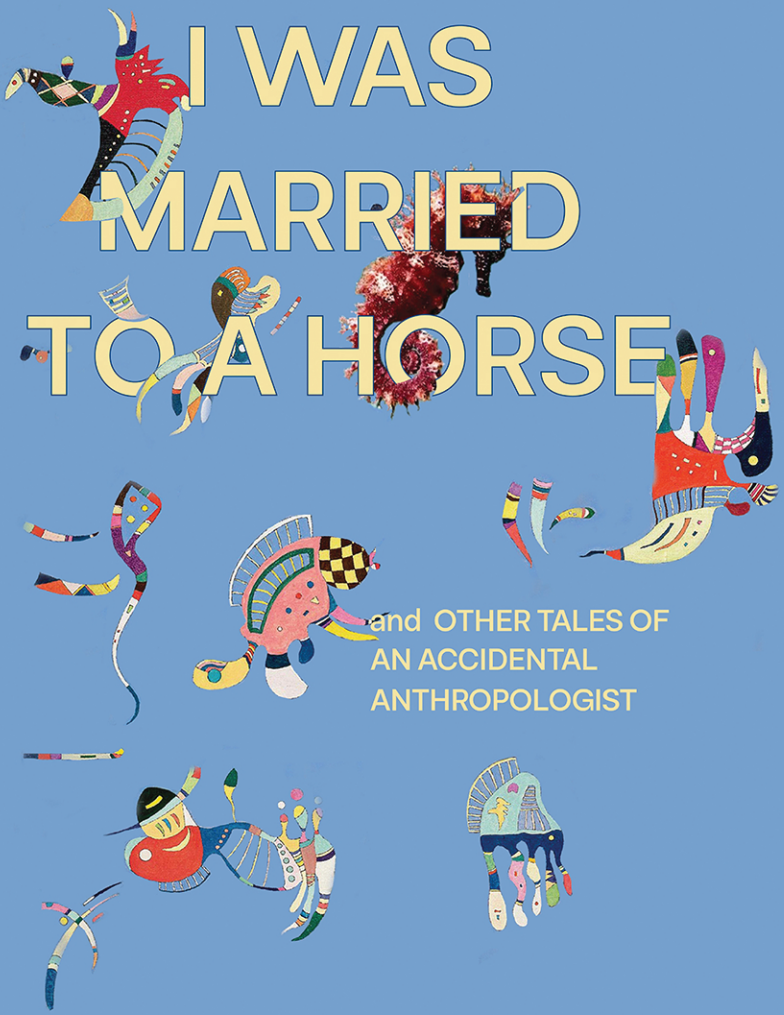
I WAS MARRIED TO A HORSE



and OTHER TALES OF AN ACCIDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

John Borneman

Foreword by Frédéric Keck

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Foreword

Frédéric Keck

What is an accidental anthropology? Many anthropologists write their memoirs as if they were transported from one culture to another—or in more contemporary terms, from one ontology to another—and they narrate this transportation as if they had always felt its need, under the guise of a romantic desire for alterity or exoticism. There is no such narrative in John Borneman's book. His choice of anthropology was accidental. He could have become many other things: a horse-riding instructor, or a political science teacher. Why then did he become an anthropologist? The first scene he describes in his book could let the reader think that, rather than a quest for alterity, the reason was a desire to return to the origin: the *Heimat*, or homeland. Coming from a family of German immigrants who settled in Wisconsin in the middle of the nineteenth century, John Borneman did fieldwork in Berlin at the end of the twentieth. And when he brings his German friend Jürgen to his dying father's bed, he hears his father sing the Lorelei. But such an encounter is not a return to the origin: the *Heimat* is *unheimlich*; the family is divided, as is Germany; and the father has always been an ambivalent figure—admired, pitied, and dreaded at the same time (Borneman 1991; Borneman 2004). In the first pages of his monograph *Belonging in the Two Berlins*, Borneman writes, "Everyday relationships and interaction routines that are unique to a particular group form the basis for feeling *zu Hause*, at home, in one place and not in another. To feel at home is to be among kin. This *zu-Hause* identity is created only when an individual

experiences a particular set of lifecourse meanings enabling him or her to belong to a group demarcated from other groups" (Borneman 1992: 31).

An accidental anthropology tells the reader how to make sense of such encounters with the *unheimlich*, which are meaningless by themselves, often failed, always misunderstood. This book is not the story of a son of German immigrants in the US who returns to Germany to find his own culture. John Borneman is perfectly aware that the German migration into Wisconsin prospered on the genocide of Native Americans in the nineteenth century and on the ruin of farmers during the Depression in the Great Plains. He knows that the German twentieth century is darkened by the worst genocide in history. In his article "American Anthropology as Foreign Policy," he writes: "The formidable cognitive and emotional task for white Americans was to (re)create oneself and to occupy the category 'American,' though fully 'foreign' oneself, through the expropriation of native lands and the liquidation of those natives" (Borneman 1998: 34). If migration becomes meaningful in this book, it is not as a return to the origin but as the chance encounter with another wave of migration: that of Syrians refugees arriving in Germany after the repression of the Arab Spring in 2011, some of whom John Borneman had met while he was teaching and doing fieldwork in Aleppo after 2004 (Borneman 2007). When he helps these refugees find a place in Berlin, where he has himself settled, Borneman finds an answer to the question that has always troubled and interested him: how does one become a father when one's home is divided? An accidental anthropology tells the reader how to make kinship through hazardous encounters.

Hence the title: *I Was Married to a Horse*. It refers to a series of pictures his mother kept at home of all her children and their spouses. Since John was not married to a woman, and since he loved horse riding, he was pictured with his mare. Borneman's memoir transforms this queer family picture into a semiotic diagram: the horse is the empty case in the kinship system, a sign that John has to escape and become someone other than a farmer in Wisconsin. While contemporary anthropology has embraced such queer companionship, Borneman here raises a question for a multispecies and intersectional ethnography (Haraway 2007; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). How is being married to a horse the starting point for other hazardous encounters, and how do these encounters make sense in a person's life?

I Was Married to a Horse is the ethnography of a boy's life on a farm in Wisconsin, who happened to become an anthropologist in Germany and Syria. The ethnographic gaze is retrospectively projected on

the family farm, its intimacies, its hopes, its discontents, its failures. The reader follows little John as he walks to school, plays with dogs and cats, brings cows back home, and rides horses. All animals, as far as possible, have names, just as humans do. They are characters of the autobiography along with parents, siblings and schoolteachers. While farm boys are mostly interested by mechanics, such as tractors and cars, John is mostly interested by animals: how they grow, how they move, how they feed. In a living enactment of Lévi-Strauss's "savage mind" or "wild thoughts" (Lévi-Strauss 2021), John's intellectual interest in the names of breeds is not incompatible with emotional engagement with the singularities of animal lives. It is ironic that his first job when he arrived at the University of Wisconsin was to punch cards to code chicken eggs for poultry science—as if he implemented the anthropologist's dream to download all animal classifications into a computer. Yet one of the most poignant scenes of the book is the auction where John's parents have to sell their machines and animals as commodities, bringing to the ultimate form of detachment and alienation the ambivalent relations of attachment and exploitation described in the first part of the book (Candea 2010).

"In research," Borneman writes in Part 3 of this book as he describes his graduate student years at Harvard, "I began to look for transformative moments and to arrive at knowledge by anticipating, often unconsciously, such moments in the lives and societies of people I was studying." Events happen and become meaningful through the structures of social and cultural life. The task of the anthropologist is to be there to collect these meanings by talking with people. Events are in themselves unpredictable, but the anthropologist can make sense of what people say about these events, and at some unconscious level anticipate them. John Borneman's work is organized around two major global events: the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—which started with a Politbüro member's accidental misunderstanding of new travel regulations at a press conference (Borneman 1992: 313)—and the Arab Spring in 2011. Being there in Germany before and after its reunification, he could make sense of what it meant to live in a dual state. Talking with Syrian citizens before and after the collapse of their state, he could make sense of their desires or obligations to migrate. These two events became meaningful through his early theoretical works at Harvard: first, a paper on totemism comparing horse breeding in the US, Germany, and France in relation to the history of the state; second, a paper on Cuban immigrants framed as penetration by the US media. *I Was Married to a Horse* also narrates another event with a direct effect on Borneman's life, even if he didn't investigate its

meaning for the people it affected: the tsunami that killed 60,000 people in Sri Lanka in 2004. We can assume that when Borneman almost died on the coast of Sri Lanka, where he happened to be for a vacation, the memory of Stanley Tambiah, his first anthropology teacher at Harvard, came back to his mind. Note that his memoir does not mention another global event, 9/11, because he was not transformed by it—even if those with whom he worked in Syria were affected by its consequences (Borneman 2007).

It is enlightening to compare Borneman to a French anthropologist of the previous generation: Emmanuel Terray. Born in 1935 into an aristocratic family shamed by collaboration with the Vichy regime, Terray was engaged in communist militancy and Althusserian intellectual circles in Paris in the early 1960s, before doing fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire at the end of that decade. He settled in Berlin in 1991, where he created the Centre Marc Bloch to promote French-German research on the transition of Eastern European states to capitalism, and he used Berlin as an observatory to meditate on the ruins of communism (Terray 1996). When he returned to France, Terray supported the movement of undocumented workers—*sans-papiers*—and launched reflections on the potential rise of new forms of international coordination promoting justice and solidarity through the growing networks of migration that capitalism uses for its development (Terray 2011).

When he situates his own position in the anthropology of Eastern Europe, Borneman has different figures in mind, more familiar to an English-speaking readership, such as Ernst Gellner or Katherine Verdery (Borneman 1998: 14). But the comparison with Terray is revealing, because Borneman and Terray are both attracted by the genre of autobiography—what the Germans call *Bildungsroman*—and yet they resist adopting naively such a narrative form. Terray does this by multiplying forms of dialogue and interviews around his experience of communism (Terray 1988; Terray and Colleyn 2005); Borneman, by writing an accidental anthropology narrating how he escaped his parents' farm. Had Terray had the chance to read Borneman's book, I think he would have enjoyed it. Even if he was more romantically attracted to a German quest for the absolute, Terray had the conviction that the absolute presents itself only through accidental encounters, and that it is the anthropologist's responsibility to let these accidents happen and retrospectively meditate on their meaning (Terray 1994).

Borneman had other French writers in mind when he wrote *I Was Married to a Horse*: existential sociologists such as Didier Eribon, Annie

Ernaux or Edouard Louis. Like them, he delves into the singularities of his education in the popular classes through the language of elites in such a way that this tension can touch any citizen of the world (Eribon 2013). But being trained as an anthropologist and doing fieldwork in Germany and Syria, he moves beyond the borders of the nation-state in which these narratives remain confined—even if it is France, the nation-state that pretends to be universal because of the specific history of relations between its capital and its provinces. This is why I find Borneman's accidental anthropology closer to Terray's than to these other authors. The latter show the necessity of social determinants through their analyses of their childhoods, and thus propose to emancipate themselves and their readers from class and gender biases in the same way as they have been emancipated: by reading and discussing books. Borneman and Terray have no such pretention. They show how the accidents of life (and reading books is one of these accidents, but there are others) helped them understand the meaning of an absolute value: paternity for Borneman, fraternity for Terray.

Existential sociologies are often narcissistic and predictable, even if they produce real social knowledge, but I find an accidental anthropology more generous and exciting, because we never know under what form the absolute will present itself. If the actual father is failing, maybe the mother will be the father? And if a human can be married to a horse, can a human be the father of a dog? This is, in my view, the main difference between sociology and anthropology: the problem of sociology is how to make an individual, converting necessity into liberty, while the problem of anthropology is how to make kin, transforming brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers into relations with other beings. Borneman's book is worth reading for anyone interested in anthropology—that is, anyone who wants to understand how to make sense of a human life—not only because he narrates how he became an anthropologist, but also because he does it with a style, constantly interlacing deep emotions and distanced humor, that leaves open for the reader other ways to relate absolute values and the accidents of life.

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The Lorelei

In the summer of 1990, having received my PhD at Harvard and on my way to the University of California at San Diego for a one-year teaching position, I visited my father in the nursing home where he was confined for the last fourteen years of his life. My friend Jürgen, who had grown up in East Germany, was travelling with me. We had met four years earlier, during my dissertation research in the divided Berlin. Six months had passed since the opening of the Wall, freeing him to leave his country at will.

My visit to the nursing home was out of duty, not love. Dad had a drinking problem. On one occasion—I must have been around four—I was too unsettled to play. Dad had been sleeping, recovering from a hangover while still hitting the bottle, as his withdrawal was too severe to go cold turkey. Now he was awake. I remember him haranguing Mom, that he slammed the front screen door shut as he stormed out of the house. I cried. My sisters Peg and Judy whimpered. I did not know why everyone seemed so afraid but from their reactions I sensed imminent chaos. It had been several years since my father had been released from the penitentiary where he served six months for his drinking. That confinement in what Dad called "the prison"—Mom dubbed it simply "Oshkosh"—lessened, but did not stop, his boozing.

My mother was accustomed to such scenes, being my father's most frequent object of rage. On this occasion, he went into the garage and got out his rifle, which he had used only for shooting wild bobcats or squirrels. He told Mom he'd shoot the whole family unless she shut up about his drinking. I was barely conscious of what was going on, yet I felt my adrenaline spike and a heightened fear circulate. Mom told

all eight of us kids to escape to my grandpa's house while she lingered behind.

It was already late, perhaps dusk; the daylight was disappearing. It was the time to milk the cows and feed all the livestock. In retrospect, I am impressed that Mom gathered the courage to leave my father, if only to go down the highway to Grandpa's house, to leave the cattle and the other animals who all, because there was no one else, needed her care. At Grandpa's house, I sat on a sofa with my sisters in silence, in shock. My eldest sister Marge mentioned Dad seeing pink elephants on the wall, the first time I heard this term. My mother had now arrived, and she mentioned alcohol poisoning. She was spooked. Such scenes were repetitive, so in my memory they tend to melt into one another, though each had been distinct.

We were comfortable there. Grandpa Smith lived in a cozy, one-story house with Katherine, a former schoolteacher. We never called her Grandma—that grandmother died when I was three and I have no memory of her. This was Katherine, Grandpa's second "wife." They never married and I never met her children. This may have been controversial, but I was never aware of any conflict. I think, in retrospect, everyone was pleased that Grandpa had someone to share his life with. And Katherine was clear that she brought her own resources to the relationship; she made no claims on Grandpa's property or on his children.

At the entrance to their house a large Webster's dictionary always greeted us. Opened in the middle, it sat on a wooden lectern between the kitchen and the living room. Katherine's dictionary, I called it. I had not yet been taught to read but I was fascinated by the thickness of the book—all those pages. The only books in our house that I had seen were the telephone book and the Sears-Roebuck and JC Penny catalogues. I am told that we had a King James Bible too.

On prior visits, Katherine had played a game with me we called "look in the dictionary." She would have me point my finger at a word, then read me the definition. After I began riding a horse alone a few years later, I would often ride down to Grandpa's house to talk with Katherine. She listened attentively to whatever boring nonsense I had to say, while Grandpa busied himself fixing things for neighbors, or he packed his toolbox and made barn visits. His workspace was a large garage filled with every imaginable tool in which I oddly had absolutely no interest. My mother and sisters seemed genuinely fond of Katherine. She had a long, pointed nose and her reading glasses hung ready to use on a

chain around her neck. She was pleasant and quiet; she treated me as if I was her own grandchild. When I think of Katherine, I also think of the dictionary.

Suddenly the headlights of our Studebaker pierced the darkened sky as it rolled into the driveway. My father must have sobered a bit because he came to fetch us and was able to convince Grandpa he had meant no harm. From what I could tell, everyone had calmed down. There were no threats, no loud voices. A short discussion followed. My mother motioned that we should climb into the car. The cows still needed to be fed and milked, and if we didn't do it, they would bellow all night.

That was just the first time I was fully conscious of having to deal with my dad's drinking. Perhaps we never had a bond, my father and I, but he was my father, after all, and we shared some good times when I was growing up on the dairy farm. We shared the vibrant fall colors of yellow and orange and winter air so frigid that each of us produced a misty cloud by simply breathing. We shared the dramas of planting corn and oats and harvesting them, the trials of sick cows and joys of new births, the companionship of dogs and horses. And after I left Wisconsin, I embraced horses, my father's major passion, and pursued riding as an occupation. But what we shared had been broken by then, in large part because, in college and in those years after as an equestrian, I was becoming someone unrecognizable to him.

He had a minor stroke in early summer 1982, a few days before I stopped by the farm on my move from Seattle to Harvard to pursue doctoral study in anthropology. The following year he suffered a major stroke and a heart attack, which meant my mother could no longer care for him. He needed the constant help of a staff.

I had visited him once before in the nursing home and found it utterly depressing. He was confined to a hospital bed in a small room that stank, surrounded by patients drooling or goggling with distant eyes from pharma-induced states of fog and delirium. His reading glasses were bent out of shape, perched askance on the bridge of his nose, and the few hairs remaining on his head stood erect, making him look a bit mad. He may have indeed been mad on bad days, but on good days, like this one, he was fully present.

Without any kind of greeting or touching (we never touched), he asked, "How ya doin', John?"

"I'm fine," I said. "Visiting Mom and the family."

These words had hardly left my mouth when his attention shifted to the plump nurse on duty. "You have guests today, Ed, family is here to visit you. Your son came a long way to see you," she said.

"Sheri, you're looking as beautiful as ever," he offered a compliment while his hands reached to grope her. She calmly redirected his hands back to his lap and took a step back.

"Come closer," he joked. "I can hardly see you."

This faux flirtation was something at which he had always been talented. Women aroused him, the plumper the better. It was amusing, of course, but I also found it obscene. I knew I shouldn't judge. In this state, what else did he have but his fantasies? Infirm, attention split between flirting with the nurses and watching, obsessively, the television.

From early morning until bedtime, he watched the sanctimonious televangelists who preached, sang, and propagandized against progressive politics of any and all kinds. This mix of evangelical radicalism and conservative politics excited him immensely. Sheri took us aside and whispered, "We have to turn the TV off to calm him down." She kindly put up with his advances and flattered him with her own compliment, "Aren't you chipper today, Ed!"

On the day of my visit with Jürgen, Dad was expecting my mother, but he didn't ask about her absence. He may have been surprised though he did not appear to be in the least disappointed. He squinted yet recognized me immediately.

Mom had shared with me earlier her extreme disappointment: "I don't know. He's not interested in me." "All those years together…," her voice trailed off. What especially perturbed her was his refusal to show some gratitude for the years of serving and sacrificing herself for him and the family. A petite woman, she had to fill in for his work when he was too drunk, lifting milk cans or bales of hay that approached her own weight, in addition to managing the household. She wanted him to express his love and perhaps even remorse for his frequent cruelty and neglect. I felt empathy for her unrequited love, but I told her, "Mom, you never demanded he show more affection before. Why expect him to show it now?"

My mother had always loved her husband, Edward Borneman, and when she looked at him and he was sober it was the look of the come-hell-or-highwater devotion a good mother shows her child. But she never demanded the same in return. She even tried to please him after he went on binges: she asked, she pleaded, she cajoled, she whined, she baked his favorite kolaches, but she never demanded back. That

embittered her now. She felt sorry for herself, the corners of her mouth turned down, a sad look in her eyes. But she repressed this bitterness, as she had repressed her need to be genuinely loved. I received from her the feeling that I also did not deserve attention, nor should I demand affection, from the men I have loved.

Our visit was not the occasion for my mother to receive this recognition from my father. She knew deep down that he would never acknowledge the times of his malice nor respond to her wish for love. So, this time, she stayed home.

Since his second stroke, my father seemed incapable of accessing any memory of why his wife might have even had these desires. "Sometimes," Mom complained to me in a defeated voice, "he does not even know who I am." She experienced this as another insult, though she was fully aware that his ability to see people was compromised, a problem due not only to memory loss but also to ill-fitting glasses that were frequently broken. He could not see clearly who was standing in front of him. He had few visitors and when he didn't recognize who they were, he nonetheless greeted them enthusiastically, pretending that he did.

I introduced Jürgen as a friend from Germany. That he was ten years older than me accentuated his worldly experience, while his warm smile and strikingly deep blue eyes had a disarming effect on everyone he met. Clad in a shirt whose sleeves appeared a bit too long, and well-worn sandals bearing the telltale signs of all-weather use, he confidently extended his hand to my father with the greeting, "*Guten Tag*."

Jürgen could speak only the rudimentary English learned in his youth, so German words snuck into his English, and his English words in turn sounded German. Growing up in the Soviet occupation zone meant he'd learned Russian as his first foreign language. All the same, he might have learned more English had he practiced with his African American lover who served in the American occupation force in Berlin in the 1970s. It was an illicit affair, that between Jürgen and his American gay lover, though not forbidden. The four zones of postwar Berlin—French, English, American, and Soviet—were playgrounds for the different occupying armies, who were allowed to visit all parts of the city without restrictions. Some East Germans also played with the Americans.

In what was then a scandal, the American soldier crossed the Wall in the evenings to meet Jürgen in his one-bedroom apartment in the East, which Jürgen shared at the time with his wife. The part of the city in which he lived was known for its high concentration of Communist

Party members, nearly all who'd over the years grown more conservative in their personal politics. Given the constant suspicion of espionage, Jürgen thought it better to converse with his lover in German. He told me he didn't want to attract attention, though, I thought, that would have been impossible: in East Berlin, a Black man would invariably attract all eyes.

On most days, my father would have shown his usual curiosity—he really liked strangers. He would have asked a bunch of questions. Instead, upon hearing Jürgen say those two German words, "*Guten Tag*," his head tilted back and his gaze ascended as if searching for some distant vista, and he began to sing the Lorelei, a classic tune put to lyrics in the early 19th century by the witty, cynical poet Heinrich Heine:

Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten,	I do not know what it means
Daß ich so traurig bin;	That I should feel so sad;
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten,	There is a tale from olden times
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.	I cannot get out of my mind.
Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt,	The air is cool, and twilight falls,
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein;	And the Rhine flows quietly by;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt	The summit of the mountains glitters
Im Abendsonnenschein.	In the evening sun.

Jürgen's eyes teared and he hesitated as he tried to talk. It was the combination of my father's mythical recall and connection—the Lorelei sung by an incapacitated old man of German descent a century removed from the homeland. Jürgen was so moved, and so was I. We exchanged looks of astonishment, mine also mixed with a certain awkward perplexity. I had been told that my father spoke some German with his parents, but I couldn't remember ever having heard him speak it during my childhood. Perhaps he had during the childhood of my older siblings—I am the youngest. Jürgen's "*Guten Tag*" ignited his memory of a language he had not spoken in decades, and a melancholic melody revisited him. The melody triggered an effortless recall of the lyrics about the death of a golden-haired beauty who distracts shipmen on the Rhine, causing them to crash on the rocks.

In that moment of song, I wondered where my father was. This evocative singing of an echo from his past carried him away from his presence in the nursing home, with its sickly-sweet smell of urine and feces and disinfectant. Had he been transported to an experience of childhood, on his family's farm with his kind father and indulgent mother among

some German-speaking relatives? Was it the feeling of regret that he had married a woman he did not love and had crashed on the rocks of his drinking? At any rate, the recall of this melody, and the enunciation of foreign words very distant from his immediate bedridden state, transformed his mood of a kind of nursing home blues into manic excitement, an urgency that the craziness in his appearance reinforced.

Jürgen leaned closer to my father: "*Woher kommt diese Erinnerung an Lorelei und die goldhaarige Schönheit?*" (Where does this memory come from, of Lorelei and the golden-haired beauty?) But my father did not feel addressed. He instead stared straight ahead at the television facing his bed, his eyes now blank and clouded over, surely mesmerized by the screen. He didn't seem to understand what Jürgen had just asked him.

As abruptly as he moved into German to express this memory of an irrecoverable time, he switched back to English to admonish us to listen to the televangelist. However, I was still frozen in the moment of his access to what I might call the German register, in language and mood. He had reached deep into the recesses of his past, into a man christened Edward Bornemann whom I had never met, whose father was also named Edward Bornemann. Even the spelling of the surname had changed by the time that I inherited it. I later asked my siblings about this recall, and they said he had never shared his childhood with them. Now, it seemed as if he was attempting to share with me some part of his younger self, some part that my presence had awakened in his unconscious.

Yet my own mood was, as it has been since my childhood, absent of empathy for him. I was just there, fulfilling an obligation, with no strong feelings for him of either love or hate. In some way I internalized my father's indifference to my mother, mirroring and amplifying it in my own relationship with him, creating a chasm of emotional distance that echoed past generations.

Only in hindsight have I gained a deeper understanding of what might have moved my father and Jürgen that day, including the significance of the lyrics my father sang to that melancholic tune. Unfortunately, this intellectual comprehension doesn't translate into an emotional connection with their meaning.

I'd thought that my Berlin research had nothing to do with my father as a person, and while doing research I always disavowed the contention of many Germans that my interest in their country was tied to my being a Bornemann, which they wrote with two *n*'s at the end. My father had dropped one *n*, so the Americanized Borneman was mine. Still, Germans in Germany have nearly always wanted to assume,

despite my protests, that my motivation to return to the land of my ancestors was our shared ethnicity, that it was somehow in my blood. Now, it seemed as if the German heritage of *Blut und Boden* came alive in my father's encounter with Jürgen in the nursing home. It stunned me that I might have to claim this heritage, since my entire life I had gone out of my way to disclaim any special attachment to either the land of my ancestors or their blood. It was my father's final gift to me, not long before his death—a gift that for both of us was equally unconscious but for me also *giftig*, the German for poisonous. Was I to share, or claim as mine, the entire heritage of this Volk, its development as a nation? The time of Weimar, the Nazis, the Cold War political division, the reunification?

In contrast to my indifference, Marge was the sole sibling who appeared to forgive our father completely for all his actions. She worked as a young farmhand during her teens, under the most humiliating and punishing conditions, especially in the year after my brother—the third oldest—abandoned our family. And she continued to love Dad despite everything, despite being forced to assume responsibilities that a girl her age should not have had to bear.

As my parents aged and their health declined, Marge and her husband drove the three hours from Milwaukee to see them once or twice a month, each time taking Dad out for a roll in his wheelchair. On my very next visit, two years later, I accompanied her and my brother-in-law to the nursing home to help bring Dad to a picnic in the park across from Mom's tiny one-bedroom house. Dad recognized and welcomed us upon arrival, though he seemed puzzled about our intentions. His narrowed eyes seemed to ask: what are they going to do with me?

Not without some difficulty, we managed to get him into the backseat of the car. He could not stand on his own, it took two of us to move him. I folded his wheelchair and put it in the trunk. Once at the park, we put him back in the wheelchair and I sat next to him, on one of the two park benches among the evergreen trees. Dad was restless and incapable of participating in our conversation. Eyes darting in different directions, he continually wrung his hands, unable to find a resting place for them. Now and then he'd lift his right hand to his mouth as if smoking a cigarette—a strong motor memory, as he'd forgotten he smoked and drank after his first stroke. Soon, he wished to return to his home, the nursing home. He died within the year while I was in Berlin. I did not feel the need to reconnect, so I did not return for his funeral.

Such encounters, whether made or missed, are the accidents that create a life. I have tried, in this memoir, to be true to my recollection of them. Initially, I set out to depict life on a Midwestern family farm, the dairy farm in northern Wisconsin where I grew up. Thirty-four milk cows, five chickens, two dogs, three horses, eight children, father, mother. I first envisioned this book as an ethnographic account of the farm's people, the characters of the animals I befriended there, and its life from my father's purchase of it in 1936 to its sale in the 1970s. I hoped that my family members' different experiences of this farm life would serve as a counterpoint to the structural story of a fading economic way of life that affected our relationships as we lived them.

However, I was soon dissatisfied with merely being an observer, as in a conventional ethnography. I wanted to integrate my characters, including myself, into the same scenes. To achieve this, I had to become the central character—now a Princeton professor—in the farm's story and in my own story after I left it. My anthropological training taught me to concentrate on others, but for this endeavor I needed to turn inward and examine how others saw me and how I responded to their perceptions. This entailed exploring the transferential dynamics in my relationships with people, animals, and the farm, revealing how these emotional exchanges shaped my bonds and my character.

After leaving the farm, new narrative arcs emerged, the most encompassing being my journey to becoming an anthropologist. Lacking experience or guidance, I stumbled into the profession, seeking not a career but an alternative way of life. The book evolved beyond its ethnographic roots into a personal account of my relationships to the worlds that I've inhabited, including the past four decades in American and European sociocultural anthropology.

Writing in a blend of intimate reflection, psychoanalytical inquiry, and anthropological analysis demanded considerable revision of the ethnographic form I had learned. It also allowed me to recognize transformative arcs—from farm boy to professor and Berlin resident, from friendships with animals to alternative kinship with humans, from rejecting normality to affirming queerness. There are also stories of shifting masculinity, fatherhood, research in the divided Berlin and in Aleppo, and an unexpected attachment to Germany.

What these reflections reveal is that throughout my life I have unconsciously searched for transformational objects to which I submitted to bring about changes in myself. Both in childhood and adulthood, these objects—aspirations, mentors, horses, and dogs—were less chosen

than simply made visible through accidental encounters. They oriented my trajectories and turns. I didn't really discover anthropology, or my understanding of anthropology, until I was twenty-nine. After that it became the most important transformational object of my life.

PART ONE

FARMBOY IN ANTIGO

Peasants to Farmers

My parents were farmers who bought their land and sold their produce. But my ancestors, who left Germany in the mid-nineteenth century to make a life in the New World, were peasants who labored for feudal landlords. They did not own their land, nor have control over what they produced. In the first part of my life I was part of the world of farmers—dairy farmers, specifically. From my earliest memories I seem to have been captive to a wish of separating from that world. When the time arrived that separation was confusing, halting, painful, and it has never been complete. The world of intellectuals, academics, and anthropologists in which I live now, and have been living since my thirties, has replaced this older world without eliminating its presence in me.

As so much of my history occurred before I was born, I've sought to fill in some of those gaps, unearthing the prehistory in the land and its relation to my kin who initially settled in Wisconsin. This began with a poignant silence about immigration in my family, a silence surrounding the undoubtedly harrowing events of ancestral journeys. By the time I was born no older voices whispered tales of struggle, no journals had been written to inform generations to come, no stories were available to fill this void. I've turned to archives in Bremen and Goslar, to oral and online histories, assembling facts to breathe life into the scant bits of myth I overheard and imagined growing up.

Between 1847 and 1887 five million Germans embarked on an odyssey to the United States. Ancestral threads from both branches of my family were woven into this migration. Lured by promises of fertile land, they arrived with dreams of a new life. Extended family followed. Like my great-great-great-grandparents they had limited education but wielded skills in farming and cooking, animal husbandry, and arts of household management.

Those on my father's side were freed from serfdom in 1833. I could not determine the exact year on my mother's side. Emancipated, they began imagining lives beyond toil for others. America beckoned them as a fantasy where the canvas of their future awaited their own diligent strokes. The intrepid fifty-three-year-old Andreas Heinrich W. Bornemann, accompanied by his wife Anna and their seven-year-old son Frederick, arrived in 1847, having set out from the village of Lengde, now part of the picturesque town of Goslar in Lower Saxony. Eleven years later, in 1858, thirty-six-year-old Wenzel Smith, accompanied by his second wife Mary and their three daughters, embarked on his journey to America from lower Bavaria.

Germany was a patchwork of kingdoms, Prussia and Bavaria the most powerful. Lower Saxony was part of Hannover until it took the wrong side in the Austro-Prussian War, leading to its annexation by Prussia. My kin were all peasant farmers, as were most German immigrants then, aspiring to continue agricultural pursuits in the American Midwest. A search of the 1890 US census revealed that every identifiable family member was recorded as a farm laborer or a spouse or offspring of one. In contrast to compatriots fleeing political turmoil, none in my family sought refuge for such reasons. When in 1847 Andreas and family secured passage on a steam ship from Bremen to New York, it was the year before sweeping revolutions engulfed Europe. This fateful year coincided with a potato crop failure and hunger in parts of Germany, though the circumstances in Lower Saxony were not necessarily dire.

The crossing spanned close to three months, in bunk beds with inadequate food and no medical care. Neither federal nor state regulations governed immigration at the time, which left those arriving susceptible to exploitation. As they disembarked, sharks and runners demanded exorbitant fees for further travel arrangements and necessities. The Bornemanns carried a solitary yet substantial trunk with the vestiges of their old life and the aspiration for a new one. Their journey by train from New York to Chicago continued on tracks completed in 1843 with the labor of freed slaves, Native Americans, and fellow immigrants. Hindered by

the absence of north-bound trains and limited roadways, a horse-drawn carriage became their conduit from Chicago to Milwaukee. Subsequently, they navigated Lake Michigan, sailing from Milwaukee to Green Bay on boats that braved the unpredictable currents.

By 1858, transatlantic travel had considerably improved for the Smiths, with faster ships and better conditions on board. They left from Hamburg, and fortune favored them in New York with the recent building of Castle Garden as a landing depot. New York was the paramount harbor for European arrivals, yet there had been no formalized system for them. The German and Irish Emigrant Societies overcame opposition to have the New York State Legislature establish a Board of Commissioners to oversee immigration. Within Castle Garden diligent staff recorded immigrants' names, facilitated the purchase of onward tickets, and orchestrated medical assistance for those in need. The once-chaotic entry was gradually transformed into a more organized, supportive process.

Like the Bornemanns, the Smiths took trains from New York to Chicago. With improvements in transportation, immigrants quickly settled in the interior of the States. The Smiths were able to avail themselves of newly established private trains for the subsequent legs of their travel, from Chicago to Milwaukee, then to Green Bay.

Green Bay, population nearing two thousand, was a pivotal stop for these exhausted pioneers. What did they know about where they were going? Following the footsteps of many German settlers, predating even the Revolutionary War, immigrants inherited a collective awareness of German settlements stretching between Cincinnati and St. Louis. The Midwest's allure grew from knowledge that conditions were conducive to dairy farming, with a temperate climate reminiscent of their native German regions.

Wheat production thrived in the rich southern lands of Wisconsin. My kin knew of this, though they perhaps didn't make a distinction between southern and northern Wisconsin. They also knew of the influx of Prussians into a town that became known as Germantown, now part of Milwaukee, and of Green Bay's predominantly German-speaking population. Armed with confidence in the American ethos that prioritized work over status, they believed their toil would reap rewards irrespective of their standing.

The question of peace with the indigenous Menominee, and access to their lands, was still an issue when these settlers arrived. Menominee

and Ojibwe had been at odds with each other until a peace agreement in 1817. Four years later the tribes signed treaties with the US allowing the purchase of Indian land. Between 1848 and 1854 Congress established Menominee rights to a reservation of two hundred and fifty thousand acres. It was designated permanent territory, contingent on their relinquishing previous claims. That marked the denouement of a century of conflicts both among indigenous groups and with England, France, and the US. These conflicts resolved, immigrants could purchase land from the government, granting them authority to exploit the forests, establish lumber mills, and transform woodlands into farmlands. Wisconsin was admitted to the Union in 1848.

From Green Bay the Bornemanns and Smiths dispersed to villages and towns along the Lake Michigan coast or not far inland. Death certifications show my kin settled in the villages of Sheboygan, Whitelaw, Shiocten, Grafton, Jefferson, and Morrison. It wasn't until after Morrison that my great-grandfather, Heinrich Friedrich Bornemann, son of Heinrich Andreas and Julia, moved to Langlade County. Having toiled for other farmers and amassed savings for a down payment on his own farm, he purchased a plot of land in a small village later named Polar.

After 1875 the influx of settlers to northern Wisconsin surged. The town of Antigo, where I was born many decades later, was incorporated in 1878. The name is from the Ojibwa *nequi-antigo-seebeh* (where-the-river-flows-past-evergreens). 1879 saw Langlade County established and the inauguration of Antigo's first newspaper. The first doctor arrived in 1880, the first dentist in 1881. The establishment of a Congregational church in 1882 was followed swiftly by other denominations, including a Jewish temple. The inaugural school was erected in 1884. While records elude me regarding the opening of the first tavern, it's reasonable to assume, given German drinking patterns, that this establishment predates even the formal christening of the town.

Then the Homestead Act of 1883 gave my great-grandfather an opportunity to expand his holdings. Through its provisions he secured an additional forty acres provided he maintained a five-year tenure. His son, Edward A. Bornemann, later utilized the Homestead Act to establish his own farm in Polar as well.

Lacking roads, settlers venturing from Green Bay to Langlade navigated narrow Indian trails through forests adorned with a variety of trees: stately pine boasting a straight trunk crowned with a rounded canopy, its cones transitioning from verdant green to a deep reddish-brown

hue; maple yielding sweet syrup and displaying vibrant foliage; red birch renowned for its peeling bark and leaves that turn brilliant yellow in autumn; and towering, regal elm. Traveling with horse-drawn carriages, the immigrants had to fell the trees to widen their paths on the arduous journey.

These settlers soon realized that the climate and soil were better suited for cultivating crops to feed cows than for cash crops like wheat and potatoes. So they continued the tradition of dairy farming learned in Germany. Small dairy farms proliferated. By 1915, with the aid of agricultural experiments and support from the University of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture, these farms thrived. Wisconsin became America's Dairyland, a distinction it held until 1993 when California surpassed it in milk production. By that time I had long left the state and my parents had sold our farm, while neighboring farms had dissolved, expanded into corporate entities, or lay fallow, often with government subsidies.

