to unimaginable destinations. Certainly, the emotional experiences of being in these historic places is inseparable from the unanswerable questions “How can some people treat others so inhumanely and

violently?” and “What is in the nature of human beings that so many survive being treated like animals or chattel?”

From Busua we headed inland to the northern part of the country, taking a train from Tokaradi to Kumasi which is a famous city, the seat of Akan-Ashanti Kingdom that actually extends beyond Ghanaian colonial borders. It is also the location of the largest open-air market in West Africa. From Kumasi we made our way farther north to Tamale. Whereas the southern part of Ghana is mostly Christian, in conjunction with some aspects of the continuing local tribal traditions, the northern part of the country is largely Muslim. From Tamale we went to Molé which is one of the few large game parks in West Africa. Here, perched on a cliff edge, we could observe elephants and many other animals in the valley below. We also took guided hikes into the area to observe, up close, many different animals in the wild including lots of elephants. We then worked our way back to Accra where we spent a couple days before returning home.

During our travels in Ghana we often felt we were experiencing something of Africa that was rapidly passing. In Cape Coast there was electricity and television and a sense of being connected not only to Ghanaian national affairs but also to the world, particularly the USA by means of CNN and Hollywood action movies. Yet a village a short distance to the west, Busua, had the poles erected for the electric lines, yet electricity had not arrived. Those folks’ sense of the world was nearly totally local with but a bit of information gleaned through conversations with tourists. These adjacent villages seemed to represent two different Africas and it was quite clear that one of these was soon to pass.

Cowries on an African Bracelet

The surf was pounding. It was difficult to make out the details of the lava rock formations ahead because of the wind-swirled sea spray. Fishy wetness filled our nostrils and our lungs. Walking the beach, Jenny and I passed a group of squishy fat ruddy Australian miners with their gorgeous sexy Ghanaian mistresses. Then we were walking an empty beach. Last night in Cape Coast we met a boy of perhaps twelve who told us of his busy day at school and his favorite American action and adventure movies, his favorite actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and his interest in computers. Busua was but 20 miles or so to the west. We saw along the rutted road to the village the skinny wood poles not yet supporting the wires that soon would carry the world into this village. We were assisted in finding a place to stay by a twelve-year old boy, dressed in a University of Colorado tee shirt, how odd, who sweetly asked us if small small boys like him got to drive cars in America. He was endlessly fascinated to learn about telephones and computers and cars and everything American. Only 20 miles, yet worlds apart.

Walking the beach, I picked up a cowry shell. I remember walking the shell-littered beach at Mission Beach Australia with Emily. At dusk the fruit bats flowed forth like a black river across the golden sky. On that beach I considered, without insight, the strange issue of what compels us to occasionally bend down and pick up a shell; one particular shell among thousands. Finders keepers. And then weeks later when we get home we have this little baggy filled with sticky sandy shells wondering what we are to do with them. I'm not so sure I thought about that on the Busua beach, but I did think about the significance of the cowry shell. The cowry is available for free, for the taking, on the beaches of many tropical countries. Yet, cowry shells have for millennia been used as money. Something that in itself is free, worthless really, being used to represent wealth. Guess we do the same thing with paper money. It is, in itself, worthless or nearly so, yet we allow it to represent our wealth, even our individual value. In God we trust.

Given the sameness, I think I prefer the cowry to the dollar. At least it is beautiful either on its own or as a decoration on the African bracelet that Jenny bought me. It shines and it comes in different colors. It was once the home of a creature. On one side it appears as an eye looking at us, checking us out I suppose. The other side is a dreamscape of imagery from teeth to vaginas to vagina dentate ... now there's a story for you. The cowry: a thing of mystery, of creativity, of desire, of fear; ... beach trash ... wealth.

Dome to the Niwot House

Houses reflect who we are in some deeply physical, yet personal, way. I've long had an idea for a book, maybe a picture book with narrative, that would be organized around the houses I've lived in. Wonder if I'll find the time and inspiration to accomplish that.

I experienced a stream of distinct personal events in the mid-1990s included divorce, starting a new relationship, traveling in Australia and Asia for five months, and falling into dark years reeling from the shock of losing a relationship and feeling the loss of any sense of identity. Throughout this period, I remained living in the dome, yet all this change precipitated shifting feelings about the house.

The decade of the mid-1980s into the early '90s was packed with new commitments and obligations. This period started with the selection of the land in the Colorado foothills, the design and physical building of the house. This was a time of living a mountain lifestyle, continuing to finish the house, and building my academic career. I had something of a love-hate relationship with the dome house because, while it drew upon my most creative energies and required my

acquisition of practical skills and knowledge to produce this glorious (to me anyway) house, it also demanded enormous amounts of time and energy that were taken away from kids, spouse, leisure, career, and health. This was a time of near total exhaustion simply because I had taken on way too much work. I had no money beyond basic necessities so I took every extra job that paid a pittance and deposited it in a special savings account for Jenny's higher education. It was by this time too late to save for Corbin, so I just hoped that I'd save for Jenny and then when Corbin got to college I'd have enough to support him.

Through the end of this decade, my marriage was steadily deteriorating. Judy did not want to work and she seemed to have little interest in the design and decoration involved in making the dome house our home. She spent her days reading and watching films; these were her passions. As the years went by there was no lessening of demands on my time and I became increasingly exhausted and weary of the whole lifestyle. Mountain living, beyond my endless ongoing efforts to finish and complete the work on the house, is hard with a long steep road to navigate daily. In the winter the road was treacherous when covered in deep snow. I just wore out and I'm afraid that Judy and the kids suffered as a result. I became withdrawn and emotionally cold devoting everything to my work, house, and career.

It is little wonder that by the early '90s I desperately wanted free of the marriage yet Jenny was still at home making separation an unacceptable choice in my mind. Having put so much of my sweat and creative effort into the dome, I also found my identity to be closely associated with its very physical presence.

The day in March 1993 that I finally left home initiating separation and divorce, the decision was not one that I'd actually made. I was home working and Judy had been out of the house, I don't recall where, perhaps a walk. It seems that when she came back I was in my office and I must have been gathering some things, yet I know it had nothing to do with me leaving. She walked in and said, "What are you doing, leaving?" I recall being shocked that she'd even say such a thing, but I was more dazed by my immediate response. "Yes, that's exactly what I'm doing." And within an hour I had the basic things I needed packed in my car and I was on my way. Of course, I had no plan where to go or what to do, but we had an old futon mattress that I loaded in the car and late that night I was able to move it into my CU office along with other things. Fortunately, I had a large office with a sort of nook behind a file cabinet where I could store a few things. I lived in my CU office for some time, unbeknownst to anyone other than Emily with whom my relationship had been growing, before finding a temporary apartment to rent on a month to month basis.

I realized that I had given up the dome house and would never live there again. Judy and I attempted to come to a divorce settlement that summer, but

she was not able to accept any final agreement even though I assured her anything she wanted was likely okay with me. I did insist that I be designated in the agreement as the sole provider for the kids' educational expenses because I didn't want the kids to have any weird uncertainty about this responsibility and it also was intended to assure Judy she would not have any financial obligation for them.

I had earned a sabbatical for the following fall and supplemented that with a fellowship that extended my leave to a full academic year. My research included travel to Australia. With few obligations in Colorado and with new research interests emerging in dance in world cultures, I began to think about extending travel beyond Australia and I asked Emily if she'd join me. She agreed and we traveled from early September 1993 to near the end of the following January.

There was no home or even apartment to return to at the end and I didn't even give it much thought. Yet near the end of my Asia travels I got an unexpected letter from Judy informing me that she was moving out of the dome to take an apartment in Boulder and I could live there if I wanted. We had not settled the divorce so I expected all this time that she would actually get the house, yet there it was empty at the time of our return from Nepal. When we finally settled the divorce that spring, I managed to purchase Judy's ownership in the house and, by giving her almost all of my retirement funds, I managed to do a single cash settlement rather than to be obligated to pay her monthly support for at least ten years. I really wanted to have a clean break so I could start new, at least in some respects, and I was willing to give up all of my retirement money.

Emily and I did okay living in the dome for a couple years, yet when our relationship came to an end I began to experience an increasing discomfort living there. I started renting out rooms in the dome finding that young single guys were often interested in the mountain lifestyle. I shared the house with single men and fell into an emotionally dark time. I began to see that the house reflected who I had been a decade earlier, but decreasingly so over time. I began to realize that I either had to engage in a major remodel of the dome to again make it compatible with who I had become, something I couldn't even imagine how to begin, or I had to sell it and live elsewhere.

What nudged me out of the dark years, what had in a sense also led to my divorce, was dancing. I had taught the CU course "Religion and Dance" beginning around 1994 through the nineties and it had become a highly popular course that was growing steadily in its richness and many students loved the course. Meeting so many artists from around the world I began to think about opening a community dance studio. Like most everything in my life, once I embraced the idea I gave it my all. I began to think not only of a studio but also of a house with land where I could provide temporary residence for visiting

artists. I also began to see it as a place where Jenny and her friends might live once she finished her degree in ethnomusicology at the University of Washington.

This was a time when real estate was booming and I'd somehow managed to invest in a condo and then other condos, using the growing equity in one as the basis for financing a down payment on the next and so on. I located a huge house on three acres, something of a country estate, that I purchased in the late '90s with the understanding that when Jen returned she'd have a place to live as would also some of her friends. I founded Bantaba World Dance & Music the year before Jen returned knowing that it would provide her work in the area of her major. And, indeed, for a few years, the house was full of young people who paid minimal rent as well as a haven for a stream of guest artists who also taught at Bantaba in residence for short periods of time. And, of course, as with almost all my projects, not only did the house require more time and money to maintain than I'd ever anticipated, so too did a new start-up dance studio. Again, I found myself single, working multiple fulltime jobs, having a bunch of people relying on me for their well-being, and me struggling personally and financially.

For a while I dated an Indian woman who was a law school student. When she graduated, she moved back to Aspen where she had been on leave from a law firm. For a long period of time, I would teach salsa at Bantaba until 10 p.m. on Friday nights and then drive the four hours to Aspen to spend the weekend with her returning home Monday morning. Recalling all this now, not even 20 years later, I am profoundly confused and rather deeply disturbed by my approach to life.

TheStrip

One of my favorite courses to teach was writing for religious studies majors. It was a required course at the junior level but, unfortunately, quite a few students didn't take it until they were seniors. I taught it regularly for a few years, until the faculty decided to eliminate it because they thought that students got enough writing experience in their other courses. I think for many of my students it was a life shaping experience. I also notice on Facebook that lots of these students keep in touch with each other and with me after all these years.

In this course I asked the students to do all sorts of writing from book reviews to grant proposals, from concise essays to research papers. They learned to appropriately include their own developing voices in their writing. I asked them to think about how they were developing as learned human beings by having them write intellectual autobiographies. I asked them to take what they considered to be their very best academic paper and to rewrite it. Most did little

more than correct a few technical errors. When we discussed why they didn't do an extensive revision, the broad consensus was that, even considering the paper their best, they still thought it crap not worth more of their time. We discussed the implications of considering most of their university writing assignments to be unworthy and we considered how one could write academic works that deserve continuing attention and, in some way, would actually make a difference.

One spring, it must have been 1996 or '97, a group of students, some graduate some undergrad, approached me. Some of them had taken my writing course, others knew of my interest in exploring the creative possibilities of academic writing. They told me that they were not satisfied simply doing the required academic objectivist style writing and wanted an opportunity to explore other options. I was happy to join them in this endeavor and we met as a volunteer group regularly over the summer each presenting imaginative writings to the group and discussing how these experimental forms might be academic and if the academy might ever recognize them as such. One of these writings I remember was done by a young woman who had been horribly injured in a fire a couple of years earlier losing both her legs and leaving her hands and arms barely functional. She was trying to use academic writing to work through being what she termed "differently abled." Her writing was about how she, as surely do most differently abled people, felt not really seen especially for who she understood herself to be. She inserted an onion skin page between each of her typed pages so the reader had to experience what was written as veiled and diffused.

By the end of that summer many of those participating were excited about their own creative academic writings yet they were even more frustrated by the limitations of the standard writing conventions. We began to discuss possibilities that might be more fully realized by using the electronic media of the internet. They encouraged me to offer a course "Religion and the Internet" which I did for several terms. The course gave them the opportunity to earn a bit of credit for continuing their explorations in writing especially in electronic internet-based forms. This was a time, the late '90s, at CU before they even had an Information Technology (IT) department. The internet became publicly available in 1991. The students didn't know a thing about the skills required to design and program for the internet. They contacted the hard sciences and acquired down streamed computers. They sought and were given access to a huge attic space in the old Geology building. They moved in desks and couches and I think some of them slept there. This group of around fifteen students started spending every spare moment learning programming and internet technology. They learned how to create interactive pieces that required the reader to engage options and make responses in the process of reading their work. They sought the most sophisticated of philosophical and theoretical works to support their

interweaving of academic and technological forms. They met regularly to critique one another's work and to discuss in the sharpest and most honest terms the intellectual ideas they were developing. I found my membership in this group to be perhaps the most honest and demanding intellectual community I have ever been a part of. This statement holds today.

They established an online student journal called "TheStrip" inspired in part by the characteristics of the structure of the mobius strip: being both two-sided and one-sided. They became accomplished at the web technologies and produced lots of content. They did not allow me to exempt myself from producing pieces pressuring me to also learn this technology and to add my own work, which I did. They made presentations to the dean of the college and they traveled to Florida to make a student presentation at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion and they wrote about their creative and innovative work that was published in the AAR Bulletin.

When this group of students graduated, the department asked me to continue the project, but I was convinced it could only work if it were student initiated and operated. There were no students eager to carry on the work. My hunch is that the intensity of this initial group and the high level and demand of their work made it impossible for any other students to join in. Knowing of the end of this work, each of the members of the group wrote a farewell note and we published all of them on the site and it was left to the ages. Last I checked unfortunately it is no longer available on the university servers.

Out of that group of fifteen or so students I think nine of them were hired, with their MA in religious studies, in technology jobs. It was, probably still is, a rare thing to have prospective employees who are technologically capable but well-read and skilled in incisive critical thinking. I know that two who met in the group got married. One of them helped me design the cover to *Storytracking* to include a visual joke that I don't think anyone ever got. When the project ended I knew that for most of these students this work engaged their deepest passions and commitments. I asked them how much time and effort they estimated they'd spent on TheStrip over the prior two years. None had spent less than fifteen hours a week across these two years.

I regret that this work seems to have vanished into the ether, yet I'm proud to have been part of this amazing project initiated and driven by students. It was true learning and the best of education. I'm confident that they all are living full and exciting lives shaped, in part, by this experience. I recently heard from one of them that many of them still keep in touch.

The Bantaba Vision

In the mid-1990s my Religion and Dance course at CU began to grow and develop perhaps because it included a dance studio every Friday afternoon. When the course regularly filled with 90 students the only place on campus large enough was Carlson, an old gymnasium that had been fitted with a dance floor. It was the size of a huge basketball court. It was available only on Friday afternoons after two. I was told no course would ever succeed with an attendance required class at two p.m. on Friday, but I didn't believe it. The course filled every semester for over ten years. In the early years of the course I offered just a few dance studios per semester because I wanted them taught only by artists who were accomplished in each dance form and also knowledgeable of the culture the dance represented. Slowly over several years I met more and more amazing dancers who were often connected with musicians, most of them were actually from the cultures their dance specialty represented. Eventually the course expanded from one semester to a two-semester sequence that included 30 studios. During this time, I was also regularly traveling as often as I could to countries all over the world to learn the dances of other cultures and to learn first-hand as much as I could about their cultures.

Late in the 1990s I began to marvel at the remarkably talented dance and cultural resources available in the Boulder-Denver area. As I got to know these artists I found that many of them were teaching, if at all, out of their living rooms or someone's garage or renting a warehouse space in which to teach. I began to consider what I might do to help them serve the greater community, that is the community beyond CU, by finding a way these artists could have more public exposure and a suitable space in which to teach and to encounter one another. I believed it would also be an amazing way to enrich the community, renowned for being very white and upscale.

I founded Bantaba World Dance & Music locating it in an old dance studio space in the Table Mesa shopping center in south Boulder. I built out the interior so that there would be one large studio and a smaller one plus a small reception area.

The vision from the beginning was to have a space for the development of a community of dancers, musicians, artists, and all those who appreciated multiculturalism. We wanted dancers, musicians, teachers and students, that represented cultures the world over coming together to share the beauty and vitality of their own cultures as expressed in music and dancing with others from around the world. Jenny was finishing her degree in ethnomusicology at the University of Washington where she focused the performance aspect of her work on Ghanaian drumming under the renowned Koo Nimo, a leading folk musician of Palm wine music or Highlife music, and steel pan drumming under Ray

Holman from Trinidad y Tobago, an innovator in pan music. Jenny and I had traveled to Ghana together in 1997. She joined me at Bantaba a year after it opened when she finished her degree. That first year, a student studying at the time at Naropa, Sharon Kivenko, who has since finished a PhD at Harvard with her dissertation focused on dance in Mali, joined me to help get the business going.

Although we had amazing offerings at really reasonable prices, the clientele that we attracted were largely those who had great intentions and much interests, but little to no resources. Although I should have known shortly after we opened, that, as a business, this enterprise could only fail, that it would exist only at great financial loss for me even putting in fulltime free labor, yet the vision Jenny and I shared, supported by Sharon and others, demanded that we do all we could to try to make it work.

I am proud that, despite the great financial and psychological cost to me, and it added up to an enormous sum of money and amount of time, we never doubted our vision, nor compromised it. I can remember a great many meetings Jenny and I had to discuss how to make Bantaba succeed as a business, yet we held firm that every idea must contribute to our vision.

Bantaba's Successes and Failures

Although it has been over ten years since Bantaba went out of business it remains almost impossible emotionally for me to think or write about it. I, and also Jenny, suffered so much trauma not only in its ultimate failure but also in so many other aspects of its entire history, that I still experience stress. The vision grew out of my CU teaching to become a business venture. I was in my late fifties and probably should have been more cautious and a great deal wiser. Still, to start a school of music and dancing featuring teachers from a variety of countries and to build it as a cultural center that welcomed people from many cultures just seemed to be essential, the right thing to do. Boulder was and still is one of the whitest cities anywhere particularly ironic given its sense of itself as being so worldly and hip. Despite Boulder's reputation of being home to Alan Ginsberg and his buddies and to the foo-foo rich spiritualist Buddhist Naropa Institute, it seems to me to be surprisingly narrowminded and elitist, more interested in the new wealth of high tech or the endless varieties of free spiritualities than in actually supporting the arts and welcoming and encouraging cultural and ethnic diversity.

Bantaba opened in an old dance studio in Table Mesa shopping center that we refit for two studios. It opened with emphasis on African dance and music (especially drumming) and Latin American dances like tango and salsa. From the

beginning we provided rehearsal and meeting spaces for the growing community of break dancers. Breaking classes were regularly taught. We also supported the development of the Capoeira community with classes and rehearsal space. We didn't know how to market and we especially didn't know how to market to the wealthy communities. What we wound up attracting were mostly people who were interested in cultural diversity and in the dancing and music of non-majority American peoples. This clientele correlated with those who generally were without permanent jobs or careers or steady incomes.

As a university professor for so many decades I've always felt that a great tragedy of this time in American history is the steady trend toward business and economics being the desired and preferred goal for young people to pursue. Those students interested in history, culture, art, dance, music, anthropology, philosophy, literature tend to be, in my sense of value, the most intelligent, imaginative, idealistic (and young people should be idealistic), open, tolerant, passionate, and interesting people. Yet almost none of them can get a job that requires, much less takes advantage of, their skills and values. We need just sit and absorb this statement a moment. *Our society seems to have little if any use for creative informed thoughtful high-valued liberally educated artistically inclined young people.* Few of these young people get a job at all beyond minimum wage work in what we now call the gig economy. But these were the people that were strongly attracted to Bantaba and the opportunities we offered. Many couldn't pay for classes and often wanted to work some sort of trade. In some worlds I think this arrangement would be excellent, but since we had to pay bills incurred as a business it made our financial success impossible.

As we tried to build a business, the clientele we attracted wanted free or cheap classes. As we began to sponsor the visas for teachers to come to Bantaba from many countries, our faculty grew as did our offerings. To survive we had to pay faculty on the basis of a percentage of the income received from their classes. Most of these teachers were grateful to be sponsored to come to the USA. Yet, as they began to integrate into expensive Boulder and American life, they too could not make it financially. I know that many of them believed that as a white business owner I was getting rich off their underpaid work. They often said as much. The fact of the matter is that I was losing huge amounts of money every month. I often lost each month at Bantaba more than my salary at CU and in the nearly decade of its operation I never took a dime in salary for my work which was often as much as 40 hours a week and this was on top of my full time teaching and research work at CU. We never had a month that I remember that was in the black. There are few things more gut wrenching than to pull \$6,000 a month from dwindling savings knowing that your employees think you are taking advantage of them to get richer. And some version of this process went on for many years. No wonder I still feel stress.

Apart from the economics, we had our successes. Each summer in the early years of the business we hosted an African festival. We attracted dancers and musicians from across the country to come to take several days of classes with our outstanding faculty and we hired some special African guest dancers to teach as well. We also had regular weekly Friday African Dance Nights that packed our studios and featured performances by our faculty and several groups of student dancers and musicians as well as dancing by a crowd that attended. But even these occasions were marred because, although we were in a shopping center and these were Friday evenings, neighbors who lived in the surrounding community often reported us to the police who came to threaten us with expensive noise violation fines. How do you play drums softly? For several years we had an annual Bantaba show at the Boulder Theater in downtown Boulder when all of our classes performed for a paying audience. These were amazing nights of celebration for everyone in the Bantaba community, but we usually just broke even given the cost to rent this venue.

As our Bantaba community grew, we felt we were establishing a presence in the Boulder community and in fact I full well knew that our efforts were known across the country since there were few studio organizations anywhere that were like ours. We even had recognition abroad, especially in Africa. Still, we were not any closer to financial stability. One year when our lease came due, I thought that perhaps what we needed to do was to go bigger and risk more. How stupid I was! Looking back, I really don't understand myself. An expanding mixed-use community was developing in north Boulder that seemed to promise access to a broader community and perhaps more financially secure clients. I decided that renting was just making someone else money so I should buy a commercial space and make it a studio and dance community. I can barely write about this because it can't be severed from hugely painful emotions I still suffer, yet I must. Trying to remember some of this history now raises for me the question, "Where did I get the money through all this time to keep on going including buying a new building?" I don't really know. Did I rob a bank in my sleep?

We purchased a new space on Yellow Pine and spent huge amounts of money building it out to meet the city's sound mitigation concerns and their code requirements for studios in this mixed-use area. Unfortunately, directly above the studio was a condo owned by a woman who had been majorly hurt in a recent divorce and she had zero tolerance for any disturbance. On the first day of operation she called the police on us with a noise complaint and after struggling with her and the city folks and the police for a while it became unavoidably clear that, despite the community covenants that supported mixed use including added sounds, that it would be impossible for us to stay in business. We received huge fines and there were police walking the sidewalk outside the business every evening to assure we didn't make noise. Music to some is noise to others. We

had no choice but to stop all our African classes because of the drumming as well as most of our other classes. I wound up teaching several hours of salsa classes most nights a week just to try to get enough money to pay Jenny and the mortgage, still suffering large monthly losses. Bantaba in that first year in north Boulder became mostly a salsa studio with me being the only teacher.

That arrangement wasn't sustainable financially. And I became increasingly physically and emotionally exhausted as well as financially broke. We closed Bantaba and rented out the space to a tech business for a year while we tried to sell the building. However, the disgruntled woman who lived above the space ruined any chance of selling the building. It became known to everyone that she would nix any sale and indeed she did stop one on the very day it was supposed to close. After years of this struggle I had no choice but to let the mortgage default and then I had to come up with \$50,000 cash when the bank took over the deed and to pay an attorney on top of that. I figured that I lost at least half a million dollars in this Bantaba business disaster and no one other than Jenny has ever known. It was interesting to me that when we had to stop the African classes all these African teachers, most of whom were in the USA because of my sponsoring visas for them, just went on to find other spaces to offer their classes. They expressed no gratitude or regrets to me and I never heard from most of them again.

There are so many other bad memories that are flooding back to me as I write this that I just can't bear to write about. But there are some things to ponder and to celebrate.

I really don't understand what there is about me, about my work ethic, about my character that manifests in so much tenacity, or perhaps better persistent stupidity. I don't think tenacity is necessarily always such a good thing. I think I have always been driven by that old adage "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." I've always faced the presence of almost certain failure by what I might describe in no flattering terms as bowing my neck and doubling my effort. Not only did I do this foolishness with Bantaba, but also with my PhD at Chicago and with building the dome. There was no reason at all for me to keep at an academic program at Chicago I was never prepared for to begin with and would always feel an outsider to the community. Yet I did and I couldn't give up and walk away. I even tried to leave it, but couldn't. I suppose the old dirt farmer salt-of-the-earth type is my gestural heritage and by the influence of both my parents and all the folks in their families, but especially my dad, I got this work 'til you drop ethic engrained in me so deeply that I simply have known no alternative. I think I'm something like a horse ridden to the point of falling dead before stopping. I know that in the modern tech world failure is often praised. Beta versions of tech are released knowing they will never become permanent, being ready upon failure to move on as fast as possible to the next idea. I have never

been able to accept failure even when the evidence of it overwhelms. The price I've paid for this character trait (flaw) is a high one I think; it has soured my soul.

Bantaba did have its successes. I was able to sponsor visas for around 25 artists, all people of color, to come to the USA. Although they all came on three-year cultural exchange visas, most figured a way to stay. Many of them married US citizens to gain green cards. Many created cultural-tourism enterprises taking groups of Americans to visit their home countries. While it was not part of my original intention, Bantaba became a force for cultural, ethnic, and racial change. As a result of widely known artists of color from many cultures being present as performers and teachers and activists in the community, it has clearly darkened a bit the hue of this area of Colorado and beyond.

As these artists married local people, while many of the marriages did not last, most of them produced children. I'll write more about them separately, but I consider these kids, whom I call Bantaba Babies, an important, if unknown, part of my legacy. Bantaba also brought many people together that otherwise likely would not have known one another. Many of Jenny's friends today are women and men that she met through Bantaba and she tells me that most of them see their closest and most enduring friends as those they met and danced with at Bantaba. These are strong creative independent powerful people (mostly women) who will make important contributions throughout their lives and whose kids are what I see as exemplary of a great new future. It is odd that, although I was constantly present at Bantaba and knew all of the teachers and most of the clients, I wound up with no ongoing friends from the Bantaba community. I don't really understand this. Perhaps partly it was due to me being the owner. Perhaps in part it was because I was at least thirty years older than almost all of these Bantaba people. Maybe it is just that I somehow appeared to others as someone to respect but not befriend. Perhaps it was because I was a white guy, the symbol of white privilege, and they were mostly young artists of color from third world countries or the young Americans drawn to them. It saddens me that while this long Bantaba struggle connected me to hundreds of acquaintances, it resulted in no close friends.

Were it not for Bantaba I would never have had the amazing experience of teaching dancing or choreographing dance or creating a *rueda de casino* performance group or learning bolero dancing or meeting so many fascinating talented people from cultures the world over or having the grandkids I have and so many other things. When I feel stressed and a sense of failure with all the accompanying anger and angst, when I ask myself if Bantaba was worth the years of intense work without pay and the loss of half a million dollars, when I ask if Bantaba was worth my disenchantment with city officials and a larger community that doesn't care about diversity or culture and the arts, I try to remember these positive things and, despite having almost no actual present contact with any of

those who were involved, I feel it important to remember that what I did with Bantaba changed a bit of the world in creative and positive ways.

High School Salsa, Rueda Competition, & Salsamigos

When in 1998 I opened Bantaba World Dance & Music in south Boulder the studio was only a block away from an innovative public school called New Vista High School. The school specialized in kids with learning and social problems and it had the character of being a safe and welcoming place for kids who didn't care to conform to the usual school environment. They offered more extensive art and music curricula than did most high schools. These special courses were often part of a nine-week block program. These courses met several times a week and at the end of the block term the whole student body met in the school auditorium to perform what they had learned and enjoy what other classes had accomplished.

The school needed studio spaces for some of these classes and we at Bantaba wanted a large auditorium in which to occasionally have a public show for the community. We traded studio space for auditorium space. Soon the principal recognized that we had many artists who might teach these special block classes. Bantaba faculty began to teach drumming and dance classes, often in our studios, to New Vista students.

After this arrangement got established, I remember being shocked that the principal, who knew that I taught salsa, asked if I would consider teaching one of these courses. I'd observed these often somewhat unruly classes and the difficulty the teachers had keeping the group focused, so my first reaction was that I didn't want anything to do with trying to teach a bunch of high school kids that had social and learning problems. Not my thing! But the principal persisted and I finally agreed to give it a try. I immediately had to face complicated and thorny issues. Salsa is a partner dance that, in its historical cultural settings, has strong gender identities associated with the lead and follow roles of the partners. The lead is the strong partner and is male. The follow is the weak partner and is female. Slightly exaggerating, but not by much. New Vista had lots of openly gay kids and trans kids and kids exploring gender roles and identities. My Bantaba salsa teaching also was developing in ways to try to challenge traditional gender roles in social dancing. I also knew that these courses were likely to attract far more girls than boys and I didn't want the boys to all be leads and to assign to some girls the so-called boys lead role. All of this was just wrong to me.

By this time, I'd begun to love and dance *rueda de casino*, a salsa dance that is still a partner dance, but it is done as a group in a circle with everyone doing the same moves that are called by one of the dancers as the dance is being performed.

It also includes the constant change of partners in the complicated circulating moves of the dance. There is a repertoire of hundreds of moves most with Spanish names. Some moves are simple, taking but an eight-count, while others become remarkably complicated with various changes of partners requiring maybe a dozen eight-counts. This form of salsa originated in Cuba in the 1950s and in Cuba it retains the gender roles associated with leading and following. I decided that in teaching New Vista kids, *rueda* would be the much-preferred form of salsa dancing than a room full of separate struggling couples, but the challenge was to overcome the gendered associations with partner roles. I came up with a four-count move that could be called while dancing that effectively switched the positions and roles of the lead and follow. Once I began to contemplate the effects of this simple roll-changing move I realized that there really was no need to keep referring to the roles with the loaded terms lead and follow. I also began to realize that there is the benefit of body and rhythm ambidexterity in that every dancer would learn to do all of the moves while on different parts of the rhythm patterns. I realized then that such bodied action might also have beneficial intellectual and physiological implications.

In this newly developing form of salsa every dancer was the same, gender was never mentioned, roles were never mentioned. Everyone danced with every other dancer regardless of gender. I also began to appreciate how the integrity of circle required that all the dancers execute the same moves at the same time and that all dancers be able to perform every move in two different positions. This wholeness eliminated the issue of some dancers being better than others and thus defeated the rise of any hierarchy based on ability. The dancers that needed it were given help by the other dancers without comment as part of keeping the circle going.

These elements of the dance as I was able to come up with them kept all the students constantly engaged, constantly moving. I never stopped the movement to talk, it was always dancing. I never took students aside to help them because they didn't get it; the other dancers simply and without being told learned how to help one another to do the movement. It was fun and lively and there was never a mention of any awkwardness when boys danced with boys (and the dance included touching) or when scrawny nerd boys danced with physically well-developed older popular girls. From the beginning I loved teaching and every time I taught salsa at New Vista it was a success and fun. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of success was when the students enrolled in the class during one block comprised about ten boys and four or five girls mostly Latina. When they performed for the whole school everyone loved it. The principal commented that this was a demonstration of what education should be.

For the show at the end of the session I always had the students help choreograph the dance and they loved coming up with some highly complex

interweaving patterned moves to show their skills. I taught this course regularly for many years at New Vista.

Rueda is a social dance with lots of interaction among the dancers facing inward in the circle. It is really fun and socially interactive for the dancers in the circle. When I began to think about the dance as a performance, I realized that those watching the dance would likely be impressed by the obvious complexity of the dance, yet they surely would soon feel excluded since they were on the outside which is not a good vantage. To resolve this issue, I came up with a four-count move that could be called at any time that would effectively turn the circle to the outside. The moves were all the same, yet they were presented to those around the outside of the circle rather than within it. For the dancers, this orientation added another axis of ambidexterity and an entirely different experience of orientation in the space. More challenging, more fun.

Miriam McGilvray, a New Vista student and the daughter of a CU faculty colleague in anthropology, approached me a year or so after she had taken a *rueda* class from me. She told me that she knew of several other girls at New Vista who would like to form a group to develop their salsa dancing skills. Elise Butler who she said was among them was well known to me as one of the first people to come to Bantaba when it opened. I didn't hesitate. There were six girls who joined the group and I immediately saw their potential. They all had some dance experience and they were super sassy girls eager to take this dancing as far as possible. We met regularly and it wasn't long before they were performance ready. This was the early 2000s and *rueda* competitions were held across the world. At that time almost all the *rueda* groups were comprised of young adult couples and many were amazing. What was never even heard of at that time was an all-girls group that could switch lead and follow and dance facing in or out. We learned of an international competition in Vancouver and decided to go. One old guy and six high school girls. They all got permission and written notes from their parents since I was taking them out of the country. We flew to Seattle and rented a car to drive to Vancouver. The competition took place in a club that sold alcohol and the girls, all under legal drinking age obviously, were not allowed to be in the club other than when they were competing. We had to hang out in the green room much of the evening awaiting the time for them to compete. Of course, none of us had ever been to a *rueda* or salsa competition before so we assumed that the basic point would be to demonstrate how skilled were the dancers at actually dancing *rueda* with the moves called, not choreographed, to show their true social dancing skills. We choreographed the entry onto the floor and the final moves, but the rest was basically improv. While the judges gave them high praise and extensive compliments for being far younger than any others there and for being the first all-girls group they had seen, they didn't win anything. What we learned—doubtless I should have known it before—was that

all the groups did fully choreographed highly flash routines. None of us was disappointed and we all felt that they had proved to everyone that they were among the best *rueda* and partner salsa dancers anywhere. At the open dance that took place another night when the girls could attend, men from everywhere lined up to dance with all these girls because they were just so damned good. They performed and competed often until they graduated high school.

Miriam has kept in touch with her travels to Brazil and around the world. Just saw on Facebook that she has a baby. Elise and I taught and performed salsa together for years. She married Adam Silva, a break dancer. Having met at Bantaba, I was pleased that at their wedding they made a point to acknowledge me as the one who introduced them and helped them develop as dancers. They both still dance, have a beautiful child, and are amazing young people.

Experiencing the potential value of *rueda* dancing for teen development I wrote a little book describing in detail the dance techniques and teaching methods I used and argued, supported by research in human development how and what the elements of the dance actually accomplished in social, educational, and physical developmental terms. At one point I'd hoped to try to make the form of *rueda* I'd developed widely known among educators of youth. I never had the time to publish the book or to try to market myself widely to do lecture-presentations and demonstrations, yet I still believe in the potential. Several years ago, I published an article on this dance form and its value for human development in an international dance journal for which I am a consulting editor.

When the north Boulder Bantaba studio failed, Jenny and I were still doing *rueda* for groups of youth and we sought and received a couple of grants from a youth council in Boulder to continue our work. We called this organization Salsamigos and continued for several years teaching the dance to the youth.

Bantaba Babies

I believe it was Julie Barron who came to see me not so long after I opened Bantaba. Nii Armah Sowah, a dancer and singer from Ghana, and Abdoul Doumbia, a master drummer from Mali, were teaching classes at Bantaba. Nii Armah had come to the USA on a student visa, which had expired, and Abdoul had come on a spousal visa to marry Katrina who was then a student at Brown University. They had moved to Boulder. Julie had visited various countries in West Africa including, I'm pretty sure, both Mali and Senegal. She said that she knew noted musicians and dancers in Africa who were eager to come to the USA. I found this pretty obvious. When Jenny and I had traveled to Ghana in 1997 half the young men we met pleaded with us to sponsor them to move to America.

Many of them proposed marriage to Jenny knowing that being wed to an American would give them legal entry to America as well as permanent residence.

This was 1998 and I, of course, was faculty at CU teaching dance and religion courses. I went to the foreign student services office and found a helpful woman who knew how to get cultural exchange visas. At that time, I discovered all I really needed to do was to get some official form of identification from the prospective visitor and she could issue the visa straight away. These visas were for three years and the only ways for guests to stay longer were for them either to marry an American to stay legally or to remain illegally and take their chances. I made sure to inform the visiting artists I sponsored about the rules that pertained to their visas, but I refused to take any role in monitoring or enforcing these rules. I was not an immigration officer. Most chose to marry an American, some no doubt by an arrangement intended to accomplish a legal result rather than to fulfill a true relationship.

September 11, 2001 brought an immediate end to my access to get these visas, but in the two or three years that I could, I sponsored more than two dozen guests. They came mostly from West African nations, but some from Latin American countries and even a couple from Indonesia. They all taught in my Religion and Dance course at CU (ostensibly this was why as CU faculty I could get these visas) and many of them gained teaching positions at CU in dance and music and at Naropa. They all taught at Bantaba and later at other studios and on their own. As accomplished musicians recently from their home countries they were also sought after by various organizations across the country. I have nothing like an official count, but I'm rather sure that at least half of those I got visas for are still in the USA.

What I never anticipated and didn't even realize for quite some time is that a whole generation of kids would come from these relationships that were formed because of the existence of Bantaba, including my own three grandkids. Many other kids have come to couples who first met at Bantaba. One of the most important things that I think distinguishes the kids whose dads (as they were all but one male) are African is that while they might be termed African Americans, they have a very different heritage than do most of their African American peers whose African roots stem from many generations of American residence. These Bantaba Babies did not have the American slave descendent heritage that most African Americans have. I think they might be better called American Africans or to find some other way to distinguish them ethnically. The importance is clear in that I've discovered that both when I was in Africa and also when I have talked with Africans in America, they often do not get along so well with African Americans. They sometimes don't understand them or even like them. Ghanaians told me that they can spot an African American a mile away because they come to Ghana feeling a sense of entitlement to African heritage, yet they

plan to stay but a week to show their kids their roots only to return to their American homes. They noted they didn't know any African languages and often didn't know their specific African heritage. In Ghana, for example, there are fifty cultures each with its own language. While in South America the slave policies often allowed families and groups to stay together and maintain a connection with their specific African roots—Candomblé, Voodun, and Santeria are examples of this—in North America families and cultural groups were split up and it was nearly impossible for them to retain any specific African connections. Thus, the cry of belonging to Mother Africa is seen by Africans as political and maybe even pathetic. Yet, of course, we are well aware that the slave heritage in the USA has manifest in oppression that continues today in a systemic way. Black Americans have struggled for centuries against deep and systemic racism. The current movements, under such rubrics as Black Lives Matter, are the contemporary faces of a struggle even older than is the USA and who knows how many more decades it will take to begin to resolve these deep and systemic issues. I wonder how these Bantaba Babies, similar in terms of racial and ethnic heritage to President Barack Obama, will experience this distinctly American racist situation and contribute to its resolve.

The kids of African fathers and American mothers don't carry so much of the deep American burden and emotion of a slave history, yet as black kids they experience and suffer racism. They are not in the lineage of the great American original sin, yet they experience the effects. These kids are likely not aware of this difference, but I believe it is an important one and that it will allow their lives to be freer and more open simply because they have never been gesturally formed in the lineage of American slavery.

Bantaba Babies are not limited to African heritage. There are others who have a Latin American parent.

I see these kids as cultural, ethnic, and racial bridges themselves the prime evidence of the beauty and talent and sass and intelligence of this compounded heritage that provides only confidence and opportunity. I hope they enact their heritage through their dancing and music and civic involvements demonstrating their openness to sharing with and performing for all others.

I can identify a fair number of Bantaba Babies, many are now teenagers. All the ones I know are stunning in appearance and talented beyond their peers in sports, dance, and music. Beyond these multi-racial multi-ethnic kids there is another large group of kids whose parents met through their relationship with Bantaba. I know of quite a few of these marriages and relationships and I know lots of them have kids, but I don't have any reckoning of how many there are. Because the parents of these kids appreciate the richness of cultural diversity and being influenced by their parents these kids are also more likely to love music

and dancing. Most of these kids are growing up in families with parents who offer them a creative and rich environment in which to develop.

The father of my older granddaughter, Fatu, is Senegalese. His name is Bubacar Diebate. He plays the kora and, when he lived in Boulder, he put together a popular Afro-pop band that performed widely and recorded a couple albums. His Senegalese family are griots and he had something of a princely demeanor that likely is a byproduct of this heritage. Jenny's marriage to Boubacar lasted but a couple years and it is Boubacar's great loss that he has not maintained a relationship with Fatu.

When I first started teaching and dancing salsa at Bantaba, Jenny was devoted to various forms of West African dancing. But as Bantaba began to shift with Latin American dances playing a larger role and African forms diminishing, she began to show an interest in salsa dancing. I'll write more about our co-teaching elsewhere but she began to go out salsa dancing with her friends. There were places with live bands where one could go salsa dancing most any night of the week. It was in this context that she met Carlos Martin, an immigrant from Venezuela. He went to salsa dances. They developed a relationship and Shay and Leon are their kids. My grandkids represent both the most direct Bantaba Baby category as well as the extended understanding of these kids; guess they might be Bantaba Babies Once Removed.

In my dark hours when I suffer the abiding stress of the many failures of Bantaba, I can be cheered somewhat by remembering that were it not for me starting Bantaba and aggressively sponsoring visas for artists from other countries, a whole bunch of amazing kids simply wouldn't exist. All of them that I know are wonderful creative kids with enormous potential. When I think of them living out their lives and having kids of their own and their kids having kids, I feel some sense of pride and satisfaction. I know that none of these kids will even know me and I think it unlikely that their parents remember the importance of Bantaba and me to them even having these particular kids. Certainly, realizing that my own grandkids, who are the light and inspiration of my life, would not be who they are had it not been for my Bantaba project, allows me to know unquestionably that Bantaba was worth all the difficulties of that crazy venture.

Jogjakarta Java

Leaving Denpasar Bali on a bus in the afternoon Emily and I headed for Jogjakarta Java. This was early November 1993. Java is but a short distance from Bali so the bus simply drove onto a ferry for the hourlong journey across the sea. It was night by the time we arrived in Java and the overland drive to Jogja would

take all night. Thinking we'd get a great view of everything we managed to get the front seat of this big bus. That was a serious mistake. Sitting just feet from the front window it rained much of the night and all through the night people on bicycles and scooters and walking roadside would suddenly loom out of the misty gloom seeming about to pop through the window into our laps.

We stayed in backpacker accommodations in Jogya, as we mostly did for months, which were rough and hot. We were awakened by the muezzin's call to prayer from the nearby minaret. Java is the largest Muslim country in the world and I loved it. We planned only a few days in Java so, after resting a bit, we headed for the Sultan's Palace area where there were daily gamelan and dance performances. The Sultan is not only a patron of the arts, but also the palace compound is the location of schools that train musicians and dancers beginning at a very young age. Based on body type and evidence of potential talent children are brought to the palace where they live, go to school, and spend long hours training as musicians and dancers. The results, as expected, are spectacular.

Gamelan is a musical orchestra that refers as much as anything to a particular set of instruments. Many xylophone style instruments, gongs, and drums all represented in many sizes are built and tuned as a collective to provide a distinctive sound. Gamelans are named and given dedication ceremonies. Gamelans occur in various countries through southeast Asia and beyond. The Javanese gamelans and the music played on them is compatible with the court setting. Generally, in Java they play fairly slow and stately sounding music. Balinese gamelan music, rapid, almost frenetic, is compared to lightning. The Javanese players have remarkable masklike visages, intensely focused and rather calm yet never changing in expression. Some of these palace gamelans comprise a huge number of instruments each requiring at least one musician. The experience of hearing them play is distinctive and mesmerizing. It is the sound of Java.

Javanese court dancing has a long history and many of the dances have corresponding stories in Javanese history and mythology. Some dances use masks, but even in those that do not the dancers, similar to the faces of musicians, hold their faces in a fixed masklike expression throughout. Many of these dances feature a group of dancers all dressed the same and moving in unison at a level of precision that seems beyond human capability. To experience Javanese court dancing is to be transported into another dimension of reality occupied by figures of perfection. It is an experience of transcendence.

In my experience Javanese people are, in every walk of life, controlled and polite and intensely present as they are somehow also calm. On a later visit to Java in 2001 travelling alone, I returned to Jogjakarta during a time of great unrest in the country. Few tourists or visitors felt safe to go, but I went none the less. Since the hotels were empty I was able to stay cheaply in a very nice hotel in the

heart of the city. I usually don't choose to eat in hotels, but since I'd travelled long to get there and didn't yet have a sense of the risks of being in the streets I went to the hotel dining room. The only guests there were a couple of Brits. I sat at a table unfortunately facing the area where the wait people were stationed. I placed my order and realized that while the several waiters never made eye contact with me they were focused on my every move. If I took a sip of water one would quickly come to fill my glass. The same level of intense attentiveness with extreme politeness was present throughout the meal. Exhausting and uncomfortable.

The protests in the streets comprised gangs of black clad motor scooter protestors roaring smokily up and down Malioboro Road, the main street in Jogja. They also met by the thousands in the open areas near the Sultan's Palace. I soon understood that what they were protesting had nothing to do with me and I felt safe not only walking in the streets, but also simply walking through the crowd of protestors on my way to the palace.

The politeness of everyone in Java didn't mean that there were not the usual touts attempting to sell most anything for prices that one could never tell were fair. Walking down the street, Emily and I were approached by a person who told us that there was a batik art show that was just closing, indeed, this was its last day in the city. He assured us there was nothing to buy and offered to walk us to the gallery. On the way he inquired where we were from and learning it was Colorado—he of course knew without asking we were from the USA—he chatted away about having relatives in Colorado. He pointed us to the door of the gallery and told us goodbye. In the gallery we were given tea in china cups and encouraged to look around on our own. After a while someone approached us asking if there were any pieces we particularly liked. Upon our pointing out one, we were told how lucky we were because the artist was at that moment present. Taking this framed batik to the entry door it was hung over the open door to better show us how it looked with the light behind it. It also, conveniently, prevented us from easily leaving the place. Then, of course, came the suggestion that should we want to purchase it we could get an amazing price since this was the last day of the show and, should we buy it, they wouldn't have to pack and move it. We did somehow manage to leave without buying, but the pressure of politeness was palpable.

I did later purchase some amazing shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*), so intricately made and iconic of Java. For a brief moment I wondered if I'd paid a fair price and quickly dropped the issue; it didn't matter. I have seen the puppets being made and it takes an enormous amount of careful skilled work. On my alone trip to Java on the morning of the day I was to leave I wanted to go back out in the street one more time. I found a large crammed shop full of dusty old Javanese stuff. Among the many items I located some exquisite shadow puppet

dolls (*wayang golek*) that were obviously old and purchased them for, I believe, six dollars each. I love them and still display them in my study.

The magnificent mountains and beautiful polite people and bustling cities of Java are amazing.

Borobudur

The principal reason I want back to Java in 2001 was to once again visit Borobudur. This is a Buddhist Stupa a few kilometers from Jogjakarta and it is said to be the largest stupa in the world. It took the better part of a century to build in the eighth and ninth centuries (760-830 AD) and today little is known about the original intent of its construction and use. It has a roughly pyramidal shape with each layer smaller than the one below it. Looking down on it from above, which of course no one could have done until modern times, it is in the shape of a mandala and is remarkably precise in its dimensions and construction. The first four layers are heavy laden with sculptures and each has a corridor that one may walk all the way around the perimeter. There are bas-relief sculptured panels, often two high, on both the inner and outer walls of these open-air corridors all the way around. The sculptures tell the stories of the lives of the Buddha and they depict events and eras of Javanese history. Reaching the fifth level, the walled corridors give way to huge platforms on which are arranged a great many small, well fifteen feet tall or so, lattice stupas each with a large sculpture of the Buddha enclosed. At the very top is a large solid form stupa. From these upper layers the view across the roof of the surrounding forest is spectacular.

In my experience traveling, as limited as it has been, there are places that I can only describe as heart places, that is, places that touch my heart in such a deeply profound and powerful way that it leaves part of me there and I take part of that place with me throughout my life. Borobudur is one. Another is Sydney Opera House.

What a magnificent testimony to human creativity and beauty that, in all its stone-hardness, it still engages heart and emotion. The capacity to imagine and make physical such grand ideas shows the finest aspects of being human. Such places are often simply so awesome that we cannot comprehend them by a single visit. This is why I had to return. They invoke so much in us that we may simply not be able to adequately grasp and process the magnificence.

When I was a teacher I sometimes asked my students to participate in a little exercise of imagination related to Borobudur. Noting that while it took at least 70 years to build, it would take likely four generations of workers to complete it. That would mean it would be the great great grandsons of the original generation

of workers to complete it. But, in order to appreciate a contemporary equivalent, I ask my students what they supposed a working life expectancy for a laborer would have been in ninth century Java, especially a laborer working hard every day in the jungle. We usually agree it would likely be maybe 20 years. But today someone starting work at 25 and retiring at 65 has a 40-year working life. This means that a contemporary project would take over 140 years to be equivalent to Borobudur. None of those living at the start would remain alive to see either construction completed, and likely nor would their kids or maybe even their grandkids. Such an exercise shows vastly different understandings of time and the world held by the Javanese who lived a millennia ago. But then there is more to consider. Since Borobudur clearly has a unified plan rather than being a random hodge podge added onto willy nilly by whoever came along to work on it, this means that some one person, likely an eighth century Buddhist monk, or perhaps a few working together had to have come up with the grand plan for the entire structure most certainly not knowing the engineering principles and the stone masonry and stone sculptural skills required to build it. How would the plans have been recorded? How would the site have been surveyed? How would the skilled workers have been found and who would have taught others to continue the work? There are 1460 stone panels covering 1900 square meters and another 600 square meters of decorative carving. The panels depict numerous Buddhist story cycles. Seems these would all have had to have been designed at once or at least the overall scheme. How was the grand design remembered and transmitted across multiple generations? What in our world today would even begin to correspond to the scale of this exercise of imagination? I think and hope that this little imagination exercise had an impact on my students. We live in a fast-food culture where everything needs to occur promptly giving us instant gratification. It is important, I believe, that we might re-imagine ourselves in a frame in which we are eager to start or contribute to grand projects that will take multiple generations to complete. Our impatience demanding instant results of work is surely connected with what seems a disastrous ignorance of the effects of climate change.

Sam's Club

I particularly resonated with Julia Roberts' character in the movie "Runaway Bride" (1999) when she ran away from Richard Gere, the third or fourth fiancé she'd ran away from at the altar, because she realized she didn't even know what kinds of eggs she liked. In a later scene we see Julia in a kitchen by herself making eggs in all sorts of ways so that she can, on her own without influence from some man, determine her favorite style of eggs. In the late 1990s I began to realize that

while as a professional and even as an adult family member I was fairly adept at making decisions with confidence, I faltered when it came to my own tastes. On so many things personal I think I had devised subtle strategies to figure out what those around me thought was cool or right or in fashion or popular and align the statements of my own tastes to those of others. Oddly, I had the relevance to my life of that scene from “Runaway Bride” in mind as I checked into a hotel room in Chattanooga, I believe it was, where I was to interview for a high paying named professorship at the University of Tennessee. I got the offer, by the way, but obviously didn’t accept it. Upon entering the hotel room and settling my stuff I flipped on the television and was stunned that what was playing was that very egg-choosing scene from “Runaway Bride.” How serendipitous! I simply had to take it as a cosmic sign and to find my own equivalent to her eggs to discover something about my personal tastes.

At the time I was living in a huge home I had bought on three acres—something of a country estate—because I had big plans for creating an international community of musicians and dancers. The house, located in Niwot, had an amazing view of the back range of the Rockies and I quickly rented out rooms to a few young people. I was simultaneously opening Bantaba World Dance & Music in Boulder. I was 56 years old. Lordy.

This house had a spacious room (25’ x 25’) just inside the front door that had been used by the previous owners primarily for a pool table. It had French doors opening to the entry hall on one side, French doors opening to the kitchen/family space on one side. East-facing windows with window seats and, on the forth wall, a fireplace and doors to an outside patio. It was a wonderful space. I had imagined it as a dance space. I had the carpet floorcovering replaced with Brazilian cherry wood flooring, but the room was painted off-white, of course. My secret “Runaway Bride” project was to spend time deciding what color I should paint this room and to paint it without even telling anyone that I was going to do so.

As an academic I decided that I needed to know something about color so I began to read books about decorating and color palates and primary and complementary colors. Then I began to read about the history of color and the natural sources of pigments. This was the start of research on color that I would continue for years. It came as a stunning surprise when it dawned on me how recent it has been the convenience of simply heading to the local paint store and being able to pick out any color paint we can imagine. I couldn’t believe I’d been so naïve about color. I read art and history books on color. One of my favorites, read later, was Victoria Findlay’s book *Color: A Natural History of the Palate* (2002). She presents the stories of various colors in slightly fictionalized historical narratives. I read about the importance of color terms in the scientific search for human universals. I read about the biology of color vision and philosophies of

color. It became an endless study that led eventually to me teaching courses at CU on Color and Religion. Over time this course evolved into Religion and the Senses. Color remains an important area of reading and writing in my present work on movement and vitality.

My immediate objective was to select colors for this dance room. The activities and function of the room were obviously important. I had put in the wood floor because I was teaching salsa dance and wanted a great dance floor, which it really was. The obvious choice given salsa dancing was some shade of red with complementing colors for trim. Of course, red has infinite possible variations and I needed to consider and select among them. I wound up selecting a deep vibrant slightly rosy red for the walls with a bright glossy yellow for the wood trim including the window seats and fireplace surround. There was a narrow ridge in the milling of the baseboard and wood trim around the doors and fireplace and I chose a grape color for this as a bit of an accent. Interesting to me now is that I think were I doing this now I'd chose something a little subtler and more sophisticated.

Having finally made my decisions on colors and doing so without consulting anyone at all or even telling anyone what I was doing, it was time to make it happen. I purchased the paint and took it home. On an afternoon when no one was home I covered the floor with a tarp, opened a can of red paint and started by painting the wall opposite the French doors next to the entry. I was shocked by the redness with the first pass of the roller. Oh my god was it red! I hung in there and painted much of that wall. I felt almost sick with the utter shock of so much red. I put the paint roller down and sat on the steps inside the French doors to see if I liked it. Part of me wanted to run to the paint store and get a can of off-white and try to erase my whole effort. Part of me felt embarrassingly bold.

As I was sitting there in shock, the front door opened and Stacey Dinner, a young woman who was renting a room from me and who also was an African dancer and had much experience with Africa, walked in. She saw me sitting there and saw my red wall and immediately said "I love it! It is so you!" No doubt this bit of Stacey affirmation has been behind my over 20-year adventure with color in homes, photography, history, philosophy, biology, psychology, and on and on. Clearly color has become a central part of who I am. I now know what kind of eggs I like.

I finished the painting of the dance room and we had many a joyous hour in that space with dance parties some even with live music, dance classes, filming of dance videos, rehearsals, and plenty of time just dancing and having fun. My baby granddaughter who is now an accomplished dancer loved to dance around in that space when she could barely walk. Those who lived in the house christened the room "Sam's Club."

Potato Salad

In Kansas farm country one's potato salad recipe is one of the signal measures of reputation. My mother's recipe required ricing the potatoes which is different from mashing. Ricing produces a grainy texture rather than a creamy one. And her recipe involved lots of pimentos rather than pickles. I'm guessing there were also onions. I have not known of anyone else to make this style. My recollection was that anyone who offered mashed potato salad was considered lazy. It wasn't until I was an adult that I experienced warm German potato salad with its distinctive vinegary flavor and I love it.

