

Parish/Sgarlat/Johns family history

I went to a 4th of July houseboat party in Sausalito this year to see a friend I met at a wedding 2 or 3 years earlier. It was on the same boat—my wedded friend had been renting it for the summer, and my newer friend is married to the owner of the houseboat. She used to be an agent for various local sports figures, set up foundations for a number of law firms and is terrifyingly rich, but OK essentially despite herself, which is quite an accomplishment, I think people would agree.

It took me several passes of the entrance to locate that set of houseboats along the bay. In order to keep their privacy, few signs in Sausalito are either visible or accurate. After numerous phone calls to the host and hostess, who appeared busy hosting or partying since no one answered, I caught a glimpse of something that reminded me of the wedding back then, so I took a turn into the parking lot, right in both senses of the word, and called to confirm I was in the right place.

The host met me and carried some of my presents, including refreshments and books I wanted to share. They were soon returning to Brooklyn to be with her two young grandchildren for several months. The party was in full swing. The association of houseboat owners had booked a band for the holiday, and it was floating right next to their houseboat. So that you could either dig the super-loud groove, or sit next to your neighbor's tonsils to hear whatever it was they were trying to communicate with you about. Luckily, the band took a break and I got into a conversation with a nice woman named April whose 6 year old then started running up to her with a new demand every nanosecond. That made the conversation episodic at best until her own mom took the boy away and she asked my name again. I always mention my world famous son in the first 5 minutes, to get the conversational high ground, and in this case it was a slam dunk. "Billy Parish is your son?" she exclaimed. "I interviewed him for Mother Jones 10 years ago. Maybe

15. He is the coolest person I ever met. I remember the time I spent with him as if it was yesterday.” She was retired from journalism now since China declared her *persona non grata* for something she wrote about them, but said it was too complex to mention and besides it still made her sad and angry, since the radical magazine just caved and canned her.

I considered whether, as a writer, she should have said “were” and decided it was too close to call, not to mention on the wrong side of pedantic. It’s a perpetual issue with English majors and writers, and being both of those, and a recovering Wall Street lawyer, I have to shed a lot of armor to get close to anyone. She seemed like someone who, if she thought that of my son, must have good judgment.

I noticed her mother came across as smart and attractive for her age as she whisked the child away to allow us to talk. But I learned that what grandma liked best, like Garbo, was to be alone. I realized this would be hard to argue with, especially if I couldn’t get her out for a glass of wine or a cup of coffee, or even a walk in the park.

My point is this, April had opened the door to my favorite subject, my family, and its unusual history with the happy ending it encompasses. After hearing ten minutes from me, she insisted that I write it up. I have told versions of it a hundred or more times, but never committed it to paper. So hold onto your hat and your credulity. The time is now.

My father was born in St. Louis, the illegitimate son of a 16 year old nursing student who loved to dance and party, although on the very few occasions when I met her, years after my dad was born, I recall her sitting in a large upholstered chair with a half-filled ashtray on one arm of the chair and a highball glass in the other hand, holding down the chair with a good 230 plus pounds. You could hardly see her eyes for the fat. We lived overseas a good part of my youth due to his Army career, catching Nazis in hiding after WW II, then chasing Communist spies in the DC area during the McCarthy insanity, which enabled him to avoid her. She had always refused to tell him who his father was, out of

embarrassment, pride or orneriness is not known. To observe that a great deal of Irish Pride has Shame for its middle name might be one way to put it.

My father was in Counter-Intelligence, finding moles and rats within the armed services and those who were using them to obtain government secrets. He also won two European basketball championships of the Armed Forces, one in Berlin where we held the tournament during the blockade to show the Russkis they couldn't stop whatever we wanted to do. He told me he didn't have the biggest guys, but CIC had by far the smartest, since treachery is always a product of the mind. Later, he helped run down members of the military—a certain type whose sexual persuasion came under scrutiny then and was ferreted out, as the expression was. Senator McCarthy had made it the only unforgivable sin, unfailingly creating a dishonorable discharge. That sexual preference, now widely accepted and understood, was then anathema on the premise that they could be blackmailed into sharing government secrets with foreign or domestic enemies of the state.

His mother lived at the sanitarium (booby hatch) for 3 weeks of the month, came home to a shanty style tenement housing 40 Irish families, then promptly went out with her buddies to venues sporting liquor, music and dancing. It was World War I, before Prohibition. She managed to find an older man, an engineer who, as it turned out, built all of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings, all over the world, one of those projects being the reason for his sojourn in St. Louis. He was a big, strong handsome man with a lively mind, an expense account and a suite upstairs from the bar, or next door, for making whoopee. He was supervising the construction of the First National Bank of St. Louis's flagship building.

In that era, construction of a project like that meant you stayed for a year and a half or more, going home only for two weeks at Christmas and two in the summer. During my career on Wall Street, travel to the provinces,

where the projects are, is part of the gig, and how funding is sold by people who were glorified salesmen.. So you quickly learned about the 500 mile rule, frequently reduced to 50, where all bets were off. The same rules applied within Manhattan when the clients came in to sign the papers and get the money. No one ever mentioned what transpired. That rule probably started during the Roman Empire, if not before. Boys will be boys, even when they look like grown men.

The lovely colleen soon found herself pregnant, but by the time she was sure, the gent in question had already left town, never to return. Besides which he had a wife at home on Park Avenue and in Litchfield County, Connecticut, the fashionable weekend and summer retreat for folks of that stripe. One of the loops in this narrative is that his wife, 25 years younger, had been lighting the kerosene lamps one Friday night at their Connecticut getaway house (later owned by Paul Newman until he died, but still known as the Parish House) when the silk shawl she was wearing caught fire and burned her face. She was hideously disfigured, and no one but her physician ever saw her face again. That occurred before he went to St. Louis. She also outlived him by 30 years-- a dozen years after he sowed the seed that became my dad, me, my kids and our grandkids.

My granddad died 15 years after he started this branch of his family. He suffered a heart attack while supervising the construction of two buildings on the National Mall. I always noticed them when going to the places in DC I haunted,—each featured huge, muscular war horses barely restrained by overly muscular handlers, an anomaly on the National Mall. Thinking back, they had to be part of the New Deal's thinking about the world of art, which had more socialist and communist thinkers than otherwise during the Depression. Both agencies that occupied them were of the same New Deal stripe, and stood out from their much more traditional companions.

I went to high school nearby in Northern Virginia, spending a lot of time driving into the DC Library, the Library of Congress, the Phillips Gallery and the National Gallery, which also had a great cafeteria for lunch, during my last two years in high school. McLean was a newly developing suburb still in the first phases of being the CIA high school--Langley was a mile away on the Potomac and the building now there was under construction. I dated the daughter of the #3 guy in the agency, and was voted the "Wittiest" in my class's Senior Superlatives. Aldrich Ames, the infamous CIA traitor, got that honor two years behind me--his sister was head cheerleader in the class ahead of me and his mom chaired the English department. Our top ten graduates included me, while 8 of us became tenured professors at major universities and colleges, and one woman became the head of the Holocaust division of the National Archives.

Even I was impressed, over time and at reunions, about what a strong school it was, but it was also true that except for the rich people who lived in Northwest DC, and whose kids went almost entirely to private schools that fed the Ivy League and the Seven Sisters colleges, the civil servants lived in the burbs, and ours was close to the river and across from DC. Suburbanization had interesting affects—when I arrived we were Fairfax County football champions and when I left, we were chess champions, including me. I raked leaves and cut up fallen trees for firewood for Stuart Udall, then the Secretary of the Interior, whose house was set back from the road and had a great cliff-side view of the Potomac below Great Falls. On the other side you could see Georgetown Pike, which ended and began at the first bridge between Virginia and DC.

When my grandmother came home from her 3 weeks of the month sleeping in the sanitarium, she had no interest in her little boy, so he was raised by all the families, which is to say not at all. Her mother was a police matron in the women's jail, working the night shift, and her

husband drove Clydesdales for the original Budweiser wagons. My dad's mother refused, for reasons that made sense back then-- having to do with shame and changing the subject to cloak the "wrong side of the blanket" issue. In those days, when a young woman who was unmarried came to a hospital to give birth, the surgeons tied her tubes as part of their services, So she just grew larger and larger, taking up with a series of taxi drivers as beaux. My father always wondered, with no response from his only parent, whether one of them might be his dad. None were, luckily-- the tomcat had skipped town, but his brain remained, and still does generations later. My father had little to say about himself on subjects other than the St. Louis Cardinals, but he would make sure you knew he'd scored the second highest in the city of St. Louis on the IQ test given to students in the 11th grade then. He finally found out after she died, and he found the obit from the Washington Post in her safety deposit box along with not much else, 35 years too late, who his dad had been, which only provided more heartburn for the soul. But the *pater familias* had left the most precious part of himself to be further fertilized and cultivated.

The immediate result of that was that I was always the smartest kid in the class, at the Army schools overseas and the public schools in Illinois, Maryland and Virginia growing up—17 schools before college since we moved often so my dad could do his sleuthing and trouble-shooting. When I fought my way into Princeton over the objections of my mother (she was afraid I would turn into F Scott Fitzgerald and "high hat" the family). Her family was also from the laboring class, farmers, barbers and beauticians, with degrees from barber and beauty colleges). My father simply resented, ostentatiously, the opportunities I received via the Ivy League which he felt should have come to him. When I called to tell him I was graduating cum laude, he quickly asked "magna or summa?" In fact, my advisor told me, sadly but definitively, that on my comprehensive exams I had crossed out the correct answer to one of the three essay questions (about identifying the author--I knew it was Defoe,

but had so much time left that I second guessed myself out of a magna by changing my answer to D. H. Lawrence). He accompanied that news with a sigh I carried through graduation. I am still mad at myself for my lack of confidence at that point, fueled as it was by the alacrity I always brought to test occasions, otherwise with great success other than that. I have to add that one of the unfortunate attributes of academic success was to bring out a level of pride and snottiness that crops up still, to my discomfort and sadness at times. In high school I liked to say “So do you want a battle of wits? Would you like me to lend you a weapon?” and other similar teenage obnoxiousness. Looking down on other people, turning the tables, since I’d felt so long in so many situations other than school since otherwise I felt completely “less than” in all the ways that counted.