Not until the 1930s did the Bornemanns and Smiths intersect, despite residing within a mere ten miles of each other for nearly half a century. It was my parents who brought them together. I always viewed the marriage of my Lutheran father and Catholic mother as anomalous, but in the archives I encountered numerous instances not only of religious but also of ethnic and racial intermingling.

Germans weren't initially a majority among settlers, but they formed the largest group and influenced the naming of the towns they helped build. Like French traders before them, they adopted Native American-inspired names for locales such as Wausau, Antigo, Kenosha, and Shawano, given by the Menominee and the larger Oneida Nation with whom the French had traded fur. As neighboring towns were incorporated, settlers christened them Hamburg (1876), Phlox (1877), Rheinlander (1887), and Wittenberg (1879). They bestowed similar names on unincorporated towns in the vicinity: Koepenick, Birnamwood, Bavaria, Doering, Rothschild.

German farmers relied on immigrants of other European origins, especially Irish, Polish, Czech, and Scandinavian. Some early French explorers stayed and mixed. They all collaborated in building schools, clearing land, raising barns, building fences, and harvesting. My ancestors distanced themselves from the escalating nationalisms of their homelands, which they could easily avoid by settling in sparsely populated areas. In Langlade County, denominational differences were initially discernible within, rather than between, ethnic groups. By their teenage years children mixed in the same high schools. Interdenominational

marriages became common. By my time we no longer talked about these distinctions.

The Family Farm

My parents never spoke of the Great Depression, but it changed their lives completely—for the better. The banks collapsed in 1929 but seven years later farm loans were again available, though for land only. Eager to leave his parents' farm, my father bought eighty acres. He took out a mortgage in his name, not considering my mother who always counseled against risks. A dilapidated two-story house, a small barn in equally poor condition, and a flimsy chicken coop occupied the land. But such buildings were worthless for the bank. What had value were the sixty acres cleared for crops.

My father was adventurous but a mortgage on a dairy farm was low in risk, for him and for the banks. He had heard of the suffering of farmers in the Dust Bowl, but Wisconsin, with its thick forests, rich soil, and regular seasons, had land better suited for Central European methods. Small farmers in the upper Midwest also avoided the more severe consequences of the Depression. City folk faced losing a job, not making rent, joining a breadline. Farmers always had work, shelter, food. They saw demands on their labor and time as natural.

After marrying, my parents lived for two years with my father's parents, Edward and Augusta. Dad had dropped out of school at age twelve to help them; Mom at fourteen to help her own parents. My paternal grandfather was ill, and his two older sons, Ray and Al, were unwilling to undertake the labor required. One left for factory work in Milwaukee, the other for odd jobs in Chicago. Both returned for only a few days yearly to help during the harvest. Their five sisters each married at seventeen and joined their husbands on their own farms.

My father, youngest, felt abandoned. The labor fell to him and his aging parents. Dad said little about his mother but admitted, when Mom spoke up, that he had been her favorite. Though close to her he also longed to escape her strong will. Mom likewise suffered having to satisfy her mother-in-law's wishes. Grandma demanded she cook, bake, and clean house daily for the family, on top of caring for Marge, Mom's new baby. Only after everybody was in bed was she permitted to wash her own clothes and the rags that served as diapers. She had another reason

to dislike Augusta. She blamed her for encouraging Dad's alcoholism, since Augusta snuck moonshine out to him when he was working. Even thirty years later she referred to her mother-in-law in less than flattering terms. "Battleaxe" was how my older siblings, who knew her, described the woman. That came too close to cursing for our mother.

My grandfather fell ill before my father's marriage, precipitating a crisis. One man alone couldn't manage milking the cows, feeding the livestock, planting the crops, and harvesting fields. Overwhelmed, my father decided to search for his own place. Edward and Augusta sold their farm and moved to Antigo, where Edward died in 1952, the year of my birth. Five years later Augusta's skirt caught fire while she was burning brush in her garden. She burned to death. I remember no details of her passing, but my siblings repeated this story to me in hushed tones. For Dad it surely was a tragedy, perhaps one reason he spoke so little about his mother. My mother also said nothing, but for the opposite reason: for her it wasn't a loss. Still, the image of Augusta's burning stuck in my mind as if I'd seen it. Perhaps I substituted the awful death of the Wicked Witch of the West I'd seen in the Wizard of Oz, not remembering it wasn't fire but water that destroyed Elphaba. My siblings had no kind words for our grandmother. Instead of identifying with our father's loss, they celebrated our mother's freedom.

My father moved into his new home with his hard-working wife, their year-old daughter, and another child on the way. After that Mom gave birth to a new child nearly every other year for twenty years. The family grew quickly with the birth of Joan and, two years later, Bob. That unit—parents, two daughters, a son—bore the brunt of the early labor. Nancy, born two years after Bob, shared some of this but was relieved of most barn work by becoming Joan's right-hand helper in the house for the cooking, cleaning, and care for younger kids. Nancy belonged to a middle group of sisters, including Mary and Judy born after her, who felt more taken-for-granted than the rest of us. As girls in the middle, they received less attention. Peg and I were the final members of a family farm constellation of eight children and two parents that lasted for only four years, from 1952 to 1956. After that it kept declining in size.

The house rested on a stone foundation with a small basement under a wooden frame. Needing repair before moving in were the wooden sides and roof—inadequately sealed and rotten—and the broken glass on the single-paned windows. With the help of cousins, neighbors, brothers-in-law, and my maternal grandfather, who lived down the road, Dad

Figure 1. Family Photo

cleared more of the forest for grazing, using some of the wood to enlarge the house and barn, selling the rest for other costs.

The farm occupied a rectangular piece of land without hills or valleys. The buildings sat in the southwest corner, bordered by County Lane AA, a dusty two-lane dirt road first paved in the mid-1960s. From the house we had a clear but uninteresting view across fields north and south, and to woods behind. When cattle or horses broke through the fences, we could spot them running on the road or grazing on neighbors' lawns. We hurriedly chased them home, hoping they had not done too much damage.

Mom was refined-looking, shapely, pretty. At five foot two she never weighed more than a hundred and ten pounds yet packed a bundle of energy. Self-effacing, practically minded, she was good at solving daily problems but never thought long-term. Working without pause in house and barn, she was also employed as a cook at the local elementary school and took on day jobs cleaning houses.

Children were as essential to the farm as the horses pulling the plows. Year-round, someone had to feed and milk the cows twice daily. In the spring there was planting and fertilizing. In summer and fall there was

harvest work from six in the morning to eight at night. After harvest, fields had to be cleared and prepared for spring planting. I grew up assuming my labor was a natural demand, yet I never felt cut out for it.

With planning and labor, the farm took shape. Summers recompensed for winters, bringing pleasant temperatures that never strayed into oppressive heat. Billowing cumulus clouds adorned cerulean skies—a vast canvas overhead. My sisters hung out together or with their boyfriends, so I was often alone with the animals. With our German Shepherd Queen by my side, I liked to lie on my back, observing those clouds drifting lazily across the expanse. I found solace in those moments, allowing myself to dream of distant places in the US I'd seen on television: New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, the Grand Canyon, the Wild West.

My father fenced the property with wooden posts. Later he added barbed wire. At the age of four I was old enough to accompany him and Bob as they attached electric fencing, slowly replacing wooden posts with aluminum. They also built a silo next to the barn to store crops in the winter, allowing my parents to go from fifteen to an ultimate thirty-five Holsteins. After I turned ten one of my morning jobs was to climb the silo and use a pickax to chop the frozen corn into pieces, throw them down the chute, then climb down and lift the silage onto the ledge in front of the cows to unthaw, before serving them. In the subzero winter it was arduous. Between house and barn were blinding blizzards and large snowbanks. I practiced singing to take my mind off what I was doing.

Three maples gave shade for our yard, and a few apple trees bordered the garden where Mom grew vegetables. Inside the driveway sat an outhouse, which we used until I was eight. For toilet paper we had the Sears and Roebuck and JC Penny catalogues. These thick books lasted us the year. I remember their arrival fondly. Of particular interest were not the appliances but the male underwear sections, the tight-fitted briefs and t-shirts the only homoerotica available in our neck of the woods. Having six sisters running around in various stages of undress had demystified women's bodies. I flipped quickly through the bra-and-panty sections, but the men! Underwear clinging to body parts I was not supposed to see, their forms, at least in outline, were perfectly visible.

Our bank barn was an efficient structure: a bank atop a masonry wall, topped with a tall, pitched roof. The hay wagon could be driven up a small hill onto the ceiling of the lower level to unload hay in the summer. The hay had to last from fall to late spring, when cows could graze again. Cows on the ground floor, the hay above served as insulation. With the

methane from belching this kept the barn warm. Only when the temperature plummeted to minus forty did the water freeze inside.

Every spring before planting the family cleared the fields of stones. We followed a slow-moving "boat" pulled by a horse, bending to pick up what hardness emerged with the thaw. As soon as I turned five, I joined. By then a tractor had replaced the horse. When my parents arrived some thirty rock piles were already strewn across fields that had been cleared. Annual plowing and intensive planting disrupted the soil, making rocks rise from under the surface. Mud was everywhere and sometimes it rained. Peg and I picked up what stones we could lift, the others excavating heavier rocks. We heaved them onto the boat before dumping them on piles of even larger rocks and boulders. For this work we had gloves and bib overalls. Because the pace was slow and not much was expected of me, I enjoyed the clearing. On a sunny day, the spring breezes dried the soil, and it was downright pleasant to partake in the labor of the family.

After nearly two decades working the land, my father hired a man with a bulldozer to bury most of the rock piles. This activated a migration of mice and rats who had made their homes in the rocks. They invaded the barn, where they found a home in the grain bin. There they ate through the sacks that held the oats stored for winter. One of my jobs was to clean up oats that had leaked out from holes in the sacks, attracting even more rodents. I was frightened of the rats, who were fearless. We had cats who were eager, but they were no match. The infestation affected our neighbors too, so the local agricultural extension sent agents to each farm to educate us on rat control. My father was grateful. Like other farmers he wasn't suspicious of government advice. Soon private businesses specializing in extermination sprung up, and Dad hired one.

I followed the farm's seasonal routines and contributed what I could, though I think in retrospect my major contribution was to avoid being in the way and not to clamor for adult attention. My responsibilities would increase as I matured. So did my interactions with the animals of the farm, companions with their own ways and characters as much as my human family. In a photograph from 1955 I stand with a frown wearing overalls, reluctantly holding a chicken. While I bonded with dogs and horses, Marge had to acquire a rapport not only with cows, horses, cats, and dogs, but also with pigs and chickens. Her experience with dogs and chickens led her to dislike them. Once an ornery rooster charged her near the chicken coop, cornering her before she escaped screaming, out of breath. It was cows she most identified with, appreciating their mellow, content nature, their repose chewing cud.

Figure 2. John Holding a Chicken

Our horses, Pat and Dick, towered over the other animals, their massive hooves leaving deep imprints in the earth. They effortlessly pulled the plow through the soil, or the wagons piled high with sweet-smelling hay or harvested corn. Despite their phlegmatic demeanor, sudden noise could spook these giants. A snapping twig or unfamiliar shadow might send them from placid to panicked. Should they bolt, God have mercy on whoever held the reins.

When Dad was absent, Mom, Bob, and Marge were responsible for Pat and Dick. They could easily outmuscle humans if they wanted, so control was possible only through sensitivity to their moods, keeping them calm within limits that didn't challenge them. Dad had a knack with them, and they respected him, but Mom and Bob and Marge had no such sensitivity and enjoyed no such respect. They feared the horses would squeeze them against the wall if they even imagined they heard something.

In the winter of 1952, my mother and her father signed papers and a judge had Dad committed to a minimum-security state penitentiary for threatening his family. His heavy drinking had made him violent. Mom relented to the pleas of her older daughters and called the police. For part of the year of my birth Dad was absent, and Mom ran the farm. The

penitentiary was also a cattle farm, where Dad worked under supervision during the week but on weekends was allowed home. His term was from November through April, coinciding with the winter's freezing cold and heaviest snow.

Every day in those months my mother had to harness Pat and Dick to a manure boat. She used a pitchfork to fill a wheelbarrow with cow dung, pushed it down the aisle to the boat, then hooked the boat to the horses and drove them outside. As they pulled patiently through fields of snow Mom forked the manure by hand onto the ground. There were days so cold the snow froze to her hands. Bob was Mom's assistant, but he was only eleven. He had to pry Mom's frozen fingers loose from the pitchfork before they could unharness the horses.

Mom was not much of a storyteller, but she sometimes told of the day Pat and Dick took flight. The top layer of snow had frozen into a crust of ice. After Bob and Mom loaded the boat with manure, she harnessed the horses and drove them outside to unload it onto the fields. The snow was almost four feet deep in places, and the horses slowed to a crawl as they labored. Suddenly, a sound or a flash of reflected light scared them. Off they went in a crazy gallop.

When one horse spooks the other usually takes the cue. As Pat raced Dick did too, but they pulled in opposing directions. Mom's frozen hands could no longer steer the reins. The most she could do was to encourage them to make large circles. The horses circled the fields with the manure boat trailing—over snow drifts, over the wooden posts and barbed wire—hot shit flying everywhere. Eventually, exhausted, they made their way back to the barn. Mom was physically intact but emotionally spent. Thereafter she didn't trust herself with the horses. In my father's absence, she asked a neighbor to come every morning the rest of the winter to handle them in the fields. After my father returned from the penitentiary, he criticized her for seeking help and accused her of having an affair with the neighbor. She was nonetheless grateful to have him back home, even if he continued drinking.

Changes at Home

In 1955, when I was three, my family's life changed forever. As a young girl my sister Mary was sporty and headstrong. That afternoon, longing for some potato chips, she convinced Judy, three years younger, to

go with her to buy some. They asked our father to drive them, but he refused. They would have ridden bikes, but they had only one. Refusing to give up, they walked. Sneaky Mary, as she called herself, had saved twenty-five cents. She agreed to share the chips with Judy if she'd go along. The closest place to buy them was two miles away at Dad's favorite haunt, the Farm Tavern, a grocery in front of the bar in back. It's where Jake, the owner, once took an ax to Dad when he was drunk and put a move on Jake's wife Marie. Dad carried a split upper lip to his end.

Mom warned Mary and Judy not to walk. There had been reports of polio. Nobody knew where it came from, but infections had increased every summer since the 1940s, as had the fear of contamination. That year the virus peaked in August and September. The year before, Jonas Salk had conducted field trials on almost two million children, and early in 1955 a vaccine was already obtainable.

The virus mostly struck children under five, so Mary and Judy, ten and eight, felt confident they were safe. But Mary had a headache and muscle spasms the next day, and she vomited. We shared a double bed, and that night Mary couldn't sleep. Mom picked up the landline we shared with neighbors, which luckily wasn't busy, and called the hospital in Antigo. The staff told her to come immediately. She jumped in our Studebaker, and Dad lifted Mary into the back seat. The Order of St. John ran the hospital, and nuns met Mom and Mary at the entrance. Inside, the doctors turned them away. They said they were not equipped to deal with polio. They called Dad to put an obstacle in the driveway at home to prevent anyone from entering or leaving.

Mary was put in the car again and Mom drove another half hour to Wausau. By the time they arrived Mary was paralyzed below the neck. The doctors there put her in isolation for a week, and the use of her upper body returned. Judy was also isolated at the same hospital, but her symptoms proved milder and after two weeks she was released. The nurses marveled at Mary's calm and cheerful nature during this ordeal, though on Judy's release she cried and cried, afraid that she was being left behind forever.

The nuns wore the habits of their order, which I already connected with holiness: a black tunic covered by a black scapular and veil, face framed by a white coif. They were charged with telling Mary what was happening to her. She was only ten, but the trauma had brought her first period. Our family had never discussed sex or puberty, and the nuns, known for modesty and chastity, were also not inclined to speak of such

things. After two weeks, one felt obligated. She said, "Mary, you are now a woman."

"What?" asked Mary.

"You are now menstruating," the nun said.

"What?" asked Mary again.

The nun explained menstruation and pregnancy. Mary fell silent. It was a lot to take in, and her thoughts were focused on her paralysis. She read the pamphlet given to her by the nurses, but she had too much else on her mind to think about how the trauma to her body had quickened her maturation. So Nancy, two years older, approached the subject, teaching Mary how to use the rags our mother had cut up from worn-out clothes, washed for reuse.

After a month Mary came home, permanently paralyzed below the waist. On the day of her release from the hospital Mom captured her in a poignant photograph. Joy beamed from her face as she gazed up at a nun on one side and a nurse on the other. She masked every sign of the ordeal she had endured. As Mary returned to the family fold, we were grateful to have her back, though mindful of having to adjust now to someone with special needs among us. I don't recall the day, but I do remember Mary's ever-sunny disposition and unwavering helpfulness thereafter. She dropped out of school for a year to concentrate on her physical therapy, and to everyone's pleasant surprise, our father quit drinking for that year, probably feeling guilt, though never discussed, for his role in this catastrophe. Mary's polio taught me never to complain, because someone always had it worse.

In 1956, when I was four, Bob left. He was frustrated that our father refused to pay him for his labor. Bob was physically strong, even-tempered, earnest, good-looking. He would have been "a catch" if he weren't a farmboy. His major adolescent ambition was girls, which meant having his own money. He prepared for leaving by saving up ten dollars from some extra work for a neighbor, with which he bought an old car sight unseen: a Model T Ford with a hand crank sitting idle in a neighbor's barn. The next model had introduced batteries, and batteries were expensive because they weakened over time, so Bob was pleased with his purchase. A turn of its crank with the spark lever on would send a magneto current pulse to the ignition coil, firing the spark plug.

The owner was eager to get this car off his hands—or out of his loft. A car was becoming a marker of individuality, and the American automobile industry had capitalized on this, registering sixty-seven million

Figure 3. Beaming Mary with the Nuns

cars in 1958, up from twenty-five million in 1950. Part of this new culture was a market for trade-ins: old models out, new models in. The Model T was definitely out, the last one having been produced in 1927.

So Bob slid the hayloft door open and cleared the hay over the car. The exterior was in excellent condition, not a scratch on the black paint. He opened the hood and sent the mice scurrying from their comfortable home in the engine, then filled the tank from the gas can he'd brought. With the first turn of the crank, it started.

This purchase brought him closer to his ambitions: "Jeez, John," he told me more than once: "You understand? I wanted a car to pick up girls and go on dates." But to run the car he needed gas, and for gas he needed an income. Our small farm created little cash. Sometimes an animal would be sold or bartered, but we largely raised our livestock to feed ourselves. We had twenty dairy cows at the time, producing some four cans of milk daily. When we delivered this to Kraft's in Antigo the farm turned over a small profit, but too little to buy what we called luxury goods: things the farm itself couldn't produce and that weren't absolutely necessary.

Still, Dad had no worries when he binged. He always had money for drinking, or he simply ran up a bill at the Farm Tavern. My siblings resented this. They worked for the neighbors when they could, helping them in planting or harvest, or by babysitting. Regardless how much they worked, however, there was never spare cash for what they wanted. Bob didn't mind the hard work on our farm, but Dad wouldn't give him a penny for it. "Loyalty to the family be damned," he told the others: "This is unjust!"

After helping with the planting, and without any further talk about wages, he packed his clothes in a cardboard box and placed them in the back of his car. Dad was nowhere in sight, so there was no confrontation. Busy with chores, my sisters didn't try to argue him out of leaving. Mom's empathy with his sense of injustice was stronger than her upset. She held her emotions in check. She was the only one to walk him to his car when he left. He moved into a neighbor's house a few miles away, where he did the same work as at home. The neighbor had two sons, but Bob considered them lazy, and apparently so did their father. His labor now brought him a weekly wage on top of room and board.

At the time I was too young to anticipate the changes that would follow. Clearly Mom would miss his presence the most. Bob had stepped in when Dad was drunk or hungover. But Dad was also devastated. A few months later Bob ran into him while picking up grain for his new employer at the Antigo hardware store.

"You know you are underage," Dad said. "I could send the sheriff to pick you up tomorrow."

"Go ahead," Bob smiled, walking away.

Years later I asked him if he felt guilty for abandoning his sisters. He hesitated but answered simply, "No."

"They must have been angry at you," I persisted.

"Your sisters will be angry at me until they die," he laughed nervously.

And indeed, they were appalled. Bob hadn't prepared them for his decision or its effects. Marge, assuming most of his labor, would mutter, "Oh Bob, where are you now?" But they were conflicted because they also wanted to leave. My sisters thought his departure a betrayal, but they held together.

Bob enjoyed his new life as independent bachelor, dating girls and hanging out with boys. The next two summers he came back to help with the hay. He thought this enough compensation for his leaving. It also reinforced his sense he had done the right thing, since nothing changed. Dad did not pay him, and Mom had no say in spending what income they generated. I don't recall his returning for birthdays or Christmas, though he must have. My inability to remember means that, even if he was there, he had no presence for me in those years.

On the day he left I moved into his bedroom, a small nook under the eaves at the top of the stairs. The slanted ceiling reduced the space, making it just large enough for a single bed and a built-in closet. It had one window next to the bed that looked out over the field behind. The plastic sealing the window from drafts was gone, and a crisp breeze brought the earthy smell of the field. I felt as if the room were made for me, and I no longer had to share a bed with Mary. My sisters continued sleeping two to a bed in the upstairs rooms.

Otherwise, I silently watched this reconfiguration, too young to think of consequences or help my sisters. Because Bob was always at school or on the neighbor's farm, I saw little of him. Only in my teens did I become acquainted with my brother.

Sissyboy

One of my earliest memories is hiding behind the living-room sofa when guests appeared. I was skinny and shy, wanting to watch but determined not to be seen. My siblings and parents saw me but went on as if they hadn't. When people looked at me, even in praise, I was overwhelmed

by a feeling of inspection. This was so unpleasant that, when my sisters teased me about my long eyelashes, I took a pair of scissors and cut them off. My family thought this just a trimming, never considering it might have been an attempt to make myself ugly.

They repeated the story of the eyelashes endlessly, though without the teasing. It wasn't cruelty I hid from, just that I didn't want to be seen. Others, for the most part, went along. About a year later I began to lick the ashes in the ever-full ashtrays in the living room. My parents were chain smokers, as were their friends and neighbors. I did this without much thought. The ashes tasted neither good nor bad. I guess I thought it was just my turn when the adults had left the room. Nobody said anything, but someone noticed: soon the ashtrays were emptied more often.

More disturbing for them was my lack of weight. Perhaps it was because I suffered frequently from childhood illnesses—the usual ones: measles, mumps, and seasonal flus—which mattered much more when I started school. I was infected by the same viruses as my peers, but my symptoms lasted longer and seemed harsher than theirs. I was so underweight for my age that my parents, who could hardly afford a doctor, made the rare visit to check if a tapeworm was eating my food. It was not, the doctor said. I just had a small appetite. When the symptoms of my maladies resulted in high fevers and chills, when I could no longer hold down food, I fell into a distressing, hardly conscious state, and had a recurring dream.

In this dream I am hurtling into an emptiness, unconnected to people and place. Like riding the Tilt-A-Whirl, as I did later at the Langlade County Fair. I become dizzy, nearly nauseous. I have difficulty placing my feet on the ground. But rather than spinning in a chaotic motion I pick up speed as I go forward. No ideas orient me. No objects bind me. I have no thought of being accompanied by others. I am empty, all sensation rushing inward in an effort to save myself from immolation. This makes me feel alone, perhaps more frighteningly than the speed with which I fly. And that is what also wakes me: the feeling of being alone in the rapidity.

When I place this dream in the formative years of my childhood, I can see how it evolved. Early on the empty space was a premonition of my placelessness. Later I struggled to find a place for myself on the farm. I had the impression I missed classes more than others, sometimes for whole weeks. And I loved going to school. Even before first grade I'd embraced any opportunity to escape the cold. Once old enough for school, the reasons for escape included my aversion to machine repairs

and lifting hay bales heavier than I was. So the dream also referred to a dread of home, a condensation of malignant spirits that lingered after I woke. And dread about a future confined to a cold, uninviting environment, which within a few years became my experience of the farm. After entering school my fear focused on not being able to return to the classroom, or that, if I returned, I would be impossibly behind. Around sixth grade this dream quit coming to me. By then I was not ill so frequently. I read more books, I worked on my riding, and I was comforted by the thought of the annual repetition of the school year.

The sensual qualities of the dairy farm infused our lives. Its smells were not an issue for me at age five. Farmboys were expected to be dirty and stinky, like the animals. We bathed once a week in our single bathtub, each taking our turn in the water heated on the wood-burning stove. The oldest first, then my parents. I was last. Yet Marge still carried "the smell of barn", as Joan put it, despite all attempts to mask it. On the bus ride to school this olfactory revelation embarrassed her. Other students couldn't help but notice her odor. Marge's morning responsibilities made it impossible to avoid carrying the barn's smell with her to school. Joan was spared this humiliation because she worked in the kitchen before school. Occasionally she was embarrassed for her sister; sometimes she felt contaminated by her. Marge felt such shame that throughout her life one of her morning rituals was putting on perfumes unmistakable for farm smells.

The usual scent of our barn combined manure, urine, and the sweet earthy aromas of alfalfa, clover, and grasses. But the smell became overwhelming when we worked with the fermented corn or peas in the silo, which infused the air with a tang like a mix of vinegar, rancid butter, and fingernail polish. With pea silage, the whole barn and all who worked in it reeked. The smell clung to our skin as if we had been sprayed by a skunk—which we sometimes were, though not so often as our poor dogs. Like Marge, many adults used cheap but potent perfumes to combat these odors. Women and men alike felt the pressure to "smell good." For men, Old Spice, the harshest and most pungent of colognes, was a popular choice when visiting neighbors. It would herald the presence of my uncles on visits, as soon as they stepped from their cars. As a child, however, these overpowering perfumes or colognes disturbed me, leaving a lasting aversion.

We had little junk or discarded treasure to store since we reused everything—toys, clothes, appliances, furniture—until it fell apart. One

storage place was a trunk in our parent's bedroom closet downstairs, where they kept two boxes of precious objects. I remember yellowed photographs of my grandfathers logging, wedding and family pictures going back three generations, the title deed to the farm, and two gold nuggets from Grandpa Smith's Alaskan mining days. The other place was the attic. Unlike the three upstairs bedrooms the attic was not insulated, making it stiflingly hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter. I always entered with trepidation, knowing mice lived there. They scampered to hide when we opened the creaky door, and I had an irrational fear of mice from my barn encounters.

At the beginning of each school year, Mom would take me to the attic to scrummage with her through two trunks of women's clothes to find something that fit her daughters. Marge and Joan would be given money for new shoes they wore for two years, also for farm work. Money for clothes was harder to come by, so Mom relied on hand-me-downs from neighbors or friends. On opening the trunk, the first smell was mothballs, so pungent I took a step back. When the sky was clear, faint sunlight filtered through the window, creating the eerie feeling of a presence trying to enter. I had the same feeling about the clothes, as if they carried scents and spirits from prior inhabitants.

Most hand-me-downs fit Joan, who was slim, but poor Marge was plump. There were few options but to mend or adjust her own old clothes, so she usually wore the same things she had the previous year. After two years the next set of girls, Nancy and Mary, inherited whatever was still usable from their sisters. Nobody liked wearing their aunt's or neighbor's or sister's passed-down clothes. This sartorial poverty distinguished most farmgirls visually from town girls who each school year, even if poor, were at least given more clothes, if not newer ones, to choose from.

Around this time my father took to calling me Sissyboy, his voice wrapping the word in disappointment. My sisters' eyes would dart toward me with a flicker of concern whenever he did this. The word's meaning eluded my young mind, but its sting was unmistakable, each syllable a tiny barb under my skin that I tried not to acknowledge.

What had my father seen in me that I couldn't yet in myself? Did he catch glimpses of a future I couldn't fathom? Perhaps it was how I'd wrap my arms around myself, as if holding together pieces that weren't quite fitting. Maybe he noticed how I'd cross my legs when seated, at odds with the manly posture of legs spread apart. It could have been my disinterest in the engines and machines so central to his vocation, or my

reluctance to embrace the great outdoors. While he reveled in the hum of engines and the scent of freshly tilled earth, I sought refuge in quieter pursuits: a divide that grew between us.

At four I discovered a weapon in my emotional arsenal. When rage or frustration bubbled, instead of lashing out or dissolving into tears I'd clamp my mouth shut and hold my breath. My face would flush, then pale, then take on an alarming shade of blue. "Mom! Mom! John's turning blue again!" Peg's panicked voice sliced through the air, setting off a familiar chain of events. Mom would burst into the room, eyes wide with fear. She'd scoop me up, my rigid body unyielding, and dash outside. The screen door would slam behind us as she sprinted across the yard, my body bouncing against her. The rush of cool air against my face would finally force my lungs to remember their job. I'd gasp, gulping like a fish tossed back into water. This macabre play continued for over a year until one day Dad intervened. As I stood there, face purpling, chest burning, he grabbed Mom's arm. "Let him be," he growled. The world started to dim, my legs buckled, then came darkness. I woke on the kitchen floor, a throbbing lump on my head where it had had slammed into the fridge. The bruise throbbed in time with my father's harsh words, hanging in the air like acrid smoke. His rebuke of my mother, coupled with my brush with unconsciousness, achieved its goal. I never held my breath again. If perhaps justified given the danger of my behavior, the punishment was a blunt instrument. It crushed the symptom but left the cause untouched.

The terror of that moment left an indelible mark. Even now I fight an irrational panic when in water. If swimming or snorkeling I must consciously remind myself: "Breathe, John. Just breathe." And the question lingers too: what drove a child to such? I've since come to understand my breath-holding as a silent scream in the face of the chaos my father wrought. It turned the turmoil inward, rather than lashing out at my father or others. Suffocating myself I was both aggressor and victim, punishing myself for what I couldn't control. My father could force that change in my behavior with a single stern action. But I, a child adrift in a sea of adult problems, had no such power over him or the storm his addiction created. Unless of course I was the root of all our troubles. If that were true, perhaps the best solution was to erase myself: to take up as little space, or air, as possible.

My efforts to seek empathy from my father were like pebbles thrown against a fortress wall. His drinking built a barrier my childish pleas for attention and understanding couldn't breach. Each held breath was a

silent supplication, a plea for notice lost in the phenomenon I couldn't yet understand: his alcoholism.

Sissyboy: it clung to me like a burr, long before I could comprehend its weight. My father's disappointment seeped into our interactions; a judgment passed on a child barely old enough to form sentences. I was the youngest of eight. I was supposed to inherit this mess and save it. Yet everything about me screamed misfit. My aversion to the cold, my disinterest in rough-and-tumble play, in running, falling down, picking myself up: all this was evidence mounting against me. While Bob toiled in the fields and dated girls, I retreated into passions such as books and art, as foreign to farm life as skyscrapers were. I shied away from oily hands and bruised knuckles, preferred sweets to meat, and found no joy in hunting or fishing. I developed a stutter, a baffling addition to an already perplexing character. Not that I'd ever been animated to share much. I was always quiet and shy. Yet the thoughts I did want to state raced too fast for words. My anticipation of saying the wrong thing made me afraid to speak. The frustration that my speech reflected in others mirrored the anguish they saw in me. Each quirk, each preference, widened the gulf between their expectations and my reality. So I developed a set of defenses against any mirroring. By five, if not earlier, the verdict was in. I was a bewildering disappointment to a man who needed a successor, not a dreamer. The farm's future and my father's hopes withered together like crops in a drought. This left behind a barren field of misunderstanding between us.

Sugarbush and Crestwood Elementary

I began to find other recognitions, starting at school. My brother and sisters teased me: "Where did you get those smarts?" Or: "You've got all the brains in the family. How'd you do it?" I found this puzzling. I was different, but I'd never thought intelligence set me apart. My grades were, I thought, the result of hard work, not special abilities. It made no sense that I was the only one. We all went through the same Sugarbush Elementary and Antigo Junior and Senior High. We had the same minimal expectations, the same book-deprived household and stress-free path. Nobody encouraged or discouraged us in any of this. We'd all walked the same mile to school from our home.

Sugarbush was a one-room school with one teacher, though I never perceived it as small. It was the only school I knew. The structure itself

had charm: a wooden frame on a brick foundation, with large, elongated windows. Stepping through the door we were greeted by a graceful staircase and all-wood interior. Our teacher handled all four subjects—math, reading, writing, geography—for twenty-odd students in eight grades, effortlessly navigating between courses and classes. My first grade had only two other students. I had no idea that other schools had much larger classes.

No kindergarten was offered so I began schooling in the first grade at age seven. Mary had just graduated to Antigo High, leaving only Judy, Peg, and me to walk to Sugarbush. We walked along County Lane AA, sharing the road with sporadic cars, trucks, and tractors. There was no path on the side, so the winter meant towering snowbanks that made us vulnerable to speeding vehicles. Driving rain or blizzards obscured our view, pressing us against the edges as we strained to discern the traffic. Reaching school felt like an achievement before the day had even begun.

School became my escape from the farm. Peg and Judy were eager to dodge chores, so they hustled off in the morning with me trailing them. This made us the first to arrive, before the teacher, the janitor, our classmates. Unlocking the door was therefore our task. We had no key, so someone had to enter through the basement. My sisters always pointed at me. I was the youngest, the smallest, and wore pants, a contrast with their required skirts—though they'd slyly wear pants underneath in the coldest months. I'd slide down the coal chute, landing in the dark with coal crunching under my feet, then ascend the stairs to unlock from within.

Our textbook, which the district purchased, and which was never taken outside the school grounds, covered each of our four subjects, and the first four grades all shared it. I discovered this was advantageous. As our teacher progressed to the next grade after finishing a lesson, I'd race to complete my exercises so I could sneak ahead to the lesson for the next grade while it was taught. We were never assigned homework. Being mostly farm kids, our families needed our help after school.

When Langlade County consolidated its four one-room schools, Crestwood Elementary rose adjacent to the demolished remains of Sugarbush. Unlike our cozy one-room setting, it had separate rooms, and teachers for each grade. It swapped coal for gas heating and employed a bus to ferry us daily. The community's rising prosperity gave birth to this. To me Crestwood felt less intimate than Sugarbush, its cement walls and linoleum floors a change that mirrored our surroundings. In the style of 1950s ranch homes—efficient, one-story, modest—the bigger space

housed a principal's office, a teachers' lounge, and an indoor basketball court that doubled for assemblies.

We began each morning by raising the US flag on the tall pole by the entrance and ended the day by taking it down and folding it. We recited, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The addition of "under God" by Eisenhower in 1954 had sparked no controversy, probably because it was assumed we were all Christian. For us the flag and the nation were the sites of the sacred too. Once, when folding the flag, I received a stern scolding for letting my corner touch the ground. I thus learned the meaning of sacrilege in a secular school, not at church.

In my second-grade class of sixteen students, Miss Pregler gave us her undivided attention. She expanded our curriculum to include art and sports. The art class thrilled me. The introduction to classical music—Bach, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev—opened a strange world of waking dreams. I was entranced by *Peter and the Wolf*, the music transporting me to a realm of ever-changing moods: alarm and comfort, pensiveness and exhilaration. Listening to classical music made images and motion in my mind in a way that reading did not.

As a second grader I embellished an essay with diacritics such as acute and grave accents, circumflexes, and umlauts, purely for their visual appeal. "My dear, these little marks are for French," Miss Pregler advised with a smile. "We don't use them in English." Well, that was news to me, and I felt my cheeks flush. Before I could hang my head, Miss Pregler placed a hand on my shoulder: "Don't worry about it. Why don't we look at some other ways for you to be creative?"

In our music sessions Miss Pregler would open a box of instruments. Her eyes brightening, she distributed the treasures among us—shiny chimes, wooden blocks, gleaming cymbals, and mysterious gongs. Some lucky kids got whistles, other harmonicas. "And for you, my dear," she placed a horn in my hands. As she settled at the piano the room filled with sound. All around me, classmates shook, tapped, and blew, with varying success. I brought the horn to my lips, took a deep breath, and produced a sound reminiscent of a distressed goose. Miss Pregler never missed a beat. She caught my eye and gave an encouraging nod. "That's it! Keep going!" she whispered to us over the cacophony.

I never considered myself the best student in the class, but Miss Pregler took a liking to me. She offered to take me on a summer trip, an honor

I found deeply flattering as I had never been singled out this way before. My parents declined: they needed me on the farm. Toward the end of the year, she unexpectedly broke down in tears during class. We sat in stunned silence as a nurse arrived and escorted her away. The next day the principal told us she was experiencing a nervous breakdown. This was my first encounter with the concept of mental illness. Until then I'd assumed doctors only dealt with physical ailments. The idea that I might never see my sympathetic teacher again left me disappointed and sad. A substitute, whose face I cannot recall, stepped in. Miss Pregler never returned. I missed her. She was the first to recognize my yearning for an alternative world. Yet her encouragement left an impact, helping shape my self-image beyond the confines of a farmboy life. The next year, in third grade, I devoured all fifty-two books in the school library, leaving an impression on my peers. The books focused mostly on famous figures in sports and politics. I soon grew disenchanted with these narratives, but there was nothing else in the library to read.

Becoming a Rider

School was not the only way I'd started to find myself. The sandbox where Peg and I had played as toddlers sat in a nook to the left of the house. There we shared plastic horses and cows and a tractor, but the meager toys left a void I had to fill with imagination. When I grew impatient playing with them, my passions turned to TV and to riding.