Early in my relationship with Judy—I'm sure long before we even considered marriage—I got a taste of her mother's potato salad. Her family was from northeast Kansas and no doubt the recipe came from that area. I loved it and eagerly offered my help when it was time to make it. Thus, I learned the recipe which was never written down so far as I know. Potatoes (I usually use five pounds), hard boiled eggs (I use from 6 eggs on up), sweet onion (half large yellow or even a whole one), dill pickles (4 to 6 or so). All these ingredients diced. The secret, should there be one, is in the dressing. It is just yellow mustard, mayo, and pickle vinegar. I think the pickle vinegar is the secret ingredient. These ingredients aren't measured. I usually also add to this a bunch of Celtic salt and lots of fresh ground pepper and whisk the dressing until smooth and creamy. I try to make it a day or two ahead so that the flavors can blend.

I have made this salad countless times for picnics and family gatherings and it is often requested. I'm slightly embarrassed by how Kansas farm basic it is. Nothing but simple ingredients and the dressing is not only dull (yellow mustard!) but high calorie. And I know that lots of folks would frown on the use of Mayo. So many cultures have, as signature food, what to my family would be exotic spices and ingredients, often requiring complex preparations. I regret that my food heritage is so farm plain potato salad, but that's what it is and a lifetime of preparing and eating my mother-in-law's potato salad has naturalized this as being good eats, as being *our* food. It explains why there are few restaurants that brag about their American food and why I'd never select one should I have the pleasure of eating out.

I recall one day, it must have been about 1994, when Emily, a woman I was dating at the time, Jenny, and I were out and about. Someone brought up potato salad—Emily had been introduced to it—and we all three looked at one another and said “we must have potato salad now!” We rushed to the market, bought the ingredients, and sped home—the dome house at that time—and working together prepared the salad as rapidly as possible and while it was still warm gobbled our fill. No regrets, just lots of fun yummy calories.

Mali

Summer of 2001 was a time for me to engage in major travel. I had the opportunity to go with my friend Abdoul Doumbia to his home country Mali and later that summer I took the opportunity to go back to Bali with my Balinese friend, I Made Lasmawan. My mother died that summer and her funeral took place between these two major trips. I have no recollection of why I would choose to take two trips to distant parts of the world during one summer including a return home between them, but I did.

Abdoul, as many Africans and artists from other countries with strong connections with their home countries, conducted what I think now would be called cultural tourism. Our dance studio, Bantaba, became a hub for these artists to find people interested in traveling with them to learn their arts in their indigenous context and to gain deeper experience and knowledge of these cultures. A Boulder-based modern dance company had developed an identity based on its grant-funded travel to various foreign cultures to learn *in situ* dances of other cultures and then to develop choreography in Western dance forms inspired by this experience. I learned of their plans to travel to Mali in 2001 and I coordinated my trip with theirs. For several weeks we spent our time in Bamako, the capital city of Mali, taking dancing and drumming classes every morning and the afternoon. The dance classes were conducted by renowned local dancers and held in a dirt school yard. Before starting these barefoot classes, we would scour the dusty ground for glass sherds and other objects that might injure our bare feet. The challenge for me was, as a 58-year-old man, to keep up with this group all in their 20s who were company dancers. As I reflect on my life from mid-40s on, it has been characterized by this odd dance camaraderie with people 20 to 30 years my junior. Even now as I dance Zumba and hip hop, it is with dancers who are at least 30 years my junior. I have been able to keep up fairly well, yet I have always regretted that I didn't get a start on this passion when I was a kid or at least a young adult. The older Malian people, especially the women, couldn't figure me out. They would closely watch me dancing. In Mali it is not that older people don't dance, it is that they do an amazing kind of dancing that I might describe as akin to a fine reduction sauce. It has all the tastiest ingredients, but boiled down to highly concentrated essences so the smallest taste has encompassing richness. Yet here I was, white-haired and old, ancient by their age standards, yet dancing with the large and energetic movements of youth. On more than one occasion an older woman would come to me and, getting on her knees before me, would place her hands around the calves of my legs. I hadn't a clue why and when I asked I was told that this was their way of honoring me, even though they didn't understand me.

Among the most enjoyable times I had in Mali were the social hours mid-day. While we danced hours in the morning and afternoon, mid-day in Mali is too hot and was a time set aside to relax and socialize. We gathered at the house where we were all staying and after eating we enjoyed a couple hours on the porch with all sorts of drummers, dancers, and musicians, especially Ngoni players, who sang and danced and laughed constantly. I would later put together a short film I used in my teaching called “Mid-day in Mali.”

One day Abdoul took us to a smithy in Bamako. Spanning a large area that spread down a hillside were many little open-air shelters housing blacksmiths making various objects. Each one included a forge that was kept hot by a kid squeezing bellows to fan the fire. Everywhere were men pounding to strengthen and shape the metal. Some were making delicate small objects others larger ones, with the size of the hammers seemingly corresponding. I accepted the invitation of one group to swing a sizeable sledge hammer to pound the steel and seemed to do well enough to earn their surprise and praise. Abdoul wanted to take us to this smithy because his family name, Doumbia, indicates a heritage of both smiths rhythmically pounding metal and also drummers. He explained that the interlocking of pounding rhythms performed by a number of drummers or smiths invokes a state of concentration we might call a zone state of being that allowed them to drum or hammer many hours in hot conditions. I fully experienced what Abdoul was talking about when we came to a place where two adjacent smithies were working separately yet together. One group was making the little square charcoal stoves that are used for making tea. The group next to them was making light weight metal colanders. The sounds of the pounding from these two smithies were distinct, yet together, interacting with one another, they had established a melodic rhythm that seemed to progress through variations. It was indeed mesmerizing to listen to and I can certainly imagine that participating in the hammering would be totally absorbing. Quite magical as is the common and ancient association with both smiths and drummers.

Abdoul hosted a trip north through Mali to some famed ancient cites and cultures. The highlight for me was a brief time spent at a couple of Dogon villages. I'd known and taught about Dogon culture that, from ancient times, has lived along the Bandiagara Escarpment in mid-Mali. I had known it from the account by the anthropologist Marcel Griaule in his classic *Conversations with Ogotemmel: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (1975). We stayed in a village at the top of the cliff and then hiked down a precarious trail along the cliff face to the river below where we walked through a village and met some of the Dogon people. The Dogon have these amazing buildings with roofs that look like witches' hats. I was nearly overwhelmed to simply be in such an amazing place and came very close to refusing to leave when Abdoul said it was time to go.

It was approaching darkness when we arrived at the town Djenné, founded in AD 800, the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa and the location of the largest mud-constructed mosque. The town is located on an island with the river surrounding it so we awaited a ferry to take us across. I grew rather concerned at the rickety look of the ferry fearing we'd all likely get tipped off mid-river. Then I noticed that cows were simply walking across the river. To be in this ancient city in an ageless country on the continent where our ultimate human mother Lucy lived pushed me to near overwhelm; I still feel it. This town is but 200 miles from Timbuktu and borders on the Sahara which has been crossed to Morocco to trade for salt since the beginning of time I think. The Moroccan influence on Djenné architecture is evident in window design especially. I wanted to go on to Timbuktu. It would have been nice to have a personal connection to the phrase "That's as far as from here to Timbuktu," but more importantly it is a remarkable city in the Sahara with a storied history.

Even topping these experiences was when Abdoul took us to his home village Foutaka Zambougou. Our journey to this village involved leaving even a track road and driving across pretty much open country. We arrived late in the evening and awaited the killing of chickens and the preparation of a food for our welcome meal. The village had no electricity and the only water source was a common well where women gathered to draw up water in a container made of a tire innertube. They washed raw meat and kids and everything else at the well's edge. The next morning a young man hosted me on a walk around the village. I saw women singing call and response songs as they pounded millet into flour. We visited their small mud constructed mosque and checked out their new four-room school. This was village Mali, village Africa little different, likely, from what might have been observed in centuries past. The locals soon began to call me Samu after one of their elders by that name; I considered it an honor.

My experience of Mali was one of overwhelm and awe conjoined with a deep frustration that there was far too much rich experience to take in over just a few days. I so longed to spend weeks or months with the Dogon and in Djenné and among the people in Zambougou and many other places. I wanted to continue dancing the Malian dances. The conjunction of ancient cultures, isolated villages, and the cultural wealth so obviously enjoyed by the people of one of the economically poorest countries on earth was stunning.

Mom's Death and Funeral

I was in Mali when my mother died in the summer of 2001. She died just a few days after I got back to Bamako following a road trip through mid-Mali. At that time there was no international cell phone service. The way to receive an

international call required callers to contact a call center near the location of the person being called. These centers were tiny little shops where a few Malians tend to hang out. Receiving a call, someone in the center would physically contact the person being called informing them when to go to the call center to receive a call back. I had received one call from Jenny, assisted by Boubacar (from Senegal), indicating that my mom was gravely ill. I'd expected that I might receive a call informing me of her death. With only a couple of days left before my scheduled return home, I got the message to go to the call center to await the expected call from Jenny. I re-scheduled my return trip going directly to Lubbock and was soon on my way to my mother's funeral. I was told that not long before mom died, she said that she'd really like to see and talk with her boy one more time. I regret it didn't happen.

My mother had been seriously ill for at least a half dozen years before her death. She was constantly being hauled to some new doctor in the increasingly desperate effort to find someone who could make her feel better. She was in constant pain and her treatment was to shift her from one type of opioid to another. At that time, we didn't know the deadly impact opioids. It is now clear that there simply was no way out for her especially at her age. She was deeply addicted to her pain meds to the point that, at her advanced age, tragically there was no treatment or relief.

I was of course sad when she died, yet I had some concern about what at that time I had begun to think about how my mom had manipulated me through much of my life. I don't fault my mother and am certain of her best and most loving intentions. Yet, I think her childhood experiences likely shaped her approach to mothering. Her mother died unexpectedly when she was a little girl. She was raised by her dad and an over-protective aunt. Her dad died of a heart attack in her presence when she was a teen. Likely my mom wanted to avoid raising her kids as she had been raised, yet perhaps she was unequipped with the experience to make that happen. During my mom's final years, I had also become close with my dad and I experienced his open acceptance of me and his deep humanity. Consequently, when my mother died I was not so deeply torn apart as I was when my dad died. My dad's devotion to my mom was total and her death was devastating for him. He lived a few more years yet I believe he constantly mourned her loss.

Rather than taking a deep dive here into the psychology of my relationship with my mother, I prefer to acknowledge flashes of memory about my mom's funeral and what lately I have realized how much of a cultural shock surely rippled across the Texas community related to my mom's funeral, including the Christian world of my younger sister. The funeral was in a Christian church in Lubbock Texas. This is the church where my sister Karen's husband who, years before when I took Fatu to visit my elderly dad, refused to be present at church

when we all went to church because Fatu was a tiny tot of color. Here then was the shock to the community at my mom's funeral as I am imagining it now nearly 20 years later. I was at the time dating Madhu, a woman from India who dressed in traditional women's Indian clothing. She came to the funeral. Jenny was present with Boubacar, who is a dark black-colored Senegalese man. I spoke at my mom's funeral although I had to force the minister to make the funeral service about my mom rather than using her death to emphasize the local Christian theology. My message included some comments attempting to identify what in my mom's and dad's lives allowed for the sorts of multi-ethnic, multi-racial, relationships that were present as exemplified by Jen and me. I have no idea why it has taken me nearly 20 years to realize how utterly shocking and threatening our physical appearances and presence must have been to the fundamental reality of that Texas Christian community. I suppose one way to appreciate this is that almost certainly that community remains today in the season of the November 2020 presidential election staunch conservative Republican Trump supporters. I can imagine now that they must have scrubbed down and disinfected the church sanctuary after Mom's funeral because of the blight of an Indian woman and an African man, made all the more disgusting by what they would have seen as mixed-race relationships. Now I regret that, just as Mom had no way out of her opioid addiction, there was no way her funeral could be about her simply because of the likely distraction displaced on Jen and me being present to mourn her.

Days the World Changed

Living on Hills View Drive in Niwot, the two-car garage was slightly separated from the house because the original garage had been turned into a large room that I had made into a beautiful dance studio. The garage doors were not working smoothly and I'd arranged for them to be serviced. When the service person arrived early on the morning of September 11, 2001 he made some vague reference to something dire happening and then went on to his work. Feeling concerned, I remember going to the little room we used as a TV room and flipping on the television. The first image that came on the screen was the airplane crashing into the second tower of the World Trade Center in NYC. The first was already on fire. I quickly contacted my kids to be sure they were witnessing this sudden and irreversible change to not only our nation, but also the entire world. My kids' lives have hinged around this date since they were both young adults at the time.

Earlier this year news began to include reports of a new coronavirus ravaging the population in Wuhan China. After a few days these stories began to suggest

that this virus might spread outside of China. Day by day reports increased the frightening news that the virus was spreading throughout Europe and would doubtless soon be in the USA. Then indeed it arrived and quickly grew more and more serious every day. It was around March 15 that we learned that Spring Break which was still a week away was being extended to include the preceding week in an effort to protect from the spread of the virus. I thought that the situation would be under control in two weeks. March 13 the World Health Organization declared that the coronavirus was a pandemic. Then it was March 23 that we learned that there would be a Colorado statewide quarantine to begin imminently. I rushed to the grocery, crowded with shoppers all of us trying to gather whatever staples were left on the shelves to last through the quarantine. I managed to get a few things. I stopped at a liquor store as well and I don't even know why since I don't usually keep alcohol in my house. I recall the strong feeling of having to rush to prepare myself as the door on the way of life we had been living was rapidly closing. It did feel like a day that the world would change in permanent ways. While we all have adjusted, some more than others, and some adjustments more satisfying than others, it is now, as I write this, five months later and it is quite clear that it will be many more months before we no longer have the constant fear of infection and death. We have grown numb to the reality that the amount of death occurring weekly is equivalent to the loss of life of two of the 9-11 tragedies. It is increasingly clear that there are systemic changes occurring so that the world we knew prior to March 23 will no longer exist for us to return to. We have little idea now about the future, and next to no certainty beyond uncertainty. My grandkids lives will hinge on this date, especially Fatu's, because she will be a senior in high school this year. Her senior year experience in school and dancing will be shaped by the virus. Her choice of what to do following high school will likely be deeply shaped by the coronavirus world. The little ones, Shay and Leon, are now adept at wearing masks and using ZOOM for school classrooms. They long to physically be with their friends and to see their teachers in person. What an odd conditioning they are experiencing with their educational and social world being largely sitting in a chair staring at a small screen filled with tiny heads in boxes.

It seems in the era of Trump almost any event is escalated into a crisis that is world threatening. The death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg on September 18, 2020 is such an event. Should the future of the Supreme Court of the United States become overwhelmingly tipped to extreme conservatives, which at this writing seems certain, then *Roe v Wade*, the Affordable Care Act, civil right, women's rights, public education, voting rights, and individual rights will be overturned and Americans will live under social restrictions not known for a century. Long term issues that will be ignored are climate change, the massive inequitable disparity in wealth, and the unconscionable privileging of corporations. Likely,

social security and other social safety networks will be dismantled. It will most likely throw American democracy into a long term highly contentious persistent state of crisis that will disturb and disrupt life for many years and frankly ruin the way of life and the possibility of life for millions. RBG's death may also mark a day the world changed.

Across a long lifetime there are a few days that are marked as days on which the world changed. In my life, adding to the two I've described, I could also include the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. I was in college on a student trip to St. Louis at that time. I could also add the day of the moon landing July 20, 1969. I suppose in time one might also include November 8, 2016, the dark day when Donald Trump was elected president. November 2020 will I believe mark the beginning of the long and arduous work of healing and righting the division and destruction that has marked the Trump era. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris offer a lightness and humanity we so need.

Burning Dome

A regular danger to mountain living in Colorado is forest fire. When we built the dome in Four Mile Canyon I remember the day that I met an hippie guy on the lot that we had purchased to talk about excavating for the foundation and basement. The guy's name was Roland Fischer. His family had lived for generations on nearby Poor Man Road and they did all sorts of excavations. When we met he noted that the lot area was steep and covered with rocks and trees. He told me that he could easily level off the whole area and besides the house we could have a nice lawn. On later reflection, I'm pretty sure he was pulling my leg a little. I reacted in disbelief and told him I wanted an excavation that would save every possible tree. He smiled and said, "Oh, you want a '60s job." And, indeed, I did. When the house was finished there were several sizeable trees that were within feet of the house and we felt that we truly lived in the mountain forest.

I volunteered for a while for the rural mountain fire department. I think it was all volunteer. We'd meet from time to time to learn and practice firefighting techniques. I don't remember staying with them long. Perhaps I didn't have the time. But I did become aware that all those trees next to my house were a major fire danger. Duh! At that time, they were recommending clear cutting all vegetation to a distance of at least forty feet all around the house and to put crushed rock several feet wide all around the foundation to prevent the growth of grass. After all my efforts to keep the trees as my nearest neighbors I was in a bit of a quandary. Then I made another assessment. The house was on a south facing steep slope and the only access was a winding road coming up from the

south. I realized that if the fire started above our house it would mostly spread to the north away from the house. If it started below us, to the south, then it would engulf the road anyway and there would be no way for fire rescue to get to us. I kept the trees. We came up with a plan in case of fire to hike out to the north. I made sure I had good insurance that would cover replacement costs.

While we lived there, one huge fire occurred on the nearby mountain and valley, Sugarloaf, to the southwest and it burned for days. I recall getting up frequently through the night to see if it had made progress in our direction. We were lucky enough to live for many years in the house without a forest fire coming near us.

Some years after we moved away a large fire, Four Mile Canyon Fire of 2010, burned to the west of the dome. It raged for days and the whole area was closed. During the fire I drove up Flagstaff road to an overlook where one could see the fire area to the northwest. There were a bunch of people at that overlook who lived in the burn area and were trying to see if their houses had burned. I thought the fire was still quite a distance from our old dome and surely it wasn't in danger. Then one evening Corbin called me and said, "I think I just saw pictures of the dome house burning." He told me that the pictures were taken from a Denver Channel 9 helicopter that had flown up the canyon and back and filmed some of the houses burning. I went to their website and, sure enough, the dome was fully engulfed in flames. I was able to download a few pictures. The first ones show the fire just starting in the house. Then apparently the helicopter flew up the canyon and when they took more pictures on the way back the dome was totally engulfed in flame. I think it was one of the last of 169 houses to burn in that fire.

Jenny, Corbin, and I talked about how emotionally hard it was to see the house burn even though we hadn't lived there in some years. It had been their main childhood home and they grew up roaming the mountains—oddly, I never seriously considered that they might encounter a mountain lion—and playing on our decks. I was stunned that the main image that kept coming to my mind after the fire was a 16-penny galvanized nail. I had built the house using a hammer and nails rather than a nail gun (maybe they weren't even available then) and I couldn't begin to count how many nails I'd hammered to make that house. Given that my identity, not to mention my investment of thousands of hours of work, was literally pounded nail by nail into that house, it is little wonder that its burning was pretty emotional.

Several weeks after the fire had burned out and the roads were again open I drove up Arroyo Chico to check out what was left at the dome site. Where the basement had been there was nothing but a hole full of ashes with a few chunks of who know what sticking up. The ground was crusty shiny black from the heat of the fire.

Salsa Dancing and Teaching

In developing my CU Religion and Dance course I included weekly dance studios. I worked to find dance teachers from the relevant cultures. I never dreamed that one day I might teach dancing. I was thrilled to be taking the weekly studio dance classes along with the students. When I opened Bantaba World Dance & Music I also had no thought of teaching dance. I was delighted to be present during so many amazing classes. Since I worked the desk constantly, I was able to jump in on quite a few of these classes. I was totally happy as a dance student who simply loved to dance.

In the early years, particularly since we had so many African classes, I tended to focus my own dancing primarily on those dances, done mostly as single dancers dancing individually in a group. African dancing typically has high energy propelled to exuberance by groups of drummers including a master drummer who leads the class as much as does the dance teacher. I even went to Mali with Abdoul Doumbia, a master drummer, to dance there for several weeks. Yet, in the local Colorado culture one can't just go out African dancing socially, so the dance occasions were limited mostly to group classes. African performance groups also began to form, but I was not in the age range or ability level to be part of those. I began to be attracted to partner dancing, especially salsa, in part because of the extensive opportunities to dance socially. I'd remembered taking a few salsa dance classes years before and I don't think I did particularly well. Still, with salsa being taught regularly at Bantaba, I began to jump into these classes as often as possible. I really enjoyed them and began to see that I might one day be able to dance salsa without being a total embarrassment. Still, I never thought of teaching salsa dancing.

One of the first salsa teachers we hired at Bantaba was a graduate student in dance at CU from Costa Rica. She was a beautiful dancer and had an engaging personality that attracted students to her salsa classes. One year I, along with a couple others, went to Costa Rica with her to dance salsa there and to visit the country. In time, however, the demands of her life interfered with her salsa teaching and I had to find other teachers.

The woman who was the first person to teach salsa in Boulder was Carmen Nelson. She was from a Central American country and was widely recognized for her teaching. I was able to get her to teach at Bantaba and I often assisted her in her teaching. Through these early efforts, salsa grew in popularity at both Bantaba and throughout the local area including the rise of a number of salsa bands. It became so popular that one could go out dancing most any night of the week and also on Sunday afternoons.

It is common when one gets the salsa dance bug to go out many nights a week. I got bitten pretty badly and turned into a salsa dance junky. Of course, I

was teaching at CU fulltime, running Bantaba which was more than a full-time job, but then I'd go salsa dancing several nights a week. Salsa dancing doesn't begin at most clubs until nine or ten in the evening. I'd go and stay until they closed at one or two in the morning. On west Pearl Street in Boulder, a restaurant and bar hosted a live salsa band on Sunday afternoons starting around two in the afternoon playing until the dinner hour at five or six o'clock. They had a tiny dance space in the bar and the band set up in the front window area. I was always there as the band set up and danced until they played their last note. Usually by the end my tee shirt would be soaked and caked with salt from my sweat. I danced with anyone and everyone and was a dancer everyone knew. Often, I had college students who knew me ask me if I'd dance with their moms. I always did, yet almost none of their moms had ever danced salsa so I had the extra challenge of being such a good lead that they left the floor believing they were great dancers.

I no longer remember what the issue was, but Carmen Nelson got offended by something I did and abruptly quit teaching salsa at Bantaba. Even though I knew most everyone in the salsa community I couldn't find another salsa teacher. By then, with considerable experience both dancing and also assisting in teaching salsa classes, I decided that I might be able to at least teach a beginning salsa class. I offered a class and found that students seemed to not only really like my classes, but also that I was able to teach them quickly and effectively. It just seemed to come naturally to me. I noticed some continuity from my decades as an academic teacher to developing skills to teach movement. I found that my personality and sense of humor came out naturally while teaching salsa, much as it had always done in my academic teaching. And I realized that my abilities at being systematic and analytical, rooted in my math and science and business background, helped me understanding the technical elements of movement and how to teach them. Not only did salsa dancing become a passion, so too did teaching salsa dancing. I was joined by various teaching partners over the years from Elise Butler, who had been one of the first dance students we had at Bantaba when she was barely in high school to a number of others. Jenny and I taught together for a number of years. We developed a whole system of teaching salsa based on the principle that all salsa dancing is comprised of but combinations of a dozen or so basic elements. We created salsa dance videos that we sold for a while and we organized our classes around these fundamental elements. Once a dancer could identify which elements occurred in a move combination it was far easier to both learn and also remember the move. The system worked well and many hundreds of students learned salsa dancing from us.

For my CU Religion and Dance class I started including a salsa studio that I taught. I fairly quickly became recognized as one of several well-known salsa

dance teachers in the area. It was a blast. There came a time when I was teaching at CU full-time, doing academic research, running a dance studio, teaching salsa at Bantaba and New Vista High School, guest teaching salsa at various clubs and bars, and teaching and choreographing for an adult salsa performance group.

I realized as I developed into a dance teacher that, while I had always loved teaching academic subjects in the university, teaching movement was more fun and that I was perhaps more talented teaching salsa and other dances than teaching academic courses at CU. It was more interactive, more personal, and students found it fun. I had a good critical eye that allowed me to assess each dancer to offer tips about how to improve. My dancing and dance teaching were gradually remaking me as a person, including my intellectual style and capabilities. During these years what would typically be recognized as my academic research and writing were put on hold although I was writing all the time. My writing was taking the form of blogs and reflections that were posted to the internet, but not published in the traditional academic forms. I paid a price for this shift at CU in being passed over for raises every year because my dancing and dance teaching life were not recognized by my colleagues as of any value to the academy.

When I reëmerged as a publishing academic, everything I thought and wrote was utterly different and to my sense much more innovative, if not also bordering on revolutionary. I will write about that elsewhere, yet here I need to acknowledge that dancing for decades remade me totally as a human being. I'm still exploring the implications of that transformation and doing so through a flood of research and writing that in recent years has been gushing from me.

While my Bantaba folly is something that continues to plague me with pain and regret, there are a few unpredictable consequences of the venture for which I am more than deeply grateful. I became a dance teacher discovering a talent and joy I'd never imagined. I had the joy of teaching and dancing with many hundreds of dance enthusiasts. I experienced a total remaking of who I am as a person.

Dancing at Boulder Creek Festival

From the earliest days living in Colorado, we looked forward to the Boulder Creek Festival held every year on the Memorial Day Weekend. It was, and still is, located near downtown along Boulder Creek near the library buildings and parks. It complements the Boulder Boulder which is among the most popular six-kilometer races in the nation drawing tens of thousands of runners. When we first moved to the Boulder area we always took the kids to enjoy the various performances in tent venues, the dozens of food stands, the many public service and commercial displays, and endless booths offering arts and crafts of every

imaginable type. One of the most enjoyable events was the rubber duck race down Boulder Creek. You could donate a certain amount of money to sponsor a duck in the race. Then thousands of numbered yellow rubber duckies would be dumped into the creek upstream from the festival and everyone would watch them float along. The winning ducks won prizes for their sponsors. Great fun for all and likely a great money raiser.

When we opened Bantaba World Dance & Music there was a dance stage that was a popular attraction at the Creek Festival. That first year, 1998, it seems we had barely opened and there was no way we had anything to offer as a public performance. I remember renting a tiny booth in the children's area of the festival to use as a place to try to promote ourselves as a new studio. We had balloons printed with the studio logo and we rented a tank of helium gas to put at our booth so we could have floaty balloons to give out along with our class schedule. Thinking of this now all I can say is "how pathetic."

I had a close history with Lee Klinger and Dance West and for years, as the largest dance studio in town located near downtown, they took the lead in organizing the dances performed at Boulder Creek Festival. By plan or default, the festival dance stage was known as the Dance West Stage. By the second year of Bantaba we had a few groups that might perform, so we asked for and received performance times.

Yet, by the following year we wanted larger exposure to the community and we weren't happy that the only dance stage at the festival was a huge advertisement for Dance West, by then seen as our competitor. We ask the festival organizers to change the stage identity, yet they refused to do so. Consequently, we rented our own space at a different location on the festival grounds. We couldn't afford to rent a raised stage or a professional floor, so we bought a bunch of 4' x 8' sheets of tongue and groove plywood flooring and laid a floor on the grass attached somehow together. It was a crude stage but it was the Bantaba Stage. We invited any and all to share our performance space and I think we had a full schedule. The festival runs day and night from Friday through Monday early afternoon so we had to manage and host the stage through all this time. I recall it raining at some point and the wood flooring had water squishing up through the seams.

I really need to pause here a moment to reflect. We found ourselves trying so many crazy things to make Bantaba succeed and Jenny and I did all of them mostly on our own. I remember buying all this flooring and physically carrying it sheet by sheet to the area and laying it out trying to somehow attach it together. I remember it coming apart during performances and the need to constantly maintain it. Then we had to manage the schedule of many groups for many hours. I remember having to tear it all down and haul it off. I can't now remember even where. The cost was large in time and energy and considerable

money, yet we didn't make a dime. We passed out fliers with coupons, but I don't think we realized much of an increase in our business. I'd also surely imagine we were the laughing stock of the dance community most of whom were dancing on the professional appearing and more official looking Dance West Stage with the City of Boulder paying for the raised covered dance floor. My heart aches when I think of all this useless effort. I can't begin to understand myself making so much effort or even thinking it would have any impact. It was a fool's errand and I was the fool. As I now again feel the agony and pain of all this work, all this effort, with so little results, I have to wonder what sort of person I have been and perhaps still am, what drove me? What allowed me to engage such foolishness thinking it would somehow lead to success? Why did I continued on and on, always failing financially, only working more and more hours on so many jobs?

Bantaba survived—not financially but by me pumping more and more money and effort into it—and by the next year, I believe, the Dance West Stage became the Boulder Community Dance Stage and we were given a large chunk of the schedule to arrange our performances. By this time, we had quite a few African classes taught by a number of Africans that wanted to perform. Our salsa and tango classes were successful enough to have groups of students that wanted to perform. There is nothing that draws attention from blocks away more than the sound of a dozen pounding African drums. We drew large crowds with a variety of performances of different African dances and some remarkable cameo performances by our African teachers. Our salsa and tango groups performed dances and we often took time to teach free beginning lessons for interested members of the audience. We also featured Capoeira and break dancing that were wildly popular.

In the early 2000s every year our Creek Festival performances got bigger and better and with several other dance studios then offering their own dance styles represented by performances, the Boulder dance community seemed to be thriving. In the best of years, we took several hours including a couple years when Elise Butler, a young woman who had been in high school when we opened and now often taught salsa with me, and I performed a salsa dance. And perhaps my favorite dance of all was when Fatu was a nine-year old kid who had been dancing for several years. She didn't even need to learn to dance salsa, it just seemed something she could do. All female salsa dancers strive to be able to turn very fast for many turns. As a salsa lead, it is amazing to turn a good female dancer. Fatu was able to turn magically and effortlessly. The dance I so loved was one in which Carlos and I traded off leading Fatu in a single salsa dance. We even included a sequence of turns where one of us started leading her and, without her stopping turning, the other took over leading. What a blast.

June was a month that featured a weekend of dancing and music performances on the Boulder Mall sponsored by the International Festival. We began adding that occasion as a second regular summer performance for us.

Things change over time. I think the huge success of Kenny Jimenez's Motion Underground studio put pressure on Dance West and it eventually closed. And by 2007 Bantaba's failure at our efforts to open a north Boulder studio led to our closure. I don't recall when Motion Underground closed, but it perhaps lasted a bit longer. The era of popular dance studios in Boulder was ending.

After Bantaba closed we continued with a *rueda de casino* (a partner form of salsa done in a circle) performance group and every year we were given half an hour performance time at the Boulder Creek Festival and also at the International Festival. We had a devoted group of dancers although with occasional personnel changes. The group would meet usually once a week nearly year-round to rehearse and learn new choreography. A few times we were invited to perform for different community organizations and festivals and also to teach salsa and *rueda* classes. I remember so many Boulder Creek Festival performances that were done under extreme weather conditions from bitter cold to pouring rain to intense heat. I think we performed every year through 2015 which might have been our last year. It seems that we stopped after I had a heart attack in December of 2015, but I don't know why that would have been the reason since I quickly returned to doing intensive exercise.

I know that once we started performing at Boulder Creek Festival we never missed a year. Best guess would be that we performed 14 years in a row. Pretty good run and lots of amazing memories of special dance moments.

The Nutcracker Ballet Tradition

I have taken Fatu to The Nutcracker Ballet every year since she was six, I think. When she was young, we prepared for this occasion by me taking her holiday dress shopping. I loved doing this with her, watching her eyes shine when she spotted a dress that she loved. Even more fun was to see her in it. The Nutcracker occasion included the two of us going to a nice restaurant either before or after the ballet. Sometimes we found a nice restaurant near the Ellie Calkins Opera House in downtown Denver. Other times we ate at a restaurant nearer our home. Fatu was always confident and a lively conversation partner during dinner. I was always thrilled to be with her in the Opera House seeing all the other little girls in their fancy dresses. During Intermission we always visited the gift shop where Fatu would pick out a nutcracker doll or a fragile glass figurine or a poster as a souvenir of the event. As she became a dancer with

considerable ballet training I was amazed by her ability to whisper the ballet moves in real time and to offer critique of the dancers.

In the last several years, I had expected Fatu to think attending The Nutcracker Ballet might not still be her thing, but I've been surprised and delighted that she seems as enthusiastic now as ever. Shay reached an age to join us. I think it was three years ago. Her first year she was fascinated by the ballet program booklet and spent most of her time during the ballet "reading the book" as she said. She told her mom about how amazing was the book.

Then last year Leon and Jenny joined the girls for the occasion. It was a grand success. We rarely go to nice restaurants and I think the experience for the kids is so important. To realize how to order and to manage napkins and various dishes with politeness that is not expected at home or the usual sandwich or taco shop. They seemed to find it a thrill to experience this food-related delight.

I really can't imagine how long this tradition will last, but it is one of the few very special ones that I've treasured for many years. I think it a holiday tragedy that Colorado Ballet has announced that due to the coronavirus pandemic they are cancelling the 2020 Nutcracker performances. I'm so sad, especially since this would likely have been Fatu's last year.

Fatu and Broadway Shows and Ballets

Among the highlights of my life every year has been taking Fatu to the theater to see Broadway shows and ballets. I'm not sure of the first year I started taking her to The Nutcracker, but it was probably 2007. We've gone every year since and in the last several years we have been joined by Shay and Jenny and in 2019 also by Leon. This event has been the high point of my holiday season every year. With Fatu getting older with a crazy busy schedule dancing and rehearsing and competing and being a teenager, she has not been available for the theater shows we used to go to regularly. Two years ago, we did go together to see Hamilton for which I think I paid \$500 for a pair of re-sale tickets. They were nearly impossible to get and I heard that in NYC for a while they were going for \$5,000 a ticket. I've often wondered what shows we went to over the years but couldn't really remember all of them. Recently I found a stash of theater programs I'd saved so that I can now make at least a partial list. I have no idea what long term impact this heritage of going to the theater will have on Fatu. I certainly hope that she'll remember this grandpa granddaughter tradition somewhat fondly.

- 2007-'19 The Nutcracker, Colorado Ballet, Ellie Calkins Opera House
- 2009 A Christmas Carol, The Stage Theater DCPA
- 2011 Billy Elliot: The Musical, Buell Theater, DCPA
- 2011 The Lion King, Buell Theater, DCPA
- 2011 Swan Lake, Colorado Ballet, Ellie Calkins Opera House

2012	Bring It On: The Musical, Buell Theater DCPA
2012	Wicked, Buell Theater DCPA
2012	Miracle on 34 th Street: The Musical, Arvada Center
2013	Mary Poppins, Buell Theater DCPA
2013	Ballroom with a Twist, Buell Theater DCPA
2014	Cinderella, Colorado Ballet, Ellie Calkins Opera House
2014	Pippin, Buell Theater DCPA
2015	Twyla Tharp Dance, Mackey Auditorium, CU
2016	Footloose, Boulder Dinner Theater
2016	Phantom of the Opera, Buell Theater DCPA
2016	Swan Lake, Colorado Ballet, Ellie Calkins Opera House
2016	Giordano Dance Chicago, Chicago Auditorium Theatre
2017	Giordano Dance Chicago, Chicago Auditorium Theatre
2018	The King and I, Buell Theater, DCPA
2018	Hamilton, Buell Theater, DCPA

Grandfather Nights with Fatu

From a very early age for Fatu, three and maybe younger, one night a week was designated “grandfather nights.” These were regular weekly occasions until Fatu was eleven. These nights were for me the high point of my week and the only possible thing I could regret about them is that they came to an end. I think the end was necessitated by Fatu’s acceptance on Sweatshop Dance Company in the summer of 2014, when she was 11, because she went to Denver four evenings a week and on Saturdays for dance class and rehearsals.

The reason these weekly meetings were called by the rather formal term “grandfather nights” was because I read lots of books to Fatu and later she read to me. It seems an odd convention, yet many of the books we read used the more formal kinship terms mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and, of course, granddaughter. We enjoyed adopting this convention calling each other by these formal names for years in a fun, insider joke, kind of way.

Likely my earliest memory of a special grandfather night occurred when I lived for several months in a motel room in Boulder. I had contracted the purchase of a new semi-custom home in North Boulder and before its construction was complete I sold the house I was living in at the time in Niwot. I had little choice but to put most of my belongings in storage and find temporary residence. The motel offered a monthly rate, a simple breakfast, a small refrigerator, a microwave, and a bed. It was close to the University of Colorado, so I could walk to class. This period did not interrupt the grandfather night custom.

This particular memorable night came in early 2004, so Fatu was maybe three about to be four. Fatu loved the television show “Dancing with the Stars” so a friend videotaped these shows so that I could watch them with Fatu in the motel.

This particular night one of the dances particularly delighted Fatu, to put it mildly. At the end of the dance she'd shout "again, again!" and I'd rewind and play it again. She danced on the bed every time and soon she began to also sing the song lyrics. I believe that night I counted the replay of that one dance an unbelievable 25 times with Fatu dancing and singing every time. She has loved music and dancing her whole life.

These nights always included doing homework, working together to fix a special healthy meal that I had planned, watching an episode of a special television show, and reading books at bedtime. We watched Merlin and lots of Doctor Who. I read several of the Laura Engels Wilder *Little House on the Prairie* series as a tribute to Judy who read all of these books to our kids when they were young. I was stunned, and slightly embarrassed, to find the strong presence of racism in these books. In time I would ask Fatu to read chapter and section titles and later whole passages. She quickly became an excellent and fast reader; indeed, faster than me and I have a PhD. She has always been a better speller than me.

Fatu had her own room in my north Boulder house and all the houses since and she helped decorate them, choosing curtains and bedspread and wall decorations. Although I've lived in my current house nearly four years Fatu still has her own room, even though I think she's spent only one night in it as a convenience for an early morning trip departure.

Mornings often included a 30-minute drive to take Fatu to her school, yet I made sure that she always had special breakfasts. I'd fix her anything she wanted, but often it was eggs, with bacon and a variety of fruit. I got in the habit of attempting beautiful or whimsical presentations of food and sometimes we'd take photos of her with her food-art breakfast. I also packed her treats and surprises for lunch. The drives were occasions of conversation on all sorts of topics and I was always thrilled that when we arrived at her school she often asked me to walk her to the door of the school.

These special weekly together times were, as I've said, the high points of my week. During some of these years I was suffering much strife and difficulty, so these loving fun times with Fatu were extra special. They forged a deep and soulfelt bond with Fatu that I still feel and I miss them every week.

Fatu's Entrance into Dancing

When Fatu was in first grade, I believe, she attended a little private school called The Broomfield Academy. I picked her up after school on Wednesday afternoons to take her to my house for our weekly grandfather-granddaughter nights. We learned that an after school optional activity was to take dance lessons from Miss Diane. We registered her and it so happened that these classes were

Wednesday afternoons after school. I was able to go and watch these classes. There were only three or four girls in the class, but Miss Diane was delighted to be teaching them. By the end of the year she had taught them a dance to Petula Clark's song "Downtown." She had arranged to piggy back their performance of the dance onto the recital performance of Elite Dance Academy.

We went to Monarch High School for the performance. Fatu and one other little girl did their dance and, of course, we were thrilled. Miss Diane told me that she thought Fatu had potential and that she hoped we'd continue her dance classes. That recital focused on Elite Dance Company that has studios in Boulder and Broomfield. I didn't know anything about the huge industry of studio dancing that centers on building dance companies to compete in any number of competition and conventions that come through the Denver area ever year. When we saw the Elite dancers perform in flash costumes and all sorts of dances it was a delight.

We discovered that in their Boulder studio Elite offered a little kids' jazz class on Wednesday afternoons so it was a perfect fit for Fatu. I'd take her and hang out in the reception area while she took class. She seemed to enjoy it and do well. While sitting in the reception area one day in the spring 2010, I overheard some of the older girls in Fatu's class talking about whether or not they were going to audition for the Elite Company. This too was something I didn't know anything about, so I asked the receptionist what was involved and who could audition. The auditions were coming right up. We asked Fatu if she wanted to audition and described what it would mean to be on a dance company so far as we could imagine. She thought it would be fun and we took her to the auditions. By then we'd all gotten our hopes pretty high, being excited for this opportunity for her. Yet, she had so little dance experience, we had no idea if she would be selected.

Elite Dance Academy indicated that they would post a list of the new company members on their Broomfield studio door in the evening of the auditions. We just had to know the results and made a special late evening trip to scan the list until we located Fatu's name. She has now danced on three companies, traveled the country to dance, studied with loads of renowned teachers and professional dancers, learned how to lose as well as win, worked hard and struggled through competition, been bullied and beat up by teachers, yet Fatu has found support and encouragement for developing her creativity and personal character. Her best friends are dancers. Looking back, it seems so serendipitous but also fortuitous that a couple Wednesday afternoon chance opportunities have so shaped her young life.

Colorful North Boulder House

By the time I decided to build a semi-custom home in north Boulder I'd had the experience of discovering color and my taste and love of color in my Niwot home. At CU I had also been teaching a course that first had the slightly confusing title "Religion and Color" (what could that have been about?) that was not only about color in cultural and historical contexts, but also about the senses. Anthropologists have acknowledged that there are cultural distinctions reflected in the senses and the sensorium, that is the hierarchy of senses. David Howes and Constance Classen developed the subfield of sensory anthropology. There are books and articles on the various senses offering insight into specific cultures and cultural situations. Through the balance of my career I regularly taught courses that evolved from these early offerings. Indeed, the very last course I taught before I retired was Religion and the Senses. I didn't know at the time it would be my last. I rather regret that I wasn't aware at the time that I was teaching my last course.

An idea I had contemplated in the context of teaching these courses and in doing research on the various senses was the sensory implications of architecture. While architectural design creates the spaces in which we live and work and play, it has seemed to me that vision is the dominant sense architects engages. The design and construction of spaces rarely engages smell, touch, taste, or sound. Structures include spaces where these other senses are active. Kitchens, for example, are places where more of the senses occur and the space is designed to facilitate sensory-rich actions, but the space itself does not. While we tend to limit the senses to the traditional five, I and others have often added some aspect of movement as a sixth. Architecture is highly entwined with concerns with movement within space. My fantasy was to assign students the task of designing a living space that actually actively included all of the senses. I had toyed with some ideas about designing spaces that included running water and living plants and to think about the sound qualities of materials.

When I decided to buy a new home in north Boulder that was not yet built I was delighted that I had at least a bit of freedom to try out some sensory architecture ideas. Most immediately I decided I wanted to use vibrant colors rather than the common almonds and grays and sage greens, popular then as now. I also wanted to incorporate themed materials. I liked the idea of the sort of industrial feel of steel and concrete so I designed stair and loft railings that were heavy shiny stainless steel. I chose gray concrete for kitchen counters for a couple reasons. I liked the industrial connection with the steel and the character of this material that changes with use. Grease and anything that comes in contact with the concrete changes its appearance. It ages beautifully. I also liked the sound of setting ceramic plates, glasses, and various kitchen utensils on the

concrete. I don't like the sharp sound made by these objects contacting granite and marble. I really wish I could design huge spaces using formed concrete. I think it is an amazing material for living spaces. A brief pause that I might mourn the loss of opportunity that arises in advanced age given the reality that I'll never be able to do this creative project.

To complement the industrial feel of concrete and steel I selected the rich color and feel of Brazilian cherry solid wood flooring that I had installed throughout the entire house. No carpet. Smooth, clean, rich, well defined, lines and surfaces. And rich colors throughout. On the main floor I chose a light but warm green along with a rich berry color. The kitchen cabinet design was also cherry, but an American cherry, that had doorless and backless cabinets on the walls with the gas range complemented by an open stainless range hood between cabinets. The dishes on the shelves were part of the appearance and the berry colored wall was visible through the cabinets. I chose simple white dishes to contrast with the wood and wall colors. The master bedroom was a rich red. The other bedrooms were yellow. The master bath was blue including blue tile. The house colors were variations on the primary colors.

I put red leather furniture in the living room with old worn Asian Indian dark wood tables. In the dining room I put a huge Amish handmade table in American cherry wood with modified (slightly curved backed) shaker style dining chairs. I put gray metal high backed stools at the tall kitchen counter.

I loved that house and it is certainly the closest I've gotten to making a space that I really created with intention. It shocked my neighbors when they came in to visit. One woman from Texas confessed that she really liked all the color but didn't have the courage to do anything like that in her own home. I knew that it was known as "the colorful house" throughout the neighborhood. I've discovered that lots of people are afraid of color. I remember when I was as well.

As I think of that house now, what was missing was my ability to add a certain sense of coziness to the space. I'm not so sure I'd call the house modern, but I know that I've often thought that the modern houses I've seen feel cold and hard and uncomfortable. I think my north Boulder house felt warm and exciting, but not necessarily cozy. Years later, I selected the colors and basic décor for a townhouse and then also the house in which I currently live. I settled for, and I did feel the pain of settling, the more standard decorative elements both due to the added cost of the alternatives and the concern to create more of a sense of coziness. Not so sure I succeeded at all. I have decorated all my houses in the last 20 years with my own photographs. I have added a great many to my current house and have plans for many more. So glad that despite living alone I have a large house with lots of wall space.

Why can't I live long enough and have the resources to build a home from scratch and take the time to incorporate the engagement of all the senses organically? I have loads of ideas.

Spaces get wedded to memories. The dominant memories of that north Boulder house are a potpourri of happy and sad ones. On the sad side, I had several relationships while I lived in that house. They all failed. My dad in his early 90s came to visit, brought by my sister and her weird old boyfriend. They dumped my dad with me and went off on vacation for a few days. I enjoyed being with my dad and caring for him those several days, but it was sad because he was so old and infirm and uncomfortable. I knew I'd likely not see him again after that visit and I didn't. Not long after that I have the distinct memory of standing in my dining room while I spoke with him by phone on the last day of his life. He told me that he'd always wondered how and when he'd die and he said that now he knew. I told him good bye.

Bantaba failed while I lived in that house which meant not only the loss of a dream, but also the long agonizing and hugely expensive process of foreclosure on the Bantaba commercial space. I had to sell the house at a financial loss at that time—I just couldn't maintain all the loss—because it was not a good time for sellers. So much loss connected with such a beautiful space.

I had built an exterior entrance to the basement and finished it as a two-bedroom apartment. This is yet another example of my persistent idiocy. It seems I have always had to make everything more complicated, causing myself more work, and always involving added risk. I had some good tenants to the apartment, but a couple bad ones as well. Always stress and more stress.

I had put mirrors in a small room in the house that we used as a dance space. I taught many a private dance lesson in that space. Our *rueda* group often rehearsed in that little room and sometimes we'd move the furniture out of the living room and rehearse there. We filmed lots of dance videos there. I filmed segments for my online CU course Religion and Dance in the house. And it was this house I most associate with the Fatu-Grandfather nights we shared. Fatu spent one night a week with me all the time I lived there and I remember reading to her, sharing stories with her, and helping her learn to read. She selected pink drapes and a colorful bedspread to decorate her room. We painted pink letters to form her name to decorate her room. We had wonderful times in that space and those times alone outweigh all the sad and unfortunate associations. How odd is life that it mashes up such a mixture of highs and lows, happy and sad feelings of accomplishments and failures and stick them all to the house walls of our memory.

Dominican Republic

The oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in the Americas is Santa Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic founded in 1496. I visited the city as part of my study of the dances, merengue and bachata. I went to the island nation in December and January 2006 with my friend Dorothy. We spent a few days in the city on the south coast before travelling overland to Las Terrenas on the north coast. Hanging out in the old city was certainly a remarkable experience. It was a powerful experience to walk among these buildings constructed by the Europeans. This city was established immediately following the voyages of Columbus who contacted land on the north coast of Hispaniola, the island shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. We went dancing, with some bit of risk, every night we were in the city. Once to a famed local open-air club called The Car Wash. Another to a young people's club owned by Juan Luis Guerra, likely the most famous of contemporary Dominican musicians. Out of our element in that club attended only by young very hip Dominicans, we did get a chance to experience some dirty dancing like I'd never imagined before.

Merengue is a very old music and dance form strongly identified with the Dominican Republic. It has a pounding regular beat, unusual given the complex rhythms of most Latin American music, and the dancing is often identified, perhaps too simplistically, as walking or marching largely in place. The hip movement is distinctive. Large orchestras often perform this music and there is no doubt the Dominicans love it and identify with it. I've never particularly liked the music or the dancing, yet my experience seeing Dominicans dance merengue demonstrated that they can dance it beautifully and sensually. The interest I had as the principal reason for this dance trip was to explore the history of bachata and to learn the dance and collect some popular bachata music.

Once we found our way to Las Terrenas we located a few beachside dance clubs and even a little dance school that was next to one of the clubs. In this little school we found a couple of young Dominican guys and hired them to teach us bachata dancing. That was an interesting experience. Their method of teaching was to simply dance with Dorothy while I watched and then commented on the two of us dancing. They taught the basic steps, which we already knew, and said, "That's it." Based on our experience of salsa dancing we had expected there would be endless moves to bachata, but the teachers seemed satisfied that the basic was all we needed. Our insistence finally led them to demonstrate some fancy footwork to elaborate the dance yet they insisted that the only time to do such footwork was for competition or demonstration, not while social dancing.

When we went to dance clubs, they played mostly merengue with an occasional bachata. On the rare DJ selection of salsa, Dorothy and I were often

the only dancers. A social dance evening in the DR was quite different than we were used to. In Colorado we tended to dance every dance all night long. In the Dominican Republic it seemed that groups of friends go to the club, drink and chat and listen to the music and only occasionally dance. Pretty interesting contrast.

Until the 1990s bachata was considered a crude form of country music played by the poor and low class. The term itself suggests a street or community dance party. The music was played by country folk using a few cheap instruments, bongos and guitar. In 1990 Juan Luis Guerra, whose musical training included studying at the Berkeley School of Music in NYC, arranged a bachata piece called *Bachata Rosa* for his orchestra, called 4.40. Quickly bachata changed from being castigated country music to becoming a Dominican favorite. To me, the rhythm is so much more interesting than merengue. It has something of the complex rhythm of bolero, yet played at a faster pace. To me it is happy music always bringing me joy. The dance is sexy and includes exaggerated hip movement. I learned how the simplest form of the dance can be highly sensual and expressive. Love the dance.

We often walked the beach where we could constantly hear music coming from the beach bars. I did an informal survey to track which music form was played the most. My results were that merengue and bachata seemed, at that time anyway, played about the same frequency.

The Dominican Republic is well known for its many all-inclusive resorts. We walked by a few of these as we explored the beaches. As their class or type name suggests, they provide everything for the vacationer so these folks never leave the resort compound their entire vacation. The whole idea of travelling to a country and never leaving a resort area seemed pretty horrible to me.

Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand Cruise

Storytracking is my book that included the history of the first European travels and settlements in Central Australia. It also includes ethnographic accounts of various Aboriginal cultures in the area. A few years ago, a professional student advisor associated with my department discovered that I occasionally taught courses on Australian Aboriginal Religions. She happened to be married to an administrator in CU's Alumni Office who organized tours specifically planned for CU alumni. These tours were often led by CU faculty who had knowledge related to specific tours. They paid the expenses of the faculty person to lead the group. I was invited to lead a group on a 16-day cruise starting in Sydney Harbor, included stops in Tasmania and the various towns up the east coast of New Zealand, ending in Christchurch. This was February 2012.

While I'd heard so many people rave about taking cruises I knew little about them. The first place I'd even seen an actual cruise ship was when I was in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Seeing these floating monsters was something way beyond anything I had imagined. There were several docked at the harbor in San Juan and I had a hard time adjusting my sense of reality that could even include such things. I recall a leisurely day hanging out in local cafes and shops in San Juan pretty much ruined as five thousand tourists trooped off one of these ships and flooded the town. I would learn that most of these cruise stops allow the passengers only a few hours in a port to take it all in and buy up all the souvenirs they can find.

Still, I'd been to Australia a couple times before and never to either Tasmania or New Zealand and thought it would be crazy to turn down the opportunity. It was scheduled during the semester so I had to get a grad student to take over my classes for a couple weeks. Apart from being a polite host to the 20 or so CU members of this tour, I was to deliver a couple talks to any folks on the whole ship who cared to hear what I had to say. Seems these cruises often offer free passage to scholars who are retired or otherwise available to serve as entertaining educators. That seemed fine to me.

I flew to Sydney and boarded the huge cruise ship and fortunately had a day to enjoy Sydney, with the city within easy walking distance. I spent most of that day in the Sydney Opera House area. The cruise departed the second evening and I was thrilled to have a chance to see the Opera House from the harbor waterway.

I discovered that these cruises travel overnight, dock in the morning, offer various shore options during the day. The routine was for folks to amble down the ramp get on a bus that drives them around all day with occasional 30-minute stops for a photo or to shop. They returned to the ship in the late afternoon. Repeat. The ship had many places to eat. Food and drink were available constantly and everywhere. Every evening a fancy formal many-course meal was served in a huge dining room. So much of one's time was spent eating.

Rather than taking these bus tours I preferred to simply walk from the ship to the town and hang out, catch whatever seemed happening for the locals, and then walk back to the ship. I soon grew weary of the constant gobbling of food on the ship. And the Tasmanian Sea is among the roughest seas on the planet. The cruise guests were mostly older folks who were consummate cruise ship travelers. They loved gambling, Trivial Pursuit, the ship shows, playing miniature golf in the bar using glasses placed on the floor as the hole and constantly eating and drinking.

I spent a couple days in atrial fibrillation and for a couple days I thought I might have appendicitis. The only thing I missed was sea sickness. I spent a great deal of time reading, as I remember, the page proofs for *Dancing Culture Religion*

that was published later that year. At the end of the cruise I got to spend a couple hours with some Boulder friends who live in Christchurch I knew from the early Bantaba days.

I pretty much hated the whole time and most everything about the trip. I also grew weary being at the beck and call of a bunch of conservative old people who wanted endless pampering. I had so much regret that I was floating along the east coast of New Zealand, one of the most beautiful countries on earth, having but the limited experience of hanging out a few hours in some of the small coastal towns. Still, the day in Sydney at the Opera House was worth the agony of the trip along with a couple hours with old friends.

What this experience revealed to me is that I don't find much pleasure in luxury or fancy abundance. The food was too much and too rich. The setting, while luxurious appearing, quickly felt uncomfortable and confining and stale. I spent quite a bit of time chatting with those folks I hosted and with others I met partly because I was among the few on the cruise traveling alone. These chats tended to be always the same, superficial and guarded since I learned that almost everyone I met was a conservative Republican who despised Obama who was President at the time. I remember a couple of older women who said they often did cruises together ranting on about Obama being a secret Muslim who was going to overthrow the government. I had to hold my comments to a minimum. In retrospect even remembering this cruise experience is perhaps of value only as comic relief at my painful endurance of something that was supposed to be a luxurious treat. Maybe also it is revealing that as I recall the horrors of the cruise I still consider the agony was worth a day at Sydney Opera House and seeing it from the harbor.

Sydney Opera House

There are two architectural constructions—Borobudur in Java and Sydney Opera House—that elicit in me a different kind of experience than any others. Risking being a bit New Agey, I call this feeling a heart connection. Despite these places being far from me in the world I have returned to both, being drawn back to experience again up close this heart connection. In many respects the two could not be more different. Borobudur is a thousand years old, overwhelming in its complexity and ornate decoration, and explicitly religious. The Sydney Opera House is a recent construction, very modern appearing in design yet with some influence of ancient architecture, with simple smooth curving lines predominating, and is an active lively venue for the performative arts. Despite these marked differences, I am astounded by the beauty and power of both that seem to transcend their very substantial materiality.