Balance is hard to achieve in many aspects of life. I still have to remind myself not to rip off the list of my achievements to anyone who will sit still long enough. I’ve learned much more listening than I ever did patting myself on the back and demonstrating how arrogant someone could get with a run of luck and unbelievably kind and generous mentors throughout my life. For years now, I’ve made an effort to acknowledge “little people” wherever I encounter them. So many of us, these days of cell phones and self-importance, ignore and depersonalize them, looking right through them as if they weren’t there. I enjoy having conversations in which I am completely present and never fail to gain from that. I hope it helps. It certainly makes me feel better. I also end all my emails and texts with a thank you since gratitude is an underappreciated virtue and I’ve never been all that great at feeling or expressing it, so I practice reminding myself what a wonderful and amazing life and family I have.

To be honest, the second time I took the SATs in high school, which I had killed the first time, I was so overconfident that I thought I was finished half an hour early, only to discover with 3 minutes to go that I’d omitted one of the 4 sections of the test, reducing my score by a hundred

points. Luckily, although that was part of what fueled my arrogance, I killed the PSAT test, got an invitation by checking a box on some form, to an interview for the Telluride Association Summer Program at Cornell where my future was determined. They chose 14 young men from all over the country and we spent 6 weeks on the Bill of Rights during the Democratic Convention, which we watched every night, that nominated JFK. This put me in touch with a philosophy prof and Princeton alum. He happened to have been a Rhodes Scholar, lightweight crew member, secretly gay, and a beach master in 7 island invasions during the Pacific campaign. At Iwo Jima, he was rocketed 30 feet in the air by a Japanese shell's explosion, only coming to almost a week later on a hospital ship. On his bedside table he saw his Princeton class ring, blown off his finger, and recovered by a classmate leading a squadron of Marines into the fray shortly after that blast. When that man spotted it on a sand dune and looked inside the ring, seeing the initials JWS, he was able to return it to his classmate and friend.

Professor James Ward Smith, my first mentor, part of a string of remarkable men who helped shape me and opened doors in life and doors of the mind—Full Professor (promoted while I was there) as my roommates and I liked to shout at him across the quad he lived on one side of while we occupied the other. He had a ton of stories like that, and liked to have the 3 of us who came to Princeton over for sherry, a tate developed at Oxford as if it was part of their program, to hear his stories, see his photos from the war and at Oxford and Rome, where he spent a year as a fellow at the American Academy After the sherry he would quiz us about Renaissance artists and sculptors and, of course, philosophers. He also loved to show off a photograph of the one lonely Japanese officer in Hokkaido, the desolate northernmost island of Japan, from whom he had been seconded to accept the document of surrender of that island. Indeed, that man did look in the photo like one of the saddest men on Earth. Jim Smith was enough taken with me at Cornell to assure my admission to PU, which made my life what it came to be,

opening doors and putting me among faculty and classmates whose richness in all respects at first astonished me, but I found I had a home at last, after attending 17 schools on my way, to my enormous benefit.

Since this is my memoir, although it's about all of us, I also have to share the most remarkable part of that summer, aside from the convention itself, I met the man who loaded The Bomb on the Enola Gay, a physics prof at Cornell, and the house resident who wrote the book on politics that was then in use in all major universities and colleges in the US. We also had a seminar with a visitor, Frances Perkins, whom I had never heard of-- women weren't part of history then. She'd been FDR's Secretary of Labor in New York and the first woman cabinet member in Washington. She was also personally responsible for forcing the men to include Social Security in the New Deal package. We owe the best part of our world and society largely to her efforts and consciences.

When she was a social worker in Greenwich Village after college, she heard noises and screaming on the South side of Washington Square Park and ran to see what was up, only to witness the girls from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory leaping, on fire, to their deaths one after another. This provided her with a drive that never diminished, so now she is famous and in the history books. She even got a commemorative stamp with her likeness on it.

She asked me, during the sherry hour before dinner, if I would sit next to her. I had no idea I'd been that eloquent in the seminar, and as is often the case, I hadn't been, although that was always a conclusion I was desperate to leap to. It turned out that she wanted a fairly normal 17 year old to tell her how the brand new birth control pill recently announced to mixed reviews from the populace was going to affect sexual behavior among young people. She was 86 years old and wore widow's weeds, a broad black hat and black dress with a veil she turned back, but she keenly wanted first-hand information from the front. As a

virgin, but not unacquainted with the subject, I managed to tap dance and freelance my way through to her satisfaction—an early sign that lawyering was in my future, one might argue strongly.

In return, she told me stories of how the president had sent her to Detroit during the sit down strikes, when management gunmen and police were shooting strikers dead in the streets and the factories. The last of the Big 3 CEOs she saw was Walter Chrysler, who told her that he'd tell her something no one else knew. So her life literally depended, and he meant that, on her keeping his secret to her grave. He had been a railroad worker during the Pullman Strike, led by Eugene Debs, in 1898, so he, alone among the auto industry leaders, knew what life was like on the other side. Because of that, and since he would be meeting with Henry Ford and Alfred Sloan very soon, he wanted any ideas she could provide him to help persuade the others to make peace rather than continue the killings. Can you imagine any industry leader, in our highly regimented capitalistic, monopoly-driven world of today, asking a government official, no matter how high up, for advice on any subject?

The arrogance that accompanies the bigwigs as they take home salaries involving multiples by the thousands of the average workers' pay and cut staff seems to allow them to feel entitled to tell the government off, with orations against regulation and restraint of any kind of the Great God Greed. That's my commercial. Now back to our story.

The envelope that had the Frances Perkins stamp was one I found on top of the mailbox cart on wheels used by the workers in the Park Avenue apartment building where I'd just made a visit to a physician. It was stamped "Undeliverable" because the name on the address was in fact cryptically inscribed. So I took it for the treasure it represented to me and my memories of that evening a decade and a half ago. Opening it, I found it was a thank-you note in a beautiful George Caspari butterfly card from Switzerland. Enclosed I found a small envelope of white granular powder. At the office I tested it on the tip of my tongue and got

a strong numbness that classified it immediately as a controlled substance I'd heard about but been afraid to try, despite Freud's enthusiasm for it and my otherwise admiration for him in general. So thank you Frances Perkins—still after more than 60 years the most remarkable person I've ever met. To be with her, you could feel the power and the depth of character and concern for others that made her such a wonderful contributor to our country, one that will last forever.

My wife having become religious, and the kids being away for the weekend left me with a dilemma. I was torn but curious for sure. I sneaked off to my office for a short snort while she made her sensational duck with green peppercorn sauce and we shared it over a phenomenal Burgundy Clos Vougeot, top of the line. Pumped up by that, I went back and snorted what was left, finally feeling a full-fledged high. I came back out, told her what had happened, and suggested we leave the dishes and make some whoopee. Whatever else happened, I also talked nonstop throughout the 4 hours we lasted and knew, even as all that was going on, that I had enough of that matter in my natural makeup never to need any from outside sources. So that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

My parents were both only children—my dad was raised by a tenement of 40 Irish families from the lowest level of white society and essentially raised himself, leaving him full of resentment--brilliant, but someone I never saw pick up a tool, since no one had ever showed him how to use one. Also a lost soul, but a leader of men in the Army by virtue of his size and his brain. At the same time, he was afraid to compete in the world of business since he had no education other than one semester of WPA college right after high school. His experience was extremely narrow and involved a great deal of training others to kill, leading groups of killers and tracking down Nazis and Communist spies. Growing up, he had taken only academic classes since his IQ was so high no one thought to teach him anything useful. He ended up a lost

soul, finding a job that suited him well, but he never had any clue about the rewarding and nourishing life he could make on the home front or in his heart and soul, or teach anyone else on that subject.

My mother's background was also poor. For Christmas during the Depression she and her mother would exchange a single candy cane so they'd be able to say they'd had a Christmas. Her mother was widowed 3 times, by gas in WW I and the infamous Spanish flu directly after, which took the father of her only child, and then two railroad engineers who died in the all too frequent accidents of that era where safety laws and regulations were regarded as excess baggage.

Mother was bipolar, I learned decades later in a therapy group from a fellow sufferer. His own mother had also gotten him up at 1, 3, 5 and 7 AM to wash the bathroom floor again, since he had failed to do it properly the previous times, after I recounted the exact same story to the group, substituting even numbers for accuracy's sake. At that post-war time, there was no diagnosis or medicine to deal with bipolarity, so learning that decades later finally enabled me to forgive her.

Understanding that for most of her adult life she never knew what she was going to say or do—her mind was not her own and we all tiptoed around her in cloaks of silence. My father somehow managed to be on the golf course or off on “special assignment” for his job chasing Communists in our government in DC and overseas as often as he could escape our version of Hell on Earth.

My dad took a photo of me and my mother in front of the famous pelican sundial in the courtyard by the humanities classrooms—the pelican is famous for piercing its own breast to provide its blood as food for its young if there is no other food available. The choice could hardly have been less appropriate in my mother's case. After the shot, my mother reached up to me-- she was a foot shorter than my dad and me-- put one arm around me, said “My tall son,” kissed me on the shoulder, and off we went to a lunch where no one said much of anything except

to complain about the University's idea of food. That was the closest she ever got to saying she loved me. Once in high school when she got me up I spontaneously, and for no good reason I can recall, stood up and hugged her. When I came home that day I found a note in an envelope on my pillow thanking me.

In her early 50's, my mother took enough pills to take her to a place where she could do no more evil. 15 years later my sister followed suit, expiring on a living room couch surrounded by empty cigarette packs with butts smoked down to the filter in ashtrays all over the house. Her favorite dog, Panda a border collie, had died and that was it for Anne, who never really had a life after the vicious upbringing our mother inflicted on her, including stripping her naked because she had dirt on the hem of her dress when she came home from school in 6th grade, then pushing her out the door naked in broad daylight, only allowing her inside around midnight—I was off at college and never learned of that until I read her diaries while dealing with the mess she left behind, poor soul.