We had recently purchased our first television set, and I was quickly glued to the fantasies awakened by shows about other places, especially those that took place in the Wild West of mountains, canyons, rivers, and streams. Widowed matriarch Barbara Stanwyck in *The Big Valley* caught my attention. Her California ranch was wealthy and clean, still country but completely unlike our farm. Stanwyck wore jeans and a tucked-in shirt and carried the authority of a man. Most importantly for me, she was not dependent on the presence of a man. She stuck up for the underdog and supported an illegitimate son sired by her dead husband. I admired her. Those places and people were beautiful, adventurous. And horses were glamorously essential to ranches, unlike how they were used on our farm. I imagined the sets real places, for *My Friend Flicka*, *Gunsmoke*, and *The Lone Ranger*. I found myself transported to a harmonious California family in *Lassie*. I felt attracted to many of the cowboys, but especially to Robert Conrad in *The Wild West*. This was

not because he was a cowboy-hat-wearing secret service agent solving crimes, but because he was a master of disguise, wore tight clothes, and had a butt to die for.

My mother encouraged anything that might bring me closer to my father, and riding seemed to work. It was his passion, and by age ten it was mine too. By then the farm was able to generate some income, and the two or three horses we had didn't have to support themselves. Pat and Dick were gone; we had tractors for that work. Horses were now for pleasure.

After my legs grew long enough to straddle a horse, I had ridden with my sisters on a brown gelding with an extra-long back. Judy was talented: aggressive, sporty, with a fine feel for horses and their temperaments. Peg was uninterested in horses, or pets generally, but rode along rather than be left home. Our gelding left little impression on me other than he could carry the three of us. I don't even remember his name, though he introduced me to riding. We didn't have enough horses or saddles for the three of us to ride separately, so we rode triple. Bareback.

My sisters invited me to ride in the woods. "Lock your arms around Peggy's waist," commanded Judy, as Peggy wrapped hers around Judy in front of her. "Hang on. If you start tipping, you'll pull us off, then you'll have to walk home alone." I learned quickly to keep my balance. I was small and agile enough that on taking a fall I could land on my feet without pulling my sisters off, and without injury. The few times I nearly pulled them off, they didn't hold to their threat. It helped that I was light as a feather: with one arm they could just swing me back on.

Between our chores and before evening milking, we'd ride down country trails, roads still dirt and gravel, and visit close-by lakes. In the spring we rode onto the lawns of absentee owners on Moose Lake, where the houses seemed better kept than elsewhere. The owners came only for summers, so nobody chased us away. I was embarrassed we left hoofprints in the yards but also liked it: a deserved desecration of the property of the rich. What were these city folk doing in vacation cottages, swimming and grilling, while I was stuck in a house in the fields, cows calling for my help?

Two foals had been born at the same time. Judy rode one, the grey mare Flicka. Dad claimed Rebel. We gelded Rebel when he turned one, but he remained as spunky as if never neutered. Something in his eyes made him contrary, perhaps unreliable. Dad liked to show us how he could

take the spunk out of Rebel yet allow him to retain his spirit and behave impishly. In the right moment, Rebel would turn agreeable enough for my father's oldest grandchildren to sit on him and walk round the yard. In a photograph from 1962 my father stands hunched over him, an air of cockiness tempered with self-assurance. Rebel's ears tell a story of their own: pricked forward, oblivious to Dad leaning on him, Peg in the truck, and me holding his rope, eyes centered on Judy taking the picture.

Figure 4. Dad with His Buckskin, Rebel

This snapshot froze a triumphant moment following an impromptu race. Dad was between Peg and Judy while I took my place on the flank. The sun beat down, the smell of freshly mowed hay in the air as we lined up in the driveway. Dad's eyes darted left, then right, building suspense before he dropped his cap, his body lurched forward. His voice boomed "Go!" But we all knew that the split second between the cap's fall and the shout was Dad's secret weapon. As we sprinted down the driveway, dust beneath our feet, my sisters' cries of "Cheater!" mingled with breathless laughter, but it was hard to be truly angry when Dad turned back, his eyes twinkling with mischief. In victory both unfair and charming his trickster side emerged. His playful mood turned upside

down the drudgery. At forty-eight he was in his prime, radiating vitality and humor.

Dad also loved Saturday horse auctions: the cacophony of sights, sounds, smells; the bargaining and trading. Buyers in baseball caps or cowboy hats and scuffed boots jostled, numbered signs at the ready. The air was thick with hay, leather, horse—pleasant smells that did not cling to our clothes or skin—and Dad was in his element: he didn't have to get drunk. His laughter blended into the din. This was his respite from the isolation of our homestead, a place where he could shed responsibility and simply be one of the boys.

I trailed behind, a reluctant shadow, my shyness and insecurity too great to fully immerse myself in the festivity. Yet the energy enticed me to pay attention. The auctioneer's rapid-fire patter rose and fell, whipping the crowd into a frenzy of bids that the auctioneer met with "Yup!" As we moved through the throng I caught snippets of talk—of bloodlines and conformation, of recent wins and promising foals. Dad rarely bought a horse, but he reveled in the pageantry of it all. His eyes would light at a particularly fine bridle or a well-crafted saddle pad, small treasures to bring home as souvenirs of his kind of pilgrimage.

Then there was Frank, a slight man with eyes like liquid chocolate who seemed to materialize at Dad's elbow. He was a small businessman, wealthier and, I was certain, more educated than my father. Frank had bought a new stallion, and my father promised to come see him, perhaps to breed our mare. He was interested in Frank's assessment of the horses available.

"Did you see that mare in the back lot?" he asked.

"Ya," said Frank, "she looks good."

"Come with me and let's take another look," said my father, their heads bent close, Frank's arm casually across Dad's shoulders in a gesture of intimacy that both fascinated and confused me. Their faces nearly touched as they dissected the merits of a new stallion or a promising mare, their shared passion for horses bridging any gaps in status or schooling.

I had usually seen men in loud, conflictual, even violent confrontations with friends, berating their wives, badgering their children. In our community, male intimacy and bonding found its expression in confrontations and competitive sports. Boxing held a particular allure, as it seemed to blend physical closeness with the raw energy of aggression. What struck me here was how Dad never moved away from the other

men when they approached him and crowded his space. Nor did he move toward them. It was a space of play tinged with the erotic, without aggression. As we left, a trace of that excitement lingered. In Dad's eyes I could see the reflection of Rebel, our spirited buckskin gelding—a living embodiment of the wildness and joy my father found in these excursions.

In the summer when I was seven, my afternoon chore was to refill the water tank behind the barn. Chores had accumulated as I grew. I was conscientious when it came to the animals and never entertained the idea of refusing. By late afternoon the cows would return from the back pasture. At this time of year, the stream in the pasture dried, leaving them thirsty. The normally placid animals crowded aggressively to be first to get their fill. If the tank had overflowed because I hadn't paid attention, a puddle of mud formed outside the rear door. The cows would slip, some panicking as they obsessed with their thirst. I had learned to stay out of their way. Slimy green algae produced by the slobbering grew in the water, prompting us to buy catfish to keep it clean. Because these fish fed on the algae, we considered them dirty, not knowing they were a delicacy in Louisiana. The cows emptied the tank so fast there was often not enough water for the catfish to breathe. I had no feelings for fish, but I pitied these as they flapped and gasped. It disturbed me to see their gills pumping. Such suffering was trivial to the rest of my family, but the trade-off bothered me. The fish were kept alive, barely, to maintain clean drinking water for the cows; the cows were driven to the point of dehydration to regulate our milking rhythms; and all this was necessary for our farm to survive. These thoughts I kept to myself. I feared my empathy for the animals would lead others to assume I was unmanly. I also thought nobody was interested.

On this day my father worried the heat would drive the cows to return early and that they would empty the tank faster than I could fill it. As I started to do so the sky turned dark. I yelled, "Dad, come here. I think a thunderstorm is coming." My father joined me and sure enough within minutes the storm was on us. The blackened sky and crackling sound of the lightning made me feel grown up, like in a movie set. When the lightning touched ground, however, the reverberating boom displaced my sense of maturity with fear. Our dogs ran to hide in the barn.

We waited an hour for the cows. None yet in sight, my father hoisted me onto Rebel, the horse he had saddled for himself, hit the horse on the butt, and sent me off to find them with our German Shepherd Queen. "Go get the cows," was all he said. It was my first time on a horse

in a storm. Now added to my chores was finding the missing animals. He must have thought this would toughen me up. I set forth down the narrow lane to the back pasture, swerving around rocks and roots that demanded Rebel's attention. At its terminus the lane opened into an expansive forest, stretching outward to the left and the right. I turned right.

I whimpered some, scared less of the storm than that Rebel would bolt. I calmed myself by talking to him, recalling that I had seen my father ride in storms and that Rebel had not bolted. "You can handle it," I said to myself. He kept up a brisk walk as we wandered into the deepest parts of the woods. By then I was calmer and started to daydream—about my father. Still only seven, I found him inscrutable. His relationship with my mother seemed loveless, so that made no sense, and the reasons for his addiction were incomprehensible to me. I'd taken note of his social skills, how others paid him respect and seemed to like him. But his congeniality with friends was not what he showed us at home; there, I'd concluded, he was weak, self-pitying, irresponsible, a drunk.

Whatever it meant for him to toughen me up, I put that thought aside and concentrated on the task at hand. Nothing was more piteous than cows returning late, their udders swollen to agony. Many would leak milk involuntarily before we could attach them to a machine. The consequence of such delays was the risk of mastitis, an udder infection causing blood to taint their milk. This could harm the cows permanently, tightening our very small margin of profit.

Rebel was skittish as the setting sun cast shadows between the trees. I reassured myself there was little chance he would unseat me unless he reared. And even in that improbable scenario, my Western saddle with its horn gave me a grip. Rebel heeded my cues, sensing my unsteady seat but not taking advantage of the hesitation in my hands despite his own nervous inclination.

A glance right shifted my weight in that direction, which Rebel followed. As the forest yielded a deep descent lay before me. At its base was the stream, but I had forgotten: by August it was dry. No cows were in sight. Turning around, we wandered into the denser forest on my left. Sheltered by the canopy, quiet enveloped us as the storm abated. A serene calm washed over me, and slender light peeked through gaps between the trees. I stumbled on the cows in the far rear corner. With relief I sicced Queen on them: the hissing sound that dogs mysteriously translate into a signal. Gradually, the cows began to amble to the barn.

On my return I was a rider. My father was proud. So was I. I'd tried my hardest to shield myself from the labors and the dangers of the farm.

By riding into the woods, alone except for horse and dog, I'd for now, at least this once, proven my strength.

The Stillbirth

Around the age of ten I began to grasp the turmoil my family had weathered. Our poverty, my father's alcoholism and prison term, Mary's polio, Bob's leaving. Despite the upheavals my parents had expanded their brood. Ours was the largest family I knew. My curiosity about the origins of all this grew. Why was I born to this family, where each member seemed so unlike me? Had a mix-up at the hospital led my mother to bring home the wrong baby? I had already learned of my parents' defiance in marrying against the wishes of their own parents, a decision that made no sense to me since both spoke with adoration of their own families. And then there was my father's drinking. Why did he subject us to such torment?

This I did know: 1952 had marked my entrance into the world and had concluded two decades in my parents' lives marked by my mother's remarkable fertility and my father's impressive potency. Our neighbors seemed to admire them for their prolificacy, but my parents wanted sons and had, after twenty years of reproducing, only one son among six daughters. After I arrived there were ten of us all counted. I found it unfathomable that my parents had expanded our family without considering whether they could afford it. They had taken on more children than they could care for. There were surely other ways to procure needed labor than by having more children.

Once Joan was ten our mother delegated the organization of the household to her, including childcare along with much of the cooking and cleaning. Marge and Bob were still indispensable in the barn. Bob would later remark to me, "Jeeeeezus, you and Peg had it easy." He received little attention from our mother and faced far greater demands from both parents than Peg and I did. Our mom, juggling numerous responsibilities beyond childcare, was unable to give any of us her undivided attention. She had little time or energy for comforting gestures, touching, holding, or attentive listening. The notion of a change in the kind of life she was leading never crossed her mind. So I was passed from sister to sister, each of them caring for me in their own way. Their love was evident, but it fostered in me a wish for diffuse attachments. Instead of placing all my emotional needs in one maternal figure, I distributed

parts of myself across my sisters. This pattern persisted throughout my adult life as I divided my attention and desires among numerous friends and acquaintances.

Still, whatever shortcomings we might have felt, we all gave Mom a free pass. She was infinitely patient and generous; she harbored no favorites; and she was forgiving of our mistakes. Each of us considered her an angel, and since her passing, whenever discussions veer toward her, tears involuntarily stream down our faces.

I sometimes thought Mom's Catholicism was part of why our family was so large. She was a devout believer who never skipped Easter Mass, even if she was not especially pious. She never censored the men for dirty jokes, and she herself had a transgressive side. One of my early images of her is sitting in the living room at night, either crocheting or saying the rosary while watching TV, then smoking half a cigarette before bed. I believe that if the pill had been accessible back then she wouldn't have hesitated to take it. She married also a Protestant, my father, which was unconventional at the time. This caused friction at St. John's, where she was a member. She claimed to have struck a deal with her priest before having children: he'd approve her marriage as long as she'd raise her kids Catholic.

So on Saturday mornings after we finished our chores Mom drove Peg and me to catechism classes. There the nuns taught us that their mission, our mission, was to share in the love of Jesus. Spiritual work meant emulating Jesus's love. One nun even mentioned the Beatles song "All We Need Is Love," much on our minds at the time. We read stories from the Bible, and I was intrigued by Jesus's miracles, teachings, and parables. Lessons like the Good Samaritan taught me to love even those who intended me harm. The story of the Friend at Midnight admonished me to keep praying, as God would eventually answer. A grand disillusionment waited, but back then I looked forward to these lessons. Most students waited for recess, but I wanted to stay and discuss. My father never asked about my religious instruction. He was more interested in personally receiving God's love or hearing His voice. Charismatic sects and Billy Graham's televised revivals appealed to him in ways that never resonated with my mother or the rest of us. She stuck to her matrimonial promise to the church with one exception—allowing my father to raise Bob Lutheran—which she never disclosed at St. John's.

She also took her own problems to our priest, in meetings that were more about counseling than spiritual guidance. I was usually present.

She cried, he listened to her troubles with her husband, she cried again, he was either silent or offered to pray with her. No comment on the abuse. His focus was on preventing a divorce.

"Mrs. Borneman," he would say, soft but firm, "marriage is a sacred bond. We must pray for strength to endure these trials."

Mom would nod, wiping her tears. "But Father, the drinking…the fear… How much can one person take…?"

"God never gives us more than we can handle," was his pat answer to her pain. "Divorce is not the answer. Think of the children, the scandal in the community."

To the priest and to my mother, marriage was a sacrament meant to help us become more like Christ. This confused me. Since Christ never married, why should divorce be a sin? Living unmarried could also be interpreted as living like Christ.

On the drive home from one such exchange I couldn't contain myself. "Mom," I said, my voice full of conviction, "you should get a divorce now, for our sake."

The car swerved slightly as she turned to look at me, shock in her eyes. "What did you say?"

"A divorce," I repeated, more firmly this time. "You don't deserve this. We don't deserve this."

She gripped the steering wheel tighter, her knuckles turning white. "It's not that simple, John. What would people say? Who'd run the farm? How would we support ourselves?"

"They'd say you're brave," I countered, surprising myself with my boldness. "They'd say you're protecting us."

Mom fell silent but I could see she was thinking, and her eyes filled with tears. A sign of hope and resignation? She'd obviously never allowed herself to imagine a life without Ed.

Another thought I entertained was that my parents' compulsive reproduction was about sex. Beyond the obvious labor needs of the farm, the number of children was a result of repeated intercourse. Mom might have known a way to prevent conception, but she certainly didn't try. Amidst the cascading demands of the farm and the evolving family, the number of children wasn't solely a practicality. It also reflected my parents' intimacy. On Sundays after lunch, during the summers before I was born, they'd lock the kids out of the house for that purpose, though the four eldest knew what was happening. In my adolescence Joan divulged anecdotes that brought a new perspective to these mysterious affairs. She

would bang on the door and yell, "Let us in! Let us in! You only want to make more babies!" Some thirty years later I mentioned this to Joan, but she couldn't recall telling me.

Discussions of sex were conspicuously absent in my presence, but I drew my own conclusions, piecing together what others said and how they behaved. One explanation was that mom treated sex as a reward to Dad when he was sober. Children were one result, a reward they shared. But when Mom refrained from touching or comforting Dad, I sensed she felt sex was something tolerated, a just punishment for the rewards of marriage. I found it difficult to reconcile these conflicting explanations of sex as mutual desire, reward for sobriety, and sinful grounds for guilt.

And then, after Mom died in 1996, my sisters found in her records a death certificate for a stillborn baby, dated a year before Marge was born. At first they acted as if they hadn't known, but then they recalled they had discussed this among themselves in 1962, when I was ten. And they had discussed this in my presence, they said, which meant I also already knew. Just like them, I had attached no significance to it.

I had not connected the stillbirth to the premarital pregnancy occasioning their wedding, of which my father's mother Augusta disapproved. In their small rural community, revealing that my mother lost her virginity before wedlock would've indeed caused a scandal. Although my sisters had known early on, my mother acted as if they did not, telling them in the years before her death that she had a secret to share. She had convinced herself that the stillborn baby was still a secret, denying herself the comfort of confiding in others. Now, I think my mother kept having children precisely because she lost her first one, and with its death she carried the weight of shame. She concealed it from us as best she could and assumed an overwhelming responsibility for her children, my father, the farm, and the cows. Perhaps she couldn't escape the feeling that the stillbirth was her fault, her initial failure to bring life into the world, leading her to repetitively seize the opportunity to conceive again.

I used to think my parents didn't marry for love, or that their love was one-sided from my mother. That may have been true, but it is beside the point. Eventually my father grew to love my mother, though he struggled to show it and, when conflicted, his addiction took priority. I for one was a child they both ardently wanted. Yet because Dad was forced to marry Mom after she became pregnant, he probably felt blackmailed or betrayed, coerced into a union he didn't choose. That the pregnancy didn't result in a living child increased his resentment, and in moments of anger he probably said as much to Mom. This was

the sole secret our parents worked hard to shield us from, one we'd already known and failed to acknowledge. My sisters never pried, or Mom might have welcomed the opportunity to confide in them, but the inexplicable tensions between my parents were obvious to me in my childhood. The unspoken secret of the lost child, never mourned, led my parents to tie the knot. I now believe its memory haunted an initial sex act that begat death, motivating my mother to continue having children. And that motivation is the reason not only why I was born into this family, but why I at all exist.

Langlade County Fair

Langlade's County Fair was a highpoint of the local calendar. 1965, when I was thirteen, saw my entry into this scene, bringing two of our animals to compete in the shows. Before the opening I'd spent days pampering Bertha, our sole purebred Holstein. I used baby shampoo to untangle every strand of her white tail, making it pristine and silky smooth. After three rounds of full-body shampooing her white hair looked bleach-bright and complimented her shiny black spots. I added a touch of peroxide where her coat was still discolored. Then we'd made two trips to ferry our show animals to the fairgrounds on the outskirts of Antigo: once for Bertha and once for Czar, my three-year-old steel-grey gelding. We'd unloaded them at the barns, at the opposite end from the grandstand and racetrack. This activity united my parents, who hoped that if they'd invest in my love of the animals I'd be the son to inherit the farm. But for me the thrill was elsewhere: being with other kids, feeding and grooming the animals, mucking the stalls—and of course, the competitions. They were an arena where I might shine while revealing little of myself, of my budding sexuality or my interests in art, dance, and literature, all of which contradicted the farmboy hunting-and-fishing culture I was supposed to be enthused about.

The fair was a bona fide animal farm where adolescents treated livestock like royalty. Competitions among cows, pigs, sheep, goats, and horses took center stage. We kept the stalls squeaky clean, taking the fork to clean up every time an animal relieved itself, piling in fresh straw after every pee. The animals looked stunning, smelling like they were perfumed, and we made sure our clothes were clean and a cut above what we wore in the barns at home. My parents were pleased I was entering their world—and I was indeed, this one way, if more accidentally

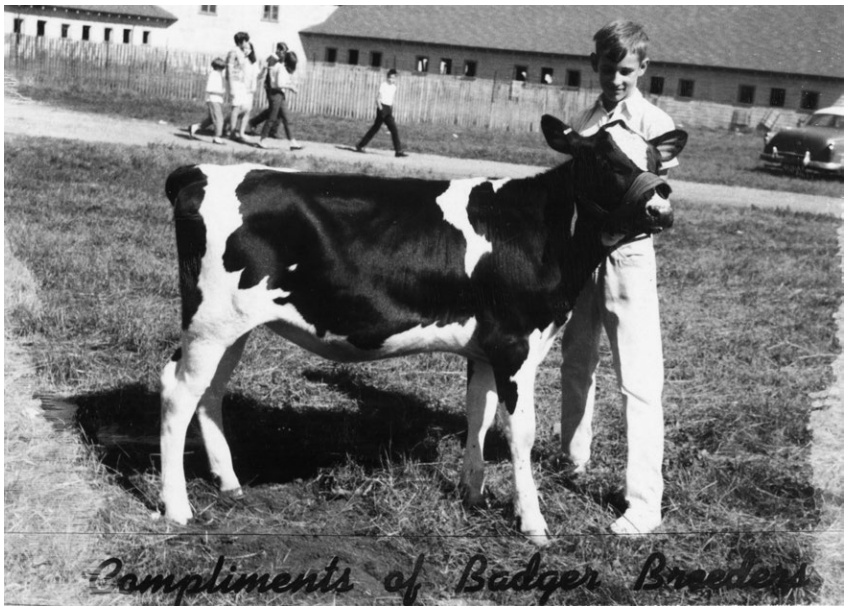

Figure 5. Bertha at the Langlade County Fair

than intentionally. I fell into it like other sons fall into their fathers' occupations or habits. Their mortgage almost paid off, my parents could splurge on a trailer for the animals, and for me new cowboy boots, a fancy Western saddle, and halters and bridles. Judy and Peg off with boyfriends, certain to leave soon, I would be the only one left to carry on the legacy.

The first day was show day, time for the cows to shine. In the morning, the cattle competition; in the late afternoon, tractor pulls, wood chopping, and my favorite, the greased pig contest. I woke before dawn and Mom drove me to the fairgrounds then returned to help with the cows. I tidied Bertha's stall then moved to Czar's, ensuring their water buckets were clean and filled. After Bertha finished her morning meal I gave her a final shampoo. At nine I guided her to the small sand-and-grass arena behind the barns. In the ring I joined our competitors in a circle around the judge. I had no experience showing cattle, so I followed the herd: two steps forward, pause, two more steps, pause, inviting the judge with a penetrating yet inviting stare: "Look at my cow!" The jerking felt strange and awkward. Why not just walk around, as with horses? I held Bertha's

head high, neck and back straight, feet squared so she looked balanced. Later that afternoon a competitor explained to me that the jerky movement was all about the angle of the hock. I'd never thought how a cow's build could affect its grazing efficiency. My knowledge of animal anatomy was limited to horses. With cattle, if the rear foot is placed in the tracks of the front, moving forward, the cow is structurally sound: neither sickle-hocked (angle too small) nor post-legged (angle too large). Both exceptions reduce the mobility and longevity of the animal, though post-legged is worse. Bertha was sickle-hocked. She won no prize.

Losing didn't bother me. The upcoming horse competition had me more pumped. I was learning about dairy cattle, but I thought of our cows just like our dogs, cats, and horses, judging them solely on their personalities and looks. Our cows had names, not numbers, unlike those belonging to big herds. Dad liked simple names: Betty, Lily, Midge. We rarely remembered maternal lines for more than two generations. One cow, Snowball, was nearly all white with a few tiny black spots, and her calves grew up looking the same. Dad kept her female calves, large and well-built, so by the time I was ten we had four Snowballs: One, Two, Three, and Four. I grumbled about this, so Dad let me name the cows if the names were short. My choices were names from Greek myths: Daphne, Apollo, Neptune, Zeus. Gender didn't matter to me.

About this time, I also learned of genetics, making me assume a purebred would elevate our herd. It turned out purebreds weren't necessarily better, but nobody corrected me. Our other cows were all Holstein but not purebreds: papers and pedigrees didn't matter to Dad. When a cow was in heat, he'd call in a neighbor's Holstein bull. We didn't care about the bull's pedigree or offspring, just if he was up for the job. Usually, one visit did the trick, and that was all we paid for. We felt lucky when some cows produced more milk. Yet I had talked my dad into visiting a farmer with registered Holsteins, and despite his reservations he had bought a two-month-old calf. Her official name was a mouthful, too fancy for everyday use, so she became our Bertha. Suddenly I had access to the official American Holstein breed registry. Owning our purebred gave me a personal stake in the breeding and care of our cows, and the incentive to develop them for profit. Though Dad wasn't thrilled, he went along with the purchase to encourage my interest. Within the year our local agricultural extension offered free frozen sperm from top-tier bulls for a few dollars. We jumped in to better our herd. They gave us options and Dad let me decide. But the next year Bertha, our registered cow, gave us less milk than the non-registered ones.

We concluded that first day by watching the slippery pig contest. Pigs are stocky, with short legs, boxy and low to the ground, making them tough to catch. The point was to run down a lard-covered pig and tackle it. You'd grab an ear, or a leg, and they'd squeal and squirm from your grip. By the end you were lying on the ground, coated in lard, utterly exhausted, while the pig stood a few feet away, watching you try to stand up.

The second day was the riding competition, for me featuring Czar. It had been three years since my initial solo ride to round up the cows during that thunderstorm. I had come a long way. I had even attracted interest from a local racehorse breeder, to train as a jockey. The competition took place before the grandstand in a wide racetrack. The prime event was Western Pleasure. Every rider, wearing cowboy hats and boots, did the same thing at the same time: first walk, then trot, then canter, clockwise and counterclockwise.

After performing the three gaits we lined up in a row. To winnow the field, the judge asked us to canter counterclockwise again. Most of the horses were unbalanced backyard ponies. They could move easily on a straight line but had difficulty with a circle. Most weren't trained to stretch their necks and backs, or to use their bodies equally on both sides. That reinforces a muscular asymmetry where horses lead off the same front leg, usually left, regardless of the circle's direction. After watching, the judge had two reasons to downgrade: one, that the horse took the wrong lead, and two, that the rider couldn't feel the difference if the horse was leading with the right or the left.

One by one we took our turn. One rider leaned so far to check if the left foot was leading that his saddle began to slip that way. Half the group took the wrong lead. One boy's horse spread his hind legs and groaned as he released his bladder. The excitement had clearly overwhelmed him. And as if that wasn't embarrassing enough, he would not move an inch after he had relieved himself. The boy kicked him in the sides and hit him on the butt with the ends of his reins, but his mount stayed put. When he finally moved the announcer said, "Unfortunately, he forgot his sparkplug today." Another horse took the correct lead before picking up speed then, as if in a race with himself, spurted down the quarter-mile track. The horse probably had a memory of racing, but the poor girl who rode him did not. Inexperienced, small, she cried the entire race but stayed on her saddle. After his run the horse returned obediently to the circle in front of the stadium, officially disqualified but allowed to rejoin the group.

Czar took the correct lead, and we won a blue ribbon. I enjoyed winning and loved the spontaneous humor of some of my fellows and their horses. But I knew something was missing. I had the strong feeling that the level of competition was extremely weak. I aspired to a higher caliber, which may explain why I named my horses as I did. I had inherited Flicka, the mare Judy rode before she turned her attention to her boyfriend. Judy got the name from the TV series *My Friend Flicka*. Flicka had foals two years in a row; the first I named Czar, the second Sky Queen. Why the Russian name Czar? I knew nothing about Russia other than it was our enemy. I found the name aesthetically pleasing simply because it was strange and foreign, much as were the Latin names I gave to cows. And Sky Queen? That answer is still a mystery. In retrospect it is weird, though this was the mood back then, perhaps anticipating the Age of Aquarius. Maybe it was an early urge to queer. If that was the case, I was surely not conscious of it. Our dog was also called Queen, but who gives their horse and their dog the same name?

At this time, I was also absorbing the religious and political conservatism that dominated the *Antigo Daily Journal* and the ethos of rural communities in northern Wisconsin. 4-H Clubs were secular organizations sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Madison extension service. Loosely tied to Future Farmers of America, they were conveyors of farming tradition. Pledges were a big deal in my childhood, and the 4-H pledge we recited at every meeting aimed to instill a set of escalating commitments: "I pledge my HEAD to clearer thinking/my HEART to greater loyalty/my HANDS to larger service/and my HEALTH to better living/for my club, my community, my country, and my world." The goals were admirable but at that time I leaned further right. I preferred the Pledge of Allegiance, drilled into us since first grade. It made me feel like a patriot, a believer in the exceptionalism of America. It was an honor to recite it at the beginning of each school day. It made me think that the animals, the farm, Antigo, Langlade County, were my mythical America, the greatest country on earth.

Yet the fair also encouraged other, less parochial inspirations. I snuck into the stadium without paying—not to watch the car racing, which I disliked, but to see the intermission performances. During one intermission a woman from Rheinlander, just north of Antigo, entered on a tall bay horse and halted. The horse's lower legs were bandaged in thick white cotton wrap, intended to protect its tendons and to accentuate its rhythmic, powerful movement. The rider herself, in formal dressage attire with

riding boots and top hat, was imposingly elegant. She rode in a special dressage saddle, which had no horn to hold onto, unlike the ubiquitous Western saddles I and my 4-H friends used. An announcer introduced her and her horse, and said she was to perform to the Overture of Bizet's *Carmen*. I had never heard of *Carmen* but immediately realized I was in for something special. She put her horse through its normal paces, but the horse didn't just move, it danced. The tempo of the gaits perfectly matched the music, and the rhythm of each step was more regular than I'd ever thought possible. Sound and movement united in one image. I was stunned. Where did this woman come from? I asked. Rheinlander? The town I knew only for its proximity to the Pelican Rapids that in the summer attracted tourists and the Great White American Pelican?

The rider's hands were so steady that she appeared to be controlling the horse through her seat alone. I was hooked but also flummoxed about what the announcer meant when he said the horse performed with "maximum impulsion" and "willingly obeyed" the rider. Long after that afternoon, the movements and music played in my head. I felt I had to unravel this mystery, to learn the concepts and principles behind it. Obvious to me was that this kind of performance lacked any sign of coercion, the opposite of the cowboy style I'd learned, where the goal is to break the horse's resistance. Dressage transformed the sport of Western Pleasure riding into an art of communication. The English saddle required the rider to be balanced, whereas the Western saddle kept the rider in place, accompanied by a bridle with a curb bit to inflict pain in the horse's mouth should the rider wish. Watching the dressage ride, I sensed a harmony and empathy between rider and horse that I wished to emulate.

Sky Queen and the Pig Sedative

Horse riding gave me a rare sense of connection both with my own body and with my parents' dreams for my future. This was very different from school sports, at which I was the worst. I played only because I feared the repercussions of refusing. Riding did not count. I was required to participate in football, battle ball, wrestling, and boxing. A strange list, to say the least, and most of them with a sadistic touch. The most humiliating were battle ball, wrestling, and boxing. In battle ball, two sides facing each other, take all the deflated basketballs, volleyballs, and footballs, and throw them at each other while darting and dodging out of the way.

If you're hit, you're out. Last man standing wins. I always tried to get hit early in the game, even though deflated footballs really hurt.

To wrestle and box, we each had to pick a partner. Once a chubby boy who detested sports chose me as his wrestling partner, and I was so grateful to him. He probably picked me because I was still smaller then, and skinny as a rail. Mr. Peterson, the coach, placed us in the center of the wrestling mat. I kept asking myself: What do I do? What do I do? As soon as I put my hand on the chubby boy's shoulder he fell to his knees, as if I had struck a blow. He reached out to pull me down to him; I went along and fell, feigning a struggle, rolling around with him. Mr. Peterson watched dumbstruck. My peers cheered everyone else on as they wrestled, but for us they just stood there, slack-armed. A hint of a smile overtook a few faces, but a scowl appeared on Mr. Peterson's face. The chubby boy and I looked earnestly at each other and tried to look like we were wrestling. It was more a matter of taking turns rolling onto each other. When my opponent broke a sweat and was clearly out of breath, the match was called—without a winner.

No one laughed. Perhaps they couldn't, for to laugh would have acknowledged the absurdity of our play. We may have felt shamed though we did turn what could have been humiliating spectacle into farce. Mr. Peterson and his assistant, whose name and face I don't remember, took their sport seriously, and surely didn't appreciate this. Their response was simply to call for the next two wrestlers, and Mr. Peterson retained his scowl. I was relieved that he avoided meting out a punishment, like pairing us with real wrestlers the next time or making us run an extra lap around the gym.

Since this was still elementary school we didn't play real football. Only in high school did boys play tackle football and wear tight-fitting breeches and padded shoulder uniforms. We played the less physically demanding game of flag football, with no cheerleaders to rouse the spectators and encourage the players to hit and tackle the opposition.

At fourteen I was neither strong nor agile enough to play even a modified version of the real game. I was averse to being hit or pushed or thrown to the ground, but the team needed every available male. Unable to read the plays, anticipate ball movement, or catch the slippery oval-shaped football, I nonetheless had a moment of success. Playing linebacker on the defense, I was supposed to protect my zone. The opposing quarterback repeatedly threw the ball to a receiver near me who promptly caught it. The first two times, I waited until after his catch

before pulling his flag off. Then a light went off! "Oh, you idiot, you are supposed to intercept the ball if it is thrown in your zone." On the third attempt, I perfectly anticipated his pass. Ball tucked under my arm, I ran toward the goal line. Someone caught me from behind then stiff-armed me, so I fell to the ground. Winded but proud, I did not fumble.

Another time didn't go so well. Our quarterback took pity on me and called a play in which I could star. He positioned me as halfback standing behind him. He called "Twenty-one. Twenty-four. Hut! Hut!" and took the ball from the center. I was distracted by those numbers. I couldn't remember what they meant. He turned and handed the ball to me, but I froze. He kept looking at me, his eyes begging, waiting, please take the football, please take the ball! Then the opposition's defense team deflagged him. After that, I quit trying and pled injuries during sports hour. Instead, I was assigned to hand out the towels in the shower—work not without its visual pleasures.

When I was fifteen, I stumbled on an advertisement in the *Antigo Daily Journal* for a whole day of horse competitions on a Saturday in Merrill, a town so modest that Antigo seemed lively by comparison. Merrill was near Little Chicago and Hamburg, small villages named after large and important cities I had never seen. I was always on the lookout for horse shows within a sixty-mile radius of Antigo. Dad was up for any horse-related event, from racing to auctions. This time, Mom decided to come along. She didn't have other plans, and her presence, she thought, might keep Dad from stopping at a tavern on our way back, ensuring we could make it home in time to milk the cows.

We started early, rising at five, tending to the cows, having a hearty breakfast, ready to leave at half past seven. By half past eight we reached Merrill's main intersection and turned left to find the showgrounds: a flat field with a small fenced-off arena for the events. We barely had enough time to register, unload the horses, and warm them up before the first event. I signed up for four classes, each costing two dollars: two in the morning and two in the afternoon.

The first event was a halter class. There were few spectators, but I attributed this to the early morning timing. The halter class also wasn't the most exciting to watch. No grandstand or benches, people brought their own chairs. We had forgotten ours, so Mom grumbled a bit but decided to sit in the truck, facing the arena from a distance. She could still hear the announcements and would join us when it was time for my classes. The announcer's voice crackled through the loudspeaker. I could spot

both my parents, leaning against the arena fence as I led Sky Queen into the ring with a special braided rope attached to her halter. We all formed a circle, each horse following the other. Then the judge motioned for us to line up at the center before calling each horse and rider separately. He told us one by one to trot in a straight line away from him, then back. He wanted to evaluate conformation.

Good conformation means the horse is well-built and balanced, with a long neck, a strong, even back, legs neither bowed nor crooked, eyes large and inviting, head not too long or narrow. At the walk the horse should be lively, showing a long, rounded topline as the neck stretches forward and downward. In the trot, the horse should move forward briskly, with spring in the step and looseness in the shoulders.

Sky Queen was a flashy sorrel mare with great conformation and good gaits. But she'd been super jumpy the last few times I'd shown her. I couldn't keep her calm when there were people watching, so I tried a small amount of pig sedative. Yes, I'm ashamed to admit, I did. I ground it up real fine and mixed it into her morning grain, adding molasses to mask the smell. Horses can be picky eaters, but she gobbled it up without a fuss. Where I even got the idea, I've totally blocked out. She was perfectly behaved but seemed awfully tired. Walking, she had zero pep and getting her to trot was a real struggle. When she stood still, she kept yawning, opening her mouth wide and lolling her big tongue around, closing her eyes. I was hoping she wouldn't lie down right in front of the judge. Maybe the judges would think she was just chilling out after the early morning trip. They clearly hadn't entertained the idea that she'd been doped by an innocent-looking boy like me. We ended up second, probably saved by her awesome conformation.

In the next class, Western Pleasure, the sedative was wearing off. I didn't know much about how sedatives worked or how long they lasted. But it seemed okay, as Western Pleasure is all about a relaxed and uneventful ride, and Sky Queen's usually energetic steps were slowed by the sedative's effects. Surprisingly, her calm worked out in our favor, and we got the blue ribbon.