When I built the dome house I was excited by the challenge of designing the interior in a way that retained the organic distinctiveness of the geodesic geometry. Although created after WW I by Zeiss Optical company, the form was named “geodesic dome” and popularized by R. Buckminster Fuller in the late 1940s. Typically, in a home with square rooms and vertical walls one imagines and plans the interior by drawing a floor plan. The ceiling is more or less the same shape as the floor with standard vaulting options. A geodesic dome, in the version that was my house, however is comprised of five concave pentagons. The flat sides are placed horizontally on the bottom. Joining the five pentagons are five concave hexagons with a horizontal side on the bottom connecting with the points on the sides of the adjacent pentagons. These hexagons join one another at the top forming a pentagon into which is placed a final concave pentagon at the highest point in the dome structure. When constructed there are five great arcs that begin at the highest point and drop down to the center of each of the five base pentagons, but there are also great ellipsis arcs that fly across the dome interior. The interplay of pentagons, hexagons, triangles, and spherical sections is endlessly fascinating. If one ignores this gorgeous geometry by designing the interior as a floor plan, strange and awkward result are likely. The vertical walls often meet the dome at multiple acute angles creating little awkward and impossible slivers of space.

My approach to designing the interior of our dome house was to design from the ceiling, that is the dome’s geometry, down to the floor. The lines comprising the five great arcs are horizontal, if but a few inches wide. Thus, a wall that meets the ceiling at one of the great arcs will follow the curve of the dome but will meet the dome at a 90-degree angle of vertical and horizontal. Using this method, the floors of rooms take on a trapezoidal shape or some portion thereof. These shapes are pleasing with corner angles that are not so acute as to be awkward or unusable.

Taking a moment to describe a bit of this creative process of dome design that endlessly fascinated me perhaps offers a clue about my heart connection with Sydney Opera House. It has these magnificent arcs that form the interconnected sail shapes of the various roofs. The base of each of the structures is also comprised of arcs that expand and interconnect in endlessly fascinating ways. These arcs for all the great sails of several sizes turn out all to be sections from the same sphere, giving it that unexplainable sense of coherence. The slightly more than one million roof tiles are triangular and diamond shaped interlocking lines forming arcs. Having the experience of my one little 45-foot diameter dome, allowed me to marvel with wonder at the measure of imagination the Danish architect Jørn Utzon had in conceiving the Sydney Opera House.

While Borobudur is different in almost every respect, both structures share arising from that unimaginable moment when someone conceived the whole

structure without even knowing how, or if, it might be built. It took most of a century to build Borobudur and nearly a millennium later, with all the engineering and construction advances, it still took nearly fifteen years to build the Opera House. Utzon, in fact, had little understanding of the engineering that it would take or even the actual geometry of these huge shapes. The project was approved and the construction initiated without a clear detailed design or even a certainty that the structure as sketched could be engineered for construction. I suppose this too appeals to me perhaps in some perverse way. I started the dome knowing almost nothing about how it would be built or even if I could do it. The floor plan was finalized after the dome was constructed. With the Sydney Opera House when it was clear it would take many times the original budget if built as the architect had designed it, the pressure from the Australian government finally forced uncompromising Utzon to resign in 1959. He did not even return to see the completed building which opened in 1973 perhaps in part because he believed that the actual construction failed to match his original idea.

In my several days of being in the presence of the Opera House, I have been inside it and around it and tried to gaze on it from every possible angle including from a ship in Sydney Harbor where one gains a completely different view. Favorite vantages, and there are many, are those where the arch shape of the Sydney Harbor Bridge interplay with the flying roof spans of the Opera House. For me it is impossible to actually grasp the structure. Its angles seem impossible. Its construction appears to defy gravity. It is massive in its bulk yet it looks barely moored to the earth. It is one structure yet it is so many as well. Its interplay with its environment—the bridge, the harbor, the promontory location, the boats, the skyline of Sydney, the ambient light and weather—is constantly in motions and endlessly surprising. In its presence I always feel, “this building isn’t really possible; it shouldn’t exist,” yet my senses show me otherwise. It is testament to the power of human imagination, risk, and tenacity.

Grantham China

As a kid I remember a few times when my parents, who lived in Cherryvale Kansas, drove to Baxter Springs, also in Kansas, to visit Aunt Cora and Uncle Walt. Walter Grantham was my mother’s father’s brother. Baxter Springs is the little town that is near the southeast corner of the state. It seemed that these were day trips. We stayed several hours to visit before returning home. For me these visits were like going to a museum. Aunt Cora and Uncle Walt had traveled the world and had the money to purchase many interesting items they had shipped back to their home. I remember an actual elephant’s foot umbrella stand, woven chairs with high fan backs, game tables with many different kinds of shell and

wood inlays, and in their hallway stacks of National Geographic magazines. I vaguely remember going to Baxter for a funeral, but I don't recall which of them had died. Digging around in some old letters to try to connect people and dates I found a letter written by Uncle Walt to my mother's brother, Obbie Grantham. Apparently Obbie had written inquiring about some details of his family and Walter was offering what bits of information he knew. The letter survived likely because it was given by Uncle Obbie's surviving spouse, my Aunt Frances, to my mom after he died and then somehow, she sent it on to me. What was most fascinating to me was that this letter, written April 18, 1930, was typed on letterhead for New Baxter Theater, a movie house, and it was in an envelope identified with W. D. Grantham's Music Shop at a Baxter Springs address. I knew that my mother's dad whose name was Oscar Grantham, whom I never met, had a music store in Cherryvale. I'm guessing that these music stores sold records, perhaps also musical instruments, and doubtless sheet music. Perhaps they also sold Victrolas, record players. My mom told me stories of when as little kids she and her cousin, Charles Ellis, whom I knew, would get in the window at the front of the music store and dance for the people walking by. I hadn't known that Uncle Walt had a music store as well. I love it that music and dancing run deep in my family heritage since it is so central to my current life and important also to Jenny and Fatu. That same letter described that Uncle Walt and Aunt Cora drove to Kansas City once a month to reserve movies for their theater. Just imagine that. Also included was this treasure, "we just got back from a flying trip to Florida and I say flying as we covered about 5000 mile in 18 days and stopped every place we wanted to besides taking a boat out to Nassau, Bahama Islands." I'm also delighted that they were energetic travelers.

Later, I learned that among their treasures was a complete set of Royal Doulton china that they had bought when they visited England during what my mom always referred to as their "trip around the world." The pattern was called Grantham, Uncle Walt's family name as well as my mother's maiden name. I think the name on the china was associated with Grantham England and has nothing directly to do with my mom's family name. I suppose that there might be a possibility that my mom's family has a history associated with that place. The set was twelve place settings with every possible size dish, bowl, and cup along with platters and serving bowls of all sizes. I had gotten a look at this china at some point and always liked the design of its pattern, lovely colors in a floral pattern that did not overwhelm. When Uncle Walt and Aunt Cora died the china was divided between my mom and her brother. Some few pieces, like cute little demitasse cups and saucers, were given away to various people as family remembrances. When my Uncle Obbie died my mother got his half of the china, but I don't think my mom and dad ever used it. Then when my mom died neither of my sisters wanted the Grantham china and they offered it to me. It wasn't

until Karen brought my dad to Boulder when he was probably 91 that she brought the whole set to me.

Now, I try to have a dinner at least once a year for my family served on the Grantham china. I do all I can to prepare a nice meal and to have the table set ahead with all the lovely pieces and I use a nice table cloth. I get everyone to sit at once and I talk a bit to the young ones about proper table manners and etiquette. I also tell them the story of the Grantham china. I haven't a clue if any of this will be remembered because it seems such things are so often forgotten or there just isn't time to do these actions of remembrance. I haven't a clue what will become of the china and its stories in the future. Yet, currently I enjoy setting a beautiful table with attractive china with a long family heritage and to briefly tell its story.

Remembering

Memorial Day, 2011

I awoke this morning with the sobering thought that, as important as we feel our own lives to be, the specificity of us, our personal identity, the "me" stuff, doesn't survive us for very long. I tried to remember the lives of my ancestors that I have known and realize that my memory peters out with my dad's parents, my grandparents, and my mom's aunts and uncles. Even though I did some personal genealogy when I was in college, I can't put personal traits to many of the names I know. Just checked the records and the earliest birth among all of them was in 1870 and most of them lived long lives. I remember when I was a kid I'd stop to talk with an old man who sat on his porch down the street. I have always remembered that he told me that he had fought in the Civil War, but I just did the math and that can't be right. Maybe I didn't know the difference between WW I and the Civil War, or he didn't remember, or I manufactured the whole thing. That's remembering for you. It turns into fiction and I suppose it often does so sooner than later. That makes the presence of the remembered, the dead, even more tenuous in one sense, yet as N. Scott Momaday told us, to make something (he was thinking of violent oppressive experience) into a story is a way to endure it, and, I add, also to give the past lasting presence. Stories outlive the people they are about. Suppose the best we can hope for is to become part of a story, one that entertains enough to be remembered and told now and then. Better yet to become a story turned into a song.

On Memorial Day I feel a welcome duty to remember my ancestors, my parents, my grandparents, my great aunts and uncles, and all the others who are now gone. And every year I feel I've let them all down. Oddly when I went to Wichita Kansas recently to do a lecture at WSU I discovered that as a student

there in the '60s I personally knew a number of people—Carnot Brennan, Harry Corbin, Josephine Fugate, Laura Cross, Everly Fletcher and many others—whose names are now on buildings and memorials, yet none of the faculty I met while I was there knew any of them or anything about them and I realized that the names meant nothing to any of them beyond architectural labels or unread names on ignored plaques near mostly unseen sculptures.

In an odd half hour while I was on the Wichita State campus I took a walk to remember. I found a plaque remembering those who served in student leadership positions. Surprisingly my name is on that plaque. Standing there looking at my name, the appreciation in being remembered was tempered by my realization that in the nearly half century of my name being among others on that plaque, I doubt that a single person has ever stopped to even read the names, despite it being in a high traffic area in the student union. Why should they? How could the names of unknown people etched on brass tags mean anything to anyone? Why do we do this?

When I was a kid Memorial Day was a special occasion, a holiday that had a feel quite different from all the others. This was the holiday my Uncle Sam Avey, my mother's uncle for whom I was named, always drove up from Tulsa in his Lincoln town car to Cherryvale Kansas where we lived. It was our practice to save up tin cans before Memorial Day and early in the morning we'd go out in the back yard and cut roses and peonies (which my grandma always pronounced "pinies") to fill the cans. Well-to-do, Uncle Sam always sent money ahead to purchase potted geraniums. Uncle Sam would arrive by mid-morning, sometimes with his daughter Pat and her husband Raymond (who had become wealthy through his association with Uncle Sam) and their daughters Terri and Sherri. Then we would all go to the cemetery, only a couple blocks from my house, and place the flowers on the graves of our dead relatives. This was an act of remembering as much as memorializing them. To see and say the names etched in marble was to remember and to again fix the relationships among spouses and generations. Then we would go back to our house and have a huge meal with Raymond sneaking off now and then to listen to the progress of the Indianapolis 500 auto race on the radio. All the Tulsa relatives would then leave midafternoon and Memorial Day would be done.

There was little if any military connection in my family although I'm rather sure that some of the uncles and great uncles on one side or the other served in the military, likely WW I. It seems to me that today Memorial Day is focused largely on remembering and memorializing those in the military, especially those who died while serving their country. When I was in high school I had a very small connection with the military aspect of the day. I played the cornet and the VFW that did brief ceremonies at both the Protestant and the Catholic cemeteries hired me to play taps after the 21-gun salute to end the service. I

remember hiding out behind some gravestone on the edge of these cemeteries awaiting the unmistakable signal of gun fire to do my part. I had a rather melancholy sense about this duty and endeavored to play taps as sweetly and mournful as possible.

My kids grew up in Boulder and for years, sometime during the Memorial Day weekend, we'd take them up into the mountains to find a cemetery for an old mining town. We'd walk around in the disheveled brambles looking at the often-homemade grave markers and talk about, sometimes making up stories about, the person who lay beneath our feet. We brought big sheets of news print paper and peeled crayons so the kids could make rubbings of the markers they found particularly interesting. I was surprised the other day when Jenny, my daughter, was telling me about her plans for Fatu's, my granddaughter, summer educational program. Seems they are going to do weekly Friday field trips. One of those planned, I was told, is to visit mining ghost towns in the nearby mountains including doing some grave stone rubbings.

Last year I visited the cemeteries above Central City and spent an hour or two walking among the graves in several conjoined cemeteries. Pausing to read the names and relationships and dates is a way of remembering those one never knew, but imagining the human condition the markers reveal. I finally had to leave when I was overcome with the grief I experienced when I found cluster after cluster of family graves dating mostly in the early years of the twentieth century where all the little markers lined in a row each named a child in the same family all younger than ten and all dying within a couple years. The unimaginable grief from this loss remains palpable a century later. Seems fitting.

As my chronology increases so also grows my reluctance to be in the past and soon forgotten. It seems somehow inevitable however hard I try to ignore it, yet I often feel that I don't understand why we simply accept this. Why don't we declare this plan unacceptable and just simply reject it? I won't go along with this! Who set it up this way anyhow? And why the long slide into the grave? Just yesterday I read that Johns Hopkins' research shows that memory inevitably declines starting at age 40! I reject this as should everyone. Why can't we be like trees whose death often coincides with their own beautiful bodily memorials in the graceful process of returning to soil? Why does our demise have to burden our children often just at the point when they should be most enjoying their own lives? After developing a close relationship with our grandchildren, why do we abandon them often just when they begin their adult lives? Seems this would be the time in their lives they could most use our help. None of this makes sense to me. It doesn't seem like a very good plan.

Of course, we gladly give up our lives that those who follow us might live. My father's clear understanding was that we need to leave our children better off than we have been. I think he was thinking primarily in terms of wealth and

education which he understood as inseparable. That too is acceptable and honorable, yet why do we so often have to burden our children so much in the process, especially near the end when we need so much care that requires so much ugliness and nastiness and indignity? It just seems to sour all we've worked for. Why can't we stay useful and helpful to them until we come, like Burning Man, to some sudden celebrating blazing grand ending?

Fatu's Dancing Reshaped my University Teaching

The early years when Fatu was on Elite Dance companies her studio offered in the reception area closed circuit television viewing of the studios making it possible for me to watch Fatu's dance classes. I often hung around in the waiting areas watching her classes on these televisions. Then when she switched to Sweatshop, parents (grandparents) were not permitted to watch these classes except during one week a year designated for these visits. This week was in December and I never missed one of her classes.

While my attention was on Fatu, I discovered that by the time these dance kids had just a few years dance experience they were expected to learn extensive sections of choreography in precious little time. I had my own experience as a comparative marker. I remember when I started dancing, what was then called cardio funk but would now be called hip hop, we learned choreography to specific music. Each week's class reviewed what part of a full dance we had learned and then it would add a few eight-counts. It was such a struggle for me to learn and then remember this choreography. Daily, driving from my mountain home to the university, I'd often put on the music and go over in my mind the choreography, over and over. And then struggle with it. And the idea of performing it with any technical skill was not even in my universe. After all these years the classes I still love most are hip hop classes with the challenge of learning add-on choreography. I have become much better at learning and remembering choreography now than when I was younger. And the greatest joy I now have is when I manage to get the choreography quickly and can do something like really dance it, well as I can, rather than stumbling through it.

What I observed with Fatu however is something entirely different than my experience. I witnessed a teacher using ballet movement terminology to simply describe several eight-counts of movement and then I observed that most of the students could immediately execute the sequence. In a matter of 20 or 30 minutes most of these young people could learn choreography lasting a minute or so and perform it full out. Only rarely did a student ask the teacher for clarification. Most students would carefully observe other groups doing the move awaiting their turn. I could see their bodies marking the movement while standing, their

mirror neurons blasting away. I noticed that Fatu had close connections with one or two other dancers and, if needed, they would silently communicate with one another using body-marking gestures, to clarify sequences of moves. I've observed this capacity for learning frequently at dance conventions where whole dances are learned in an hour to the level of performance. And I know that these dancers were highly critical of technique.

I have often found myself overwhelmed by trying to comprehend how such complex body movement can be learned so quickly, coordinated among multiple dancers, and set to music often with complex rhythms. Then after observing this capability demonstrated for a whole weekend at a dance convention involving hundreds of kids, high school and younger, I'd enter my classroom on Monday morning to teach my university students. Asking them about a reading that was assigned, many had not read it. Others complained that it was too hard, often saying they thought the author didn't know anything because they, the student, had trouble reading the material. It was rare that a student was able to come even close to stating the principal ideas or to offer an informed critique of assigned reading. Rarer yet was the student that found the intellectual challenge joyful and exciting.

As common to most teachers, I think, I often began class by engaging students with an interactive review of what we were studying and what the previous lecture and readings contributed and what was important to their lives about what we were doing. A teaching method, guaranteed to fail, was the simple open request for any student to state in the simplest terms the core ideas or issues. The response was deafening silence. Other methods had to be developed to engage and inspire students. These students were attending a class one research university, the flagship campus in a sprawling state system. This was what we consider higher education.

Remembering how a great many dancing youth can learn complex material that demands the active coordinated technically skillful engagement of the entire body by paying close attention and loving what they are doing, I began to realize what a total disaster is most learning that we label academic. I know it is entirely possible for the average person to read complex material and to remember the core elements of an argument and to illustrate or apply the material to significant examples, yet, in my view, we educators are simply failing to teach our students how to do this. It was not my students' fault that they couldn't read or think or remember or love the academic process. It is that we don't comprehend that such skills are essential in order for students to be able to enjoy and delight in the process of using their intellectual capacities in demanding ways that they may gain the richness of life that these processes enable. As dancers love to learn and do so quickly, surely it can and should be fun and exciting to exercise intellectual skills.

It is odd to me that dance majors are often considered in the university environment to be not so bright intellectually. It is odd to me that we expect dancers to learn, remember, and perform highly complex materials, yet we don't even expect so-called academic students to learn how to read complex material or to have the devotion to learning that keeps their attention focused long enough to read and appreciate a few pages. We don't demand that they understand or remember or even have any interest in what they read. We haven't managed to inspire them. Likely we aren't even teaching them the most important and engaging things. Especially in the last couple decades of my teaching career I grew increasingly discouraged by the decline of academic capabilities and interests of students. I think this decline to be the result of a shift in educational systems away from creating skilled, capable, readers and writers. Higher education institutions have increasingly become businesses producing credential-stamped products. Young people have all the information known in the universe available from their phones, yet we have not engaged them in educational systems that nurture in them the skills and desires that sustain their attention enough for them to appreciate the vast potential that accompanies understanding complex intellectual materials.

Seventieth and Seventy-fifth Birthdays

I no doubt inherited it from my dad. I've always felt uncomfortable somehow by the focus of attention on me on occasions like my birthday. My dad would always say, "Well, it is just another day." I've heard the same damned words come out of my own mouth. I don't think either of us actually believed what we said. Following his example, I always assumed that fathers do things for their family first and likely nothing is left for themselves. In his lifetime I could see that my dad would often go without so that the rest of us would have what we needed and wanted. For me this is the dad pattern and responsibility, deeply bodied gesturally. Deny oneself just because that's what you've always done. What now seems so odd is how uncomfortable I have always felt when my birthday comes around. I found that I just wouldn't know how to respond if someone actually did something to honor the occasion of my aging. An odd thing about life is that people become what I call gesturally naturalized to patterns. After years insisting that my birthday be either ignored or minimally marked, that is what people began to assume as my preference. Although, of course, this is what I'd always requested, I was always a tiny bit disappointed that it seemed my birthday was mostly forgotten. Maybe a hamburger meal on the weekend before or after.

Over the years I have occasionally been around folks that make a big deal of their friends' and family members' birthdays, especially the decade turning ones.

I have attended a few of these 50- and 60-year old birthday parties and they were often lavish and fun. In my late 60s I began to panic, privately of course. I'd seen my kids do a large event for their mother's 70th birthday although that was done in part because she was beginning to decline from Alzheimer's and this occasion was seen as an opportunity for everyone to enjoy her before it was too late. I began to expect that the usual pattern would play out and little would be done to celebrate my 70th.

Largely to prevent my own disappointment, which I knew I'd need to hide, I decided to follow up on an idea that I'd long had. That was that perhaps one's birthday should be the occasion for the person celebrating to honor others with gifts and something special. I decided that I'd write a personal letter to my family to say something about myself but also to address each of them to make a few personal comments and to focus on something personal about them that I could speak about and have a gift selected to connect with this 70-year old wisdom, such as it was. I prepared a nice meal with a beautiful table arrangement. My plan was to serve the meal and then before dessert, if I remember correctly, to read this letter to them all and to present each of them with a gift. I carefully selected gifts that would correlate with the specific message for each person. I'm including that letter at the end of this book. They cooperated and were gracious, yet my feeling afterward was that it didn't really succeed nor did it necessarily dispel me from still feeling some sense of disappointment that needed to be hidden.

The following major birthday, my 75th, I tried a different version of distraction by taking Jenny and Fatu to Denver for a tasty meal at a fancy restaurant followed by going to "The King and I" at the Buell Theater. It was a fun evening, yet it didn't seem to have much connection with my birthday.

Upon reflection, I know that this pattern of denying myself only to feel and hide disappointment was something I set up and, in fact, insisted on, yet I have to admit at this point I have regrets and lots of hidden disappointment. So much hidden. In following what I thought was the most selfless and sacrificial acts of a father for his family, I normalized my family to think that I didn't want or need their acknowledgement of my birthday or pretty much any other milestone of my life. I retired from CU after 35 years and a 50-year career and didn't get a card or a single person saying "Congrats!" I feel utterly selfish in even writing this, yet now, if ever, I should be honest.

Dancing with the Boulder Stars

YWCA's have dialed down the explicitness of their Christian origins to become important community service organizations, at least as evident in their Boulder location. According to their mission statement they are "dedicated to eliminating

racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.” Local YWCA organizations in recent years have developed a fund-raising model inspired by the popular television show “Dancing with the Stars.” Each fall the Boulder YWCA hosts a fundraiser at the Boulder Theater called “Dancing with the Boulder Stars.” They select ten or so professional dance teachers from the area and pair them with well-known local business and community leaders, especially those with lots of potential to raise money. Often these community people have little to no dance experience. The pairs meet a dozen or so times during which they learn a dance choreographed by the professional and then in costume perform it on stage for a large packed house audience. The couples are then voted for by members of the audience at one dollar per vote. The winners are not always the best dancers since having wealthy donors voting for you is what is important. It’s all done in high spirits with plenty of fun competition.

I was asked several times by the Y to be a dance pro and several times also to be a judge. The judges don’t actually have any influence on the outcome, they are charged with making entertaining comments about dances immediately after they are performed. Perhaps the most fun I had doing this gig was the first year, 2009. I was paired with Shari Tebo, the spouse of a wealthy Boulder real estate investor. I had learned bolero dancing in Costa Rica and loved its beautiful sexy and romantic character. I considered it as something like a technically less demanding form of tango dancing also with less attitude. In its fundamentals it shared much with salsa, but salsa is a high energy lively sassy fast dance while bolero is a slow smooth sexy dance. For a long time, I had imagined a dance that started as bolero and then suddenly transformed into salsa. For this dance with Shari I found two songs I loved that represented these two dances and edited them smoothly together for this effect. That year was a year I was teaching salsa to large classes and many of my students came to cheer us on. Shari was a fun partner and learned quickly, had some nice sass, and we pulled off a pretty decent performance. It was a blast.

The other two years were fun but less memorable. One was a business woman who constantly was concerned about having what she called senior moments, a term I don’t use, in forgetting choreography. In that dance, performed in 2010, we did a little skit style dance in which we played an older couple having tea at a restaurant but then, shedding the coats revealing our flash costumes, to do a fast and energetic salsa dance. The last year, 2017, was done with a woman who ran a Pilates boutique studio and constantly touted her national standing as a movement teacher. Given her movement background I chose to choreograph an advanced salsa dance including a whole series of highly complicated Cuban-inspired moves. She had plenty of stage presence but she had difficulty remembering choreography. I’m sure I had judged wrong in the

choreography I prepared. She was fine so long as we had a physical partner connection and I could lead her, but when the choreography relied on her dancing on her own she wasn't able to remember and do the moves as choreographed. I was disappointed with the performance and couldn't even bring myself to look at the videos that were made of the dance. Still, together we raised a good deal of money for the YWCA and that's what it was all about anyway.

I was disappointed that no one in my family came to support me at these shows. Yet here's something for me to remember. In a matter of a few years beginning when I was at least 60 years old, I became one of the known salsa dance teachers in the area, I performed regularly, I was chosen by the Y as a pro to perform in their annual gala fundraiser continuing on into my early seventies. That's not so bad when I think about it.

A-fib and Heart Attacks

Spending a weekend with Madhu, a friend who lived in Aspen, at a B&B in Marble Colorado, we relaxed for a while in a hot tub and then went for a hike. The year must have been around 2000. I struggled with the hike feeling physically weak. I discovered that I had an irregular heartbeat and we went back to Aspen to the hospital. They diagnosed it as atrial fibrillation with no particular identifiable cause and used a medication to convert the arrhythmia to a normal sinus rhythm, a process that took a few hours. Occasionally over the next few years I had episodes of A-fib that were either electronically converted or converted on their own. I took a medication that was supposed to help maintain normal rhythm. I include this account here because having a chronic issue with an organ as vital as my heart, reshaped the way I have thought about life and living. It tends, at least in my experience, to shift focus to the unpredictability and inevitability of mortality. I was in great physical shape, did loads of hiking, biking, and gym workouts, yet here I was with a heart condition. I was assured that it was not life threatening, at most something to keep an eye on and perhaps occasionally experience as an inconvenience. Yet, being told this as reassurance only relieved a small portion of my anxiety.

Then on December 18, 2015, things changed again. I'd devoted the fall term to the ambitious process of writing two dozen lectures for a course I was teaching on religion and technology. It was a grueling schedule with me often writing two of these lectures a week. I was excited about this writing and soon saw that it had to become a book, which it indeed did, *Religion and Technology into the Future* (2018). I was also teaching a graduate theory and method course that same term that was a new preparation and required a great deal of work. On top of that, I had grown

increasingly disenchanted with my academic department and its new administration. It was, in my experience, a highly toxic environment and I resented it deeply especially since I'd been at CU for decades and had enjoyed a relatively good, if impersonal, working environment in the department. Just at the end of that term mid-December I had a heart attack. I was taking a step aerobics class in the gym when I began to feel chest pains. I didn't know what it could be and drove myself home. Lying down on the sofa I realized that there was something about this pain that I probably should not ignore. I drove myself to Good Samaritan Hospital about a ten-minute drive from my house and they immediately determined that I was having a heart attack. Implanting a stint was the treatment and I was home in a couple of days and was advised to take it easy for six weeks or so. I was able to take spring semester off from teaching at CU.

I returned to teaching in the fall of 2016, but then shortly after I moved in a new house at the end of the year, on January 3, 2017 I had another heart attack and it occurred in the same damned step aerobics class. This time I was transported by ambulance to Boulder Community Hospital and two more stints were implanted. I traveled to Gainesville Florida to do a lecture mid-January, but I took the spring term off from teaching and began to think seriously about retiring. One other incident of A-fib occurred in March of 2017 linked closely with a highly emotionally charged meeting with a CU department administrator who was extremely nasty attempting to force me to retire.

My reason for recounting these rather boring details is only because these experiences changed me in a profound way. While I experienced something of a fault line shift at age seventy, I think I still held to a sense of an open future during which I'd enjoy a long healthy life. No doubt that was due to the fact that I was physically fit and highly active. These heart issues did not occur as gradual declines or changes. They were sudden, totally unexpected, and without evident cause. They introduced me to the possibility that in life, sudden totally unexpected things, including death, can just happen. The result was that death felt both closer and more real. Death, unfortunately, became my constant companion.

I wish that my response had been, as some at least report, to gain a new outlook on life, one of taking the fullest advantage of every moment to have fun and enjoy. I think I have always tried to do my best to make every day count, but these experiences of heart attacks have left me perhaps more sober and emotionally a shade darker.

For a while I refused to use the term heart attack thinking it both an inappropriate term and one that recalled unpleasant events. Now I think the term attack is rather appropriate. My experience was rather like being attacked by a monster that jumped out from behind a tree and whacked me when I was just out for a pleasant stroll.

Gym-world Dancing

I remember well that day over 30 years ago when I unexpectedly joined a gym spurred on by my realization that I was in terrible physical shape. The first gym I joined was called The Pulse and I thought it was swanky. I remember walking in the huge mirrored room designated for group classes to take my first class which was low impact aerobic dance. I was nervous but excited. I was so pleased that it was taught by the same young woman with whom I had been taking an adult jazz dance class. Indeed, it was this serendipitous class that set me on a new life path and also revealed my flabby unfitnes. I don't remember so much about what comprised the movement in that class, yet I suspect that it resembled the Zumba classes I have taken so often in recent years. Of course, the Latin leaning of Zumba music was likely not what characterized the music in those classes. I started dancing in the context of fitness classes in gyms and continued doing so consistently through all these years. The exception was the period when I was dancing constantly at my own dance studio, Bantaba. I have found fitness dancing in gyms an important part of my self-moving life.

In those early years, as I became more physically fit I began to take high impact aerobic dance classes and for years I did step aerobics classes. I also did street dancing and cardio funk, what would now be called hip hop. Then, as much as I can remember, after I founded Bantaba World Dance & Music and started dancing there I didn't have time to go to the gym. During the most fun period of the Bantaba years, on Friday as an example, I taught or took a religion and dance studio class at CU in the afternoon, then I taught a salsa class at Bantaba, then I went to a two-hour rehearsal for our *rueda de casino* performance group. In the last days of Bantaba, when we couldn't afford to hire any teachers I taught several hours of salsa dancing several nights of the week.

When Bantaba failed, our *rueda* performance group continued on. I was still teaching at CU but had given up the Religion and Dance course with its regular studios. Weekly *rueda* rehearsals were simply not enough to satisfy my need to dance and move so I looked to my gym roots to find more movement. I learned that a north Boulder gym, not far from where I lived then, offered an advanced step aerobics class. I found an economical way to join that gym and started taking that step class which met two, maybe three, times a week. I'd taken step classes decades before, but this class was so much more advanced and obsessively fun. It consisted of moves called by the teacher requiring complicated movement around and on and over the step. The moves could be done with first one foot leading then the other, thus ambidexterity, and they could be initiated on either side (the front or back) of the step, thus adding an additional axis of spatial ambidexterity. These characteristics were almost exactly the same as *rueda* as I'd developed it for teaching high school kids. Of course, I became a step aerobics

junky loving every second of these classes and exerting myself to the max. Perhaps I shouldn't include this information, but both of my heart attacks occurred during these classes. I'm writing this during gym closures due to coronavirus quarantine. Before that happened, I was doing more step classes, from the same amazing teacher, Suzanne, as well as hip hop classes. You only live once.

Years ago I had, of course, heard of Zumba classes as a new Latin-music-based fitness dance form, but my schedule had been too full to give it a try and I wondered if I'd like it. Zumba classes became widely available while step classes disappeared. I gave Zumba a try and have now taken many hundreds of them. When I retired I was able to get free memberships to most gyms so that I could do Zumba, and also hip hop, classes about as frequently as I wanted. Before the quarantine I was going to the gym four or five days a week to take fitness dance classes. Now I'm depending on online resources and I'm doing one and sometimes two classes a day seven days a week in my kitchen. It helps with sanity during quarantine.

The Zumba world in gyms, as also true of hip hop, is largely a female domain with the median age somewhere around the late twenties to the late thirties. The oldest ladies are often in their fifties. In the gyms I've gone to there is a welcome variety of race and ethnicity. A 77-year-old man is clearly a weird presence in these classes. Yet, with my long history of dancing and my continued relatively fit body I can do the choreography as well as most students and with nearly the energy of many of the young power dancers. Interestingly, I almost never think of this stark age and gender difference with these Zumba ladies, at least during class. All of them are friendly and happy to chat it up with me. I almost never hear from any of them any reference at all to my age or gender. When I do think about all this, I'm actually rather confounded. Do they not see me as an old man? Does my dancing simply erase my gender/age physical markers? I really don't know, but I'm deeply grateful that I have had this slightly odd social environment as part of my life. It has allowed me to continue daily dancing. Unfortunately, with the endless opportunities to do Zumba and hip hop online and so conveniently, it seems unlikely that I'll be going back to the gyms even when (and if) they are again safe. While my social contact in those classes was brief and superficial, at least it was a bit of in-person socialization and often my only one; I miss that.

Friends in a Storybook House in the Virginia Woods

Late in my teaching career I gained a reputation among students that I didn't like working with graduate students and I did publicly acknowledge this preference

from time to time. The difference I discerned is that I often found that undergraduates were open and eager to learn, to ask naïve questions that I often recognized as remarkably profound. Their questions were the ones graduate students and scholars knew not to ask. I loved these undergrad questions and the sincere attitude with which they were asked because they surprised me. I was often taken aback at how their questions showed me how myopic are sanctioned academic discourses. This wonderful undergrad attitude unfortunately changed radically and progressively through the last couple decades of my teaching career. It isn't that it ceased to exist, but it had shifted in a university environment that transformed from educating people to be intellectual engaging thoughtful reflective capable adults to being a business transactional space in which degrees were rewarded primarily for showing up and paying one's tuition and fees. During this same period, I found that graduate students in religious studies had no interest at all in the questions of how it is that human beings have such a penchant for, even a forte for, what we label religion with all its distinctive impossibles. Graduate student interests became narrower and narrower wanting to work with only the one faculty person that specialized in their chosen area of study. They also tended to think that they already knew most everything and all they wanted was a bit more experience in their narrow specialization. I found many of them boring and irritating. In this recent period members of the faculty shifted from having an interest in all graduate students to the sometimes-competitive claiming of specific students to be "my students."

Yet there was a time when I worked with lots of graduate students. During one period I loved sponsoring a number of graduate students doing independent studies on all sorts of things. At that time, I had a large conference table in my office and all of these students would come weekly to my office at the same time and each would present to the group his or her progress and concerns. There were thrilling gains made in these research projects as well as much learned by all through the exchange of ideas among a widely diverse group of engaged and interested students.

In 1985, which was I think during this era, a graduate student, John Minear, turned up to study Native American religions. He lived in Fort Collins and drove to Boulder to take classes. He was acquiring experience in the southwest with the Tewa and other eastern Pueblos and he was also a Presbyterian pastor with decades of experience serving church communities. He was interested in ritual as he was exploring creative liturgy; he was interested in mythology as he was exploring how scripture might be understood as story and myth; he was interested in the broader issues of religion in the comparative framework of his experience in Christianity and Native American religions. Needless to say, we had many fine conversations. Then, in 1987, having completed his MA in religious studies at CU, he went on to the PhD program at Iliff School of

Theology in Denver. My late good friend Delwin Brown was faculty and later Dean there while John was a student.

John wanted to continue his studies of Native American religions at Iliff with me helping out in some unofficial way as I could, but the folks there didn't think that appropriate. For many years he struggled through various faculty and areas of study at Iliff working on a PhD. Somewhere in the midst of all this, I recall seeing John by chance one day when I had some business at Iliff and he introduced me to his friend Nancy Maxson. Over time I lost track of John and Nancy.

A few years back, 2011, John contacted me through Facebook. He had retired from the Presbyterian church and he and Nancy had moved to the woods of Virginia. Gradually over time John and I came to correspond. Our emails grew in length and regularity as we exchanged ideas on a great many things from academic topics to politics to the issues raised by aging (he is less than a year younger than me). Nancy joined in the conversations. She studied Asian religions and cultures, traveled quite a bit, and reads widely. She is a musician and joy-producing and inspiring artist.

In time they invited me to visit them and I accepted. I was delighted to find them living in a storybook house deep in the woods of Virginia. Theirs is a handcrafted cottage nestled among the trees and bushes, each living plant it seems is known and cared for by them. The house is complemented by a "barn" a few yards away that is Nancy's studio where her creative magic takes place. I've enjoyed visiting them a few days each year for a few years now. We sit at their kitchen table looking out the large picture window at all that comes and goes in their woods including, when I'm lucky, a big old bear. We eat lots of goodies prepared by both John and Nancy, drink a good bit of all sorts of alcoholic beverages I usually don't know a thing about, and tirelessly exchange stories.

Such a treat to have such fine friends. They showed up unexpectedly in my life and have stayed as good friends should.

Dance Moms

Fatu, who at this writing is seventeen, has danced on competitive companies for eleven years. I do not think I've missed a single one of her performances; although, like today, I've watched some of them live-streamed from other cities (today, February 15, 2020, she is in Anaheim). I've joined dance moms to chaperone groups of dancers on dance trips. I've driven tens of thousands of miles to Denver and elsewhere to get her to and from an evening of classes and rehearsals. I've spent countless hours in studio reception areas doing my own work and chatting with dance moms while waiting for Fatu to finish classes.

Many of the moms have graciously embraced me as an enthusiastic and devoted dance grandpa. I'm often shocked that they seem to actually enjoy me and likely they don't know that they are to me an important cohort, group of friends. None of them know that I operated a dance studio for years or that I have traveled to many countries to study and learn the dances of other people or that I've written extensively on dancing or that I've performed dances on stage. We are simply joined in the fellowship of engaged adults supporting our beloved youth as they navigate the trials, joys, and rewards of the rigorous and competitive world of dancing.

When Fatu switched to Artistic Fusion a couple years ago I no longer drove her. The studio is closer and now she has her own car. Further, the culture of this studio doesn't seem to facilitate the adult supporters of young dancers into any interaction. Maybe it is just that when dancers are older there is less adult involvement. I no longer have a dance-mom community other than a few residual connections maintained through Facebook and I miss them.

Chicago with Fatu

Being a grandparent benefactor and always-present cheering section requires the steady application of wisdom in the environment of such a salad of emotion. Contemporary Western society has quite strange and often unflattering images and projections on grandparents. Grandpas particularly are often the go-to image of the old geezer with no self-awareness who talks constantly spewing old fashioned and out of date and super conservative bullshit who must be politely tolerated and mostly ignored. As a grandpa, I find myself rather resenting this image, yet I suppose it matches reality more commonly than I know. Perhaps it describes me and I just am not sufficiently self-aware to know it. In my youth grandparents were a regular presence in sprawling multi-generational families. I spent much time with my dad's parents who were my only living grandparents and also with my mom's three old aunts who were of the generation of grandparents. I had close personal relationships with all of them and a particularly close relationship with my grandma Gill who lived well into her 90s. Aunt Betsy was quite something to behold, yet her eccentric behavior only endeared her to everyone. I never remember thinking of these older people as ignorant or out of touch. I do remember treasuring them and their stories and wisdom. In my studies of cultures around the world it is commonly the oldest who are the most revered and treasured. They are respected and attended to, not because they are infirm and incapable, but because they are treasured for their experience and wisdom. I think that the loss of that understanding of grandparents is a loss to the culture and, in practical terms, a terrible loss of

access to experience and insight and history. It is also disgraceful that the majority of grandparent aged people feel useless and unwanted and a burden.

For majority suburban America this sort of extended family living in close proximity seems to be rare. It exists more commonly in the families of color as a cultural preference and also in families whose economic stress requires including grandparents in the same household. I think for many of my peers, their kids and grandkids live far away with only occasional personal visits if any at all. Relationships across generations are maintained by Skype and Facetime and text and email, if at all. I have been so fortunate to be near my kids and grandkids yet also at just enough distance that we are not bound together in the daily routines. I've had a strong urge to gather my family to be near enough that being with one another is common.

Grandparents sometimes find themselves having the privilege to use their accumulated financial means to be benefactors, financially supporting their kids and grandkids that they might be able to engage in important activities they otherwise could not afford. I've experienced the joys of this especially in supporting Fatu's dancing career that has spanned a dozen years. It turns out that dancing on youth companies that train many hours a week and compete many dances every year at huge conventions and competitions is expensive, easily rivaling the cost of going to college. Since I have been intimately involved with dancing since long before Fatu was born, it has been impossible for me to limit my participation to simply paying the bills and getting an occasional report on her dancing. I've never missed a single dance performance, even though I have had to see some of them livestreamed. For years I drove to Denver several times a week to take her or pick her up from dance classes. The extent of my interest is obvious. The tricky part for me has been to be intensely interested and informed about dancing from decades of studying it and to be excited and actively present at every development of Fatu's dancing, while also being the proper benefactor by containing myself to expressions of enthusiastic support. Grandparents, especially those who are benefactors, have the reputation of placing conditions on their gifts and I think that is inappropriate. Grandparent benefactors should understand that their involvement is limited to positive encouraging support and paying the bills. And otherwise keeping quiet.

There is some desire, surely common to most benefactors, to be acknowledged every once in a while. The active lives of those being supported perhaps obscures any awareness of how essential is the received support to their most cherished aspects of life. Of course, the good benefactor must remain satisfied simply seeing these joys and accomplishments that they are making possible.

I did, rather by default, get a chance to participate in part of Fatu's dance life that I found especially enjoyable and it felt like the sort of involvement that

offered me a special personal joyful connection. During summers, serious young dancers often attend special programs for aspiring dancers offered by professional dance companies and other organizations. In both the summers of 2016 and 2017 Fatu went to Giordano dance workshops in Chicago. The week included attending the Giordano company show in the marvelous old Auditorium Theater in downtown Chicago followed by six days of dance workshops focused primarily on jazz. Those years Jenny couldn't go because Leon was a baby, so I was privileged to serve as adult chaperone. We stayed with a friend of Fatu's and her dad at an apartment rental in downtown Chicago so we had easy walking access to the whole area to enjoy while the girls were dancing. It was a pleasure for me to be with another adult male. I loved taking lunch to the girls and to be with a whole bunch of them and their moms when we all went to dinner. I had the opportunity to go on my own to photography aspects of the city. And one evening I joined a bunch of the girls to take a Segway tour through downtown. In 2017 one afternoon I took the train south to visit the University of Chicago campus. I hadn't been back there in decades. That too was a distinct joy. That year we also stayed an extra day, after the dance program ended, so we could take the girls to the beach on Lake Michigan. There I also got to make some great photos of the girls doing leaps and dance poses on the beach. I also had occasion to spend time with some of my dance mom friends to commiserate about the challenges and opportunities of company dancing.

What I think I most treasured about those trips to Chicago were spending some time closely connected with Fatu and her dancing, traveling with others yet not being either alone or with a single partner, and being almost constantly around a lively bunch of young dancers for a week. These trips felt like benefactor benefits, even though they were not explicitly such, and they will always be dearly treasured experiences.

Judy's Death

It was a Sunday morning. The date was May 19, 2019. I was in north Boulder to take a Zumba class. When the class was over I gave Jenny a call. I knew that her mother, my ex-spouse Judy, was nearing the end of her life in a nursing home just a short distance from where I was. Jenny told me that her mom seemed close to death and I should come if I wanted. I stopped by a nearby Safeway and ate a quick serving of pasta salad from their deli and went to the nursing home.

Judy and I had divorced in early 1994 after a sad and angry year of negotiating the end of our marriage. It was not friendly and the divorce opened a period of years of anger and isolation. I understood and appreciated all this especially because I was the one to blame. I had attempted to re-create relationships with

my kids, both, at the time, young adults. Still, such an unhappy split of their parents left them having to negotiate how to be with, and happily so, both their parents and to do so while keeping them apart. I clearly have heaps of regrets about this whole situation and its effects on the kids and on both of us.

As the years passed, those fairly rare occasions when Judy and I would be in the same space, I recognized that the feelings were gradually becoming less raw and that there were hints of possible openness. I was grateful for this softening, yet most all splits lead to an extensive realignment of family, including extended family, and friends, especially those who had been mutual friends. As I reflect on the divorce now over 25 years later, I believe that the warm affectionate connection I would expect to have had with my kids and the extended family on Judy's side and our mutual friends was irreparably damaged by the divorce. I have suffered and mourned this absence of fundamental affection for decades.

Sadly, ten or so years before her death, Judy began to show signs of possible dementia and it eventually became Alzheimer's. She began to have difficulty managing the basic needs of her life and eventually took residence in an assisted living facility. A fall with a broken knee exacerbated her situation forcing her to be in a nursing home where she could get proper physical care. She seemed to give up any hope for independent mobility and spent the balance of her life in a wheel chair and in bed. Judy loved literature, poetry, music, movies, humor and so much more although she tended to socially isolate. I so regret that the last few years of her life were marked by the progressive loss of the things she loved and her slipping into the tomblike isolation that seems so often to characterize this horrible disease.

As her memory began to deteriorate, she lost recent memory but retained a bit more longer-term memory. I've heard this is typical. Oddly, and also tragically, since I was connected with memories in her past, she was drawn to me that we might remember together. And out of the memories of our common past we reconnected a bit as friends. We also, of course, shared a love for our kids and grandkids. I regret that this reconnection coincided with her decline. It seemed appropriate that I be with her in her last hours.

When I arrived at the nursing home, Jenny and Corbin were both there as was Judy's sister who had been there almost constantly for the previous several days and nights. Judy lay unconscious and hadn't been conscious for days. She was receiving oxygen, but was breathing mostly through her open mouth. The care was strictly palliative. Her breathing was ragged and now and then it would pause for a few seconds.

Mid-afternoon Judy's sister decided that she would go home for a shower and to tend to a few things at her house, which was an hour's drive away, and left the four of us. Jenny had something to attend to so she left for a while, leaving Corbin and me with Judy. Corbin sat in a bedside chair. I stood by the

bed holding Judy's hand with my other hand on her upper chest to sense her heart beat and to offer some possible comfort by this touch. As Corbin and I silently kept vigil, it was clear to both of us, that her time was short. I was hoping that Jenny would make it back before Judy died and she did, taking my place and hugging her mother as she took her last breaths.

We spent the next hour just hugging each other, feeling the sadness of the loss and the regret that she suffered so much during her long decline, yet also realizing and acknowledging how special it was that, after nearly three decades, the four of us were together alone as a nuclear family on this most special occasion. I was grateful.

Norway, Iceland, Sweden

I believe I celebrated my fiftieth birthday in London by myself going to Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park where I thought about delivering a rant at Speaker's Corner, Trafalgar Square, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben and Parliament, and 10 Downing Street to get a quick sense of the city. It was a wonderful birthday, even though celebrated alone. Next day I boarded a high-speed train to Cardiff Wales to attend a several-day conference. Don't remember much of what the conference was about yet it seems it had something to do with theater and the arts. I remember visiting with Edith Turner the spouse of the late noted anthropologist Victor Turner and a scholar in her own right. I remember participating in an example of performance art. I have always found these events so strange, yet perhaps I haven't experienced the right ones.

Oddly, this was at the time my only trip to Europe/England in my life despite extensive travel to Asia, Indonesia, Africa, Latin America, and Australia.

I was fortunate to have further European travel experience just after I retired at the end of 2018. My friend and mentor Jonathan Smith had died at the end of 2017 and a number of conferences were planned to consider and honor his work. One of these was hosted by Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim Norway. I had a bit of grant money left over from CU that I needed to use or lose by the end of June 2019, so I applied and was accepted to present a paper at that conference to be held at the end of May and into June. My friend Greg Johnson heard of my trip and he contacted his colleague, whom I had briefly met a couple years earlier, Bjørn Ola Tafjord, who teaches at University of Tromsø which is far north in Norway. Bjørn Ola invited me to come to Tromsø to do a lecture. One of his professional colleagues, Olle Sundström, teaching at Umeå University in Sweden heard I was coming and he was a fan of my book *Mother Earth*. We couldn't work out a way for me to visit his university on that trip, so he invited me to come to Sweden in October. After

all these years I was finally going to get a chance to travel to Scandinavia, part of Europe. Making travel plans I wanted to extend these trips a bit to have a fuller experience. I spent some time in Oslo on the way to Trondheim and Tromsø and I spend time in Stockholm on the way to Umeå. Then I discovered that Icelandair had good priced fares to Europe and offered free stop-overs in Reykjavik which gave me the opportunity to have some experience in Iceland, such an amazing country.

It was energizing and rewarding to be around European scholars who knew my work and were excited to meet me and hear what I had to say. It was a rich and expansive experience to visit these Scandinavian cities and to experience, if only for a bit, the quite different lifestyles of these wonderful folks and to imagine what life might be like near the Arctic Circle. My experiences were extended by my efforts to record some of them by making photographs.

Once home I wanted to share my experience through images and writings with family and friends so I got to work on making a couple versions of a book I titled *On Reflection: Vignettes & Images* (2019) comprised of selected pictures that correlated with 14 little pieces of writing, something like prose poems. I include these here, each with a non-English title, to help record these treasured travel experiences. They also mark my later-life explorations of different writing styles and forms.

I wanted to return to Europe this year, 2020, but the coronavirus quarantine has made that impossible. Hopefully I'll have another chance soon.

Djúpalónssandur

Walking a crushed grassy path, the massive glacier Snæfellsjökull, Iceland in 2019, splatted atop a once-fiery volcano looms over my shoulder. Some say it is one of Earth's energy axes. It was Jules Verne's portal to commence his Journey to the Center of the Earth. Iceland is the land of fire and ice. Green pads of moss cling to sharp black lava, once red liquid fire. In their sluggish skirmish I'm pretty sure I know which will prevail. Continuing along the trail, massive lava rock formations abruptly open to afford me a glimpse of pure white waves smashing onto a black beach, Djúpalónssandur, curving round to a distant shadowy mesa jutting into the sea. I feel myself gasp instinctively reenacting the first creature crawling brand spanking new from the briny deep with fresh lungs frantic for air. Needing to be on the beach, I run the rest of the way down the narrow treacherous path. Perhaps this stony strand is the very spot my fishy ancestors, taking their first panicky breaths, dreamed vaguely of feet and thumbs and big brains. I walk on smooth black glistening sea-wet pebbles. In a few million years

they might be ground to sand. I pocket a couple to put to my ear one day back home that I might hear echoes of my first dance steps.

Fonteng Studenterlunden

I had to be dragged from the huge bowl-shaped International Fountain in Seattle Center near the Space Needle. Enthralled, was I. Dozens of water shooters programmed to turn music into dancing. Inspired by the old magister ludi Friedrich Schiller, who taught me play, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" appears before our eyes as water rhythmically blasted, spewed, and spurted into the air. Joy to Ludwig's unhearing ears. Enthral, a word that in the sixteenth-century meant to put into slavery, now indicates being pleasantly entranced, enchanted. For hours, day and night, I circled Buckingham Fountain in Chicago's lakefront Grant Park even for a while on a Segway—think about that!—riveted by its ever-shifting moods. Water mimes the shape of its vessel. At repose, water is a reflecting puddle or picture, its shiny face imitating ours; beguiling, ask Narcissus or Frankenstein's creature. Fountains liberate water from its thrall. Even from its nature? By dancing with gravity, spouting water finds its own dynamic shapes. Kinetic ephemeral sculptures. *Fonteng Studenterlunden*, a fountain in the student grove behind Oslo's *Nationaltheatret*, recalls the magical eternal dying and rising progenitive strategy of salsify; the end of life glory of the giant dandelion some call goat's beard. The slaying of death by death itself. Daisy-chains of life upon life. A fleeting orb comprised of tiny helicopters awaiting lifesaving flights upon breeze's breath. Since the time of Herodotus and later when Christ's blood dripping wet from his wounds imitated the eternal life of tragopogons, we've searched high and low for the Fountain of Youth and the Fountain of Life; the grail and the golden bough. Yet, isn't vitality—youth and life force—the moving essence of any fountain? The dying and rising of any flower?

Bakklandet

The morning after I return home from Norway I begin the day with personal habits. I open my bedroom drapes and lean with both hands on the window sill taking in the expanse of the Rocky Mountains as I assess the mood of the morning and the prospects for the day. This morning, rather than on the majesty of the Rockies, my eyes fall on the gray and brown colored houses of my neighborhood. My heart sinks, morning high spirits wane; the feeling of drab. In Trondheim, I delighted in the rows of three-storied barn-shaped houses and businesses, each in a different color, standing on stilts abutting the Nidelva River

in the Bakklandet neighborhood near the Old Town Bridge. I couldn't get enough of this vibrancy and its ever-changing moods. A theatre of kaleidoscopic delights reminding me of wandering the streets of Puebla, Mexico, where the colors are similar yet in subtler hues. I live in the wrong neighborhood; perhaps the wrong country. I used to imagine designing a home with the intention of giving full play to all the senses. Just ponder the possibilities! *Jouissance!* I realized this dream only in bits and dabs in decorating various homes. Red. Yellow. Purple. Concrete. Steel. Brazilian Cherry. Walnut. To the cosmos color is physics. To animals it is also biology including survival itself. To humans color is all these and also psychology, ethnicity, class, race, language, history, botany, geology, taste, geography, aesthetics, gesture, identity, and, above all, story.

Bjørvika & Harpa

Once considered an unfinishable folly, a shameful failure on aboriginal ground, Sydney Opera House swells my heart as does no other structure. In close proximity its sheer shiny massiveness grounds as it inspires. From a distance its white sails catch the wind and travel the sea on a voyage of Argonauts. Having twice been in its presence years ago including attending a concert in the acoustic marvel of its great hall, I was delighted by the opportunity to return once again so that I might spend a day in its presence. My favorite vantage is where its concrete arcs interplay with the steel girders of the Sydney Harbor Bridge. A few other great halls in surprising places that I have visited remind me of these Sydney feelings: Bjørvika Opera and Ballet Theater in Oslo and Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavík. I'm thrilled that many cities consider music and dancing so important that they build enchanting venues for the moving arts. I think these edifices are so captivating to me because they honor the evolved human capacity to surpass ourselves, honoring our biological power to transcend. Tethered by gravity yet seeking escape from the boundaries marked by skin, our senses aspire to otherness and in these transcending encounters with the beyond, we wonder, imagine, dream, hope, create, make, learn, inquire, express, perceive. The banality of the unfathomable capacity for self-transcendence, for movement, is a treasured gift of our evolution. Music and dancing are surely the purest means of immanent transcendence, of corporeal incorporeality. As a student of dancing I've come sometimes to imagine it as the exploration of the infinite potential of human movement; the limitless freedoms experienced despite the distinctive physical limitations of our bones. We dance, like Nataraja, for no reason other than that it bubbles forth as vitality itself. We dance because it is of our nature to do so; just observe any child. Impossible to grasp, the essence of dancing is being in no place, constantly transcending, never just here, not yet there. It is

fitting that music and dance have both a constant presence in daily lives—I'm thinking of toe-tapping country fiddlers and banjo players, jazz bands playing for gyrating dancers, the ubiquity of chic ear buds, and the street cultural home to hip hop—as well as being appropriately honored by renowned artists performing in lavish productions to tuxedo and gown clad audiences in grand opera and dance theaters that soar beyond their materiality.

Björkräd

What a delightful gift to be in Umeå in October (2019) when the björkräd are at the height of their autumn beauty. Joined by many other tree and plant species, the parks and streets are ablaze with colors that remind of their origin story. Umeå lore is perhaps lighter and warmer than most Norse mythology. In 1888 a fire devastated most of this Swedish city. Wisdom earned of red-yellow flaming loss shaped the plans to rebuild. Umeå was resurrected around wide streets lined with birch trees thought to be resistant to fire. In my youth I knew the birch as the trees providing the Indians bark for canoes. Umeå is popularly known today as the City of Birches. How often loss and destruction give rise to beauty and wisdom; and an occasional canoe. We are made of the stories we want to tell again and again; the stories of the blazing autumnal björkräd; hopeful stories of the phoenix rise from ruin.

Kirkjufellsfoss

As the road along the rim of *Snaefellsnes* Peninsula begins a descent to the sea, *Kirkjufellsfoss*, Church Mountain, appears as a massive blocky mesa. Does it deserve its name? From across the end of a fjord I make out a feature near the far end that resembles a bell tower. Aha! Farther on, the massiveness of a cathedral on the sea gives way to the standalone sloping tower, among the most iconic landforms in Iceland. Its pyramidal shape would beg the question of the appropriateness of its name were it not for *Hallgrímskirkja*, a wedge-shaped church (an *axis mundi*?) towering above Reykjavík. God's rocket ship prepared to blast off heaven-bound. Shifting perspectives remind me of a little essay I wrote using the Sesame Street inspired title "It's Where You Put Your Eyes." I suggested that perhaps the most powerful experience of a mask, as an example, is not when seen as a piece of art on a wall, but rather seen as the face of a character in ritual drama. Better yet, by performing the mask oneself, dancing it, being the masker looking through the eyeholes so as to feel within how the world responds to the masker's moving presence. Now, more than sight, I prefer the

synesthetic matrix that comprises the whole body, yet I continue to marvel at the impact of a plethora of vantages—the eye would call them perspectives, the body storytracks—appreciating all the more that it is in the ever-shifting multiplicity of creative encounters that we realize ourselves and the promises of our humanity. The shifting vistas of moving about with the imagination to discover lively characters in the rocky landscape awaiting their role in stories.