When I went into the kennel where her other dogs were kept, I was immediately bitten by a thousand fleas, a feeling I will never forget, and ran into the house to shower in my clothes because the stinging was so incredibly penetrating. The most vivid memory I have of my mom is her sitting at the card table in the rec room with her portable typewriter, pounding out a 4 or 5 page letter to the Chairman of Texaco complaining about the station attendant not checking her oil or wiping her windshield after he'd filled her gas tank. She was the Illinois typing champion in 1938 at age 22, and it felt as if the whole house shook when she got her teeth and fingers into something to complain about.

When I was a teenager I mowed 8 lawns a week in our neighborhood for pocket and gas money for dates and hanging out with my friends. I was paid in dollar bills and kept them in a top drawer of my dresser in a money clip that got sprung from holding all those singles, so they

frequently fell out. One afternoon she came in and said “Put your shoes on, we’re going shopping.” I asked for what and she opened my top drawer, took out the money clip and dropped it back in the drawer, shoving all the money into her purse. I asked what she was doing with my money. Her answer was to shout “My Money, Your Money, Your Money” at me five or six times and give me a 15 minute lecture about how lucky I was to have a roof over my head and food on the table and the use of the car, and on and on until she lowered her voice and said this money was our money, not mine, and so she was going to buy me a bedside table with a lamp because I needed to contribute and it was for me, but I had to help pick it out, as if that would endear it to me with my narrow range of focus at the time..

I got used to the idea that you can learn to let things go, superficially, but getting over them takes much, much more time and effort. I’ve always wondered why I survived and my sister didn’t. I was so good in school that I knew I was better than the dirt bag way I was treated at home, where my mother tried to make me perfect by criticizing every breath I took as well as everything I did as her head house boy, cleaning person and lawn jockey. Dad was a Houdini at escape invoking reasons for him to be away, except when he was coaching me at sports, at which I was a total disaster and could see it in his eyes whenever, as all too often, I messed up.

We had many silent rides home from games, a memory that’s still painful. I was born left-handed and my poorly educated and superstitious mother did her best to beat out of me as a small child-- the left hand was the sinister one, the unlucky one that would doom you, as if I weren’t already doomed-- using heavy kitchen implements (wonderful word, implement) whenever I’d raise that arm. My response, unconscious but effective-- as those things can be—was to psychologically orphan and dissociate that part of my body, never using it at all, and being unaware that I was doing that.

I only re-connected with that arm 50 years later, through extensive psychological therapy after I retired from practicing law, and physical therapy from a masseuse who was blind from birth, and All-American paralympic swimmer, and has a precious gift in her hands to compensate, partially, for the deprivation she has suffered her entire life. She can literally guide her hands to get underneath my shoulder blade and unkink knots I knew about because I feel the restrictions they caused, but could never imagine reaching.

But since my son turned out to be such an all-around athlete, especially in soccer and running, I gained an offset through all the times he won races or games, and how we almost glowed in the dark with pride and the taste of victory. There was also the other side of the coin, during the worst of my drinking, when I acted out on the sidelines at a phenomenal level of stupidity. Writing about those rides with him brings tears to my eyes now that I bring it up in the interests of honesty and atonement, if that's possible, as I hope it will be.

The rest of my mother's family was essentially normal. They were Kentucky hillbillies, and my grandmother's oldest brother, John, had put a shotgun in his mouth and fired it after having a huge dustup with his teenage son. The son went off saying he'd never come back. When he didn't, the father went out to find him dead, in a pond he'd dived in to cool off, hitting his head on a rock that broke his neck and killed him instantly. The father took the son home and ended his own life within minutes. These are the stories I grew up with, although the incredible warmth around Gaggy made them seem like fairy tales or ancient history rather than the stuff we were made of.

She was always Gaggy to me, running a beauty parlor in her basement where she let me help her when we visited and I got to wash the hair of the women when things got busy, a strange but rewarding exercise I never discussed with her because of the thrill that often came along with it in my early adolescence. Her fourth and final husband was a sweet

man, a barber also, who doted on me, so there was good cheer all around when we visited them. She and her older sister loved each other in a way we all laughed at when we saw them together, because it was a contest at putting each other down that they could both laugh at spontaneously, a rare phenomenon-- low comedy in its own way, but when Prince Charles found Princess Diana, Gaggy called her sister and said "Gladys, abandon all hope. He's been taken. So pull up your apron and dry your tears." If that's not a great punch line, in both senses of the phrase, I don't know what could beat it.

This is as good a spot as any to make a simple statement. One of the blessings of the awareness that came with my intelligence was the ability to notice unusual things that other people somehow fail to observe. My whole writing career has been built around startling people with insights that are plain to me but that almost everyone else in whatever group I was part of misses entirely. In Gaggy, I came face to face with love, unconditional, undeniable, magically healing love. I knew it immediately and without question--I felt it through my whole body and soul at once. She saved my life by showing me unconditional love whenever we were together. I recognized it as a life preserving characteristic, and wrapped it around myself as long as I could. That, along with school being the flip side of the coin from life at home, stayed with me always.

It was so different from the totality of being raised by two bright but uneducated only children, one of them empty and angry and the other one somehow lost but hyperactive due to her comprehensive and devastating mania. After experiencing the phenomenal effect of that epiphany, which was always with me, I saved myself from my sister's fate and managed to abandon the family I grew up in, while my sister tried to save that family and it killed her, slowly over a long period, agonizing to witness and try to help but to no avail, as surely as the sun going down every day, but in this case, not to rise again.

I spent years after law school wiring money to her at various truck stops all over the South. If she wasn't in the hospital, or selling coffee package deals to small businesses and winning awards for sales successes, she raised shelties and showed them, on a small time basis. When I was two years out of law school, happily practicing law from an office out of which I could see the Statue of Liberty every day and I had just spent Thanksgiving with my parents and my mother killed herself two days later, Anne saved Christmas for my father and me with miraculous efforts. She devoted herself to keeping us busy, well fed, and with thoughtful presents, but it was downhill after that until the end. The other building I admired was 70 Pine Street, a classic NYC skyscraper in the mode of the Chrysler Building and Rockefeller Center, not knowing until years later that my father's father had built it, as so many other things took years to open up for me, always gratefully received, since two good ways to describe my path are a roller coaster and a sine curve, but with exaggerations both up and downward. When I went to South Carolina to clean up Anne's house, pick up her ashes and open the house to her neighbors-- colloquially called "White Trash" down there, they picked it clean, leaving almost nothing. Even the boxes of sex toys disappeared quickly.

The only place that would accept her china and canned goods was a charity "For the White Ladies of Columbia, SC." They never gave me a receipt, and when I wrote for one, I learned that the stuff was so infested they had to close the charity for a week and have it fumigated. At least I could laugh about that, and knew she would have too—it served those racist folks right. The doctor said she had apparently OD'ed on pills, like our mother did, laid down on her couch and smoked herself to death. You could only get into the driver's seat of her car—the rest was full of fast food containers and mail including a lot of weekly shopper magazines she never opened, just left them and the entire car smelled like years old cigarettes.

After my mother's death, my dad got remarried within a month to a woman he'd never met before. He needed structure and comfort, even military style, having grown up without ever being taught to take care of himself. I never saw him use a tool and it's a standing joke between my son and I that I don't know one end of any tool, hammer, screwdriver or pliers, any more than Hamlet did. He was charming and she was a rich, twice divorced clothing shop owner.

His second and final wife provided New York Seventh Avenue clothes to the wives of Atlanta CEOs from Coca Cola and the major banks. She had great taste, although it was hard to see how it came from a cracker from Social Circle, Georgia, right along the Interstate on "Tornado Alley." Once, driving up to Augusta to walk the Masters course before the tournament, we saw hundreds of frame houses, RVs and trailer parks devastated and twisted by the harbinger of spring that had just twisted thru, shepherded by the Angel of Death, it seemed. She did have keenly capitalistic eye for high end Atlanta real estate in the decades after Eisenhower's presidency. Doubtless her fancy clients for the clothes tipped her off, but she made the most of it and made millions. So they lived high on the hog, became serious Republican donors, enjoying pool parties in the nude (with my father boasting about strutting along the poolside to show off his first class equipment).

They traveled widely on cruise ships, and collected art from the ports of call they visited and hung it. She was consumed with jealousy of me, thinking my father loved me more, which was impossible since my father didn't even love himself, much less anyone else. When he died and I went to Buckhead, the legendary North Atlanta enclave of the rich, she took me by the hand, saying she was sure I must want to read my father's will. She sat me down, brought me a drink and the will and left, so I could be alone to learn he had left everything to her in a will signed on my birthday.

My grandma, Gaggy, came from a family that had left Scotland in 1745 after Bonnie Prince Charlie got wiped out by the English forces. As peasants, they knew that they were due to be enslaved or murdered so that the English nobles could repopulate Scottish territory with their own overflow of essentially enslaved peasants of theirs. Her people actually came through the Cumberland Gap with Daniel Boone after the American Revolution, and settled in Kentucky until bad luck farming drove them up to Illinois, where the corn and soybeans provided a living for people who could afford to get their hair cut with reasonable frequency. She owned a house across from the Masonic Temple in Decatur, Illinois, my birthplace, with the beauty shop in her remodeled basement.

We had adopted a boxer dog, Argo, in Germany, but since we were returning for another three years, we had to leave him with my grandma since at that time Europe had a year-long quarantine requirement for dogs coming from abroad, and that would have been much too cruel and unhealthy, so we kissed him goodbye and left him with someone who knew about love well enough to take proper care of him. He was a friendly and lively dog who wandered freely and sired numerous mongrel pups. The local paper once featured an ad Gaggy sent to us in Germany which read “Free puppies—mother is a golden retriever, sire unknown but can scale 8 foot high chain link fence and escape unscathed but happy.” When he died, the local Scout troop gave him a drum and bugle funeral, marching to the pet cemetery with flags flying and a 15 gun salute from the older boys.

One of my favorite memories relates to the few but delightful times we visited in the summer. I was in early adolescence, and getting to help wash the ladies’ hair on Saturdays, when the traffic was enormous, the interaction with those women primping and eager to find male companionship and the interaction between my hands and their scalps and necks, and the oohs and aahs that resulted, theirs vocal and mine

silent but internally resonant, gave me a perspective that helped launch me going forward into the world of sexuality in a highly turbulent era.