Right after lunch came the Keyhole Race. Thankfully, the sedative had worn off completely by then. The pattern of a keyhole had been drawn with white powdered chalk in the dirt at the far end of the arena. With the announcer's "Go!" I raced from the gate. Sky Queen sprinted implosively to the keyhole, stopped abruptly, swiveled to the right a hundred and eighty degrees and galloped home without touching the chalk. We managed second place again in this one.

Our final class was English Pleasure. Since seeing that dressage performance at the County Fair I'd convinced my parents to buy me an English saddle, bridle, boots, and helmet. They felt they couldn't afford leather boots and jodhpurs, so they purchased rubber boots, and my mother bought a pair of cotton pants and changed the seam so they would fit into the boots. Sky Queen had more energy now but was still very relaxed. I encouraged her to move more freely and briskly, and she responded with seemingly effortless movement. She stood out among the other horses, who were themselves now lethargic under the afternoon sun, and won our second blue ribbon.

By then it was about half past four and we were ready to leave when the organizers announced an award for Best Rider of the Show. I heard my name called over the loudspeaker, one of three finalists. I wasn't prepared for this. Sky Queen was tied to the side of the trailer and chomping on some hay, all cleaned up and blanketed, while I was inside the trailer changing back into my regular clothes. The organizers gave me the option of riding in Western or English gear, while the others had only competed in Western. Since I had just finished in English, I thought I would stick with that and quickly took off my cowboy hat and put back on my trousers-made-to-look-like jodhpurs, stuffing the legs into my knee-high rubber boots

All three of us entered the arena at a trot and went in circles listlessly without directions as to what to do. It seemed the judge himself had not yet decided. Most of the crowd had left and the few remaining riders were loading their horses into trailers. The two other competitors rode at the barely moving jog they had perfected, while I, wearing English gear, posted to the trot, up and down in the rhythm of the two-beat gait. It took me no time to pass all the others twice in the circle.

The judge called us into the center and asked us to do a turn around the forehand. We riders looked at each other quizzically. My minimal knowledge of dressage paid off, while the others struggled. I knew the difference between turn on the forehand and turn on the haunches. Sky Queen was immediately responsive. A slight pressure with one of my legs behind the saddle girth, reins held tight, and Sky Queen nailed the move. The judge awarded me the trophy.

On the drive home we seemed to have the highway to ourselves, cruising along Wisconsin 64 East. My parents were quiet but in a particularly good mood. I sensed a moment of contentment between them. Mom was especially pleased Dad hadn't stopped at a tavern on our way

back. They were beaming with pride for me, and I felt proud of myself also. But I vowed never to use a tranquilizer again. I had this nagging feeling that my win wasn't fair, that I hadn't earned it. Even if nobody else knew, it didn't sit well with me. And worse, I worried I might have endangered my horse.

Once we got home, the cows were waiting behind the barn, thirsty, hungry, udders full of milk. Mom hurried to the barn to put grain in their mangers before calling them in, while Dad and I took care of Sky Queen, making her comfortable in her stall. Then we all busied ourselves with the milking routine. I noticed that my happiness made them happy too. It was rare to see them this way. I wasn't sure if it was real.

Electing Homecoming Queens

I was still in elementary school when Mary became Homecoming Queen, the first of three sisters elected so in a vote by high school classmates. Returning from school that day I darted directly to my bedroom to swap my school clothes for my dirty jeans, shirt, and broken-down shoes. An unsettling quietness hung in the air. Mom was missing. It was too early for her to be in the barn. I exchanged puzzled glances with Peg, who had been on the bus with me. I sought answers in the barn and found Dad. "Where is Mom?" I asked, sensing something amiss. Mom never ever missed milking the cows in the early morning and late afternoon. Judy hadn't returned yet, as the bus from Antigo High arrived later than the one from Crestwood, so I couldn't ask her. Dad paused before a glint of anticipation crossed his face. "Your sister was elected Queen," he divulged. "Your mother went to school to watch the ceremony." Wow, I thought, Mary's a Queen! Soon enough, our Ford Fairlane rolled into the driveway, carrying Judy, Mom, and Queen Mary. Mary's exuberant smile spoke volumes. Her win was a thrill she could not have dreamed.

On the stage of the high school gymnasium that afternoon, Mary had been crowned. The seven other candidates automatically became members of her Court. Later that day she was honored in a grand parade in downtown Antigo. Girls from the town—Antigo had about nine thousand residents at the time—had always been the chosen ones. Farmgirls were traditionally expected to become farmwives, nothing more. To prepare girls for life after high school they were offered instruction in home economics with classes in cooking, care for babies, and household

management. What set the town girls apart were classes that encouraged their aspirations beyond the farm. They had to complete the normal liberal arts curriculum of mathematics, natural sciences, and literature, to become teachers, secretaries, nurses, and physical therapists.

My sisters didn't fit this mold. Their ambitions grew out of farm life. By the eighth grade, if not before, it was clear they had to simplify their aspirations and above all find a man. Mary had already found a boyfriend to share a future with—after he completed his military service. A tall, quiet man with thinning hair and a broad chest, his name was Jim, and he seemed much in love with Mary. His parents lived in a neighboring village and were God-fearing folks, so righteous in their sense of themselves that Jim preferred being with us. He seemed to rebel by seeking out the counsel of my father.

After the barn chores our evening meal buzzed with unusual pride and bewilderment. Our very own Mary, the Homecoming Queen? A farmgirl in a wheelchair? A pork roast had been simmering all day. Judy tended to the potatoes while Peg prepped the string beans. The sheer surprise of Mary's election dominated the conversation.

Before we ate Mary called Jim, who was stationed in Colorado. All I overheard was that he said he was very proud of her. As the minutes passed, her initial shock eased into a palpable gratification. Something had gone right in the family. All frustration disappeared. Everyone seemed simply happy. Especially excited were Judy and Peg, who could now see themselves with a crown, though they didn't expect one. Amidst the excitement, though, an ineffable anger brewed in me. It wasn't directed at my sisters, but at their expectations, or lack thereof, for me.

My sisters hadn't excelled academically, and Peg's habit of skipping classes due to phantom headaches didn't improve teachers' expectations of "the Borneman children." They expected the same disinterest and lack of aptitude from me, assuming I'd follow in my sisters' footsteps. What really bothered me now, aged twelve and beset by ever more specific and powerful sexual desires for other boys and men, was that I was supposed to count my blessings that I had sisters boys wanted to sleep with. I felt left out in this economy of desire, and with each subsequent election a bit more resentful that my sisters could all be so successful with nothing more than a pretty face and friendly smile. Perhaps they had more to offer boys than I could see. Maybe they were all special. But as their disgruntled little brother, I saw them only as older sisters who were desired by handsome men.

Granted, everyone genuinely liked them. People didn't dislike me either, but I faded in the background, too quiet to even dislike. There was a strange freedom that came with such low expectations. Since I could not excel in sports, and could not compete with my sisters for boys, I never entertained becoming a center of attention as a man. The demands of farm life should have made me tough. They did the opposite as I grew to detest that work. The accumulating demands of manhood grew rapidly year by year while my body developed slowly. It wasn't until my twenties that I had a growth spurt, but by then I had left the farm and was at university.

By the time Mary entered high school at fifteen she wasn't just pretty but a beauty. She had a smooth profile with strong features: symmetrical face, full lips, perfectly spaced white teeth, a generous and welcoming smile, pleasing to the eye and to the heart. So beautiful that a few years later, looking at her picture in the high school yearbook, I found it remarkable how much she resembled Elizabeth Taylor, the beauty icon of the era for men in my family. I had the impression all men dreamed of Elizabeth Taylor at that time. My father idealized her to such a degree that in moments of mischievous reverie he would share with us the gentle perversity of his imagination: "Elizabeth Taylor! She could soak her nylons in my coffee!" Eww!, I reacted.

Mary's polio had challenged her, and she struggled to refocus on academic learning. She stayed home for a year because Sugarbush Elementary was not equipped for children with special needs. The missed year altered how she saw herself. Now reliant on crutches and a wheelchair, she needed assistance to navigate stairs and carry her books. The new Mary was unlike her previously feisty, self-reliant self. Among my sisters she was known as the sassy one. She had challenged Mom frequently, even pushing her to the point where Mom once slapped her. Now she fell behind, especially in math where she felt she could never catch up. In her beloved subjects, like reading, she still believed in her capability.

At school the teachers treated Mary as if she were slower than her peers. She always spurned any pity. She faced insensitivity and cruelty with a quiet smile, enduring this new image of herself so long as she felt others meant no harm. The adjustments demanded by her new reality fueled her frustration, but she mastered the art of appearing naive and concealing her anger. That new persona made her especially kind and generous, and likely contributed to her election as Homecoming Queen seven years later.

Decades later, when Mary was already in her second marriage and a mother of two daughters, the *Antigo Daily Journal* published two brief stories listing the most significant events of the years 1955 to 1964. She shared with me these clippings. There was the county's first polio immunization clinic with the use of Sabin oral vaccine, Mary Kay Borneman was elected Homecoming Queen (and it listed the names of her attendants), a car driven by Thomas Novolny struck a utility pole, the New York Yankees were victorious over the San Francisco Giants in the World Series, and the Easy Way Super Valu (sic) advertised pork roast for thirty-five cents a pound. These local events, along with unprecedented economic growth, overrode the fears about involvement in Vietnam, or nuclear annihilation, and deflected attention from the increasingly visible civil rights movement. In many ways Antigo epitomized the American heartland, a nostalgic community untouched by broader upheavals. Even as economic and cultural changes loomed, the town preserved its self-image as a harmonious community of townspeople and farmers.

Judy became Homecoming Queen the year after Mary's election, and Peg two years after Judy. Both surprised our family. But sandwiched between Peg's election and my own graduation was a Homecoming in a different key. The school hummed with an unusual energy that day in 1968. The principal had announced that the results would be delayed. Whispers flitted back and forth.

There were rumors that members of the football team were clandestinely campaigning for June Hageman, a girl from the Menominee reservation. June found herself in the spotlight, candidate for a position typically reserved for girls from the town. I was suspicious of the very idea of her nomination. A Native American girl as Queen? I knew the football players plotting for her, and I assumed they were not doing so in her best interests. While groundbreaking, the nomination sparked widespread skepticism among students who questioned the motives behind her selection.

Once June was in the running, her nomination triggered a shift in the tone of conversation, veering toward vulgar comments that ridiculed her. She was large-boned, close to six feet, and carried considerable weight. Boys made disparaging remarks about minority-looking girls all the time, but June and her younger sister were the only two Native Americans in our high school from the reservation. Did they want to use the occasion of this election to humiliate her?

The tension peaked with the deferral of the results. I heard that June had won, and that the principal was seeking a "solution." The next day he declared that June had placed third, and the corridors echoed with mixed reactions—alarm, confusion, disbelief. In front of my locker one girl whispered to a friend, eyes wide with surprise and relief, "Did you hear? June came in third!"

"Really? I thought she had it in the bag," the friend replied sarcastically, eyebrows raised.

"At least she's part of the Court," I added.

June and her sister were participants in a special program for children of the tribe to attend Antigo High, which offered more classes and better teachers than the small reservation school. Since graduation rates at reservation schools were abysmal, Wisconsin had created this program to bus children to better funded institutions. This followed the spirit of a 1964 program under Lyndon Johnson to send inner-city black children to better schools in white suburbs. In school, June and her sister kept to themselves. Neither teachers nor students made any effort to incorporate them into routines or circles.

The enigmatic events surrounding June's election cast new light for me on the fantasy of the Homecoming Queen and its importance to Antigo. I sensed its meaning was part of a dreamscape tied to our own local reality of race, in which an emerging white unity asserted itself over older differences between Northern and Central European settlers. Without ever putting this dream into words, June came to symbolize a disparaged colored minority.

But why the importance of the Queen? Insight came from my mother. Her favorite show was *Queen for a Day*, aired weekly, on NBC then ABC, from 1956 to 1964. I watched it with her during the final four years of its run, at a time when I watched as much television as possible. Host Jack Bailey always began by asking the mostly female audience, "Would YOU like to be queen for a day?" To that question my mother would have answered, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"—if she had been asked. Each contestant narrated the challenges in her life, the more extreme and bitter the better. They ranged from recovery from life-threatening illness, to painful separation, to financial ruin. After the audience voted the queen was crowned and, draped in a sable-trimmed red velvet robe, showered with gifts—a washing machine or refrigerator, new silverware, a trip with her husband, and, most movingly, a reunion on stage with a lost friend, a wayward child, or some person in her past who now magically appeared

from behind the curtains. The queens would sob with abandon, provoking the audience to the same. I know now that the show was rigged, and at some level I knew it back then. But it didn't matter that the winners were selected ahead and paid. The amateur performances were strong. And crying is contagious. What mattered was the portrayal of reward and reconciliation after loss and grief. That spoke to my mother's mood, if not her experience.

Mom sat entranced, fully identified with each contestant, winners and losers quietly shedding tears of suffering or joy. She certainly had an abundance of hardships to share: irreparable injuries and irrecoverable losses. But share with whom? Perhaps this dream was as close as she could get to feeling that her hardships were not in vain; that if others would listen to her pain, they would reward her for her suffering. And it mattered not that she had no chance to make it onto the show. She was deserving, that's the point. She *could* be crowned Queen, if only for a day, much as Mary had been, Judy had been, Peg had been, and June had almost been. My sisters had each, one by one, been crowned in a public event, and despite being simple farmgirls they were recognized for their wholesomeness, kindness, beauty, niceness. Recognized for qualities that the student body or high school principal wanted their Queens to embody.

At the Homecoming ceremony, June played the part assigned her with supreme dignity. The Queen and the members of her Court marched from one end of the gymnasium to the stage on the other, arm-in-arm with their football-player boyfriends, or, lacking such a boyfriend, with another member of the team. June marched with a muscular blond linebacker on her arm. She was a Woman of the Court full of grace. I remember that most other members of the Court wore a beehive held in place with so much hairspray it would have taken a storm or tornado to pull a few hairs astray. June wore her sleek black hair as she always did, cascading naturally to her shoulders.

Despite being unfairly deprived of the crown, she simply ignored the prime motive for her candidacy: the intent to humiliate. Instead focused on the recognition of her presence, a Native girl whose people less than fifty years before had been forced to cede their land to settlers. Against all odds she had managed to be among us, the offspring of colonists, at Antigo High. Back then we would never have thought of ourselves that way. Even now I doubt if the non-indigenous still in Antigo would call themselves such.

On the bus ride home, the morning chatter gave way to a more somber mood. I found my usual spot, a window seat near the middle, and tried

to blend into the background as usual. June was not somber but talkative, proudly smiling, her demeanor surprisingly unaffected. Someone blurted out, "You should've won." June's smile softened. "It's okay, really. I am honored to be in the Court." Her reaction astounded me. All I could think of were the vicious motives allowed free play to debase this girl who played the role assigned to her without so much as a peep. What part the principal played in this I will never know. What I do know is that June rejected the notion that she was a sacrifice, instead construing the Homecoming with her own pride in who she was, satisfaction with whatever recognition she got. Mom received no such recognition in her lifetime, and perhaps for this reason was unable to turn her own tears into joy. She missed the last two of her daughters' coronations because farm work called. She frequently missed Sunday church for the same reason. But she never missed the celebration of rewards for suffering on *Queen for a Day*.

My Neighbors, the Menominee

When I had snuck into the Langlade County Fair stadium to watch the intermission show in 1962, the final act that day was a Native American performance. A powwow or a simulation of one—I couldn't tell which. The powwow as such was familiar to me from TV portrayals of frontier wars. This one presented me with a new image of Native Americans. There were no tomahawks, bows and arrows, or war cries. From my seat I watched as members of the tribe formed a large circle. Slowly, deliberately, they began to move and sing rhythmic chants to a drumbeat. As the men began to dance, the women joined in. Most of the men and some of the women wore ceremonial costumes. Again, I recognized them from television: the feather headdresses, breechcloths, beads, animal furs, fringes on coats and shoes. I saw some moccasins, the same kind one of my brothers-in-law wore, though I only knew they had something to do with Native design. Some were obviously hand-made, with a colorful band on top and fringes on the lower part. Yet many dancers wore the same casual clothes as the adults I knew: jeans, long-sleeve shirts, tank tops, cowboy boots. Some women even wore high heels and loose blouses.

The ceremony stopped and the announcer introduced the performers as Menominee. I listened closely hoping he would explain what they were doing when they shook rattles and played drums in a regular two-beat

rhythm. Or what it meant when they lowered one shoulder then the other in a two-step move. He didn't, but he did address why they raised their feathers above their heads and sliced the air: it was a gesture of openness to the universe around them. And when they leaned forward during the dance, he said, they were acknowledging their ancestors.

I felt an odd sense of pride, though I was not certain why. When I watched the ethnic prides of Germans and Poles, on television or in fairs, I was embarrassed: where was Elvis or Rock and Roll, the music my sisters danced to? Menominee song and dance provoked an entirely different feeling. They performed as a group, though some were obviously better at singing or dancing than others, while in German ethnic dance a man and woman danced as a couple to a three-beat tune. I also felt something painful on display, and it certainly wasn't my pain. I couldn't understand why they were performing this for us. It seemed to be a celebration of a fading tradition.

The history of Native American groups wasn't taught in my school. Growing up I knew that many Menominee lived on reservations that were what we called "dirt poor." More recently there had been talk about the dissolution of reservation status. Whites were buying up land on Menominee lakes and living on reservation land. It surprised me that no one made a big deal of this. I had been led to believe that land ownership on the reservation was collective and restricted to members. I also knew that many Menominee were no longer living on the reservation but intermarrying and blending in as Americans no different than my siblings.

I watched this powwow with keen attention, while most spectators around me were distracted as they ate and drank. I might have been distracted had I liked food, but I grew up not liking food, and that changed only many years later. My attention was fixed on how this group of Indians, that rumor had it were disappearing, were making a statement about survival. Even as a young child I could appreciate the dignity expressed, but now I felt uncomfortable being part of a nearly all-white audience. I kept asking myself, were they dancing for us? My interests in this community that wasn't mine, the Menominee world, and my fascination with the performance, set me apart from my community. Something was ill-matched, but the adults around me seemed neither to notice nor to care.

In my elementary school years, it never occurred to me to inquire into my relations and those of my family to the Menominee. As a teenager I grew curious, prompted by a conversation I overheard at age sixteen regarding protests to restore reservation status. My parents and I were

visiting neighbors in their mobile home on a small piece of land they were renting. A young couple in their early twenties, with two children, they had moved to Antigo a few years before. Sharing an interest in horse shows, they quickly became good friends. Jerry looked up to my father and asked his advice. He had worked for a lumber company on the reservation and told us of the protests there. My father asked what they were about. Jerry said, "They want their reservation status back. They don't earn enough from the lumber mill to support the schools and hospital. The doctors all left, and they don't have enough teachers. The men don't work much, and what they earn they spend on booze. They sold some prime land on the lakes to outsiders when they opened their land for sale. They tolerate us because they bring business and money, but some don't like us there."

"What do the Indians want?" I asked.

"It's about welfare payments they got when they were under federal control. That status ended in 1954, and the Indians themselves pushed for it back then. But now they want it back."

"Those subventions!" exclaimed my father, disapprovingly. "Once they have 'em, they'll never give 'em up."

Apparently, the state used the termination as an excuse to withdraw support, decimating the tribe financially and leading to the closure of all medical facilities. I recalled reading something in the *Antigo Daily Journal* three years before, about the same time I'd watched the powwow at Langlade County Fair, to the effect that Menominee were protesting to regain reservation status, with the aim of restoring tribal rights to their land and over who lived on it.

Teddy, a schoolmate whose mother was Menominee, lived down the road about a mile from us. He was a short, agile boy and a capable guard on the basketball team. On the bus to school one day, I asked him, "Do you have contact with anybody on the reservation?"

"No," he said flatly.

"Did you ever think about the Europeans coming to America and taking away Indian land?"

He replied tartly, "My father has Irish relatives. They've never taken anything away from my mother or me."

Maybe the American way of life in northern Wisconsin was untouched by the dynamic of extermination elsewhere. I'd read about the brutal treatment of Native Americans in the South and West—the Trail of Tears, the Sioux Uprising, Custer's Last Stand—and I sensed an inherent

connection to the advance of European settlement. Yet I found no confirmation in my high school history readings. I began to think that an amnesia was ingrained into the story of America's inception. The suspicion struck me forcefully that this history was wrapped in a shroud, and that I had inherited unearned privileges.

Peering through that shroud, I discovered that not one but several narratives had been erased. One was of settlers' attempts to displace and eliminate Native Americans. Another was the story of mixing with them. While I had known early about the genocidal conflicts, my childhood exposure was largely through TV. Shows like *Wagon Train* depicted white settlers as victims of Indian attacks—tribes and outlaws being dangers to brave pioneers. I recall the iconic image of "circling the wagons": white people with rifles in tight self-defense, while Indians attacked with arrows from horseback. That depiction had created in me an undercurrent of empathy for settlers.

My perception shifted with a new wave of films during my teenage years in which Native Americans were victims of colonization. The first I saw was John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn*, which portrayed the resolve of three hundred starving Cheyenne on their Oklahoma reservation to return to their ancestral lands in Wyoming. The US government viewed this as a rebellion and sent the army to stop them. I watched it in 1968 in the old Palace Theater in downtown Antigo, four years after its release. Exiting, I questioned my received history.

In the Antigo Public Library, I found a few books on northern Wisconsin and the Menominee, and that history did not align neatly with either narrative. The Menominee had been displaced, and they had lost land but had not been subjected to a policy of extermination. Unlike Native Americans elsewhere, they had a reservation policy that settlers had respected, providing them with some security. Another important difference was racial mixing, which I discovered was more widespread than acknowledged.

One example of such mixing was the life of Charles Michel Mouet de Langlade, after whom Langlade County was named in 1879. Born in 1729 to an Ottawa mother and French Canadian father, his native tongue was Ottawan, but he was raised in a French fort and educated by Jesuits. He represented an era when French and Irish were the main European presence in the upper Midwest and relied on their relations with indigenous communities. Their common adversaries were the English, against whom Langlade gained renown at twenty-three when he led two hundred and forty Native Americans to a victory. A Chippewa

man reported that a member of his band tore the heart from an English captive and ate it in retaliation for an earlier atrocity. Following that battle, Langlade and his men purportedly boiled alive then consumed Miami Chief La Demoiselle, who had fought alongside the English, in the presence of surviving captives and the chief's own wife and son. He continued as a fur trader and as war chief defending French territory from English incursions. During the Revolutionary War, however, he led the Great Lake Indians for the British against the Americans. He died in 1801, and a century later was acclaimed Father of Wisconsin: an unconventional tribute given his complex, shifting loyalties. Nor was this the only such story. Also well documented was that of Willard LeRoy Ackley, the area's first white settler in 1853. Seeking adventure, English-born Ackley operated a trading post west of Antigo. He defied the wishes of Vermont relatives by marrying Me-Da-Gee-Wa-No-Quay (Maiden of the Forest), the daughter of an Ojibwa chief sixteen years his senior. Ackley affectionately called her Mary and together they had two children, one of whom remained with the tribe until his passing.

During my childhood in the 1950s, most Langlade County residents were descendants of settlers who had arrived in the previous century. By the 1960s most of the new arrivals were Mexican seasonal laborers, typically aiming to work the harvest then return home. Their children became my classmates. Among them was Juan, a quiet, unassuming boy who appeared in my fourth and fifth years at school. He struck me as observant and intelligent, though he seldom spoke. I was aware at the time that he faced language barriers, and the school made no effort to help him overcome them.

Juan remains memorable to me due to his exceptional talent in baseball. Adept at throwing, catching, and hitting the ball far into the outfield, he was highly sought after for games. Despite wearing the same shabby pants and shirt to school every day, much like me, his athletic abilities overshadowed any material differences. Like many Mexican children who accompanied their parents for seasonal work, Juan discontinued his education after just two years. I keenly felt his absence—the one child who obviously came from elsewhere—but I don't recall anyone else taking notice.

It puzzled me that older migrants with European roots were not seen as such. I found myself wondering at what juncture we were absorbed into America. This integration didn't mean an erasure of differences, but rather that no questions were asked about our origins. My brother Bob's

wife bore the maiden name Smrz, about which she was embarrassed because peers at school teased her endlessly about having a name with no vowels. Yet there was no discussion about her Czech origins. Nonetheless, remnants of ethnic roots persisted across generations of aunts and uncles, all older than my parents. During conversations at our dinner table, drinking coffee and eating Mom's pastries, I recall that those on my father's side spoke with faint German accents, saying *dies* and *das* instead of this and that, or slipping a German proverb into an English story, which I couldn't understand at the time. Variations in English pronunciation accompanied the accents. As a child these pronunciations left me befuddled, unsure of which were "correct."

Without recognizing it, my family and community also had a lot of contact with the Menominee. It was taken for granted that some would intermarry, and I attended school with several of their offspring. Teddy was one of them. These mixed children were never singled out. June, who served as demoted Homecoming Queen attendant, stood out because she lived on the reservation, and not one but both of her parents were Menominee.

My father was fond of recounting how his father bartered beef for wild ponies on the reservation, and how he was tasked with riding these back to his family's farm. He and my mother told stories of their great-grandfathers logging timber on Indian lands in periods when the reservation was open to such development. I found these stories amusing but did not at the time understand how they were significant.

Mary shared a story about a group of Menominee unexpectedly appearing at our door during supper. It was an unprecedented event, as none had come to our house before. Our mother, easily startled, said to her daughters, "Go hide, quick, you don't know what they want." Our father then went out to talk to them and was offered a large catch of fresh fish. He went to the freezer and traded packages of beef for the fish.

Within my own family, this blending of cultures unfolded on a more personal level. Five years into their marriage, Mary's husband, Jim, left her for his sister-in-law, a Menominee woman admired for her beauty. His departure was scandalous enough—the only divorce in our family—yet the full extent of the betrayal was revealed when Jim claimed to have fathered three children with the other woman while she was still married to his older brother. It took years of therapy and introspection for Mary to cope with the heartbreak of her divorce, though she never harbored ill will toward the woman who had captured her husband's affections. Jim

spent five years living with his Menominee wife and their children in Colorado. Then, grappling with his wife's alcoholism, he reached out to Mary to ask her to take him back. Stunned, already remarried, she said no. Burdened by despair, Jim loaded his rifle, the one he'd brought back from army service, and shot himself.

PART TWO

TRANSITIONS IN MADISON AND SEATTLE

Out of Wisconsin

I first left the state of Wisconsin in 1969, on a trip to the nation's capital. Because I excelled at the 4-H events with horses, our local club leader, Gladys Kaiser, a schoolteacher whose daughter had ridden horses, nominated me for an all-expenses-paid journey to Washington, DC, sponsored by Merck Chemical Company and scheduled for the third week of August. Mom and Dad were excited for me. It was after hay season, so my labor was no longer urgently needed, and school had not yet started. Participants were selected based on some combination of success in 4-H, academic merit, and what was called citizenship—meaning, more precisely, civic awareness. A large bus holding about thirty 4-H Club members departed from Madison in the afternoon and arrived in Washington, DC sixteen hours later, in time for breakfast.

That trip was a turning point in my life. I was turning away from the farm and would soon start applying for college. None of this was the result of a single decision. I never discussed any actual plans with the school guidance counselor, nor with my parents. But an outbound path had been in the making for some time already. My intellectual interests and my grades played a role. So did the initially unconscious growth of a disposition to leave behind me the places of my farmboy childhood.

On a trip to the town library one afternoon a few years earlier, when I was thirteen, I had carried a Limburger cheese box with me. It was filled with fifteen dollars in neatly stacked quarters, which I emptied onto the teller's counter at Antigo's Fidelity Savings Bank. It had taken me three years to fill the box, my first phase of capital accumulation: saving modest amounts for some yet unforeseen purpose on an equally unforeseen day. I did not have any identification, but the unassuming teller only requested that I fill out a form with my name and address. Voilà, I had a savings account.

The small, rectangular wooden box was itself a charming treasure. On its cover was inscribed MARK BADGER BRODHEAD CHEESE CO. Produced solely in one place in the United States, the Chalet Cheese Cooperative in Monroe, Wisconsin, it was the perfect size for a piggy bank. At home we never indulged in strong-tasting cheese. All I had been exposed to was Velveeta or similar processed varieties, engineered with chemicals to be scentless and mild. But my father loved strong flavors and varied textures, so once a month he treated himself to a small box of Limburger. Because the cheese had an odor resembling gym socks, we stored it in the refrigerator, wrapped in tinfoil and nestled within its original packaging.

Walking the couple of blocks from where we parked the car, all the buildings in Antigo back then—hardware stores, clothing and shoe stores, a stationary store, a barber shop, several restaurants where I never once ate—were modest in size, two stories. Except, that is, for the Fidelity Savings Bank. Once through its vault-like entrance I stood in a gigantic high-ceilinged room and entered a line leading to the tellers, each sitting behind her own plexiglass window. The bank sat at the very center of town, the major intersection on the corner of Antigo's main street, Superior, with Fifth Avenue. It was the institution where my father took out his farm loan during the Great Depression, and where residents of Antigo had their accounts.

Train tracks from a long-abandoned line crossed Superior Street, dividing the town that stretched about three-quarters of a mile from the start of the countryside on "the other side of the tracks," where it gave way to potato fields, dairy farms, and many billboards interspersed between the few houses along the highway. The land was flat and unremarkable to view, with few valleys and hills. The town had only one main street, and five traffic lights.

Seemingly transplanted from another city and another era, the Fidelity Savings Bank resembled small-town banks I later saw on movie

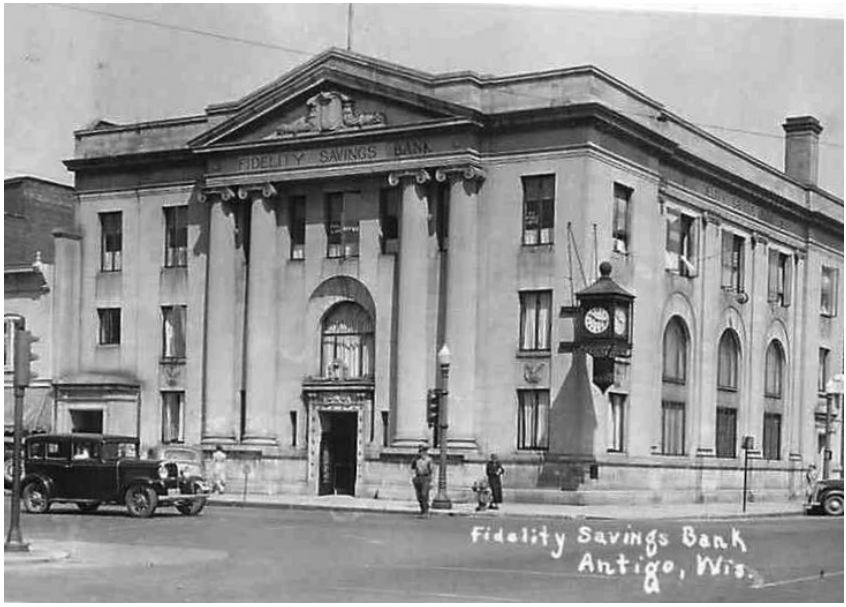

Figure 6. Antigo's Fidelity Savings Bank

sets of the Wild West. As a child I imagined it had a history of famous robberies and was waiting for another generation of Bonnies and Clydes to appear. Incorporated in 1909, the bank had moved into this grand building in 1936, the year my father took out his mortgage on the farm. Originally occupied by the Langlade National Bank, the building was closed in 1933 at the beginning of the Great Depression, and then opportunistically taken over three years later by the Fidelity Savings Bank. After I left Antigo, JP Morgan bought it up and rebranded it as Chase Bank.

That world back then, of the bank, the farm, the churches, the taverns, the country, and the town, presented itself to me as unchanging and confident. Midwestern common sense was reassuringly predictable—the favorite topic in all conversations being the weather, divided into four seasons, three of the same length, the brutal winter being the longer exception. "Cold enough to freeze a witch's tits," men would say. I grew up expecting the miracle of the timeless regularity of seasons, comforted that things would be the same, or only ever slightly so different, tomorrow.

This picture of climate stability and predictability was incongruent with the instability of my experience in the family. Every two years

another sibling left. What I had not been made aware of was the steady change in the communities of Antigo, Langlade County, and Wisconsin, both before and since the mid-nineteenth century arrival of settlers from my family. While growing up in the Cold War I was given the impression that radical change occurred elsewhere, in the Second and Third Worlds, and that the Midwest was a model of slow growth. I failed to notice that, as in many Midwestern towns, this part of Wisconsin was in decline. Rural populations began shrinking the second half of the twentieth century. Antigo's declined from ten thousand in 1950 to less than eight thousand in 2018.

So when I diligently saved those quarters in the Limburger cheese box and deposited them at the Fidelity Savings Bank, they might have been part of an unconscious plan to venture elsewhere. I had witnessed the perils of what happens when you rely solely on support from the farm, have no money, and are dependent on others to give it to you. This was the lesson I learned when Mary contracted polio because our father refused to drive her to the store for candy, and when Bob left the farm because our father wouldn't compensate him for his labor. Although nobody anticipated or encouraged my savings efforts, and none of my sisters had a piggy bank, I began early to prepare for my independence. Fidelity Savings Bank was part of that plan.

The long-distance travel to DC made me anxious but I was very excited to meet other young people, not only from Wisconsin but from the whole country. Talking with the others on the bus, I was pleasantly surprised that nobody seemed particularly interested in farms or the kind of achievements that had earned us all a trip to the capital. Only a few of the students older than me said they were going to college in the fall, one to the US Naval Academy. How did he even come to think about applying there? I asked myself. The other students had more diverse viewpoints than I expected, and it was reassuring to me that most were as undecided about their futures as I was.

Two girls wore their hair long and straight with a band around the forehead holding it in place, what I recognized as faux-Indian or hippie style. That was the ultimate in hipness at the time, both drawing attention to a difference while showing total indifference to how others saw you. I approached both girls as soon as I found a chance and asked, in my direct farmboy style, if they were hippies. They only smiled back. Our conversation ended with my question. The boys I ran into seemed as shy and inexperienced as I was. Although the year was 1969, I heard

no discussion of the political events whirling around us. We were juniors and seniors in Wisconsin high schools, quite removed from the immediacy of the university student protests.

For two days we toured the major buildings and monuments of the capital, including the Jefferson Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Library of Congress. We also met our two Wisconsin senators. My lasting impression: the climate. Temperature was in the 90s! In northern Wisconsin, I had never experienced such heat and humidity, and only some thirty years later, in Beirut, was I subjected to the same feeling that all my energy was dissipating like air escaping a popped balloon. As soon as we left the air-conditioned bus or the hotel rooms or the Capitol building, I felt as if hit by a large hair dryer followed by a vacuum sucking the air out of me. In the evenings I returned to my room exhausted, unable to engage in further conversation or even to walk down the Washington Mall with some other participants.

On our final evening, at a banquet with a formal dinner, waiters in white shirts and ties served us while we watched an elegant woman in a gown singing melodious, easy listening music. Ill-suited for a 1960s teenage audience that loved the Beatles. But we were all 4-H kids, so even if we didn't like it, we were appreciative. The highlight of the evening, for me, was a ceremony where I was astonished to be awarded a scholarship for college, sponsored by Merck Chemical Company. The funny thing was, I wasn't sure I was even going, and I hadn't thought much about where to go. I was surprised to receive a scholarship before I had been accepted anywhere.

After my return home I sat down at the kitchen table, which also functioned as the only desk in the house, to read the brochures from Wisconsin colleges and fill out their applications. I completed applications for only two schools: the University of Wisconsin- Madison, with a staggering 34,000 students, and the lesser-known Wisconsin State University-Whitewater, a quaint and cheaper abode with fewer than 5000. The Madison campus intrigued me, but I feared I might not measure up. By contrast, I could surely be competitive at Whitewater, with the advantage that it had an excellent business program, something Madison lacked. My first major was to be math. I thought it would lead me to a secure job in business. A business degree seemed the surest path to escape the fate of the farmer. I would've thought someone was joking if they'd suggested I apply to a place with elite graduate programs and doctoral degrees. A "university": that was not an institution for farmboys like me.

I Was Married to a Horse

If livelihood was one issue in my path away from the family farm, another such was love. Or at least, the awkwardness of the kind of love imagined for me there. After Peg tied the knot in 1969, my mother resorted to her customary practice of rearranging the pictures hung along the living-room wall. It was her ritual, arranging the eight-by-ten airbrushed photos of her children in couples after their wedding ceremonies. Now Peg and her new husband, Dave, joined the other six couples. But I, the youngest son, remained unmarried, leaving a gap in her arrangement that she felt compelled to fill. Stymied in her desire to treat us as equals—as equally married, that is—she faced the dilemma: which photo for me?

Despite her own rocky marriage, my mother regarded matrimony as a sacred institution you entered and stayed in, for better or worse, until death do us part. She couldn't fathom that I might desperately want to avoid the thought that I would not find a woman and experience this sacrament myself. When she sensed I was not on a straight path, her response was straightforward denial. It was impossible to miss my lack of interest in dating or expressing any romantic inclination toward girls, but on that topic, too, she strictly avoided dwelling. She also recognized my disinterest in traditional boyish games. I found joy in reading, drawing, and painting: hobbies seen as unmanly.

To her credit, she never admonished me for my interests (or lack of interest) or tried to steer me toward compliance with her wishes or the expectations of others. Evenings, she sat in the living room, crocheting while watching TV. If I joined her and expressed something she disagreed with, she had a standard retort: "I don't believe that but as long as it makes you happy." Her intentions were clear. She wished for my happiness. In her eyes, however, that meant marriage and children, mirroring the path she had followed and what she assumed everyone should do.