Tromvik

Morning and night I take a moment to remember my mom (1914-2001) and dad (1915-2007) by looking at my favorite picture of them which I keep on my bedside table. It was snapped high in the Rocky Mountains on a walk across the tundra. The image captures them, heads tilted slightly together, smiling; Mom holding a recently exposed Polaroid; Daddy, in sunglasses wearing my blue ski jacket. In the framing background is the snowy grandeur of Longs Peak. As Kansas flat-lander dirt farmers, later small-town grocers, this occasion likely was the only time my parents, in their near centenarian lives, ventured above the middle elevations of the great plains. They were enthralled by the miniature alien wonders of the tundra: tiny vibrant plants huddled together like a pin cushion, elusive pikas peeping their locations sounding like sonar, and mottled ptarmigans easily mistaken for lichen-covered rocks. At forty degrees north latitude, the tundra is a mile above the plains, two above the sea a thousand miles away. Dwellers of middle earth, we think *here* is everywhere; a comforting mistake. My Norwegian friend, Bjørn Ola, takes me for a hike near Tromvik at seventy degrees north latitude. Here, well above the Arctic Circle, the tundra meets the sea. Tiny bouquets of perfect flowers bloom within view of crashing sea waves. Grouse huddle nearly invisible among the lichen-covered rocks as sea gulls sail overhead. Black-eyed fuzzy-antlered reindeer graze the roadside skirting the fjord. With middle earth corn-fed humor, I ask if any of these magical creatures have red noses. With a straight face Bjørn Ola tells me that, as it is summer with its midnight sun, Santa and Rudolf are on vacation. With sea waves lapping the tundra. I can't feel where to live. Near and far, sky and sea, collide without a between. Tromvik is a raw enchanting primeval vastness where awful teases awe.

Nidaros

While celebrating the life and works of my mentor Jonathan Z. Smith (1938-2017) in Trondheim Norway in June 2019 I had the opportunity to visit Nidaros Cathedral (built 1070-1300) including crawling around in the basement among

the bones of those buried there over the centuries. Dominating the façade, rows of relief sculptures remind of stories: Adam and Eve, the crucifixion, and one saintly figure holding a basket containing three severed heads. I asked to be told the story of three heads in a basket, but no one seemed to know. Perhaps I should make one up. Nidaros triggered a flood of “church memories.” A few years ago, I returned to Java primarily to again experience Borobudur (built in the 8th and 9th centuries), a massive multi-layered mandala covering an entire hill. The lower levels are comprised of hundreds of bas-relief panels telling the stories of Buddhism. On the upper levels, peering over the surrounding forest, Buddhas sit in lattice stupas. In another memory I experience the mission churches that dominate the Pueblo architecture throughout my old stomping grounds, the American Southwest. Atop a high mesa, the pueblos of Acoma stand in the shadow of the massive San Estevan del Rey mission church (built 1629-1641) with its dark history of using forced Pueblo labor to haul the enormous ceiling beams from far-away forests across the desert and up the mesa and up, once again, to the top of tall thick walls. Another church memory. At Hermannsburg, west of Alice Springs, I stood before a one-room Lutheran Church (built 1880) imagining the straight-laced Germans who made this first church in Central Australia in which to introduce their German god to the aborigines. How odd their mission! At this stage of my life, I have the luxury, perhaps more so the duty, to reflect on half a century during which I devoted myself to the study of religion. It now seems incredulous that I have done so. My memories of these “church” places haunt and mystify me; my own story now uncomfortably entwined with theirs. I never sought nor found god in these places. The closest was perhaps in the plaza in front of the tiny Yaqui church in Guadalupe on Easter Saturday; yet that was surely due to the dancing masked Chapayekas. I’m beginning to realize and accept—indeed, celebrate—that what has persistently amazed me is the sheer creativity of human beings who everywhere build such remarkable structures, story them with a host of imagined beings and mythscapes, and use them as settings for sensuous ritual dramas. I have been inspired by human biology and anthropology and art and dancing, not by theology or a longed-for glimpse of the spectral or eternal; by the incorporeality of flesh, not the immanence of spirit.

Helgafellssveit

Roaming across the Snæfellsnes Peninsula in June 2019, I chip the edges off my total ignorance of Iceland. With my forty-two-megapixel mirrorless Sony as my cyborgian prosthesis, I become an intelligent amalgam of carbon, silicon, metal, and glass; goopy fleshiness conjoined with the clean hardness and exacting

precision of technology. From the road's edge near *Helgafellsveit*, the smallest community in Iceland with fifty-three people, my carbon body endeavors to grasp some of the distinctive features despite the overwhelm of sheer vastness. So much eludes me. I walk the landscape breathing the scents and feeling the atmosphere. I even taste the food at a nearby ranch. As cyborg I also practice the alchemy of transduction from hard to virtual reality by grabbing impressions of unimaginable dimension captured as a matrix of electronic pixels. Home again in Colorado I revisit Iceland virtually as a metahuman; a cyborg jacked-in to my computer prosthesis. I import eighty-megabyte files and travel this landscape anew in its virtual possibilities; a cyborgian creative encounter. Dehazing penetrates the gauze that muddies the biological eye. Adjusting clarity, shadows, and highlights reveals hidden features and rich hues. Stitching individual images into a panoramic seamless quilt reshapes the vastness; a wide slot giving focus to the peripheral. Zooming removes cloaks of invisibility. Features with the splendor of detail magically appear, rabbits from the cyborg's hat: endless stretches of lava almost obscured by green-brown moss and time, a large body of water surprisingly tucked in this arid enormity, distant blue mountains surrounding the area, a dark fin-shaped feature suggesting a subterranean shark; all summoning a feeling of the pristine beyond prehension. *Helgafellsveit* whispers its secrets in my metahuman ear. As cyborg I trek where my fleshy feet cannot. With charmed super powers, far from Iceland, I return through a wormhole in defiance of the biological bonds of time and space.

Arnarstapi

Spotches of yellow and pinkish red command my attention as I walk, nose to the ground, along the sea cliff at Arnarstapi, Iceland, 2019. Lifting my head, I take in a few quaint houses at the foot of a black conical lava rock mountain accented by a nearby snowy glacier; a grand juxtaposition of fire and ice. I turn round and round in sync with the swirl of birds. Tiny grass-topped isles white-washed with droppings and dotted with nests are avian homes with landing strips. Feeling a vertiginous thrill, I peer over the cliff's edge, amazed by a glorious world of rock formations, arches and pillars, constantly washed and engraved by the foamy sea. My eye follows the dark cliff facing the bay around on a trajectory toward mountains, colors fading to blue-gray in the distance at the very edge of the earth. Looking south, the great Atlantic! Uninterrupted sea all the way from Iceland to Antarctica. Where the sky-sea colors blend, a barely noticeable line reveals the slight curve hinting the shape and size of our planet home. So vast, yet we are spoiling it. Horizon! Amazing. Always there—far, farther—yet somehow also here. Horizon! Always beckoning us to wonder and

wander; promising something beyond, some outside. Horizon! Like a rainbow excusing itself as our pursuit of it nears, taking with it the pot of gold. Always more. Always unknown. Always out there. Always beckoning. Horizon! A miracle of our species—won upon a moment's musement—the unattainable there beckons us here to move, to seek, to imagine, to transcend, to live.

Tulipan

In Trondheim I wander the streets fascinated by doorways and street cafes; neighborhood character markers. In the tiny garden area just outside one charming door, I am captivated by a *tulipan*, surely a fancy fringed version of the flaming parrot variety. Peering past the showy fringes, the inner world of botanic beauty, all sex and gender, comes into focus like adjusting a microscope on a drop of pond water. Utterly remarkable. Such an intricate universe of reproduction secreted in its depths; its beauty rarely appreciated. Where are you Georgia O'Keeffe? I've spent much of the last few years thinking and writing about human making; especially those audacious claims made across the centuries by arrogant men who brag they can create sentient beings, most always women, sexy women at that. Pandora, Galatea, Eve, Ava, Samantha. Let's ask these gentlemen to start small. How about making this flaming parrot tulip? Oh, and be sure to include all its beauty and intricacy and functionality and fragility and fragrance. How about making a hummingbird, or even a honey bee, hovering about aiding and abetting this tulip in the mysterious acts of botanical sex? No future without them. Despite our grandiose claims to making, to production, to stamping out one damned plastic thing after another, it is clear we are far better at un-making and it seems more natural to us. A pity. Perhaps we should pledge to make no more than we un-make and to un-make nothing that we are incapable of making. We might also spend more time on our bellies being seduced by the flowers.

Nidelva

Smashing my face against the glass pane of my upstairs library window, peering through the space between neighboring houses, I can glimpse a sliver of Sienna Pond. A bit awkward yet I do it daily. Sometimes I'm rewarded with a Canada goose or two. My workspace, on the other side of the house, offers a more direct view of another small pond, unnamed so far as I know. Early mornings it is usually a glassy surface holding an upside-down image of Longs Peak and the stirring back range of the Rockies. Why does my eye seek water? Is it thirsty?

Perhaps it is to marvel as the occasional squadron of landlocked pelicans swoops in for a spectacular water ski landing or now and then to see a great skinny-legged blue heron standing in water up to its knees. A snowy egret was there this morning. Frozen water turns white, sometimes blue. I occasionally wonder what it would be like if water and blood switched colors. Who decided these things? At odd hours I was drawn to the Old Town Bridge to catch the differing moods of Nidelva River in Trondheim. While I found it difficult to discern any movement of the sun in the sky—sunrise was but a couple hours after sunset—my body felt the shifting moods of the Nidelva as it absorbed and reflected the buildings, clouds, and sky around it. Home in Colorado, several times a year I visit Brainard Lake to gawk at the grandeur of the lake-cloned Indian Peaks and Indian paintbrush. Why are we so fascinated by the world conjoined with its upside-down double? Water moves, hides, reveals, reflects, shimmers, clouds, colors, echoes, supports, sounds, forebodes, runs, plays, dances, waves, rises, falls, erodes, quenches, irrigates, escapes, floods, washes, buoys ... for starters. Yet perhaps most amazingly it mirrors, reflects. Reflection: to bend back. As tots we discover self in a mirror. Then we spend the rest of our lives reflecting on who we have discovered there. On reflection we pause for memory and dreams; wisdom and regret.

Vatnajökull

Chewing on pieces of crystalline glacier ice frozen a thousand years ago, I taste the double crunch marking our time as I drift around bergs floating in a lagoon at the foot of Vatnajökull, the largest chunk of ice in Iceland and nearly also all of Europe. This huge deep lagoon has greatly expanded in the last few years due to the melting of Vatna Glacier. I am tasting the delicious purity of these ancient waters as byproduct of our penchant to pollute our air and dirty our water and warm our planet. The stark and overwhelming beauty of this place comes at an ugly price. Just a few days ago, I walked by the Parliament building in Stockholm where Sweden's young environmental activist, Greta Thunberg, sat regularly for a year to protest climate change. In her speech at the United Nations she scolded, "How dare you!" Some of us felt uncomfortable as we returned to enjoying our oil-lubed lives. She speaks a simple truth. We are not only stealing the future of our youth and our planet, we also don't even have the courage to admit it, much less take decisive action. It is ironic that it is in the overwhelming beauty of a glacier lagoon floating among sparkling icebergs in a remote area on the fringe of a nearly vacant and sparsely populated country on the edge of the Arctic Circle that the melting ice in my mouth belies its sweetness with the foreboding taste

of things to come. How we must feel hearing ourselves say, What beauty this is!
How pure and delicious!

Stortorget

Wandering through the labyrinthine narrow streets of *Gramla Stan*, the old town, on *Stadsholmen*, the island at the heart of Stockholm, I take a random left heading up an even narrower steep street named *Kåkbrinken*. At the end of a short block I unexpectedly emerge in *Stortorget*. A slightly sloping cobblestone square surrounded by gayly colored buildings, the Grand Plaza feels to me quaint and more festive than grand. Yet it has a gravity born by its long and storied history. The most modern looking building—*Börshuset*, the Old Stock Exchange, built 1773-1776—currently houses the Swedish Academy, the Nobel Museum, and the Nobel Society. This highest point on the island is the oldest part of the city. Across a thousand years this place has been the setting for cycles of rise and ruin, the fragrant grandeur of wealth and the sickening stench of poverty. Every building on the plaza houses a long story of hope and regret and love and loss. My attention is drawn to the row of tall colorful buildings along one side of the square. These, the only buildings occupied by private citizens, were built in the eighteenth century yet they stand on medieval foundations. As the living hub of a great city, the square has been the setting for festivals, protests, and acts of violence. As a septuagenarian my end-of-life anxiety is modulated (or perhaps intensified?) in this small plaza. Across a thousand years, right here where I stand, so many human beings lived out their years to become swiftly diminishing memories passing into history as but a number, a footnote, a nameless member of a group; most all of them totally forgotten. The *Stortorget* event most mentioned to me by those I chat with here is the Stockholm Bloodbath that took place November 7-9, 1520. Religious reasons were given for settling political differences by beheading and hanging nearly one hundred people, many aristocrats, in this very square. As I stand mid-plaza in awe of the Nobel and enchanted by the row of colorful whimsical buildings, I can't help but conjure, as a shadowy overlay, dark bloody images of bodies hanging and severed heads rolling. Is this jarring conjunction life?

Chapter Three

Reflections

A major capability that I attribute to humans in distinguishing them from all their animate kin is the ability to reflect. I recently read that the Dahlia Lama considers reason to be the critical marker of humans. I have less interest in reason than in the remarkable demands of reflection. I really don't think that we are all that reasonable and I also think reason may limit some of our more creative lights. We humans can make ourselves objects of our own subjective reflection. Language, reflective thought, art, writing, scholarship, religion . . . all those things that we humans do that our animal kin are not capable of amount, in some sense, to our insatiable eagerness to reflect on our individual selves and on our species distinctions and on the worthiness of our existence. Who are we? Who am I? Why do we exist? Reason alone provides no answers, but questioning itself gets to our humanness. Taking a detour from the usual highway of mind, I trace these distinctively human capabilities to the long and rutted road of the evolution of human hands with opposable thumbs that allow us first to grasp objects but eventually to grasp ideas. Along with thumbs came upright posture that allowed the evolution of hands to begin with and gave us bipedal motility and the anterior space where our thumbed hands allow us to scrutinize with our eyes and other face-centric senses what we hold. Not only scrutinize—what is this thing?—but to manipulate—as a watchmaker or a schoolyard texter. And we can do none of this inquiry without having evolved large brains with the capacity of metastability—the energizing capacity of holding together opposites—and

nonlinearity—the engagement of the random and inexplicable and the experience of surprise as the raw materials of creativity.

In the writing of these, my stories, some of them more than others turned more heavily toward self-reflection, the further self-objectification done to comprehend the subject that I call “me.” Holding myself up as subject for further scrutiny seems bordering on being intolerably self-absorbed. I began to feel that the stories that were more reflective should be put in their own box (or chapter) to be opened only by those especially curious or interested in such convolution. I try to avoid the overly personal and hopefully the maudlin and self-pity (I’ve done my best and it isn’t much my style anyway), yet I have allowed something that has felt at the time to be a bit of bare-naked truth, if such is anything we are ever actually capable of telling. I’ve attempted to set these self-reflections in the context of my larger appreciation of human distinctiveness, yet I’m not sure I always achieve this goal.

Arting: Making Beauty

When I was a kid I took a few piano lessons. I’m pretty sure that we didn’t even have a piano so I don’t know how that worked. I remember going to some house on west Third or Fourth Street to take them. Don’t remember why I quit, maybe because we had no piano. My mother played piano and I loved hearing her play. Years later, she had a small electronic organ that she played. How nice of my dad to agree to sacrifice what surely was a lot to get that for her. I also played cornet in the high school band and remember taking a few lessons from the band teacher. He had an artificial leg that was attached near the hip and it didn’t bend at the knee so when he sat down his long wooden leg, it looked like a post, always went in some odd catawampus position. He’d take my cornet and play to demonstrate. Then when I got it back to follow his example I’d have to choke on the tobacco staleness of his spit that remained on the mouthpiece. Nearly makes me gag to think about it because the taste comes right back.

I never did anything as I recall with graphic arts and even now I feel utterly inept in this area. I did do a few woodworking projects and I think I may still have a breadboard made of magnolia wood for my mother that I glued and sanded. Its color and smoothness were always pleasant to me.

In my forties I tried to learn piano again and guitar, yet neither with much success. I still love hearing and also watching these instruments played well. For a while I played in a Balinese gamelan, yet rather ploddingly.

During a midlife crisis in my forties I made the effort to acquire some fitness needed because of the deteriorating tendencies of the sedentary academic

lifestyle. Fitness, and an adult jazz class, led me to dancing. And dancing changed my life progressively right up to the present. That's a story told elsewhere.

Yet, despite academic study of dancing around the world, the writing of books and articles on movement and dancing, the founding and operation of a world dance and music studio for a few years, my teaching of salsa and other Latin dances for many years, my selection as a pro dancer for YWCA's "Dancing with the Boulder Stars," my choreography for a performing *rueda* group, and my continued dancing to the present, I still never achieved what I understand to be a sufficient level of skill and competence to actually call myself a dancer.

I regret I didn't start dancing at a young age. I regret that I didn't learn to play a musical instrument. I regret that I didn't seem to have artistic talent or the will to develop it. I regret that I was not able to engage in the ten thousand hours that brings one to the threshold of artistic skill and acumen. I regret that at my age I'm not physically able to feel the joys of complete and untethered physical exertion in a skilled way to create beauty in my own moving body.

What I've come to comprehend through nearly eight decades of living is that making beauty is the most noble and satisfying and humane of our human capabilities. Beauty is not just joy and lightness and pleasantness. It is the heartfelt and honest engagement of the complexities that we encounter in life. Thus, my regret is that I haven't gained sufficient skills and insights to make nearly enough beauty to justify my existence.

The African American poet and activist, Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones) used the gerund "arting" to place emphasis on the process rather than the product. I followed this shift across much of my own work preferring dancing to dance (and especially to "*the* dance" so commonly synonymous with ballet) and moving to movement (a focal distinction in my most recent academic work). In my 2012 book *Dancing Culture Religion* I used gerund forms to title all the chapters in the book. And here and there I have suggested religioning as a term more interesting and accurate than religion.

This shift from noun to verb is perhaps a smallish way of contributing something of beauty in that it highlights that the doing, the living, the making, the moving are miracles of human biology. The emphasis is on the process more than the product. At this stage in my life I have surely fulfilled the ten thousand hours of practice in writing that I might dare to make the modest claim that occasionally, and often surprisingly, I experience writing as arting, and hopefully the residual marks it produces might engage readers artfully.

Books: A Love-Hate Relationship

I'm writing in the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic (June 2020) and so many of the expert commentators have been appearing on the news shows from the comfort, if inconvenience, of their own homes. A majority of them appear gazing into their computer cameras with a bank of bookshelves behind them. I've been so interested in peeping into the homes of so many of these people that I sometimes forget to listen to what they are saying due to my fascination with what books are on their shelves and how they have decorated their homes. Almost none of them look anything like I'd imagine. I have been a bit surprised by how many of them place a number of copies of their own recently published book as the prominent display on their shelves. I have been surprised by the modest, sometimes tacky, appearance of some of their homes. Pandemic pastime.

As an academic of course I have purchased thousands of books through the decades, reading most of them. Over the years they accumulated on the shelves in my CU office as is the case in all faculty offices. Shelf upon shelf of books somehow attests to one's authority as a scholar, as an expert on whatever is in all those books. One evening I heard a news host mildly chastising a guest for appearing in a setting without a bookcase in view. When I was teaching, it was common for students who were visiting me in my office to notice books on my shelves and to comment on them, often with a hint of awe and respect in their voices.

Some decades ago I began to notice whole shelves of books that I wish I hadn't wasted precious hours of my life reading. I certainly consider education something of a holistic affair. No matter the disparity of the subjects one studies and the experiences one has, they all organically accumulate. Still, rather than these shelves of books feeling like wall sized badges of my knowledge, wisdom, and authority, they began to feel oppressive. I felt closed in by these banks of books, a prisoner in a jail of my own past reading, in danger of being crushed to death by the weight of the books and the hours and effort that they somehow represented.

I decided to act. I started sorting through these books selecting those that felt most oppressive. There were lots of them. I put them in a shelf unit that I'd cleared and when that was full I invited colleagues and students in to buy these books at a dollar a book. I was surprised that lots of books weren't worth even a measly dollar to anyone. I had to try to give them away. No one seemed to want them.

My academic department moved to a new building that had room for a department library, a rather nice room actually. I donated a bunch of books and journals to this library. Still I had so many books left. When I began to think

about eventually retiring I contacted the University Library to donate the books and they weren't interested. I wound up donating dozens of boxes of books to the new Indigenous Cultures library. And, upon retirement, I still hauled a number of boxes of books home. In a room in my house I call my library I have three tall book cases filled with books and several other shelf units full of books located around the house. Even among these final surviving books there is only one four-shelf case that contains the books that I continue to rely on and read and re-read.

Yet, I keep writing books. I can't stop. Seems an irony. I've published a book in each year 2018, 2019, and 2020. I have completed a book length manuscript on moving and vitality that is a philosophy and biology of self-moving. It is new work in fields beyond what I have worked in before. And then there is this book of more personal writings. I want to edit and self-publish travel journals from the early '90s. Why do I do this? Good question for which I have little satisfying by way of answer. The books I've published in the last couple of years I've never seen in the hands of another person, yet they are on topics that I think should be popular and interesting to many. I recently purchased a small three-shelf book case just to hold the books I've published and the books in which I have a chapter. I love writing books. I haven't much love for shelves of books once read.

In modern academia there is the adage "publish or perish" and it is accurate at least in research class universities. Yet in my experience, while one's career is dependent on producing at least that first book, most of the books scholars drudge through writing are not worth the paper they are printed on. Academia has become a haven for elitist snobby scholars who think their super specialist research is the most important thing in the world, but only several of their colleagues are likely to even read it and some of them will harshly criticize it just because that's what academics do. Most of these books will never be read by a single student or a single member of the general intelligent population. I've published many dozens of articles and they contribute to a genre that probably has an even lower public value. Perhaps I am too cynical.

In my experience over the last fifty years, as academic research, at least in the humanities but I suspect even more broadly, has become increasingly specialized and obscure, while at the same time university education has become more and more generalized and vapid. A divergence. The intellectual demands on students have shrunken to the level that degrees are often awarded for showing up and paying tuition. I found that increasingly over the last quarter century students considered reading to be something recommended, but optional. Most students can't sustain focus long enough or have the skill to read and appreciate an academic article. Given the gestural conditioning of our entire culture, reading more than the length of a tweet is often cause for stress. I sometimes feel this

impatience myself. When the pandemic forced quarantine, I made some of my more relevant works available for free on my website. I announced their availability on Facebook. The only response I got was a couple people asked me if this material was available as podcasts or audio-books.

I experience writing as a practice of alchemy and self-discovery. There is something of wonder in the process of making strings of words and discovering through the writing process what one knows and maybe even expanding it a bit. I have no illusions that my insatiable need to write and to keep writing books is anything other than the practice of my own folly.

It is a singular depressing moment when the doorbell rings and I find a box on my porch with half a dozen copies of my newest book. But at least now I have a special shelf dedicated to displaying them.

Feeling Young: Exertion, Exuberance, Ebullience

I have spent nearly half my life now studying dancing and movement all over the world from biological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives. I have danced with and observed the dancings of a great many dancers and dance cultures. Participation in dancing often has an inverse correlation with age. When I was in Ghana years ago I was able to compare the dancing of young people with the dancing of their elders. I recall it was near a beach. I was thrilled by the exuberance and power and vigor of the young dancers. For hours they danced with speed and huge expansive movements to pounding drums and inspiring song. But then there was a break and several older women entered the dance ground. Their movement was small and seemed understated. As I watched them I began to appreciate that their dancing was like a fine reduction sauce where the many ingredients were cooked down to their rich refined essences. The huge energetics of the youth were cooked and refined and reduced to essences through decades of dancing experience. It was a glorious thing to behold.

In contrast I remember attending a faculty dance performance at the University of Colorado. It occurred during an evening of student dance presentations. The dance faculty members chose a comedy of unrefined movement to entertain and show their willingness to participate. I found it humorous, yet somehow embarrassing, even at some level shameful. This was not the refined essences of dancing performed by bodies shaped by decades of continual experience. It was an excuse, a cover-up, for the loss of their ability to perform with skill and exuberance, while they likely retained a sense of that skill that could be presented on the bodies of their students by means of verbal cuing and criticism. Modern Western cultures don't seem to know how to adjust dancing appropriate to bodies over time, to aging bodies. The standard of

performance is heavily weighted by the energy and exertion of youth, of young bodies. Older dancers succeed only so long as they can perform as young dancers. At some point they stop dancing and start teaching.

In Ghana older people danced yet in a way that treasured their experience and how aged bodies might demonstrate the accumulation of a lifetime of dancing experience. When I was in Mali—I was almost 60—I took dance classes with members of a company of dancers from the USA. They were all in their 20s. We danced in school yards where bits of glass needed to be gathered from the grounds to prevent injury to our bare feet. We danced the pounding Malian rhythms on concrete-floored pavilions sometimes as well. It was summer and I remember dancing so hard that the tee shirt I was wearing dripped sweat from the hem all around my waist. Of course, it was exhausting to try to dance with these young people, but that was all I knew to do.

For the last dozen years or so I have watched my granddaughter, Fatu, dance on companies and compete with young dancers across the country. I am astonished at the abilities of young people to learn to dance and their seemingly endless capacity to dance with ebullience. Such vitality they enact in their every dance. It utterly astounds me. I am often simply in awe.

Shaped more by the dance norms of my own culture, it is impossible to avoid comparing my own dancing with the dancings of the youth. I regret that I didn't do any dancing at all until my mid-40s. I regret that today, while I can learn the choreography and while I still enjoy the sheer movement of my body, I recognize the physical limitations of what I'd label exertion. I so want to go all out and experience that youthful feeling of the full capacity of their bodies. I used to experience this rush that comes with the demands of mountain biking. Grinding up a steep mountain track for miles is exhausting yet also the amazing experience of exertion. I resist offering the excuse of aging with all my being. I sometimes wonder if my seeming physical limitation is due to my having had two heart attacks or the meds I now take. My cardiologist confirms, in at least some measure, this excuse. It still seems lame. But I sincerely and deeply regret that I can't experience the rush of vitality that accompanies sustained all out exertion. I'm always thrilled when I see young dancers fly and move with grace and the full measure of the capacities of their toned muscles. I regret the decades in which my lifestyle was body-denying and movement-discouraging. I regret that I lost the years of my life when I would have been most capable of full out movement. I am, of course, grateful that I have been able to dance enough to gain the skill to perform and to teach dancing to thousands over the years and to experience the joy of thousands of hours of partner dancing. When I taught, students would often comment on how easy my movement seemed to be. The Italians might call this *sprezzatura*. Still, I always think about how different it all would have been had I begun to dance as a youth. I have known through all my years of dancing

and moving that there is a difference, and I think this should be much more fully explored in biological and psychological frames, between the experience and results of dancing when starting at age six or ten compared to beginning at age forty-five.

A note on the biology of youth among animate organisms. My littlest grandkids just got a kitten. Watching this cute little fur ball fly around the house and the almost insatiable interaction between kitten and kids suggests there is a biology of youthful exuberance. Little humans, not unlike kittens, once they've developed the skill tend to run everywhere, even across the room. This attests to a biology of youth, the newfound explosion of uninterrupted and insatiable moving that, as anyone can see, is them exploding with life, sheer vitality. I am addicted to the appreciation of this moving vitality.

Do-Over? Of course, Maybe?

“If I had a chance to do it again I wouldn't change a thing.” I cringe every time I hear someone say this. Like talking nice about the recently deceased —“Oh they were the nicest neighbor, always a smile and they even gave me cookies at Christmas”—I know you are supposed to say “I wouldn't change a thing,” yet I know I would change many things. I always think, “Living a whole life, didn't these people learn anything?” It could be seen as something of a philosophical question. If it just means that being who I've been I'd certainly do the same stupid things because I'd be the same stupid person, then okay, but why then even raise the issue? Surely this adage implies that, *given what you know now*, would you do things differently if, knowing these things from the beginning, you got a do-over? I suppose this understanding too invokes philosophy and physics, or perhaps a bit of sci-fi. We could suppose that a change in any decision we have made would have changed everything in the rest of our lives so all the other dumb things we'd want to change would be irrelevant. We might just figure that we'd make other decisions that would lead to another lifetime of dumb decisions. So surely this adage really is mostly intended as a way of our reflecting on the full course of our lives, on our accumulating experience—maybe we'd call that wisdom—as a memoir-ish kind of activity. It's an older person's concern largely, isn't it? I can't imagine it bearing much interest to my grandkids or even my adult kids. Surely it appeals to those closer to the end than the beginning.

Given this silly reframing of the question, to those who proclaim “I wouldn't change a thing,” I say, “What a lazy and empty statement. Why not enjoy the reflective opportunity and consider what you now regret and what you now cherish? Why not reflect on what you've learned from mistakes that you'd not repeat? Why not discern what have been the persistent values that have been

behind acts you now regret even seeing that they may have led you to unexpected happiness or further regrets?” I’m sure that the quick expected answer is, for many, an affirmation of their current situation, their spouse, their kids and grandkids, their profession, their home and location and so on. And, of course, no one would want to say to spouse, kids, and grandkids, “I’d really have preferred marrying someone less disappointing and one I really loved. I think I’d like to give life a go with different kids and grandkids than you crazy imps. I’d have preferred not having to work my whole life at a job I hated and in this hell hole of a place to live!” So as with a dead neighbor we say the expected nice things, “Everything has been peachy keen. Wouldn’t change a thing.” Yet, there is the loss of remembering and evaluating and discovering that should inevitably lead to discovering regrets. I think it might be a sign of maturity to say, “I wouldn’t do that again!” maybe referring to the sum total of our lives. What’s so bad about having regrets?

Regret: An Emotion with a Story

Fascinated with etymology I often find myself studying the origins and histories of words and especially how early usage so often is at odds with, even the opposite of, contemporary use. The word “regret” begins with one of my favorite syllables, *re*, meaning again or back or once more. The syllable *gret* comes from *greter* (to weep), from Frankish *grétan* (to weep, mourn, lament), from Proto-Germanic *grétanaŋ* (to weep) and Frankish *gréotan* (to cry, weep).

Regret then is to weep once more. Regret is biologically based in referring to the physical expression of the emotion of sadness, physical evidence of the the emotion itself. We might think of it as the recurrence of having felt/expressed it before or perhaps about something in our past that now causes us to weep, mourn, or lament. Regret is comprehensible as evidence of and requiring what I have often referred to as the fat present. In this understanding of the human experience of time I have wanted to indicate that the present is not simply the knife edge emptiness where past and future meet. Rather it is rich in that it contains the full expanse of time and experience. Regret requires the presence of and more so emotions about something that is marked by having passed or having existed or occurred in the past. It implies the bodied feeling markers of weeping and crying. It implies a present emotion connected with a history. Regret is an emotion with a story. The emotion is obviously felt and manifest in the present yet it exists only in the conjunction of one’s current perspective as it encounters and emotionally evaluates something that is marked as of the past, a remembrance that stirs feelings expressed as mourning, weeping, lamenting. What can enhance the poignancy of these emotions is that our remembrances

may reveal to us that we once saw things differently. That is, what once we may have felt happy and proud of, we now feel regret about. The emotion is a product of incongruity. This suggests that feelings of regret arise and change over time, yet they always require a current perspective on a remembrance of things past. Regret depends on the accumulation of experience over time that might be an indicator of wisdom or a mature perspective. Regret arises ironically as the effect across time of our learning something through experience. Regret has the poignancy of an echo.

Regret may also arise in the interplay of current evaluations associated with possible future events as in the example of sending our regrets at not being able to accept an invitation. Répondez s'il vous plait or RSVP. Or our regrets at not being able to live long enough to experience something in the future in which we are currently interested.

The word regret is etymologically connected with the bodied expression of an emotion rather than only the emotion itself. Although I'm not so sure such a distinction can even be made since I think all emotion is bodied, otherwise how would it be felt? The second syllable indicates weeping or crying rather than some notion of abstract sadness. Regret is a bodied action or reaction conjoined with emotion and feeling. It is feeling in both the emotional sense and also as a specific bodied sensation.

As the word regret demands the richness of the fat present as well as complex bodied feelings (emotions and sensations) it also demands, for it to have any sense at all, the awareness of a paired alternative. While the root *gret* indicates a bodied response, the term is used to indicate remorse, guilt, shame, disappointment, grief, unhappiness, distress, sorrow, and so forth. All of these uses of the term require the awareness of paired alternatives such as satisfaction, agreement, happiness, and pride, the positives correlating with the negative. Regret then requires, if tacitly performed, comparison and valuation.

While we are conditioned to seek meaning in life or aspects of our lives, I have grown weary of the implications of this term "meaning" and its common use. It seems to suggest that our lives are generally in a state of being without meaning; wanting, incomplete because we have yet to find meaning as if lost behind a sofa cushion like a dime that fell from our pocket. Perhaps this assumption of lostness arises as a face of the unfortunate legacy of the Christian notion of the fall, the belief in original sin, that we are by nature sinful and need redemption. Yet, those happy-talking smiley-faced folks who seem to always bask in having found the deep meaning of their lives are, to me, the least interesting, the least authentic of folks. I can think of no novel that charts the course of characters who are always happy and satisfied because of their possession of meaning and who experience no regrets. At a minimum we want the story of their search that leads them finally to plunge their hand into the

unknown detritus under the sofa cushion. We are engaged by those people who try and fail, who fail and learn, who suffer and survive or maybe not. A rich life is one that has regrets because it is one of risks and dangers and adventures some of which produced loss and failure and guilt and shame. Regret attests to the necessary double-face, the age-old pairing of comedy and tragedy.

I'm a Damned Misfit!

As I found myself in the midst of writing all these pieces I realized I had no plan, little sense of what might allow these mixed messes to cohere. I had some sense of wanting to leave something of my personal life as a hedge against time's relentless melt. I wanted, I think, to leave some record of what happened, should at some future time someone of my progeny might take an interest. Yet, as these pieces poured forth I began to realize that these spewings were becoming a late-life voyage of self-discovery, perhaps more so than a record of my past. As the writings, little by little, began to make a pile, I began to ask myself, "So what are the threads that hold together my life, other than some continuity of change in a single biological blob or a persistent nominal label?"

Rather late in the reflective process accompanying writing, slowly and then more suddenly, I came to realize that I'm a damned misfit! I've never been where I was supposed to be. My associates have never been those they should have been. My interests and contributions have never been much like those of my peers. I've always been drawn to the peculiar, the incongruous (to the point of centering my religion theory on this quality), the metastable, the nonlinear, the accidental, the fortuitous, the serendipitous. I've embraced play and humor and the joke, yet few, I suppose other than my former students, have perhaps thought me funny. My great admiration of Jonathan Smith, my mentor, is perhaps that he whole-heartedly embraced these same qualities. He too might be thought of as a misfit, yet he was considered more an eccentric and one simply above and beyond the categories that measured fitness for the rest. He was the misfit of the genius whereas I just have a penchant for hanging with the wrong crowd.

A misfit is one whose behavior sets them apart from others accompanied by feelings of discomfort. I've never been so good at having friends or colleagues perhaps because they feel the discomfort of my out-of-placeness. I rather think that, throughout my life, I've been so occupied with just going along, surviving in unfamiliar places, working extra hard because I was doing stuff that I wasn't prepared to do, being with others that were not my peers, that I never even realized that I have always been a damned misfit. As a teacher a misfit can be embraced by students as an oddly curious alternative to the usual, entertaining and thought-provoking and inspiring, even occasionally endearing. Perhaps that

is why I've always felt most myself and most accepted as a teacher than in almost any other setting.

The term "outlier" has become popular, but technically that indicates one who is detached from the system. I've always done my best to contribute, if in totally unexpected ways, to the system. While I have been a persistent critic of academia, I have accumulated a half century career as an academic and I have published and taught as expected, if often reluctantly and curmudgeonly so.

The term "disrupter" has become popular. Many consider it necessary that the status quo can change only upon threats brought by disrupters. I'm sure I've done my share of disrupting and I clearly have done my best to find those perspectives that challenge, yet my motivation has always been focused on the creation of something new and exciting rather than simply the desire to confuse and disrupt. My critique is always conjoined with the offering of an alternative. I have embraced the importance of surprise and the absence of fit (incongruity and incredulity) as the driving force of hypothetic inference, the initiation of something new, the stimulus to creativity. Still, my interest has always been in the creative process as a positive contribution. I have never wanted to cause the destructive blast that leaves chaos that something different might arise should we, or a system, survive.

I used to think I was somehow what people call a loner. I think that such a label is only partially accurate. I enjoy being alone. I think that living most of my life alone has honed the skills of understanding the benefits and comforts of being alone. I think that I have been alone so long that I rarely feel lonely. Yet, I have always enjoyed the pleasure of social interaction, when it is true and honest and substantive. I have almost no tolerance for social glibness and idle chatter. I've spent hundreds of hours in locker rooms and always ignored the "how 'bout that game" talk and overly opinionated political comments. Yet I greatly enjoy the rare occasions when I can actually converse with another about anything with sincerity and actual concern.

In this process of self-discovery, there is no need for an antidote to the malady of misfitness. As I assess it, despite a certain constant presence of painful blisters that evidence the friction of not fitting, misfitness is the core of my creativity and the fuel of my passions. It is my character to see the creative potential of things that do not fit perhaps because incongruity is, in a sense, what fuels my own life force. At this stage in my life I wouldn't be honest without admitting that this process of coming to know the character of my life has not given rise to a deeply and pervasively felt anguish.

Misfit: Incongruity Gives Rise to Accomplishment

The intellectuals I most admire—Michel Serres, Jonathan Z. Smith, Jean Baudrillard, for example—have possessed a vast knowledge of intellectual literature and they were proficient in a number of languages. I loved school as a kid in Cherryvale Kansas. The saddest day of the year was the last day of school in the spring. I played all the sports. I was editor of the school newspaper and the yearbook. I was in all the school plays. I got all A grades. Yet, it was a rural farm community and I was offered no foreign language, little history, little literature, no anthropology, no classics, no arts beyond the school marching band in which I played cornet. I've tried to recall when I discovered that not all people in the world speak the same language. Could have been high school. Really? My Chicago mentor, Jonathan Smith, had read the 12 volumes of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* before starting high school.

My college major was mathematics with a physics minor. I had a couple required plodding semesters of French. I thought literature was useless until I read Faulkner and Hemingway in Dr. Kennedy's required lit class at Wichita State. My first graduate degree was a Master of Science in Business. I worked in a corporate job for several years. I started my study of religion at the University of Chicago with the intent of it being a temporary sabbatical from what I expected to be a highly successful career in business. Only recently did it dawn on me that the only reason Chicago admitted me was because a 1963 Supreme Court decision had deemed it constitutional to teach religion in state-supported colleges and universities and the University of Chicago Divinity School had become a factory, of sorts, to produce faculty to meet the surge in demand. Thus, in 1967 I was an odd risk they decided to take, perhaps they thought me a curious experiment. Perhaps my greatest asset in being admitted is that I didn't have a seminary background. I was profoundly ill-prepared and didn't even know the depth of it, yet I persisted because I couldn't ignore the vastly rich world I'd somehow stumbled into. Yet, I never fit. I simply didn't have the requisite background and skills. Shaped by my lack of reading knowledge of foreign languages and my having no mastery of fundamental bibliography, my career has amounted to a stream of naïve responses to the surprise of incongruity. In a sense, my career has been to be the perpetual freshman student asking the most naïve and seemingly odd questions because I hadn't been trained that these were not the questions one should ask.

Yet, now after retiring, I can appreciate with some sense of irony, that my weaknesses have been in large measure also my strengths or I have made them so. I remember having an inkling of this possibility when I was a student at Chicago, yet with no comprehension of how to realize that potential. I have read different kinds of things than my colleagues. I have seen creative connections

among disparate things others were trained not to see. I have appreciated that most every aspect of my personal experience invariably somehow intertwines with my academic passions. I have imagined and been able to adumbrate global perspectives and approaches to academic areas that have often not been seen by others as possible.

I have so often wondered why Jonathan Smith was my constant mentor and inspiration. He was in an intellectual league so beyond mine comparison is pathetic. I can perhaps now see that a persistent preoccupation of his was to work out the implications of the idea expressed by Paul Ricoeur “incongruity gives rise to thought.” Jonathan often quoted this phrase. Perhaps my building on Smith might be summed by the addition of two words. “Incongruity gives rise to thought *and action*.”

Big Risks, Big Failures, Big Gains

When I think about my parents I would never think of them as risk-takers. Growing up during the Great Depression being financially conservative was etched on their souls. I recall that my dad always said that he wouldn't do anything unless he believed it would improve the family situation. I have had in my mind all these years that they lived a carefully controlled and stable life. Yet as I have been thinking about the impact my parents had on me, I have had to rethink my assumptions. My mom always advised and encouraged and insisted that I live my life a certain way. I always felt that I had to please my mom and I'm sure much of what I did was done in the effort to please my mom, not only when I was living at home but also the through the rest of my life and even after her death. I somehow felt that her love of me was dependent on my doing what pleased her. I also felt that no matter what I did, she was already expecting something more of me. Of course, my view of all this probably has little or nothing to do with her actual intentions.

What I have appreciated more and more through recent years is that it was perhaps my dad, who I didn't think influenced me all that much because he didn't say much to me, who, by his actions, had as much, if not more, influence on me than did my mom.

I've been a bit surprised, while writing these bits, by evidence of my own willingness from time to time to take major risks for an idea or an opportunity. There is a list of these big risks that might be cited and what characterizes them is that they were all mostly sudden leaps of faith rather than the result of some carefully calculated deliberative process. These risks were big in the sense of significantly changing lives. Disturbingly common is that most of these risks

resulted in failure or, perhaps better put, in surprisingly unanticipated outcomes that included considerable pain.

Even though I was a small-town farm kid I was eager to go to university. Only a couple kids in my graduating high school class went to a university. A few went to community college, but most stayed in the small town and became farmers or local business people.

By the time I started my master of science in business program at Wichita State, I had a fulltime corporate job in which I tripled my starting salary in three years. I was also teaching courses in the business school. I was married and lived in a swanky apartment and then a suburban house that we purchased. I traveled extensively in my job and had considerable power. There was every expectation that this life course would soon make me financially well off and establish me as someone known in the community. Yet, I tossed all this away to go to the University of Chicago to study religion, a subject about which I knew nothing and for which a job was many years away and would be, if I even got one, relatively low paying.

Another major risk was when I learned during a sabbatical year at the University of Colorado that they wanted to hire me full time. Before starting at CU, we had to return to Arizona State for a year to fulfill the contractual condition of my sabbatical. Yet I knew that I wanted to live in the Boulder foothills and I took a huge risk by purchasing land on which I'd build a home. I didn't know anything about building a house from scratch. I had no idea even what it would cost. I certainly didn't have any significant savings or income. The enormity of everything involved in such a project was beyond my imagination. Yet, without even much research or inquiry I made the decision and suffered the consequence. We wound up with a dome home in the mountains, yet I had to do much of the labor and all of the construction management myself. It took most of a year with me working every spare minute on it while I had a brand new tenured full professorship position to establish at CU. It nearly killed me. I still don't understand why this whole home building folly didn't simply fail.

Then, in my mid-fifties, my academic career was on cruise control teaching and doing research as I wanted and enjoyed. I was divorced and enjoying new relationships and dancing with and socializing with a crowd 20 to 30 years my junior. I was fit and free and probably financially better off than I had ever been. Rather than thinking about how to increase my financial estate with the goal of retiring when I reached 62, I put all this at risk by starting a business, a school of music and dance. While I had a graduate degree in business and had worked in corporate business for several years, none of that prepared me in any way to start a new small business especially one of a type that I knew nothing about. I did it, again without too much thought or planning. Just took the plunge. From the beginning everything about the business indicated it would fail financially, yet I

had a vision and I shared it with Jenny. Then after struggling to somehow succeed for several years I repeated my risk pattern and purchased a commercial space. The only rationale I had was that it seemed ownership was preferable to renting. For unforeseen reasons—an irritable neighbor and a disgusting city administration—the business failed almost before it opened. Having bought the space, I was then saddled with an unusable and unsalable space. The risk led to a long process of taking desperate measures to avoid catastrophe yet it was inevitable and the subsequent loss was not only the closure of the business and the foreclosure on the property, but also the loss of a great deal of money.

The question I ask myself at this stage in life is why I have had such a willingness, often in the midst of relative comfort and security, to take the big risks. I know myself to be highly analytical and reflective and in daily life financially conservative. I worry over spending \$10. I won't even buy myself a cup of coffee. Yet these big risks were taken without me doing due diligence. I just plunged blindly into the abyss. What the hell made me take such risks?

While contemplating this strange behavior, I recovered some relevant memories of my father. He was the last kid of seven and was a lot younger than his closest sibling. This meant that he wound up running the family farm since all his brothers and sisters had moved on. It was an informal rental arrangement based on sharing the income and expenses of the farming operation with his parents who lived in the old farm house. He didn't own the farm, his parents did, but he didn't pay rent or mortgage payments. For a small farm of 160 acres, this business would, in the best of times, not build any wealth. It had to support two families. As everyone knows, all farming is risky especially the small ones, due not only to unpredictable weather and growing conditions but also to fluctuations in markets and economics. Many aspects of farming are beyond a farmer's control.

What I've recently remembered in a more thoughtful way is that my dad took big risks. Recalling these surprised me. He purchased a self-propelled combine so that he could not only harvest his own crops but hire himself out to harvest the crops of all his neighbors as much as possible. It recently has dawned on me that a combine was a hugely expensive piece of equipment. It is the sort of thing that is often owned by one whose whole livelihood is made by starting in the south and traveling north following the crops as they ripen to work day and night to harvest farmers' crops. But my dad took the huge risk of buying such a machine only to work for a limited time for his neighbors. I'm almost certain he never even made expenses. I have no clue how he paid for the machine. He did the same thing by buying a hay bailer. He not only bailed his own hay, but also hired out to all the neighbors to bail theirs. I worked with him on both of these risky ventures in which he tried to better himself and support his family. I think

it meant mostly a great deal more work for him without much, if any, actual financial results. This strategy and outcome characterize much of my life.

I could describe my risky venture starting Bantaba World Dance & Music the same way. It drained me of every dollar I had and I spent thousands of hours without ever gaining a dime. I see now some continuity with my dad in terms of taking the big risks. I want to say there is something noble and courageous about all this type of risky behavior, yet I'm not so sure that it is anything other than pure foolishness. Perhaps it is having too much faith in one's own efforts. Upon reflection I am certain that the drudgery followed on by the failure came at a large cost to my dad, emotionally as much as financially. I think it broke his spirit in some ways. He worked so hard. He had such high hopes. Yet his rewards were meager to none. We think that hard honest work and failure build character and wisdom, yet I'm not so sure it doesn't also have the power to sour one's personality and crush one's spirit.

I understand that failure is not always failure. It sometimes is an opening to the unexpected and the delightful. There is occasionally a nobility in believing in, maybe the world, maybe life itself, that one plunges despite the consequences of the risk. Yet, I'd be dishonest not to acknowledge the steep price so often paid and I'm not thinking of money.

Fear of Loss and the Loss of Lightness

When my mother was old she often had irrational fears and emotions and they visited her especially at night. In attempting to explain what she felt, I recall her saying, "It's the nights. It's the nights." I don't really know why her fears and intolerable feelings were worse at night or became more apparent at night, which is more likely, but I don't doubt her sincerity or the reality of her experience. I have often remembered her statements especially as I've aged and experienced some increase in my own fears and the darkness of my own background emotions.

As I have gotten older I frequently experience unidentified and pervasive feelings of distress and anxiety. When I become aware of these feelings—not easy since they tend to function tacitly setting emotional tone and background mood—I can usually trace them to a fundamental fear of loss. It is not a loss for myself necessarily, yet that's increasingly the concern as I creep into the late 70s. It is the fear of some possible loss related to my kids and grandkids. Some reflection on the origins of such feelings often reveals the slightest of triggers (a term I pretty much despise, yet is somehow relevant), a word or phrase I hear or overhear or a trivial incident that has grown all out of proportion mostly outside

my awareness. Still, these all seem to accumulate under some sense of fear of loss, the anticipation of regret.

I have had a few major experiences in my life when I risked a great deal on the promise of accomplishing something that I thought to be worthy and humane. So often these have taken enormous investments of time, energy, and money. Most failed. The failures were not sudden moments, but usually long drawn out agonizing months or years long processes in which I persistently doubled and redoubled my efforts and investments (time, money, energy) that I might succeed, producing only the continuing and increasing trapped feelings of decline and eventual certain loss and failure. My current penchant towards being more aware of background emotional tone that so often aligns with fear of loss seems to me to be posttraumatic stress. Perhaps it is a normal accumulating effect of living a long life.

Work May be Pathological

When I began the writings that have turned into this collection, I wanted only to communicate my thoughts about certain values—basically holding passion and creativity over money and material wealth—in a communication style that would not offend. I don't really know what happened next. I don't think that I have adequately addressed my initial issue in these various pieces. But concurrent with that first writing came the quarantine forced by the novel coronavirus which is still in effect (end of October). What happened during this time is that I began to write little pieces that tell stories of some aspects of my life conjoined with sufficient self-reflection that they weren't simply cloyingly personal and self-indulgent. As so often happens in my life a little suggests a little more and then that quickly grows into quite a lot more. While in strict quarantine, writing several hours daily, somewhat compulsively, I noticed how these little pieces were quickly adding up to a whole bunch of words and how they were beginning to cover lots of the notable events and times in my life. I constructed a general chronology, which I included below, to offer some understanding of how these stories spread across my life. A few short essays began to appear on topics that have been persistent preoccupations bridging my academic and personal life.

It was when the length grew past one hundred thousand words, that being the length of a fair-sized book, and words kept on coming that I realized that maybe this was amounting to something, a hint of possible coherence, if but in the exercise of writing, amidst all these little chips. What began to draw my attention as I continued on were moments of genuine surprise about who I am and what I have been over these now many decades. In telling a few of these stories, I began to see that in some respects many told the same story, or

variations on same few themes. Apart from them being my stories, they began to reveal to me, with perhaps more clarity than I've ever had before, who I am. The bits upon bits, stories upon stories, comprised a late-life inquiry and self-examination. It is perhaps soberer and more honest than it might otherwise have been simply because at my age nothing else much matters. Tell it like it is; if not now, when? Or, to be more accurate, if not now, never.

What shocked me, realizing a leitmotif threading among many of these writings, is that I've seen myself persistently as a misfit. Shocking in a quite different way has been discovering how central work has been to my life; not just job, but an obsessiveness to the point of pathology about working, performing labor, exerting myself. No doubt the central role work has played in my life is deeply rooted in my salt-of-the-earth heritage of middle American farmers and particularly, I've discovered, the example of my father. I've worked hard for many reasons and I don't give up easily. Almost invariably I have met difficulty by renewing and increasing effort. I worked at least 40 hours a week building the dome house, never really knowing how to do what I was doing, while working as much or more at the same time on my academic career. My intellectual development occurred as I pushed myself into areas beyond my comfort and acquired knowledge and skills. This strategy always required extraordinary amounts of work. As I wrote about all of these efforts, I began to see the correlate, causal connection, between this obsessive work and the decline of my marriage and my relationship with my kids and my own happiness. I was physically and emotionally exhausted and felt alone and I felt that I alone was responsible for the outcomes that demanded so much work. My writing about this time in my life was accompanied by an increasing feeling of disbelief. Initially it was disbelief that I actually did this much work, that I put myself in this seemingly inescapable obligation to work. But then, the greater surprise went beyond the fact that this level of work wasn't confined to just an unusual year or so. I discovered that this attitude and practice related to work was not a one-off, not temporary, not simply the necessity of building a house while establishing a career. Perhaps because I have been writing these pieces over such a short period of time, it has dawned on me that, rather than this one situation being an exceptional time of extremely long and hard work, it has been typical of almost everything I have done in my entire life. And that includes even the obsessive work of writing these pieces while I am retired.

I've always known that work has been the core of my life, in a sense it is who I am, how I be, yet what I didn't comprehend is that I have persistently and regularly put myself in situations that demanded that I work probably double the time and effort expected of any healthy responsible person. It seems I have regularly and willingly, even eagerly, put myself in situations where I have felt obligated and responsible to work beyond any reasonable measure. Suddenly it

occurred to me that perhaps my life of work has been pathological, that my work has been the evidence of malady, that it has been unhealthy. Work has been my go-to mechanism for coping with much in life and also perhaps avoiding much as well. Doubtless I have felt I needed to work harder and longer than my peers because I have regularly, routinely, felt a sense of insecurity and I've held the perception that I was not as smart or as creative or as prepared or as capable as are others around me. Doubtless I have felt I needed to work to protect against loss. I've always felt that what little I have, not just stuff but also relationships and family, are constantly at risk if I don't work with all my energy to prevent any possibility of loss. I think I have worked in an effort to earn the love and friendship of others. I think over time, but clearly this trait is one I share with my dad, I have experienced an increasing inability to understand the importance of personal pleasure and happiness or even how to pursue such things.

I've often asked myself what would make me happy, what might I do to just relax and have fun? I have yet to know even how to begin to *work* on these issues, yet I suspect it would require much effort. What a pathetic statement! No doubt my almost total absence of friends while I generally enjoy being around people, my inability to find and keep a partner relationship at any time in my life, and even what seems like an absence of true affection felt towards me by my kids and grandkids, are all connected with this malady. Maybe somehow, I project the message "I don't need you because I can do it myself." Maybe the message projected is "Stay away I'm working and don't have time for you." I live a life even in retirement when I work all day (eight to ten hours) every day (seven days a week) as evident in the fact that I published a significant academic book in each year 2018 (the year I retired), 2019, 2020, a number of articles, wrote and delivered a number of lectures (Norway and Sweden), and I have another book drafted. Beyond that is this book length collection. The simple fact is, I don't know what else to do but work.

I only wish that writing these pieces and experiencing the revelations and clarity they uncover might provide some catharsis freeing me of this compulsion. Yet even now my impulse is to finish these pieces and to gather them. I'm pretty sure no one is likely to read any of these writings. I still can't resist thinking that someone some time might find them informative or interesting or entertaining, yet this is a pale motivation compared with the compulsion to work, often accompanied by joy and satisfaction. This behavior seems sufficient evidence that I'll never get over being who I am, a worker, a person with a worker pathology.

In my life I think I've felt the most myself in a public setting as a teacher, both at the university and in the dance studio, and in the private sphere I feel most myself when I am working (especially writing), which is invariably solitary. There is no question that I loved teaching and miss it dearly, but I also love

thinking and writing and reading and researching. I love dancing yet it always turned into the work of teaching and performing. Even now my dancing is part of my daily physical workout. In working I experience, often as a euphoric feeling, how ideas and materials and knowledge come together suggesting insight and possibilities and richness. I often experience the zone of total absorption while moving in dancing and dance fitness. There is no question that I am a worker, a maker, a doer and that I gain great pleasure from the process even though it is often confounding, irritating, and confusing. I hope that occasionally my working and making are creative and surpass mechanical repetition. I regret however that the extent and obsessiveness of all this work is perhaps pathological and has come at a high cost to my social, personal, and family life.

Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit

“By adding little to a little there will be a great heap.”