I had always featured as a tall, skinny, bespectacled geek with a sense of humor until I made partner years later in a major Wall Street law firm. At that juncture I found myself suddenly becoming incredibly sexually attractive, leading to 3 marriages and a spate of other entanglements that could have turned out better if I had been more thoughtful and less eager and needy. Enjoying and appreciating women was far from the same as being a good judge of who showed interest in me-- or just what I could supply them with, wealth and security first and foremost-- although I did find one who gave me two children worth anything to us, and who look to care for and help others, so their values are aligned and they can say anything in the world to each other and not worry about overtones or undertones. It's a beautiful thing to know it exists. Two incredibly wonderful children who have produced offspring who make all of the foregoing worthwhile.

We lived across from the American Museum of Natural History on the street where they blow up the balloons for what New Yorkers call the Macy's Day parade. From my living room window I could see Margaret Mead in her corner turret next to Central Park, working at night by herself. Across on 81st Street, 4 blocks north, I studied the Beresford, a solid 20 story co-op that had tennis courts and a swimming pool inside it, along with emerald green lights on each of the corner towers that made a compelling vista on a nightly basis. I finally realized after puzzling over the way it looked for a year or so. Then one night, watching an impressive thunderstorm, I realized that it was a perfect copy of the Escorial, the palace outside Madrid I saw once on a cloudy dawn from the Parish to Madrid train window, a spectacular and compelling demonstration of the power and wealth of that dynasty. Spanish kings and Holy Roman Emperors lived there, and Velasquez painted there, when Spain ruled the world and ships heavy with gold

arrived regularly at Cadiz for decades. That reminded me then of our visit on the same trip to Cadiz itself, where I saw only modern ships, but also a larger than lifetime statue of a male figure in a cloak or capacious overcoat, entirely shrouded in canvas, tied on with numerous ropes, making me feel like I had walked into the after-party of “Don Giovanni,” a memory that stays vivid for me over 50 years later.

The only blot on our idyllic life was when our daughter was two months old. Her mom Susan took her shopping in a Snuggli, an elastic cloth baby carrier mothers slip into so the baby becomes tucked between her breasts, perfectly at home. They had been shopping on Columbus Avenue for my birthday gifts. But then a diminutive man came running at them, waving a wooden corkscrew, the old oaken type you see in Spanish restaurants. He was on parole, living in a halfway house at the West end of our fancy block, and had just lost a fight with his roommate, so he grabbed that implement and went looking for someone small enough that he could attack to get even with the beating he’d just received.

She fell to the pavement to cover the baby, and he stabbed her 6 times in the back-- all superficial puncture wounds, thankfully, since the metal tip protruded only half an inch from the wooden housing-- but nevertheless painful and frightening beyond imagination. Bystanders pulled him off, he was arrested, and I picked mother and baby up from the hospital. We lived upstairs from Arthur Sulzberger, the future publisher, succeeding his father, of the New York Times. His father was nicknamed Punch, while he, much slighter in build, was dubbed Pinch.

Our building was one where no one locked their doors and everyone dropped in on neighbors frequently. Arthur and I were frequent late night companions, enjoying his cognac enjoyed from glasses that had teardrop bottoms instead of stems, so you couldn’t knock them over no matter what. Arthur gave me a reporter’s name at his paper to tell about the assault, so that weekend carried a half page story on the front page of

the B section about the attack, asking what a halfway house like that was doing in a location like that. We understand now, better than we did then, that it everyone had to live somewhere, and that well-off people are not exempt from sharing the burden, but the story provided serious drama, given the people involved and the distress NYC was experiencing then while President Ford was telling us via front page headlines in the Daily News to “Drop Dead” before any federal aid would be forthcoming.

To my astonishment, Gaggy called the next day. Somehow, in the public housing where she lived in Winder, GA, she had gotten the news and was distraught. Winder is a town where the city hall, on the road from Atlanta to Augusta, the state capital and home of the state university, is identified by a white enamel sign featuring Coca Cola bottle caps at each end and the words Winder City Hall in between. It sat next to Joe Smith’s Radial Tires (“Formerly City Recappers,”) as their sign said. I assured her that Susan and the baby were fine and that when she asked if they had gotten “the fella who did it,” I responded in the affirmative and said “so he’ll be getting what’s coming to him.” There was a pause and then she said in her cracked, 80 year old voice “Well, just be careful how you do it. We don’t want any more trouble than necessary.” I assured her and stifled a gasp and a laugh before saying goodbye and blowing her a kiss.

That was the voice of Kentucky over the ages since that part of our family first arrived there. Knives were the weapon of choice-- you didn’t want to waste powder and shot that was better directed to hunting game to supplement the meager diet that was their standard, and may well still be. She had told me years before about two cousins who were in essence paid assassins mostly focused on Confederate sympathizers in that deeply divided Dark and Bloody Ground. During the latter part of 224 a sheriff shot a judge to death in his chambers in Kentucky for reasons still unexplained, except to say *res ipsa loquitur*.

As in any family, threads proliferate with success, so it seems like the right time to shift from the first 3 generations and move on into an era most genuinely captured by the iconic song of an entire period, Paul Simon's "Bridge over Troubled Water." When interviewed on Dick Cavett's show after the song took America by storm and Beatniks gave way to Flower Children and then Hippies, then to Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. Simon's answer to how the song came about was as follows "Well, I got to a place where everywhere I went was a dead end. I was stuck, so I took myself out of myself and happened to think of the woman I loved, she had silver hair, so "Sail on Silver Girl," became the opening of the way the song found itself in the mess of my mind," or something like that.

I met Paul Simon twice, both briefly. First when I had left a German film near Lincoln Center that ended, oddly enough, with Paul's "Hazy Shade of Winter." I passed him going home to 77th Street, while he was holding his son's hand with one arm and his guitar with the other as they headed downtown to the Dakota at Central Park and 72nd, where he lived with Carly Simon at the time, I believe. It just happened that I was singing that song as we crossed the street in opposite directions. I swear he smiled and winked at me as he picked up the tune and we moved on. The next time was at the Brendan Byrne Arena in the Meadowlands, where Paul headlined a fund raiser for his good friend Bill Bradley, the great basketball icon and New Jersey Senator for 18 years who is a college classmate in a class of 750, all guys at that time.

The concert featured the album Paul did after Graceland involving a lot of black South African material, and the after-party was below the floor of the auditorium/basketball court (appropriately enough). Bill was then chairing the Senate Finance Committee and creating the first major revision of the Internal Revenue Code of 1918. After we greeted each other once the performance had ended, I told Bill that I wanted my taxes increased. He smiled his usual laconic smile and said "Well, thank God,

that's two of us anyway!" So we had our laugh and moved on. I've been the class secretary of our Princeton class, of which Bill is our most successful and prominent member, and he should have been President.

The choice of Gore, especially when Clinton sat on his hands because they didn't get along personally, was the first of many choices that led to W's Middle East war which tried to return gas prices to the punitive level of theft that Western countries had enjoyed for so long, abandoning the free market that we boast of out of the other side of our mouths when we became the buyers rather than the profiteers of other peoples' resources. That was after the Supreme Court, led by the invidious Scalia, abandoned all its Federalist principles and crammed W down the throats of the American public with horrendous results. This in turn, gave us the unspeakable DJT as the Democratic leadership chose Beltway insiders, instead of people who were capable of connecting with voters in the real part (if often parochial and given to believing what they wished for rather than recognizing how much better reality is, under any circumstances, than fantasies that arise from wishing on simple minded stars).

I followed Simon around, just to shake his hand and tell him how much his music meant to me, feeling already banal and trivial-- but each of us plays that role more often than we think. Finally, he turned around, stuck out his hand and said "Paul Simon. What's up with you following me around?" I confessed to having met him once for an instant on the West Side and he actually nodded, indicating he did recall that moment himself. I added having taken my daughter on my shoulders to see him and Garfunkel at their legendary Central Park concert reunion not that long ago, since we both were neighbors by Central Park. He laughed and thanked me. That's it, but memories are made of this, as Dean Martin said, although I never met him.

So that's my bridge over troubled waters plural. Susan dedicated herself to the children, got a fabulous job as the #2 lawyer at Columbia, a giant

corporation where she got to do everything from discrimination cases (like the student who sued since he had failed to finish his PhD program after 8 years, due to his learning disability) and had been terminated (she won), as well as ground-breaking work on reproductive and DNA research involving patents and licenses with Big Pharma, and contracts with major media entities involving the use of the Columbia campus for films and programs involving entertainment productions and documentaries. She also involved herself more and more deeply into feminist causes and religious ones, a tough territory to partner in. After retiring she attended Union Theological Seminary. It is affiliated with Columbia, and as a senior officer she got a free ride to her divinity degree, was ordained, and is now the Secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church of America's synod. Another case of cream rising to the top.

When she was graduating as a day student at Wyoming Seminary, the best secular prep school in Northern Pennsylvania, she organized the annual senior program, which always involved use of the pool to show off the swimming abilities of the seniors. She made sure it bore the title "New York, Here I Come" and starred on her way to Barnard, across the street from Columbia. On her first day there going through registration, she was spotted and claimed by Larry Lissitzyn, a fine man who is the son and grandson of Columbia's Professor of International Law (his father married the professor's daughter and was also the best student, so it all made sense) and Larry got his own free ride at Columbia. He went to help register the Barnard freshmen, he always said, as a simple act of service to the community (sure) and won a sensational prize, a Galatea all his own. After 4 years with her including marriage, and knowing that as a Caucasian in Morningside Heights he was sure to be drafted, he enlisted in the Marines, commanded an artillery battery in Vietnam and lost most of his hearing, not to mention a good deal of his patriotism, and they both enrolled in law school in consecutive years. When she enrolled the next year, she ended up first in her class and was recruited to our firm by the partner spending a year as a visiting faculty member

who had also recruited me from Yale. Showing the flexibility of Wall Street lawyers when it comes to money, that same partner, 5 years later, screwed me out of a quarter of a million dollars in annual comp at year end as a member of the bonus committee, and sent me a 400 day clock from Tiffany's as a wedding present-- 4 years after our marriage--to atone for what he knew had been wrong. He was a Christian Scientist, but when he dumped his long-time wife and married a French countess, he also became an oenophile. Happily, he is now deceased.