By the time Peg walked down the aisle, I had become an outspoken critic of conventional beliefs—in religion, marriage, the family, the farm, and small-town values—all most dear to my mother. I was emerging from my shell and became more assertive and contentious, particularly with my family, pulling no punches in expressing my antipathies. Vehemently opposed to the Vietnam War and raising the topic whenever the opportunity arose, I began to distance myself from conservative groups and causes and resisted conforming to normative pressures.

On one weekend when the larger family descended on the farm for a visit, I seized the chance to broach the topic of ZPG—Zero Population Growth—a movement I had embraced since my early teens. Though I was well aware that many found any argument against reproduction nonsensical, their resistance to any critical reflection on the matter emboldened me to spark a conversation, especially because they steered the topic back to their own children. In the kitchen I, the only kid still living at home, observed my sisters help Mom prepare dinner. The other men and my nieces and nephews were in the living room with the TV on. Potatoes and carrots were peeled, two desserts made, and dishes washed, while the Sunbeam electric frying pan filled the room with the aroma of a simmering pork roast and sauerkraut.

"Have you heard of ZPG?" I asked, breaking the rhythmic hum of my sisters' chopping and gossiping. They exchanged quizzical glances, feigning polite curiosity, while Mom, ever familiar with my musings on the subject, understood where I was headed.

"It's about the planet's sustainability with too many children," I continued. "We are exhausting our resources. I think we should reproduce enough only to replace our population, not to increase it."

A momentary silence enveloped the room until Joan, donning an apron, quietly assumed control of the cooking from Mom. Her raised eyebrows and the rising pitch of her voice signaled her disagreement as she expressed incredulity, "But John, children are a gift from God. And we love children."

I dug in, drawing on skills perfected in my high school debate team: "I think it's immoral to have such large families as ours."

Mom, wearing an apron and preoccupied with making pastries, had been silent but listening closely. "But we wouldn't have had you," she said, a familiar retort whenever this topic arose. My response was always the same, in a defense honed with repetition.

"That is the point, you should never have had me." I was showing a harsh side, realizing while I spoke that my words were crueler than intended. Mom wasn't one for jesting, and she undoubtedly found my comments unkind. Nonetheless, I persisted, "Think of the strain of supporting eight children on a farm! There was no justification for having me. You should have stopped earlier and given more attention to a few."

Mom held her tongue, shook her head in disagreement, chuckled softly at the extremity (to her, absurdity) of my stance, and gently replied, "But I love all my children." And she did love all her children, deeply. That was beyond dispute. But the family photo wall presented a

significant issue for me—marriage. Instead of leaving me out entirely, or hanging a solitary picture of me, unattached, on the wall, Mom decided to include a photo of me with Sky Queen, the sorrel-colored mare I rode in local competitions. Initially I appreciated her thoughtfulness, yet the image captured neither the horse nor me beaming with joy, unlike the other couples that radiated an almost divine blessing. Those couples had indeed been blessed, by both the Church and the community.

Mom took great care to never display favoritism and genuinely aimed to incorporate me among the lineup of children proudly showcased. Those pictures adorned a wall that visitors and guests couldn't easily overlook. It was a gallery of sorts, an exhibition of our family for anyone who crossed our threshold. Mom, as she traversed her daily routine between rooms, undoubtedly found pleasure in pausing at those photos, whether she moved to the kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, or living room as she continued her rotations among these rooms throughout the day. The couple photos were the sole decorations in what we considered our family rooms. Everybody who dropped by took notice, and I'm sure Mom believed they'd pause before them, much like visitors in an art gallery, pondering, "Such a large family, all married. What an accomplishment!" Indeed, I, too, found myself stopping to gaze at them.

I must admit, they were a striking group. The air brushing had erased any imperfections. The husbands and wives exuded an undeniable allure, even a sense of sensuality, in blemish-free faces with less-than-perfect chin lines smoothed out. We were, or at least appeared to be, at our prime in the full bloom of youth. Except for me. In front of such a wall of man-woman pairs, I felt overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy. Somehow, I sensed, though without fully convincing myself and certainly not sharing it with the family, that portraying me as part of a married couple was not in the cards for my future. Yet the pressure to conform, to find a girl and marry her, increased as I grew older.

The choice of including Sky Queen with me in the lineup might have been fitting, since I loved horses, had it not been for the angle at which Sky Queen gazed into the camera. Horse heads do not photograph well from the front. Sky Queen, much like me, stared directly into the lens. And to photograph her profile from the long side would have disrupted the symmetry of the frames. A horse looks queer from such an angle. No amount of air brushing could change the elongated shape of her head or reorient the viewer's gaze toward a more flattering perspective.

I found Mom's choice of that photo peculiar, but I kept this observation to myself, too hesitant and embarrassed to voice it without a suggestion for an alternative. I wondered if it might grow on people with time. But what struck me most was the complete absence of comments or inquiries from anyone, or at least not to my knowledge. No one remarked with an, "Oh, how unusual!" or "John, how lovely she is!" More urbane visitors might have thought, "Almost like a Modigliani portrait. Just a different species!" But no, the silence was to avoid an awkward conversation about why I was paired with a horse instead of a woman. It seemed Mom was grappling with the awareness that I wouldn't, legally couldn't, marry. And she couldn't bear the thought that I wouldn't share the same blessings her other children had. So she reassured herself, and me, preemptively, attempting to convey that I wasn't alone because I had Sky Queen, and perhaps would have a series of such mares in the future.

Despite all this, Mom's photo gallery evoked a sense of tenderness in me. It revealed her genuine effort to bridge the gap between my siblings and myself, even as it ultimately underscored the distance between us. It also underscored the stark reality that her endeavors to assimilate me into her world were futile, that I needed to forge my own path elsewhere. I felt increasingly desperate to imagine my future self in terms other than those set by my community. That meant I began to doubt horses as a possibility. How in the world could I make a living off riding? So the more I achieved academically, the more going to college emerged as a threshold of hope. It offered not just an escape from the confines of the farm but also the chance to liberate myself from the constraints of its family ties. I envisioned college as an opportunity to immerse myself in a completely unfamiliar milieu, unencumbered by the weight of my past, a place to make myself anew.

Going to College

In May 1970 the University of Wisconsin-Madison offered me a full four-year scholarship for undergraduate studies. The mail arrived in the afternoon and Mom saved the letter for me to open. Mom and Dad sat at the kitchen table watching as I took a deep breath and read it. I gave it back to Mom, who put her reading glasses on. She read only two sentences before exclaiming, "So you're going to college!" They both seemed

proud yet acted as if it was no big deal. The drama was elsewhere, and we all seemed prepared for this, as if we already knew that I'd be leaving them alone with the farm. That must have been their concern, as it certainly was in the back of my mind, but we'd never addressed what my leaving would mean for them.

My admissions package included the Merck Chemical Company scholarship awarded the previous summer for academic performance in high school. Its large pool of applicants was limited to those engaged in 4-H activities. Farmboys, farmgirls, country kids, in a nation-wide competition. The scholarship covered room and board if I maintained above-average grades. For the other costs, including a remarkably inexpensive two hundred and fifty-four dollars for tuition and fees per semester, I was allotted a work-study job of ten hours a week for the university. A generous offer? To be sure—even if, coming from a cash-strapped family farm, I would have zero discretionary income after buying the mandatory books for my classes. I accepted it the next day.

That letter of acceptance was pivotal in my life. Prioritizing myself felt selfish, but I was also assured that I was on the road to some personal security. Going to college held the same significance for me as "moving to Milwaukee" did for my three older siblings. Our tickets to somewhere, anywhere, an escape.

The admission to college wasn't unexpected, but the promise of a scholarship to finance my studies was. Without that I couldn't accept, I wouldn't accept, because I had been led to believe I couldn't afford college, certainly not with the little I earned working in the local pea and corn canning factory during summers. In my family, if you left the farm, you were on your own. Bob had at sixteen, and all my sisters at eighteen. Much was at stake here, for if I didn't go to college, I expected I'd end up in a menial job at minimum pay.

At that point, I viewed "college" as the pinnacle, the summit of higher educational achievement. Few people reached that summit where I came from. Now that I was going to college, I needn't aspire to more. I would get a Bachelor of Arts degree, one that required I complete courses in the natural and the social sciences, and in literature and the arts. A well-rounded curriculum for learning. Like turning a light switch on, my expectations for myself changed overnight. Now I'd find employment in the white-collar sector, and escape from the gnarled fingers and dirt-caked nails of the farm. Lo and behold, in September 1970, a brother-in-law drove me to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a *university*

that offered much more than a college. People back home had chirped, "John's going to college," and all the while I was at the university, I echoed the same mantra. A fellow on the same floor of my dorm later described me so: "Tall and really skinny. He had a high-pitched voice and shoes with a large buckle, which I'd never seen before, and bellbottoms. A pilgrim in bellbottoms."

Several months before I entered the university, two events had roiled the campus. They brought home to me how sheltered my own life had been from war and from the consequences of US foreign policy, even if I already opposed these personally. In May, the Ohio National Guard killed four and wounded nine students at Kent State University. In August, four men calling themselves the "New Year's Gang" bombed the Army Mathematics Research Center at Wisconsin-Madison's Sterling Hall, killing one researcher and wounding three others.

Killings and bombings on campuses were linked to student radicalism but so distant from my experience that I had no way to fathom their significance for me. I was becoming more radical, but I had put any personal worries aside because attending the university gave me an automatic student deferment from the draft. Under no circumstances did I want to join the army. Me, a soldier? Unimaginable. My marksman skills never advanced beyond a BB gun to shoot squirrels. It would be the end of me before I even got started with my life. My greatest pre-college anxiety, therefore, wasn't Vietnam but anticipating how I'd fare as a student. I didn't like who I was and wanted to change everything about myself. I wanted to be less garrulous and to make more friends, but also, I desperately wanted to succeed.

For my first two years of work-study, I sat at a desk on a wooden chair facing the wall in a cluttered office in the Animal and Human Sciences Department, my back to a middle-aged employee: a thin, sympathetic man with a few remaining stands of long black hair pulled over the top of his head. My work was to collate coded chicken eggs for an experiment to enhance the breeding of productive chickens. In those early computer years IBM punch cards demanded a trained worker to do the data entry—no questions asked about what the data meant. I diligently penciled in the plus and minus symbols on cards, a task I performed mechanically while absorbing an unexpected education through my sprawling conversations with the man behind me. I had been given the choice between working behind the counter in the cafeteria or working with data on chickens. The office job appealed to me more than the food

service one, which in my mind resembled the manual labor that I wanted to avoid. Also, anonymous work appealed to me as I felt too shy to appear wearing a hair net before my fellow students while serving them food and cleaning up after them.

Our open-ended discussions in this office with the employee sitting behind me made the coding feel less like a work-study requirement and more akin to a therapy session—I on the hypothetical sofa, he an invisible presence behind me. I could see him only by cranking my neck one hundred and eighty degrees. He listened attentively to my questions and seemed to appreciate hearing reports on my classes. We exchanged opinions on politics, lots of politics, and he responded to me with a sincerity that showed he took me seriously.

It seemed fate's hand was behind my assignment to the poultry division, a return to farming—animal husbandry, specializing in raising healthy chickens. It wasn't exactly aligned with my intended study, which nevertheless kept changing. Paradoxically I'd proudly tell my new acquaintances on campus, "I work in the poultry science department!" Ironically meant, of course. In truth, the job was a foreseeable result of my late enrollment. By the time I looked at what was available, the jobs as assistant to professors on their projects or in the libraries were all taken. My late enrollment, in turn, stemmed from the foreseeable result of not knowing to enroll early. So much of what the university did, what kind of institution it was and what fields of study were available, I didn't understand, even after a year of study. Looking back, the job must have been painfully embarrassing, though I didn't let on.

After my freshmen year, a group of us boycotted university-owned dorms and opted to take over the building formerly occupied by the Acadia Fraternity. We called it by its address, 222 Langston Street, and turned it into a co-ed cooperative. Amidst Vietnam War protests, the party-hearty male vibes of the conservative fraternities were at odds with a mood of political engagement and integration of the sexes. Fraternities faced membership droughts. This frat leased us their place for three years, a decision we made after the regents brushed aside a unanimous faculty vote for co-ed dorms. Apparently, they said, the student motives all boiled down to sex. Maybe it really was true, about the sex, I mean, but certainly not for me. I remained chaste for my entire time at Madison.

The grand piano in the main living room close to the entrance always surprised me. I didn't expect the frat boys, the former residents, to be playing piano. Together with a fireplace it created a warm message of welcome. The kitchen and dining area occupied the basement, while the upper floors

accommodated one- and two-person bedrooms. Our only house rules revolved around sharing bathrooms and chores. Thirty-four of us, perfectly divided between genders, embarked on this cooperative adventure.

I shouldn't forget my days in the culinary spotlight. Seven days, seven cooks, and I was one of them. Looking back, something was wrong with me that I volunteered. My cooking was uncompromisingly dull, there's no other way to put it. Why my fellow students didn't stage a revolt remains a mystery. Maybe they didn't mind my mediocrity because it meant they could avoid this responsibility. But there I was, so unprepared, so inexperienced, my gastronomic palate limited to the staples of farm life: meat and potatoes, with the occasional side of overcooked canned vegetables. My signature dish? A reliable albeit uninspired roasted ham, with pineapple, baked potatoes, and mushy canned peas. It was simple, foolproof, and strangely enough, although nobody sang my praises, they all devoured it without a peep. They grumbled about other cooks, and other meals, but my limited offerings escaped their criticism. Perhaps it was pity, perhaps it was my dessert: Aunt Dee's Cookies. A chocolate, walnut, coconut bar with a sweetened-condensed-milk graham-cracker crust. It was a hit and became a running joke, for the name itself elicited a smile. "John is making Aunt Dee's cookies tonight!"

Figure 7. Co-ed Co-op Friends

One day, Diane, a home economics and nutrition wizard, took me aside.

"John, don't you think your meals should be a bit more balanced?" she gently chided.

"I never thought of that," I said, thoroughly Midwestern in my honesty. "What do you mean, balanced?" I queried, utterly clueless about the intricacies of a well-rounded meal.

"Vegetables, meat, greens, dessert," she explained.

Diane, bless her culinary heart, always nailed that balanced equation whenever she took charge, although I can't recall how any of her dishes tasted. Truth be told, no one fancied her food much, but I suspect it had little to do with her cooking skills. She showed a certain desperation for romance. And her straightness, I mean, home economics? We were celebrating the experimental and unconventional, not the prim and proper, the well-groomed and well-mannered. Still, I took Diane's sage council to heart, as much as I was able to, integrating vibrant greens and opting for noodles or rice instead of the customary potatoes. Yet, I must confess, I felt a tad uneasy preparing them. Spinach, collard greens, zucchini, eggplant: these weren't the usual staples of farm fare. Even in their apparent simplicity, they posed culinary conundrums—how long to boil, how much to make, what spice to add—that baffled my limited cooking skills.

In my second year, Nixon suddenly limited draft deferments, which had been automatic for undergraduate students. My anxiety turned to the draft, and I began to truly comprehend what war meant. Several friends who were seniors circulated their letters appealing for conscientious objector status, claiming a religious exemption, the only acceptable grounds other than bad health. One such friend was a big red-haired farmboy from the southwestern part of the state, whom I met in the dorms my very first semester and who had moved with me to the co-op. Dale and I had quickly become buddies. Warm and, like me, eager to overcome his provincial background and become more politically aware, we sat together at meals. Some evenings we attended extra lectures and teach-ins on Vietnam. I was learning that my own education in history and politics had been severely misinformed. I had been fed propaganda about America-the-Great-and-Innocent, and had lapped it up. This cast a shadow over all my acquired knowledge. Obviously, the sources of my information in the slow-paced rural north were not to be trusted. Still, when I presented my newfound knowledge to people at home, they either dismissed it as propaganda or, more frequently, were indifferent to

the truth. My new awareness raised the disturbing issue of how, through indifference, people found comfort in their own ignorance. How was I to deal with that?

Since the odds of obtaining conscientious status were low, Dale and I often joked about fleeing to Canada.

"What would we do there?" I asked. "I've never been to Canada."

"Neither have I!" Dale laughed.

"Well, my brother-in-law Larry has a hunting cabin over the border; perhaps we can stay there."

"Seriously? We might never be able to come back. I'm not a hunter. I don't want to live on a hippie commune, and I don't want to spend the rest of my life as a draft dodger," Dale doused the humor.

"I don't either. But I read that Toronto and Vancouver are great cities, and welcoming to immigrants," I added.

Merely thinking about the dilemmas that the war presented changed how I thought about myself. I knew there was some connection between Merck Chemical Company, which was financing my education, and its production of napalm for the Vietnam War. But since that scholarship was my ticket to the university, I couldn't afford to grapple with the idea of giving it back to them in protest. Discussions with Dale about desertion became moot after our luck with the lottery. For me, that was August 5, 1971, the lottery drawing for men born in my birth year, 1952. The highest number selected to go to Vietnam was 95. Mine was 177. I was elated.

Broken Trophies

In the fall of my third year, Nixon was campaigning for reelection, and many of us in the co-op were glued to the news about the Watergate break-in that had occurred in June. There was standing room only in front of the small TV screen as Nixon and the upper echelons of his administration were implicated. When I wasn't cooking, I listened and watched intently with the others before we went downstairs for dinner where excited discussions began. On campus, I found myself working for the political scientist M. Crawford Young, sorting through answers to questionnaires for a book he was writing on cultural pluralism in Africa. At the time, I had no idea that Young's work would become pathbreaking; a decade later, I pursued and taught questions he had posed at the time.

That winter of 1972, during the university's Christmas break, I caught a ride from Madison with another student heading north back to my parent's home for a weekend visit. Several major storms had already covered the ground with over a foot of snow though the roads were all passable. Mom and Dad sat at the kitchen table, shoulders slumped, unusually subdued as I dusted the snow off my shoes and took my backpack off. Everything else was the same, the same old wooden table and chairs, the same linoleum covered floors, the same nutty aroma of percolated coffee in "bottomless" cups awaiting a refill. And, of course, there were Mom's donuts and other baked sweets beckoning on the counter. The only difference I noticed was a small television in the corner where the sewing machine had been. Now they didn't have to walk into the living room to watch the TV. It stayed on the whole day.

I climbed the stairs and entered my small bedroom under the eave and stopped in disbelief, shocked at what I saw: behind the bedroom door many of my trophies were scattered in pieces and fragments on the floor. A horse's head or tail, a rider's head, a stand, a saddle stirrup. It was unlike Mom to simply leave something in disarray on the floor. Either she wanted to shame Dad or she herself felt too ashamed to touch them.

How could this have happened? I went back downstairs. They were still seated at the kitchen table, heads down, unable to meet my or each other's eyes. What I saw on their faces when they looked up was fear, the fear of telling me about what I had just seen. It seemed as if they had agreed that my mother would do the explaining. Looking down and away, she talked while my father remained silent.

He was fully sober though neither joyful nor melancholic. Mom explained that a friend of his had visited after the two had been drinking all afternoon. They were feeling good, and my father took him upstairs to my old bedroom—all three rooms upstairs were now empty—to show off the trophies I had won in local competitions. They had been on display on three shelves loosely attached to the wall. It was a small room with barely enough space for two grown men who had become tipsy. As my father lifted one trophy from the top shelf, the others came unbalanced. While trying to recover them as they fell, he knocked most of the others off from the two lower shelves also.

More was broken than the trophies, for all of us. They were cheap little statuettes that anybody could have purchased in a trophy store for a few dollars, but my parents had sacrificed for them. They had purchased saddles and bridles and a trailer to haul horses to events. This activity pulled

them together. They shared pride in my riding, my little victories, something other than shared farmwork. Riding represented an investment in their youngest child's passion that they could not afford for their seven children who had come before me. Dad knew the impact of what he had done even while inebriated, and he was afraid. Objects of pride sullied by his drinking, again. Wasn't that one story of his life? The destruction was a failure by my parents to protect the memory of our collaboration—of what I had done, made possible only with their support. They looked defeated. Certainly, I felt that way, standing awkwardly before them, not knowing what to say or do, not wanting to make them feel even worse. I said only, "Well, that is too bad."

This moment was another confirmation that I was right to seek a future independent of the one my parents had imagined for me. It was clearly the *only* possibility of a future for me. The major connection I'd had as a child with my father was broken. My marriage to horses may have saved me from a miserable childhood, but now was the time to forge new attachments—with people this time. With other places. The generous support of my parents in my riding and my relations with animals had helped make me who I was. It had carved out a space of fantasy and accomplishment, of pride in my ability, providing a source of strength that helped me ignore the acute pressure of dating girls, of boy competition, and my future as a farmer. All the hoopla about sports: I could leave that behind with no regrets while on a horse in the backfields with our German shepherd trailing. But if I no longer needed the marriage to horses, the ties with my father would be severed, and I suspected his own emotional interest in me would also wane.

College had become my new refuge, though I hadn't the vaguest idea that ten years later the university would become my home. For now, college presented itself to me as the intellectual and personal community I had longed for but had not imagined possible. All except on the sexual front. There I'd have to reach outside the college. I had thus far been exposed only to heteronormative alternatives—find a nice girl, marry, have kids, buy a ranch home with three bedrooms. I had met only one openly gay professor, and every person I befriended presented themselves as straight.

I had by then already chosen mathematics as a major, rejecting training to be a pharmacist or elementary school teacher. After a semester of imaginary numbers, I had a brief flirtation with accounting, which I rejected too, concluding that such work would be too repetitive and too parochial. I wanted work where I could think about and experience the larger

worlds around me. That's where my desire, still amorphous and lacking direction, was moving. As my bonds with my family waned, I was eager to cut my ties with the farm and its animals also, and with the horizons of the small town. It no longer made me anxious to think that I didn't know what to pursue, or where to live or where to work. My courses were stimulating, and my university friends were imagining for themselves very different paths of travel, career, and romance. It was simply assumed they were all going to live in cities, that nobody was going to a rural region. I was determined to take part in the same kind of explorations.

Europe on Five Dollars a Day

It was my first trip outside the United States. For six months, beginning late December 1973, a whirlwind tour of the European continent: hitchhiking, catching rides with groups in vans and buses outside American Express offices, finding cars with an empty seat, and a few times buying bargain student tickets for trains. Once, even a plane. This was the American century, and I had the bonus of an American birth and an American passport. I was a young adult at what would become the tail end of an era of freedom to travel the world. I'd heard from friends who were traveling around the world. My immediate future would also entail extended travel—and intensive self-discovery—though my imagination then didn't go beyond Europe. The dominance of American culture and the dollar was behind me, the expectation of rising incomes and continued American dominance before me.

My new companion, *Europe on Five Dollars a Day*, promised that savings budgeted for five dollars a day would be sufficient for the six months I had planned. I had a thousand dollars in American Express traveler's checks, saved from a loan I had taken out for my final semester of study. I flew from Chicago to Munich on a one-way ticket, arriving the day before Christmas. Anxious and expectant, knowing no one, I delighted in the idea of total anonymity. And in Europe! The learning curve was steep and began immediately after I got off the plane. I did not know how to navigate a large city, how to buy tickets on the subway from the airport, or where to find lodging. The tourist office at the airport told me that all the hostels were full. I hopped a tram into the city anyway and learned to improvise. A sign of things to come: the first tram I took from the airport went in the wrong direction. After two stops, I got out and crossed the tracks to go back in the direction of the city.

In the city, everything was closed. Unlike in the States, Germany celebrates Christmas on the twenty-fourth. Hostels turned me away, pensions turned me away, and the private lodging I asked about was unaffordable on my budget. I wandered around the city center, decorated with reindeer and dwarfs and Santa Claus paraphernalia. Dusted with a layer of soft, newly fallen snow, it was all charming and beautiful, but by late afternoon I was tiring, with no place to spend the night, having eaten nothing since I got off the plane. Another traveler gave me a tip and so, as darkness fully descended, I knocked on the door of a small home that took in guests.

The woman at the door claimed that they were full also, but she saw the exhaustion in my face and took pity on me. What luck! "We cannot turn you away on Christmas," she exclaimed, and put me in a room with a South Korean student. We shared a bunk bed; I climbed to the top. This was exciting, I thought; I had never met anyone from South Korea. The following morning, the owner served us tea and a crusty white bun with a slice of cheese, and I was fully satisfied. The next two days, my bunk mate and I traipsed around the city together. I led, he followed, a pattern that repeated itself with other travelers throughout my journey, certainly not because I wished it or considered myself a natural leader. It seemed like I was driven to do things while others slept in or wandered around, nonchalant about their travels, not afraid of missing anything. This became my standard itinerary in every city in every country I visited: free museums, churches, famous cemeteries, parks and botanical gardens, monuments and public buildings, a zoo. Constant movement from country to country tended to blur all sites, but the feel and mood of each city and country left distinct and lasting impressions.

Crete was my original destination, but I had detoured north first to visit Tom, a friend from Madison who was teaching English in Hanover. It was also my very first experience hitchhiking. Carrying a cardboard sign that said "Hannover," as the native spelling has it, I walked to the freeway entrance ramp in Munich. A car with three Germans picked me up—a chance to practice my German—and took me the entire distance, engaging me in conversation the whole way. It was pitch black when we arrived on the outskirts of the city. I found the apartment building, rang the doorbell multiple times. No answer, no light in the window. In desperation I rang a neighbor's bell on the same floor. He stuck his head out the window and angrily yelled at me. I met his scowl with my sob story: "I am looking for Tom, his name is on the buzzer. I just arrived from America."

"Tom was taken to the hospital early this morning!" he said.

The next morning, I found Tom. He was doing fine, he explained: he had been taking a shower—the shower was in the hall, shared by others on the floor—and he fainted. Foam was coming out of his mouth, and his bright red hair was soaped up. One neighbor thought he was epileptic; another called an ambulance. The doctors determined Tom had low blood pressure, not epilepsy. I was so relieved. We were friends before, but the incident brought us much closer. Many years later Tom gave me a huge stack of letters I'd written to him, including a photo he had shot of me in Hanover, standing next to one of the three Nanas (Sophie, Charlotte, and Caroline), iconic pop art sculptures in odd shapes resembling female body parts. My hair is Beatles-long, and my wire-rimmed glasses actually look stylish in retrospect. I am wearing jeans and a cheap all-weather blue nylon jacket. My left hand is placed firmly on my hip, my right gestures to the Nana sculpture towering behind me, my right toe points as if tapping the ground. What in the world is this kid doing?

On my way to Greece, I had the option of going through Central Europe, and Tom recommended Prague. I arrived by train from Germany and discovered a quaint city still recovering from the defeat of the Prague Spring in 1968, its attempt to reform communism by giving it a "human face." People were cynical, without illusion—and liquored up on my nightly visits to local pubs and beer halls. They scoffed at my naive questions: "What kind of freedoms do you still have?" (Met with a laugh.) "Do we have to whisper when we talk with each other?" (Big smile, raised eyebrows.) Two tall, good-looking men approached me walking down Wenceslas Square and asked, "Want a woman?" I must have shaken my head too vigorously. They followed up, "How about us?" Czech humor—though it was probably a real offer.

I met two men from Croatia. One had an engaging girlfriend from West Berlin who intrigued me with her description of the divided city. Well-dressed, with short brown hair, and very relaxed traveling with two Slavic men, she praised its liveliness and unusual people, its universities and small lakes to swim in, and thus planted an idea in my mind about a place that about fifteen years later became my second home.

In one of Prague's beerhalls, I had the good fortune, or so I thought at the time, to meet a Dutch tourist who told me of a farm in a Greek village near Heraklion where he had stayed for free in a barn. He drew me a diagram of what bus to take and which roads and fields to walk through to find it, and he promised the farmer would take me in. I imagined

Figure 8. Three Nanas

going to sleep on clean straw in the evening and waking up to bright Hellenic sun in the morning. There were no tourists in this village, so it would be an ideal place to learn Greek.

Greece was pure fantasyland, filled with figures from reading on the ancient world of Ithaca, the sirens of Ulysses, the ten-year journey of Odysseus to reach home, Athenian democracy, and Cretan masculinity in the Archaic Period. My Greek language instructor at Madison had added additional images, having us practice *tsamiko*, the Hellenic dance with men of all ages holding hands while dancing in a circle. I assumed that community and tradition still existed in Crete, and I hoped to experience a kind of communal utopia of dancing, singing, and male bonding. And there was the odd curiosity of the hippie gatherings on Crete's beaches, with cheap living, sun, ocean, and experimentation in lifestyles.

Inland, not that far from Heraklion, I found the farmer just before the sun went down. A small man with a weathered face who looked like he had worked too hard that day. I introduced myself and asked if I could stay in his barn. He looked at me with a frown that said, you got to be kidding. After I explained my purpose, he said, "What?"

His face saddened as we walked in the direction of the orange grove and the goat shed—a cement slab, an enclosure with a roof over it. He asked, incredulously, "You really want to sleep here? This is not fit for a human."

"But my friend from Amsterdam said he found it perfectly acceptable," I replied. "And I won't be a bother, I promise."

He shook his head slowly, mumbled something about crazy Dutch hippies, and left. What did I see in the waning light? Many goats, a dirty floor with very little straw, and no windows. I had imagined lots of straw and light. But I felt I had no choice. I unfolded my sleeping bag in a corner where the goats had left the fewest of their droppings.

After four nights, the sun and the oranges weren't enough. What the fuck was this kid doing here? I had come to meet people. But my roommates were the ever curious and stinking goats nosing around on my body and in my backpack. All that was too much for this farm-boy-with-college-degree. I thanked the farmer, put on my backpack, and walked to the village. There I found kind and simple people, sort of like the country folk I was fleeing.

Learning Greek did not go well. Only elderly men seemed to come to the cafés. Youths had abandoned the village for better employment in cities. Much later in Germany I ran into many of these Greek workers, who had become restaurant owners and waiters. After three weeks of this, my utopian fantasies revealed themselves to be illusions, so I continued my explorations elsewhere. On I went to Turkey, Italy, Spain. And Morocco: my first major experience of a distinct, non-Western culture.

In Morocco, a flood of incongruous sensorial images overwhelmed me. A blind man on a bus reciting the Koran; large numbers of insistent beggars, shabbily dressed and unwashed, or missing a limb, or unable to stand or talk; young men trying to swindle or help me, I couldn't tell which; the nonchalance of men holding hands, kissing on public display; the colorful ceramic tajine for tender and well-spiced chicken and beef and vegetables. People made impressive use of pastels, my favorite colors, in ceramic pottery, clothes, rugs, and buildings. Subdued yellow and emerald greens, burnt orange and blazing blues, aged reds. The tiled walls impressed me with wild geometric patterns. My insecurity in haggling at bazaars with indecipherable pricing gave way to play, the merchants exaggeratedly acting as if they felt hurt when I rejected their offers.

I took the train to Marrakesh and there discovered the central square called Jemaa El Fna. It was life on steroids: musicians, snake charmers, card players, petty thieves, storytellers, peddlers, dancing boys, all hustling for my attention. One day I happened into a tearoom, by accident, and was seated on pillows against the walls of the courtyard. Adult men in animated discussion occupied the other seats; I was the only one to enter alone. Soon a couple of young dancers came out from behind a curtain. Not the famous Chleuh boys from the square, who looked nearly adult to me. These were still children, androgynous boys dressed as women, quite proud to show their made-up faces as they whirled and shimmied and did belly rolls, all focus on movements of the hips and pelvis, their hands opened wide, gracefully twisting, extending, rising. My first introduction to the renowned oriental aesthetic of seduction.

It was not that I was personally seduced but that the boys performed seduction as an art they'd undoubtedly learned from women. That would have been *haram*, forbidden, even criminalized in rural northern Wisconsin where I came from. Growing up I'd experienced masculine gender codes as coercive, what today we call toxic masculinity—always seeking dominance, suppressing the show of emotion, denigrating anything that might be thought of as feminine. The dancing boys played with these codes, and rather than judging their performances contrary to their male natures, the adult male audience was quietly amused, pausing conversation to observe them.

I'd thought of male seduction as a trick to bed women and as a source of violence against them. Here it was a fine art practiced among Muslim Arabs. The audience reaction was fundamentally different from what I had encountered in the Christian countries of the Mediterranean I had just visited. I had seen enough of Jesus pictures, nativity scenes, plump

babies, sado-maso crucifixions, the elongated faces of the pious Virgin Mary. Back in 1974, the ubiquitous visual iconography of Christian Europe seemed obsessed with death by comparison to the hectic life on this square and the eroticism of the dancing boys.

Looking back at this European experience now, what stands out is how rudderless drifting prepared me to be receptive to the experience of strange people and places. An introduction to anthropology. I was unguarded, and there was no social media to warn me of what to feel, how to frame my experience, to entice me to follow a trend. Back then I was able to wander into situations without the fear of being taken advantage of or, at its extreme, being abducted. I was learning how to take care of myself, how to befriend others, how to explore, how to manage my fears of the unknown and the unpredictable. I learned that I could have novel, safe experiences outside the US without much money. I came away from hundreds of encounters much more courageous than before, more willing to stand alone, and more willing to help others and even lead them.

Down and Out in Seattle

Returning to Antigo from my travels in Europe, I went back to the canning factory where I had worked prior summers and saved enough money, around a thousand dollars in two months, to get me to Seattle and pay for a first month's rent somewhere. I bought a ten-year-old car for three hundred and fifty dollars and drove to Seattle with a few clothes and some pots and pans strapped to the top of the vehicle. Before leaving for Europe I had applied to several law schools and the University of Washington in Seattle put me on its waiting list. Later in the summer the university inquired about my intentions, but I did not reply, thinking I needed some more time off to discover who I was or could become. I feared the pressure to conform to a corporate culture, to the business world, to what we called the system. I feared in that world I wouldn't be strong enough to live outside the closet, and that would be the end of any life of adventure.

On the drive out from the Midwest, across the Great Plains to the Pacific coast, I pondered my future in a city I'd never been to but only read about. Seattle was the place I had sought in my fantasies as a new beginning, nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains,

fresh, green year-round. I imagined camping in the Olympic mountains in the middle of a rain forest; taking half-day trips to the Puget Sound, an inlet of the ocean; attending an exciting theater in the city—all in the same day. Then there was the promise of the majestic Mount Rainier rising above everything, and an openness in the community that made it welcoming to strangers. And, I would be anonymous, no friends or networks, everything from scratch.

All of this I did, and it was indeed exciting, but I also had to find a place to rent and a job. My anonymity meant I was on my own, no one to consult or confide in. Initially, I had hoped to continue my student life without being a student. Hence, I drove straight to the student center in the university district, and on its bulletin board I found a room in a house with six students, all of whom wanted to practice speaking German. Goldmine! An opportunity to continue to improve my spoken German, as I'd only had three semesters of study.

We were all assigned work duties, which was only fair. But one student took it upon herself to give us a grade every two weeks, using the German grading system: *ausgezeichnet*, *gut*, *befriedigend*, *ausreichend*, *ungenügend* (excellent, good, satisfactory, adequate, insufficient). In my two months living there she gave me the worst grade in each bimonthly evaluation: *ungenügend*. She was right: I did in fact neglect my responsibilities. I was hardly ever there, and I no longer felt myself a naive student, and she noticed that.

In my next apartment, the mousy woman who leased the place beat up her slob of a boyfriend with a cardboard box after he assumed they would still have sex even though she had broken up with him. She hit him and hit him while he pleaded, "I didn't know. I didn't know." Those were only two of five places I lived in that year.

The hunt for work was even more painful than the hunt for lodging. I had no contacts and no experience in any of the fields in which I sought work. I knew nothing about the expectations of employers. I never wore a coat or tie, probably because I didn't own one. My shoes were not black, and those I had were not polished. I had never given any thought to how to present myself for white-collar jobs or perform interviews. On cool days I wore jeans, on hot summer days I sometimes wore shorts. Once I even wore sandals to an interview. I thought being polite, forthcoming, willing to be a hard worker, and having a college degree from a renowned university would be enough. Jeez, I had a 3.5 Grade Point Average from the University of Wisconsin. It was difficult to stomach the lesson that

nothing about me was sufficient to get a foot in the door. I hadn't expected to have so little to offer.

What gigs was I able to land? Manager of a mini-golf course; manager-in-training at Skipper's, Seattle's first fish-and-chips franchise; life insurance salesman; answering telephones in an office; unloading products from trucks and stacking them on warehouse shelves; cleaning office buildings after employees left work; gardening and helping with entertainment in a nursing home; packing and moving furniture; teaching at a Fred Astaire Dance Studio. That's nine and I'm probably forgetting some. But before I forget more, I should note that during my job with Skipper's Fish and Chips and my brief spell as a life insurance agent I had my first homosexual intercourse. It hurt, of course, and was devoid of what I was looking for. It was neither love nor sexual pleasure as I had imagined and idealized them. Nonetheless I was pleased that finally—finally!—I had had a sexual experience comparable to what my friends, all straight, assumed was a natural event: a gift from the God, at least for the boys. So much energy and anticipation had been put into this climax.

The scene was unassuming. I was sitting on the steps of the building next door to a public launderette waiting for my clothes to dry, and a man about ten years older walked by and did a double take. He turned around and, looking me directly in the eyes, asked, "You want to come with me? I live nearby."