Throughout my life I've occasionally wondered what it has been that has seemingly pushed me beyond the expectations of my origins, both in terms of accomplishment but also toward the particular area of my life's work, the study of religion. In my most recent book, *The Proper Study of Religion*, that builds on the work of my mentor Jonathan Smith, I ask this question in a personal way of raising what I believe are important questions about the field, the academic study of religion. To me the questions, not the answers, are the more important, even at this stage of my life. If there are no questions there can be no answers, yet the best questions are those that raise other, more insightful, ones, that is, the questions that have no final answers.

In our society, I think the common almost unquestioned measure of worth is wealth, money and accumulated stuff. My first job was in the corporate world and I tripled my salary in the first three years. I have no doubt that should I have stayed that course of corporate business I'd now have a great deal more money and stuff, gotta have stuff. I was motivated to write these stories when I heard my daughter and young-adult granddaughter expressing the view that money should be the goal of a job and a course of life. I was surprised that I was emotionally upset by this statement of value. I suppose that my own personal history contributed to my concern. My mother had, after all, sent me off to college to major in math, which decades later I realized she'd meant any major that would assure that I'd make money. Through my graduate degree in business I placed money and stuff as my goal or at least a good part of it. Upon marrying in 1965 our first apartment was a swanky new complex with a private pool with a water fall on a lake and we went to Hawaii on our honeymoon. To decorate our new apartment, we made a huge purchase of expensive furniture. The next

year we bought our first home. In those days, any interest I had in religion was religious, including assisting the minister in our church liturgy and attending services regularly with Judy's family.

The question is, why did I not stay that course and become a moderately well-off man with loads of stuff, not that I don't have adequate of both now? The health of my current financial status is due largely to the economics of my retirement and more directly to my choice to continue working through age 75 while not taking Social Security until age 70. Otherwise, I'd be in dire straits. It seems, in the beginning, everyone expected me to make more and more money, have bigger and bigger houses, fancier cars, a whole bunch of pale white grand and great grand kids and a prestigious position in company and community. I can't really identify a moment of epiphany or, I suppose a moment when the dark one took my money-seeking soul, yet, as I've written in my story of Harry Corbin, surely his influence was deep and perhaps decisive. It was in my observing the measure of this man—his intellect, gentlemanly character, passion, values, sense of service, concern for the world, and certainly the scope of his interests—that I found myself deeply admiring his values and qualities and they seemed to have nothing to do with money and stuff. It is perhaps an odd notion, yet it seems that the shift in my life from money and stuff was connected with seeing that the measure of a person is, despite the overwhelming cultural agreement, not money and stuff, but ideas and intellect, pursuing and developing questions that lead little by little to better, deeper and more profound, questions. The unexpected place I find myself now is that this shift has finally led me and my research to the most basic materialism, biology and the moving body. The regret I have is that, while I shared and hopefully exemplified these values to thousands of students over a fifty-year teaching career and perhaps I have shaped and I continue to shape an academic field that has the potential to make important contributions to societies the world over, I somehow never found the means by which these ideas could be communicated at the most general level to my kids and grandkids. This has been a whole area of my life that I somehow just plain did wrong.

I used to think that the foremost question to contemplate about my life was how a farm kid from a backwater Kansas community managed to make the leap to the city and the university and to success in business. I think this question came from recognizing that few of my classmates ever left my little hometown. They stayed there as farmers and small business people, living the sort of life that my parents and all of my childhood local relatives did. Yet I was certainly not the only one who had gone on to do other things. I had a cousin, Eugene "Gene" Gill, older than me by maybe six or seven years, who became a veterinarian specializing in treating race horses. The stories of his magic with horses were many as were always the stories of his building of wealth. He lived in upstate

New York and worked with many of the finest race horses and the associated businesses. He had his own horses and continued to a rather advanced age to drive his own horses in sulky races. When I chatted with him—I'm sure it was the last time—at my parent's 50th wedding anniversary, he asked me what I did. He was utterly confused by my efforts to tell him that I was an academic student of religion and he asked me, "Well, why didn't you do something to make a lot of money?" I think his question disturbs me now more than then because I would have thought that his passion for horses would have been the measure of his life, not making money. I suppose the irony is that, as I recall, his son became a preacher.

The more interesting question that has emerged is why things intellectual appealed to me with so much passion that I'd leave a rapidly advancing business career to pursue a path that was almost unknown to me, with little sense of future career possibilities, and certainly with unknown promise for accumulating wealth and stuff. Indeed, to begin a PhD program required leaving an affluent life to live in poverty and to accumulate debt with certainly no guarantee, no clear path, to career or success. How could the pursuit of ideas and questions and thinking and reading somehow be, for me, that powerful? Even now no answer is altogether clear, yet somehow, despite all of the things about which I have regrets, I don't at all regret this rather sudden change. I can see that over the decades little by little shifting from question to question there has been an accumulation of sorts, a maturing, a deepening, a growing profoundness. The things that captivate my passions today have to do with what is most fundamental to life and death, what is most distinctive of being human, namely moving and sensing and dancing and vitality.

In my most recent book I ask the question, "Why religion?" as an area of study for me. While I was somewhat religious as a young man, any religious inclinations soon fell away. The study of religions the world over creates something of a meta-religious perspective where those concerns for one's salvation in a specific religious context are replaced by the more global concerns about why it is that human beings can even imagine something like salvation and why they do all of the most unbelievable and engage in the most impossible things to seek it? It has become increasingly clear that my interest in religion rests in the potential value to the exploration of the remarkable characteristics of what it is to be human—for me both philosophically and biologically—rather than in pursuit of some personal religious interests.

As I think back on my encounter with Harry Corbin, I recall that he expressed being deeply influenced by a scholar who was a humanist and Corbin proclaimed himself one. He recommended a book by this humanist that I don't believe I ever read and I regret that I now don't remember the author. What is perhaps a fascinating remembrance now is that, after half a century studying religion, I'd

call myself more a humanist or maybe an anthropologist, in the most fundamental sense of being a student of what distinguishes and characterizes being human, than a religious person which decidedly I am not. Perhaps being a humanist is an unexpected fulfillment of Harry Corbin's influence as a humanist who introduced me to the academic study of religion. Whether or not we are rarely that much aware, given time little things pile up.

Academic Alchemy

A few years ago, I was teaching a course on religion and the senses. My argument, building throughout the course and one central to a book I'm now engaged in writing, was that all our concepts have a base in human proprioceptive self-moving. That is, as Aristotle wrote, "Nothing is found in the intellect which was not first found in the senses." We are, of course, conditioned from an early age—gesturally naturalized I'd say—to think of concepts as abstract, learned in the body-disabling context of schools—"sit down shut up so you can learn"—not through moving and touching. My students were interested, yet as expected, rather skeptical at the somewhat radical degree to which I insisted on this position.

I decided to offer a challenge to my students. "Come up with something about which we have knowledge that you think has no moving touching sensory aspect to it." I promised that by the next class I'd present a lecture to argue my point based on their specific example. One student called out "the sky." "Okay," I immediately said. "see you next class." I was excited to take on the challenge and began thinking and exploring the topic immediately. Indeed, by the next I presented what, reflecting on it now, I think was one of my most insightful and breakthrough lectures ever. What I discovered in but two days was shocking to me and greatly advanced my own thinking on the subject.

I often think that writing is analogous to alchemy, the magical process of converting base metals like lead to precious metals like gold. It has been a regular experience of my academic life to begin with a base idea and through writing, that somehow integrates research and reflection and transformation and transduction, discover something new and surprising. Though certainly not all my writing turns out golden, I often experience the process nonetheless as something akin to the magic of the alchemist. I'd argue that it is the physical acts of hands and fingers that are essential to this process as well as eyes seeing what unexpectedly appears. Of course, this bodied engagement is but the hint at the full sensory engagement.

In 2015 I followed an idea, whose origins I cannot seem to trace, to teach a course on technology and religion that would give me the opportunity to explore

a wide range of popular media—films, fiction, and television—and my thinking and ideas, vague as they were, on technology also informed by my own background in business computer technology from so many decades ago. I have long been fascinated with robots and androids and artificial intelligence (AI) and dystopian worlds and futurism and on and on. It seemed an exciting project to teach a course on these materials offering me a chance to re-read, re-watch, re-imagine so many interconnected ideas and to experience and explore lots of materials that I knew about but hadn't had a chance to consider carefully. I sat down one day to design the course. A semester comprises 14 weeks or so and this course met two days a week for 75 minutes. I'd need around 25 lectures. Spending perhaps no more than an hour or two, I wrote down a list of these lecture topics trying to use engaging and clever titles. Many focused on a specific example—film, play, novel, short story, television show—and selections from these became some of the readings and audiovisual parts of my lectures. I quickly found other relevant readings for other topics and this became the topic outline for the course syllabus.

In July of 2015 I started writing lectures for the course so I'd have a few ahead by the time the course started in late August. Yet for much of the semester I wrote two lectures a week. With but a bit of development, each of these lectures eventually became a chapter length essay in my book *Religion and Technology into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve* (2018). I experienced every aspect of this project as the magic of alchemy. Twice a week I began with raw source materials, base ingredients, and through the process of reflecting, exploring, and writing I discovered and created both what I knew but didn't know that I knew as well as a whole bunch of things I had not known or thought about before. It was exhilarating if also exhausting. I had a heart attack on December 18, 2015 that may well have been related to the alchemist's exertion, but I have other ideas about the more likely cause. It takes a great deal of energy to turn lead into gold. The composite figure Tomorrow's Eve that gradually develops and evolves in that book was wholly new to me and I hope that one day she will be recognized as an important contribution to not only the study of religion, but also to feminist and futurist studies.

My first book *Native American Religions* (1982, rev 2004), which is still being used, came about when I was simply asked to write it. That writing was among my first experiences of academic alchemy. It began with a request with little more than a book title. The writing led to something of value that has endured. I've written a number of books under the same challenge and enjoyed similar experiences.

As I ask with increasing frequency these days why I have spent my life as a rather self-marginalizing scholar pursuing topics and interests that few, if any, others have been interested in, I'm increasingly satisfied that, at least in part, it

has been because of my regular thrilling experience of the magic of academic alchemy.

Regret Related to Race, Gender, and Ethnicity

A persistent leitmotif of the tune that is my academic career has been to promote the appreciation of folks different than those of my own white middle-class male identity set. I have spent much of my career exploring how such a complicated kind of interaction can be achieved. As the son of a Kansas dirt farmer, I don't understand where this persistent preoccupation came from. In my academic work I've sought to make this set of complex issues publicly accessible and engaging. Yet, it has not been confined to the abstract arena of my academic work. It has also manifest in my personal life. I founded and operated a dance and music school and studio that focused on non-Western or world cultures. This school promoted through physically active bodied practice the creative encounters among those of different races and ethnicities. I have traveled frequently to countries whose people are black or brown. I sponsored cultural exchange visas for dozens of artists from a number of countries to reside and integrate into the overly white society to which I have belonged. In this environment, my daughter married a Senegalese man and later a Venezuelan and her babies, my grandkids, are beautiful shades of brown.

Yet the accident of my birth has given me the prominent identity factors of whiteness, middle-classness, and maleness all of which are typically identified, as evident in a long Western history, with privilege. I somehow must at once cherish and also regret these superficial identity markers and their social implications and advantages. These indelible immutable identity traits seem to me so utterly banal and boring, yet, I often feel shame and regret by the associated implications of my own identity. More than being embarrassed and concerned about my whiteness, I am often simply ashamed at my white maleness. While I certainly know and recognize many white males who are thoughtful and kind and generous and refined gentlemen, I so often am faced with, on the one hand, the old sour white male politician and business types that I think are predominantly, yet not universally, disgusting and immoral and callous. On the other hand, I am faced with the young jock, beer drinking, crude, misogynistic, shallow, dirty, thoughtless white guys. As a result of being identified by a skin color I didn't choose, I often feel regretful at my white maleness. I'm disgusted that brown people and so many other people seen by those in power as somehow different, have been forced to endure so much suffering due to the systemic racism that my color- and age-peers have perpetrated across American and world history.

Academic Writing Becoming More Personal

A long time ago, I think this had to be in the late 1990s, I was asked to contribute an intellectual autobiographical essay for a collection including a number of scholars. The editor who invited me assumed, I suppose, that it was clear enough what he had in mind. I didn't give his expectations much thought and was excited to immerse myself in this challenging assignment. I began to trace the evolution of my thinking and academic work to a string of personal experiences from relationships to my passion for biking. I thought it abundantly interesting to discover correlations between the style and substance of my research, writing, and teaching and the often-accidental events in my personal life.

I sent off the manuscript and didn't hear back from the editor in a time I thought reasonable. It began to dawn on me that what I had submitted was not the sort of thing they wanted. Duh! Of course, I should have known that they wanted me to trace the development of my intellectual work in terms of bibliography and a group of influential scholars. My realization was rather a surprise mostly in that I had found the writing so fun and interesting and revealing, while I should have known that these influences were not what they had wanted. I did eventually hear from the editor who gently hinted that the approach was not quite what they wanted and that they had mistakenly thought I was much older. Right!

I taught a course on writing for religion majors for a number of years. I was eventually prohibited from teaching it when my faculty colleagues began to understand that for me it was a course that included a wide variety of student writings that included their own version of an intellectual autobiography in which they were allowed, indeed encouraged, to include their personal experiences in understanding their academic interests. It also included asking students to engage in personal terms what they wanted to accomplish in their lives and why their aspirations were justified. I am certain that a high percent of students who took this course found it life changing, or minimally, usefully clarifying. I'm still in touch with quite a few of them. Some became religion scholars, others thankful that they did not.

There is a great deal of professional pressure to present academic writing as objective and non-personal. Many university teachers prohibit students from using first person pronouns in their work as a means to assure that the personal does not taint the academic purity or objectivity of their work. I, always the contrarian, nearly insisted that students use personal pronouns in their writing. I insisted that what they wrote had to matter, to make a difference, to them if to no one else. When students asked me if they had permission to "use 'I'" in their writing, as they put it, I'd often ask them if they were the one writing, if they were the one paying for an education, if they were the one getting the grade and

the evaluation on their work, if they were the one learning? If any of these was the case, then they needed to own their work. Then I taught them that one can be present without simply offering subjective opinion. Most scholars carefully develop the most boring and tedious of writing styles as evidence of the objectivity (read truth, maybe authority) of their work. Academic presses are terrified when scholars use first person pronouns and especially relate personal experiences and editors often insist that writing be revised to, in effect, disguise or hide a scholar's personal investment or any hint of subjective interest.

Over the decades my writing has increasingly unapologetically included the personal as a way of engaging readers, being honest as to my position, and approaching a topic in a more urgent way. I've gotten away with this style perhaps because of my reputation as well as my age. Older folks get away with more personal involvement I've noticed. I also think that I've learned how to appropriately select and use the personal in writing. I believe that there is a specific style of including the personal that engages the reader without it being simply about the author or mere opinion. I am fully aware that many styles and uses of personal information or perspectives are distracting and annoying. Years ago, a colleague asked me to read a work of his. It was so personal and about such overly personal matters that I literally could not read it. It felt like voyeurism, peeking into someone's bedroom at an inappropriate time. I hate that sort of writing. The personal can become offensive and presumptuous. I find laudable the use of personal anecdotes that are publicly tasteful and broadly relatable that serve to introduce and energize, rather like a cameo, a broadly important topic. Such stories are interesting and can provide insight into why a subject, a problem, an issue is compelling, deserving of passion and the investment of research or for the reader to use of his or her time to read it. Yet, publishers and other academics still offer challenges. In my recent book *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference* (2019) the publishing editor requested that I change what was considered a personal anecdote that was used to introduce a topic. Fortunately, the series editor, who did not work for the publisher, insisted it remain as written, noting that this style is what distinguishes my writing among most other scholars and he meant that as referring to a welcomed development.

I've also been rather surprised that almost always the first comments I hear from other scholars who read my work is about how important they feel are these personal touches to my writing. They often have a story about offering certain passages to specific students of theirs who, they say, gained from it much in their own struggles and questions about becoming an academic.

In my latest book *The Proper Study of Religion* (2020) I raise in personal terms the most fundamental questions of the integrity and honesty of academic efforts to try to be objective and authoritative. My proposed approach, new to this field, to a study of religion properly located in the environment of secular education,

is based on philosophical and biological arguments that moving bodies, always someone's body, are foundational to our work. I expect some controversy to accompany this proposal. Some readers will be excited about this opening of the field to moving personal bodies while others will see this proposal as the very abandonment of what makes our work academic, perhaps also what is appropriate to the topic religion. And, of course, a core point of the book is to clearly distinguish a secular academic study from a religious one.

I don't think that academic work is merely autobiography although I'm sympathetic to James Clifford's book *Writing Culture* (1986) that argued that ethnography is autobiography, but I don't think that honest and engaging academic work can be divorced from the stories of the authoring scholars.

Made Over by Moving

I was an athlete in high school playing all the sports. Going to college and then graduate school and then starting an academic career correlated with me becoming less and less physically active. This progressive decline in moving seems to be the design of our culture. I'm sure I had dreams associated with an academic career including spending wonderful hours on racquetball and basketball courts, swimming in lap pools, and working out in the university gyms. When I taught at Arizona State University, Del Brown and I played a good bit of racquetball. I remember losing and being frustrated but loving it. It is damned hard to be a graduate student, work half time, commute extensive distances, and do anything other than sit and read and write. Then the effort needed to get tenure and teach and raise a family and start a home is sufficiently exhausting and time consuming that moving is confined to the necessary utility of getting from one task to the next.

By the time I was a tenured full professor at CU in the early 1980s I was pretty much out of shape and overweight. I somehow managed to do much of the physical labor for the better part of a year in building a house, but I don't think it had much to do with having a healthy or fit body. It wasn't until the late '80s that I realized my lack of physical fitness and took the time to do something about it. I joined a gym and soon became addicted to exercise style dancing such as aerobic dance. Then in the early '90s I began to appreciate that dancing was recognized as culturally and religiously essential in most cultures around the world. European and American Christian cultures tended to be the exception. Western societies rarely give dancing a proper place in human development, education, and enculturation. This realization bridged between my gym obsession and my academic life of research, writing, and teaching. Soon I was thinking about dancing almost constantly as cultural, historical, and

psychological, not limited to movement for fitness or entertainment purposes. I had published nine books from 1976 to 1997, almost a book every other year. This rate of academic production obviously required lots of sitting to read and write. I began teaching courses on Religion and Dancing that included weekly studios where I enjoyed dancing various dances from cultures the world over with my students, taught by artists of those cultures. Then my dancing increased yet again when I started Bantaba World Dance & Music. In the early years of this millennia I simply had lost my appetite for straight traditional-style academic research and publication. My still considerable writing and reading were done much more to serve my increasingly personal interests rather than anything like duty to the field or to a formal research agenda. My obsession with dancing was accompanied by my own work focused increasingly on my dancing rather than on my academic research and writing. My almost total absence of any publication, and my refusal to do any of the service crap (committees and committees and committees) that is expected of faculty, and my refusal to do any administrative work (I was not chairperson for a single day of my academic career), and even missing faculty meetings on a regular basis led me to be a person scorned by my faculty colleagues who punished me annually by giving me no increase in salary and deeming my performance as below expectations. I was willing to pay the price, yet not so happy at being treated with nastiness and marginalized even though I understand their reason and recognized that, on their terms, I likely deserved it.

I was not simply slacking, I was learning as a dancing moving active person. I was learning in the most demanding and exciting way imaginable. In a sense at age 60 I was learning in the very same way that preschoolers learn, by running and dancing and playing and exploring. I loved it, although so much of life was really hard and difficult and even depressing during much of this time. It wasn't until 2012 when I published *Dancing Culture Religion* that I began to understand that I had been reading a huge literature in areas that no one in my academic field read and most didn't even know existed. These were works in biology and philosophy that had to do with evolution and physiology centered on movement. And I recognized that so many of these important works were written by authors who themselves did not move or recognize the importance of their work in the experience of their own bodies. I was complementing reading with moving. Still through the mid-2010s I continued to prefer to read and reflect while I danced and moved rather than to write for an academic audience. My unreadiness, as I see it now, to write for publication finally led to university administrators, who really wanted to get rid of me, to take formal action to sanction me for the repeated faculty evaluations of "performing below expectations." The threats got nasty and I finally retired at the end of my seventy-fifth year having worked for over 35 years at CU.

Yet, what had begun to happen in the years prior to my retiring was a virtual flood of writing that led to publications on a range of topics. As I began to contemplate to myself what had opened the gates, I realized that what I was writing was the product of a long period of incubation and finally the birth of a new me. I realized that what I was writing and the potential of my work was the result of being entirely remade through the actions of the long period of dancing and moving and reading and thinking about dancing and moving, if not always overtly so directed or obvious. I have begun to appreciate that now in my mid-seventies I am a totally different person—and I intend this in a radical sense that includes tissue as well as the virtual—than I would have been had, several decades ago, I simply carried on as a traditional academic spending my life sitting on my ass following the expectations of such a career. And it was the experiential bodied physically active life that had remade me so much more so than anything that might traditionally be considered academic.

The results have been a book a year each on quite different subjects yet each colored and energized by the impact of these decades of stewing in the cauldron of self-moving. I'm excited by the prospects of my book *The Proper Study of Religion* (2020), in that it includes an extensive proposal for an academic approach to the study of religion especially suited to the secular university that is based on the core idea of the implications of self-moving, that is the in-process moving that is the result of directed biological processes. No one has ever made anything like this argument and I expect that it will shock, offend, and inspire a good many scholars of religion and their students.

Persistently important are my ongoing efforts to understand how a bodied moving active life has the power to do more than modify and refine, that is, to actually remake almost wholly who one is. Through these many years in the forge I've come to appreciate that our identity and the continuity of identity that we label with our name is comprised of our gestures, our habitual and normalized movements. I have a fairly broad sense of gesture not limited to unexplained hand movements or as movements that stand in for language as in waving at someone at a distance. I think gesture includes posture and style of motility, micro-gestures of facial and body movement, thought patterns, what we often think of as habits (whether bad or good), Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, so many movement-formed and moving-based patterns. I think that many of the factors by which we enact and identify age, gender, and profession are in part accomplished through gesture and posture. I find that things like our scheduling of and techniques of eating are gesturally based which is why losing weight is so difficult. We are gesturally formed so that an important part of our identity is the food we eat, the times we eat, and the amounts we eat. Thus, to change eating, often requires changing a whole set of gestures, which is, in important ways,

equivalent to changing our identities. It is not that we lose weight; it is that we change core aspects of our identity.

I've thought long and hard about whether we can inherit gestural patterns and I believe we can. It is not so much what our parents, or those who raised us, say. It is what they do. I think that while my mom talked to me all the time, my dad not so much, my dad's identity was formed and performed in the gestures of work; my mom's too so far as that goes. Their identity was also deeply shaped as young people by the long experience of poverty during the Great Depression continuing on through their entire lives. Their lives were comprised of gestures of holding tightly, saving everything, not trusting any evidence of plenty, of doing everything themselves, of deep fear of loss. Even through my life make-over I have retained many of these gestural patterns and I have to believe that they formed me at the cellular level, at the way the synaptic criteria are shaped in my neurons.

One way we might look at our identity as gesturally based is to think of it as a certain skill, the skill to be me. We know that athletes and musicians and dancers create skill through seemingly endless hours of guided and critiqued practice. Some estimate that the full mastery of skill requires on the order of ten thousand hours. For these skilled performers this often take 10 to 15 years to accomplish, yet for newborns, whose whole existence is the practice of gesture, the first ten thousand hours is just a year and several months. No wonder these early months are so critical. Our identity is acquired like a skill so that we live by performing ourselves through the application of these skills. Once the mastery of skills is acquired, the performance of skilled actions, such as dancing, is to be a dancer rather than a person doing dance technique and choreography. It comes to feel natural, to feel like us, to be us. That's why artists say at some point "I am a dancer," "I am a musician."

The upshot of these few comments then offers suggestions about change, especially the sort that produces a whole-person make-over. It can't be cosmetic, it can't be easy, it can't be quick. It amounts to remarkably high repetition of the engagement of new and different gestures. We are all familiar with how difficult habits are to break or change. This is because of the nature of how our skilled performance of ourselves becomes inseparable from who we are; it is gesturally insinuated in the physiology and neurology of synapse and tissue.

The years during which I was not motivated to do traditional academic work were years I spent learning and practicing new gestures, often through arduous painfully clumsy physical processes, that is, learning new ways of moving and interrelating and interacting and reading and everything else. As I reflect on this process now, it was a process that took decades before I felt that I was comfortably skilled at being a me, a new me that was distinct in many yet not all ways, from the me of decades earlier. At that point I was released to write and

publish as the re-made me. Of course, we all go through shifts in identity with experience and the ongoingness of living. I feel that my change had a kind of primacy in that I can mark it by a specific time of breaking from one trajectory followed by an extended period of reformation. I can also identify this transformation with specific changes in movement behavior. Perhaps I should have taken a new name when I finally became aware that I was a notably different me.

Recognition Enigma

When my dad died at age 92, I was deeply saddened. For so many years my mother dominated conversations I had with my parents, reminding that she spoke for both she and my dad. After she became very ill the last few years of her life it was only my dad on the phone. He didn't suddenly reveal or proclaim independence from my mother or show something about himself that I hadn't known. It was just that we talked directly to one another, really for the first time. And through those conversations we became good friends. Some of that time I was going through hard times, including when Emily ended our relationship. I felt comfortable expressing my pain to him. I learned that he wouldn't try to fix anything, which was more my mother's style. He did not pass judgement or try to mollify my feelings. He simply listened and confirmed that he heard me. What a friend!

Throughout my life I've never known anyone who worked harder and more selflessly than my dad. He would do anything to support his family. When I was a kid, he worked a day job at a munitions plant in a nearby town. I have no idea what he actually did. No doubt common labor. He'd farm at night and weekends. When I was in high school he farmed during the day and he worked weekends at a local grocery store. I worked there too on Saturdays as a bag boy. At one point he purchased a little drive-in restaurant called "The King" where he spent endless hours since it was open seven days a week until 10 p.m. and he couldn't afford to hire much help, just a couple high school kids to take orders and fix drinks. Later he and my mom opened a little mom and pop grocery store. He had learned how to be a butcher by simply observing butchers at other grocery stores where he had worked and, at his store, he ran the meat department and, of course, he did all the shelf stocking and book keeping as well. As a farmer he thought he could make some money doing jobs for other farmers so he purchased a hay bailer and hired out his services to farmers who didn't have this equipment. He also bought a self-propelled combine, an expensive piece of equipment, and hired out to harvest the crops of all his neighbors. And all this on top of tending his own farm. I was a teenager during some of this time and

worked with him. But despite all these risks and efforts, he never really made much money and he certainly was never recognized for the remarkable life of effort and service to family that he lived.

My mother's wealthy Uncle Sam, for whom I was named, had a daughter, Pat, whose husband, Raymond King, was supported in major business ventures by Uncle Sam and, as a result, he became quite flush. He drove fancy cars, flew his own plane, and was constantly developing new businesses. He owned strip-mall shopping centers when they were becoming popular. He became a builder of high-end custom homes. My dad always compared himself, privately of course, to Raymond King and always found himself coming up far short. I think he felt belittled and maybe even ashamed and I know it made him angry, if mostly unexpressed.

I think the thing that hit me so hard when my dad died was that by that time, age 92, there wasn't even anyone left that knew him enough to recognize the accomplishments of his life and his remarkable hard-working selfless character. The pastor presiding at his graveside funeral had not even ever met him. I so wish now that I'd have stood up and spoken what I knew to be the truth about him. I did speak at my mother's funeral. I wish I had done so for my dad as well even though there was no one attending that would have much cared.

I've realized as I've aged that, while my mother spoke for the both of them for so long, it was my father that I most emulated. I believed in his ethic of working hard. I believed in the nobility of his quiet selflessness. I believed in working for the sake of the work and its contribution to family rather than some sense of public recognition. Indeed, through much of my life I felt that to value recognition was somehow inappropriate and perhaps even shameful. I still mostly feel this way.

But as my dad had his Raymond King, I have had those that I've been unable to avoid comparing myself to. There hasn't been a single person or thing that I can identify, but more an ongoing sense that I have felt quite often overlooked and unrecognized. I can't offer any of the details I might privately attach to these feelings because even thinking of them makes me feel angry at myself. Yet, I'd also not be honest with myself without saying that I deeply regret that the feelings associated with a sense of lack of recognition have shaped my life, perhaps more so my feelings about myself across my life. As I reckon this now, I can't even begin to imagine how this hurt and anger and disappointment, being something of a constantly present, yet hidden, silent background emotion, has dampened my life, prevented friendships, limited my relationship with my kids, and so much more. While it did not reduce the energy that I have put into my work, it has prevented me from being a joyful person.

Teaching: When I Felt Most Natural

I didn't retire until a few days before my seventy-sixth birthday and I wouldn't have retired then had it not been for the rude and marginalizing behavior of the administrators in my department and college. All of my age peers on the faculty had retired much earlier so I was certainly the old man in the department. I recall several years earlier being asked by the spouse of a retired longtime colleague that I happened to run into at a university function if I had retired. I indicated that I hadn't and didn't know when I would. She said, "You'll know when it is time." I really enjoyed teaching, so I didn't have much confidence that I'd know when it was time. Yet, mid-seventies one perhaps should be thinking about it, so I invited a different longtime colleague who had retired several years prior to meet me for coffee. I was flabbergasted by the response he gave to my asking him what it was that tipped his decision to retire. He said, "I just got tired of having to try to know everything."

This statement took me back to my teaching in the earliest part of my career. I remember thinking that as a teacher it was my duty to know the answer to students' every question. I remember in those early days how utterly uncomfortable and awkward it was to try to make up for what I didn't know by espousing some sort of bullshit answer. Occasionally, when wild invention failed me, I'd beg off indicating that I'd do some research and report back.

A major shift in my teaching, one that immeasurably changed everything about my academic life, was when I realized that good teaching had very little to do with imparting information and answers and somehow being the one who knows everything. Teaching has, I learned, everything to do with raising questions and concerns that were not easily answered, that might not even have answers, that would shape student attitudes and approaches and views of life and learning. My role was to shape courses around the inquiries and issues that I spent my time thinking and worrying about. I believe all worthy endeavors might be described as "persistent preoccupations," the title of a chapter to follow in which I gather brief introductions to a few of mine. My role was to change students, at least in terms of key aspects of the way they engaged themselves and the world, not to fill them with information or answers.

With the advent of the internet which occurred well into my career (my god I can't even believe this as I write it!), there began a gradual and inevitable shift towards information being instantly available to anyone with a computer or later a phone. I remember that many teachers forbid students to use computers in class and I'd guess some still do. I suppose the two reasons were that they feared that their job of disseminating information would be replaced by a student's Google search. And I think many members of the faculty feared they could not hold students' attention should computers allow social media or online shopping

to compete with lectures. I always loved the presence of computers in classrooms and would frequently simply ask students to look up some factual information that either I didn't know or knew but had forgotten the details. I made strong distinctions between what I term "information processing" and "educating."

I frankly don't think that higher education has recovered from the advent of the availability of the universe of knowledge to any kid with a phone. It seems to me that the more easily information became available to anyone with a phone, ironically and foolishly, the more higher education focused on information and credentialing. The opening chapter of my *Religion and Technology* book titled "Thumbelina's Severed Head" deals with this distinction. The idea is that technology today places our heads in our hands where with our thumbs we can instantly access all information and accumulated knowledge. My perspective on this modern development is that it does not challenge or compete with education, it actually supports and enables it to achieve its higher potential. It frees educators from supplying information to pursue the liberal educational goals of shaping intelligent thoughtful human adults who will live responsible lives based on carefully considered values. Following the inspiration of Michel Serres delightful book *Thumbelina* (2012), creativity occurs in the flash of insight that might be located between the severed head held in the hands that is the source of all information and the body whose thumbs and connected body are the necessary instruments of engagement.

In my most recent book *The Proper Study of Religion*, I challenge the penchant for academia to insist on being conclusive, definitive, and objective. Such requirements seem almost to define academia, yet I energetically argue that they only amount to the halt of the dynamics and energetics of inquiry which is often achieved falsely by a dishonest forced conclusiveness and objectivity. Answers halt learning. Learning is not something that has a distinctive point of final accomplishment. Learning, like building skill, is, if it is something worth pursuing, a process of expanding possibilities and complexities. No matter how accomplished the musician or dancer, there comes a time when he or she feels confident and can practice the skill with ease and seeming effortlessness, yet there does not come a time when one says "Okay, now I've perfected dance or music or sport so I'm done with it; nothing more to gain by just continuing to practice and perform it." Education, hell life itself, is a skill that we never perfect, yet, if we are vital human beings, we love to practice and perform. To say "done that" regarding learning is the halt of death.

Teaching for me then was always the guidance of students to appreciate the life value of ongoing education and inquiry. I wanted to help them develop an appreciation for asking the questions that have no easy answers or maybe even no answers at all. It was to shape the student's entire being in relationship to life

and inquiry, not to fill a vessel with information, and certainly not to require the dishonesty of conclusion and objectivity.

In the last decade or two of my teaching career, I was increasingly dissatisfied by the university's attitude toward education focused, it seemed to me, on production. This was paired with the attitudes of so many students who felt that education had only to do with credentialing so one could get a good paying job. Still, I enjoyed how much I learned from students. I eagerly asked them, and increasingly so, about their young lives. I wanted to know about their use of social media, their formation of values, their goals, their attitudes toward their futures, their ways of thinking, everything I could learn. I found that the more interested I was in them and their lives the more interested they were in my courses and what I was sharing with them based on the experience of my long life. I always told them I surely was learning far more from them than they were from me. I think they got it and understood that they had something to learn from me if nothing more than that this old teacher had an insatiable curiosity and endless questions that forced reflection and further inquiry. I hope they learned from me there is always a surprise to be experienced even in the most banal. There is something infectious about an honest eagerness to learn. We're all born with it, but school usually ruins it for most of us and usually this ruination is achieved at a remarkably young age. My job was to show that learning was vitalizing and enriching and fun and, should one find it boring which most of them thought they would, they just weren't listening to what in their growing experience might engage them to learn.

Over my nearly half a century teaching, my students were more interesting to me than my academic colleagues. I always felt I was most myself in the classroom where I could openly admit my limits and eagerly learn from and with my students. And I could be fun and funny as well. I had great faith in the structural implications of teaching a course. I relied on having 15 weeks to gradually create a powerful and trusting relationship with students. Teaching a course is very different from giving a single lecture. Together, I insisted, we should strive to make a difference.

So many of the intellectuals that I greatly admire treasured many deep peer friendships; something I almost never experienced. Most of my peers seemed to me, perhaps my unfair projection, to be bent on besting their colleagues by spouting sources and overly valuing arcane ideas shorn of any mystery. Such folks often seemed to me to be slightly hostile and their work often, to me, tedious and obscure, not so interesting. It is not that I don't have a long list of intellectual writers whose work I find remarkable, interesting, inspiring, and essential to my life. It is just that I seemed never to have personal relationships with more than a very few of them.

In retirement I miss nothing about the administrative and faculty tedium of the university. But I miss the creative and engaging discourse with young people. I feel this absence as a diminishment to my energy and exploration. It seems somehow tragic that society no longer finds a veteran teacher of value just at a time when she or he has spent a lifetime building skill through thousands of hours of practice and has accumulated so much personal knowledge based on experience and life.

Retirement: A Bathetic Ending

After over 35 years teaching at the University of Colorado with a total teaching career approaching 50 years, I retired a few days short of my 76th birthday. There was no retirement party. There were no cards. No balloons. No one in my life noticed, not even my family. A few months later, I found in my mailbox a bubbled envelope containing an odd little paper weight featuring an etched buffalo—funny (ironic?) that a university would identify itself with a herd animal—from the administration with a pre-printed card “thank you for your service.” That was it.

The entire process of bringing my teaching/university career to a close was painful to me in so many ways. I outlasted a particular understanding of what the academic study of religion should be at the University of Colorado. All of my age peers had retired years before I did. Over the last couple of decades there was a gradual but thorough transition of religion studies to being understood almost exclusively as a collection of area and specialist studies. One studies Buddhism or Islam or Christianity or Japanese religions, but no one any longer at CU had any interest at all in religion as an aspect of being human. For me this concern with genera is essential that the study of religion be important to a secular university education. Most of the faculty persons hired during this recent period represent specialty areas and knew little to nothing about the heritage of the study of religion that I represented. Certainly, this shift was not distinct to the University of Colorado, but at least in many other universities there remains some discussion of the value of studying religion, a human engagement and activity, as well as religions, the specific cultural and historical traditions.

I'm sure that this new faculty cohort saw me as a relic of a bygone era, as the misfit I've always been, and it was their clear and decisive intent to isolate me and force me to retire. None of them knew anything of my actual work. It didn't help that I had two heart attacks and needed to take time off from teaching. I had over two years of sick leave accumulated. It didn't help that I didn't like or respect any of these new faculty. I found them elitist and narrow-minded. If you didn't read the research languages they worked with or knew the highly specialist

vocabulary known often to but a hand full of other specialists, then you weren't worth talking too, not that, in my view, a valuable conversation could occur anyway. Most of them disliked students and teaching. I couldn't comprehend who they thought they were serving beyond their little smug group or what they thought their work did that was of value to society at large or even a small segment. I couldn't see why they didn't realize that, while they thought themselves of great stature in their field of specialization, beyond their elite cohort they were simply irrelevant and effete. I sound bitter and I suppose I am.

So, after serving the University of Colorado for decades, I was threatened and treated rudely to force me to retire. When I did announce that I would retire no one on the faculty knew a thing about me and they asked me if I would write up comments that they could read at the department graduation ceremony to take some small notice of my retirement. I had better things to do than to write their speech about me so I declined and that was the end of my career.

I have deep regrets and no small amount of hurt and anger related to the situation of my retirement. It made me lose any sense that a university is a humane and time-honoring place. The callousness of the way they treated me at the end was hurtful and I have no interest or desire to every again have anything to do with that University. There is some measure of feeling revenged in my having published a book a year for the last three years and I have another fully drafted. There is some solace in knowing that my most recent book, published by a reputable academic press, addresses the importance of a study of religion as genera and I believe it will be widely read and discussed. I know that these vengeful thoughts are stupid and none of the CU people will even notice what I have done. Most of the members of that faculty have yet to publish their first book and all but a couple of those who are tenured and have been there over a decade have published only one book. My 14 books will go unnoticed.

Everything related to my retirement is regretful yet here I am still researching and writing away producing works I believe will have wide and general appeal, wishing I could still teach students, and experiencing a constant stream of creative academic topics I'm interested in pursuing.

Remarkable Suchness of Living

It was a lovely evening when Bob and Sarah arrived. Julie, the woman I was dating, and I had had dinner with them before and I truly enjoyed them. Their experience stacked up over the more than 80 years each of their lives and they held the wisdom of travel and adventure and the long tedium and joys of family and career and aging. Our conversations were open and exploring. I enjoyed

watching their personal encounters with one another sweetly ripened over many a season. Sarah had cancer and knew she had little time remaining.

We began on the patio with a favorite, caprese—delicious home-grown tomatoes, fresh basil and fresh mozzarella, dressed with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Sarah delighted in the yummy tomatoey-cheesy-vinegary flavors and, when the treats were finished, I persuaded her to drink directly from her plate the leftover olive oil and balsamic. I could tell she considered it as scandalous as she found it delightfully indulgent. We laughed as we peered at each other over the brims of our upturned plates. Sarah lingered on the patio clearly not wanting to go in for dinner, visibly relishing the luxurious feel of the evening. We did eventually go in and the conversation over dinner was engaging and lively. As the evening unfolded the conversation waned a bit, but Sarah expressed her reluctance to go home. It seemed to me that, knowing she would soon die, Sarah was paying full attention to the tiniest elements in her experience, savoring and cherishing the most common and banal. We are often told to live every day as though it is our last, yet the haste and obligations of life usually distract us from what is so close to us. Sarah was living her last days knowing they were her last.

I am not so sure why this evening with Sarah and Bob has persisted strongly in my memory, but I have an idea. It focuses on Sarah savoring the minutia of the evening's experience and her reluctance to let it end. It was well put by my granddaughter, Fatu, when she was but eleven years old. We were absorbed in conversation that we couldn't seem to stop despite her bedtime having passed by quite some time. She said to me, "I don't like to go to sleep." "Why?" I asked. She replied, "I just don't like to end the experiences of my day." I agreed with her.

I'm not sure it is due to my old age and thus my sharing Sarah's urgency to enjoy every little thing while one still can, but I do find myself quite frequently simply momentarily overwhelmed by the suchness of life, by which I mean that all this world we live in is just here and that it is so incredibly remarkable. It is here seemingly just for us and we didn't even ask for it. We really don't need to find some meaning or some wisdom or some message in things in the world. That it exists, that it is here for us, that we are here and capable of experiencing it, that is, its suchness, seems enough.

Spooked on Halloween

Halloween 2010

The Pearl Street Mall was a sea of little ghouls and goblins each carrying a plastic pumpkin filled with colorfully wrapped sweet substances of bodily abuse, the instruments of a manic high soon to plummet them into screams and sobs. That

parents enable this is a mystery of Halloween. The wild swings of my emotions, rafts of delight pummeled by waves of desperation, didn't need sugar for fuel. Just being there was enough. Carlos was ardently directing Fatu, a punker winged insect of some cute variety, to the best candy hauls. Jenny was trying to keep pace but kept running into kid-dragged women she hadn't seen for years, torn between catching up and keeping up. Somewhere in the middle, fifth wheel (not even fifth business), I watched the punker insect (the sweetness in my life) honing in for another drag on a sugar source. My unbound love for her curiously embraced my unexplained desperate need to find in the crowd a mate, a peer.

Joy buffeted by waves of pain threatened to wash me out to sea; stalked was I by the "undertoad" that sucks you into the emotions leaking uninvited from its cave. Alone, isolated, unmoored in an ocean of kids and young parents. Smiling and laughing while silently fighting to swallow the bile-tasting ache for lost life, for time past, for uncertain future. Desperation choked with fear, flirted with pain, masked by a smile, as I reluctantly grasped my aloneness, a spectral presence in the midst of this mob.

In the sea of cute monsters and darling robots herded by smooth-skinned dark-haired vibrant bouncy-stepping laughing young parents, my scanning for a mate, a peer with a light in the house even, turned up only bent-shouldered wrinkly saggy-skinned sallow dim-eyed shuffling caricatures of aging humans. Guess my mates were wearing costumes, too.

Slide Rule Nerd to Metahuman Cyborg

My dad prided himself in his prodigious ability to add, as in summing numbers. Indeed, his skill surpassed the ability to quickly add a column of numbers by being able to do so when the page of numbers was upside down. When I was a kid, really through high school, I worked in a grocery store on Saturdays bagging groceries and carrying them out to people's cars or trucks (in those days I think there were carts in the store, but they didn't go outside). The clerk operated a mechanical cash register that did manage to add the grocery total, bread 18 cents a loaf, canned veggies five for a dollar. Most customers were credit customers (no credit cards) and grocery stores had drawers in which little sales books were kept so the edge was visible on which the name of the customer was written. The little book would have a running total and for each purchase total the amount would be written in the book and added to the running total. A carbon copy would be torn out and given to the customer. Often on Saturday's maybe once a month, people would come in to pay their bill. The pages with all the charges would be torn out and put in a little paper bag along with some candy and gum and given to the customer when the bill was paid. Lots of businesses didn't even

have cash registers and wrote a list of all items purchased and then, by hand as we say, they'd add the column to determine the amount to be paid. This is where my dad's skills excelled. Standing on the opposite side of the counter he would add up the column of numbers to assure that he was being fairly charged. I recall several occasions where he correctly challenged the clerk's accuracy.

I began my life in a home that didn't even have a typewriter. Our phone connected to a live operator and all numbers had just three digits, not that you even needed a number. You need only pick up the hand set and say, "operator, connect me with Aunt Betsy, please." My grandmother had a party-line phone that was a big box on the wall with a crank that required styles of turning to distinguish sequences of "longs" and "shorts" to signal other parties on the line.

When I went to college in 1960 I majored in math and minored in physics. My math major was modern math and required little calculation, yet the physics courses often required complex mathematical calculations. We did those calculations by means of a slide rule. Slide rules had a small slide within a slot with logarithmic scales printed on the surfaces. Calculations were made by aligning the numbers on one fixed side of the slide rule with a number on the slide and reading the answer on the other side of the slide. It was a clever way of calculating and almost all science calculations were done this way through at least my time in college. The science and engineering students, those today that would be called nerds, typically wore leather cases that hung from their belts in which they carried their slide rule.

I switched to business when I was a senior having pretty much finished my undergrad requirements in three years and started work on a master of science in business while finishing my undergrad degree. The next year, the first year of my graduate work, which was 1965-'66, was early in the era of using computers for business purposes. While working on my business degree I was hired by the Coleman Company, headquartered in Wichita, to help install their first business computer. It was an IBM model 1401 and it was four feet tall, six feet long, and a couple feet wide. It had 4,000 bytes of memory and used punched cards as input and output interface. My job was to focus on specific company accounting processes and create computer-based systems that would automate these jobs. I recall working with some old guys who were remarkably skilled at using a machine called a comptometer. This machine was totally mechanical and had a huge bank of keys. To multiply required placing one's fingers on a set of keys corresponding to a number to be multiplied and then pushing all those keys at once the number of times in the multiplier number shifting from a column for ones to tens to hundreds. At the top were spinning wheels with numbers that provided the final answer. Technically it was nothing more than a mechanical adding machine that could multiply by successive additions.

By the time I got to the University of Chicago a few years later I was knowledgeable of extant computers and skilled at systems analysis. I was hired part time in the computing department of the university administration that worked not only for the academic parts of the university but also for the hospitals and clinics. I was the principal systems analyst that designed and implemented a new payroll system for the entire university. It was still a punch card interface huge machine system although it included printed output (paychecks for example) and tape backup storage of data. It was my knowledge of computers that led me to Pennsylvania to a conference on using computers in education that led to me finishing my PhD and getting an academic job.

As an academic I went through a period of feeling some disdain for computers. At Arizona State University I recall a few faculty colleagues thought they needed to purchase personal computers, which were little more than word processors with a tiny screen, at a price of over \$4,000 at the time, to expedite their research and writing. I stuck with my IBM Selectric typewriter on which I wrote my first books. The method was to write a draft on the typewriter. Cut and paste was literal. With all sorts of comments on the manuscript pasted in strips to other sheets of paper. Then a final typing. That was it. And I used carbon paper for the final typing so that I'd have a small measure of security when sending the manuscript to publishers, which of course was to mail the paper original. I remember challenging my computer-purchasing colleagues by asking them if they were increasing their production rate of publication. Nasty me. They of course were not and most were sliding into the world of techno-babble which became the preferred topic of conversation for computer owners.

When I arrived at the University of Colorado in the early 1980s I was treated to the assistance of a department secretary who was efficient and fast at typing. Rather than typing my own final manuscript I had help. After a few years, computers had developed to the point of having small monitors, usually with the display in orange, or green, and increased internal storage. I recall my first computer at CU had 40K bytes of storage which I thought to be vast. The university had calculated that purchasing computers for faculty would allow them to eliminate the secretarial staff needed to type manuscripts and other documents, thus saving money.

I started work at CU in 1983 which was one of the first years that the internet, which was invented in the '60s, was scaled up to begin to be available in various ways to the public. Universities especially were at the forefront of this development. Again, having left the world of technology I resisted the advent of email, preferring to type and snail mail my letters. I resisted the list-serv methods of organizing groups that communicated efficiently among members of groups who received the same emails. Connecting to the internet required a laborious

and unreliable and extremely slow connection via modem using existing phone lines.

Eventually I embraced these basic methods of communication yet the work was mostly limited to communication. It was not until the end of the '90s that flip mobile phones became readily available. I recall that during the week or so when students arrived in the fall to start classes, many vendors were hawking their latest phones and phone service plans. It wouldn't be until 2007 that iPhones became available.

Finally, I not only embraced computers as an indispensable tool for my writing, I also embraced the internet and access to it by means of computers, phones, and tablets. I taught courses on religion and the internet and sponsored a graduate online interactive journal called *TheStrip*. Recently, in 2015, I wrote the book *Religion and Technology into the Future* (2018) that, among other things, proposes that we have become and should embrace being what I call metahuman cyborgs, meaning biological humans enhanced by technology that has become almost inseparable from most aspects of our lives. I write about realizing myself as a metahuman cyborg when I make photographs using a remarkably sophisticated camera that incorporates a computer including artificial intelligence and post processing that is sophisticated almost beyond comprehension. There is no question that I have fully and eagerly embraced this cyborgian identity never being more than half an arm's length from at least one, but usually several, electronic devices. Like so many now, I feel uneasy somehow, if I do not have a device close by. Perhaps one of the great advantages of dancing is that devices are out of mind and out of hand, although with the pandemic I usually take dance classes online (yikes!); my teachers and fellow students are little six-inch tall people, virtual avatars representing their real sweating bodies located all over the planet.

In the later years of my teaching almost none of my students had any memory of pre-internet pre-smartphone lives. Such folks are referred to as digital natives. And, of course, Shay and Leon have had iPads almost since they were born with full naturalness of using them. I often can't comprehend the measure of technological change in the last quarter century that has actually transformed life for everyone. Here are a couple sobering benchmark: I was 50 years old when the internet was brand new and I was nearly 65 when iPhones entered the world.

My dad was still alive with the advent of computers and the internet, yet he never had or used one in any way. He remained through his 92 years proud of his arithmetic skills and his prodigious memory for numbers. He could easily recall the price of a bushel of wheat for many a year. Yet, the aspect of technology he adapted to was related to transportation. He was born in the era of the Ford Model T and enjoyed buying nice cars even when he was old. He did fly on jet planes yet he was born little more than a decade after the Wright Brothers' first

flight, in 1903. And, of course, my parents were alive for the moon landing in 1969.

I am amazed, shocked really, when I reflect on the development of computing technology that has occurred in my lifetime and that I played a role fairly regularly on the forefront of technological development and advancement and its application. At this point I'm also fascinated that I have developed with increasing conviction the importance of the primacy of the biological distinctiveness of human beings. This seems unexpected against my persistent interest in technology. My invention and articulation of the notion of the metahuman cyborg, a biological organism enhanced by technology, is to see contemporary technological life as human biology on electronic steroids.

As something of a futurist, I can't help but try to imagine the future my grandkids will experience. The question is "what things will change and in what ways over the next half century?" Even entertaining this question gives rise to the urge to explore it extensively. I'll restrain myself making just a few notes. Surely it will be energy production and use that will be a major area of change. By necessity of climate change fossil fuels will have to be totally eliminated, replaced by renewables. Almost certainly new energy technologies will be invented and disseminated planet wide. The failure to accomplish this will be apocalyptic. Material culture will also have to change to stop literally trashing the planet with plastic. That line in the classic 1967 film "The Graduate" where Benjamin is given the advice "Go into plastics" has proven to have been wise from a business perspective, yet the success of plastic has nearly ruined the planet. One revolution, essential to survival, in the next half century will be to make everything, and I mean everything, renewable and biodegradable. Perhaps a major change will occur in the current equation of human worth with accumulation of material stuff. Perhaps in the future a few durable fine things (I'm obviously thinking of my Sony camera) will be preferred to the endless flow of stuff that becomes almost instantly junk. Surely travel and commuting will be transformed so the home/work separation is virtually overcome rather than physically. It is incredulous to me that we had the technology to go to the moon over 50 years ago, and today we don't have technology that helps us communicate in groups better than ZOOM. Cars obviously will become autonomous and far fewer than now. Public transportation should increase and become more comfortable and rapid and convenient. Education today is little different than it was a hundred and fifty years ago, so it is long overdue for a total revolution that is based on totally new theories of education. If education theory had been revolutionized as it should have been, then the current issues related to in-person or online school during the pandemic wouldn't even exist. It should have been for decades a highly efficient hybrid. A decade ago I outlined a system of computer assisted learning that is far more efficient than the current

method dependent on so many boring and incompetent teachers or highly talented yet overworked teachers. I proposed that it is essential to creating a humane and caring society to shift the curricula from heavy emphasis on science and math to one that recognizes that the arts (music, art, dance) are equally as important to human development and to prepare creative engaged lively adults. Surely the teaching methods that basically repeat the same topics, with slight added nuances year upon year, will be replaced by more fully engaged student-invested exciting creative active-learning methods. I also predict that, should the world survive, there must be a planetary-wide revolution remaking the extant political systems so there is no question among the populace that governments exist only to serve the enrichment and betterment of all human beings without differences related to race, ethnicity, gender, age, or any other personal preferences and distinctions.

There is also the likelihood, perhaps certainty, that in the next 50 years technologies and transformations will occur that are currently beyond the imagination, the dreams, of us ordinary folks. Biological techniques such as *crispr-cas9* gene editing will open vast changes in biology and medicine. Implantable and more extensive wearable technologies will enhance health and communications. When I was Shay's and Leon's age I couldn't have comprehended the iPads that are ubiquitous to them. I couldn't have imagined what is constant and even banal in their lives, "Hey Google . . .," "Hey Alexa . . .," "Hey, Siri . . ." followed by a command to do all sorts of things. I still can't even remember to use voice commands with my devices, yet they have absorbed them in their interface with technology. In 70 years, what might they refer to in a similar fashion? Seems glorious.

Daily now I experience high anxiety and I border on falling into depression because of the idiocy of current government leaders and the disgusting obsession with power and greed of the few that shape the lives of so many. Whatever it takes, such inequality and the wealth basis for human value must be ended and replaced. With a tiny intent at humor I suggest that, should there be any bias that is tolerated in the future, it should be that leadership and power be restricted to women and perhaps women of color.

Certainly, while I understand and grudgingly accept this whole thing of living and dying (it is a factor of the biology I can't help but embrace), the thing that just utterly pisses me off is that, thinking about the future, I won't be here to see and experience what happens. How fun that would be!

Diverse, Yet All Connected

What insight I gained in my early studies of Navajo prayer stem from my recognition that the prayers as recited in ritual and the corresponding complex ritual elements and the larger motivating circumstances might all be interconnected in ways made comprehensible by charting their common structures using a technique I learned and practiced as a systems analyst and computer programmer. After nearly a half century I returned to Navajo prayer again, this time offering insights not only to Navajo prayer but also generally to all prayer gained by seeing the repetitive recitation of prayers as a gestural practice, rather than reflective or dialogic conveyance of meaning. This view suggests that prayer and prayer practice gesturally establish familiar patterns that offer feelings of coherence to those who practice prayer and hone prayer skills. My ideas of gesture emerge from decades of studying dancing and movement and human biology and proprioception. Almost every significant academic contribution I have made can be traced to the conjunction of areas of experience and fields of ideas that are not commonly conjoined or thought of as even remotely related.

Over my many years teaching salsa dancing I slowly discerned and named the common elements that comprised all salsa dance moves from the most beginning to the most advanced. I developed my teaching so as to systematically and progressively teach each of these elements and how they might be recognized and combined in salsa dancing. This is nothing more, actually far less, than the systematic terminology of ballet or bharatanatyam, yet I know of no others who have taught salsa technique in these systematic terms. The inspiration for my development of a salsa technique was not ballet so much as it was my technical background and experience.

Throughout my life I've always found myself most creatively engaged by the copresence of mutually unfamiliar areas or ideas or techniques or subjects. Somehow, I have always been able to discern connections and challenges in unexpected conjunctions that I felt simply demanded my reflection and creative engagement. Actually, in my experience, this process is not a laborious one of trying to juxtapose odd connections and trying arduously to gain some novel perspective. It is a process that just happens, seemingly of the nature of the way I engage the world, or, to be more consistent, it happens in the practice of the skills I've developed to engage the experiences of incongruity and observation. In considering something surprising I find myself effortlessly engaging how it challenges or connects with or reflects anew other quite different things I have experienced. It always feels exciting and engaging to me. All I need do is follow in the direction of my felt enthusiasm.