By the time she graduated and joined our firm in 1974, she and Larry had split up. I was not the hiring partner yet, but the firm Christmas party where the entertainment was one guy with a folding piano who only knew "Rollin' on the River" and "I Heard It on the Grapevine" was enough for a dance with her that became, the next day a romance, a relationship, a marriage and an apartment just off Central Park across from the American Museum of Natural History, two wonderful children, a girl and then a boy, and some wonderful years.

During a good part of those years we still worked together, but two children was incompatible with the high pressure high tempo world of Wall Street law practice. So she got a sensational job at Columbia University, working on a small staff to serve a multi-billion dollar institution and do a wide variety of interesting work, from financings to DNA patents and product licensing and work from Columbia's affiliates, like two hospitals. Meanwhile, with the birth of the kids, my love of writing rekindled and I got to take a number of free courses due to being her husband, from first rate teachers in Columbia's General Studies evening program. I started writing poetry and stories that got published and won prizes, which fed my ego and my enthusiasm for the work, which is now my only occupation, to my great joy and satisfaction.

It's important to give Ben Stein a cameo, not up to his famous role in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" where he says "Anyone, anyone?" several hundred times to enormous effect. At Susan's third and final wedding,

her children served communion at the altar up front in the Episcopal Church in DC where Charles, the final husband, had worked while in seminary. In the back benches, where I sat with my final wife (another story entirely) Sat Ben, next to first husband Larry, dressed in a Brooks Brothers gray suit and green Kids sneakers, and handing out green Tic-Tacs to all who would accept them since we sat too far back to trek up to the altar for communion.

At the reception afterwards, Ben shared with me the story of how he had never believed in any kind of International Jewish Conspiracy, but had just learned from Larry, his roommate as well as best friend, why that was. Larry wrestled, got a varsity letter and joined a jock fraternity, persuading his brothers that Ben would bring a great deal to their parties, as indeed he did, as we've all seen in movies, books and his TV quiz show which turned Jimmy Kimmel loose on the major networks. But due to Ben's belonging to a non-Jewish jock fraternity, the Elders of Zion, Larry divined, passed over him, so he never got "The Word," saving him a good deal of worry and freeing his mind for other pursuits than money lending and praying.

When I came to Princeton, I had only three goals in mind. To be taller than my father, to live longer, and to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Batting .333 will get you into the Baseball Hall of Fame without question. I have outlived my father by 8 years now (10%) and ended up exactly his height, but no taller. Luckily, my father did get me a job on a great newspaper in the Piedmont section of North Carolina, where all the major universities are clustered, leaving the Tidewater and the Smoky Mountains to less forward looking folks. My family had moved when he found another job in the poultry industry, modelled on Frank Perdue's success. His boss, however, did not have Perdue's panache so it just became a humdrum job, but it paid better than an Army pension by a considerable amount. I got to be a full-fledged reporter when one of the

regulars got hepatitis so that the job of covering the local courts and government matters fell to me. My dad was a career Army officer. If you meet a lawyer in that situation, you are already cooked, and the rest will just be slicing you up and disposing of you into another calling or confinement, depending.

So it was only by this happenstance that I lucked into meeting actual lawyers, who were bright, had senses of humor, enjoyed their work and still had time for other pursuits more fun and less strenuous. I came to understand that, between the trials of academia, the insanity of my mother and, ultimately, my poor sister, and the fact that what little I was writing was puerile, and had much more head than heart--which does not lead to prize-winning literature, or even publication. Reading the tea leaves, I opted for the law.

My advisor in the English department, Larry Kirsch, who went on to head UVA's English Department, and found a second wife to replace the one he split with at Princeton-- the Southern belle being both rich and beautiful-- his life turned out pretty great. Correspondingly, my life definitely took a meaningful turn for the better. I told him about my summer and how meeting lawyers had made it clear that my future lay there, rather than in a PhD and a professorship in the world of literature. I also knew myself well enough by then to know that I am a doer, enjoying getting things accomplished, more than a philosopher or dreamer.

I could also see all too well that teaching the same material for 40 years, while trying to write anything meaningful, was at best a long shot. It also made it more likely that I'd end up spending much too much time surveying the class to see if I could spot two attractive and horny young ladies who might find a threesome attractive. I also knew I was too much a chicken and actually endowed with enough intrinsic morality that I would never actually do it either, and I was not prepared for a life and career divided by grimness and glumness. Professor Kirsch popped

out of his chair, came around his desk, pulled me out of mine and swung me around in a circle, dropping me back on my feet to say what great news that was “Because I can give you a much better recommendation to law school than I EVER could to grad school!”

By refocusing, I made the Dean’s List every semester, got into the only law school I applied to, Yale, which I actually enjoyed even more than the richness of my alma mater and which provided me with an education of what it was like to transmogrify myself from a High School Harry into a serious attorney and succeeding in a major Wall Street law firm, which involved access to worlds I never knew existed, including being mentored by an older senior partner who had clerked for the Chief Justice of the United States, who more or less adopted me and made me his Tonto for 15 years before he passed away too young but left me most of his clients. So the opportunities and the money rolled in.

Now a brief sidebar to thumbnail the range of activities I enjoyed over 35 years practicing law. I served for many of those years as securities and corporate counsel for a large New York state utility company known throughout Wall Street as the most poorly managed company in the industry. They lied to me and the public as often as they could, but I caught most of those lies and fixed them in the final documents. They hated me for it, even though I was keeping them free from liability and out of jail thru what I made them put into their public disclosures, which I made sure I controlled, being the only one in the game with any conscience, until I got fired for honesty, but then one of their brother utilities hired me since I no longer had a conflict

. So let’s move along to other more satisfactory relationships with clients, two investments bankers who became close friends and were wonderful and demanding clients. The best kind, I would argue.

Tom Healy brought me into a raft of interesting transactions with two investment banks he was at before going to DC as the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury for Domestic Finance. He had just finished the Chrysler

bailout when I got a call from him about the nuclear power crisis after Three Mile Island, the Fort St. Vrain meltdown and Chernobyl, I believe. Enormous amounts were being sunk into plants across the country, and the only two things the companies didn't know was what each would cost and when, if ever, it would come into service. Ultimately those builders took it in the ear and the wallet with disallowances of billions based on inadequate stewardship of the process. Tom's question was how this was likely to prove out. We talked for 15 minutes and he said he'd like me to come to DC the very next day to speak to his people about it.

When I walked into the room, he had assembled people from 18 different federal agencies to hear me out. Since I was involved in one way and another with 4 or 5 of the plants, I was pretty clued in and worked on the comparisons between the situations to protect my own clients to the extent possible. After an hour and a half of answering questions Tom said "Thank you so much, Michael. That was very helpful. The lights won't go out, it's not Brazil or the Middle East, so we can just go ahead and let the chips fall where they may." In essence, I downsized the problem so it became manageable without more resources, which was in some sense bizarre, but in others fit the bill very nicely indeed. He soon came back to Wall Street at Goldman, where did a little more business, but he moved into higher management, which did not involve deals, so our paths diverged. Nevertheless, I admired him because of his determination and, even though I'm not religious, as he very much is, having siblings in the clergy, I also respected his code of ethics and morality as unusual in the pit of vipers also known as Wall Street.

My other favorite was Marc McIntosh, who I used to say looked a lot like OJ, light-skinned black guy, about 6'6" and a member of the DePaul team that went to the Final Four in the NCAA and later scrimmaged with some of the Knicks at the 23rd Street Y. He was part of the

Goldman team I often worked with, but our friendship became, and has stayed, a very close and endearing one, including crazy deals in Mexico, and one in Mississippi where going down to breakfast in the elevator I encountered a man in overalls and a straw hat but no shirt on his way to the same room for breakfast as I was going to. That deal closed successfully and Mac and I danced in the street at 2 AM outdoors on Rush Street, the blues center of Chicago.

My best job for him, however, was getting him out of jail. I bailed him out on his own recognizance after he was arrested for something we soon established could not be criminal, since it involved his destruction of some items which he had paid for out of his own pocket. If not for him, I never would have seen Manhattan Night Court with a judge reading Amy Tan while sending a group of street hookers, handcuffed together, who had conga danced their way down the aisle to face the judge being shipped off to the Greenwich Street Reformatory for Women for 30 days apiece. In one of life's more amazing coincidences, I was guided through the lowest end of the legal process by a bailiff who happened to be a black guy who had run my law firm's mail room and played on our softball and basketball teams before attending John Jay College of Justice and Law Enforcement. Harold Johnson showed me all the things a guy who only did deals of a hundred million dollars or more how to enter an appearance and navigate the criminal system long enough to spring my guy and buy him dinner to get the rest of his story, which was a beauty. We still see each other regularly and it's always the kind of reunion that only needs two to make it sing and dance again.

For an after dinner libation before turning serious, I'd like to mention a case I was happily not involved. It was an antitrust case involving manufacturers of large equipment for electric utilities who conspired to divide the market so that each entity got an agreed upon share of the situations that were up for bidding. The lawyers and their bosses were scrupulous about destroying all correspondence and written records of

this substantial piece off illegal behavior in pursuit of profits, but the head of records of one company was so scrupulous, or anal, about his job that he made a separate copy of all the papers he was instructed to destroy and kept them at home. When the investigation commenced, he felt obliged to come forward with the *corpus delecti* on a silver platter, right next to his head.

My favorite insight into the practice of law, working in what ceased to be the legal profession and became the law biz, controlled by money, so that lawyers started to think about money even more than they had, which should be impossible but wasn't. James Watson, the co-discoverer of DNA, said that what enabled him to do what he did was that he knew that men thought about women 98% of the time, but something in him permitted him to perform that task with only 95%. The law has its parallels. I left into the largest law firm bankruptcy in American history not over money, but because a generation of thieves and mountebanks had succeeded the founding partners, who were phenomenal individuals who earned their respect and positions. And I didn't even know that the Mafia had infiltrated it, just that the leaders who had built a great firm had passed on, leaving it to a group of selfish deceitful bozos.