It took just a few seconds to agree. "Can we wait until my clothes are dry?" I asked, in the calmest voice I could muster. He was a medical doctor, which I thought was pretty cool. And exciting. I had never met a gay doctor. He put me on my stomach, and before I knew it, he was done, wiped us both off, and we parted—unfortunately, he said, he had a hospital shift right away. He called me two days later and advised me to visit a health clinic to get tested for a sexually transmitted disease. I cannot remember which one. Just my luck, I thought, the very first time and I am catching a STD. I was a bit ashamed but not alarmed. This was six years before the spread of AIDS, and nobody seemed to make a big deal of viruses. And compared to my totally negative experience as a new member of the labor force, this sexual encounter was mildly pleasurable.

I was not very good at any of the jobs I had, though I should give myself credit for trying. Work was all about survival. If I was unemployed for more than a few days I had no money, so I had to take the next job available. If I was employed for more than a few days, the job became increasingly unbearable, but I had no time to search for a new

one. I bounced from one to another, like a football that takes oblique, unpredictable jumps.

Being fired felt as if an arrow were shot directly at my diminishing self-esteem. After all, I was a boy-with-a-college-degree. I had completed the six-week management-training course at Skipper's and was two weeks into the job when the boss fired me. Management training was pure exploitation, twelve to fourteen hours daily, six days a week. Did I move across the country to do this? By the end of my shifts, I was exhausted and apprehensive. I could not think, and I felt like l was running on autopilot—which I was. In the mornings I arrived first and had a protocol: open the door, take the chairs down from the tables, put clean oil in the fryer for the fish and French fries, empty the dishwasher, make sure plates, silverware, napkins, and condiments were available, make sure the scheduled deliveries had been made, call and re-order if not. As the other employees arrived, I took turns alternately cooking, taking orders, and cleaning the tables and floors, all the while supervising the others. At day's end I followed another protocol to close the restaurant: empty the oil in the deep fryer, clean the frying grid, the countertops, the tables, lift the chairs onto the tables, vacuum the floor, and check on orders for the following day. Turn the lights off, lock the doors.

On my first day off, the tenth day of the job, I rushed to the library to read up on some Marxian labor analysis. The texts were either too abstract or too filled with economic jargon, at any rate way over my head. But they helped me frame some relevant questions about what I was experiencing as an employee in the growing service sector. For instance, was working for a restaurant chain oriented to profit alone extracting "surplus value" that would otherwise belong to the farmers producing the food we served? Or was I, a manager, necessary to create value out of their products? And how was I to reconcile my sense of being exploited with being a manager who would be responsible for exploiting those for whom I was the boss?

I really disliked my boss, an abnormally normal kind of guy who smelled like he had bathed in cologne and wore a colorless suit and tie and a Big Ring to show he was Married Big Time. I wanted to be nothing like him. After two months, he called me into his office and asked, "Do you want this job?"

"Yes," I said, ambivalently disingenuous, "that's why I put so much work into completing the training."

"You know," he said, "you earn more here than you would in other jobs? And there is a clear path to promotions."

"Yes," I said meekly, avoiding his eyes.

And then he flung the pen in his hand onto the floor and banged his hand lightly on the desk. Shocked, my eyes followed his pen. Not knowing what to do, I obsequiously picked it up and put it back on his desk. I cringed as I did it but couldn't stop.

"You take no pride in this work, you don't put in the extra effort we expect from management, for this salary and this opportunity to rise in the company," he asserted.

"I'm sorry, that's all I have to give."

"It's not enough. We'll terminate your contract. Don't come back tomorrow," he replied sternly.

Despite resenting the job, I took the firing as a sign of my personal worthlessness. Living "from paycheck to paycheck" was suddenly more than an idiom. It was existential and made me question my very existence in Seattle. What was the meaning of all this? I had to limit myself to a midafternoon snack and one meal a day. But cutting food costs still didn't leave me enough to pay the rent and buy gas for my car. I left the car sitting on the street and walked or took the bus everywhere. I quit paying for its insurance. And then, one night, someone smashed the front windshield. Unable to afford a repair, I left the car sitting there for months.

This crash course in failure was a lesson in humility I'd wish on no one. Not that I had thought that highly of myself anyway. I saw only one option: return to my strength, to my farm roots, to my relation with animals. I was good with animals, and I liked them. No cattle this time, only horses. Find a stable where I could teach and ride, devote myself full time to dressage and three-day-eventing. And that is what I did, reluctantly but with all the energy I could muster over the next six years. I became a professional equestrian.

The Auction

First, I went back to Antigo. My parents were no longer capable of caring for the animals they had to feed daily. They both were now sixty-one—young, actually—but their farm bodies were already worn out. I felt sorry for them, and guilty for being unable or, better said, unwilling to step in. Without the labor of their children, the family farm was impossible to sustain. An auction to sell the animals and machinery was scheduled for the end of August, 1975.

I had been in Seattle for about fourteen months when they called and asked that I return. I dreaded the thought of going back so soon. Yet Bob and Marge called on the same day and suggested that, since I was not locked into a job and did not have children to care for, I should consider coming back to prepare for the auction. Our parents needed my help.

Although their needs were the immediate reason for my return, it was also an excuse to put my journey on pause. I needed a breather. My first year in Seattle had been a tough adventure. I hated to admit to myself how miserable I actually was. I had grown to love the city, but finding a decent place to live and a steady job had eluded me. The physical escape from Wisconsin was my only accomplishment. And I still had no end goal, no road map for my future.

Since I couldn't afford a return flight to Wisconsin, and gas was cheap, I drove the two and a half days and two nights back to Antigo in the same car I had driven away. This repetition was the last thing I wanted in my life. It seemed like a total defeat. On the way, I ate junk food and slept in the car, as I had on my initial trip to Seattle. From Washington through Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota, to Wisconsin, everything looked the same from the freeway. The airwaves had been made fully uniform from state to state. The only steady radio reception on AM was for Christian preachers, local news, and the same top twenty rock songs replayed on each station. There was one big difference from my trip out to the Pacific: I was returning broke, the money I had saved for the transition now gone.

I arrived late morning on a Tuesday; the auction set for Friday. Mom was in a panic, trying to keep Dad calm, and Dad was desperate, unprepared for this moment but aware of its finality. What it would mean was unclear. They still had the land and would have a small income from the sale of crops planted and harvested by someone else. In another year Mom could eventually collect social security, but not Dad, as he had been self-employed on the farm. Only she had paid in, when she worked as assistant cook at Crestwood Elementary School. That payment would be minimal. Maybe a hundred and fifty dollars a month. They hoped that they had saved enough and that, with the proceeds from the sale of the machinery and livestock, they could retire and live off that total available.

A firm that specialized in closeouts had been hired to prepare and conduct the live, on-site auction. By the mid-1970s, family farms were collapsing right and left, replaced first by medium-sized farms and then by corporate ones. Many of our neighbors had already sold their livestock

and farms, so they had no need for what was being sold. Many had passed away, and most of their children had left the area and moved to cities. So our neighbors did not show up for the auction. My siblings were all busy too, so they didn't show up either. On the day of the auction, I recognized no one among the buyers.

My job was to help with the liquidation of what had been accumulated over some thirty years of farming. I had to sort through all their farm possessions and put everything into categories so the auctioneer could move swiftly from one set of objects to another, to tag the objects before the sale and after purchase, and to clean things up after each sale. I knew where things were, so I was able to help the liquidation crew considerably in finding them. The auction company had already done a fair amount of preparation, with announcements in the media and flyers disseminated at agricultural goods stores in the area. It had spray-hosed the major pieces of equipment, installed one Porta Potty, and taken photos for a sales booklet. The morning before, I removed the electric fence and blocked off a section of the field behind the house for parking. After the first buyers arrived Mom locked our German shepherd in the house. Our loyal Queen, greying on her chin and around her eyes. At least she wasn't up for sale.

The event began with the sale of the last two horses we had bred and raised—both young and talented enough, I had thought, to have some value. On closer look, I was disappointed that they no longer looked special to me in any way. They were of average height and had good conformation, but on my six-month jaunt in Europe I had seen larger horses with much better gaits. I had taken a couple of challenging lessons at the German Olympic riding school in Warendorf and spent two mornings in Vienna watching the compact Lipizzaners in their training at the Spanish Riding.

Our horses were not bred for the longer, larger, more relaxed gaits demanded in dressage. They were Quarter Horses with some Arab blood, bred to herd cattle, to turn quickly and sprint, to take short strides. I had thought of them as better than they were. It was shocking to realize we had bred horses just a step above backyard ponies. My standards had changed, and I was saddened to discover our own horses were no longer of use to me. I was astonished I could hardly remember their names.

I quickly shifted my attention to the buyers. They appeared to have come for the equipment, not the animals. Nobody asked to ride the horses or even wanted to see them ridden. They sold quickly and for piddles. That

was devastating; I had to swallow my tears. I was certain they were headed to the slaughterhouse, worth more as pet food than as pets. Mom kept busy, running in and out of the house, fetching small things as needed by the auctioneer and his helpers. She looked so small. It never ceased to amaze me that this delicate woman had assumed the care for the animals and the children every time the family was endangered, and the farm was about to fall apart. She was still holding it all together. Dad was silent, struggling with his emotions.

Next came the remaining cattle, some twenty products of a failed experiment in conversion. They were beef cattle now, to be sure. No longer dairy cows. Good to eat, as in fact had been the dairy cattle, but that was all they were good for. They produced no milk but were also not made to reproduce themselves as optimal beef cattle, efficiently turning what they ate into good-tasting muscle and fat. For that there were better purebred stock: Black Angus, White Face, and Charolais, for example, were commonly bred in Wisconsin, and my father had in fact crossed his own Holstein dairy cows with Charolais bulls. Like the purebreds, our mixed-breed cattle were all slated for immediate slaughter, each pound of meat worth something. But certainly, they were not worth the costs of having raised them to this point. They sold with no haggling, and none of the rhythmic chant I had heard at auctions as a child. "Going once, going twice, sold!" was all I heard quickly repeated, never more than twice.

Dad stood and watched as the animals, the tools, and the small equipment went. Despite his reticence to talk about the liquidation, he still had the "gift of gab," as we called it. He managed to engage in small talk with other farmers and with a few of the potential buyers who had questions.

"How you doin', Joe?" asked my father.

"Good, good. We appreciate the weather today. How'd you make that happen, Ed?" Joe joked.

"I've been working on it, Joe. You still have all your livestock?" asked my father.

"My son, Dale, he's taking over, ya know. We're getting bigger, the only way to survive. Just bought another forty acres down the road from the Neigenfends," said Joe. "I thought I might bid on your combine. It looks pretty new."

The auctioneer saved the larger and more valuable machinery for last. That proved, surprisingly, the hardest for Dad to part with. Mom stayed in the kitchen for this final phase of the auction, unwilling to watch the

family's lifetime investment made available to the highest bidder. We knew that was all the auctioneer could do but were not prepared to see that the farm had lost nearly all value.

On neighboring family farms, either the possessions had been modernized, or corporations had taken over and expanded. Anonymous entities with numbered animals replaced the names of local people and their stock. Optimization to increase profits was the single principle that organized what had come to replace the family farm. The dairy cows themselves were bred to optimize production of milk, expediting immediate profits by shortening their lives. After only a few productive years, they were depleted and destined for the butcher. Mexican migrants were brought in to optimize the labor. The land, I assumed, would also be optimized with monocultural farming, a single crop depleting the soil to produce profits for a few productive years.

When the auctioneer turned to the large equipment, I could see Dad began to lose it. His eyes went blank, and, suddenly, he seemed no longer there. Wandering around aimlessly, his playful banter with the customers was gone. He avoided looking anybody in the eyes. I'm sure in that moment he wanted a drink, and I felt, for the very first time, that he needed it. For the plow, mower, planter, baler, combine, tiller, horse trailer, and truck, the auctioneer tried to create the mood that had escaped his efforts thus far. But the crowd lacked the density of bidders necessary for him to do his craft, to whip them into a buying frenzy.

His pitch was always the same. "Twenty-dollar bid, now thirty, now thirty, will ya gimme thirty? Thirty-dollar bid! Now forty, now forty, will ya gimme forty? Forty-dollar bid! Now sixty, sixty-dollar bid, now sixty, sixty, will ya gimme sixty?" The audience warmed some to his rhythm, which came across as a race for words he couldn't pronounce fast enough, only a few of which I understood. "Now eighty-dollar bid! Now eighty, now eighty. Going once, going twice, sold for eighty dollars!" The buyer retrieved his item and paid for it.

Dad stayed quiet, emotions still barely in check, until the tractors were announced. The auctioneer seemed to have a feel for this moment, yielding it to my father. The tractors were his pals. They had replaced Pat and Dick, the two draft horses who had done most of the rock clearing and logging that initially turned the forest into open fields. The tractors pulled the plow, the tiller, and the planters that made it possible to sow crops. They pulled the mower, the baler, and the combine that prepared the crops for storage. Without their heavy lifting there would have been

no harvest, no pastures for the cows to graze in after the harvest—no farm.

The auctioneer obliged Dad after he insisted on climbing up onto the tractors, slowing down the pace of the sale. It had been going so fast that we'd be done before noon. First the ancient, red-painted, odd-shaped three-wheeler. A Cockshutt 30 tractor that appeared to risk losing its balance when it moved forward, which I'd driven for hours with a rake behind it to gather the freshly mowed hay into rows to dry. Then the newer squat and square four-wheel Allis Chalmers with a forklift in the front. Dad started each tractor in turn. Batteries were good, engines were good, wheels were good. They ran as if he had purchased them yesterday. With tears running down his cheeks, he proudly motioned for the auctioneer to begin the bidding. It was the first time I could fully identify with his tears. It would have been unmanly to console a farmer in this desolate moment, so after he dismounted from the tractors nobody approached him. He stood alone and watched the sale close.

That night, Mom, Dad, and I were listless. It was like the cleanup after a fire. A fire sale. The skeleton of a farm remained—farmhouse, empty dairy barn, empty silo, empty horse shed, and a garage for many vehicles but containing a single car. Only the frames of buildings were left standing; the inside, the content, had been gutted.

The next day people came by to pick up purchases they had not been prepared to take with them after the sales. Bob came down from Wausau, Nancy and Judy from their homes nearby. They came by as if to a funeral wake, finally to console and comfort our parents, to say hello and goodbye to me. They were appreciative that I'd returned, and I was glad I had, but I also resented being put in this position, having to stop my life to step back into my childhood. I told myself I should be thankful for how my siblings had cared for our parents in my absence, never complaining, always checking in by phone if not in person, always ready to step in when needed, which freed me to be elsewhere. Their way of loving was not mine, and by most measures it was more. A few words were exchanged but there were no more tears.

"The weather cooperated," Bob said.

"Yup," replied Dad.

"The barn looks pretty cleaned out," said Nancy, "Everything will be gone in another couple days." It was back to life as usual or, for my parents, the end of business, the end of the family farm. They were truly on their own now, everything gone but themselves and Queen the dog, and

these now useless frames of farm buildings. The large house that had been provisioned for ten people but was now inhabited by two.

After a visit of merely five days that felt like several months, I left on a Sunday to return to Seattle. I had fulfilled my familial duties and with the sale of the farm felt freer than ever before. Nothing holding me back now except myself. The completion of the auction was a relief for my parents, even though they suffered a huge loss in the rummage sale of livestock and machinery. Their financial future was now as uncertain as it had been when, in 1936, they had first purchased the farm.

Gay in Seattle

On my first visit to a gay bar in Seattle, I walked past its door several times because I couldn't see its name or street number. It was dark, and its windows were covered to keep outsiders from looking in, so they passed by without knowing what was going on inside. That was the point: to keep their existence, which many people knew about, a secret. The first one I entered was Shelly's Leg, which had a big sign inside that read: Shelly's Leg is a Gay Bar. Bold, humorous, and shocking at the time. Once inside, I was greeted with friendly looks and the party went on. From the entrance, I could see a disco ball in the back shooting beams of light in every direction, and men and women dancing with abandon to Donna Summer and the Bee Gees.

A few years later, the Gloria Gaynor song "I Will Survive" spoke to my personal experience of what gay life and community meant: I exist! Young men and women from all over the country were moving to the city, eager to join a laid-back urban life surrounded by extraordinary nature. Seattle did not share the lure of San Francisco or New York. It had no gay-identified neighborhoods, no gay ghetto. Enclosure in a gay neighborhood provided a sense of safety in numbers, but it also carried with it some assumptions that I didn't share. I did not want a discrete identity, fixed and unchanging, nor did I want a totally gay experience. Even then, I did not want a simple identity that was stabilized in part by the exclusion of other desires and heterosexual friends.

For a few months I joined a men's group that sought to do for men what women's groups had done for women: raise our consciousness. We questioned the sources of our own masculinity and femininity. In my group, the radical fairies were intolerant of the bisexuals, the bisexuals seemed intimidated by their criticism, and the married men felt they

were in the wrong place. There were certainly other groups that acknowledged the central ambivalence within each sexuality, and I heard from friends that their groups were handling this struggle well. I felt sorry for the married man with children who didn't want to stay in his marriage and had joined us in the hope that other men could help him. We couldn't. The others in the group treated him like an unwelcome ghost from the past, someone left behind. It was true that the masculinity he had achieved made him incapable of empathizing with the problems of others. I didn't find him unsympathetic, though my overwhelming feeling was relief that I had avoided going down his path.

At a poetry reading, I met Ricky Rankin, who wanted to be a gay writer and introduced me to the happenings in the emerging gay culture. We shared the joy of reading so much excellent gay literature and history being published at the time: by John Boswell, Mary Renault, Andrew Holleran, Larry Kramer, Armistead Maupin, John Rechy, Rita Mae Brown. Ricky read his poetry at breakneck speed, very stream-of-consciousness, hilarious and contemplative in places, incomprehensible in others. But because of the speed, his readings created a manic, ecstatic mood in which I felt elevated. If we were in a group and there was a moment of silence, he liked to take charge and ask, "Can anyone guess who is a writer here?" I loved and learned from his spirit, his courage, his ability to include everyone, his refusal to be anyone but himself.

Ricky invited me to an event of the Tacky Tourist Cruise Club, which he had co-founded. The name was a parody of the 700 Club, a pioneering televangelist program that presented the news from a biblical perspective while entertaining with Christian singing, testimonies to Christ, attacks on the devilish things in life, and upbeat interviews. My gay friends and I joked about the hosts, Jimmy and Tammy Faye Bakker, the money they made from milking true believers, and their campy marriage, long before Jimmy was accused of hitting on a young man who worked for the ministry. In fact, we joked about everything religious. Ricky, in his plays, especially loved nuns in their habits. The mainstream religions were so intent on keeping us in the closet, if they couldn't put us in jail, that we showed them no mercy.

For the cruise, about a hundred men gathered at a pier in Elliot Bay near Pike Place Market to board a ship and enter Lavender Valley High School, Home of the Fighting Poodles. The theme for that year was The Prom You Never Went To, and as soon as we boarded the ship, we were told to pick a date for a photo—as if we had picked each other for the

prom. I can't recall my date's name now, but I do remember his red hair and slim build. This was our chance to dance, drink, look fabulous, and have a lot more fun than we could have ever imagined if we'd gone to the real high school prom.

While waiting to board, we met an equally large group of well-dressed older Norwegian couples, members of the Norwegian Commercial Club. Seattle had a neighborhood, Ballard, settled by Scandinavians. Despite the difference in dress and our lack of wives, they were friendly to us, and we chatted them up.

"Oh, so you're Norwegian immigrants?"

"Proud third generation!"

"I hear you're working to promote trade with Norway. What kind of things do you trade?"

"We import a lot of fish and seafood, technologically advanced ships, and recently we started importing oil and gas."

"That's impressive! Do you trade any other lubricants than oil?"

"Huh?"

"I've heard that the Norwegian Club promotes hospitality to Norwegians visiting Seattle."

"Yes, we do. We have a welcoming committee."

"Do you also introduce them to gay life here?"

"Hm?"

This was the mid-to-late-1970s in Seattle, after the student and hippie rebellion of the previous decade. The Vietnam War was finally over, and in retrospect, this calmer period was filled with quiet experimentation and the building of institutions and communities. Gay men and lesbians worked with the women's movement, pumping new life into Seattle's staid neighborhoods. New immigrants, though few, also began to open restaurants serving their own cuisines. I was treated to South Asian, Ethiopian, and Japanese.

Aqua Barn Ranch

As planned, if reluctantly, I returned to riding in 1975, wrong in my assumption that a college education would give me a leg up in white-collar work. To motivate myself to return to working with animals, I set a lofty goal: to participate in the more demanding and intellectual equestrian sports, the Olympic ones. I would have nothing to do with the American

tradition of Western riding. Practically, however, I had no money to buy a horse for myself, no boots, no jodhpurs, no saddle, no bridles, no local reputation as a trainer or instructor.

Aqua Barn Ranch was across from the Maplewood Golf Course in Renton, a half-hour's drive south of Seattle. In the front along the busy highway was a huge lighted billboard declaring: "Babies Can Swim." That was the key to Jack and Laverne Riley's business. They had a large covered and heated swimming pool in front, with a run-down stable behind. It was well known as the only establishment at the time that schooled new mothers in how to teach their babies to swim. The classes were always booked full, and the rest of the time the pool was available for open swimming, with one night reserved weekly for men-only (nude) swimming and sauna.

The stable had an indoor arena of decent size with four large upright poles near the corners holding up the ceiling. There were stalls for the horses on one side, and a mile-long field behind the arena. The upright poles made the arena awkward to do dressage figures, but this stable with an arena had the advantage to horse owners of being cheap and close to the city. People paid to board their horses there and to use the odd-shaped arena, and they could ride in the trails all summer. The ranch needed an instructor who could step in right away. Jack wanted me to create a clientele and expected I would quickly develop a loyal following of students. Unfortunately, I thought, the equestrian sports—dressage, combined training, show jumping—would initially have to take a back seat to the daily demands of running a stable, mucking stalls, feeding the horses, and teaching people wanting primarily to know how to sit on a horse in an English saddle and to ride without getting hurt.

The most pleasurable aspect of teaching, I found, was motivating the horses and riders to communicate with each other. I was fascinated with the nuances of inter-species communication. Both horse and rider tend to assume they are communicating not with individuals but with generic breeds or species. But there is no generic horse, and no generic rider. The key to riding is to develop a relationship between two very different characters. My job, as I saw it, was to improve communication between them by teaching the riders, who had different temperaments and habits, how their particular horses saw and treated them, and helping them understand how different horses took advantage of them, or not.

At Aqua Barn, I had for use six stable horses, and each was supposed to be available for three to four hours of lessons a day. By the third lesson,

most were tired and less generous to their riders. I had to stand in the middle with a long lunge whip and occasionally crack it lightly or swish it around on the ground to encourage the horses to move at a brisker pace, or sometimes to move at all. Horses have amusing quirks, as do riders. And much as I was a teacher to aspiring riders, so were the many stable horses. We were in this together. Each horse had its own mind on how to instruct the many different kinds of characters who came to learn from them how to ride. That is, the riders and horses had different lessons for each other in mind. In one sense, the horse and rider are always engaged in training each other, and I was present as an external, independent supervisor for both.

Take Lover Boy. Usually obedient and calm, he had a habit of hugging the wall when circling around the indoor arena, while most other horses wanted to cut corners to spare energy. He did this because of a perverse but totally rational calculation: an unsuspecting rider's knee would occasionally scrape against the wall, resulting in up to fifteen minutes of total rest while they recovered. The pain could temporarily take the riders' breath away and leave them intimidated for weeks or months. For most riders, this made them wary, at least temporarily, of trusting any horse. Lover Boy, however, did what he could to maximize his rest.

Take Lopez. Endearing eyes, as large and kind as a Jersey cow, betrayed a calculating temperament. He tried to totally ignore his riders. He watched only me and my scary lunge whip, for the whole lesson. When I looked away, he slowed to a crawl regardless of what the rider did. As soon I looked at him, he picked up speed and watched closely to see if I lifted the whip before accelerating his pace.

Take Dixie. A big-bellied pinto who had obviously been starved as a young horse. She had a mean streak when it came to other horses but a heart of gold when it came to riders. Incredibly generous, she would do anything asked of her: boldly jump over any log or obstacle, run through a stream as if there were no water there, move at brisk paces even when she was tired and even when the rider was inept about how to ride. She had nerves of steel and never seemed to lack energy or stamina. But when it came to eating in a group, Dixie's history of hunger erupted with violence. She feared she would never get enough, so she pinned her ears flat back, and with mouth open and teeth showing chased any competitor away from the food. Once I remember the horses broke into the grain bin at night. We discovered Dixie the following morning, head dropped, eyes dead, breathing heavily. She was the only one of the grain thieves who had eaten herself sick.

Students arrived with the same sort of variation in character. Dale, a fifteen-year-old who took weekly lessons with a group of boys and girls from an orphanage, was always trying to cause trouble. He just liked to be naughty and bully the other boys, playing tricks on them by feeding on their insecurities about the size or inscrutable nature of the horses they were riding. "Watch out, he wants to step on your feet!" was one warning he yelled at the beginning of each lesson that was sure to increase the anxiety of the other riders as they prepared to mount. He'd smile as the others would approach their steeds with trepidation. Once seated on a horse himself, Dale was fearless, but also inconsiderate, forever the bully wanting to kick or hit his mount into submission. Yet he was very fond of horses. He was always the first in line to select which horse to ride, and the last to show up when it was time to return to the orphanage.

I took him aside one day when he was harassing the other riders and tried to trick him into good behavior: "Dale, you are a very talented rider so I want you to come to the center with me and help me teach the other students." Dale acted as if he knew this all along and proudly came to stand next to me, so very pleased with himself, for once not being criticized for bad behavior.

My compliment brought out his hidden charm. After that, he never left my side and, with his courage and boldness, was eager to step in to stop a horse if another rider could not, or adjust a saddle girth that was too loose. His new behavior gave the others confidence that they could also handle unexpected situations. And it gave me confidence, perhaps for the first time, that I could handle his kind of troubled masculinity—insecure, aggressive, dominating—without resorting to the same traits to discipline him. I could instead seduce him to learn and teach him something by simply being kind and encouraging, praising whatever kernel of goodness and worth he had in him. And I needn't be threatening or diminishing of him, or effacing of myself.

Some students had higher aspirations than merely to circle in an arena or trail ride safely, and they trailered their own horses to the stable for lessons. For them, I organized a "Pony Club," after the British model, to collectively educate young riders on horse care and equestrian skills. Several of the mothers took over its leadership and became close friends. One was Evonne, who brought her daughter Camy for instruction. Evonne and I became friends and would occasionally drive to Seattle to see a play together, or she'd invite me to her house and I'd drive over for coffee or lunch. Once I took her to a poetry reading by my friend Ricky in Seattle.

Evonne had a quiet and calming presence, and was an attentive listener, traits that Camy took over and that served her well as a rider. Evonne initially bought an energetic ten-year-old grey Lipizzaner gelding for Camy to ride. He had very regular gaits, but his short back made his trot difficult to sit and he was temperamentally sensitive. With her good seat and quiet hands, Camy was able to reassure him. Being so young and inexperienced, her problem was not knowing how to deal with his intelligence. He knew more than she did and occasionally liked to outwit his rider. Especially when it came to jumping. With no warning, he'd stop in front of the fence. Camy learned a great deal from him, like how to stay on a clever horse that stops in front of fences. She was usually able to ride him in a manner that embodied the dressage principle of willing obedience.

At Aqua Barn, I organized competitions among the students, some using their own horses, others using stable horses. All events were organized at the beginner level of dressage and jumping. With the help of an ex-prisoner on parole who worked for Jack, we built some jumps and a whole cross-country course for teaching. The stable was suddenly lively, my classes filled, and weekends outside of the cold winter months were taken up with riding clinics, dressage competitions, and jumping events.

To inspire the young riders to think of dressage as not simply a sport but also an art, I organized several freestyle dressage competitions. For the younger students, I organized a Kür, a freestyle dressage competition, where the artistic qualities of the horse's movements are encouraged. Some had their own horses but were still not advanced riders, just learning basics such as what it meant to stretch the horse's back, to establish regularity in its gaits, or to make the horse move with more impulsion. I also opened the competition to those without horses, who were just learning to ride well, by making our stable horses available. They were obviously disadvantaged compared to those who brought their own horses, but for me the point was not winning the competition but being able to participate and improve their riding skills.

Riders could select their own music—pop, rock, jazz, classical—with the only condition that it have a good beat and a pronounced rhythm. In a test, the students were to synchronize the horse's three gaits—four-beat walk, two-beat trot, three-beat canter—going both directions with a particular five-minute musical score. It was an image of harmony between horse and rider in motion to music. At its best, this was clearly something like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing, like what I had

first seen as a child in that dressage performance at the Langlade County Fair. That elegant performance stayed with me through the years, creating a wholly new imaginative realm about what it means to communicate with a horse. It pleased me that I might be able to introduce my students to the same enthusiasm.

Camy was one of those who participated. As she rode in on her grey Lipizzaner, it was clear that the music she had chosen—some classical western that I can't recall—moved her emotionally. By now she had an image of what dressage movements should look like, and she did her best to simulate this image. In reality, at this level of riding and with these particular horses, performances were simply about the basics of balance and rhythm, to move the horse as if listening to a metronome. To dance to music, however, the horses needed more rhythmic energy than the stable horses had. Camy had an advantage in that the Lipizzaner had natural rhythm and balance, and with her excellent seat and hands, rider and horse were a model of correctness and harmony.

Most of the students rode our school horses: Beauty, Lopez, Dixie, Lover Boy, and others. For beginners, a lethargic horse is generally preferable to an excitable one. But without impulsion—powerful forward movement—the gaits look like a dancer dragging his feet. The entire event was far below the minimal expectations of even most amateur dressage riders, and I watched with a weird mix of embarrassment, shame, and pride. I continued the competitions solely because I thought of them as aspirational. Most of the riders accepted the challenge, even though it was impossible for them and the horses to come anywhere near the aspiration. My own explanations were undoubtedly way over their heads, but I was content if they helped to motivate only a few riders to improve.

This very humbling experience of the freestyle was itself, I thought, an important part of the instruction to become a good rider. With rubber instead of leather riding boots, rock or classical music grossly out of sync with the horse's irregular gaits, in a dingy, dusty arena with poles in odd places that prevented riders from making round circles, an aesthetically pleasing performance was pure aspiration, an illusion far removed from that on which it was modeled.

As an equestrian teacher, my aspirations far exceeded my reality, but that didn't stop me from pursuing them. I initially competed on an elegant-looking black thoroughbred stable horse with mediocre gaits whom I had convinced Jack to buy. I rode him in some competitions outside the stable with breeches stitched together out of old cotton pants and resewn at the lower leg to fit inside my own rubber boots—much as I

had done as a teenager in Wisconsin. Although his gaits were mediocre, I was able to keep them regular and balanced much as Camy had done with her Lipizzaner, making a good first impression on the judge and other riders. So began my equestrian career.

My Second Marriage

Looking back, I regret that my younger self couldn't see the beauty in love's risk. Sure, I had crushes, but I wanted the love of men like I wanted a unicorn—it seemed magical and utterly unattainable. I thought I'd have to morph into someone else entirely to find love, like some romantic shapeshifter. Everyone I knew was trying so hard to be abnormally normal, to bask in the affirming circularity of "I am who I am." It was exhausting just to watch. Me? I couldn't orient myself to normality if you gave me a compass and a map. I knew deep down that a "normal" life would suit me about as well as a straitjacket. Near the end of my teens my mother had married me to a horse, after all. That union, while intimate and certainly amusing, was thankfully nonsexual. It nonetheless deserves a rightful spot in the anthropological *Pantheon of Queer Marriages*, alongside the people who've claimed to wed their birds, dogs, cats, goats, or even the occasional djinn and ghost.

My second marriage took place in 1977 in Seattle, during my time at Aqua Barn Ranch. On my wedding day in the back pasture, there was an overcast sky and slight drizzle—Seattle's classic Mount-Rainier-is-missing vibe. It was the perfect setting for a double wedding…on horseback. Because obviously, I was a riding instructor, and who wouldn't want to gallop into marital bliss on a beast of burden?

One of my students, Elisabeth-from-Sweden, had visa troubles. She needed a green card and told me she might have to return to Sweden. Without a moment's hesitation, I agreed to marry her. My motivation? It was more of a "Yeah, sure, why not, she needs help" sort of decision than anything else. Elisabeth then informed me that her boyfriend, Birger-from-Sweden, also needed a green card. I proposed Rosie, the stable's farrier, as his bride. Full-bosomed, corpulent, funny, Rosie was one of those women who looked like she should've had a harem of suitors but didn't. Fiercely independent and single, with no intention of marrying, she still indicated an interest in men but quickly rebuffed advances. Suspicious? When I asked if she'd marry Birger, she took a few days and

came back enthusiastic, "Sure, why not?" We decided it should be done as soon as possible.

The wedding day was spectacularly absurd. For our double wedding on horseback, Elisabeth and I wore classic dressage gear: black jackets, jodhpurs, knee-high boots, and top hats. She jazzed it up with a makeshift veil, because when you're faking a marriage for a green card, you still gotta look fabulous. Rosie, on the other hand, wore a Salvation Army wedding dress that draped all the way back to the tail of her horse.

The horses? Mine was an easy-going, talented chestnut-colored mare I had named Myra Breckenridge, after a transvestite in the Gore Vidal novel of that name. Elisabeth rode Dunny, one of our calm school horses. Birger rode—sat on would be more accurate, as he couldn't ride—the sullen Lover Boy, and Rosie, who also couldn't ride, sat on the lazy moon-eyed Lopez: two horses that preferred to be in a permanent state of rest.

We had quite the eclectic guest list, all friends I invited by telephone the week before and promised a truly novel and quick ceremony—no gifts, please. They all came. Riding instructors, riding students, the parents of riding students, ex-lovers, friends from the city, a poet, a playwright, gay men, and my current roommates—a model and a TV addict.

Another friend, Mark, a Vietnam vet, served as our minister and came with his German wife Gudi, a close friend who dressed as a Native American. Ordained by the Universal Life Church, Mark claimed he'd performed marriages several times already and that Washington state would recognize ours. Attired in a black robe, he looked like a dashing Catholic priest with his dark curly hair escaping in places from his wide-rimmed black hat. I seated him on Beauty, a gentle chocolate-colored mare with a large white blaze running down her forehead. Mark took us through our vows and pronounced us man and wife—twice, because it was a double wedding, of course.

By then, the steady drizzle had turned into a thunderstorm that lasted about ten minutes and thoroughly drenched us. In the lull after the storm, the skies opened and Elisabeth and I took a victory gallop down the field, as planned. Her veil flew off, exciting the other horses—being herd animals, they wanted to join their friends. Rosie freaked out, and Birger's horse looked like it was contemplating its life choices. The guests? They didn't know what hit them.

After the victory gallop, we gathered between the horse stalls in the barn, everyone talking, no one wanting to leave. So, naturally, my roommates invited the entire crew back to our tiny cement-block house. Cars

Figure 9. Wedding on Horseback

Figure 10. Victory Gallop

filled the whole block. Our guests were confronted with a barren kitchen and no food, no drinks, no music. Someone took up a collection for pizza, someone else for beer. Someone spun a vinyl record on the turntable of Boz Scaggs's *Greatest Hits Live*. People milled around. I could hear unconnected conversations, none of which I remember participating in. My friends seemed to accommodate themselves better to the weirdness of the event than I, treating me as if I was just another guest.

Exhausted and confused, I sat down and withdrew. I kept asking myself what the hell I was doing here. On reflection, the wedding seemed to be an experience of conceptual art, performances of which circulated in their newness in Seattle at the time. A Seattle theater that staged a Maoist detainment camp introduced me to this concept. We, the audience, were the prisoners, the actors were the wardens and administrators. The wardens brutally rushed us through certain rooms for reeducation in a simulated experience of terror. Was the idea behind the art to produce this experience? I was puzzled about what experience this wedding was supposed to produce. Was it about reeducation? For others to share in working through my confusion?

My parents and siblings were also confused. I had informed my parents and three of my sisters immediately got together to call me:

"Mom said you are getting married. Congratulations!" said Nancy enthusiastically.

"It's no big thing," I replied. "I am marrying her because she needs a green card." They had probably never heard of a green card, but I offered no explanation.

Judy continued, "What is her name?"

"Elisabeth," I said. Silence. "She's from Sweden."

"How did you meet her," asked Judy.

"She is a riding student of mine,"

Mary asked, "Tell us what we can get you as a gift? We want to buy you a wedding present."

"How about a toaster?" I joked.

About a year later, the INS called us all in for an interview on the same day, but we were treated as two separate newly married couples. My bride Elisabeth and I cruised through our immigration interview like seasoned pros—smiling at each other, holding hands, pretending to be a couple in love.

The INS officer sat behind her desk in a small room and pulled our filed out from a tall stack of papers while she talked. "Where did you meet?" she asked.

"At the stable where I work. Elisabeth was one of my riding students!" I proudly declared. "We both ride dressage." I opened the photo album we'd prepared and pushed it across the desk: pictures of us celebrating at a picnic with Gudi and Mark, a stroll on the beach together, a few Polaroids taken in a booth where we hammed it up in variations of frowns, smiles, and sadly drawn faces.

The officer nodded and smiled, then asked, "What are you planning next?"

Elisabeth explained her plans to work at a museum, where she currently was volunteering, with their textile collection. I said I planned to continue teaching dressage. We thanked her for the interview and left the room.