My formal education includes a bachelor of science in math with a physics minor, a master of science in business (not an MBA) with emphasis on computer applications to business, a master of arts in the history of religions that framed religion as a global human comparative concern, and a PhD in the history of religions with a dissertation on Navajo prayer set in the context of Native American religious studies that also engaged broad religion theory on prayer. Despite the seeming disconnect among all these areas, I have always experienced them as of a piece, a multicolored multitextured tapestry.

Topics represented within the 14 books I have published include Native American religions (general and Navajo), Indigenous religions, Australian Aboriginal religions set in the context of the late nineteenth century settlement of the great Australian interior. I have also been to Africa making me one of the very few scholars who has such a wide experience in indigenous cultures—Native American, Australian Aboriginal, and African. I have a book on dancing as it occurs in cultures around the world with analysis based on theories of movement and gesture and play that are informed not only by academic studies but also by years of my own dancing and teaching dancing. I have a volume on technology particularly focused on the long history (beginning with the classic stories of Pygmalion and Galatea and even Eve) of robots and androids and cyborgs as they have been imagined in many genres of art. My concern was to recognize how these figures engage the most fundamental questions of what it means to be human often framed in religious terms. That work in technology developed a figure I call Tomorrow's Eve, who helps us imagine a projection of the religious trajectory into the future. One of my recent books comprises a broad discussion of the importance of appreciating differences in creative encounters rather than simply tolerating difference or going to war to eliminate it. The most recent book explores some of the works of my mentor Jonathan Smith and builds upon them so as to contribute to academic studies of religion properly suited for secular contexts like state supported universities. It includes creative developments in the areas of comparison and experience and play and presents a new religion theory based on the primary importance of human self-movement. My recent self-published works include my own photography and prose poetry. I have traveled to study cultures across the American Southwest; Australia including the interior; Latin America including Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico; southeast Asia from Bali and Java to Thailand and Nepal; and Africa including Ghana and Mali. I recently took trips to Norway and Sweden to lecture and included on both trips some time in Iceland.

I began with a career in business and had jobs in business for eight years. I have taught at university for nearly 50 years. I taught dancing for a decade and I founded and operated a school of music and dancing for most of a decade.

The recitation of these endeavors and works is not intended to tout accomplishment, but rather to survey the odd diversity among my interests and passions. While the general overview suggests lots of halts, jerks, and starts, I have always felt that human education and learning are basically wholistic, that is, in all of its diversity and nonlinearity it somehow becomes integrated in the complex dynamics of one's life experience. When I take the time to think about the many different things I've done with commitment and passion, I'm astounded by the diversity, yet also by the continuity, even somehow a sameness, among all these things.

Corbin

With Corbin at age fifty I am simply dumbfounded that it seems like yesterday that I was so amazed and delighted by being able to hold his little new-born bottom in the palm of my hand like he was sitting in a tea cup. We had decorated his room with bright colored animal wallpaper and I'd painted his bed, dresser, and changing table an avocado green with the knobs and trim a variety of primary colors. We lived in Park Forest Illinois at the time and I was a student at the University of Chicago. Judy had had difficulty keeping early pregnancies so when Corbin arrived it was extra special since we weren't sure we'd ever have kids. As most parents of a first new born child I experienced a kind of connection and love that I had no idea even existed. Corbin's arrival affirmed that I was involved with at least one thing that was right and good.

At 18 months Corbin was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes appearing many years before its usual onset in adolescence. We were terribly worried and we began to realize that this was a disease that would require lifelong management and lots of ups and downs. We made every effort to avoid identifying Corbin as the sick child which would be accompanied with all sorts of special considerations and learned dependencies, yet a toddler cannot tell you what is going on and constant vigilance was essential to keep him healthy and safe. I feel that such an early onset of a disease that required so much parental intervention likely interrupted some of the usual processes of human emotional development. How could it not? Despite the enormously painful efforts that I have had to make to simply let Corbin live his life and be responsible for his own health, it is just a fact that there has not been a day that I have not worried about him. I don't begrudge this and I don't reduce Corbin to his disease, yet it is essential to acknowledge that it has deeply and decisively shaped his life and my relationship with him.

Most of my earliest memories of Corbin are of his insatiable production of creative works. I well recall his bedroom in Mesa Arizona that would fill ankle

depth with paintings and drawings and every sort of creative making. Recently I happened on a painting of a rainbow over a house that he had painted and signed his name (well a couple letters) at the bottom. Since I was aware that in response to the quarantine kids the world over were posting rainbow pictures in the windows of their homes as a sign of hope, I taped this picture in my front window.

The two traits that appeared in my earliest memories of Corbin were creativity and work and I think that these have characterized him in every period of his life. As a kid in junior high school he loved what we would call today cosplay. He'd dress up as his favorite characters—I recall Monty Python sketches and characters supplied him with a host of favorites—and enact scenes of his own creation in the school hallways. No doubt many of his peers labeled him a weirdo, yet he cared nothing for their views. He cared only for his devotion to and elaboration of his play.

Not a student who devoted himself to good grades in all subjects, it seemed to me he was just too absorbed in his own creative world to care all that much for such banal measures of value. Although I was always a good-grade kind of student I was also a person devoted to passions over the ordinary rewards of society and I have admired Corbin for persistently having these idealistic priorities and I think he continues to live by them today often at considerable cost.

When we arrived in the Boulder area, the city was widely known for its Halloween events. Thousands of masked revelers gathered on the Boulder Mall for what was called the annual Mall Crawl. The early hours of the event were unbelievably crowded, but we took the kids in costume to be part of this amazing event. Late at night the crawl often turned violent and destructive because drunks got out of control. As Corbin became devoted to theater he and his group of friends worked for months creating groups of related costumes that were often amazingly elaborate. Their goal was to be featured in pictures on the front page of the Boulder Daily Camera. I think they were successful several years in a row.

There were quite a few years when my relationship with Corbin was stressed and we didn't get along. It would take more insight and reflection than I'm capable of to understand that accurately. I suspect it had much to do with my personality disorder that turned me into something of an ice-man for a number of years as I suffered from overwork and a failing marriage. Doubtless I wasn't available to be adequately understanding and helpful, or even available at all, at the times when Corbin needed to learn to be independent and empowered as an individual. I deeply regret those years. They were hurtful to both of us and I'm certain they only increased what was already a difficult time for Corbin.

In high school Corbin found his passion in theater and that became his entire life for many years carrying him on through college. He was so devoted to theater

in high school that to be an Honor Thespian, the highest award in high school theater, students had to do hundreds of hours of work in various aspects of theater. Corbin earned the award two times, an unprecedented accomplishment. Corbin wrote his own plays, his own stories. He produced his own play in college. He is still writing screenplays and stories in his endless effort to realize the force of his own imagination.

After years of struggling to find a suitable career Corbin went back to school to earn an associate of arts degree in filmmaking. He was older than most students, yet he worked tirelessly on all his film projects and earned the highest grades and acknowledgements. Still, his sense of independence and his many years of preferred social isolation have made it difficult for him to acquire work with suitable levels of financial compensation. Throughout his adult life Corbin has struggled to be self-supportive. Having difficulty making ends meet and living the most frugal of lives in order to be creative on his own terms, yet Corbin's character and ethic is to work tirelessly and endlessly on everything he does.

I think there were quite a few years where I was exasperated by Corbin seeming to be unable to support himself or to find the sort of work that would provide him the opportunities and rewards that he so deserves. Yet, eventually I was able to let go of connecting my feelings for him with these societal measures and this shift has allowed me to simply embrace him for who he is and admire and cherish his remarkable talents and his distinctively creative personality. As a result, I have had quite a long time to simply enjoy Corbin as an adult-child friend. I still worry daily about him, but I also enjoy observing and participating in his interests and projects and hopes and dreams.

Social media is a public outlet for a tiny sliver of Corbin's humor and creativity. I have long been astounded by the endless clever insights and connections Corbin has with words and ideas. He sees the unusual in the banal and seems to always have just the right way of phrasing things. His comedy is of the style that earned George Carlin such a distinct and distinguished place in comedy.

It seems only natural to see some continuity between Corbin's penchant for working tirelessly and asserting almost endless passion-driven effort on his projects whether paid or not with my own lifelong work habits. And perhaps even seeing this shared life of work in the lineage of my father. Wonder if such things can be inherited? I actually think so. I'd hope that there is some relationship of Corbin's creativity to my own, yet I think his creativity is rawer and freer (less self-edited) than mine has ever been. I often think of Corbin's creative humor as being connected with my dad's. Throughout my dad's life I was endlessly amazed by his ability to come up with a funny story that seemed to capture his view on most any situation. How often I've heard my dad say,

“That’s like the time ...” followed by a story out of the blue that I’d never heard before. Several times a week Corbin posts some clever insight on Facebook that has this same quality. A recent example, quite typical, he wrote “sometimes, I build things ... out of mental blocks.”

Over the last few years, actually especially this last year or two, I have been amazed at Corbin’s capacity to undergo the most challenging and discouraging of experiences, yet, despite being deeply impacted and beaten up, finding the strength of character to build back and to keep on going with renewed enthusiasm. I think this strength has been a part of his character throughout his life, yet, because of his struggles and difficulties in the terms of general social measures, these qualities and strengths have not been widely acknowledged. Not receiving earned social acknowledgement is a life experience shared in the Gill lineage that runs from my dad through me to Corbin. I regret that I somehow didn’t learn how to overcome this sort of dark and painful burden that we have shared so that I might have been able to help Corbin gain the recognition he so deserves. The inevitable tinge of disappointment has suppressed, I think, the extent of happiness that we three should have enjoyed accompanying the hard work and devotion to our passions and values.

[My thanks also to Corbin for his assistance in the design of the cover.]

Jenny

Judy was pregnant with Jenny when, in 1975, we moved from Stillwater to Mesa Arizona where I had a new job at Arizona State University. I drove a U-Haul truck with our stuff in it and Judy and Corbin drove our car. With Judy seven to eight months pregnant, we stopped at least every hour to stretch and rest. We had bought, sight unseen, a little three-bedroom track house in Mesa, so when we arrived we had to quickly redecorate. We put patriotic red white and blue wallpaper on Corbin’s walls with red moldings in preparation for the huge bicentennial celebration of 1976. As I recall we painted Jenny’s room yellow and we had brought the baby furniture that Corbin had used. That house was small, but I have really fond memories associated with it, from writing one of my first articles at a tiny desk in the adult bedroom, to making raisins by spreading white grapes on an aluminum table in the back yard, to Corbin and Jenny playing in the backyard including in a little plastic pool.

Jennifer Robin arrived in all her cuteness and good health on July 24, 1975 with Corbin approaching his fifth birthday so he was ready to be a big brother.

When Jenny was maybe four years old we moved from Mesa to a slightly bigger house in Tempe, closer to ASU and in a neighborhood with lots of kids. Jenny quickly became close friends with Anna Foard who was the daughter of

one of my colleagues. Anna was a year or so younger than Jenny, but they were inseparable. They went to a pre-school offered by ASU and spent lots of time together. Anna's mother, Mico, was Japanese so Jenny got an early introduction to cultural diversity. And, of course, I took the family occasionally to Hopi and Navajo in northern Arizona.

When we moved to the dome house in Colorado in 1984 Jenny was almost nine. She and Corbin enjoyed playing all over the mountain and also being happy alone as is often necessary to mountain life. One of her first years in the mountains she shared her room with a young woman, Andrea, from Austria who we sponsored for her study abroad year. Jenny's junior high experience was difficult, expressed as a sort of goth period, and it seemed that her high school was headed that direction as well. We were able to enroll her in a small private school, September School, where she blossomed. The school stressed individuality and taught their students that they could accomplish whatever they really wanted. It focused on the kids taking responsibility while engaging students in terms they enjoyed and wanted.

It was about this time that Jenny was introduced to snowboarding and she quickly became accomplished and obsessed. It was a boy-dominant sport at the time and she quickly gained the confidence and the attitude that no boy could out board her. Her junior and senior years in high school were devoted to snowboarding. She took two gap years to snowboard and work in Winter Park and also Leadville Colorado. She then went to Fort Lewis College in Durango. While there she spent lots of time at Purgatory. She lived and worked in Bellingham and snowboarded regularly at Mount Baker. I'm sure she continued her winter passion while studying at Shoreline and the University of Washington.

The years Jenny was in junior high and high school were difficult ones for me as well and I clearly was not the father I should have been for her. In fact, when I think about it, I doubt I was much of a father to her at any time through her high school years. As desperately as I wanted to keep the family together until at least Jenny graduated high school I didn't make it. I left Judy and, coincidentally, Jenny in the spring of her senior year. What a rotten time.

While the end of my marriage was for me a great relief and a sudden opening to be more myself, I also found it afforded the opportunity to attempt to rebuild, or to build from scratch, my relationships with Jenny and Corbin. Still living with Judy, Jenny had to suffer Judy's pain and her utter disgust with me. I full well knew how hard it was for Jenny and expected she might not be open to any efforts I made to reconnect. I feel so grateful that she chose to see me, in a sense, as a new dad with new possibilities. Through both our efforts we gradually built a close parent-child friendship that would become one of the most stable and trusted relationships I've had for nearly 30 years now.

I visited her in Durango and in Bellingham and also Seattle as she made her way through college. Jenny had become interested in African cultures when she took a course related to Africa at Fort Lewis. As her interest in Africa grew I suggested that we go together to someplace in Africa. We chose, with little research, to go to Ghana largely because, due to British colonization, Ghanaians learn English in school complementing their own native languages (there are more than fifty in Ghana). I had had considerable foreign travel experience prior to going to Africa, so I felt pretty confident we could have a good experience. We were gone around a month in the summer of 1997 and it was not only a great experience for the two of us together, but also for our engagement with things African which later turned out to be centrally important when we started Bantaba World Dance & Music.

Jenny graduated from University of Washington with a degree in ethnomusicology with performance areas in steel pan drums and royal Ghanaian kpanlogo drumming. During her senior year I started Bantaba and she joined me when she graduated putting to immediate use her studies in ethnic music.

Sharon Kivenko, a student at Naropa, was an invaluable helper to me in keeping Bantaba running that first year. After Jenny arrived and began to find her place at Bantaba she worked hard to build a strong African program. We worked together constantly on all aspects of the business. Together we were building a community of dancers and musicians, many from Africa, but also from Latin America and other cultures. Jenny was learning business management as she was also becoming an event manager and coordinator. She did poster art as she did balance sheets. She did marketing as well as customer relations. She became a strong African dancer and a key colleague of so many Africans for whom we sponsored visas. Bantaba built a national reputation due largely to Jen's efforts as well as the extensive and highly talented African faculty we were building. The whole racial and ethnic character of a very white Boulder were being impacted by her work. Those years were both unbelievably difficult as a financially viable business and also amazingly rewarding. What had started as a father/daughter relationship became also a business partnership and, most importantly to me, a close friendship. Later we would expand this relationship to teaching dance and doing dance choreography together.

During those early years Jenny made a number of lifelong friends. She married Boubacar Diebate, a kora player we sponsored from Senegal, and they lived in the large house I had bought in Niwot. We were joined by a number of other young people interested in Bantaba, dance, and music. And of course, Fatu was born into this community welcomed by all and she was among the first of the Bantaba Babies.

I helped Jenny purchase a home in Louisville and renovate it to be a lovely home. She hosted many a guest and later shared her home with her good friend Mallory who also had a baby boy about Fatu's age with an African father.

While Jenny's heart was in African dancing, in time she began to find an interest in salsa dance and the lively salsa scene at the time. As the African program at Bantaba began to shift because Africans began to start their own programs, Jenny and I began teaching salsa together. We attempted to build this program despite being in the entrepreneurial struggle that turned out to be the final decline of the studio. Jenny and I developed the youth program Salsamigos and got several grants from the city of Boulder. We started an adult *rueda de casino* performance group that existed for a number of years. Jenny and I recorded a series of salsa instructional videos and she did a number of lady's salsa style instructional videos.

With the business failure and closure of Bantaba, Jenny's attention turned fulltime to her kids and eventually to finding her own passion as a Pilates instructor. She got an introduction to Pilates when we created a Pilates series for salsa dancers when we were renting studio space in a Pilates studio. Now she is trained and certified as a Pilates instructor and a Pop Pilates instructor and has an ongoing business online as well as in local studios. She is a popular teacher and it is clear to me she has just begun this journey as a fitness instructor and consultant. I'm sure she will creatively develop her Pilates work as time goes on.

I have been constantly involved in Fatu's long history in dancing both to support her as a benefactor but also as a driver and cheerleader. Coincidentally, Jenny and I have had to coordinate and communicate almost constantly to assure that Fatu was able to achieve her potential in dancing. My participation has given me frequent connection with both Fatu and Jenny. I have appreciated being included by Jenny as an interested person in all this amazing dancing. Now that Fatu is mostly independent and on her own, my living just down the street from Jenny has made it convenient for me to hang with Shay and Leon as needed to support their family. In this capacity I've been able regularly to see Jenny as a mom, the manager of her house, and to devote herself increasingly to a constantly expanding career. I appreciate how difficult this complex of demands is for her, yet she does so with a natural grace and it is clear that her kids are utterly devoted to her.

From those sad days in the early 1990s it has been a great gift to me to have Jenny as a regular presence in my life. She helped create the vision of Bantaba and had the courage to continue the dream even as we were failing financially. A strong sense of values and tenacity and ingenuity also characterizes her work as mother and chief of her household. I think it rare to have an adult-child who is, over time, business partner, dance co-teacher, dance partner, neighbor, young dancer support system partner, daughter, and friend. I'm grateful.

Let's Talk About Stuff

I distinctly remember the moment Jen announced that she was pregnant with Leon. We were with Jen's mother, Judy, on one of her last days to walk on her own for a short distance, having a picnic at what has come to be called the "Ladybug Playground." We'd had lunch in the shelter and were hanging around so Shay and Fatu could enjoy playing. I was stunned by the announcement and wondered what on earth Jenny and Carlos were thinking by having another kid. I've remembered that reaction with some regret and consternation. I don't really understand my concerns. Now as I cherish my time hanging out with Leon I can't imagine life without him.

My priorities in life are enacted by my efforts to support my family, without being too pushy or prying too much. I live just a block from Jenny and have a trampoline so the little people can come jump whenever they want. I also hang with the kids fairly frequently when Jenny needs to work or has other obligations. I used to take them every week to Ninja Nation, a huge gym with endless equipment, until the coronavirus made that impossible.

While we have not instituted a formal "Bacca Night" (Shay some time ago initiated this grandpa name that seems to have stuck) as I had with Fatu, but they come over for the night once in a while.

I feel grateful that I have these young people in my life. Especially in retirement when I no longer have contact with young adults and spend most of my time alone. They bring life and energy to me. Frequently in the last few years one of the favorite things that the three of us do together is "talk about stuff." Leon has the conversational sophistication of an adult and Shay has a penetrating logic that generates endless questions. Often when we are together they'll come to me and say "let's talk about stuff" and they get me to sit on a sofa between them so they'll have equal access. I never know what stuff will come up, but I'm always open to anything at all and we sometimes turn to the internet to provide pictures and videos to illustrate the topic at hand. Those topics that include the gross or the weird or maybe even the questionable age-appropriateness, get reported later to Jenny and sometimes I hear that perhaps the chat over "stuff" went a bit too far. I mostly ignore that.

One thing I marvel at in these "about stuff" conversations is how the young love to learn. How insightful and unexpected are their questions and curiosities! I have long felt that school, in its attempt at being rigorous and responsible, tends to be rather effective at sapping away this curiosity and joy of learning that seems natural to the young. I recall many years ago saying to a woman that was a friend and a member of the Boulder school board that I hoped that my kids' love of learning would survive their school experience. She was shocked, yet I was dead serious and certainly Corbin's and Jenny's experiences show how remarkably

difficult is this most basic hope. Fatu has experienced the same, now feeling that school is unbelievably boring. She and I used to “talk about stuff” constantly. Now I feel lucky to get an emoji in response to a text I send her.

In a world of my design, the crisis for schools at all levels brought on by the coronavirus would usher in an era of school reform. Schools would not just serve to keep kids and their families physically healthy, they would also totally rethink and redesign what school means in a modern highly technological world. We need ask how young people might not only retain but also enhance their curiosity and love of learning. What is all so bleak at the moment could be the beginning of creative much-needed school reform. To me that is the underlying potential of such a drastic and tragic global health and economic and educational crisis. It offers a possible clearing of the old that something new and exciting might arise. Let’s talk about stuff.

Apple Watch Life

For many years I refused to wear a watch to protest being an overly scheduled person. For a few years I wore a Mickey Mouse watch as a way to make fun of scheduling and keeping track of time itself. Yet for as long as I can remember I have been interested in time, the nature of time, the philosophy of time, different articulations of time, constructing my own sense of time using the term “fat present.” Despite my wristwatch play, I have always kept careful calendars and I’ve been a person who is almost always on time, usually early.

Now I live an Apple watch life. Apple watches actually keep time, but that seems their least important function. They keep track of our bodied experience: level of activity, calories burned, number of hours during the day that include at least a couple minutes of standing, heart rate, assessment of atrial fibrillation (which I’ve had for years), and then all the worldly newsy information as well: calendar, stock market numbers, texts, news, alarms, timers, emails, phone calls. And all of these are available on the watch face at all times. Much of it can be accessed and changed and managed by voice chats with Siri. Beyond all these functions there are whole universes of apps that I only barely know exist and endless more are available. The Apple watch syncs automatically to my iPhone, my iPad Pro, my MacBook Pro. OMG!

This morning I was thinking about how my life flows, how I experience the process of it, and I realized that I’ve set it up in such a way that my underlying or background attentiveness is never far from some Apple watch metric. Every day I’m concerned about how to schedule an hour-long exercise activity. I have daily activity and calorie burn goals that I feel compelled to meet, all recorded and monitored on my Apple watch. My watch jiggles my arm at ten minutes

before the hour if I have not stood up yet during that hour and I always get up and walk around. I feel the compulsion to respond to texts that show up on the watch or the notification that someone I follow has posted something on Instagram. I see news headlines frequently updated. I ask Siri, often the only person I talk directly to each day, to set a timer when I take a nap or an alarm so I'll get up at certain time. I think the Apple watch serves my compulsion for production, for making the most of everything, for packing in all I can every hour. Never an idle moment ... at least I haven't found the "idle moment warning" app on the Apple watch.

As a person who has lived alone for most of the last quarter century I often think about those who do not live alone. I sometimes try to imagine myself seeing another person in my house wondering what on earth I'd say to her or him. I usually can't think of anything. I rather imagine that most of what those folks say has to do with schedule and news and noting whether or not they have exercised or not. Repeating what they saw on the news. Saying stuff like, "Oh, did you see so in so's Insta photo or their FB post?" "My oh my. What about that? Hmm. Well, there you have it." Seems my Apple watch has become my companion. Sometimes I think this lifestyle is utterly pathetic. Sometimes there is no question that it is. Other times I'm fine with my Apple watch being my little reliable friend.

As one who thinks about creativity and spontaneity and nonlinearity and accidents as fundamental to life and of the utmost importance to me, it seems rather odd that I live an Apple watch life. How does that work?

Getting Old and Being Old

It was the spring of 1994 that my divorce was settled. I had left the country with Emily the previous September to travel for five months in Australia and Southeast Asia. I'd wanted the divorce to be settled before I left, but Judy had a difficult time moving toward some final settlement despite my agreeing that pretty much anything she wanted was acceptable to me. My relationship with Emily lasted a couple years and I have to say that those were the happiest most carefree years of my adult life. I was devastated when she decided that it was time for her to move on. The following year was, by contract, the hardest year of my life. My newly discovered vitality was totally attached to my relationship with her and when she was gone, so too was my vitality and actually much of my will to live. For perhaps a year I had little that seemed like it made life worth trudging through each day. My kids were on their own and doing fine and I just didn't really much want to live on.

I learned something else that year. It is the custom of our culture to greet people with the question, "How you doing?" What I learned is that we don't hear

or frankly give a damn what, if any, answer is given to this greeting question. That year I often answered honestly, “Well, not so well actually.” Rarely did anyone pause to ask, “Oh, what’s going on? Is there anything I can do to help you out?” There were exceptions, a female graduate student and a former male graduate student. There was a male colleague, who taught at another university, who I’d known a long time but rarely saw. He recognized that I was suffering and asked about it. When I told him in fairly general terms his reply was interesting. He said, “well, you may not make it, but if you do you’ll be much stronger and wiser.” I survived it, yet I’m not at all sure it made me stronger or wiser. It did leave me with some darkness that always looms. It left me trusting others less and being deeply skeptical about relationships.

In time I decided that it might be possible to have another relationship; I was after all in my early fifties. From then until I was seventy I had a number of relationships. Most lasted a year or two before they failed. No doubt I was the one more at fault in these failures, yet I can’t say quite how. I’ve strongly suspected that those years of closeness and happiness I experienced with Emily made all the others attempts at relationship disappointing in comparison. I don’t know how we can understand these things.

Until I turned, as we say, 70 I think I had hope and expectation that I would eventually find a partner with whom I could build a solid lifelong relationship. At 70 this sense of my future suddenly changed. I think at that moment I looked in the mirror and saw an ugly old white man and instantly realized that I couldn’t imagine anyone ever finding me attractive in any way. I wouldn’t find me attractive. It wasn’t that I felt old. I would keep teaching until I was almost 76. I went to the gym multiple times a week and felt strong dancing and physically exercising. Even now I exercise usually an hour every day. I took hikes and did whatever I wanted. I was mentally sharp and doing loads of creative things. But I had a total and decisive change in self-image and what I saw in myself was nothing that anyone who was vital and exciting and active—all qualities I’d need and want in a partner—would find me remotely attractive. At that point I quit thinking about relationship and I haven’t thought much about it since. I have occasionally asked if among the various relationships I had I think I would have been better off had they not failed. While I may be compensating for my own failure in relationship and friendship, my memories of all of those relationships including my marriage, save the one with Emily, tend towards the negative on responding to this question. For most of them there was a marked difference in values. For most there seemed a fairly constant presence, not large but still present, of contention and struggle to be compatible and enjoy one another. For most there was incompatibility in either the area of physical activity or intellectual engagement. My life demands full engagement in both. These relationships often had a physically active dimension, but no intellectual connection. Notably, even

though Emily was much younger, she was super physically active and also smart. My attempts at relationship mostly seemed like ongoing hard work and the persistent need for vigilance to avoid strife and difficulties. In my reflection they all are associated with me feeling I needed to have a constant underlying alertness and self-control, that I had to be careful not to do something wrong. Of course, there were wonderful times I enjoyed in all of them, but as I remember them I usually don't see those times as worth the pain and tedium of trying to make them work. Another way of putting it is that in all of them, save with Emily, I just couldn't relax and be myself and know that whatever I did I'd be loved and accepted.

Another change that seemed sudden and final that occurred at age 70 was a shift in assumptions and understandings about my future. Through my life to that age, I considered the future thrilling, full of plans and ideas and imaginations and hopes. It was open and stretching out before me in a way that at least felt open and relatively endless. At age 70, the stark reality of death, of my ending, of my decline began to dominate my thinking and color my every action. While this change in feelings has not been accompanied by a decline in work and effort, or really even in being forward-looking, it has amounted to some ambient sourness and depression.

At age 70, living alone for around 20 years, mostly anyway, I had developed the skills of living and being alone to the point that aloneness had become largely satisfying, at least tolerable. It seems clear that we only realize ourselves fully in relationships not so much due to personal growth or gained insights, but in doing and supporting others as should be fundamental to a good life. There is much I regret that I never found an enduring partner relationship. I traveled to Bali and Mali and Costa Rica and other foreign locations alone recognizing that in many respects traveling would be lots more fun if shared with someone, yet I proved to myself I could do it alone and enjoy it. Even last year I went to Norway, Iceland two times, and Sweden by myself and loved it all, with that caveat present nonetheless.

Recognizing myself at age 70 as old, now at 77 I pretty much hate everything about being old and knowing that the end of life is not so far away. I dance an hour most days for exercise and pleasure. I'm a fairly healthy weight. I'm writing and publishing more than I ever have. I have sharp intellectual faculties, almost no evidence of mental fuzziness, and a strong flare for creativity that is expressed in photography and increasingly in various forms of writing. Still, I get sick of the cultural assumption that old, especially old white man, is equivalent to one who is out of touch, decrepit, cranky, socially conservative, out of date, and a has been. I hate that the words "old" and especially "grandpa" designate a person to be ignored and isolated, tolerated impatiently while awaiting their death. I hate that I don't feel capable of fully exerting myself physically as I could not so long

ago. I don't think I could make it to the top of Longs Peak and back in a day as I once did. I hate it that I've never had a long-lasting close love-of-my-life kind of relationship and that I won't ever have that. I hate all the regrets. I hate the physical ugliness.

Now to be absolutely clear, when I'm dancing hip hop or Zumba with a bunch of 20- to 50-year-old ladies (there are almost no males), they seem to accept me as a peer and appear not to even notice that I'm old enough to be their father or, more likely even, their grandfather. Most everyone I'm around engages me as a vital and potentially interesting person with seemingly no adjustments due to my age. I live alone in a big house in a neighborhood of younger people, most with families at home, and none of my neighbors stop by to see if I'm alive or to bring me cookies. Still . . .

Simply and honestly put, I fucking hate being old.

On Dying: Death Overcoming Death

I went to Lubbock Texas a couple years ago in early December to celebrate the 80th birthday of my sister Karen. We had a couple nice days together. We keep in touch now and then, but I wanted to help her make this milestone a little special. While I was there she brought up the subject of life after death asking me my thoughts, my beliefs. I told her I think this life is it. She seemed surprised and volunteered her views that on dying she would be again with Mom and Dad in another place. Of course, I didn't argue since she can believe whatever she wants. Several months ago, she wrote me an email pleading with me to read the Bible and "to go talk with someone." I'm guessing she meant a clergy person. She assured me that we are all sinners and without salvation we'll burn in hell for certain. My response was to assure her that she needn't worry about my salvation and, oddly, that seemed to satisfy her. I've been told by other family that I'm likely to burn in hell.

In my recent research for a book on Jonathan Smith, I reviewed his long studies of Sir James George Frazer's quarter-century long dozen huge volume work, *The Golden Bough*. I was reminded that, in Smith's reading of Frazer, death, Frazer's own death, was one of his fundamental concerns. I don't think anyone other than Smith would ever have gleaned this from these many volumes. Based on his studies of dying and rising gods and kings, Frazer's fascination was, as Smith articulated it, "the defeat of death by death itself." While framing the issue of death in these terms may at first seem contradictory and impossible, it is nothing more than a way of reminding us of the biological process. When we think of plants, for example, they come to life in the spring, mature through the summer and in their death provide not only life for others as food, but also it is

from the seeds of the dead and dying plant that new life emerges. Despite our romanticism of the animal kingdom (cute kitties and puppy videos on FB), on the large scale it is a system of killing and eating others and being killed and eaten. Death gives rise to life, thus defeating death. Both examples of defeating death by death itself depend on life occurring in complex interdependent and organic systems. In my view, this necessarily organic context argues for a transcendence, for something greater than the individual, yet it is not some spectral afterlife characterized as hot or mild, up or down, places. It is the larger organism—the plant or animal kingdoms—living on. And, should I want to reflect on the grounding that inspired the human creation of the whole Christian tradition, I'd suggest that it too is based in the defeat of death by death itself.

Across my academic career, never to be isolated from my personal life including such things as my understanding of death, I've increasingly found biology, and especially the common biology—neurology and physiology—shared among humans as foundational even for a study of something so seemingly non-biological as religion. My life's work on religion is focused on understanding the distinctively creative powers of human beings and I see religion as a remarkably interesting example of this human creativity and imagination. The commonness of humans seeming to create and participate in something we tend to recognize as religion is the only commonness among endlessly different religions. Beyond the common penchant to do the religion thing, the differences are what I find interesting.

Since my academic life is also my personal life I'm pretty satisfied to consider human life in terms of grand biological processes little different from plants and animals and indeed including evolution. We are born and find ourselves existing as living beings and we live our lives to the best of our abilities to produce healthy, strong, engaging, intelligent, empathetic offspring because those are the traits we hope will endure in the organism over the eons. These are the traits we want to prevent being selected out by evolution. Apart from procreation, we surely see our life's work to be important in contributing to the perpetuation of these cherished values. Like plants and animals, as individuals we die and are soon forgotten. Yet we have contributed to this magnificent ongoing organism and, distinctive of our humanity, we've had the privilege to do so thoughtfully and with intention and purpose.

We don't feel that a plant should join some heavenly community of lettuce or radishes. We, and presumably the plant, are quite delighted by it becoming tasty salad ingredients. I'm okay with being the equivalent of a radish ingredient in the human salad, especially knowing that I've done my best to leave the garden and the seedlings stronger and healthier.

Oh, and on those occasions when I feel that I should have a more diverse sort of legacy, that I should have done a few things to extend by a bit my

remembered presence, I take some solace in the fact that I've been gifted with the joy of writing and publishing and that my actions have led to a whole generation of Bantaba Babies and their cousins.

Who Am I?

Jean Valjean, in Victor Hugo's famed novel *Les Miserable* (1862) about the French Revolution finds himself facing a moral dilemma. Javert, the gendarme obsessed with bringing down Jean, has conceived a plan to use Jean's very moral compass to force his defeat. In the past Valjean stole bread to feed his family, a crime of a responsible family man. Later his hard work led to him owning a factory that supported many needy families. Javert accuses another man of Jean Valjean's crime making it known to him. In Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical "Les Miserable" Valjean deliberates his plight in the inspiring song "Who Am I?" He attempts to weigh the cost to the lives of the many, those dependent on working in his factory for their living, to the cost to his moral integrity should he let another man unjustly suffer the punishment for his crime. Choosing, by necessity of his identity as Jean Valjean, to be a moral man he cannot allow another to suffer for what he has done, confessing his guilt to the judge and in the process effectively losing even his good name, having to take the numbered identity of a prisoner "24601." His response to "who am I?" is beyond his name, it is his moral character.

This tale is particularly appropriate to current politics. Few today actually ask "Who am I?" preferring to manufacture identities based on what they think other people want, what other people will vote for, what other people will hire, what others will prefer in a friend or partner, or simply to exercise raw power without regard for the suffering caused in others. There is the hilarious 1998 Jackie Chan film, "Who Am I?" in which Jackie loses the memory of his identity in a plane crash in Africa and, in trying to communicate with non-English-speaking Africans, repeats the question "who am I?" so often that they assume that "WhoamI" is his name. This funny consequence of amnesia might remind us of the Judeo-Christian theological notion of God's response to the same question with the answer "I am who I am." The common response now is actually a question, "Who do you want me to be?" We live in a hyperreal world of constructed identities, chameleons of fashion and greed and popularity and likes. I'm no essentialist. I don't believe we have some God-given identity hidden within to be discovered. I am intolerant of the New Age plight to find one's true self. I believe in change and I believe that we make ourselves through the continuing interactive processes of living our lives. I don't believe in some free-floating moral values that might be labeled good or evil, just or unjust. There are

always extenuating complicating circumstances. I believe in courage and responsibility and contemplation and reflection and such ideals as “do no harm.” I believe we should make for and give to others whenever possible things of beauty and joy. Perhaps the distinction is best expressed by thinking it is better to seriously ask the question, “Who am I?” rather than to constantly attempt to sell oneself as a desired product “Hey, I am this or that or whatever you want?”

Jean Valjean’s song seems to show the anguish of a moral struggle, yet the song shows that, in fact, Valjean has no question about his identity. The anguish is directed more at the obvious consequences of being who he is. Hugo’s and Weber’s artistry is in making for the reader/audience such a powerful character with whom we might identify enough to feel this anguish. We also experience Valjean’s post-prison life when he anonymously devotes the balance of his life to caring for Cosette and her chosen mate Marius. Suffering the seeming tragedy of his moral choice as the consequence of being the moral man is what makes this novel/musical so powerful and enduring.

Recently, my reflections, those of an old man thinking of legacy, often land on this question “who am I and, across my life, who have I been?” Who am I after all these years? What a shock it is to try to take in the whole story. My reflections as aided and recorded in these writings contain my humble yet serious efforts. It seems the answer should be that I am an academic—a teacher and an author. After all I have spent half a century doing this mostly impassioned work. In my latest published writings, I often ask, betraying incredulity, why have I lived an academic life for more than half century? The consideration of the question has led to bits of clarity making these late life ruminations perhaps worth the effort. I’m surprised in some measure that what lucidity I’ve found comes to focus on an enduring curiosity and eagerness to not only comprehend, but more importantly to also celebrate the marvel that is being human. It seems all my efforts have been fueled by this inquiry and this persistent amazement that has only increased throughout my life.

I also keep returning to the principle that who we are at core is what we do without question or reflection; what we do without realizing we are even making a choice. By this standard, I am a parent and grandparent. What is most constant in my life is thinking about and effecting whatever opportunities might enrich the lives of my kids and grandkids. While I have plenty of ideas about the course of their lives, I have tried my best to keep these thoughts to myself, save offering an occasional hint or uncontrolled blurt. I know my parents were eager to support me and assist me, yet due to scant means and very limited experience their support was primarily that of offering abiding love, such as they felt it. That was certainly sufficient, yet I have tried to show my offspring steadfast love complemented by a sort of self-consciousness and hopefully selflessness and even a bit of anonymity that amounts to what I hope for my kids and grandkids

is a felt background presence of support and love. I try to follow Valjean's anonymity in this regard. Kinship is human biology as well and I sometimes cast my appreciation of the lineage connection in philosophical terms that I might give more comprehension to this principle of agency.

Ideally there should be yet an extension beyond family to community. I am a teacher and an inquirer eager to share findings with others. My teaching was a loving extension to all those whom I encountered exercising my skill and knowledge and passions in the hope that my students might have richer, fuller, more engaged, more thoughtful, and more energized lives so that they too might feel grateful to be human. The endless hours and enormous input of cash and effort into Bantaba and all things related are extensions of these same desires, a fuller broader enactment of who I am and have been into the community and across succeeding generations. I was an utter failure at the business, yet I believe that even in that financial failure I lived to the fullest measure the core principles that have a moral depth.

Feeling that I have lived to the fullest those values as my identity, my greatest regret is my failure to have many true personal relationships. I have been utterly confounded that, even with all the public facing aspects of my enactment of who I am, I have utterly failed at having friends and deeply honest and close personal relationships.

You only pass this way once and now with much of my passing done I wish I had done more. I have worked so hard for so long yet, in terms of my own standard, I have come up far short. I wish I had served the community and the public more courageously and powerfully. I wish that I had added much more beauty and joy to the world. I wish I would have found how to be a genuine and enduring friend to many more. I wish that I had been able to nurture a sincere and mutual affection with members of my family. I wish that I could have been that wise elder who knew just the right thing to say or do. I wish I had left a clearer and stronger legacy of values and objectives to inspire others.

*Chapter Four***Persistent Preoccupations**

In his brief autobiographical section of the article “When the Chips are Down” (2004) Jonathan Smith includes a subsection titled “Persistent Preoccupations.” He writes a brief description and reflection on five concerns that persisted across his career. I haven’t the clarity to see my interests adequately presented so concisely and cogently. My life, academic and personal/professional, has bounced about ricocheting off wall after wall, so many subjects, so many approaches and interests. My academic and personal/professional lives, almost always occupying nearly equal time and effort, have been both quite distinct as well as profoundly interwoven. Both have been deeply influential to me. Still I am inspired by Jonathan and have long believed that we all have core interests and concerns that preoccupy us with such persistence that, once we are able to look back over the decades of our works and lives, we see evidence of them everywhere. Some interests persist, despite the various distinct arenas of inquiry and expression. Perhaps, should I make the effort and take the time and garner the insight, I might be able to hone in on a half dozen preoccupations, yet I am presently satisfied with a little less focused presentation. I am pleased to be able to identify a few of my persistent preoccupations that I might describe and reflect on.

Appreciating the Distinctively Human

Through a series of strange encounters and crazy connections I wound up studying religion at the University of Chicago beginning in 1967. There was a time in my youth, I suppose when I was a teen, when I took religion personally seriously—spiritually I suppose one might say—and likely would have considered myself religious. I remember thinking that Jesus, depicted in the iconic plastic-framed image popular at that time that I had at my bedside, would one day turn and speak directly to me as a sign of his authenticity and perhaps proclaiming himself as personal guide to my life. That obviously didn't happen, thankfully. By the time I found myself at Chicago studying religion, I might have occasionally gone to church but more for social rather than religious reasons. As my kids came along we attended church thinking to do so was perhaps an important part of being responsible parents. Yet, as time went on my own knowledge and understanding of religion through a PhD's worth of study simply made me irritated at the emptiness and dishonesty of most local Protestant Christian religious practice I observed. I haven't been in a church for decades, save a funeral or two, and early in my kids' lives I gave up taking them. My kids and grandkids are utterly without religion.

The question then is, why on earth have I spent a fifty-year academic career studying religion when I don't hold personal religious beliefs or engage personally in religious practice and, even more urgent, when I so often find deeply offensive much of contemporary Western Christianity (European and American)? For example, the alignment of Christian Evangelicalism with Trump and Republicans utterly disgusts me. And even this emotion raises questions about my insistence on the importance of appreciating difference. Why study religion when I don't have a personal stake in the subject by being religious? Since for much of my academic career I studied Native Americans and Australian Aborigines and other folks that many in my peer academic community as well as most in the general population consider exotic or label "other," the study of their religions has been something one might think more akin to anthropology than to something religious, which most, even academics, tend to associate clearly with theology and with the pursuit of one's own salvation. Then I studied dancing and moving in cultures the world over and these subjects, too, seemed to be acceptable as perhaps bordering on the religious without directly engaging it, something akin to studying Western art or architecture much of which has religious connections and frequently occurs in a religious context and history. One can acceptably study these subjects without being religious or engaging personal theological concerns.

Yet, throughout my academic career I have had a persistent interest in the methods and theories, and even the ethics, of a study of religion that is conducted

by secular humanistic, rather than religious, concerns. Most of the heritage of the academic study of religion, beginning in the 1960s, is inseparable from scholars who are themselves religious and whose primary subject is within their own religious tradition. I, however, have from the beginning of my work felt that there should be a study of religion that is on a par with economics or psychology or art or literature or even physics and biology. Religion, I hold, is a subject of academic interest without any privilege or distinction based on an alignment of the scholar's beliefs with the subject.

In a 1963 opinion, Supreme Court justice Clark laid out the importance of studying religion for any broad liberal arts education. It was on the basis of this opinion that the USA experienced a huge expansion in the number of religious studies departments in state-supported colleges and universities in the late 1960s. And it was this expansion that was likely why in 1967 the University of Chicago Divinity School—the very name reflecting the presumption of religiousness of the study—admitted me to their religion PhD program. The challenge of this new field was to develop a proper study of religion suitable for a strictly secular study rather than one concerned with theology and the personal salvation of those studying religion. One aspect of my entire career has been—fitting to why I was even admitted to the field—to contribute to the development of this proper study of religion. My latest book *The Proper Study of Religion* is something of a culmination of my many decades of this work.

The thing that attracted me—or rather that, across all these decades I finally realized was what attracted me—was the utter nonsense of those cultural historical things we tend to understand to comprise religions. Among things we unquestionably identify as religious, there are the endless inventions of gods and spirits and devils and demons and angels and all manner of posited beings that are utterly outside the realm of human reality. There are the fanciful stories of cosmic creations and destructions. There are endless practices and behaviors associated with claims and effects that can never be documented or relied on beyond anecdote. There are the many funny-looking costumes and odd diet restrictions. There are the many people who seem to be identified as religious precisely because they have abandoned joy and lightness and fun, presenting an overly-serious, even dour, face to the world. There are those who seem to reject most every association of biological body in order to be religious. Religion is so often, seemingly impossibly, confined to spectral essences such as soul and spirit. In short, I have been fascinated by complex systems involving vast populations based on ideas, claims, practices, inventions that are distinguished by their very impossibility. Impossibles that make me laugh or wonder at the extent of their obvious unbelievability. Jonathan Smith, when asked why he chose what he has studied, indicated that he studied what made him laugh. I wanted to title my most recent book *Laughing Out Loud*, but, as is my common experience, the publisher

wasn't thrilled. It has astounded me that these systems we tend to call religions appear nearly everywhere and consistently from early human history to the present.

As my research and writing have grappled with what seems so extraordinary, so laughable, I began to find that, to me, the most interesting biological distinctions of human beings, articulated by both natural scientists and perhaps more insightfully by a few philosophers, involve our capacity to hold together things that are identical that we know all along that they are not. For example, in human natural language a word is *both what it names and it is not what it names*; you cannot pet the word dog. Yet, it is this impossible copresence—the *is* that also *is not*—that makes language so powerful. Metaphor, which is at the core of language and learning might be defined as *understanding something in terms of something else which we know it is not*. We may say “she defeated him with that argument” invoking the metaphor “argument is war,” yet we know that a verbal argument is not actually a war, there are no physical guns or arrows, no physical harm involved. Human play is to act as if something is what we know it is not, whether it is child's imaginary play or actors playing roles in a theater. In all these cases the distinctive human capacity to hold things to be the same while knowing that they are not. Furthermore, we see this metastability, the *is* that is at once *is not*, not as something requiring rectification but rather embraced as the very source of importance and value and power. As I have studied biology, including neurology and physiology, I began to appreciate that we function at a biological level based on these same principles and in such a way as to enable human beings to distinguish themselves from other animals by the centrality of this copresence and the constant exercise of the power that comes from it. I have focused, when focus and summary have been valuable, on the human evolution and consequent effects of thumbs, upright posture, and big brains as essential to the biology that gives birth to this copresence.

The study of religions then for me, approached in a way to appreciate these distinctive qualities of being human, might be seen as finding their forte in the invention of impossibles, in the purposeful construction of artifacts, practices, and behaviors that explore and take advantage of the vast potential of copresence. Myths, rituals, beliefs, theologies, ideologies all are distinguished by the obviousness of being impossibles. Myths are distinguished as stories we say are true, even the basis of truth itself, yet we know they are fanciful stories of impossible characters and worlds taking place in inaccessible times. Rituals are actions and behaviors heavily symbolic, which means that we see them not as just what we see but as indicating more and other. Typically, rituals promise what we know all along won't be delivered, yet they continue to be cherished. The vagueness or openness of ritual symbols is at the core of their capacity to be widely applied to life. It has not been my intent to denigrate religions, although

I know that at least some religious folks and scholars are enraged by my work. I have endeavored to see religion, as a common human enterprise, as among the most interesting and complex and creative examples and illustrations of what distinguishes human beings.

My study of the many specific religions in diverse cultures and across history has always been paired with my development of a general theory of religion, and also ritual and myth. Invariably, and increasingly explicit across my career, I have framed my religion studies as serving my interest in being human. My studies and the general theories they include constitute my efforts to contribute to the appreciation of what to me has always been my gob smacking amazement of our own human distinctiveness.

At this stage in my life I have more questions than answers, yet they are powerful energizing questions. In my most recent writings I include personal reflections and articulate my various misgivings. I ask basic questions. Should I have chosen the career I did? Why did I do so when I was so ill prepared and likely simply not intellectually smart enough? Why should there even be the field that I chose to focus on for more than half a century? Perhaps, as I imagine it, it doesn't actually exist. What does my professional life amount to beyond the writing of a shelf full of books that few will ever read? Have I done anything of value to anyone or anything?

I would make different choices given the chance. I believe there are valued alternatives to the path I chose. Alternatives more enjoyable, more suited to me (or at least to who I have become). Alternatives contributing more directly to humanity, more accessible to others, more creative, with more potential to use my talents for the good and the beautiful. Yet, my work has always been, and still is, driven by passion and has always had a sense of urgency about its importance. Yet, the end is there.

Biology and Two Fundamental Questions

The novel coronavirus is reshaping the world and changing human culture on a daily basis as I write these words in the summer of 2020. Without federal leadership the USA is suffering tens of thousands of new cases every day and deaths in this country are over 125,000. I hesitate to even write down these numbers because this pandemic has unfolded in only four or five months and who could even guess what will be the situation, the number of deaths, by the end of the year. Yet, here I want to note that, while the response to the virus has been highly politicized, it is quite clear that the virus does not, as so many commentators are describing the effect, recognize political party, race, ethnicity, state or national boundaries. This indiscriminateness doesn't mean that the

impact has been the same across all these distinctions, but this is due to systemic prejudice toward people of color, the poor, and the elderly and infirm. My point here is that this pandemic reminds us of our common biology. We are all human. As humans we are all vulnerable to this virus. We are all biological kin when it comes to the pandemic.

Throughout my academic career studying religion and culture, common concerns for me have been comparison and categorization. Foundational to humanities studies, which should include the arts and social sciences and even some of the natural sciences, is the question “what is human?” In the early days of my studies of religion we often spouted the Latin phrase *homo religiosus*, man (or human) the religious. It is a subset of the humanities issue “what is human?” answered by an assumption that religion is a distinction of humans. This proclamation was, as I’ve long reflected on it, much more a religious declaration of belief than it was the result of any sort of academic inquiry. It is an academic-sounding truth statement that doubtless is located in Christian cosmogony (understandings of cosmic creation) that sees god as world creator and the father of humankind. The cosmological and religious grounding of this inquiry tends to overwhelm what should be the larger and far more interesting issue of how religion arises and becomes possible in the context of the history of humankind, a history much longer than is the history of religions. The difference can be stated starkly. A religious approach to the question “What is human?” is based on the presumption that humans succeeded from godly creation, thus religion/god precedes human existence. The secular approach—based in physics, biology, evolution—recognizes that the universe, the earth, life, and even the human species preceded religion. Religion is a human invention. If we are actually interested in “what is human?” a religiously based study of religion excludes most of what is interesting, at least to me. In such a religious approach there is no room for questions of how human beings have become biologically capable, a distinction among animate organisms, of inventing gods and myths and rituals and beliefs, all of these makings characterized in a sober sense as being utterly fanciful and, to a rational being, unbelievable. Yet, surely, if we are interested in what distinguishes us as human beings these questions, that are excluded by religious studies, are of primary interest. These are the concerns I’ve always been interested in and that have shaped my ongoing research.

Where the study of religion has included science, it has either opposed religion to science in an endlessly unsatisfactory kind of conversation that quickly, to me, becomes dreary, other than as a historical account. Where biology has played any role in the study of religion, it has occurred in oddly narrow, in my view, studies such as cognitive science seeking a highly reductionistic explanation of religion. This is the effort to understand something about religion by finding some distinction in human neurology that compels humans to be

religious. An extreme example is to explain the existence of god by locating a “god spot” in the actual tissue of the brain or to search for a “god gene” in our DNA. Even though this CSR (cognitive science of religion) approach often uses data-based studies and sometimes even things like fMRIs, to me it remains more pseudoscientific and it rarely reveals anything of interest related to the broader questions “what is religion?” and “what is human?” Still most students of religion in the last quarter century have said “to hell with all this” and have restricted their studies to some specific subject area where a small group of specialists discuss intricate issues of language and history without any regard for relating their findings to these larger issues. Few remain interested in these fundamental humanities questions, yet I am interested and think these questions fundamental, indeed essential, to any justifiable future for an academic study of religion, especially one conducted in a secular context. While some argue that such questions are inevitably essentializing or reductionistic, I see them, as did Jonathan Smith, as issues of genera and species. The field has lost interest in genera as it has been overwhelmed by the description and analysis of species. Yet, as Jonathan noted this approach has shown no path where these studies limited to species (religions) contribute to an understanding of genera (religion).

In the largest frame, our naïve notion of science holds that in the entire history of the universe, including the tiny paragraph on humans, can be told as a story of physical laws. This view, that which distinguishes the natural sciences, is inseparable from a mechanistic deterministic lawful universe and it is extraordinarily difficult, given the enormous timespace frame of the history of existence, to carve out some strange exception to the determinism of physics for an odd little group of bipedal creatures. Yet, as humans, this is our mandate. Throughout my career I have been constantly frustrated by all this religiously influenced academic mess and I have wanted to develop an understanding of these two questions based on biology, although not in a way to reduce religion to some simplistic biological need or function. The development of my career has given increasing importance to my long and intimate experience of moving bodies and my intellectual attention has increasingly shifted to moving bodies, their biology and philosophy. I appreciate that the recognition forced on us today by the novel coronavirus that we are all biological kin is the same basis on which humanities and religious studies must be based. We are, as Edmund Husserl wrote, animate organisms. That is, we are all biological beings capable of moving ourselves. This understanding of our humanness frames us first as animals. Then, as we look at the evolutionary developments that led to what is biologically distinctive of *homo sapiens*, we find, in broad terms—that is, in the terms that characterize our species—the development of opposing thumbs that enable holding and grasping, upright posture that shifts attention to the face and the upper anterior region, as well as bipedal motility and feet with the capacity to

pirouette (dance), and to the development of large brains that thrive on nonlinearity (the accidental and random) and metastability (the capacity to hold together as the same two things that we know are not the same) and to be self-aware and self-reflective. Indeed, our capacity to see ourselves as objects is essential to these writing about myself as *momento mori*.

These general biological distinctions then, as I show in my latest publications, have deep and profound philosophical implications that, to me, totally reshape our approach to these two fundamental questions. My 2020 book *The Proper Study of Religion* devotes an extended chapter, the last one, to presenting an academic study of religion proper to a secular environment based on self-moving and its implications.

To Risk Meaning Nothing is to Start to Play

Among the challenges in my life is the continuity—better, the identity—of the issues and concerns and ideas and passions of my academic work with the total fabric of my life. In the most basic sense this task has never been an issue because my academic efforts have always been driven by my passions. Passion is something felt, yet thought-shaping. The academic pursuit of one's passions is to transduce feelings, which are always personal, into reason and technique, into hypotheses and argument, into data and words. Yet, there is a complementary return arc in which the formal sometimes stilted, indeed even mind-numbing, products of one's academic work can also be somehow, maybe as inspiration, transduced back into feelings, a translation of the public into the deeply personal. In the best practice this double-arc process becomes a kind of oscillation that plays like music, like the reverberation of sound. I'd like to think that one of the few things that I might embrace about getting older is that my decades of rehearsal and practice have made this playing nearly constant, born in the very tissues that comprise my moving body.

It was many decades ago that I became interested in masking. I suppose it was because of my personal experience of being in the presence of masked Navajo and Hopi dancers. I drafted a manuscript that I suppose I still have in a file somewhere called "Dancing the Faces of the Gods." The focus of my passion as related to masks and masking has been the conundrum and the magic of the double-face. The very term "mask" indicates the presence of two faces, the natural face of the masker and the artificial face that is mask. Masking then demands that two things are also one thing while always retaining their distinction. Mobiotic. The masker and the mask are always seen, even by observers, as two things—else it would be disguise, not mask—but the effect of masking is the appearance of the one.

In the midst of my early studies of masking I began to think of masking in terms of play, as the interplay of the mask and the masker, the willing acceptance and delight we have in seeing this magical conundrum of one thing being another that we full well know that it is not. We know that this play has something to do with what is most distinctive and characteristic of being human. Play is among the earliest words kids learn and most use it frequently. They easily engage in the play of a folded paper being an airplane or a spoon full of peas being a choo-choo train. How utterly remarkable it is that what is acquired without effort as obvious to the youngest kid, is precisely the same thing that has confounded philosophers for ages. Cutting to the present, I can say that there is a constant through line from that early study of masking that shifted into the ever-expansive world of play to my most current work on self-moving and vitality.