I've always felt that the future is what we think about, especially since we can't change the past and we are experiencing every day the pressure the present always puts on everyone to do good work while you're also putting out fires, making money, finding a mate, and dealing with your precious children and their unreasonable demands and expectations. My greatest insight was to observe that the hiring partner was a job normally delegated to someone in trusts and estates, or the docket partner, a functionary whose sole function was to make sure all the people in litigation made it to their court appearances on the right day and place. In other words, if you missed the meeting, you'd read in the reports that you'd been unanimously chosen for this task.

Since law firms are just enlarged boxing rings, the other thing to deal with, as a junior partner, was help with administration as well as cases and deals. So I grabbed the recruiting job as soon as I could. That way, while I didn't get big bonuses, I did get to know who among our recruits were the brightest and most presentable. When they came on board, I'd give them assignments above the first year level, because I knew they could handle it and would be energized instead of being bored with the tedium of much of the law. Then I would take them to lunch a couple of times a month—we were surrounded in midtown Manhattan with a vast number of top notch restaurants and the firm paid for lunch partners had, and deducted them since it was either for client development, or firm administration or some other cover story that finally got shut down by the IRS, but not until I had gathered my crop and been able to expand my own practice I knew that my work would be done by smart people, and as my work, grew, I could continue to meet with potential clients, sell them, and pass on the work to those eager to show their own abilities. I did well by doing good—not always easy, but in this case it was just sitting there waiting for someone who could think just far outside of the box. By indirection I found direction out, as Hamlet says.

A great part of the joy in my lucky life has been that I have two wonderful children who, although they have lived at great distances and traveled widely, plus they each have offspring who are delightful, so I get to be Dad and Pops, and also Mike, which is as many sobriquets as one person needs.

So I have to throw in a few stories about their early days to liven up this tale. When Billy was 3 we already knew he would amount to something unusual since he asked questions about gravity and how buildings could remain standing if it was such a strong force and why you couldn't cross-breed cats and dogs. But my favorite story is that I was making breakfast and he was standing on a chair next to the pass-through from the kitchen to the dining room. Salt and pepper were near him and I asked

him to pass it to me, saying that I needed it. By age 3 1/2, he had a need for clarity which remains a salient characteristic- “You don’t need the salt,” he said “You want the salt. That’s what you mean.” Also worth preserving and passing on is the time we went into Central Park to a playground right by the Humboldt Gate by the American History Museum. It had various things kids could play on and he liked a huge cast iron bicycle he could sit on the seat of and be at eye level with me standing next to him. “Let’s go to Brazil, he said in his little 4 year old voice and made a boom zoom noise. “Okay,” he said “How do you like it here?” My response was to observe it was pretty cool but it did look a lot like NYC to me. He looked at me with disdain and mild annoyance and said “Dad, that’s because we’re pretending to go to Brazil.’

All good things are supposed to come in threes, so let’s bolster that. While I had joint custody, which worked very well so far as I know, I was driving him back after a week with me and my summer friends, to his mom, we were discussing why he couldn’t, around age 8 or 9, have a dog. I told him that in the city it was cruelty to have a dog but he could always get one when he was grown up. I asked him what kind of a dog and volunteered Lassie, to which he responded “No, Dad, that’s an ugly dog. Besides, how’d you liked to have a dog that was smarter than you? That’s a dumb idea, Dad.” Since then, I’ve always done my best to avoid dumb ideas, and I believe I’ve improved on that, partly with his advice.

He is a Virgo, for sure, and in 2007 Rolling Stone named him, at 26, the Environmental Superhero of the 21st century, edging out Gore and Jim Hansen of NASA. Hansen was the first to proclaim to the heavens that global warming would kill us all long before we expect the world to end as we know it (and while we’re still on it). Because he’s so phenomenal, his younger daughter asks me every time I see her to tell her another story about her dad, and I’ve told her at least 30 or 40 good ones, so here are a couple of my absolute favorites.

I took him to see the Knicks v. Celtics game since I wanted him to see Larry Bird. We had dinner first and stupidly took a cab, so we found out before getting to our seats that Bird was out with an injury, we and when we walked into the arena we saw the Knicks were down 31 to 7. Seriously. The game got no better, the margin held fast. At halftime I asked him if he wanted some ice cream or something to drink. He looked at me and said “Isn’t there a “Toys R Us” store around here, Dad? I think there is.” I’m indulgent to a fault, and I knew he was right, but he was all about optimizing the situation if he could.

I also took him, with tickets in the first row under the basket, so he could be close to Shaquille O’Neal, which he was properly impressed by, standing 3 feet from him, and once to see Charles Barkley play, also amazing. Barkley took over the game in the 4th quarter and willed his team to victory, leading the way at both ends of the court-- as well as I’ve ever seen anyone play—Billy expressed proper amazement.. The one exception was Pete Maravich, as a sophomore in a North Carolina high school all-star game where I watched him score 46 points in the second half while I was masquerading as a sports reporter, sitting at the end of the scorer’s table so I got an incredible view of unparalleled genius at work.

Billy’s quickness, alertness, and determination to put everything into motion, for whatever the cause might be, usually sports, morphing in later life to environmentalism and the future of the planet, left me hoarse as he grew up, cheering for him as he piled up the wins, the meet records, and finally made a name for himself at the national high school championships in Raleigh on the NC State track. With two boys on the team who later went to Stanford and ran on the varsity, his 4x1 mile team qualified for that tournament. In the stands I sat behind two groups of black women. I learned that they were the moms of the two 4x100 meter sprint teams in the country, one from Campton, CA and one from North Philadelphia.. That race is over almost before you hear the

starter's gun, and I didn't know which team was which until the race was over. I saw one set of moms, across the aisle from the other, all calling home to spread the news, and the other group was hugging and patting each other on the back for a race well run, but there's always next year, and in less than a minute they all joined together. It was something to see.

I can recall every element of Billy's final race. I had a great camera, and the race turned out to feature Billy as one of the stars. His foursome had one boy who was nobody's runner, but later became the two time student body president at Dartmouth on the bong and keg ticket, and is doing well in NYC politics now.

The other teams all sent out their rabbit to disrupt the plans of the others, and set a killer pace to take the heart out of as many as possible. This left Billy, who had the second leg when he got the baton, in 15th place out of 16. The first thing he told me about running was that he loved was overtaking other runners. On his first outing he caught the 8th grader, who'd been leading the way, halfway up the 50 step stairway up from Riverside Park to the level the school sat on, several blocks away. I congratulated him and said that he owed that to his Irish forebears, who had learned to run hard and long after tucking a small pig under each arm and hitting the trail across the bog with the law and the farmer right on his heels.

What I recall is that the announcer at the Nationals spotted Billy and started making the whole segment of the race about him, calling it like a horse race. "Who is that kid running for Collegiate School in New York? Look at him cut down the runners in front of him! Wow!" At the top of the stretch, B was in 3rd place. I positioned myself there with my camera and got four shots off in that second or so that took them to pass. The first shows them rounding the bend at the top of the stretch. The kid from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was built like a linebacker, big chest, big legs, and was slightly ahead. The next shot shows Billy

somehow get larger, as he stretches every part of his slender body and starts his kick. In the third frame, he draws equal, and in the fourth you can see the other boy's head drop as he knows he cannot go any faster and that Billy will beat him.

What I treasured after that moment is to me, and always will be, my favorite sports moment of all. After I stayed where I stood, avoiding him having to share all his efforts and result with anybody but his teammates and competitors. After 3 or 4 minutes he came back up the sideline and we hugged. He told me that other runner had turned to him, after they handed off their batons, and said thanks for pushing him to run faster than he ever thought he could, so they hugged again, in the truest example of the beauty of sportsmanship I've ever been witness to.

After years working through NGOs on environmental projects, finally having acquired a wife and two kids, he started Mosaic, Inc., now producing a billion dollars in revenues, which he still heads, making him the largest solar financier in the US not tied to a bank or finance company. He's won lots of other awards from the Sierra Club, *inter alia*. He also dropped out of Yale after 2 years to focus totally on the environment—since I went to Princeton and talked it up so much, he would have gone anyplace else. I was able to see it as a high quality situation and sure enough, after 2 years he'd learned all they had to teach and set off on his own, with results that gave him a name in the environmental community, and the energy world, that is pre-eminent.

This seems the right place to wedge in Billy's family, since they are certainly part of this family. His wife Wahleah (pronounce Wahaleh), is, like Billy, a long distance champion runner, having finished in the top five in Arizona's cross country finals. Both are lifetime activists for the environment, and she's a leading advocate for Native Americans. They met in Boulder at an environmental rally, and got the last extra-long pup tent to share, the first night head to foot and now I have two sensational granddaughters, 15 and 13, who look nothing like each other but have

shared first a bed and later a bedroom are incredibly close and fun to watch as they needle each other in ways none of the rest of us can understand but they know how to draw blood without piercing the skin. The older one, (Tohaana, which means guardian of the waters in Navajo) favors her mother's granddad, the second most famous Navajo artist after R.C Gorman of the hefty women sitting by the fire, protected by a blanket, and is gifted in artistic areas. The younger one (Alowaan, which means song in Lakota) takes after my side of the family, the part that started with the grandfather I never met, down thru my father and both my kids—she's been making remarks and asking question since she was quite young that cause people to gape in amazement of what can come out of a person's mouth who sees things differently and more deeply than all but a lucky few.

Wahleah got a job, after running the Black Mesa Water coalition to help put Peabody Coal mine out of business, in charge of Indian Affairs at the Department of Energy. Then she got a job in the current administration running Indian Affairs for the Department of Energy. Only 25% of Native Americans on the Rez have access to running water OR electricity and 9 federal agencies share jurisdiction of them, 10 since the Dems created the job for Wahleah at DOE, where she led the government to create Native American Month, and was photographed on the steps of the White House standing next to the Secretary of the Interior, also a Native American, on the front page of the White House bulletin for December.