Rosie and Birger weren't so lucky. They were separated and sent to different rooms, each with their own officer. Their interview went south as soon as the officers warned them of penalties for marriage fraud: a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of more than $100,000. Apparently, I reasoned afterward, they don't trust an American woman marrying a foreign man, even when he's a white northern European. The first question followed: "What's the color of your husband's toothbrush?" Flustered, Rosie cracked faster than an overcooked egg and confessed the whole charade. Confronted with her statement, Birger admitted to the fraud. They gave him a month to prepare for deportation. Elisabeth and I waited a month before filing for divorce. All we had to claim was incompatibility.

My parents visited me, on their own initiative, the following year—the first time they'd ever flown. My father was not drinking at the time, and so fastidious about attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings that he and Mom went to one the day after they arrived. They returned in the evening, nearly euphoric over the friendly reception.

The next day, while I was working at the stable, they apparently noticed the gay literature lying on an end-table by the couch. That evening, Dad approached me and declared, "John, we have to ask you something."

"Okayyyyy," I said.

"Are you a lesbian?"

I could not prevent a big smile from spreading across my face, not the reaction I had anticipated. But I pulled myself together and responded as matter-of-factly as possible: "No, I am homosexual."

Ever the smarty-pants when it came to my parents. I also suspected that they had never uttered the word "gay," which was still not used in

print in newspapers or on radio or television. *The New York Times* lifted its ban on the use of the concept "gay" ten years later, in 1987, and only then did small-town newspapers like the *Antigo Daily Journal*, which my parents read, slowly follow suit. But "lesbian" was a word in common use, as was "homosexual." Dad had heard "lesbian" somewhere and probably thought it the more innocuous of the two terms. I made the small correction.

"Well, we want you to know that we love you and want you to do whatever makes you happy. But we do not want you to tell your brother and sisters, and we will not tell them," said my father. "I don't know if they are ready for this." While he was wrong about my siblings, he'd correctly assessed the country. It took another thirty-six years, until 2015, before the US Supreme Court decided that same-sex couples could marry.

Though marriage was out of the question, I fell in love twice during these years in Seattle. This possibility had been beyond my imagination earlier in my life. When I was eleven, our teacher asked us to discuss Alfred Lord Tennyson's adage: "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." I was the only student who had disagreed: "I think it's better never to have loved." The others looked at me like I was some kind of weird duck.

I met both men through the ranch. The first shared my name and had moved from Idaho to take a veterinary class. He came with two dogs that slept in the back of his truck and two horses that he boarded at the ranch. We saw each other every day in the early evening, and soon I was either sleeping on an extra bed in his room or he was driving to Seattle with his dogs and sleeping on my sofa. It was kind of a *Broke Back Mountain* thing: we didn't confide in anyone, but we really basked in each other's presence. Or at least I did in his. He didn't want to stay in Seattle long, and as he told me more about himself, he revealed that he'd fled a relationship with a woman in Idaho, and before that, he'd fled his father's ranch in California. His indecisiveness made lasting love, or what I thought of as love, impossible. One day he left, and I went into mourning. It took me a year to recover and become intimate with another man.

The second was Jack, a sixth-grade teacher who approached me at the stables for lessons in dressage and jumping. I loved everything about him. His looks. His smell, even though he smoked. His voice. His kindness. But even before our affair began—which, of course, we kept secret from those around me—it was over. He confided that he liked older men, about twenty years older. I was six years his junior. We remained

close friends, and he would visit me in the city once a week and we'd go to a movie or some event. I learned that love is not reciprocal, that people rarely share the same sense of reciprocity. This breakup really depressed me. Jack almost made me regret my negation of Tennyson's proverb. It took me another seventeen years to open up to love again.

Dream of the Murder

It had been three years since I had chosen riding as my next employment adventure. I rose early every morning, six days a week, to drive a half hour from Seattle to Aqua Barn Ranch, where I rode, instructed, fed the horses, and mucked the stalls. On Sundays, I frequently had competitions, either for myself or my students, and sometimes I worked as a judge at dressage shows. They were unusually long days; when teaching, my last class was over at nine at night. And then the drive home, and a quick meal, if anything was available at home that didn't cost much. Although I felt reassured that I could do the job, that I was needed, that students and my employer appreciated me, I seemed to be stuck in the equestrian world and yearned for more intellectual activity. I loved riding and enjoyed my students, but I was unsure of where my life was headed, and I wasn't convinced I would want this kind of physically grueling and financially unrewarding work after I turned fifty or sixty.

At night another scary repetitive dream addressed an issue similar to my childhood nightmare, that of connection to people and detachment from place. But this one visited me with an even more extreme poignancy than the childhood dream of hurtling forward with increasing speed into an empty space.

In this dream, I was alarmed to discover a body in the garbage compartment under my kitchen sink. The more I thought about this body, the more I freaked out. I asked myself questions, puzzling, unanswerable questions; they piled up, smothering me in anxiety. Whose was this body? How did it get there? What should I do with it? Should I call the police? Will they arrest me?

Panicking, I carried the body to my car and shoved it in the trunk, much as actors do in crime thrillers. But now: How to dispose of it? Where should I take it? I entertained the frightening thought, in the dream, that since I had no experience in body removal, I was at an impasse. No place to get rid of it. I hopped in the car and just kept driving into nowhere in the dark, approaching early morning before daylight

fully arrived, on tree-lined unpaved country roads, gravel hissing under spinning wheels, until my inability to answer these questions awoke me.

At the ranch several days later, a lesson had been scheduled for Evonne's daughter Camy. She had sold her Lipizzaner and purchased a new horse, sorrel-colored with white stockings and a white blaze running down his head. He was tall and clumsy, and didn't appear particularly energetic, but he had good gaits and a willing temperament. And he was willing to jump. Despite his size, Camy trusted him, in contrast to her relationship with her old horse, who was crafty and, if Camy wasn't always attentive, knowingly evaded her control.

In this lesson, we worked on getting her horse to pick up his legs more by trotting over poles on the ground, then jumping over a pole two feet off the ground. Once, he didn't take the pole seriously and stumbled, falling to his knees. Camy and Evonne were alarmed, though I wasn't, as I'd seen this before. I looked at the horse's knees, which were not bruised, and asked Camy if she was okay, which she was. I told her, "This happens all the time. I know it's tough, but he's learning from you, how to take care of you. You have to get back on and we'll do this a few more times." We were all still a bit shaken but ended in a positive note. Evonne then drove Camy home.

That night Evonne and I were scheduled to see a play: Sam Shephard's *Buried Child*, in its premiere at the Seattle Rep. Evonne came to pick me up at the ranch, and we drove on the busy freeway to the theater. I appreciated not having to drive, and though tired, much looked forward to the play and a break from the equestrian world. In *Buried Child*, a murdered child haunts the characters and their interactions. What it illuminates could not have been closer to home: the imploding of the American nuclear family, alcoholism, the end of the American Dream, the loss of vitality in rural America, the rejection and flight from home, the fated search for a new life. This insight occurs to me in retrospect. At the time I could only guess what the play was about. I did not think it was about me.

On the drive home, Evonne's large truck seated us high above the road, in contrast to the close-to-the-ground seating in the tiny Honda I owned. She drove it with caution, which gave me a feeling of security. We continued without saying much, past some new skyscrapers in the city center with Puget Sound to our right and then past the abandoned warehouses further to the south. I guess we were literally speechless after leaving the theater and shared only an unsettled silence.

Then I told her of my dream—obviously a premonition of the play. I described the body under the sink and in the trunk of the car. I described my inability to dispose of the corpse in the night, and my fear of being discovered with it in daylight. Evonne said, "Why John, that body is you."

"You are so right," I replied. "Why couldn't I see that?" I was dissatisfied with myself and trying to get rid of my own body. One murder had already occurred, the murder of the farmboy. Was this the murder of the equestrian? In many ways, that farmboy was not killed but left to die, abandoned for another life. Although now a corpse, his body survived, and my attempt to dispose of the corpse had failed. Perhaps the corpse was not only the farmboy but also what he had become, the equestrian. Perhaps there was no place to dump it, says the dream work in its wisdom, no place to put it past me or under the ground. I was being counseled to make room for these past selves, with no alternative than to carry them within me.

PART THREE

BECOMING AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

Riding—Not Writing—Instructor

During the first gathering of Harvard's entering anthropology graduate cohort in 1983, Stanley Tambiah took us to the cafeteria in William James Hall and treated us to coffee. An imposing figure with a commanding baritone voice, he was renowned for his expertise in Thai religion, ritual, and politics. Tamby, as he wished to be called, was of Tamil heritage, born and educated in Sri Lanka before holding esteemed academic appointments at Cambridge, the University of Chicago, now Harvard. As he introduced us to one another—we were only five—he made a few comments about our paths to Harvard. Where were we coming from, and in what country and in what subfield did we want to work? When it came to my introduction, he proclaimed, "This is John Borneman, a writing instructor from Seattle. You other students surely have something to learn from him."

I could feel my serious expression soften as if revealing a secret I'd not wanted to hide. I gently corrected him, "You mean a *riding* instructor; I worked with horses."

Tamby glanced down and looked as if he didn't know whether to smile or to correct what he'd said. So he just continued to talk, introducing the other students as if there was no need for a correction. The other students, in turn, who also didn't know what to make of this, avoided any immediate acknowledgment.

That was September 1983, and, indeed, Tambiah was onto something but had understandably confused the details. I was entering the world of writing, not coming from it, and it remained unclear how the world of riding was relevant to this one. Graduate study was one of those idealist choices I had made to pursue my passions, without heeding pragmatic considerations that might otherwise counsel caution. I could no longer conceive of a future earning a living by correcting a rider's posture on a horse.

Only four months before, I had abandoned horse riding and embarked on the cross-country journey from Seattle to Cambridge with all my belongings, excluding saddle, bridles, and other horse equipment, to commence my graduate studies. It marked a poignant farewell. Over the last eight years in Seattle, I had expanded my activities well beyond the horse world and formed many friendships in diverse communities. Leaving behind this vibrant adopted home and cherished friends—equestrians, academics, new friends, friends from my Wisconsin undergraduate days, gay friends, and former lovers—proved a challenge. I knew I was losing something but didn't know what it would mean. These were connections I had assiduously cultivated and genuinely loved, thinking of them in the terms of Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften*: relations of elective affinity—or, in the now-well-known phrasing, as a family chosen rather than one of blood.

The idea of graduate study as such had emerged after a stint volunteering for the reelection campaign of a Washington state congressman from Seattle. He caught me off-guard with the casual question, "What would you like to do?"

I had anticipated he would assign me a task, so I meekly asked, "Where do you need help?"

"You could edit the monthly newsletter or dive into campaign finance; both areas need attention."

"Actually, I'm interested in speechwriting," I blurted out.

With a nod he offered a few themes around which he wanted me to write a few paragraphs. The following week, I reluctantly handed over what I'd penned, sure that my prose fell far short of his expectations.

His critical response was to the point: "Mine is a local campaign for a congressional district, you're pitching ideas for a national audience."

Lacking any training or experience, I sought guidance by entering graduate study in political science at the University of Washington. I enrolled in 1980, hoping I could learn what was necessary to change

careers. Juggling graduate courses and teaching assistant duties three days a week, I arranged my stable visits around my university commitments. Either in the mornings or in the late afternoons, I drove five times a week to ride the horses I still owned and continued their training while giving a few riding lessons. I did all of this with enthusiasm and never felt squeezed for time. In riding, I was concentrating on training my four-year-old thoroughbred gelding Cadiz, who I hoped to ride in an Olympic trial for Three-day-events the following year.

At Washington I took the required courses in political theory and quantitative methods for first-year students in politics, as well as elective courses in the communications department, on rhetoric and filmmaking techniques. Unexpectedly, my performance caught the attention of two professors who told me the university wasn't the place to learn speechwriting. They encouraged me to apply to anthropology programs at prestigious universities. This suggestion was quite a shock. I had never imagined such a future for myself.

One of the professors, Dan Lev, was a specialist on Indonesian courts within the field of comparative politics. He was so impressed by a brief commentary on comparative methods that I submitted that he requested I read it aloud to my peers. Flustered, I turned red, not at all confident that my thoughts deserved such attention.

"You really want me to read it?"

"Yes, yes," he insisted, "please read it."

The discussion that followed did not help me understand why Lev thought my essay was worth reading. After class I reread it and could find only one possible distinction from other student responses. I had compared the ethics of statistical comparison versus the ethics of comparisons of actual people's or groups' experiences.

The other professor, Andreas Teuber, had a doctorate in philosophy but taught political theory, and I worked as one of his teaching assistants. "What makes you think I could get into an anthropology program at an elite university given my background as a riding instructor?" I asked.

Teuber responded emphatically, "You think like an anthropologist."

Lev, when faced with the same query, confidently affirmed, "You'll get in."

My application process took a disappointing turn when letters from several private universities arrived in the mail and informed me, "regretfully," that I was not accepted into their programs. What about Teuber's optimism and Lev's assertion, "You'll get in?" Were they wrong in their

assessment of my potential? The formal letters left me feeling disheartened and puzzled, offering no clues into the reasons behind the rejections. When I later commiserated with a friend, she told me of receiving a rejection letter from a university two years in a row, and in the second year she hadn't even applied. Her story lightened my mood and saved me from a sense of defeat. I reframed the uncertainty of the process into a simple question: what are my next steps?

During the subsequent summer, I embarked on dual preparations. First, I devoted myself to preparing for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Up until then I had perceived these tests as assessments of innate intelligence and had never prepped for them. Unbeknownst to me, they were constructed based on models of language and knowledge typically associated with the upper middle-class, encompassing high art and literature, and a certain proficiency in the art of test-taking itself. I had clearly been competing out of my league.

Recognizing this, I acquired a well-worn *Baron's GRE* prep book. Amid my responsibilities as a riding instructor and training a horse for Olympic trials, alongside graduate courses and working as a teaching assistant at the University of Washington, I dedicated my evenings and spare moments to rigorous practice. I tackled practice tests, familiarizing myself with the vocabularies, analogies, metaphors, and case studies embedded in the GRE.

It was evident that most of my high-achieving peers had acquired large vocabularies and specialized knowledge through private schooling or within their own university-educated families. I was essentially learning how to excel at test-taking itself, and it was fun. I was being introduced to some of the rules behind academic learning: correct syntax, extensive vocabularies, pacing, familiarity with analogies, and games in logic that I had taken for granted. This effort elevated my scores dramatically, ascending from the 89th percentile to a striking 97th percentile in verbal reasoning and analytic writing—crucial areas in the humanities.

The second step I took was to meticulously scrub my resume and personal statement, ensuring they contained no allusions or references to my sexuality. Despite being deeply involved in opening the closet, actively participating in gay-related activities and even co-organizing Seattle's first conference on gay diversity, I carefully reframed these endeavors in my curriculum vitae as work related to "human rights."

The impact: I received acceptances that fall not only from Harvard but also from Princeton and from Stanford. Nothing in my application had changed other than this reframing. I had not personally changed in

any significant way that might be inferred. But I was on my way to doctoral study in the field that would become my life's object.

I was perhaps the only student with a memory of Tambiah's initial slip. My relation to horses would come up in conversations now and then, but there were other differences that were more salient. For instance, I was the oldest member of my entering class, by about five years. I was also the only one whose parents had never gone beyond an elementary school education. Yet I found it exhilarating to be in this atmosphere of expected excellence with others who had better educations and were more prepared than I was to perform well in the academy. I was amused when in the second week, I entered the elevator in William James Hall and detected a very strong smell of alcohol, a scent I was quite familiar with. And standing next to me was a retired professor, the one who worked in Mexico, wearing a super-large sombrero. Such was the diversity of faculty. Welcome to anthropology!

Learning from a Soviet Émigré

Once at Harvard, I had the financial support that freed me to read and think full time. That was an immense relief. I had only one obligation: academic studies. With time to reflect, I was becoming aware of the many discontinuities in my life and felt a strong need to integrate these previous experiences into my present work. Yet the intellectual environment around me seemed to encourage a disavowal of my previous experience, as if in this new world my prior selves—as farmboy and equestrian, with short stints as Fred Astaire dance instructor, fish-and-chips restaurant manager, insurance salesman, and a few more—were no longer relevant, no longer part of me. If what I already knew and had done was irrelevant to what I was about to study, then I had to not only keep up in my coursework but catch up with what the other students already knew about anthropology and the academy. I began extensively reading books on the history of anthropology, focusing on the British and American traditions. And I immersed myself in the various theoretical schools that had evolved in this academic field: functionalism, structuralism, interpretivism, materialism.

With each reading, my nearly total ignorance of the academic field in which I was now enmeshed became more and more apparent, compelling

me to read even more, to spend even less time socializing or having fun. Having stopped riding so abruptly meant I also quit exercising. This could have led to weight gain, but I still ate very little anyway. Instead, after sitting so many hours in my apartment at my desk, head down, reading, reading, reading, I was increasingly stiff and began experiencing upper back cramps.

In my first year of study, I rented an apartment from an artist named Ilia, who wanted to use it only in the evenings as a studio for painting. Ilia had been born in the Soviet Union and had emigrated to the United States, via Israel, in the large wave of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. He needed subjects to sketch and asked me to sit for him. Standing behind his easel with his back to the window in the living room, he asked me to pull up a chair in front of him, then he sketched my face with charcoal and kept repeating the sketch. He'd occasionally ask me questions but usually just stared, his intense brown eyes scrutinizing the details of my face: nose, mouth, eyes, hair, ears. He occasionally sniffed as if he had some cocaine powder still stuck in his nose, though I know he did not.

He cautioned me that I might not like his portrayals, which indeed I didn't. Apart from my thinning hair, I couldn't recognize myself. Ilia took creative liberties with my features, making me into someone he recognized in me, but I couldn't. Yet after all, I thought, why should he paint what I saw? It was his view, his picture, his art.

His life in the Soviet Union intrigued me, because I already intended to do research in that part of the world, the Soviet Bloc, from which he had fled. I asked him why his parents didn't settle in Israel.

"They were secular," he said. "They were scientists. And they disapproved of the influence of orthodox Judaism in Israel. They saw these orthodox people as dogmatic, convinced that they knew the truth of Jewish life. This reminded us of Soviet dogma. But we had developed a different sense of being Jews before leaving the Soviet Union. My parents found dogma, Soviet or Israeli, to be oppressive. That's why they were eager to find a way to America."

We talked about his pursuit of a new career as an artist in the United States and the risks involved, much like the risk I was taking by giving up riding to study anthropology. We had both just turned thirty, which made us older compared to our peers. I talked about the challenges of catching up, and that I had never been exposed to so many of the questions that anthropologists had explored. The closest I had come to anthropological theory was social theory, with which I had familiarized myself at the University of Washington. My lack of preparedness was

something I felt I couldn't discuss with my classmates and colleagues at Harvard, but I could confide in a Soviet émigré.

In hindsight, what was perhaps most significant for me were our discussions about class resentment, which I hadn't truly contemplated in Seattle, despite my occasional readings on exploitation. Certainly, I had experienced class distinctions in the equestrian world, especially in dressage, exacerbated by the limited access I had to the best quality of horses and training. However, I had somehow managed to establish myself in that world without money, networks, or horses of my own. It was a world largely comprised of affluent female riders and competitors who encouraged me—because they thought I was naturally talented at riding and training horses. My students at the stable appreciated something else: my ability to communicate the principles of dressage in simple language at various levels of skill.

But at Harvard, I struggled with my own class resentment from the start. It was an almost inevitable conflict. Indeed, I had chosen to gain access to this world of elite education precisely *because* access to it had been denied me for my first thirty years. I knew I had missed something and was eager to discover what it was. As I was settling in, I couldn't avoid observing the pervasive privilege that surrounded me. It was evident in the taken-for-granted assumptions about knowledge, merit, and constant references to learnedness and erudition for its own sake. Suddenly, someone was talking about a novel or a play, assuming everyone had read or seen it. I thought the references gratuitous but began to realize they had many purposes—one being to separate those who were already in the club from those knocking at the door. Equally of note for me was the complete absence of any discussion about class backgrounds.

It was striking to discover that many of the students who had gone to private universities as undergraduates had only one special skill: they could memorize and recapitulate arguments easily. The standardized tests we all took to obtain admission focused more on these skills than on the ability to think on our own. As students started sharing details of their travels, childhood vacations, and parental occupations, I was astonished to learn how much knowledge of prior generations within their families they had inherited that was relevant to graduate study. Many had already learned how to write personal statements with just the perfect balance of self-praise and modesty, how to apply for financial aid and grants, and how to write short essays and book summaries overnight. The system of learning suddenly struck me as profoundly unjust.

This injustice fueled a righteous anger and came paired with a feeling of resentment, leaving me both insecure and envious of those I was angry with. It seemed that these emotions—anger, resentment, insecurity, envy—were intricately intertwined. And, as I had never felt that way before, I didn't like feeling that way now, especially not at a moment when the doors at Harvard had opened and I had arrived at the best education available.

Ilia, in his gentle way, acknowledged the validity of my feelings, even though he ultimately dismissed their utility. He confessed that he, too, had experienced such emotions. "But," he added, "they were useless. I had access to the best education in the Soviet Union, but as a Jew I felt set aside, or marked, by other students. And the bureaucrats, they were suspicious of Jews, which in the end persuaded us to leave when the US changed its immigration quotas, and Soviet authorities agreed to let us depart. So I came here, and now, the rest is up to me, not the Soviet Union."

Ilia had made peace with his losses.

I recounted the story of two friends in Seattle who, at my urging, applied to professional training programs at Harvard. One applied to the Business School, the other to the John F. Kennedy School of Government. I thought that if I could get accepted, why not them. Both were brilliant and original, but both were rejected. Alan, who had applied to the Business School, had recently started his own bagel business, one of Seattle's first, from the ground up, and it was booming. He was involved in every aspect of the business, except for grocery store deliveries. However, my admiration for him didn't stem from his business acumen alone but also from his quirky, self-deprecating humor. He had the unique ability to turn every potential catastrophe—whether it was his elderly father's adventure nearly drowning in the Ganges River in India, his own college dropout phase or ill-fated dance career, or his struggles while riding horses—into comic experience. He and his wife had come to me for riding lessons at Aqua Barn Ranch at her insistence, and they sometimes brought Alan's sister along. Besides sharing Alan's humor, the sister was relentlessly cynical. Together we had constant fits of infectious laughter. They were such a fun and energetic group that I determined to befriend them.

When we met, Alan was working as a mechanic. He had received a dance scholarship at a private liberal arts college that supported him for three and a half years of study. "It was a joke," he said. "I had rhythm,

but I didn't have a dancer's body." It's true that Alan was a bit plump and not inclined toward the athletic routine that ballet entailed. He did, however, have an artist's creativity, but he was learning ballet before men like Mark Morris began changing contemporary dance with different kinds of movements and bodies that had more heft. He quit a semester short of a degree and soon thereafter trained as a mechanic. "Something practical," was his brief explanation.

Soon, he and his wife had their first child, who cried all the time, frequently working himself into a fit of rage. I saw it many times, not merely a temper tantrum but a full-blown, uncontrollable rage. A concerned neighbor suspected child abuse and called the police. The incident led them to seek therapy, where they were advised to hold their child tightly, not allowing him to move, while repeating "Mommy loves you." Surprisingly, this technique worked, and their child's crying stopped. However, he started wandering around the house and continually repeating, "Mommy loves you, Mommy loves you." Alan and his wife were completely freaked out.

I experienced a recurring pattern of loss as access to education was blocked for the most creative individuals I knew, like Alan, striking a blow to their personal development, forcing them to pursue different paths. Alan stuck with his bagel business until he could no longer compete with large chains as they took over that business in Seattle. This pattern of leaving friends behind seemed to persist as I continued advancing in my profession. Each step upward, I left behind my previous friends, and the gap between us kept widening over time.

The first step was leaving my family and friends in Wisconsin, then leaving the university community in Madison, then losing my circle of acquaintances in Seattle. The experience was repeated after graduate school, as my new academic friends had to move to other universities, and some had to leave academic work altogether. All the while, I didn't minimize my own role in this. Often I wanted the separation, and I wanted the access to a new group of friends and colleagues. I shared my frustration and anger with Ilia.

All along, Ilia had a point. Allowing my anger to turn into resentment was ultimately futile. It only left me embittered and prevented me from appreciating the distinct qualities and unique experiences that new acquaintances shared with me and that the Harvard community offered. Yet, the resentment would emerge on its own, whenever I experienced what I thought was an injustice.

Like when my father had a stroke in the middle of the semester, and I was upset that I couldn't return to see him, because I had no money to pay for a ticket, much less to contribute to his sudden debt from hospital bills. I assumed, perhaps falsely, my classmates wouldn't have been in this situation.

Or when, in applying for financial aid, the university asked me for contributions from my parent's income. Knowing they were retired, the university nonetheless assumed my parents had sufficient social security and savings to subsidize me. After I disputed this assumption, they asked for notarized statements vouching for their lack of income or savings. I didn't have access to those. Small slights, perhaps, but they were upsetting. When these events intervened in my life, I sought a diversion and plunged into my research, which helped me ignore my immediate experience. My focus on the lives of people I studied rather than my own served me well at the time.

When resentment periodically arose, however, I knew it continued to simmer, making me a more nervous and even more impatient person than I'd been. I realized that I could live with these eruptions so long as they didn't boil over. Probably more important than my own self-control was that I was fascinated by my studies and doing well, and that made me optimistic about my near future.

The Co-op and War Widows in West Berlin

Late summer, 1984, was the first time I visited Berlin, the place where I'd be doing fieldwork. I planned to work in both East Berlin, which called itself Berlin, the capital of the GDR (German Democratic Republic), and West Berlin, which called itself simply Berlin. To me, an aspiring anthropologist, this was more than a visit—it was a professional commitment, the start of a lifetime dedication to understanding a culture, its history and language, to immersing myself in the experience of fieldwork. It also meant transforming Berlin, the city with two halves, into my second home.

Why Berlin? It was a question often asked of me, especially as an aspiring anthropologist. One of the senior luminaries on the faculty of the department put it bluntly: "What do you think you can learn in a big city like Berlin that a sociologist could not learn better?" It was not a bad question, but he would never have asked this of beginning students working outside northern Europe. It reflected a commitment he had to

anthropology as the study of indigenous, tribal, or non-Western peoples in non-urban areas. Even if they did fieldwork in Europe, anthropologists mostly focused their attentions on its social and geographical peripheries: the rural Mediterranean, or the Balkans. I fully understood and respected these commitments, but I disagreed intellectually, reasoning that anthropology had to renew itself by using its considerable tools of participant observation and theoretical frameworks to understand not only peoples and communities but also the historical era we now cohabited with those we studied. For me, the Cold War was an object of study in which I had grown up. Why should it not inform my choice of field site?

More immediately, the choice of research focus already made, what took me to Berlin that summer was that Harvard's anthropology department encouraged its doctoral students to do preliminary research in our intended field-sites during the summers. But in 1984 it had not set aside sufficient money to support travel and lodging. Our stipends were for only nine months of the year, so it told us to find other sources but also that we should apply to the department and lay out our specific needs. The department decided that to be fair, it would distribute what little money it had to students equally rather than evaluate us as to need or quality of work. Because I was both very needy and had been a stellar student, I hoped it would come through with an additional stipend. It was well known that I had zero parental support, since both of my parents were retired farmers, my father already in a nursing home. In the end, all members of my cohort received the same amount: two hundred dollars for the entire summer, independent of need or merit. I was a bit sour but there was no one to complain to. The parents of several of my colleagues were multimillionaires, and I knew they didn't report this wealth, though it probably wouldn't have made a difference. In the end, I financed the trip to Berlin by exhausting my last savings from Seattle, from the sale of the last two thoroughbreds I'd trained before leaving.

I flew on a Pan Am flight from Boston to London and a British Airways flight from London to West Berlin, landing in the modern and well-organized Tegel Airport, just a half-hour bus and subway ride to the district of Kreuzberg. After two nights in a cheap youth hostel there, I moved into a *Wohngemeinschaft* (*WG*), a flat-sharing cooperative of unrelated people one block from a segment of the Berlin Wall. Five tenants, each with their own bedroom, shared one bathroom, one kitchen, and a spacious living room. They were renting an airy, fourth-floor apartment

with high ceilings in a turn-of-the-century building. Such large apartments were remnants of a bygone era when affluent families occupied generous spaces. After the war, family size declined and many affluent families who owned such flats moved to West Germany, with many others leaving after the Wall was built.

Everything was new to me, exciting, unexplored and unexplained. I was full of questions. Naturally, I initially turned to members of my *WG*. A friend of a friend had given me the tip that this *WG* might have a room, but I had only their address, and no way of contacting them before I arrived in the city. The *WG* was near the hostel, so I walked over to their place in the early morning and introduced myself. Luckily, the two men who had signed the lease were both there eating breakfast.

"I've heard you have an extra room. I'm here for two months doing preliminary dissertation research," I said.

They replied, "We do have a room. You're welcome to use it."

"How much rent do you want from me?" I asked.

"We don't charge rent. We have left one bedroom open only for guests, and it is free now."

"But I'd like to pay something for my stay."

"No rent. Just keep your room clean. You're welcome to use the kitchen and living room also."

"That's really kind of you. But isn't there something I could do to reciprocate?"

"No. Not necessary."

"Do you have any schedule for cleaning?"

"We have a vacuum cleaner and broom. Clean when you feel like it."

"How about cooking, do you ever have meals together?"

"Not really. Whenever someone feels like cooking they can."

"How do you know who will come?"

They looked puzzled. "We don't."

"Are there any rules or things I should be sensitive to?"

"No rules."

"Well, then, at least agree to let me cook a dinner for you all next week."

"Okay."

So it was. A few weeks later, I prepared a dinner, a beef roast with roasted turnips and potatoes, which I only remember because the roast for eight people was very expensive, a whole week's allotment for food.

I came away from these interactions confused. What boundaries did they have? Certainly, they must have boundaries, I thought. I'd already

lived in a large co-ed co-op in Madison, thirty-four students, for two and a half years, and in a much smaller co-op in Seattle for a couple of months. Both had a lot of rules, especially the smaller one. The ambiguity at this place made me so anxious that there were days when I'd just stay in my room to avoid having to deal with it.

The bathroom was the one place where contact was unavoidable. It was a small unheated room with a sink, toilet, and bathtub in which you could shower. One morning, I was taking a shower when one of the women walked in, took her clothes off, and said flatly, "It's cold here, can you hurry?" I tend to take quick showers anyway, so I was out in record time. In the Madison co-op, we had taken turns using the shower stalls and sinks; in the Seattle co-op, we had three showers and two toilets on each floor and never seemed to conflict. Here I was unprepared for such close contact, especially as we were total strangers.

Another scene: One of the men in the *WG*, the one who was most friendly to me, had breakfast around the same time I got up. That may have been the reason why he was friendly, I don't know. Anyhow, he chatted more with me than the others did, and he was patient answering my questions. On the morning of the third day of my stay, I was making coffee, and he came into the kitchen fully naked. "*Guten Morgen, John. Gut geschlafen?*"

"*Ja, se se sehr gut*," I stuttered. "Would you like some coffee?" I asked, trying desperately to keep my eyes from gaping at his long swinging cock.

"That'd be nice," he replied.

It didn't help that he was an attractive man, unassuming, lean and muscular, with dark brown hair of medium length. He came over to where I was standing in the narrow kitchen space and reached up to get a plate, and then down for silverware. It was hard for him not to rub against my body now and then. He took eggs out of the refrigerator and cut some bread to make toast, offering me some, which I declined. After he sat down to read the newspaper, I excused myself and retreated to my room. What was going on here?

I didn't find any of this invasive or offensive; on the contrary, the nudity was actually arousing. I thought of it as a sign of liberation, a sign of absence of shame. But I didn't know how to act given the level of uncertainty he and the others sustained.

For me, on such a limited budget, the key was that I had a room. On top of that, it was free. And on top of that it was a *WG*! I was learning how they organized a household, how they regulated partnerships and

conflict. But I didn't want to offend anyone, and I had no clue when I might be doing that. Since I spent most of my time out exploring the city and its residents, I used the common areas infrequently and thus had less opportunity to get in anybody's way.

During the days, I explored my initial plans for research. I was considering two alternative projects that might illuminate how the city was divided. One revolved around war widows, a considerable demographic in both city halves. I would simply approach older women in my neighborhood who looked as if they had lost their husbands. They shared a certain look of skepticism seasoned by resilience. They rode bikes. Despite their small and seemingly fragile statures, they had developed a mental and physical toughness, evidenced by an ability to use their elbows and cunning to get ahead in lines without being noticed. I was impressed.

I would walk alongside or sit next to them on a park bench. And after a brief conversation about my research, they would inevitably invite me to come to their apartments for *Kaffee und Kuchen* the next day. There I would listen to them talk about their experiences in Berlin, and when I could get in a word, I'd try to steer them to details which they could correct about their marriages and families: "So you were happy in your marriage to Hans before he was sent to the front?" "You said you had three children?" "Where are they now?" And about the division of the city: "So you were born in Berlin and lived here through the War?" "Did you visit the East Zone regularly before the Wall was built?" Some of these women had set the table for their husbands for years after the war, hoping they would return. Some had had affairs with occupying soldiers; some had been forced into sex with these soldiers. I wanted to know, initially, what it meant to live alone during the war and now, not only as a widow but also as a single woman.

After several visits to one woman, she gave me a bag filled with her entire collection of *Reader's Digest*, the English versions. A gift I couldn't refuse. But what use did I have for American propaganda? With that, I suspected my project had to risk encompassing a much wider range of women, not simply defined by marital status; I also wanted to meet people closer to my age to understand the dynamic of generational differentiation. My enthusiasm for this study of war widows waned, though later the widows I met informed part of my research on generational change.

Simultaneously, I pursued a second alternative, on household form, focusing on the *Hausbesetzerbewegung*: the squatter movement. There I encountered people who lived in or had friends who had moved into

abandoned or unused apartments that were fully functional except for electricity, which the squatters acquired by hooking up illegally to the electrical lines of a neighboring building. Some of the owners had moved to West Germany, others had just disappeared.

I liked to walk down Admiralstrasse, a street not far from where I was staying that had many squatted houses, with banners hanging from the balconies proudly proclaiming their opposition to the police and the law. It was easy to approach residents on this street as they left their apartments. I'd identify myself as a doctoral student in anthropology and ask them about their involvement in the squatter movement.

After a few weeks of such work, I scheduled appointments with two professors at the Freie Universität Berlin to get advice on my research. When I ran my ideas by them, they both advised me against these projects, dismissing the war widows as "politically insignificant," the squatter movement as "already past its prime." They knew better how to assess the projects than I, so I followed their advice and began looking elsewhere for projects with more scope.

Around the corner from the *WG*, I would walk by a thirteen-story gilded-looking skyscraper, the only tall building around. It was the home of the Axel Springer Verlag, a multi-media corporation known as Germany's largest conservative publishing house. For the students I was staying with, the Springer Press and its media empire would be tarred forever by the memory of its hate campaign in 1968 against the charismatic student leader, Rudi Dutschke. In radical opposition to the student movement, Axel Springer labeled Dutschke an "enemy of the people."

Sitting in the living room with several of the *WG* members one evening, I asked them about Springer Verlag. They told me they were certain that Dutschke would still be alive if not for Springer's incitement. I was taken aback by the vehemence of their antipathy to Axel Springer. He had of course at the time insisted his publishing empire was innocent of all accusations. To check out the story, the next day I went to the Stabi, the Staatsbibliothek, the glass-walled state library with its own cafeteria that served as an informal meeting place for many foreign scholars. You could write quietly at a well-lit desk, read the latest journals, borrow books, and accidentally run into other scholars doing the same. In 1968, Dutschke was indeed shot by an anti-communist in contact with a neo-Nazi cell, and in 1979 he died of brain injuries sustained in the assassination attempt. Because of Dutschke's prominence in the student protest movement, Axel Springer, who owned the two

most extreme right-wing tabloids—*Bild Zeitung* and *Berliner Zeitung*—had encouraged violence against him with headlines such as "Stop the Terror of the Young Reds!" and "Students Threaten: We Shoot Back." After reading a few of these older issues, I began to read *Bild* daily, as it was available in nearly every café. It seemed to specialize in discovering alarming communist plots and in showing women with *teuflische Beine*—devilishly attractive legs—on its covers.

What I also discovered was that Dutschke was born and educated in Berlin's East sector, just like his assassin. He had registered as a refugee in West Berlin on August 10, 1961, just three days before the East German government closed and sealed its borders with West Berlin, after which he became the leading voice of the student movement.

In merely three weeks, I managed to establish connections with several communities and made a few important discoveries. One was that my ethnographic research should include both East and West Berlin despite strong arguments from some scholars that a comparative project was not feasible. They had many specific objections: the project was too large, I should focus on one project in a particular district and not the entire city, I couldn't work in Berlin without understanding the Weimar period, I'd never be able to get the research permits necessary to work ethnographically in the East, I should focus only on West Berlin. To my knowledge back then, there were no anthropologists doing research in the two Berlins and none working in East Berlin, though there were many scholars in other disciplines doing work in one or the other half. Those scholars focused either on the past or on East or West Germany. They did not think it necessary, as I did, to consider the two city halves, societies, and states as co-dependents.

Hence, when I applied for grants, I had to appeal to separate agencies and claim familiarity with separate bibliographies for funding in the East and in the West. There was some overlap, but overall, these two entities were treated as relatively autonomous states that could be studied with little knowledge of the changing mirror image on the other side. Moreover, West German scholars who worked on the GDR told me it would endanger their careers if they visited the East; they'd be tainted as compromised by personal contact with "the Communists." For East German scholars, the point was moot as very few were allowed to travel to the West anyway. Aware of this geopolitical division of the academic field, I had, as an American working in a discipline with no presence there, the advantage of a kind of anonymity. I was now convinced I'd

be able to live in both halves successively and consecutively if my grants were successful and visas were granted.