The core idea I explore throughout my latest book, *The Proper Study of Religion*—a book that evaluates and appreciates much of the work of my mentor Jonathan Z. Smith—is expressed in the term “the necessary double-face.” I trace this term to Smith’s doctoral research on James George Frazer’s classic dozen volume work *The Golden Bough*. One common historical root of this idea of the double-face is the ubiquitous Greek theater figures of sock and bushkin, often throughout the history of theater conjoined in the double masks we commonly identify as comedy and tragedy. Through long and tedious analysis of Frazer’s vast work, Smith could find no persistent thesis or organizing principles, finally discerning that at the root of it all was Frazer’s concern—engaged for quarter of a century with five thousand cited sources and a hundred thousand cultural examples—with his own death. The *Golden Bough* was his *momento mori*. On this matter Jonathan wrote, “Striving to conquer death by means of death, man asserts the reality of death, its omnipresence and omnipotence, all the more strongly. It is tragic, it is comic, it is absurd. Frazer . . . adopts the necessary double-face.”

It is shocking to me that I’m only now realizing that this early interest in play has been my obsession and passion manifesting in so many forms: masking, dancing, art, ritual, metaphor, language, symbolism, human biology, moving, and on and on. It would be fascinating now for me to systematically consider the chronology of my work so as to trace this evolving passion. As I reflect on this history I recall moments while teaching, that is, in the very act of my lecturing, when what I was saying exploded anew for me showing me the expansive implications of play.

At this point, I must recognize that this odd twoness that is also oneness, this play, has also been the dynamic strategy of my life, if not always something about which I was fully aware. I have often been aware of oppositions in my life that seem so incompatible, yet have always somehow been understood as necessary partners. I have been an academic and I dearly love thinking and reading and

writing and constructing ideas and hypotheses and arguments all so very abstract in being made of words. I have been a physically active person and I love to dance and to move and in times past to bike and hike. I continue to do dance workouts. In popular culture these seeming polar opposites are often termed “mind” and “body,” but I’ve rejected this bifurcation as anything fundamental, as Descartes considered it, preferring to see that these terms are but part of the twoness of my oneness. We aren’t fundamentally mind and body with the later need to reconcile or join them. We are a unity that is also a multiplicity and it is being both at once without need for reconciliation that is the source of our distinctiveness and our power. It is in the interplay of these modes of moving and living that I am who I am. I live the double-face and necessarily so. We all do since it is distinctive of being human to live the double-face of play, yet I do so perhaps somewhat more intentionally and self-aware as the result of decades of intense personal and intellectual self-reflection conjoined with a life attentive to the effects of self-moving.

Much of my recent research has been an exploration of how the evolved human biology has physiologically and neurologically equipped us to not only tolerate the oneness of oppositions, but to thrive on it. Something as taken for granted as an opposing thumb allows us not only to grasp things—tools, art brushes, another’s hand, pencils, and to text on mobile phones—it also allows us to grasp the airy nothingness of ideas, immaterial and abstract by nature. Indeed, the abstract concept “to grasp” could never have come about, I suggest, had thumbs not evolved. Just fathom the evolutionary track that led from the grasping of a spear shaft to the grasping of quantum mechanics. The thumb opposes the finger, yet the thumb and finger are of the hand.

I suppose it is natural in a practical and production-oriented world to ask, especially as I am at this stage of my life, “so what the hell does it all mean?” “What is gained by all this play?” “Isn’t play just a frivolous pass time, a game, kid’s stuff?”

Yet, as Friedrich Schiller discussed in the late 18th century along with so many others all the way to the recent post-modernist writer Jacques Derrida, play is beauty, play is self-moving, play is skill, play is art and music, play is vitality, play marks human life. Still we may want to ask, “What does it mean?” For some time, I’ve rejected the value of asking the question of meaning or of thinking that things, even our lives, must somehow have meaning in order that they deserve to exist. Meaning, even seeking meaning, halts, prefers death and stillness to life and moving. I’ve long loved Derrida’s statement, “To risk meaning nothing is to start to play.” I recently found an old notebook of mine dated 1993 in which I outlined a book project titled “To Risk Meaning Nothing.” It was to be a book on play. I hope this current book is as well, yet in a rather different and less direct way. I’ve recently developed discussions of the interplay of coherence and

incoherence as being much preferred by me to the halting statements of meaning that almost always seem to me to be dishonest and shortsighted and halting. I think we recognize this preference for play to meaning in our embrace of that wonderful photograph of Albert Einstein with his tongue sticking out.

Hopi Initiation: Calculus of Impossibles

“Take two!” Maybe it’s “take three” or four! Seems all these writings on my persistent preoccupations converge. Doing fieldwork, a term I actually hate, in Navajo country in 1973, I spent a few days at Hopi where I first experienced kachina dancing. I found these spectacular dance rituals riveting. The gorgeous costumes and masks enthralled. The sonorous singing voices and accompanying rattles mesmerized. The clown performances in between kachina dance sets were as frightening as they were entertaining. I use the language of performance fully aware that the theatrical implications may misrepresent, in some sense, these ritual pageants as understood by the Hopi, yet this perspective hints of profound depths. For the Hopi the kachinas dwell half the year in a world beneath this earth surface world of ordinary Hopi life. They make their appearance with the winter solstice and as hundreds of distinct kachinas remain physically present to dance and engage in ritual until early August when they return home. In the terms used to satisfy the non-Hopi they are sometimes referred to as spirits or gods.

Hopi culture includes the organization of religious societies whose membership is comprised of adult men. Each has its own secret knowledge and practices, yet the whole organization interlocks these societies to encompass the fullness of Hopi identity. Among the work of these societies is the learning of kachina lore and songs and dances. They maintain costumes and masks. They meet frequently in kivas, partially underground ritual structures, to learn and rehearse songs and dances and to conduct business.

Early in my studies of Native Americans I was interested in the Hopi rituals of initiation. Hopis keep young kids from seeing or knowing that these kachinas who are so familiar and physically present through half the year are costumed and masked performances by their male relatives. The culminating act of initiation is to show this secret to the kids, around ages eight to ten or so. The newly initiated feel hurt and angry as a result of this disenchantment. I published a couple of articles early in my career that explored the power and significance of this kind of seemingly cruel initiation.

Now I recognize that this experience was an important one among those that introduced me to a dynamic, an issue, a situation, that has occupied me almost constantly for nearly half a century. To state it directly if somewhat abstractly, “How do we understand something that *is* what we know all along it *is not*? How

do we realize that it is precisely this impossible math that is at the heart of the power of almost everything distinctively human? How do we explore the energetics of this calculus of impossibles?" I have dealt with these questions under many names: play, copresence, metastability, chiasm, and others. I have explored them in many forms: metaphor, ritual, art, fiction, language, biology, philosophy, and others. After 50 years of reflection and inquiry, I believe that these questions, as introduced early in the study of Hopi initiation, are at the heart of what distinguishes us as human beings. Even asking these questions engages our most distinctive human capacities. This fundamental capability is essential to and operative in all things distinctively human from our biology to our most audacious inventions such as religions and gods.

How to Do or Think Something New

"How can anyone do something new?" Put a bit differently, "How might I make or even think something new?" Over the decades I have returned again and again like a pig to a trough to feed on Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophical writings on abduction, hypothetic inference, and play, all more or less synonymous. These were his preoccupations engaged persistently through his many hundreds of thousands of words over a lifetime of writing. In my reading, philosophers of science tend to consign the moment of inspiration that gives rise to the new idea or the new hypothesis to something akin to a mystical experience (odd for scientists). To understand inspiration of the new, Peirce gravitated toward our general sense or feeling that things should somehow cohere, fit, make sense. Seems he considered this sort of feeling something natural to human beings (*il lume naturale*). My research has located the sense of naturalness of fit with our common experience of smooth movement, as in walking or lifting a spoon full of pudding to our mouths. These smooth movements experientially set the standard by which we identify some of our feelings with coherence, with rightness. What initiates the iterative process that precipitates some possibility to comprehend the soothing feeling that things fit, is precisely the opposite, the feeling of incoherence. We must feel surprised or shocked by the presence of incoherence, jarred by what seems nonsense. A hypothesis then arises in the effort to posit a condition or situation or explanation that would relieve the feeling of incoherence. Aaah!

A bit obsessed on these issues of novelty and creativity, this persistent preoccupation has energized not only my intellectual life but also my physical and social life, especially in the areas of dancing and movement. There are a few things relevant to creativity I've come to appreciate. We must be willing to experience the discomfort of surprise, allowing ourselves to be misfits, and

appreciate it so much that we allow the nagging feeling to persist, at least long enough to make us feel the discomfort of incoherence. I suggest that the most creative people are those most patient with discomfort, incongruity, the ongoingness or energetics sparked and fueled by surprise. This feeling-based condition, often uncomfortable and persistently irritating, fuels movement and vitality. The acquisition of some promised solution, congruence, fit, explanation, even truth is never as vitalizing as is the sticky, faltering, frustrating, maddeningly iterative, ongoing process of seeking coherence. We need to embrace the nonlinear—that is, those things that are seemingly not predictable, those things that randomly appear, those things beyond our control—for doing so gives rise to the play of creativity and vitality. I've often criticized academia for its habit of insisting on conclusions, explanations, interpretations, answers and for its efforts to consider subjects only in a controlled environment—lab or book or academic objective paper—that has as a principal interest the elimination of nonlinearities. My sense is that education and intellection, as life itself, should be the ongoing struggle with the incomprehensible, the surprises, the incongruities, the inconsistencies, the nonlinearities.

Stories, novels, myths, tales, anecdotes, gossip are never interesting if they are accounts of characters for whom everything is always perfect and predictably so. Those who proclaim to know truth, to have discovered meaning, to be balanced and centered, are not likely to be creative or even vital, certainly not fun. To me these folks are the ones not to be believed or trusted. The word “drama,” names both theater productions and the plot in story. Drama indicates an exciting, emotional, unexpected series of events and is synonymous with such strong words as catastrophe, calamity, emergency, disaster, and quandary to just start the list. We are attracted to, as we are also repelled by, those conditions that make us feel challenged, confounded, even threatened and such conditions always give rise to efforts towards resolution. It is the play of the possibility of coherence in the constant presence of incoherence that is vitalizing and creative, rather than the achievement of coherence, meaning, balance, answers.

Gestural Naturalization: The Core of Identity

I am a convert to gesture. When I was first teaching and writing about dancing I often read or heard the phrase “dance is gesture.” I had an immediate aversion to this reduction perhaps because I was opposed to the common view that dance is a universal language. My early thoughts on gesture were that it was either a substitute for verbal language, as in thumbing a ride or using fingers or fists to communicate an offensive message, or gesture was a system of finger and hand signs each standing for specific things, like flag semaphore or mudras in Indian

bharatanatyam dancing. Otherwise gesture was that flapping about of hands that occurs when someone is speaking and, at best I thought, it might communicate emphasis but little more.

I can't recall what precipitated my come-to-Jesus conversion when I saw the light that illuminated holy gesture, but I think important influences were my reading of Marcel Mauss' 1935 essay "Techniques of the Body" and perhaps also Carrie Noland's book *Agency and Embodiment* (2005). By the time I wrote *Dancing Culture Religion* (2012) the first chapter was titled "Moving" and the second "Gesturing," in which I laid out something of a rich theory of gesture that has since only grown in complexity and led me to further insight. I'm just finishing a book manuscript on vitality as inseparable from moving and I'm considering a book-length treatment of gesture, which I now pair with posture and prosthesis (indicating merely any extension beyond the physical body) to form a tripartite nexus.

I increasingly think living, enacting our individual and cultural identities, can be appreciated as the practice of acquired skill. Indeed, I think gender, age, social group, and so much more are aspects of skills that we begin to acquire, practice, and become from the instant we are born, perhaps even before. Gesture comprises patterns of movement, even micro-movement, that are repeated again and again. They take shape in the way we walk and sit and stand and speak and smile and respond. These movements are a reaching out both to engage the world, as expression or action, but also as a way of taking in the world, as in grasping and encountering and inquiring and exploring. From infancy gesture is rather like groping, the penchant to touch and grab what's in our reach. Notably infants want to put anything grasped in their mouth, seemingly the foreshadowing of the perceptual functions of gesture as practiced throughout life. Gesture has this double-arc that comprises our engagement with the world, minimally in the constant shaping of both self and other (environment). I can show that gesture is at the heart of the acquisition and significance of all concepts, which we tend to think, incorrectly I believe, are principally abstract and formally learned.

What I refer to as "gestural naturalization" is simply that bodied sense of skill. When we learn a sport or dance or to play music we often are at first overwhelmed by the fundamental elements, by the rigors of technique. Yet as we acquire skill through repetition, usually supervised by a critical eye, we begin to shift from mechanically performing technique to exercising the skill. Rather than counting steps and focusing on so many body positions at once, we dance. When the techniques that constitute dancing become gesturally naturalized, mastered as skill, we dance. I think the same process encompasses all things out of which we construct and realize our personal identities. We use the skills of identity to be who we be.

I have long been confounded that there often are diametrically opposed understandings of what seems to be the facts of the world. Currently we live in a world seemingly not simply divided but more like bifurcated into different realities that scarcely intersect if at all. What my perspective on gesture helps me understand is that what appears to me as just-so, that is what is experienced by me as obviously real, has been deeply constructed and powerfully shaped by a long history of the practice of the gestures. Gestures may include constantly repeated statements that claim truth and the foundations of the world that seems just-so. Yet, it is perfectly plausible that others have a lifetime of practicing gestures that provide the basis for an experience of an entirely different just-so reality.

We see vivid displays of the techniques of gestural naturalization at work in contemporary national politics. The president repeats what fact checkers call lies endlessly and often repeating the exact words and phrases. Generally, in politics these short highly repeated statements are called slogans or sound bites. They may also function as creators of a gesturally naturalized reality even if not based on fact. They may be linked with small physical items—red MAGA hats or the defiant refusal to wear a face covering—that in their public repetition, particularly supported by the endless insistence on 24/7 Fox News, further the naturalization of these constructed gestures. They come to be experienced as just-so truth and reality. One reality sees the obviousness of hundreds of thousands of deaths due to COVID. One reality sees the inconvenience of the flu.

When I reflect on the multiple decades in which I went from a largely movement-discouraging academic and personal lifestyle to one that emphasized an abundance of active and skilled movement, I believe that it took repetitions practiced over this long period to replace the gestural underpinnings of my identity with new quite different gestures that eventually became skills for me to enact and experience as a rather different identity. The result is that I am a person who, in significant ways, walks, talks, thinks, perceives, and lives differently, in what might be considered a different reality, than I did decades ago. I have been remade through the powerful processes of gesture.

Story: Lies that Tell the Truth

In his novel *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), N. Scott Momaday wrote that a people can endure anything so long as it can be told as a story. He was, of course, referring to cultural trauma, yet almost anything is enhanced, remembered, and identified with by it becoming told as a story. My lecturing strategy was comprised of storytelling so far as I could make it. I wrote a book titled

Storytracking (1998) about Australian Aborigines and the settling of Central Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The title also indicated an academic method I developed that I argued had integrity and interest largely because it included all those involved—academics and their subjects—interacting in what is best presented as a creative story or set of intersecting stories.

One of my early books, *Mother Earth: An American Story* (1987), was a controversial book because, despite the broad understanding of the special character of narratives we call “story,” academics and the politically engaged academics, were unable to be engaged by story, preferring to see my work in colorless binaries.

When Shay and Leon, my grandkids, are around me they often say, “Bacca, tell us a story,” by which they usually want me to tell them about when I was a kid or when their mother was a kid. They love these stories. They retell them and ask me to repeat the ones they like best.

When Fatu spent a night a week with me, a period spanning a decade, we almost always read stories at bedtime. We also made up stories. One of the methods we used was for one of us to come up with five terms—say dog, car, sky, refrigerator, toothbrush—and the other had to invent a narrative that would weave into it all five items. When I was the storyteller I always tried to also include a character that was identified as a girl with curly hair which Fatu always recognized as herself to her great delight.

Almost never have I had a day when I didn’t spend some time reading what I’d generally think of as cheap or junk fiction. I love the narratives, the characters, the plots, the color even if all of it is totally predictable and even not always that well written. I had read probably half a dozen of Diana Gabaldon’s *The Outlander* series of fatty volumes when one day it suddenly dawned on me “well I’ll be damned, these are romance novels,” a genre of fiction I thought beneath my sophistication. Lordy. And I cried through the intimate scenes saying “I want a relationship like that!”

I once agreed to revise my *Native American Religions: An Introduction* only so that I could include my own secret experiment with storytelling. Having centered important parts of my study of Native Americans on stories—tales and myths—I wanted to conclude the work with a short section that included my own stories. I wanted to provoke the discussion of story expressed in the phrase “the lies that tell the truth.” I wanted to tell stories about myself that were engaging but that would raise the question of truth and storytelling. I delight in our common use of the word “story” to indicate biography, lie, fiction, entertainment, tale and that we often don’t distinguish, maybe we even can’t, which of these uses we intend. Despite *Native American Religions* being published so many years ago, and it is still used in college classrooms, I have never received a single inquiry about that

section of the book. I haven't a clue why my stories were not provocative (maybe they were), yet the lack of response certainly has not deterred me from my interest in story that approaches obsession.

In my recent work my attention has taken the form of what I often call "copresence." This is captured in the description of fiction as "lies that tell the truth." Fiction, as story, engages us because we know both that it is a lie—that is, it is made up, concocted, invented, yet not to trick people by insisting it is fact and truth and reality (such would be what is ubiquitously called "fake")—and it communicates truth often as no other genre can. By identifying writing as of the genre, fiction, we acknowledge this remarkable copresence of lie and truth as the distinction of the genre and as the source of its power. Publishers distinguish between "fiction" and "non-fiction." Isn't it interesting that they don't use the terms "fact" and "made up lies"? But we all know that the best of fiction is understood as those stories that catch and communicate the truth as nothing else can. These stories become part of our personal stories and we cherish them as resources that inspire us as we live our complex lives.

I think I've been attracted to Native Americans and Australian Aborigines and so many other cultures because they have stories that they live by and through, combining the exigencies of their daily lives with the wisdom of the stories that comprise their personal and cultural identities. These cultures, but in some ways also all cultures, take shape and gain identity through the specific interplay of their stories and the practical lives lived.

In his book *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts* (1993) Milan Kundera wrote that the moral position of the novel, as a literary genre, is to take no moral position. Novels, at least those that Kundera thinks should be considered as worthy of the genre, do not preach or advocate for a moral position. They are not moral tales. Rather the novel should present situations in which the characters, with whom the readers identify, find themselves in situations where they must make moral choices, yet in situations where there is no clear and obvious choice. The worthy novel, for Kundera, refuses to resolve these situations. In this way, novelists construct lies that tell truths. They capture the complexities and dilemmas that must be engaged in living life where tough choices must be made with hard consequences and risks whatever the choice. What Kundera lifts up is that the questions, the conundrums, the dilemmas, the hard situations, all call forth what most importantly engages the human situation. How one struggles with such questions and situations is the measure of a person, perhaps much more than the choices ultimately made.

I have, on occasion, suggested that scholarship should focus on crafting engaging narratives that in their fiction and qualification they are most effective in communicating the insights and truths gained by decades of academic work. Academics, even those who are interested in story and narrative, have not been

much interested in this suggestion. My guess is that they are invested in the idea that academic authority is based on objective reasoned conclusive arguments presented authoritatively to colleagues and students. I'd contend that this idea of authority may be the greatest fiction of all, yet not one paired with, copresent with, any truth.

A principal distinction between novelists and academics is the sovereignty of facts in academic tales. Academic works are about the real world and about real people, existing independently of the scholar. But it is a misunderstanding to conclude that an academic is limited to simply objective statements of fact. The renowned filmmaker Werner Herzog is fond of quoting the Nobel Laureate novelist André Gide as writing, "I modify facts in such a way that they resemble truth more than reality." Rephrasing this adage as appropriate to academics, one might say, "I contextualize and engage bodies of facts in such a way that they might tell stories supporting a reader's own search for insight and engagement."

This set of stories tracking my life, presented in several styles, is also likely comprised of lies in some sense. They are contemporary constructions, re-imaginings and new tellings, of my memories shaped by my current feelings and wishes, my felt pains and my need to reckon and occasionally see some glimmers of joy. These stories are concoctions using the memory of what seem factual as constituents in narratives whose intention is to convey truth or at least to provoke sober reflection. When my mother was in her last years, she'd often tell a story about her past. One day upon telling a story she paused and then commented, "Well, I don't know if this is exactly how it was, but I'm the only one left, so who can argue with me?" and she laughed with great delight. Precisely.

Story is like life, in some sense you know how it's all going to turn out in the end, yet you never know what unexpected things will happen along the way.

Proprioception: To Perceive Ourselves

For a time, I dated a woman named Julie who was a massage therapist. We shared interests in physical exercise and fitness and health, yet she was not by her own description a person that had much curiosity. She often grew weary of my endless inquiries about everything. My interest in physiology led me to query her frequently about how the body works. In response to one of my badgerings, Julie used the term "proprioceptor." It likely had to do with her treatment of a client who had a sprained ankle. She described her treatment as resetting proprioceptors. I was unfamiliar with the term and immediately asked many more questions about it. She had pragmatic information geared to massage therapy. I needed more.

The term literally means “own reception” and refers to the kinesthetic ability of the body to locate itself, its parts, in space especially while moving. The most common descriptions are banal ones indicating that proprioceptors allow us to walk in the dark or to move body parts with some precision that we cannot see. From my first awareness, the term proprioception screamed to me of an outsized importance even with likely extensive philosophical implications. I began fuller inquiry by carefully studying the physiology of proprioceptors that exist in several types located in muscles and ligaments that work in coordination with one another. Quickly I realized, with no small amount of amazement, that proprioceptors are where the neurological system and the skeletomuscular systems not only interface, but, more importantly, proprioceptors might be considered to belong to either system. My near instant insight was that proprioceptors, which occurs by the billions in the body, are the physical counter evidence to Descartes mind body separation. Proprioceptors are inseparable from the dynamics of moving (in process) rather than movement (the course accounted after moving). They are what provide the physiological grounding for feeling movement as it is occurring which we usually call kinesthesia. They are engaged in the control and awareness of all of the dynamics of moving as articulated by, for example, Rudolf von Laban. Conjoined with and inseparable from touch, proprioceptors are fundamental to perception. Extending the implications, inspired by Renaud Barbaras’s insight that all perception is based in self-movement, proprioceptors are fundamental to all perception, are active in all sensory activity.

In one sudden insight I had the biological basis for a philosophical position that offered a primacy to the animate organism, complete and whole in its moving/living, with only secondary value to any division of the organism into the neurological system and the skeletomuscular system, or, in popular terms, into mind and body. Appreciating proprioception, there is, philosophically, no need to solve the “mind body problem” as it is so commonly posed. Proprioceptors are, as I sometimes put it, the posterchildren of the integrated organism whose life and whose connection with the ambient world are inseparable from its moving and its capacity to move itself and, especially in humans, its awareness of where its various parts are as it moves about.

I found but a few philosophers who even mentioned proprioceptors and those that did seemed not to have done the research on the physiological architecture and how the various types of proprioceptors work together to enable and control and sense moving *as it is in process*. I know of no religion scholar who has used the word. Over the following decade up to the present, proprioceptors have played a central and outsized role in most of my research and writing. I have much more to do. The implications grow with my increase in knowledge and my continuing exploration of the vast implications.

In terms of my persistent preoccupations, proprioceptors have played an essential role in so many of them. The vast implications of proprioception came to me as surprise, that is, as nonlinear, as accidental, as unexpected and unanticipated. These qualities of the experience in discovering proprioception are the very ones I've argued motivate creativity and give rise to new hypotheses and insight. Proprioceptors were recognized as neurology and muscular, at once separate and distinct systems, yet copresent and inseparable. Proprioceptors are the biology of the two that are also the one, the qualities of metastability that I have long explored as central to vitality. Proprioceptors are biological and exist in all animate beings with nervous and skeletomuscular systems, yet in human beings they are part of our self-awareness (or can be), indeed, they may be understood as inseparable from our senses of touching and moving, our awareness of self and other. Proprioceptors are central to understanding self-moving, movement, and appreciating proprioception extends and deepens my understanding of dancing and skilled bodily movement.

One of the most fascinating parts of life, to me, is the possibility—no, this needs to be put more strongly as the probability—that some seeming accidental or incidental or marginal or unimportant word or comment or observation might occur at any moment during one's life and totally upend everything. Perhaps this jarring disruption is not always a happy one, yet often it is transformational. Proprioception, incidentally encountered, is a sterling example of this creative process in my life.

Making and Tomorrow's Eve

Without doubt the easiest, as well as the hardest, book I've ever written was *Religion and Technology into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve* (2018). I wanted to title it simply *Into the Future*, followed by a long subtitle that I could never quite remember, but the editors at the press wanted a more descriptive title. Don't know why it made any difference since I don't have much evidence that many are reading it. But I think in many ways it equals my best work and compares well with my latest distinctly different book, *The Proper Study of Religion*.

This book was the easiest to write because I started with just this persistent background desire to teach a general education course on futurist ideas related loosely to religion focusing on the widely popular figures of cyborgs, robots, androids, AIs, and notions like singularity that have been posed as the breakover point when machines become independent and more intelligent than humans. I wanted to rely heavily on film, literature, folklore, and television as the sources of core examples for the consideration of a range of futurist concerns. I was sure that these popular examples would be accessible to most folks with no

specialized knowledge. A developing theme throughout the course would be evolving ideas that relate religion and also the study of religion to technology. I got assigned to teach the one freshman level class the department offered called Religious Dimensions of Human Experience. Years earlier I taught this course many times on various topics. The easy part was that once I knew I was going to teach the course I sat down one day and spent a couple hours thinking of the examples I wanted to include, the focus or insight I wanted for each example, and how these topics might be arranged so as to build on one another throughout the course. The class met twice a week for 75 minutes and, given 14 weeks or so accounting for holidays and exams, I figured I'd need a couple dozen lectures. By the end of a couple hours I had a list of topics, many with clever titles, with a few ideas about what each lecture should include and how it might be organized.

Then came the hard part. I have every confidence that, with my many decades of experience, I could have simply sketched lecture outlines supported by some video clips and references to select readings and, with no other preparation, taught a perfectly fine course. However, in the final few years of my teaching I chose to write all my lectures and edit them to be near finished pieces of writing. I did not read these written lectures in class. I'd just make a few marginal notes on the manuscript to guide the lectures. I started writing the lectures for the Religion and Technology course in July hoping to get the first half dozen or so done before the fall semester started the fourth week in August. In writing these lectures I began to appreciate the potential for each one to be developed as a chapter in a book, a realization that upped the extent to which I wanted both to thoroughly research the background for each one and also to write them as carefully and as fully developed as possible. Finishing several of these lectures, I committed myself to these becoming a book. By the end of the fall semester I had written 25 or so chapters all fairly clean and finished. I had in mind several other topics that I just didn't have time for in the course that would be important for a book. They could be written after the course concluded.

Through much of the term I wrote two of these pieces a week. As it turned out, this would be one of the last courses I taught before retiring and I loved every minute of it. The constant regimen of research and writing, as needed to produce two lectures a week, was intense and exhausting, yet I maintained it to the end. I think the course not only was entertaining and engaging for students, but it also challenged them to think about all kinds of things quite differently. I especially liked challenging the students with the projections of a future world that would be theirs. That semester I was also teaching for the first time in decades the required graduate student theory and method course. My reading and lecture preparation for that course was extensive and I had those students writing weekly papers that I read and evaluated.

That semester ended December tenth followed by papers to grade and course administrative stuff to finish. During a step aerobics class on December 18 I had my first heart attack. I don't think the heart attack was caused by the exhaustion of the research, teaching, and writing, but more from that combined with major stress caused by the damned CU faculty and administration in my department that clearly wanted to get me to retire. They were doing everything they could to marginalize and harass me. I just found the psychological impact of being treated that way after having been tenured full professor at CU for nearly 35 years to be deeply disappointing and painful.

Yet, here was this wonderful new book. A theme that surprised me that arose quite early in my research and writing process was captured by the term "making." Technology is about making, human making, and I found that these imaginings of humans as being capable of making, by means of technology rather than biology, a sentient being had a long history dating to antiquity with, for example, Pygmalion and Galatea. I had thought of technology and making as more of a contemporary futurist theme, yet I soon realized that it had been a constant across history because it had to do with the greatest imaginable achievement of technological making, the making of a sentient being. I also noticed that persistently across all of these examples of making a sentient being was the notion that for a human to achieve this feat would make him (invariably male) equivalent to a god (also invariably male). It is gods who, throughout human history, make sentient beings, so, should a human use technology to accomplish this making, he would surely be considered a god, or minimally, godlike. Thus, even in the most secular of examples, this element of religion invariably occurred. What excited me so much is that this issue centered on *making* has been for millennia a way of taking measure of what it means to be human, but it also pushes to the boundary the seemingly radical distinction of humans and gods.

The other theme that arose through this book, that I think is so exciting and hope that one day others will actually notice and consider it, is a new idea about the future I came to develop under the name "Tomorrow's Eve." What I noticed is that throughout this long history of these makings of sentient beings, the makers were all men and almost all of the sentient beings made were women and even more interesting they were sexy attractive women. The very reason for these male makings was often to have a sexy beautiful companion, also a controllable one. The surprise for me is that, rather than what might be anticipated as this gendered imbalance in making reflecting misogynistic patriarchal male domination of women, the female sentient beings often hold an advantage over their male makers. Though made to be controlled, it is the female made beings that in many of the examples assert power and agency, even over their makers. They sometimes even kill their maker—Nietzsche's murder of god is relevant—

and thus assert the fullest measure of free will. I constructed a figure—male maker that I am—that I called “Tomorrow’s Eve,” inspired by the English title of a quite strange late nineteenth century French novel, as a composite figure drawing on all the examples I was studying. The distinction of Tomorrow’s Eve is, as I discovered, that she escapes her design limitations to manifest the model and guide to the future. She is not the good or perfect being her maker imagined, but one whose future remains open and undetermined as shown by her often-violent exercise of radical free will. She surpasses her male godlike makers, who by virtue of being makers were also controllers, and she achieves and introduces the terrifying qualities of freedom.

Making Photos

As a kid I saved up my money so I could buy a little photo developing and printing kit. It had a little plastic developing tank with a reel inside. I had to go into a dark closet and by feel alone take a roll of exposed film from my little brownie Kodak camera and wind the film strip onto the reel. The lid to the tank was designed to prevent light from entering while allowing liquids to be poured into the tank and later drained. I had packets of chemicals to develop the film. Then the film could be taken from the tank and hung up to dry. The printing came next. I had a tiny little metal box with a glass top covered by a rubber flap. It had little red and white light bulbs inside. Secured in a dark room—the bathroom with coverings on the window—the printing process involved placing a frame of negative film onto the glass of the light box and covering it with a piece of photo paper and then closing the flap. I could see what I was doing by the red light illumination. The paper was exposed by my flipping a switch to turn on the white light, then counting the exposure time. The exposed print paper was then put through a sequence of small chemical solution trays to develop and fix the images on the paper. Then I hung the wet prints to dry. Once dry I had a photo print.

I loved doing this and offered to develop and print pictures for other people. Seems I might have had a taker or two. The down side was that these were contact prints so they were the same size as the film negative. My pictures were about an inch and a half square. Grainy tiny black and white images. Yet, to me it was magical, a reliving of Louis Daguerre’s experience two centuries earlier. Light turned into still image through multiple stages of chemical transformations. I don’t think I’ve ever gotten used to the seeming impossibility of this process of transformation.

Finding these tiny contact prints rather ... well ... tiny, I learned that the contact box could be replaced by an enlarger that allowed one to project light

through the negative and, by means of a lens, focus an enlarged image onto photo paper placed at a distance on the bed of the enlarger. I desperately wanted an enlarger and requested one for Christmas. I wish I could remember how old I was at this time. A couple weeks before Christmas I noticed a large wrapped present with my name on it under the Christmas tree. It just had to be an enlarger and I was so excited. Every day I'd examine the package imagining all the fun I'd have making enlarged photos.

My family, following maybe a German tradition, opened presents on Christmas Eve. We had as I remember a special meal on that evening and then my mom would always tease me by saying that she had to clear the table and wash the dishes before we could open presents. I was always so excited. That year was going to be the most special of all. When it was finally my turn to open my big present, I ripped into it and opened the box to discover a desk lamp, one of those with a base and a flexible neck so the light hood could be adjusted. I was crushed, yet did my best to hide my total disappointment. I hope my parents didn't see my disappointment and I never told them about it. But that was a turning point for me I think. It was a disenchantment of Christmas and I think perhaps a whole lot more. As I now reflect on this experience it likely forged a sense that I should never again hope for special things, for nice surprises, because doing so would likely lead to bitter disappointment that would need to be at once suffered and hidden. This gift of a light for my little desk also confirmed that foremost I am to do my work, not to have frivolous fun. Should money be spent on oneself it should be for tools for work, not objects for enjoyment. I think I have lived much of my life replaying that experience, living its dark lessons.

I never did get an enlarger, yet it did not destroy my interest in making pictures. Over the years I've enjoyed it and especially in the last few years I have learned quite a bit about the infinite potential of making images. And for me, because I am me, there is a philosophical and even biological profundity that cannot be separated from photography.

The words "alchemy" and "transduction" and "magic" risk being overused in my writing, yet I am a fan of repetition for the sake of bodying our culture and sense of the world. These words help me invoke the aspect of so much of my life and learning in which one form or domain or segment of reality becomes somehow a completely different one. The process by which iron becomes gold. The rendering of the brute physicality of the world into words, mere strings of black inky squiggles on a page. The magical sampling of the physical world in images; it's there, yet it's here.

Photography is one way in which I have observed and also participated in this magic, a complement to my experience of writing. Photography centers on the lens as the interface between realities, between subject and image. Lens is a magic portal, a portal at the back of a wardrobe, a wormhole. The *camera obscura*

is but a closed box with a pinhole in one side. The world outside the box magically passes through the tiny hole to appear, upside down for god's sake, on the inner surface of the box opposite the hole. Just think of the chaos of light at the hole! The three dimensionality and materiality and thereness of the world squishes itself through the tiny opening to become a two-dimensional miniature upside down likeness of itself with no material substance at all, just patterns of shadows on a surface. Surely one of the reasons we find the old daguerreotypes and sepia prints so romantically attractive is that they remind us of this magic in its nakedness. My Sony FE 2.8/24-70 GM lens is but the great grandchild of the pinhole and my Sony Alpha a7RII 42-megapixel full frame mirrorless camera is the great grandchild of the iodine-sensitized silver plate and mercury vapor process once used to make images from the shadows on the inner wall of a black box, yet the modern AI driven process is still an act of alchemy. The same magic is just technologically ramped up by precise mechanics and electronics and juiced on Artificial Intelligence steroids.

Photography, unlike most forms of painting and other representational arts, seems premised on the identity of the *out there* with the *in here*. A picture is of something objective out there (outside the camera) that is *taken* or *shot* or *captured* in here (the sensory surface inside the camera body). Aren't the violent implications of these key words fascinating? The words suggest that photography is a violent means of taking control of one's world. There is in these common words also a sense of halting process, a biopsy of the actual moving/living reality, the dissection of a sliver measured in tiny fractions of time. An autopsy. Even murder. A *momento mori* as Susan Sontag noted. There is the implication of objectivity as well as death. The lens, on its own, is designed to replicate the world without aberrations or alterations. All lenses have documented aberrations that computer post processing can fix, supporting these assumptions. Indeed, the price of a modern lens correlates with its accuracy. As do camera sensors that aim to be so fine-grained (densely packed individual sensors) that the human eye cannot distinguish image from seen reality. The camera replicates the presumption also of human vision—we call the lens the “eye” of the camera, suggesting that it sees. We so easily bestow our senses on the object that is the camera. Bestowing the agency on the technology rather than the photographer is common. I'm often humored, and slightly offended, when someone admires one of my images by saying, “You must have a really good camera.” And, while we communicate objectivity by referring to vision in a lens, we know that human vision isn't objective. Still we so commonly say “seeing is believing” and we treasure the “eye witness.”

I have come to prefer the term “making images” over “taking pictures” or any of the other seeming violent verbs. It suggests that photography is a more humane and interactive and creative process. Making acknowledges both the

alchemy that creates a whole new reality from a reality that is completely separate and it also acknowledges the agency of the photographer who so often now becomes also the post-raw image processor engaging a vast arena of computer magic. The word “images” acknowledge this fascinating and, in my broad research, distinctively human quality of the importance of holding opposites together at once even considering them the same when we know all along that they are not. Copresents, I call them, Photography is distinguished by the copresence of the objective and the subjective. Both what is out there, independent of us, and also the final product we call “image” are both objects, things with materiality that exist in a specifiable time and space. Yet we make images of a subject and it is the photographer who aims the camera and selects the settings and who artfully adjusts the raw data recorded by the sensor and decides the size and shape and texture of the physical character of the image. The resulting image is through and through subjective, arguably so even for the most amateur photographer using the simplest point-and-shot camera; but artistically so for the experienced and artistic photographer. Across every aspect of the process the subjective and objective are at once entirely and necessarily separate, but also entirely and necessarily the same, entwined to the point of indistinguishable boundaries. This too is magical, of the magic of being human.

From the time I first acquired an adjustable camera I was fascinated by the interdependence of the various adjustments and how they worked both with and against one another. For a specific ambient light condition, the smaller the opening for light to pass through the lens, obviously the less light passes through for a given time. And oddly the smaller the opening the greater the numerical aperture setting on the camera. This too is to flip things upside down in that the aperture number is but the denominator of a fraction. With less light coming through a smaller opening, the shutter would have to be open longer to allow light to expose the film (later sensor). The interaction between these two choices, impacts the physics of the light resulting in changes in the focus within the image. Of course, with more modern cameras there are many more factors involved, but whatever the factors, taking a photo is a matter of the play among the adjustable variables, that work in usually complementary opposition to one another, in the attempt to achieve the desired and imagined result. It is also a process of engaging the laws of physics pertaining to light to contribute to the image one is making.

There is a whole arena of post-processing, what we do with computers after the data for making an image is captured. With my little light box method of exposing photo paper, all I could do is count the exposure times. Many of us, back in the day, were purists, or wannabe purists, who sought to use the camera so skillfully that even the framing should never be adjusted even by cropping. Ansel Adams was our hero. We scoffed at digital cameras as many music

aficionados preferred vinyl to digital recordings. Many still do. Yet, I'm a new convert to digital in the name of alchemy and artistry. And new converts are often the most devoted. My come-to-Jesus moment was the experience of seeing what is possible when one begins post-processing with a grossly underexposed raw image, all dark and shadowy with nothing distinct because it is too dark. With a few quick post-processing adjustments in exposure, highlights, shadows and so on, right before your eyes, color and detail magically appear. How can all that color and detail be there in the data yet hidden until revealed through the alchemy of post-processing? Again, alchemy and magic, even though I know the science as well.

A bunch of my thinking in the last couple of decades has focused on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Donna Haraway's classic essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) suggested long ago that we have all already become cybernetic organisms, amalgams of flesh and steel, carbon and silicon. While this idea of a composite biological machinic entity seems frightening—perhaps we think of The Borg in "Star Trek"—photography shows a positive example that we have become cyborgs. Equipped with our cameras and post-processing software, both now highly integrated with AI, we are capable of making huge magnificent images of worlds unseen other than with our cyborgian eye, for example, the tiny sex organs of flowers or the vast array of succeeding mountain ranges. Conjoined with our AI image makers, we have become metahuman cyborgs, humans enhanced by conjoined electronic machines. Quite the opposite of the group-think and loss of individuality of The Borg, being a metahuman cyborg, as we all are, sets us free. The Borg mantra "resistance is futile" applies I suppose in our advertising driven desire for constant upgrades to our machinic parts, that is, we always want new cameras and computers. Yet, as metahuman cyborgs we are enhanced and freed of banal limitations.

There are continuities as well as hiccup disjunctions in the trajectory from *camera obscura* to daguerreotype to my little Brownie to my mirrorless full frame Sony super camera. Common throughout, however, is the human fascination with making something marked by our own creativity inspired by the magnificence of the world beyond us. This urge is a desire for transcendence, a moving beyond the limits of our biological nature with technological enhancements, tools to extend and enhance our biological reach and power. Common across this continuum is also some urge to transcend the seeming inevitability of the ongoingness of time that we might freeze the process of time into image, thus affording us a moment that can be experienced anew again and again across ticking time. Sontag notes that every photo is testimony and reminder that we must die. Common as well is the human delight in the impossibles of the entwining of the oppositions of objective and subjective, the out there with the in here, the ongoing with the halted moment, the living and

the dead. Photography is a strategy of defeating death by death itself. In these ways every photograph is a testimony to what is so remarkable about being human. Pandas don't make photos of humans. I think it has been this connection with the magic of our species that has persistently preoccupied and fascinated me beginning in those days performing the chemical transformations with my little developing kit continuing to today with my regular making of images with my Sony and Lightroom.

Jonathan Z. Smith: Mentor

Jonathan Smith died the last day of 2017. I first met him the second year I was at the University of Chicago which was the year he joined the faculty, 1968. I've told the story of that meeting elsewhere. I took a number of courses from him. He saved me from a certain failure of my MA exams. Oddly, despite my being a student far below the caliber deserving his guidance and also that the area of my research was not close to his, he became my dissertation advisor. I invited him to do lectures at both Arizona State University and several times while I was at the University of Colorado, the last time, in April 2010, the occasion was one of the University's most prestigious lectureships. I saw and visited with him now and then at national religion conferences and at a few other meetings. He invited me to edit a section of *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (1995) for which he was the general editor.

I was never invited to his house. We never went out for a drink or coffee. Yet, throughout my entire career Jonathan was the person who most influenced me. I constantly relied on his work to inform and, more importantly, to inspire my own work. His work, to me, always had an element of surprise about it. He saw what no one else saw despite it often being in plain sight or he saw differently what we all saw showing that we didn't recognize the potential of our observations. Among the most enduring lessons I learned from him was one we all learn but often fail to practice, "check your sources." The core of his six-year study of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* done for his Yale PhD dissertation was to take one by one the thousands of examples Frazer cited and check them against the source from which Frazer took them. This method revealed the extent to which Frazer invented his examples or skewed them to fit his needs. That work gave Smith a vast knowledge of cultures around the world and it was his means of asking the unanswerable question of what Frazer thought he was doing in writing this enormous work and what it was that actually motivated him. The insightful use of a banal technique to achieve remarkable results, if not answers.

The November following Jonathan's death at their annual meetings, the American Academy of Religion and the North American Association for the

Study of Religion held special sessions during which a few scholars read papers to remember and honor Jonathan. I was invited by the NAASR to offer a paper despite my not having attended these annual meetings for many years. I was shocked by a number of things related to these meetings. First, I was surprised that no one there had known Jonathan as long as I had. My first meeting of him in 1968 meant that I'd known him nearly fifty years at the time of his death. I had no idea that seemingly no others of my peers at Chicago had survived this long. Second, while it seemed many who attended these sessions had had encounters with Jonathan, and all of these were memorable because of his engaging and striking personal style, few of them had actually worked with him academically. I don't think I encountered any others for whom he'd been their dissertation advisor or otherwise had a strong intellectual connection with him. Harvard professor Kimberley Patton read a very moving personal tribute to Jonathan and she had known him professionally for many years. Third, listening to the papers read, I was stunned that so many of them that attempted to deal with Smith's actual work seemed to me to misunderstand and under-appreciate it. Several spoke of not liking his writing style because they reported they felt he constantly changed his position and that his writing was difficult to read. I'd always marveled at Jonathan's ability to nuance his positions to reveal the depth and complexity and confoundment of his subject and that his writing to me seemed masterful. Then finally (perhaps), I was shocked by the questions from the members of the audience, the young scholars of religion today, who didn't seem to recognize the importance of the core issues Smith spent his career developing such as the importance of comparison to the study of religion. I am pleased that these papers, including mine, have just appeared in a collection, *Remembering J. Z. Smith* (2020).

Following this November 2018 meeting I did a presentation at a conference devoted to Smith in Trondheim Norway in June 2019. At that meeting I found that the bulk of papers mentioned Smith as something of a courtesy, only to present a paper that I found of little relevance to him or the concerns that most persistently preoccupied him. This pattern was consistent with a book of essays presented in Smith's honors years earlier. Despite it being a fat volume with papers by many scholars only a few did more than this seeming obligatory courtesy mention of Smith only to then not mention him or his work again. The general, perhaps unfounded, conclusion to draw from these incidental occasions is that Smith's work, while well-known and acknowledged as important, has not been well understood nor has it served to inspire, at least as much as I think it should, the continuing growth and development of the academic study of religion. I realized that perhaps my work, that has frequently cited him, and my interests, as seemingly unrelated and distant from Smith's, has done more than have most both to take Smith seriously and also to see the importance of

continuing to look to and advance Smith's legacy. Put in more urgent terms, I have come to believe that I have had a responsibility to put some aspects of Smith's work forward and to build on them, not simply to continue the field's development, but more so to actually save a whole aspect of the field, and an important one, that is seemingly being lost. That aspect is, put simply, to understand that the study of religion proper to secular academic studies must address religion as distinctive to human beings and as a common presence through much of human history and cultures. The force of his work is to engage the essential context for the study of specific religions at explicit times by asking "what is religion" and "what about humanity can one learn in the study of religion." Oxford University Press is publishing my book, *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (2020). This work not only lifts up the importance of some of Smith's works and ideas, it also attempts to build anew on it, the intended advancements being the creative engagement of my own 50-year career that has dealt with issues and approaches quite in contrast with those identified with Smith. In this creative encounter I advance my own theories and methods for the study of religion based extensively on my decades of dancing and moving. It is my hope that the book will be widely influential in both remembering and retaining the deserved vitality of Smith's work and also to introduce my own quite unusual perspectives that might seem more acceptable because they are shown to be at least in continuity and conversation with Smith.

Movement and Vitality

Zeno's arrow paradox is a classic that has fascinated philosophers and the curious for 2,500 years. Given a finite distance an arrow travels from the bow of the archer to the target, it is argued without contention that this distance can be divided in half. The resulting half distance can be divided again in half and so on infinitely. The paradox is that given that the arrow has to transit every remaining half space, since there are infinite half spaces it must be concluded that the arrow can never reach the target. As I understand it, French philosopher Henri Bergson was the first to offer an understanding of the paradox. He discerned the distinction between movement reckoned in a sense after the fact, that is when the arrow has completed its transit from archer to target, and movement in the process of transit. He argued that these are different phases or aspects of movement and that the paradox arises when the two are conflated. Moving is a different phase of reality than is movement. Moving is in process, while movement is post-process analysis. Zeno's paradox arises in his conflation of the two. It may seem that this distinction is a minor one of technical pickiness that is of interest only to philosophers or puzzle-loving people. The distinction

however is one that has enormous importance. For me the distinction which has been a growing awareness for me over the last 15 or 20 years, has served in a sense to thread together all of my persistent preoccupations and, I am sure, will play a central role in the academic works I will produce going forward.

To say a bit more about the distinction. Let me call the in-process phase “moving” and let me call the in-process moving that characterized all animate organisms as “self-moving.” All living animals are self-movers, that’s the critical distinction that informs Edmund Husserl’s term “animate organism.” Animals have the capacity to move their bodies within the context of their environments and this capacity is distinctive. It is also commonly purposeful even as the amoeba, for example, moves toward food. Self-moving is the living interrelationship of an animal and its environment. Imagine the insignificance, the sheer uselessness, of hands and feet and skin and muscles without a self-moving body engaging an environment. Passive movement does not require life or interrelationship as in a body being transported by some other means, such as riding in a wagon. What I call “movement” is the reckoning of supposed post-halt moving. Self-moving always has a subjective aspect, movement always has an objective aspect.

Going further, as Brian Massumi noted in his *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), moving is never *in any place*. Should we locate moving as occupying a specific time and space, it would obviously be halted in that place and cease to move. Moving is always moving. Still, while moving is neither here nor there, it implicates both. It has a trajectory, an intention or “desire,” to use Renaud Barbaras’s term in his brilliant book *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception* (2006). This desire is the dynamics of the interrelationship of the mover and its environment. As Einstein revealed so powerfully, moving is always relative to something outside the mover. A car must have a road. A body the ground. When we are sitting in a parked car and an adjacent car moves, sometimes we feel that we are moving and, indeed, relative to the adjacent car we are. There is no non-moving ether. Continuing. We feel self-moving. We experience ourselves moving. It is a sensory experience that is based in proprioception. The feeling of moving is often referred to as kinesthesia. We do not feel movement.

I have a book manuscript tentatively called *Movement and Vitality: The Philosophy and Biology of Self-movement*, that considers these many notions in much fuller detail and this book need not be even outlined here. Yet, it is essential here to acknowledge that the self-moving/movement distinction interconnects all of my persistent preoccupations and serves to advance each to greater levels of applicability and profundity. The core distinction is that the gerund, self-moving, lifts out a way of exploring and articulating the force of life, vitality. Self-moving is a complex biological and philosophical distinction that will occupy my

academic concerns for the rest of my life. However, I'm certain that the importance that I have recognized in self-moving was born of my experience moving and dancing and being in the living environment of moving and dancing. My lived identity of moving/dancing and vitality, the exuberance experienced as the force that is living, has revealed to me the foundational importance of moving and dancing. I have argued for the primacy of dancing to art and life. The first chapter of my 2012 book *Dancing Culture Religion* is titled "Moving."

As obvious and incontestable as are these distinctions and characterizations of self-moving and movement—they are the lived experience of all animate organisms and humans are distinguished among their animal kin by our abilities to identify and articulate and contemplate these implications—they are rarely appreciated, especially in the mind-centric habitus of academia. A quick example. My most recent book *The Proper Study of Religion* was recently published. The part of this book that I am the most excited about and proud of is the final chapter in which, in many pages, I explore a theory of religion and a process for the study of religion that arise based on the implications of these straight-forward observations about self-moving and movement. I consider this discussion nothing short of revolutionary. However, when I read the book blurbs on the book jacket written by highly accomplished religion scholars, neither even mentioned this feature of the book. All the more incentive for me to expand, complete, and publish my book on moving as a capstone achievement to my long life of academics and dancing.

*Chapter Five***You Only Pass This Way Once**

United States Congress Representative John Lewis died on July 17, 2020 at the age of 80. He was a black civil rights activist who spent his life lovingly and passionately fighting for the causes of human rights, equal rights, and the more perfect union as promised by the American experiment. As much as he accomplished in his lifetime, his legacy is in the example of what a person is capable of being. From extremely humble origins he rose to prominence forcefully enacting his beliefs and values with the clearest integrity, never wavering on what he knew to be just and right, and always doing so benevolently and humanely.

Upon his death he was honored in many ways appropriate to his position and accomplishments, yet all who knew him and spoke about him agreed that the most fitting tribute to John Lewis would be to follow his example. President Barack Obama, who was inspired by Lewis, told a story that occurred at his inauguration. Immediately after he was sworn in as the first black president of the United States of America, Obama said he went directly to Lewis to tell him that this achievement was really Lewis's. President Obama delivered a stirring eulogy for John Lewis at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on July 30, a speech that some have said is among his finest. In his powerful tribute, President Obama called folks to action communicating the urgency by saying, "So, we're also going to have to remember what John said. If you don't do everything you can do to change things, then they will remain the same. You only pass this way once. You have to give it all you have."

Before I could conclude this collection of writings, another great American has died. On September 18, 2020 Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court Justice for 27 years died at age 87. Gaining rock star fame in her 80s, RBG, as she was

widely affectionately known, was a wildly popular inspiration to girls and women, and certainly also plenty of men, around the world. Despite the massive number of cases for which she was in the majority, she is perhaps best known for her powerful written descents. Of these she remarked, “Descent speaks to a future age.” She worked arduously and tirelessly through grave illnesses to the day before she died. Like John Lewis, she showed us what constitutes a life well lived, one in which she clearly gave it all she had.

Experiencing rising interest in the potential of this story project as the novel coronavirus pandemic persisted, I have now spent much time and energy over many quarantine months remembering and reflecting on my past. As a near necessity of this process I’ve turned occasionally to soberly do some legacy accounting. Yet taking measure has never been a primary motivation. In a sense it’s a bit late for that. I have done this gathering at the beckon of my love of writing stories. It is what I do to be me. Through this period of isolation, I awaken every morning with an eagerness to get to work on these stories. Once written I have loved rereading and honing their telling. As they have appeared and amassed, I have been delighted to find surprising threads and themes revealing something of a coherent whole, a sense of my own identity and history.

Also arising in this project has been a realization that I bear the heavy burden of having lived so long, that I feel the overwhelm of the accumulation of regrets, that my spirit is dimmed by an emotional darkness, and that in my caring for present and future I’m prone to the occasional diminishment of hope and optimism. These writings have revealed to me that I haven’t had a single day as an adult that hasn’t been emotionally clouded by my abiding concerns for the happiness and wellbeing of my kids and grandkids. As I saw these themes of heaviness and darkness appear—I gave voice to many in gloomy, even maudlin, writings that I then fortunately discarded—I asked, “Shouldn’t there be a measure of catharsis gained from mucking about in the past?” I began to hope that this process of looking back as openly and honestly as I could might serve to bring a sense of cleansing transition, if not closure. I hoped for some opening of a new phase of life that I might be free to live forward feeling a lightness of being. I am thankful that I have survived so long and that I’m still living. I have much joy in living near my healthy and relatively prosperous family. Yet the present chaos, in the world and the seemingly inevitability of the many national and planetary crises, exists on a scale and has an urgency never before present. My feelings churned daily by these crises nullify what relief I might have gained, particularly as I see the disturbing impact they will most certainly have on my kids and grandkids perhaps for the rest of their lives. These concerns veil any rising lightness of being. Of course, history is the frequent cycling among good times and bad. I have briefly explored in these writings some futurist imaginings that I find hopeful and exciting. Yet, the present feels to me dark and dangerous.

I think that the impact on me is due to my sense of the urgency of the global reach and the direness of the threat of the current crises. How is it possible to be brightly optimistic and hopeful when it appears likely that over the lifetimes of my grandkids the planet will become a hostile environment unlivable in many places and that this is due to the utter irresponsibility, the product of the thirst for power and greed, of too many of the current world leaders? I hope that in a year or two, in a post-pandemic post-Trump world, I might write a more hopeful postscript and attest to my finally achieving that lightness of being.

The John Lewis and RBG question, “have I given my all,” is really not one I can answer for myself. Nina Totenberg, the renowned commentator on the Supreme Court and the longtime friend of RBG recently said, “Ginsburg didn’t do regrets.” That statement shocked me knowing that in my stories I so often “do regrets.” There are many ways I could imagine making better choices and pursuing different interests, seeing alternatives that would have served my family and the universe more effectively and lovingly. Most of all I regret the many years I lived as a zombie to my kids. I also deeply regret not having had many true friends or a truly loving life partner. Writing these stories, I was shocked by how hard I have worked my entire life, yet I have also seen that working hard may have many unwanted and even unhealthy consequences and it likely does not equate with “giving my all.”

Many a time I’ve asked why I was spending so much time and energy on this project. Who will ever read this or find it of interest? Perhaps no one. Yet I felt compelled, even obsessed, to carry on. The work of this writing seems typical of the works that comprise my life: work hard, driven by the experience of doing the clean hard work, and leave the question of outcomes aside. When the glimmers of these legacy questions arose, I found myself increasingly fascinated and inspired by graffiti. Graffitiists don’t scratch or paint on walls, which they usually do in the dark of night, needing much of any other objective than to say, “I was here.” And while their identity is tagged, the actual person behind the tag is rarely known. Banksy is a famed contemporary example. I’ve increasingly found delight in the idea that my stories might be appreciated as being in some sense graffiti, markings like those in the ancient caves at Lascaux, the hand prints I so love at Cueva de las Manos in Perito Moreno Argentina, the tags scratched on ancient walls in Rome, the names and dates etched on Inscription Rock in El Morro National Monument in New Mexico, or the colorful spray paintings on trains in New York City and walls the world over. My stories aren’t intended to reveal who I am or have been, yet they may do so. They are made to briefly engage, perhaps provoke, any who might pass by. They need not say anything other than, “Sam passed this way once.”