To show the desperate situation on the Navajo reservation, where they refuse to stoop to casinos, Peabody Coal brought a firm of Mormon lawyers to represent both themselves and the tribe when they cut the deal for the mine. Before it was decommissioned, it ran for 40 years, pulverizing the coal and shipping it 40 miles to the Mexican border to avoid air pollution issues. The contract granted the company the right to all the water needed to flush the pulverized coal that long distance, in

one of the driest regions in the entire country, and no court would overturn the contract despite the fact that the same law firm represented both sides in that “Deal.” The law in the West is not that far from the days of Judge Roy Bean, with many believing that real freedom ended when FDR was elected, and thinking they’re voting for Herbert Hoover to return to office when it’s actually the man who studied Mussolini’s speeches to help him get elected in the first place and who is actually the reincarnation of P.T. Barnum as the world’s greatest salesman of nothing but himself.

My daughter never loved school, focusing mostly on acting. She wanted to play Lady Macbeth at age 12, a trifle premature, and spent 15 years in LA looking for her big break. She got lots of advertisement work, including some great Geico commercials, but getting shoved aside when the Caveman series supplanted her schtick. She is also much too smart, often—and Hollywood is a perfect case for that-- she holds too many strong opinions for any director to be willing to take her on except for bit parts.

She finally recognized that and went to Hawaii to meet her husband late in life. Now they have a beautiful 4 year old daughter who looks wonderfully like her as a child, a house from which you can see Maui across the strait from the Kona coast of Hawaii. Her finishing by far first on the progressive Dems slate in the most recent island primary, morphed into her sitting on a board the governor set up involving encouragement of entrepreneurs. When she called to say how happy she was we were coming to graduation, she mentioned that before that at 10, we had to go to some stupid breakfast thing. “What is this Phi Beta Kappa s--t anyway?” she asked. That’s my girl, in her own world, making everybody else better. As difficult as she was until she got through college, she blossomed in the real world while striving to solve the conundrum whose code name is Hollywood. Since that experience, she has been a pillar of strength and accomplishment, and a wonderful

shoulder to cry on, and arm to lean on, as age and the ups and downs of life have found their way into my life, causing difficulties she's always had wise advice about beyond her years, and a smile to go with it that could stop traffic.

Her favorite expression when younger—whenever she supported some other worldly proposition like how she was sure to win the lottery, I would say that it would happen when pigs flew, and her consistent answer was that I had never seen all birds fly, so how could I be sure.

But she's also responsible for one of my earlier triumphs. When she was 4 or so. I heard her crying and bawling in her room in the very early morning and found her with her hands covering her face and shouting "The bees, the bees! They won't go away!" She said they were inside her eyes and I quickly said for her to open her eyes, which she did, burst out laughing and gave me possibly the greatest hug I ever have or will receive. Also in the support of joint custody, when properly exercised, that is under the supervision of the children involved, not the parents, once when Maya was a year or two away from heading off to California and Italy for college, I was in bed on a Sunday night about to snooze off when my phone rang. It was her mom, clearly agitated. I said hi and asked what was up. Her response was "She's killing me. You need to do something. I can't stand any more of her nonsense."

My phone clicked a second time and I said "Hold on a sec. I don't know who this is, but it's an odd time. I'll be right back." When I clicked over, it was my daughter. What she said was "Dad, I can't take any more of this stuff. She's killing me. How come she doesn't get what I'm trying to tell her." I told her that I had her mom on hold at the moment, and had to get back to her, but she should just try for more than a minute to see her mother's point of view. Opening up one's mind to that is the hardest thing in the world to do, but since I had her mother on hold, having just told me the same thing, in the same words exactly, that Maya had just uttered, I believed that calling me should be enough for them to start

over, since one thing I was sure of was that they loved each other more than either could ever express.”

I’m still amazed that those words came out of my mouth, but in a case like that, where the three of us were involved, I wouldn’t have found any other words. I knew that I had to be as honest as I had ever been, and it turned out to be so simple and direct that I knew it would work. I clicked back to Susan and told her that had Maya. We both laughed and I knew it was, in the words of a wise man, all good. A year later, at Newark airport at the gate, my hard-boiled daughter, who was 17 going on 35, broke down at the very last minute and cried, saying through her tears “I love you guys so much,” and we hugged each other and all was as it should be.

Maya now runs (on behalf of the local farmers from indigenous families, or brought from other Asian locales to be coolies, all small truck farmers trying to deal with the largely Chinese merchants who have served too long as middlemen with the hotels and restaurants in Kona coast), a coop started by a couple who were heirs to the Campbell Soup fortune but spent more time travelling than working on infrastructure. Since she took over, their revenues increased in 6 months from \$1,000 to \$15,000 a month, and she now sits on the Hawaiian governor’s board concerned with entrepreneurial opportunities. Her household is dominated by a four year old force of nature named Zephyr. Maya and her husband came on the West Wind to Hawaii from LA, and it’s the Greek name for that wind. My view is that Hurricane would be closer in the case of the offspring, but Zephyr is cuter than that, so her name fits.

I don’t want to move on without mentioning one of the happiest things that ever happened to me—when my own two children were 11 and 8, I was putting their dinners down for them and thought to ask if they were afraid of me. They burst out laughing, and I will treasure that forever. I’m particularly grateful for that since I realize these days, more than I’ve ever allowed myself, that while I did great in school and the law

business, a primary talent I developed in my personal life was how to get around orders and get away with stuff without anyone knowing. I lived a secret life from fairly early childhood. My conversations with the parents involved being told what to do and saying “Yes sir,” or “Yes ma’am,” then starting immediately to scope out how to soft shoe my way around the orders of the day, and have any time for myself. Mostly I read, and still do. We moved all the time, I attended 17 schools before I went to college, including 4 fourth grades. I’ve always been a loner with few friends, but I started reading at 3 and I would read cereal boxes and syrup cans, and anything that had print on it, and still do. A great boost for that was when they gave us, sophomore year in high school, a short version of the Evelyn Wood speed reading system and I tripled my reading speed. Years later that came in incredibly handy when I was turning out transactions that had hundreds of pages of documents in each one, so I could swallow them and digest them much faster than almost anyone else in the firm or on the deal.

So briefly in conclusion, in case anyone missed it-- my mother was bipolar and a deeply troubled and destructive soul. She did her best to ruin my life by making sure I was perfect in every way. When I came home with a report card that contained straight A’s with a D in handwriting. She read it as I stood there, tore it into pieces and threw it at me, saying solemnly “What are we going to do about handwriting?” The answer was that I held that in my heart, hating her reaction and making sure that my writing remained unintelligible until I was past 80. Then I was suddenly able to let it go and forgive her, We grow up slowly and incrementally, and some growing up takes a lot longer than other parts, mostly because fear and resentment dig deep roots and are like taproot plants, reaching deep into the unconscious and hard to displace. My writing suddenly got better when I accepted the obvious, that it involves making each letter accurately, not writing words whose intent and content could only be divined by an archeologist or cryptographer or specialist in Asian calligraphic typography.

She lived in her own sad, angry world, and accordingly so did the 3 of us. I escaped as soon as I could, while my sister tried to heal the family, and ended up committing suicide in her early 50's, just as my mother had.

My father had little to say about his undercover and spy-catching efforts,, and no one ever talks about their war experiences, so that almost goes without saying, both hand to hand combat in the Philippines and a year in Tokyo as part of the occupation, making up for the brutal times before, I'm sure, acting the part of overlord and conqueror. I can't recall how many times he said how much he hated the raw fish they served in Japan, keeping my NYC experiences to myself, as I did with most things. We became skilled at talking about nothing until it was time to go to bed.

That sums him up pretty thoroughly, like when my girlfriend's dad was transferred to Italy before senior year in high school, possibly a good thing since it was even money I might get her pregnant--she kept asking for it and in Virginia you needed a doctor's prescription to get any condoms. I was determined to go to college no matter what, and keep from ruining my life like other smart kids a year or two older had done. Everyone knew the stories, but they kept happening. He asked me part way thru the fall if I had a new girlfriend. I said yes, then he asked if she was pretty. My mistake was saying "of course," which gave him the opening to say "Really? I didn't think the old one was good looking at all." Enough on that, you get the picture. When my mother did herself in and I came home, he rushed out the door when my taxi arrived and said "Oh, Mike, what am I going to do?" For him, only "I" mattered.

When my sister died years later, I called him in Atlanta before leaving from New York to deal with the aftermath and sign whatever needed signing. I knew without asking that he would leave it to me to deal with the wreckage. His first words were "Kind of tough about Anne, huh?" It was a short conversation, and he never asked any questions about my

trip to clean up after her and to collect and scatter her ashes, half of which went on his own father's grave, which I had tracked down later in my own adult life, but never told him about it. What was the point to a soul lost inside his own emptiness?

Why do people like stories so much? They turn chaos and confusion into sense and sensibility, to cite a famous author I did my senior thesis on. I loved Dickens rather more, as a male youth from a poor background, but he also wrote a ton of books, long ones, and Jane Austen wrote only 6. Any English major knows the profs kvell over her name and prose style. Dickens has more than his share of masterpieces, all across the landscape, and his later books, works of genius, are large, complex and hard to corral, so he has a lot of unexplored territory for critics. But most profs are too snooty for a commoner like he was, and don't want to work hard enough to do him justice. Austen is like Wimbledon, civilized, covering ground well-trampled in ways that are various but not wildly different, circumscribed and full of lessons that are straightforward to explain but nevertheless useful. So I did Austen and got my A. By applying both sense and sensibility, I was appropriately rewarded.

Stories are also wonderful because most people only want to know more about things they are already comfortable with or find of special interest. They want to learn more about what they do know, and we all know from an early age the courtship, marriage and families are the central subject of most people's lives. A clergyman in Ohio gave a sermon, during Trump's presidency, advising the congregation to make sure, when they looked at colleges, that the one they chose would never teach their kid anything that the parents didn't already know, and that was the only way to be sure they'd be safe when out of the nest. What I'd like to know is why Illinois is the Sucker State, and not Ohio, although it also demonstrates why Vance and Trump both won Ohio. They buy the sizzle instead of the steak, because they are blessed with abundance they did not create but believe they did-- like W, born on 3rd base believing

he hit a triple, also believes he won the presidency while it was Scalia who stole it for him—read Dershowitz’s book and you will have no doubt whatsoever. But let me throw in a couple of stories of my own which show me—in a rounded light, a little close to the bone, but at least an attempt to correct the seasoning and bring this closer to the balance I claimed at the beginning to be dedicated to.