Chapter Six

Autobiographical Chronology

I'm not entirely down and out. I don't feel done. I have published an academic book a year for the last three years and I have another one in its late stages of completion. I have far more creative projects I want to develop than I currently have the time to work on. Still, while there are hopefully years ahead, if I could identify anything that I want this work to be, it would be to take stock of nearly eight decades that I might know a little of how best to continue on to the finish line. In looking back and trying to remember, I've been shocked at how much effort it has taken to try to come up with a simple chronology of some of the main events, yet I have found it insightful to take the trouble to do so. The following simple chronology of my life's shifts and changes has given me some sense of a temporal through line.

Having drafted it, such as it is, I think something is revealed in what I've considered noteworthy. I question what distinguishes the main events and find the answers inadequate. Most are transitions: births, marriage, moving to a different residence, changing jobs, deaths, graduations and degrees, travels, business events including failures. I have to wonder if these transition events are the best way to understand the processes of living. Surely my life has largely been lived between these transitions and I find it odd we don't have easy ways of jotting down those spans of life. Of course, the stories in this collection may fill in the spaces between transitions. For long stretches there seem to be transitions going on pretty much every year. There are, however, periods where it seems nothing must have happened. For example, the decade from 1984 to 1993 has little that seems notable in this chronology. Yet, correlating this chronology with the following list of publications reveals that during this time I published three books and 17 articles. It was a period that began with moving into the dome house and closed with the end of my marriage. Likely no other period in my life involved so much growth and change.

It is fitting that this chronology is not the only thing present herein. While it marks transitions, it is the tracks and tracings I've written that give some hints about

the processes carried on in the in-betweens. Hopefully the stories and essays in this book, which are not ordered principally as chronology, will offer a complementary sort of accounting.

1/6/1943	Born at 11:17 p.m. in Saint Francis Hospital in Wichita Kansas. My parents lived in Cherryvale Kansas much of their lives. During WW II, farmers were considered essential workers and weren't drafted into the military. They were however required to work in some capacity to support the war. My dad worked for Boeing Aircraft. I really don't know what his specific job was. We lived at 1828 South Main Street in Wichita.
1945	At the end of the war my family returned to Cherryvale and took residence in a house just north of town that I always knew as the "smelter cottage." I remember what the house looked like from one photo of me standing on the steps to the house, but I never thought to ask why it had that name. Edgar Zinc Company formed in 1896 and operated a few years smelting zinc and lead. Likely the house was on that company property and was rented out after the business ended.
1947 or 1948	Moved to 424 West Fourth Street, just a block west of the highway that went north-south through town. A vacant lot to the east afforded an area to play. On the other side of the lot was the house where Catholic nuns lived. The Catholic School was on the other side of that house next to the highway. Across the street south was the Catholic Church.
1953	Moved to 1004 East Fourth Street. I was in fifth grade so it meant transferring from the tiny McKinley Elementary School which I'd attended since kindergarten to the much bigger school on the east side of town. Cherryvale had only three thousand residents at the time, so size is obviously relative. A friend of my parents was building little slab houses around town. My dad went to the bank to borrow money to build us a house. The story goes that the banker asked him how many years he wanted to set up the mortgage. My dad responded that he didn't want a mortgage because he'd pay off the loan when his wheat was harvested the next fall. And, in fact, he did. One of the few times that his farming actually worked out.
Spring 1960	Graduated from Cherryvale High School
Fall 1960	Wichita State University made possible by my winning the Gore Memorial Scholarship the largest undergraduate college scholarship in the State of Kansas.
Fall 1960-Spring 1961	Lived in Carnot Brennan dormitory. Carnot was a well-known active alumnus at WSU and the director of the Social Security Administration. He hired me to work at the SSA one summer perhaps at the end of my sophomore or junior year.

Fall 1961 – Summer 1963	Lived in Beta Theta Pi Fraternity House on Hillside Drive in Wichita.
Summer 1963	Worked for Social Security Administration, Wichita.
Fall 1963-Spring 1964	Lived in basement apartment with Mike Bloodhart, who was my best friend.
Spring 1964	Graduated from Wichita State University with a BS in Mathematics.
Summer 1964	Started working for the Coleman Company in Wichita as a Research Analyst.
June 1964 – May 1965	Lived in small cheap rental apartment near downtown Wichita.
Fall 1964	Started work on MA in Business at Wichita State University.
June 4, 1965	Married Judith Fern Snapp at the Methodist Church in Andover Kansas. Pastor George Gardner officiated.
June 1965-May 1966	Rented an apartment in a new complex called Twin Lakes Apartments on the west side of Wichita.
June 1966 (est.)	Purchased a little track home on Devon Street in northwest Wichita.
Spring 1967	Received MA in Business from Wichita State University.
Fall 1967	Took sabbatical from the Coleman Company, sold the house on Devon Street, moved to an apartment in Hickory Hills southwest of Chicago and I started graduate school the Divinity School at the University of Chicago in Hyde Park.
Fall 1968	Moved to Park Forest, a planned suburb south of Chicago. It was a planned community featuring large numbers of townhomes, usually four to a building, that were arranged around a common parking area and between them were expansive green spaces. This design is common now, but Park Forest was one of the first to be planned and built. The other distinction was that it was co-op housing which meant that you paid a few hundred dollars for a membership and then the rent was determined by the costs of operation with no one taking profits. When you moved you sold your share in the co-op back. Great community with loads of young families. I was a student, but I also got a half-time job for the data processing department at the university as a systems analyst. I was able to make enough money to cover our expenses and to pay my tuition. I don't think I ever took out student loans and I don't remember getting any scholarships, but I might have.
September 17, 1970	Corbin Matthew Gill was born in Park Ridge, Illinois. This is a suburb north of Chicago and we lived far south of Chicago. I don't recall the details, but Judy had difficult pregnancies and I believe she went to that hospital because her specialist gynecologist had hospital privileges there.
Spring 1971	I received my MA in religion, but I did so poorly that I simply quit the Divinity School. I didn't expect to return,

	but I kept my job for the university administration and I might even have started working full time. I know that during this period I redesigned the payroll system for the entire university including the hospitals and clinics and with a couple programmers we saw it through the installation working late nights in computer facilities to have time to test and debug all the programs.
Fall 1971	Attended a conference on the use of computers in education at the University of Pennsylvania. While there I met a faculty person from Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina.
March 1972 (est.)	Corbin was diagnosed with diabetes. He was admitted to the Children's Hospital at the University of Chicago for a week or so to reestablish blood glucose levels and for us to learn how to manage the disease.
Spring 1972	Went to Converse College Spartanburg South Carolina for a faculty job interview. I loved the campus and was thrilled by the possibility of being college faculty. I didn't get the job because I didn't have a PhD.
Fall 1972	Returned to the University of Chicago. I met with Jonathan Smith to see if I could return. He assured me that since I'd just disappeared they weren't all that interested in having me return. I could return but only with the understanding that I'd be closely scrutinized and dropped if I didn't do exceptionally well.
Summer 1973	Field research on Navajo Reservation. Lived in Peyote Hogan near Cow Springs, north of Tuba City, Arizona.
Fall 1973	Held a one semester fill-in teaching position at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.
Spring 1974	Lived in a cottage at the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff Arizona and worked out of an office in their library to write my PhD dissertation.
Summer, 1974	Rented a house in Flagstaff.
Fall 1974	Moved to Stillwater Oklahoma, rented a house, had a one-year appointment teaching in the Humanities Department at Oklahoma State University. I also finished and typed my PhD dissertation.
Spring 1975	Received my PhD. Got a job at Arizona State University in Tempe. Bought a house in Mesa, Arizona, sight unseen because Judy was pregnant and we didn't have money to both go to look for a house and actually buy one.
Summer 1975	Moved to Mesa in a rental truck stopping frequently because Judy was eight months pregnant.
July 24, 1975	Jennifer Robin Gill was born in Mesa Arizona.
Fall 1975	Started teaching at Arizona State University.
1978 (maybe)	Moved from Mesa to Manhattan Drive in Tempe Arizona.
Fall 1981-August 1982	Sabbatical from ASU to University of Colorado, Boulder. Lived in the mountain home of Gary and Mitch Stahl in Sunshine Canyon. Got job offer from CU. Bought a three-

	acre mountain lot on which to build a house on Arroyo Chico in Four Mile Canyon.
Fall 1982-Spring 1983	Final year at ASU to fulfill sabbatical agreement.
Summer 1983	Moved to CU married student housing in Boulder while building dome house.
Fall 1983	Started teaching at the University of Colorado as Tenured Full Professor.
May 1984	Moved to dome house on 1133 Arroyo Chico in Four Mile Canyon west of Boulder.
July 1992	Traveled to Australia with Judy and Jenny.
January 1993	Traveled to London and Cardiff Wales for conference. Fiftieth birthday in London.
March 1993	Moved out of dome to a short-term rental apartment in Boulder.
September 1993 to January 1994	Traveled to Australia, Bali, Java, Thailand, and Nepal with Emily.
January 1994	Moved into dome. Judy had lived there but left preferring not to be isolated.
March 1994 (est.)	Divorce finalized.
July-August, 1997	Ghana, West Africa with Jenny.
Spring 1998	Moved to large house on three acres on 9400 Hills View Drive in Niwot
Spring 1998	Opened Bantaba World Dance & Music in the Table Mesa shopping center in south Boulder.
July 1998	Bali & Java. Second trip to area. Traveled alone.
Summer 1999	Jenny joined me to run Bantaba after graduating from University of Washington. Majored in ethnomusicology.
Summer 2000	Costa Rica with Madhu.
June 2001	Mali West Africa. Traveled alone.
June 28, 2001	Lelah May Gill (nee Grantham), my mom, died age 86. Born 11/20/1914.
July-August, 2001	Bali. My third visit there. With Madhu and a few of my former students
September 11, 2001	World Trade Center bombing.
January 2002	Costa Rica with Malory and Carolina.
October 2003	Puebla Mexico for Conference.
January to April 2006	Lived in a motel in Boulder while building my north Boulder house.
April 2006	Moved in new north Boulder house on Tansey Place.
May 2006	Moved Bantaba to Yellow Pine in North Boulder.
November 2006	Puerto Escondido, Mexico with Dorothy.
December 2006-January 2007	Dominican Republic to learn Bachata dancing with Dorothy.
March 3, 2007	Chester Dale Gill died age 92. Born 10/22/1915.
Summer 2007	Closed Bantaba under City of Boulder pressure.
December 2007-January 2008	Puerto Rico and NYC with Julie. Saw Lion King on my 65 th birthday in NYC.

May 2008	Road trip: Hopi, Canyon de Chelly, Bryce Canyon National Park and Slot Canyons with Julie.
2009	Foreclosure on Bantaba property at huge financial loss.
November 2009	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico with Julie.
September 8, 2010	Dome house burned.
Fall 2010	End of Julie relationship.
March 2011	Lectures at Wichita State University.
September 2011	Moved to Blue Sky Circle condo in Erie while my townhome in Broomfield was being built.
March 2012	Moved to Raven Run townhome in Wildgrass area Broomfield.
March 2012	Cruise to Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.
December 18, 2015	Heart attack.
December 30, 2016	Moved to 3721 Harvard Place in Anthem Highlands in Broomfield.
January 3, 2017	Heart attack.
December 31, 2018	Retired from CU.
May-June 2019	Norway and Iceland.
October 2019	Sweden and Iceland.
March 15, 2020	Beginning of novel coronavirus quarantine.

Chapter Seven

Publications

Books

Through 2020

- *Songs of Life: An Introduction to Navajo Religious Culture*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979
- *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1981
- *Beyond "The Primitive:" The Religions of Nonliterate Peoples*. World Religions Series, Robert Ellwood, Jr., editor. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982
- *Native American Religions: An Introduction*. Religious Life of Man Series, Frederick Streng, editor. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1982, revised ed. 2004
- *Native American Traditions: Sources and Interpretations*. Religious Life of Man Series, Frederick Streng, editor. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1983
- *Mother Earth: An American Story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, paper 1991
- *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987
- *Dictionary of Native American Mythology* with Irene Sullivan. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1992. Paperback edition by Oxford University Press, 1994
- *Storytracking: Texts, Stories, and Histories in Central Australia*. Oxford University Press, 1998

- *Dancing Culture Religion*. Lexington Books, 2012
- *Religion and Technology Into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018
- *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference: Perspectives and Strategies*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2019
- *On Reflection: Vignettes & Images*. Self-published in two-versions, 2019
- *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020
- *Dancing Graffiti: Stories from My Life*, 2020

Articles

Through 2020

- "The Prayer of the Navajo Carved Figurine." *Plateau* 47 (1974): 59-69.
- "The Color of Navajo Ritual Symbolism: An Evaluation of Methods" *Journal of Anthropological Research* 31 (1976): 6-13
- "The Shadow of a Vision Yonder." In *Seeing with a Native Eye: Contributions to the Study of Native American Religion*. Edited by Walter H. Capps. New York: Harper & Row, 1976, pp. 44-57
- "Disenchantment." *Parabola* I:3 (1976): 6-13. Reprinted in *I Became Part of It: Sacred Dimensions in Native American Life*. Edited by D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York: Parabola Books, 1989, pp 106-119
- "Hopi Kachina Cult Initiation: The Shocking Beginning to the Hopi's Religious Life." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLV 2, Supplement (June 1977), A: 447-464
- "The Trees Stood Deep Rooted." *Parabola* II:2 (1977): 6-12. Reprinted in *I Became Part of It*. Edited by D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York: Parabola Books, 1989, pp. 21-31. Reprinted in *The Inner Journey: Views from Native Traditions*, edited by Linda Hogan. Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press, 2009, pp. 274-83
- "Prayer as Person: The Navajo Conception of Prayer Acts." *History of Religions* 17:2 (1977): 143-157
- "Native American Religions: A Review of the Status of the Field." *Council on the Study of Religion Bulletin* 9 (1978): 125-128
- "Whirling Logs and Coloured Sands." In *Native Religious Traditions*. Edited by Earle Waugh and R. Prithipaul. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfried Laurier Press, 1979, pp. 151-163. Revised in Gill, *Native American Traditions*, pp. 71-77
- "It's Where You Put Your Eyes." *Parabola* IV:4 (1979): 91-97. Reprinted in *I Became Part of It*. Edited by D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York: Parabola Books, 1989, pp. 75-87. Selection used for SAT test by Educational Testing Service, 1994-1995. Reprinted in *The Inner Journey: Views from Native*

Traditions, edited by Linda Hogan. Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press, 2009, pp. 161-70

- “Shamanism.” *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981
- “Time.” *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981
- “Navajo Views of Their Origin.” *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 10 - Southwest. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1983
- “Native American Religions.” (12,500 words). *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987
- “Native American Mythology: North America.” (5,000 words). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987. Reprinted as “Mythic Themes” in *Native American Religions: North America*. Edited by Lawrence E. Sullivan. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989, pp. 157-66
- “Shamanism: North American Religions.” (2,500 words). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987
- “Prayer.” (5,000 words). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987
- “Nonliterate Traditions and Holy Book: Toward a New Model.” In *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective: Studies in Origins, Forms, and Functions*. Edited by Frederick Denny and Rodney Taylor. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985, pp. 224-39. Honorable Mention, University of Colorado, Boulder, Writing Awards, 1986. Published in revised form as “Holy Book in Nonliterate Traditions: Toward the Reinvention of Religion.” In *Native American Religious Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 129-46
- “And He Took Away Their Wings: Story and History in American Folk Traditions.” In *Native American Religious Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 76-88
- “Prayer as Performance: A Navajo Contribution to the Study of Prayer.” In *Native American Religious Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 89-112. Reprinted in *The Anthropology of Performance: A Reader*, Frank J. Korom (ed) John Wiley & Sons, 2013
- “One Two Three: The Interpretation of Religious Action.” In *Native American Religious Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 147-72
- “Mother Earth Mythology.” *World & I* (July 1987): 581-593
- “The Continuity of Research and Classroom Teaching, or How to Have Your Cake and Eat It Too.” In *On Teaching*. Edited by Mary Ann Shea. Boulder: University Learning Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1987, pp. 67-76
- “A Rumor is Afield: Fieldwork Leads to Spreading Rumors.” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 2/2 (Summer, 1988); 245-256

- “The Power of Story.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12/3 (1988): 69-84
- “Mother Earth: An American Myth.” In *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies*. Edited by James A. Clifton. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990, pp. 129-43
- “Walking with Spirits.” *APA Insight Guide to Native America*. London: APA Publications, 1991, pp. 65-69
- “Religious Forms and Themes.” In *America in 1492*. Edited by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992, pp. 277-304
- “Religion in America in 1492.” *The Newberry Library, D’Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian. Occasional Papers in Curriculum Series, Number 15, America in 1492, Selected Lectures from the Quincentenary Program*, (1992), pp. 28-62
- “Native American Religions.” (8,000 words). *Encyclopedia of North American Colonies*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993, pp. 643-52
- “Native Americans and Their Religions.” In *World Religions in Today’s America: An Introduction*. Edited by Jacob Neusner. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994. Pp. 11-32. Third revised edition, 2003, pp. 8 - 23
- “The Religions of Traditional Peoples.” *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*. Jonathan Z. Smith, General Editor. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995. Pp. 1087-98
- “The Academic Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. LXII/4(1994): 201-211
- “Linking Human Beings to Nature: Australian Arrarnta Religion.” In *Introduction to Religion: What Religions Do*. Edited by William Scott Green and Jacob Neusner. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press. 1996
- “Territory.” In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Edited by Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 298-313. Selections reprinted in Gill, *Creative Encounters*
- “No Place to Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *homo ludens*, the Academic Study of Religion *sub specie ludī*” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 66/2(1998): 59-88. Reprinted in Gill, *Creative Encounters*
- “The Academic Study of Religion and TheStrip.” With eight graduate students. *Council of the Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 27:1 (February, 1998): 7-9
- “To Make Them Speak: Colonialism and the Study of Mythology” *Journal of Religious History*, 22/2 (1998): 168-82
- “Approaches to the Study of Religion.” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 11 (1999): 119-126
- “Play.” In *Critical Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Russell T. McCutcheon and Willi Braun. London: Cassell, 2000, pp. 451-462. Translation to Greek: *Egheiridio Threskeiologias. Dimitris Xygalatas* (trans.). Thessaloniki, Greece: Vaniias Edition, 2004

- “Embodied Theology.” In *Shifting Paradigms: Theology, Religious Studies, and the University*, edited by Delwin Brown and Linell Cady. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, pp. 81 - 92
- “Dance.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion and American Cultures*, edited by Gary Laderman & Luis León. ABC-CLIO, 2003, pp. 536-538
- “Dancing Ritual, Ritual Dancing: Experiential Teaching.” In *Teaching Ritual*, edited by Catherine Bell. Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 45-56
- “Dancing: Creative Healthy Teen Activity,” *Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014: 181-207
- “Moving: The Core of Religion,” *Body and Religion*, vol. 1.2, 2018: 131–147
- « Jonathan Z. Smith, ou la duplicité nécessaire » *Asdival* 13, 2018: 53-60
- “Jesus Wept, Robots Can’t: Religion into the Future,” *Body and Religion* (2020)
- “Jonathan Z. Smith and the Necessary Double-face” In Emily D. Crews and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Remembering J. Z. Smith: A Career and its Consequences*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishers, 2020
- “Forward” to *Native American Myths and Tales*. London: Flame Tree Publishing Ltd., 2020
- “Imagining a Proper Academic Study of Religion Inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith” In *Imagining Smith*, ed. by Barbara Krakowicz and Ann-Kathrin Brefeld-Wolf. NAASA Working Papers. Sheffield, UK: Equinox Press, 2021

*Chapter Eight***Family History Notes****Sam's Seventieth Birthday Message to his Family**

January 6, 2013

To Corbin, Jennifer, Fatu, Shay, and Carlos,

Three score and ten years ago today I was given the gift of life and, since my blood runs through your veins as well, then, in a sense, so were all of you. As this day has approached I've found myself reflecting on what has become of me in these seven decades and what is or may be yet to come. I've thought about how to mark this milestone in my life. I suppose had I the more traditional life with a lifelong partner I would be giving you all a call from some lovely beach in Mexico or Puerto Rico to let you know that I remember you on my birthday. For reasons I don't fully understand that sort of life wasn't given to me. For reasons I don't have much of a clue about I took another path or made other choices, so you've got me face to face dealing with what surely would seem to many an unusual way to mark a 70th birthday. I'm not convinced this is anything you'll really understand (at least now) or appreciate, yet it is what I've chosen.

I have been inspired by several things in thinking how to endure this occasion or to somehow make positive what could so easily be negative. Orson Scott Card's wonderful 1994 book *Speaker for the Dead* introduces the notion of speaking truth for and about someone who has died; there is something to be said for speaking about, and speaking honestly about, things we often don't, either because we don't feel it appropriate or we don't have time or it seems too imposing. The downside of speaking for the dead is that the dead miss out on the truth-telling and the responses

of those who hear it. I don't want to wait that long and I've missed out on more than I'd like as it is.

I've also never quite thought that the practice of giving someone gifts and throwing them a party on their birthday quite makes sense, for it is the birthday person who should be celebrating his own gift of life that should be shared by giving gifts to others as tokens of the most precious gift any of us can receive. I also think that marking these major years—60, 65, 70—is a little much. My dad always said, “it's just another day,” but perhaps he was wrong or a bit too selfless. I know that being in New York City and going to see “The Lion King” on my 65th birthday after spending a couple of weeks in Puerto Rico was really wonderful. I remember feeling almost overwhelmed by this amazing Broadway show and thinking how remarkable a journey it had been that a kid born in a farm town in Kansas could wind up in New York City experiencing something so wondrous. As I have approached this day I've been simply baffled that I have completed seven decades of life. But as I contemplate this number, the number 70, it is surely a remarkable time for me to celebrate. On the one hand, I'm not yet to the point that decrepitude and decline are all that obvious; indeed, I certainly feel like the projects I have on my workbench are the most exciting and promising I have ever engaged. I feel that I can still move my body in artful and enjoyable and energetic ways. I feel that the future is opening and promising and interesting and inviting. Yet, on the other hand, I have come to that time of life when many of my ego needs, like career and personal status, are adequately satisfied as well as the fundamental responsibilities of providing for family and sustenance. It is a time when I can experience what I imagine is the finest meaning of generosity, giving simply for the pleasure of it.

In thinking about some of what I wanted to do today I have also been inspired by L. Frank Baum's 1900 classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and, perhaps more so, the movie. The wizard wasn't inherently powerful and the gravity of his apparent wisdom was based on his actions which were quite literally trickery employing smoke and mirrors and a nice sound system. Yet, he managed to offer gifts of value to those in need that they might realize their potentials and experience life fully. What he offered was what they already had but didn't realize. I want to try to do this today hoping that words can evoke something of the effect of smoke and mirrors. But a little more reflection first.

In thinking about this occasion and who I am becoming, I'm also reminded of Mary Doria Russell's character Father Emilio Sandoz in her 1996 novel *The Sparrow*. There is a certain expectation that at my age wisdom should have been achieved, yet I think wisdom is often equated with having proper answers. The thing about Sandoz that I so admire is his sense of self-confidence in action and living while embracing the unknowable, the confoundable, the unpredictable, the inexplicable, the adventure and the full range of emotions that go with this varied terrain. As a priest he was nonetheless seeking, while also doubting and most of the time being pissed off at god. He never knew what god wanted yet he kept at his life tasks. I suppose what interested me was his style; he was quiet yet humorous and clever and energetic; he

was extremely intelligent but didn't dismiss the associated power by espousing a bunch of cockamamie theological beliefs; he was deeply drawn to people (service, friendships, languages, anthropology) while being somehow always alone (not lonely; alone in some sense necessary to his character); he gave of himself extensively and deeply, but in no way that one would consider sacrificial; he was active and energetic yet controlled and calm. When I ask myself why I find Sandoz so admirable, I think it is because he embodies in many ways the dynamics of all of the academic research I have done over forty years and how these things have come to shape me as a person. I'd like to think that I am approaching some affinity with Sandoz's style.

I want to reflect briefly on those who gave me life because they also gave me value and character and style. I also remember them to, in some sense, keep them alive, it is the least I can do, but also to honor heritage. While my mother was almost totally dominating in the parenting I received (she always said "I speak for both daddy and me") as the years pass by I think it was my father that most influenced me. His gestures and actions set the pattern of my character and values more firmly than did my mother's words. My mother held amazingly high expectations for me and I always felt that I wasn't able to adequately please her, to earn her love, because any achievement was, at least as I heard her, only a step towards the next expectation she had for me. I simply wanted to be loved by her and I suppose I have worked my entire life, even all this decade since her death, to try to finally deserve that recognition, that love. One of the most confounding things in my life is that I don't think I ever felt her acknowledgement (which to me meant her love) and this somehow got transferred to my association with everyone else in my life. I still feel that I work so hard trying to achieve whatever it is that others might acknowledged me so that I might feel loved. The mystery to me is that despite wanting to be connected with others, what I seem to have achieved most decisively is a life almost totally alone.

My father was the dutiful, sacrificing, and a loving husband and father. He always put his family before himself and he always loved unconditionally. I got to know him best during the last years of my mother's life when she was so ill that she could no longer speak for the both of them and I talked only with him. This continued on during the half dozen years or so that he survived her. During that time I found him to be gracious, understanding, supportive, surprisingly affectionate and emotional and remarkably, given his Kansas roots and his residence in Texas, a liberal. And I felt that his love and acceptance of me were unconditional; just the opposite of what I felt from my mother (although I am sure this was my perception rather than her reality). Indeed, unconditional love is something, truth be told, I've only truly experienced several times in my life. I recount these things in gratitude with no complaints or regrets. We are formed almost totally in the framework of our family heritage and I acknowledge the wondrous gifts I was given by my parents. I owe most everything I have ever achieved to my mother. I owe my character, style, and humanity to my father and maybe a little bit of good humor as well.

At age seventy it can no longer be considered bragging to speak of one's achievements. This is something I've begun to enjoy more and more. I want to comment on some of these. Several times I have traveled for extensive periods and it has been my habit while traveling to write copious journals. Perhaps when I get really old I'll take some time to edit some of these for whatever that's worth. A concern that persistently engaged me in this journaling was to take stock of life and to think about what is most important to me. Invariably the conclusion quickly and decisively resolved in it being my children, my progeny. My first achievement, though I can take so very little credit really, is being fortunate enough to have two amazing children and to be close enough to them to not only watch them grow into adults, but to become friends as well as family with them throughout their adulthood. Then, of course, begetting succeeds begetting, and now I have two beautiful granddaughters. As I contemplate my mortality, or what my good friend John Minear calls "finitude," it is clearly these two girls that put all this in some perspective for me, making my eventual end almost acceptable. Having been born into a huge family that for many generations bore in common the family name "Gill," it stuns me that this name, this family, is coming to an end. Seems inappropriate somehow. So having kids and grandkids has really been but another gift I have been given rather than something I did.

Begetting for a guy ain't all that difficult. But parenting is quite a different matter. While being a parent has been my greatest occupation, I can't honestly say that I was all that good at it. I know that for most of two decades, and they were the most important decades, I didn't know enough about how to do it to do it well and I was further hampered by being so emotionally handicapped that I couldn't allow myself to even feel. All I knew to do was to do my best, to love my kids, and to follow my father's example by putting them first even though I think, bizarrely and ironically, this led to me removing myself to work in the guise of the sacrificial provider. I'm sorry for those years; I often think of them as the lost decades. I apologize to you all for the impact that this emotional distance and misplaced sense of love has in its reverberation on your lives. I, like all parents I think, tried to do the best I knew how. I just somehow didn't really know how. Oddly, perhaps because in time I emerged from this blight, I found myself out of sync with my own peers. I found myself emotionally, and even in some sense physically, peers with people a quarter century younger. I've never figured how to get back in sync.

Thanks then to my mom and to my sense that deserving to be loved meant working myself to the bone to provide for my kids, I have had a successful and productive career and I think I have become a good teacher, an imaginative researcher, and a pretty decent writer. I've never really understood quite why, but I seem to have an ability that often amazes me to see things in deep and complex ways and to be able to write about them in straight-forward and relatively poetic ways. Robertson Davies called it, I believe, "the plain style." I have been a loner through my academic career researching and writing more or less because I was driven to do so. I have received some professional recognition for this work, but very little actually

I think considering its merit. I think life is all of a piece however. I think my insight is largely due to my separation from the crowd, the community, yet my separation has meant that I have been less acknowledged and that I haven't developed colleagues or friends. This pattern is the defining fabric of my life.

My tenuous connection with the conventional academic career freed me to pursue dancing mid-career as both an academic and as key to my personal lifestyle. I am completely convinced that in the quarter century of dancing and fitness activities that my mind was completely reformed leading me to the research and writing that I am currently doing. It is I believe by far the most important work of my academic, indeed also my personal, life. It is sensing the importance of this work and that I have the skill and talent to achieve it artfully that energizes me as I look forward to my eighth decade of life. Oddly when I scarcely need it any longer, it may be this work that others will finally appreciate and perhaps through this work they'll discover the achievements of my other work spanning so many books and articles. I regret that this work remains invisible to my family because it most fully embodies and expresses who I am. I've taught at the University for forty years and I don't think anyone in my family has ever seen me in this setting.

While I think I should still have mixed emotions about my remarkable folly in the business of dance teaching and dance studios, the negatives and the heartaches of all that seem to have more or less evaporated in the last year or so; thankfully. I feel liberated and am grateful that the emotion I have around this part of my life now comes largely in the simple joy of being still able to move with skill and nuance and confidence not only in dancing, but in the gym. Although here in step aerobics classes, where I feel most fully myself, most joyful, it saddens me some that none of my family has much of an idea about this part of me. I am saddened that those I care most about don't know the best parts of me.

It still amazes me that, mid-fifties, I had the audacity, and surely stupidity, to jump into a business about which I knew nothing and had almost no preparation, yet, despite the remarkably high financial and emotional costs, it most certainly reformed me; I am, as a result, an entirely different person. The process was perhaps like being forged in a crucible or fired in a kiln; the heat and pain, sometimes agony, was almost alchemical. Out of that trial by fire came the great gifts of working with Jenny in such a close and powerful way and out of that came Fatu and Shay and Carlos and dozens of relationships and kids. Yes, there are those Bantaba babies that were born to bridge ethnic and national and racial boundaries; kids that I believe are a bright hope for the future. I realize that I will not be recognized as someone whose well-intended folly was responsible in some fundamental way for these relationships, these kids, yet, with Jenny's help, I really was and Jenny and I will always know that this has made an impact that was not limited to just a few stressful, yet joyous years, but will continue cascading through generation upon generation as these kids and their kids take their places and remake the world that so sorely needs it. I'll never see it, yet I believe it.

This is what I want to say to this point, now for the gifts, they are for you, although don't get too excited they are mostly virtual.

Seems fitting I should start with Corbin. Corbin, your birth introduced me to feeling unconditional and unbounded love for another human being. There is nothing quite like the love a parent feels for a new baby. I remember when you were the tiniest baby holding your bare bottom in my hand amazed that a living being could be so tiny and so precious. Indeed, throughout my life my unquestionable feelings for you and for Jenny have always been my measure of what love is. I remember the day, we lived in Park Forrest south of Chicago, that we discovered that you had diabetes. We were in the kitchen and the doctor phoned us and instructed us to take you immediately to the hospital. We took you to the University of Chicago Hospital and at that moment all our lives changed, for good or bad, who knows. As parents your mother and I had to supervise and monitor you when developmentally that is not what you needed. We had to interpret behavior in terms of insulin reactions rather than as natural kid behavior. Yet, from early on it was clear that you didn't want to be defined by diabetes and even risked health and well-being to assure this result. My very early memories of you as a child are as an engine running at high speed churning out creative thing upon creative thing, all seemingly for the simple pleasure of it. You were driven and you were always creative, finding the different side of things, a side no one else saw. Your imagination almost always outran your practical and social sense, leading you to costuming, roll-playing, dreaming, and acting in ways running counter to the norm. In many ways I think that you remain that imaginative productive creative child; that you never wanted to grow up or put away childish ways, because for you they are not childish, they are childlike, I agree with you, and it was Einstein, after all, who lauded the importance of remaining always the child. I have to admit that as your father this has sometimes been frustrating and heart-breaking as I have witnessed your struggles with the "real" world affecting you so deeply and too often negatively. Sometimes I have felt that I have enabled you to avoid growing up by supporting you in ways that perhaps a better father would have shown tough love and forced you to make your own way in the real world. But I didn't and I still can't, but I believe that what I have done has always been my attempt to be a supportive loving father. Most importantly for me, my aging has placed all this in perspective a bit and I've grown increasingly in the last years to simply love you for who you are and to support you however I am able. I have sought not to judge you (too much anyway) and to cherish your creativity and imagination and childlikeness.

Now I also know that you tend to stand a bit apart seemingly not quite knowing how to engage even your own family and with others in the world. Perhaps the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. You sometimes seem emotionally isolated and as a result perhaps uncaring. Yet, I do see that beneath these appearances you do feel and care deeply, yet for some reason (reasons I'm perhaps more familiar with than are you) you can't quite get in touch with these feelings to even admit them to yourself much less to others. You see I know that you are deeply humane and loving as well

as creative and productive. I was fifty years old before I was able to engage my own feelings and I had lots of help coming to terms with them. I fear that you have picked up this pattern from me, perhaps despite your desires to avoid this influence.

My first gift to you is that you feel and express your feelings without hesitation so that you will find love and comfort in your family; that you find yourself able and eager to reach out to nurture and love them. In Oz terms, maybe this is best represented as “heart”; you have a big one, accept the gift of sharing it with those you love.

My second gift to you is the ability to accept some of the constraints of the adult world so that you may enable and ultimately achieve the dreams of your childlikeness and so that your creativity and the almost obsessive productivity of your childlikeness will find a rightful place in the world where you will be allowed to realize your truly amazing potential. Maybe it is that a little bit of reality is the key to achieving your dreams.

Jenny, you are next. Having you in my life introduced me to something very special; the remarkable experience of that bond between fathers and daughters and certainly granddaughters. I don't think I was much of a father for you through much of your growing up. As the second child and a self-sufficient one in a family with an older brother who needed so much attention, you found yourself becoming an independent caregiver. There were the hard years of your searching and exploring and I'm afraid I wasn't much help even then beyond trying to give you the space to do what you needed to do and to try to show you that I was there for you, even though I often wasn't. Your difficult years were also my difficult years and I'm sorry that you had to suffer my weaknesses and shortcomings. Yet, as I got myself together I found that to nurture a relationship with you, even though you were out of high school, was a fundamental part of it. I well remember that I understood that I needed to actually start over with you and to take the long road to showing you how important you are to me. I'm so grateful that at that time, despite enormous pressure to hate me, you opened your heart to me and we have become many things to one another since. Being able to be so close to you in so many ways through the last dozen or so years is clearly among the most important experiences of my life. It is remarkable to me that we have been so many things to one another beyond parent-adult child: business partners, teaching partners, co-dreamers and schemers, and friends. The Bantaba days were difficult for us both, yet hanging together with you always insisting that our vision and values were fundamental, more fundamental than success and survival, we grew together. We learned and experienced many things, not all pleasant, yet we have much to show for it and we can't have regrets.

Now, you find yourself continuing the role of the selfless caregiver as a mom, a wife, and a daughter. Your life now is all about others, even as you attempt to hold onto the things with which you are doing for yourself: your business, your salsa teaching, your imagination of enterprises that can be healthy and personally fulfilling and, above all, the qualities that most distinguish you, your adventurous creative spirit, your crazy sense of humor, and your courage to be natural, non-pretentious.

You have the emotionally wrenching primary responsibility for the care of your mother and I see you doing this lovingly with patience. Surely this poignant task colors everything in your life now and frankly that simply isn't right. This is not something someone your age should have to endure. You are also engaged with the greatest responsibility anyone can have, the parenting of two beautiful smart talented daughters. As they are the most precious of gifts they demand everything in your reserves. And so too with your marriage; you are a supporter and partner, both of which take much from you.

Jenny, what virtual gift might I give you? As with the gifts given by the Wizard of Oz, it seems the most precious ones are the ones that you already have, but don't realize and for you I think this is simply yourself, your true self. In your selflessness, in your being a caregiver, in your being a mother (even giving from your body to your baby), in your giving to your husband, in your giving and caring for your mother and brother and father, in now making a new home—in all your giving to and supporting others you come last if at all among your priorities. Many of the things that you have so loved and have been so essentially who you are, aren't given a place in your life now. Giving so much and caring so much is an amazing thing and is itself fulfilling, but it can lead to a loss of your personal dreams and desires and pleasures. So I give to you, yourself, with not only the remarkable loving qualities of mom, wife, daughter, sister, and caregiver, but also the rugged individualism that you showed as snowboarder, the creativity of the artist, the skills of entrepreneur, the imagination of future endeavors that build on your rich life experience and the many talents and skills it has given you. And the heritage of humor that stems from my father, runs through me and you and Corbin to Fatu. Please take this gift and lovingly demand of all those that depend on you the time and resources to nurture and love yourself; you are so worth it.

Jenny I also know that among the many demands you experience it is sometimes difficult for you to do tasks that seem unpleasant or a nuisance. Still leaving them until later only complicates and adds pressure and weight. Jenny I give you the magic wand of "prompt action on nasty tasks" as a supplement to your many wonderful personal traits so that you will experience a new lightness of being.

Carlos, you are not my kin and I've known you only a short time. Yet, I think I have seen something of who you are as you have become a father. Certainly, you have been a kind and engaged adult in Fatu's life, but babies offer something different and I believe a fundamental measure of a man is in how he relates to his infant child. I see myself with my first baby in the unbounded love you have for Shay. I remember that I couldn't even sleep at night for a very long time after Corbin was born because I was listening for his every sound as he slept. You have that dearness of heart that connects you with your baby daughter and that love extends outward to Fatu and to Jenny and to others around you. It is very sweet and I believe highly admirable.

I also know you to be impassioned about your work. On the one hand this is a part of you being responsible to care and provide for your family and on the other it is truly your passion; you love your work and that is essential for you to be happy

and satisfied. The potential price of this passion, however, is the difficulty in balancing the time and energy you spend with your family and the amount you devote to your personal passion. Whereas Jenny's balance is necessarily tipped overly to ignore her personal passions because her "work" is in taking care of others, yours is tipped towards your personal passion (your work) because following it is identified with how you provide for your family. There is here temptation and there is danger and the forces for allowing your career, your work, your personal passions to take over will only increase over time. As you have learned I know all too well this imbalance. My gift to you is "balance."

Fatu, you are so deeply in my heart that I can't imagine my life without you; I can't even imagine the world without you. As I see you go through life, I'm delighted by your intelligence, your humor, your beauty, your talent, yet I think I'm most amazed by your grace. I have thought a lot about this and what I mean by grace encompasses many things. It certainly means the beauty and effortlessness with which you move in the world. It also means your charm and attractiveness both physically and your character. It also means your sense of rightness and value; your considerateness of others and your thoughtfulness. I suppose what I mean most by this word "grace" is that all of your many fine qualities are not simply a list of unrelated skills or abilities or attributes; rather they are all interwoven into you because it is the consistency and beauty and interconnectedness of all these qualities that make you who you are. You move so beautifully not because you have taken a class to learn to do so, but because it is the manifestation of your intelligence and humor and thoughtfulness and kindness. Your intelligence is not expressed because you want to earn good grades or be smart but because it is an essential part of who you are. Dancing, I think, is so appropriate for you because it so thoroughly expresses the interconnection of all the facets of who you are; as you said yourself, dancing is how you are most fully yourself.

Fatu, you are also a deeply feeling person; you have strong and powerful emotions. Things impact you and you are strongly affected by your sense of your own actions. Sometimes you feel hurt by what happens to you and your emotional response can get beyond your control. You sometimes cry. I'm not going to give you the gift of "control." I'm not going to give you the gift of not having such feelings. I'm not giving you these things because I believe that the hurt and pain you feel are inseparable from your abilities to feel so clearly the beat in the music, to uncannily interpret the feeling of the music in your movement, in your love of stories, in your imagination, in your connection to and feeling for others. My gift to you Fatu is "tears" because you know that tears come both from sadness and pain as well as joy and happiness. Tears come from feelings about yourself, but more importantly about being able to feel for others. Tears lubricate your eyes and make them glisten and shine. Tears remove obstacles so you can see clearly. Tears relieve as they express. Tears then can remind you that there is a necessary connection between sadness and joy, between pain and happiness and you can know and remember that when you cry because you are sad or hurt, it is part of the blessing of having deep feelings, of caring

so much, of being so graceful. Tears are amazing things. I think that the beautiful and graceful shape of the teardrop expresses what I'm talking about.

Baby Shay you have it all now and you have it all before you. You are already demonstrating intensity and focus in the way you study the world around you with those dark eyes. You are already showing the ease with which you'll manage things and people in your quickness to smile and laugh. You are already showing your eagerness to become a commanding part of the conversation by your delight in speaking out. Like your sister, it looks like you already to have it all. So what I have to give you is again in the tradition of Oz which is something you already have, but will come increasingly to understand and treasure: your family.

My Mother's Story of How My Parents Meet

Mother - Lelah May Grantham (11/20/1914 -- 6/28/2001, age 87)

Father - Chester Dale Gill (10/22/1915 -- 3/3/2007, age 92)

I had apparently asked my parents for information about them. I'd really wanted to set them up with a tape recorder so they could simply tell, in their own voices, their stories. What a treasure that would have been for me. But Mom said they wouldn't be comfortable doing that, so she wrote a couple of short descriptions to at least give me a bit of their story.

In a letter postmarked January 23, 1996, my mother wrote about how difficult their financial situation was. I think Elaine and I had borrowed some money from them that they had in minimal interest savings accounts. As I remember we paid them much better interest with the advantage to us that it was cheaper at that time than getting personal loans. At that time, they were in their early 80s and wanting to leave Cherryvale to move to Texas close to either of my sisters. They also mentioned that the plans for a large family gathering to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. My mother responded to my request that they make tape recordings and then offered a story.

We wouldn't feel at all comfortable talking & using a tape unless you were asking questions & so on. We told the girls [my sisters] what you were wanting & they thought it was great. I asked both of them if they knew where I was born & they didn't know.

I was born in Cherryvale in the first block west of the highway on the north side of the street. I know the location but the house is different.

You ask about our early years. I didn't remember when I first knew there was a Chet Gill [my dad] but Maxine [Maxine Avey was my mom's cousin; her dad was Benjamin Avey the brother of my mother's mother Ocy Lenore] and I went out to Aunt Flora's [Florence Avey was my mother's mother's sister] one summer when she was cooking for silo men. I suppose I was a freshman or

sophomore. Anyway, I talked to Maxine about how cute he was. I knew that I was older because I was ahead of him in school. From there we go to my senior year in High School. I was in the senior play & he sang in the boys' quartet between acts. After the play 4 couples, no one special went for a ride & ended up on the other side of the lake at the Country Club. None of the couples cared about each other, we were just having fun talking & laughing. Anyway—the girl with Chet stood up to whisper to the girl in front & when she did that Chet grabbed me & pulled me over by him. The other girl was so surprised but anyway that was the start of going together. We had a rough time because Chet had to come to town with Ralph [his older brother]—he was dating Adah [whom he married] but finally Chet bought a little ford from Bernice [his older sister] for \$100.00. Things were a little easier then but he always had to go home to help with the chores. We dated for 5 years before we got married & the day before we got married, I was working at the grocery store when Lucile Sturgeon [my dad's older sister] came in & told me that we had no business getting married that the folks needed him to help them. I'll continue later.

I received an envelope with a few historical items in it that was postmarked January 29, 1996. In a letter my mom, seeming to be continuing on, but not commenting further with her soon-to-be sister-in-law's advice. She wrote,

I talked about me last time so will talk about Chet. Guess you know that he was born out on the farm. When his folks were first married they lived in Independence. Chet's Dad [George Washington Gill] worked for a Mr. Schultz & trained race horses & farmed. From there to Neodesha then from there to Elk City & later on March 1 (moving day) they moved out to the farm northeast of Cherryvale. Millie [my dad's sister] and Chet were born there. Chet will fill in a lot of details when we see you. I'm sending this letter from Uncle Walt [my mother's father's brother] to Obby [my mother's older brother] too. You might send it back. [I must have returned it.]

My Mother's Mother's Avey Family History

My mother's cousin, Don E. Avey, wrote to me about my possession of some family Bibles that had belonged to my mother's grandparents. I did have them but don't recall quite how they came to me. He was interested in the dates recorded in them to assist him in his work on the history and genealogy of his grandfather, Joseph Osborn Avey who went by his initials J O. I copied the requested pages and then in 2012 Don sent me a narrative presenting the results of his research. I'm presenting this here for the record without editing, although I add a few bits and corrections in square brackets.

J O [Joseph Osborne Avey (1857-1946). I would have been only 3 when he died, but I well remember people talking about “Grandpa” or “Grandpa Avey”.] was born in Keedysville, Maryland July 1, 1857. The town is at the sight of the Civil War battle of Antietam, to this day the bloodiest day in American’s history. J O told me stories of him watching soldiers coming off the battlefield, some on wagons, some able to walk, most wounded in battle.

Why the parents of I O Avey moved their family to Ohio, I do not know. Census show several Avey families living in this area. Using mostly Ancestor.com and early census, I traced what I think is our family being in the United State back to the mid 1700s. It would appear that Aveys came from England and Germany. At times the name was spelled Ewy and pronounced “Avey”. The Aveys settled in Virginia and western Maryland.

Old records from Washington County, Maryland shows original land patents to Aveys. The Avey tree I make started with my father, George Edward “Ed” Avey. I call it a “straight line” as I followed only fathers, mothers, grandparents, no children.

J O & his wife Susan, three young daughters with J O’s parents, his younger sister Decotia (“Cody” 1868-1965), moved to Indiana where another daughter (Florence 1884) was born. Decotia was married to James W Spade in Indiana. I do not know where they lived in Indiana or when they move to or from Indiana. This group moved to O’Dell, Nebraska (south of Beatrice, Neb.). One girl (Sally 1885) and two boys (C W [Charles] 1888 & Ben 1889) were born to J O & his wife in Nebraska. Some time in the early 1890s J O & his family moved to Kingfisher O T [Oklahoma Territory], leaving behind in Nebraska the Spades (they had no children) and J O’s parents. They lived out their lives in O’Dell and are buried in American Cemetery, O’Dell.

J O must have taken a claim on the land in Kingfisher County. I think that there were at least three openings of the “Indian lands” in Oklahoma [Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889], the first in 1889 and the last, most famous, and largest race was held on September 16, 1893 with over 100,000 people “running” to claim land. I know for sure that J O ran in the last run in 1893. For some reason, I always thought that J O started the race from Arkansas City, Ks [Kansas], I believe that he entered from Hennessey, Okla. because Hennessey was about forty miles from Kingfisher and closer to Enid than any other entry point.

I remember J O talking about his “run” into the strip several times. He said, he had a good pony named “Billie,” Billie was fast, sure footed and that he (J O) took very good care of him. He said, “it was a very hot day and that there were probably thousands of people at the starting line and many of the people were carrying guns.” There were at least three starting places; Hennessey, OK, Arkansas City and

Caldwell, Ks. The run would start at 12 noon. The army would fire a cannon to start the race. People were on horseback, wagons and on foot. I remember J O saying he was setting on Billie with one leg over the saddle horn when about five or ten minutes before noon a pistol went off nearby and the race was on! Billie jumped forward and J O was almost thrown off of Billie, he recovered and got into the saddle. I remember him saying that he stopped several times to rest Billie and got the claims that he wanted. He stayed after the race for a few days and sold the claims before coming home. He said that many people rode too hard too far and wore their horses out.

He hired some men to help him and he got the claims he wanted. Aunt "Alu" [Alice (1877-1971)] told me that J O was gone almost a week and that C W (Charlie), who was about 5-6 years old at the time, missed his Dad and would spend a lot of time watching the trail for his Dad to come home. As I remember J O's daughters called him "Pa," the boys [called him] J O. Frank Ellis [Sally's (1885-1980) husband] told me years later that J O had hired at least two men to stake claims for him. Frank thought that J O had made a trip into the strip before the run to look things over and pick what he would like to have. Who knows, maybe he staked a claim or two before the opening! This may qualify J O as a "Sooner," [these were people who entered the area to stake claims before the legal date and time] which would not surprise me! Frank thought that J O claimed several lots on the northeast corner of the square in downtown Enid and at least two or three claims on land outside of the city and sold them before going home.

The Enid Museum files of claims were checked years ago. Surely, claims had to be recorded before selling them. I did not find any records with the name of Avey, however, the clerk told me that their records were not complete and that the county records should be checked. This I did not do.

Census records for early Oklahoma Territory (1890s) could not be found, so I am not sure when the Aveys moved to Oklahoma. I also found that it was hard to find census records from Maryland and Virginia around the time of the Civil war. It may have been that many people did not want to talk to census takers because they were afraid to reveal their support of the North or South.

From some things that Aunt Alu said about the time they lived in Kingfisher county, they must have lived on a farm and been on a main road, as they had people stop to water their horses & buy feed. From time to time people would camp over night near their home. She said that the family had a big garden that she and the older girls worked in. Before going into the garden she would take a hoe and check under plants for rattlesnakes.

From time to time, small groups of Indians would also appear wanting to water horses. They never caused any trouble, but she was

very scared when a group of Indians stopped while both her Mother & Father were gone and she was alone with the other kids. Frank Ellis told me that Joe Ellis [his and Sally's son] made a trip to Kingfisher and checked court house records and found the land that J O & his family apparently own[ed] & lived on was north of Kingfisher. Joe said that the land looked good. I do not recall if it was farm or ranch land. He also told his father [Frank] that there was oil production in the area. I remember Charles Ellis [Frank's other son] telling me that he & Joe had ask their mother to tell them stories of the time when she was young & growing up. Charles said she did & that they recorded it. I do not know what ever happened to the recording. That would be interesting. [Joe and Charles were my mother's cousins. Their mother Sally was sister to my mother's mother, Ocy]

J O & family moved from Oklahoma to Baxter Springs, Ks, probably around 1896 or '97, why I do not know. Baxter Springs was a booming area about that time with lead, zinc & coal mining. According to the Baxter Springs paper, J O was in the grocery business at least part of the time that he was in Baxter Springs. C W, Jr. [Charles Junior is what I always heard him called and he too was my mother's cousin, his dad, Charles, being my mother's mother's brother] told me that he sold hay to farmers and delivered it with a wagon & team of horses. C W, Jr. said that his father would go with J O on some of these deliveries. I also recall that someone said that J O had a livery stable while in Baxter. At any rate, with nine children, he had to be doing something all of the time to take care of them!

Baxter Springs is a very interesting town with a lot of history. It has a very well done Heritage Center & Museum with information about the town's early history. In Columbus, Ks, the county seat of Cherokee county is a genealogy library that is also well done. I have made two trips to this library and found several newspaper articles about the family. Ocy, J O's daughter married Oscar Grantham in early 1904 [these are my grandparents whom I never met] and moved to Cherryvale to open Grantham music store. Thirty days later J O & family moved to Cherryvale. Lelah Grantham Gill [my mother] always said that J O moved his family so that they would all be close!

Cherryvale and Montgomery [county] was a very prosper[ous] area from the 1890s to the depression. Per capital income was very high compared to the rest of the country. The Cherryvale area had several large brick yards, one of the largest zinc smelters (located on the northwest edge of town, do not know if the old smelters toxic waste has been completely clean[ed] up) in the country. The town was serviced by two main railroads, Santa Fe & Frisco including rail lines covering all the points of the compass & in between and a passenger interurban line [when I was a kid this was known as "the old street car"]. The area was blessed with good farm, pasture land, water and shallow oil & gas wells. Drive around Independence today and you

will still see several old mansions that were built during the boom days. Like most of the country, the area crashed very hard during the depression, even after eighty years it does not have a very good economy. B C Avey & Brother (Ben & Ed, another story) was one of a few businesses in Cherryvale to survive the depression. They very quietly helped many good people during that time. [When I was a little kid this grocery store was still operating.]

There are several things that are still missing in my research of the Aveys. I don't know for sure what J O did from the time he got out of the grocery business in 1917, he was 60 years old at the time. I remember someone talking about a farm he lived on east of Cherryvale, but don't know where. I remember his big gardens on Clark Street. I am sure that he sold most of the potatoes, etc. to the store [Avey Bros Grocery] for resale. He also took care of our yard and Uncle Ben's yard as long as he could. I remember that he and my mother [Anna] got along very well, my mother could drive and did things that a lot of women at that time did not do. [When I was a kid, Uncle Ed, Aunt Alu, and Uncle Ben, all siblings, lived within a block of one another on the south side of Clark Street across from the park and swimming pool.]

A story about him [J O] not getting along with his father apparently is not true. After J O was married, they, his parents & younger sister moved to Indiana, and then Nebraska, before J O & family moved to Oklahoma. Why J O moved so many times? Probably for free or cheap land (homestead act) and greater opportunity of some reason. The family & J O lived several places in Cherryvale. I have not checked to see if they owned or rented. His children moved very little. For example my parents (Ed & Anna Malcom Avey) bought their home at 521 Clark Street in 1914, one year after their marriage. They built on the house over the years and never live[d] any where else.

Looking back, I feel blessed that I knew J O as I did. I was his youngest grandchild. He was a person from a different time and a great time in our country's history and he lived it. He and his wife Susan had to be very strong people to have nine children, move so much and raise a great family. I feel that J O was a very good, tough, hard driving businessman, (much like his sons) but a very compassionate, loving husband, father and grandfather.

Chapter Nine

Photos



Avey Family, Circa 1903, Baxter Springs, Kansas

Top (L to R): Charles (1887-1979), Alice "Alu" (1877-1971), Elizabeth "Betsy" (1878-1971), Sally (1885-1980); Middle (L to R): Florence "Florrie" (1882-1971), Joseph Osborne "J O" (1857-1946), Susan Marie nee Bales (1853-1917), Ocy Lenore (1881-1920); Bottom (L to R): Sam Earl (1895-1962), Ben (1889-1968), George Edward "Ed" (1893-1948) NOTE: I have memories of meeting Uncles Charlie, Ben, and Ed, but not much content. I had very close relationships with Aunts Alu and Betsy, who I think is quite beautiful in the picture. I spent lots of time with these two and loved them dearly. I also knew Aunt Florrie, whom I was a little less close to. These three all lived in Cherryvale and had close relationships although they each insisted on living alone. They all died the same year as seems fitting. I knew Aunt Sally well and she and Uncle Frank Ellis lived in Wichita when I went to college there and I sometimes visited them. I remember Uncle Sam well and knew him throughout my youth. I never met my grandmother Ocy, who looks a bit stern in the picture, or great grandmother Susan who lived to age 64 amazingly it seems having had nine kids. I was three when Grandpa "J O" died and I suppose what seem like memories of him are likely memories of the many stories everyone told about him.



Joseph Osborne "JO" & Susan Marie Avey
Wedding Photo, 1876, Xenia, Ohio
JO was only 19 and Susan was 23



Samuel Earl Avey
Tulsa, Oklahoma



Uncle Sam's Coliseum in Tulsa



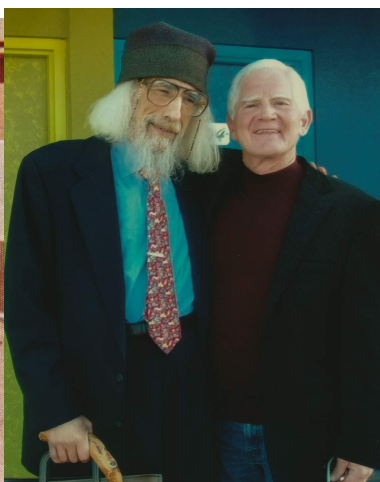
Sam 1946
Smelter Cottage
Cherryvale, Kansas



Lelah & Chester Gill
Rocky Mountain National Park



Don Talayesva (Hopi, age 86) & Sam
Arizona State University, 1976



Jonathan Z. Smith & Sam
Boulder, Colorado, April, 2010