At a college reunion, my best friend and college roommate Tony and I shared a hotel room and went out to dinner Friday night because the rain was drenching like there would be no tomorrow, which guaranteed that tomorrow would be better than tonight. After a leisurely dinner, full of complaining about my wife but otherwise pleasant and amusing, we hit the pub next door for a nightcap or two. In this case, I got involved in a conversation with an enormous long haul trucker—about what I don’t recall-- and was starting to wind him up for the fun of it. I felt a strong tap on my shoulder and turned to see Tony signaling that we were leaving. I pantomimed shock and he repeated that we were leaving, so I obeyed. On the porch under the awning and trying to see our car somewhere in the parking lot, he said “Do you know why you still have all your teeth?” I shook my head and tried to look innocent and curious, so he said “Because when you get to this point, you start insulting people and your vocabulary and delivery are so far over their heads, lucky you, that they don’t understand a single fucking thing you say, but someday they will and it’s not going to be pretty.” I suspect now that almost nobody is a nice drunk, and some years in recovery have sharpened that awareness. It’s amazing how much more you notice when you’re not strongly, not to say obsessively, focused on yourself. The next morning he advised me “In your continuing search for the perfect woman, based on the way you snore, you might commence to seek among the kingdom of the deaf.”

During that stretch, I went to a 25th high school reunion in Virginia outside DC, after spending the interim at college, law school and Wall

Street to my great benefit, and acquiring some warts I couldn't see or feel. An open bar, red wine and a large group of people for whom I'd been a geek, and marginally a member of the in crowd, known as the Potluck girls because they threw the parties everyone wanted to go to. It was like pouring nitro onto Fuller's Earth and hoping for ambrosia, the drink of mythology, not that coconut stuff. Now I'd made it in the Big Town, and let everyone know it, in my smoothest way, I thought at the time, but now know better. On the way home I was driving, amazingly, and got into a horrendous argument with my wife, resulting in my throwing the car keys at her, getting out in the middle of a traffic jam of people on their way home from the theater or the movies, and hailing a taxi. When my best friend greeted me with a sideways look I just said "I owe you a car." and went upstairs. I knew he'd wait up and be debriefed by my spouse.

The next day on the train back home, it was Father's Day, but my mind had been made up. She'd found so many other interests, as I had, but hers took time that I felt should belong to me. She was a first generation feminist, had gotten religious when pregnant and become a deacon and then an elder at that same church, plus she'd risen to become was the #2 lawyer in the legal team at Columbia. The other woman there had also become her best friend, and in essence spent more time with us than elsewhere. She was unhappily divorced, a whiner and complainer and general female version of the Al Capp character who always walked around under a dark cloud blaming other people for his problems. I really couldn't stand her, but she and Susan, when together, acted like twins separated at birth, almost to the exclusion of the rest of us.

So I told her, holding onto my attitude of the previous night, that I was tired of being ignored by her and left to my own devices by all her other pursuits and we were finished. Why did I do that—at this distance, and indeed long before now, in all honesty I did it because I was so embarrassed by what a complete jerk I'd been the night before, showing

off and taking up all the air in the room, and throwing a tantrum a 4 year old would have been embarrassed by. So to cover it over, I blew up the whole business. We had our problems, but in the long run, as I now know, everyone does at some point or another. Thanks to our daughter, who shamed each of us into being nice to each other, we have remained close and a family in a genuine sense. I was even invited, as the Ben Stein story makes clear, to her wedding to a wonderful man. I couldn't have been happier for her, sincerely so because I still love her with all my heart and recognize that change can play a meaningful role in life instead of turning into a disaster. It doesn't have to be the end of what started as something very powerful and good, and continues to live through the kids and grandkids we share with great joy.

One shining example I only thought of while writing this is that my daughter and son have the same connection with each other that Gaggy gave to me, the sense of complete trust and total love. We've never talked about it, but I know how close they are and how strong the bond is, which is wonderful to know, and needs no discussion, or even reflection, to know it's true.

No biography of my family would be complete without a thumbnail of my best and dearest friend, Tony. We met Sophomore year when he came down from the floor above, which was stocked with varsity swimmers and soccer players from prep schools across the East, while we were with one exception High School Harrys, as the term went, a term coined by Peter Preps. Ours was the first class at Princeton that had more Harrys (by .1 percent) than Peters. Tony had a girlfriend at Vassar, whose dad was a professor at MIT, and she was coming with her roommate to NYC, where his family lived on Park below Grand Central, so he needed a date for her to round things out. I volunteered and we found a match made in heaven—Tony and me, that is. The redhead from Vassar she hooked me up with was hot only from the color of her hair up, and Tony's marriage to Ann didn't last more than 5 years after law

school, if that. The late 60's, with championship teams all over the place in New York, plus Viet Nam, Nixon and the explosion of sexual mores and governmental crimes and unbelievable music and concerts, to name just a few of the changes that blew from every corner. But thru all that, he and I were as tight as ticks and always will be.

There is only one of him, which is easily demonstrated by two stories. Tony played soccer, ran the half mile for the varsity track team and played rugby, having been raised in Australia, where his dad worked as the number 2 man at Caltex, which then controlled Saudi Arabian oil. Sophomore year he took a tent and camped out in the woods next to the Vassar golf course to be close to Ann. Yes it was cold, but.... In the late spring a group of us went up there for a weekend. We found a roadhouse with a band and drank something like 8 beers each, doing our best to dance them away with moderate results, then we had to get the girls home by curfew. Tony disappeared into the bushes to relieve himself, and emerged stark naked, shouting "Here comes Adonis" to our amusement and horror, I think is the right combination of reactions. We dropped the girls and headed to the next town north where one of our roommates lived and where we were bunking out.

I made sure to take the window and squeezed Tony into the middle front seat of the station wagon, where he could do the least harm. We stopped at a red light and a squad car pulled up to us. Tony crawled across me, turning the window down—it had a button, unfortunately instead of a crank, and then he shouted out to the cop, whose window was open—"Officer, you know what happens at Vassar on a Saturday night at midnight?" The cop said "No, son, what?" and the response was, complete with a hand clap "All the little vaginas snap shut!!" The cop looked at me and said "Do I understand you boys are going straight home?" and I nodded vigorously and shouted "Yes, sir. You bet," and we saluted each other as we pulled away in different directions, thankfully.

The other side of this fine man, one of the leading mutual fund lawyers in the United States, is that he went to his 60th reunion at Berkshire, the prep school of his father's choosing, and helped lead the charge at the class dinner that night, I'm sure. The next morning he surveyed the crew at breakfast, seeking a companion for his 5 mile run, and found no takers. As the old saying goes, nothing daunt and scarcely loath, he set out over the surrounding hills on a run he remembered well and had always enjoyed. Arriving back at campus he felt incomplete, so he went down to the football stadium and did another mile on the oval track surrounding the field before heading back for a shower and a well - deserved breakfast. That's my man. A man of colossal energy and the dearest friend a person could ever have.

Based on his efforts alone, I got to be chairman of the board, after retirement from the law, of a \$5 billion mutual fund group, laughing all the way but also, unlike most chairman I ever worked with as their counsel, I worked for the shareholders and not the management, with Tony right beside me.

This leaves me possibly the best anecdote I have, saved for last. One Saturday morning I was doing the NYT puzzle, the hardest of the week, with my dachshund Lady Gwendolyn on my lap when the phrase, it was about noon, came thru my head *Hostile, Fragile, Senile* --- which I recognized immediately as the motto of Tony's Old Boys' rugby club (for age 50 and over boys). The club's name is the Poltroons, a Dutch word for coward, used by them during their wars with the French. I thought nothing of it. But Monday morning while ironing my trousers, to put on a good front for the world, the phone rang and it was him, asking if he had given me one of his team's shirts, which are quite handsome, with an embroidered crest and a wide yellow stripe down the back to go with the poltroon motif. I said no and he said he'd gotten me one on Saturday at the clubhouse after the game since they were having a sale. I asked him what time and he said about noon. So I explained to him that

it was at that precise time the phrase had gone thru my head, demonstrating that we were aligned with each other thru the stars and rugby both. I don't believe you can get any closer than that.

So I thought I wanted the Nobel, but what I really wanted was a real family with people I love, and that, which did occur, took on a life of its own that will continue after I've been removed from the scene. In a way I myself could never imagine, I have that.

I'm almost out of anecdotes (not really) but this piece feels long enough, and is longer than anything I've written since the two novels that didn't get published—one appropriately so, but the other one, a coming of age story that is wonderfully raunchy and funny but probably too far over the edge for the times during which I wrote it—and is available from my computer for the brave and horny, if your sense of humor is ship shape. My college classmates love it and the few women I've showed Novel #2 to did also, each one telling me it was the clearest exposition of what goes on in the male mind they had ever encountered and they were extremely grateful for the insights. Really.

So I've won poetry prizes, written two books full of stories and a year's worth of columns in the Alameda Sun, our precious island's weekly paper, and gotten sober, to appreciate what I have and find contentment without more.

All this is true despite the horrific direction our society, country and the world at large seems to pursue, impelled by greed and inner selfishness—a world where one of our two deeply flawed national political parties makes jokes on the floor of the House of Representatives about the word empathy as unworthy of inclusion as an element central to statecraft for any good and useful life or society.

Let whatever god there be bless the pointed little heads of the idiots who rule us, and those who accept all the nonsense that goes on, while so

many of us remain self-absorbed in all their circumscribed lives, afraid of change or risk, or any analysis of themselves or the world round them. Most people, without any consciousness of it, abdicate those lives, wonder what went wrong, and look for someone else to blame, dying full of confusion while telling everyone what a great life they must have had, and how hard they worked for the general good. Truth may be stranger than fiction, but does fiction rule because it's easier to swallow, that nothing's more important than getting ahead enough to feed your face until you choke? No, in our hearts and souls we live, together and alone, anew and anon, and forever, and gone.