My second important discovery was that I found myself, by chance and with little effort, within arm's reach of some of the emblematic symbols of the Cold War. I was living close to the Berlin Wall dividing the city, in a flat-sharing cooperative connected to the student movement, and near the Springer Verlag, whose owner Axel Springer was demonized by students.

The proximity of these locations forced me to see some of the paradoxes of division and the rhetoric of unification. One was that the forces arguing most vehemently for unity were the most antagonistic to the other side they wanted to unite with. Unity meant for them elimination of the opponent. At the same time, they were mirroring the positions of their opponents. For example, my neighbor, the right-wing Springer Verlag, was a strong proponent of unification. Yet Axel Springer had built the gleaming skyscraper on the border between the Soviet and American zones as a show of dominance. He built it not in a spirit of reconciliation with the East but as a provocation to symbolize reunification of the two cities and states under West German rule. In response, the GDR built tall apartment buildings on Leipziger Strasse across the street from the Springer Verlag, blocking the view from the East of the glistening, golden building. In this tit-for-tat, reunification appeared to be a nostalgic fantasy. It would be possible, I thought, only if East Germany dissolved itself, and at that time it seemed unlikely that would happen.

The Mood in East Berlin

That summer of 1984, also for the first time, I crossed from West Berlin into East Berlin, using Checkpoint Charlie, the military checkpoint controlled by the Americans. They were perfunctory and simply checked my passport. The real controls began moments later, as I passed through a series of metal gates that reminded me of small cattle holding lots. Those were the GDR soldiers, whose officers buzzed me through each pen, accompanied by a loud clang as the gates shut behind me. Although I didn't think the GDR intended to frighten American guests such as myself, I found the clangs and buzzing unnerving. In such situations, I tried to convince myself that nothing could happen to me, that I was an American citizen and that this status would protect me, so it would be

wise, and help me exude calm, if I acted unaffected. I told myself, it was the experience of an authoritarian socialist state that I sought, after all.

What first came to my attention was a sign: You are leaving the American Sector. In English, Russian, and French, with no corresponding sign to tell me what sector I was entering. It was the Soviet sector. That's because you didn't need such a sign to tell you that you were entering an entirely different zone. I seemed to note a distinct drabness in colors—like the somber, slate blue of the uniform of officials—and a dullness in facial expression (though everyday expressiveness in West Berlin was at any rate also limited). I registered something unusual about the air, both on the street and in public spaces. A store clerk I asked said it was the acrid smell of sulfur from brown coal for heating that permeated the air. The smell was strong and all-encompassing, giving a more totalizing meaning to the phrase "the air we breathe." And as soon as I entered public transportation, I sensed another odor, peculiarly musty, which someone later explained to me was the disinfection liquid *Wofasept* that overpowered any space where it was used. Poison air and disinfectants, not a good first impression of the *Stimmung*: the mood of the place.

This was my third week in the divided city, and spring was in full bloom, with flowers everywhere and lush green grass. This brightness contrasted starkly with the look of the darkened buildings and the socialist uniformity of everyday wear. I was on my way to meet Sascha Anderson, an artist, punk rock singer, cultural organizer, and dissident. The year before, I had met two West German journalists and environmental activists, Peter Wensierski and Wolfgang Büscher, when they were visiting Harvard. They suggested that I meet Anderson, as he was well-connected and could help me find people to talk to. I had eagerly read their 1981 book *Beton ist Beton: Zivilisationskritik aus der DDR*, which gathered together voices of East German opposition figures, especially on state environmental policy. The authors were critical of the progressivist paradigm of older Marxists, which assumed that nature was there for humans to exploit. I managed to call Sascha on a pay phone in West Berlin and leave a message that I was coming in the late afternoon.

To enter East Berlin before I had any official approval, I needed to obtain in the morning a day-visa, like every other tourist, from an East German office in West Berlin. That visa ended at midnight, and I was irrationally worried what might happen to me should I be late. I was anxious about remembering to return through the very same entrance

I had used to arrive. This time, I felt more relaxed since the Americans controlled the exit at Checkpoint Charlie. Still, an arrest record or a ticket might lead authorities to decline the year-long visa I'd need to do fieldwork. On the other hand, I dismissed the political or career dangers I might face from entering the GDR. Although as a child I felt surrounded by anti-communist ideology in the US, my West German acquaintances had been influenced by a direct relation to this ideology, especially through the continuous stream of East Germans fleeing to the West. The extensive reporting on the "actually existing socialism" of the GDR was almost totally negative. Even the critical Left in West Berlin and West Germany were unable to think of East Germany in terms of its own aspirations and constraints, or in terms of its relationship with the more powerful West German economy and society. Hence when West Berliners or West Germans visited the GDR for a day, as many school classes did, their experience was prejudiced before arrival by anticipation of an Orwellian surveillance state.

The visa cost nothing, though I had to exchange twenty-five West German marks for twenty-five East German marks to obtain it. West Germans complained about this. They called it *Zwangsumtausch* (coercive exchange) because the actual exchange rate was closer to three to one. I thought the one-to-one rate was fair and justified, given that visitors from the capitalist West were not supposed to benefit from the heavily subsidized East German products. If the twenty-five marks were insufficient for my purchases, I was told that, while illegal, it would be easy—and this proved to be true—to exchange West German currency on the black market for very favorable rates. I should simply ask someone I passed on the street. I knew that all countries in the Eastern Bloc had such black markets, since I had already experienced them in 1974 when visiting Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during my first travels in Europe.

I thought I'd spend my money on books, so I first lingered at the major East Berlin academic book shop near Alexanderplatz. The room was spacious but the books scarce and customers few. I wondered if this was because of a paper shortage, a staffing shortage, a shortage of foreign currency to purchase books not published by GDR presses, or some other shortage in a place well known for them. I intended to buy, if not now then later, the complete works of Marx and Engels, and prominent Communists and anti-fascist activists and writers from the 1930s and 40s. Many of these books were not available or not easy to find in the West, but they were incredibly cheap in East Berlin, though printed on

flimsy yellowing paper. There was nothing of interest to me on politics or sociology, and no attempt to place recent, prominent publications in the front of the store to entice readers to buy. The only section with a large selection was literature, mostly Communist authors from the past. There were no contemporary American or British authors that I can recall.

There was one offering that impressed me as unique, and it was not the classics but a collection of mini-books or pamphlets, each less than fifty pages, that detailed the rights and duties of citizens. Pocket-size and printed in a friendly font for reading, they clarified in simple language the most important laws on labor, marriage and the family, taxation, property, education, and many more topics. I bought a few of them, hoping to inform myself of the pedagogy of citizenship, how to teach citizens what rights they might enjoy and what duties they were to fulfill in a socialist land. I knew my German was not yet adequate to understand the fine distinctions in official language use, and after I began to skim one, I got stuck on a quote from a 1957 speech by Walter Ulbricht, first leader of East Germany: "*Überholen ohne einzuholen*" (overtaking without catching up). It was a time when the *Wirtschaftswunder,* the economic miracle, began positively transforming the outlook in West Germany, leaving growth in the GDR behind. Head of state and party, Ulbricht intended to force a quickening of the tempo of development in the GDR. I found the play on words—*Überholen ohne einzuholen*—clever until I thought more about what it meant. Lacking a miracle, it would be impossible to overtake something without first catching up. I was learning.

For lunch, I went to the Palace of the Republic, in the very heart of the old city and ordered a fish filet. When I talked to my housemates in West Berlin the next day, they were stunned: "Really? You just walked in there."

"It was open," I said, with the chutzpa of someone not knowing what he was doing. Only one of my *WG* members had been to East Berlin, and he had nothing to say other than that he had felt relieved to come back. The fish was tasty, to my surprise, crisp on the outside, perfectly done on the inside, and I was really impressed by the superb quality of the three-piece jazz trio that played in the corner of the relatively small dining room. After German defeat and Allied occupation in 1945, the old city center became part of the Soviet zone—and in 1948 the capital of the GDR. Nearly all the prewar cultural institutions and government buildings were concentrated there. The palace was shiny and light, in stark contrast to the buildings across the street that had survived the war.

There, the monumental German Evangelical Church, known as the Berlin Cathedral, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel's neoclassical Altes Museum were both darkened by soot, their facades in desperate need of repair.

Colloquially called Erich's Lamp Shop because of its generous and brightly lit ceiling lamps, the Palace of the Republic had been completed in 1976 under head of state Erich Honecker's leadership. Here it was, my very first day in East Berlin, and I was already discovering in this new building the novel mix of culture in the postwar "actually existing socialism" of Eastern Europe: an elite high culture of music, art, literature, and theater, and a public space for the people in a Farmer and Worker State that was to represent the Communist alternative to capitalism. The palace housed both the *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber) and a large array of cultural facilities, including auditoria, art galleries, a theater, a cinema, thirteen restaurants, five beer halls, a bowling hall, four pool rooms, a rooftop skating rink, a private gym with a spa, a casino, a medical station, barbershops, an indoor basketball court and swimming pool, a police station with an underground cellblock, and a discotheque.

As I wandered through the Palace, I was impressed that it was attempting to show an open, modern face to "the people." The building had been designed by Swedish architects, not trying to produce a nostalgic socialist-realist aesthetic. This experience was friendly, the opposite of what I sensed at the border crossing. No guards at the entrance, no one watching me (as far as I could tell). The Palace spoke to me, and I heard it say, "Look how we have turned our back on the past, both the imperial past of the Reich and the fascist past of National Socialism."

Slowly, I made my way to Anderson's apartment in Prenzlauerberg, just north of the old center. The district had a reputation as the hip, alternative-oriented district of East Berlin, but to me, coming from two weeks in the vibrant counterculture of West Berlin, it appeared subdued. The drab grey and brown color that characterized most of its buildings seemed to parallel the color of the polluted air. The many blackened four-story residential buildings with bullet holes from the war were missing bricks on their facades and faced treeless cobblestone streets. The entire scene looked as if it had survived the fire of war, which in fact it had.

The sun was quickly setting when a young woman answered the door, and a second one greeted me in the living room. Anderson stood up. He was my age. Blond-haired and slight of build, he welcomed me and, after I addressed him with the formal *"Sie*," he corrected me, in English:

"You can use the informal *Du* with me." He sat down, and his two female friends took my coat and seated me in a chair next to his. We sat in front of the crackling fire of the sweet-smelling coal in a tiled stove that sat in the corner. Even though it was summer, the apartment was drafty. I could see that the women were very drawn to him, much as disciples around a guru. I commended Sascha on his activism, and he proudly showed me his recent book of mixed poetry, prose, and pictures. His art had been described to me as political, but I had difficulty seeing a provocative statement or argument in what he showed me. Perhaps others were responding to the originality of his forms, maybe the mix of genres was the point.

My intention was solely to establish connections for my upcoming fieldwork in the divided Berlin, so I aimed to be as unobtrusive as possible. My research agenda was still vague, and I did not plan on an intellectual conversation, so I was relieved that Sascha chose to impress me with his artistry rather than, as many West Berliners had been doing, grill me to find out what I didn't already know. There was so much I didn't know, I felt I always came across as ignorant and unprepared. I recall nothing else about our meeting, and it didn't work out for Sascha to set me up with contacts. That would be the key to my research: contacts. I'd have to find people to take me behind this façade of officialdom, to take me into their families and friendship circles, to invite me to private parties. I still had two years at Harvard to prepare.

It was dark when I left Sascha's apartment but still plenty of time left to make a leisurely trip back. I walked on his barren, treeless street to the tram that took me down the hill to Alexanderplatz. From there I caught the S-Bahn to Friedrichstrasse, before walking back to Checkpoint Charlie. I hadn't expected so many impressions from my first visit to East Germany. I was elated about future research and couldn't wait to get back to the *WG* in West Berlin to take notes.

The Mood in West Berlin

Moving from one side of the Wall to the other, or even from one district to another, I could see the same remnants of physical destruction in bullet holes in walls, the same damaged intricate facades and neglected apartments and commercial buildings from the *Gründerzeit,* the mid-nineteenth century surge in entrepreneurial activity and economic expansion that laid the groundwork for the Kaizer's empire. The same

restlessness and behavioral distortions from the war experience, the same air reeking of the acrid, smoky smell of brown coal. Both city halves shared the same political history for over 700 years, culminating in the Third Reich, which at the time of my fieldwork was still held up as the standard of evil. It was the Nazi regime itself that had led to the destruction of Germany and occasioned the mid-twentieth-century creation of the two Berlins.

Forty years later, I was grappling with how to conceptualize their relationship to each other, the East to the West. It already appeared to me there was much more to account for than socialism versus capitalism and the authoritarian versus democratic political systems, because they incorporated elements of both polarities.

Yet West Berlin felt nothing like East Berlin, without being its negation. The two states—the Federal Republic and the GDR—both claimed that they were breaking from the Third Reich's record, a disavowal necessary for their foundational legitimacy. But this was not a total rejection of the Third Reich and the history leading up to that catastrophic, collectively willed turn in German history. It was not a simple negation. East Germany paid massive reparations to the Soviet Union, while West Germany assumed the debt to the other Allies, and later to Israel. Yet both retained in high places officials from the Third Reich.

West Berlin symbolized a third, intermediary unit belonging solely to neither state, officially a West German entity but in the middle of the GDR, which in turn maintained its half of Berlin as its capital, while the West German capital moved to Bonn. Despite the three occupying armies living in its midst, West Berlin became a beacon of freedom, representing an American-dominated Cold War entity for the disgruntled from both sides of the Wall.

The differences in *Stimmung,* collective and private mood, stood out even more than the visual similarities. And the major difference was a stereotype that I had, in my mind, been trying to ignore: freedom. I hadn't expected to feel "freedom": the wish for unrestrained liberties. But I unmistakably did. In West Berlin, I was surrounded by this feeling that was absent in the East, as real as the feeling of warmth or cold, sadness or surprise. I saw it in people's eyes, in their embrace of sartorial and ethnic diversity (especially with the large number of Turks), and in the general ferment in the air produced by the diversity of social movements that grew out of life in the city, a *Frontstadt* on the frontline. An external expression of an internal mood.

And it wasn't the old Berlin residents who shaped this freedom but the huge swell of youth from elsewhere who filled the empty apartments and worked in the service sector. They were young men escaping military service—West Berlin was the only place West German men could go and be legally free of compulsory service—and East German men and women who had fled the East both before and after the Wall was built. They were also hippies, homosexuals, adventurous and rebellious and politicized youth converging on a place where something was always happening and countercultures proliferated. Life was highly subsidized, utterly cheap, run-down, with no German army (only the occupying ones), culturally Americanized, quaint in its enclosure. Living there was unlike life in any other German city, unlike anywhere in Europe.

Yet there was something ineffable in the concept of freedom. Its closest counter-concept is unfreedom, a literal negation without specific content. Many in West Berlin saw the coercion of the GDR as the negation of their idea of freedom. This view was compelling enough, but, to me, the feeling of surveillance, more than unfreedom or coercion, characterized the everyday experience of the East. It was likely that you were being watched. Not all the time, not everywhere, but once you thought of yourself as more than a tourist, it was difficult to rid yourself of the feeling. A certain paranoia inevitably accompanies surveillance, even within supportive families, and this discourages trust. And without trust, what is the point of freedom?

If the alternative is framed as between freedom and surveillance, freedom would always come out on top. Especially among postwar Germans, who sought distance from the totalitarianism of the Third Reich. Hence the Left critique in West Berlin of its own West German/East German system was rarely just against surveillance and for freedom. By the late twentieth century, both concepts became much more capacious. In the resistance to surveillance, the principle of data privacy—the right to the control one's own personal data—was continually expanded to limit the state's ability to collect and use private information. At the same time, an important argument for freedom was embedded in a critique of capitalism: that there was a lack of "real" choices when decisions were controlled by capitalist interests and market prerogatives. Ultimately, the freedom appealed to was about the right to choose how one lives, and about limits on the ability of states to intervene in and control these choices. That was West Berlin.

By contrast, East Germany saw itself as *the* alternative to the West because of its elaborate social welfare system, and there was some truth

to this claim, although by the 1980s the West Berliners I met scoffed at it. Caring for citizens from cradle to grave with a thoroughness certainly lacking in the West ameliorated many social problems. But to build a system of such total care, to care for everyone equally, as much as possible without regard for status, and to provide such care on a national scale, you had to know who it was you were caring for; and you had to distinguish between what they needed, such as food, housing, and employment; what they wanted, such as imported fresh fruit in the winter, apartments with central heating, well-paid work, travel to expensive Western European countries; and what they could afford. To make those distinctions, the government needed information. It had to surveil.

To be sure, the East German state transformed surveillance swiftly enough from a tool for satisfying needs to one of excessive regulation and control. The state quickly found information about its citizens useful for purposes other than fulfilling their wishes. It could use this information to monitor them and prevent expressions of dissent, to suppress all those wishes emerging from local contingencies of life in the East. Especially important for East Germany was to suppress those wishes that appeared to derive from the expressions of freedom or wealth in West Berlin and West Germany. It was as if a lid from above was put on the creative capital at hand, to smother the aspirations and wishes of citizens to which the state couldn't or didn't wish to respond. All of this was clear to the West Berliners I met; I am only summarizing arguments they made.

There was only one district within East Berlin, Prenzlauerberg, where I saw any sense of experimentation with alternatives. And those residents were allowed this freedom only to the extent they limited it to experimentation in living, in domestic relations, and in the arts, not in politics. Much of West Berlin, on the other hand, presented itself as a hotbed of political, economic, and domestic alternatives—to West Germany, to East Berlin, to capitalism, to militarism, and to family and household structures.

Additionally, a new political movement, the Greens, organized as an extra-parliamentary party in West Berlin and West Germany. Its major focus was expressed in its original name, the Alternative List for Democracy and Environmental Protection, founded in Kreuzberg in 1978. At the time of my first visit, in 1984, the Greens were the political wing supporting a number of experiments: environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice, participatory grassroots democracy, feminism, the expansion of human rights. Discussions in the *WG* experiment where I was

living, and in other households, assumed a certain agreement about these issues but did not, at least in my presence, go into any detail about a person's own involvements.

Alternatives also emerged under the umbrella of but outside the Greens, in actual relationships, households, and practices of sexuality in private lives. While living in Seattle, I had already seen *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives,* Rosa von Praunheim's provocative and original 1971 film set in the West Berlin scene. The documentary aimed to critique social attitudes and systems for pathologizing homosexuality, and did it through an in-your-face celebration of some of the more radical individual expressions of sexual orientation: transvestism, transsexuality, screaming queens.

Then there was the form of the political demonstration—the *demo*, as Germans called it. I attended several each week in West Berlin that summer, most of them in Kreuzberg. Since I was interested in the squatter's movement, I went to protests about the many buildings that were empty despite a shortage of apartments. I also happened onto the *demo* for Mayday, International Worker's Day, in which I got trapped in a bar on Oranienstrasse when the police barricaded the street to prevent us all from leaving. There were several *demos* by Autonome, a radical Left anarchist-Marxist group, that organized spontaneous actions. Near where I was staying, I passed one protesting gentrification.

Where there was a *demo,* there was a good chance there'd be a counter-*demo* the same day or the following week, often in the same place, and I'd already attended two counter-*demos* my first month in Berlin, one in support of stationing nuclear weapons on German soil, the other for militarization and defense, both of which were much smaller than the protests they opposed.

One *demo* escaped any countering or resistance, at least when I attended, and that was the Christopher Street Day (CSD) Parade. I'd already marched in many CSD parades in the United States, in Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, and Washington, DC, and in some places there'd been catcalls and threats of violence that necessitated police protection, and even arrests of some protesters. Not here, not in Berlin, not on this day in 1984. Four years earlier, Germans had adopted this celebration of the protest, led by transvestites, of the closing of a gay bar in the Village in New York City. This demo was now theirs, no longer American, expressing a feeling of freedom peculiar to West Berlin—simultaneously a national, European, and intercontinental festival, with no opposition.

On the seasonably warm day of the parade, I sat on the lawn—not a manicured American lawn but wilder, a mix of grasses of different lengths and colors—in Wittenbergplatz across from KaDeWe, Kauhaus des Westens. This was one of the informal meeting places on the day as it was centrally located and easy to find. People called KaDeWe (pronounced Kah-Day-Vay) the largest "temple of consumption" in continental Europe. In 1943 a plane crashed into it and the entire building burned. It reopened in 1950, offering luxury goods and gourmet food products from all over the world. Fresh produce was flown in daily to represent the success of the West German economic miracle, to show that even in the encircled West Berlin, the Cold War's premier *Frontstadt,* that miracle was visible. It was indeed an impressive store. Lacking money, however, I felt my nose was being rubbed into a display of class privilege. Why should I celebrate the best of everything, from meat to fish and vegetables, clothes to kitchen utensils, when it was not available to me?

I was waiting outside KaDeWe for Steven, a friend from Berkeley, to join the parade as it passed by. He was on his way to Poland to do research on the new social movement, Solidarity. He showed up with a man he'd just befriended: a tall, elegant, dreadlock-wearing Black student from Washington, DC. Steven was always fashionable, and being blond and blue-eyed, he made such an interesting pair with his friend from DC that a photographer snapped a picture of the three of us relaxing on the lawn, then published it in the leftwing newspaper *TAZ*. I had to laugh when I saw the picture in the newspaper the next day, but I didn't think of myself as important enough to keep a copy.

My memory keeps returning to how relaxed we were, as if we had all the time in the world. There was none of the tension of the other demos. It felt more like a commemoration than a protest. The published photo got me thinking about the significance of being drawn to participate in the parade and even to become part of its public representation.

Perhaps it was my sense of being an anthropologist that made me feel like an outsider, there to observe. Still, I noticed that residents hardly took note of our presence. I inferred that they could easily imagine me and the two men I was with as being part of the fabric of the city. The fact that I didn't stand out, that I was hardly noticeable among so many men and women in colorful and unusual outfits, was oddly reassuring.

Due partly to the American military's omnipresence and the city's unique status, my presence in West Berlin was not out of the ordinary,

not foreign to the place. But the perception of me varied. Among the war widows I had met, their gratitude for American presence was palpable. Elderly West Berliners generally greeted me as if I was part of the power that had saved them and the city from Soviet domination.

Then again, people only slightly older than I was regarded me with much more ambivalence. They were the ones who organized most *demos*. They all seemed to love American culture but generally resented American power. The popular hostility among them to the *Amis*, as we were called, was a sentiment I understood. That I shared their ambivalence and criticism of America mattered little when we interacted. I marched with them in their *demos* also, but I was not part of their crowd. The generational proximity was not enough to bridge the difference between American and German national experiences.

Among Germans my age and younger than me, my American origins, if they came up, would elicit a shrug. At CSD, which was largely organized by this younger generation, I was more than an American. I was part of a highly cosmopolitan group that was quite oblivious to my own personal history. Part of the gay crowd, I marched with it, as one with them, in the West Berlin demo; that was all it asked of me.

The CSD Parade was small compared to those I'd experienced in the US, though it had most of the same diverse elements on the floats. To the music of DJs or recordings of disco and other dance music, floats with singing and dancing passed by, demanding equal rights and change. Lesbian floats, gay floats, mixed gay and lesbian floats, floats with feminist themes, and transsexuals with the most outrageous costumes. Wigs, high heels, large and flashy hats, oversize jewelry, Dr. Frank-N-Furter make-up—and men and women in white T-shirts, baseball caps, and jeans. I marched alongside different floats, eager to show solidarity with the Berlin scene—diverse homosexuals in their iconic celebration.

What I found most exciting was the crowd at the dance that evening in the *Mensa*, the large cafeteria on the ground floor of the Technische Universität Berlin. I was surprised to learn that a technical university would host such an event, rather than the Freie Universität, which I thought was more experimental and more known for its humanities programs. When I asked someone from the Technische Universität, they told me the university had already welcomed countercultural movements in the 1960s, opening some of their buildings in the center of West Berlin for students to meet during protests. In the US I had not encountered university administrations that openly hosted gay-friendly events on campuses.

The bands kept changing and with them the music, from disco to house to rock to Europop. I reveled in the sense of security and freedom in the diversity of expression but also wondered exactly how this changed the expression of sexuality in the West Berlin milieu. All I had by way of comparison was an American experience, where there was a strong tendency to use this freedom to ghettoize and create separate minority cultures. That did not seem to be the case here. Soon I hoped to experience the personal differences in expression and in group formation in both halves of Berlin.

Mentoring and Informality

At our very first meeting she said, "Call me Sally," correcting my address of her as "Professor Moore." That introduced an informal tone into our relationship, in which she was formally mentor, and soon to become doctoral advisor. My second and third year at Harvard, I lived in the attic of the Master's residence connected to Dunster House, the undergraduate living quarters, where she and her tall and soft-spoken husband Cresap served as Masters. It was the former maid's quarters, a small room under the eaves with a single bed and a desk, and a window facing the Charles River. The adjoining room had a toilet and large bathtub with a garret window facing the undergraduate residences. I had kitchen privileges downstairs, though I seldom took advantage, as I was too shy to feel comfortable running into the Masters while they were preparing or serving meals.

Sally and Cresap had offered me the lodging to save money in return for helping bake, serve, and clean up their residence after they entertained students or faculty. I was more than pleased to accept and joked to others that I lived in the maid's quarters and worked as a maid for the Master of the House. Others didn't find it particularly funny.

This was my final year of coursework. Most important for me, I had earned a measure of respect for my intellect by then. A visiting professor from Israel even tried to recruit me to write an essay for a new book he was editing on smell. Yet Sally suspected early in my studies that I would require a longer gestation than other graduate students—despite being the oldest in my cohort. She knew I lacked preparation for this study—my origins were modest to say the least—but she also had faith in my abilities.

It took her longer to grasp that I had faced many structural barriers that were premised on students' being straight. To be admitted to the

doctoral program I had scrubbed my letter of application of any reference to homosexuality, which also erased any explanation of my desire to be an anthropologist, to be in a field where there was less value placed on normality. It made no sense that a riding instructor would pursue an anthropology career, not even to me. Why would this character who was already thirty invest in six to eight years of graduate study for such an insecure future? Ultimately, at Harvard my sexuality didn't matter much, neither among students nor among faculty who by-and-by got to know me. I felt treated as an intellectual equal and encountered the same expectations as the other students.

It helped that I excelled in seminars, both in written assignments and in discussions. I read everything assigned, early on even the recommended reading, and I wasn't afraid to ask questions, which were earnest and indicated to others that I wanted to learn from and with them. I did not see myself in competition with the other graduate students. We had all arrived with the same five-year guarantee of support.

In her writing and in conversations, Sally gave me a language. She told me, when I pushed for a definition, that she was a processual anthropologist, referencing a set of rich concepts to focus my interest on why cultures change, even though most people and most scholars, certainly most anthropologists at that time, were more concerned with the stability and durability of cultures. I saw Berlin and Germany as places in which dramatic changes had taken place, personal and political, despite the well-known conservatism in German thought and culture.

When I entered her office I would usually eye some new books, often still wrapped in plastic, sitting on her desk. I recall books by Jack Goody, Pierre Bourdieu, Dan Sperber, and Claude Meillassoux. She had not yet read them, but, seeing the envy in my eyes, she would offer, "You want to read it first?"

I'd report back to her within the following week or two, and we'd discuss what I'd understood, my enthusiasm or disinterest. Having advised many students myself since then, I know how immensely satisfying it is for mentors to see the thinking of their students mature. Most of the time, feedback on the quality of our advice or mentoring skills is delayed, sometimes by decades. Exchanging ideas with Sally was immediately rewarding.

While still a graduate student I published two papers on topics unrelated to my dissertation research but to which I returned decades later. Both topics have since become timely for a new generation of scholars. One

was for a seminar Sally taught on legal process. My paper examined the use of penetration as a metaphor in the print media to frame the entrance into the United States of one hundred and twenty-five thousand Cubans on the Mariel boatlift to Florida in 1980. Up to twenty thousand were labeled Castro's "undesirable elements": imprisoned malcontents ("criminals"), and self-defined "homosexuals."

There was agreement across political parties to welcome all Cuban refugees as innocent and illegitimate victims, and to define all Cubans who came to the United States categorically as political rather than economic refugees. I argued that this political event, the arrival of the Marielitos from Cuba, was understood symbolically in sexual terms, as male penetration, which created categorical confusion in the public conceptualization of Cuban immigration and in the administration of immigration laws.

Sally praised the originality of the essay, but when I asked about publishing it, she at first replied, "I suggest you wait. You will change your mind and no longer hold to these theoretical positions." She was particularly critical of a distinction I had taken over from Marshall Sahlins, between culture as received and codified oppositions and culture as lived and practiced.

A week later she came back: "I discussed it with Cresap. A good idea doesn't come along often. Publish it." A decade later, although still enthused about my central argument, I no longer found Sahlins's theoretical frame convincing.

The other paper, on totemism in horse breed classifications, was also unrelated to my doctoral research. I wanted to analyze experience with which I was already familiar, personally, unlike the merely textual knowledge of Germany I had by then. My experience on the dairy farm and as equestrian made me intimately familiar with totemism—the relations of humans to animals and plants. However, my theoretical question was far removed from horse breeds. It was instead about the ideological and political motivation of signs.

The regnant theory, most convincingly stated by the brilliant French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was that categories were "good to think," motivated by the pleasure of thinking about signs, the mind communing with itself, unconnected to the world of politics and history. I argued against this idea by showing how classifications of horse breeds have a history driven by specific ideologies, such as, in the American case, naturalizing racial categorizations. Horse breeds are not found but made by humans, I argued. We project human differences onto our

breeds, creating a second order language—leaning on an idea I learned from Roland Barthes—to validate systems of class, race, and ethnic differentiation.

My research questions as an anthropologist nearly always stemmed from personal experience. Insights from events and changes in my own life motivated my inquiries. But I rarely saw these connections immediately. Sometimes it took years or even decades to realize the meaning of personal experience, its impact on me, and its relation to research questions that were more abstract and of larger scale.

These two earliest publications, investigating immigration and horse breed classification, are prime examples of experiences from my earlier selves that I only much later was capable of thinking through more deeply. In research, I began to look for transformative moments and to be prepared to learn by anticipating, often unconsciously, such moments in the lives and societies of people I was studying.

About once a month, faculty and graduate students in Harvard Anthropology gathered at the home of Professor David Maybury-Lewis and his Danish-born wife Pia. I addressed him as David, as he encouraged us to do. He hosted these informal gatherings at his home for us to mingle and to meet a guest who had usually given a lecture a few hours before. Pia devoted an entire day cooking and baking. We were encouraged to converse with the guests after their lectures, but in those early days of my studies I refrained and simply observed.

After eating buffet style and chatting with each other and the guests, someone played a tape of dance music and most of us danced. We danced in groups or loosely paired, and faculty danced with students, which struck me as another attempt to break down the formality that generally characterized academia. I had been a teacher at Fred Astaire in Seattle in 1975, and others knew this. I could still remember how to do some of the classical moves of ballroom dance, but I was no longer capable of dancing like I had when I was an instructor. Nonetheless, unlike the other students, I had learned how to lead a woman in dance.

At this gathering, as the contagious music of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album came on, the dance floor enlarged. A couple of young male students did their own version of Jackson's moon walk. Our interest at the time was not in Jackson's subsequently revealed penchant for young boys but only in his music. Then Sally Moore asked me to dance. She was everything I admired as a mentor and remained a guiding light throughout my academic career, becoming also a confidant and a dear

friend. But rather than reveling in the moment, a ghost from my past came out of nowhere and incapacitated me. I was spooked. I felt a sense of embarrassment as I was unable to reciprocate in her lively improvisation, as I might have done at the Fred Astaire studio. There was the issue of sexuality in this setting.

Being the only student who was out in the department made me feel peculiar dancing with women. The era of disco with its infectious rhythms and dynamic beats—and Jackson's music fell within that genre—encouraged expressive movements. And it had accomplished something that prior rock music had not. It had dissolved the necessity of the couple, making it easier to dance without heterosexual pairing. At discos, I often danced in threes or fours, or all alone, but rarely in a male-female pair. Here I was feeling the expectation to dance with a woman, and that expectation took the joy out of it. I became hesitant and tense. I couldn't keep the beat and lost my rhythm. I felt as if I was regressing to my miserable youth.

Nor was this a time when I could easily take comfort in the sexual milieux that being gay had opened to me. When I started my graduate studies in 1983 there was still some open sexual experimentation, as there had been in the 1970s, but it wasn't as common anymore. The emergence of the AIDS pandemic turned each sexual encounter into a life-and-death decision about what sex could be, and how to consent while terrified by fears of infection.

During my second year of study I had befriended Ben, my first-ever Black friend and a doctoral candidate in linguistics specializing in Jamaican dialects. He was one of five graduate student affiliates at Harvard's Adams House residence who I hung out with. We were all gay. Ben and I shared questions about method, as he also intended doing fieldwork, and we shared an interest in his field of study—linguistics and questions of language use. But I loved him especially because he was warm and curious and approached everyone with an infectious smile.

Early in the semester, Ben called another graduate student and me to tell us he was in hospital. He wished for us to visit. It was my first encounter with someone infected with HIV and ill. Gravely ill. As I entered his single room, a dim light from the window cast shadows over his figure in the bed. He had been sweating from fever, so his skin was wet and shiny. I was aghast at the sight before me, a harrowing portrait of impending death. Ben was tethered to tubes, wearing an oxygen mask that impeded his ability to speak and ours to hear.

Just a week earlier, he had appeared in good health. Ben, the sweetheart with the warm smile, urged us to reach out to a young Hispanic man he had been seeing, someone from a poor family whose parents were unaware of his homosexuality. We followed through on Ben's request. Within a week Ben passed away.

Never again would my vision of sex be untainted by the incongruence of Ben's smile and the image of his final days. The AIDS pandemic left an indelible mark on my years of graduate study. It had the effect of closing down sexual freedom, at a time when the well-meaning culture of my department encouraged an informality that assumed being at ease in our bodily selves was unproblematic, certainly undangerous. That assumption did not always apply.

Surveillance in East Berlin

In 1986, during my fourth month of an initial nine-month stay in the GDR, I found myself at the Opern Café on Unter den Linden, savoring coffee and a slice of poppy-seed cake with Ilona Stolpe. She was dressed in her usual black skirt and tucked-in white blouse, very proper and unadorned, nothing that would cause attention. We were discussing revisions for our collaborative article on surrogate motherhood contracts, which had been accepted by the premier East German journal for socialist law and legality, *Neue Justiz*. Ilona had been assigned to be my contact person at Humboldt University in East Berlin, a stay made possible by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), an international nonprofit organization that supported research and academic collaboration between the US and countries within the Soviet bloc. A grant from the Krupp Foundation, given to Harvard for student research in Germany, paid costs that IREX didn't cover.

Six GDR scholars, all from the natural sciences, were supported for a year of research in the US. The same number of Americans, mostly German Studies scholars, went to East Germany. There had never been an anthropologist on this exchange, so authorities were puzzled as to which department I might be affiliated, and unaware that an ethnographer like me would be talking to people—a lot. IREX, founded in 1968 at the height of the Cold War to promote cross-cultural understanding and foster international cooperation, arranged for me to be affiliated with the Faculty of Law at Humboldt University.

The acceptance of our article surprised me. I was an unknown scholar, and American, but Ilona said other legal scholars at Humboldt were intrigued by the development of surrogacy. Nobody knew anything about the legal debate around it in Europe, and she assumed I could fill her in about the US. All I knew was what I had read in the news, but few East German scholars read much English, and even if they did, they hadn't easy access to US or West German newspapers. From the start, I was puzzled by her confidence that *Neue Justiz* would accept it.

Our conversation started after I had expressed an interest in the notion of *Mutterwunsch*—the desire to be a mother—a term that I had seen repeatedly in many East German publications. This was one thread in my research, which Ilona understood to be about the relation of law to kinship, or family law. I noticed how GDR legal scholars were asking how they might encourage the desire to have babies and thus increase the country's low reproduction rate. That, coupled with the large number of petitions to leave the country, translated into a perpetual shortage of workers. These scholars had observed that their goal of increasing the number of children was dependent on women's desire and ability to have children, but that this wish was frustrated by the "double burden" of women: caring for their children and home while also employed outside the home. Ilona thought *Mutterwunsch* was a natural drive, and on this point, we disagreed. I argued that desire was not natural but contingent on sociocultural conditions.

Regarding surrogacy, however, we shared a skepticism that surrogate mothers would be able to confine their emotions to the transactional period of pregnancy. Many might also seek a continuing attachment once the baby was born. In this context, she proposed writing something together. Ilona thought it important to anticipate what it might mean legally for women's rights and socialist law.

The editors of the journal proposed one major revision: to axe our examination of the cultural meanings of surrogacy, while retaining everything on the economic and material conditions in the new market, and on contracts for babies through surrogate motherhood. Faced with a truncated argument, I reluctantly accepted, sensing there was little use in debating the matter with Ilona or attempting to align my cultural perspectives with the Marxist ideology of the editors.

As our conversation neared its end, Ilona's eyes brightened and sparkled with enthusiasm. She eagerly asked, "What can I do for you now, Professor Borneman? Let's plan another trip. Have you been to Rostock? Don't you want to see something else?"

"I've been to Rostock already," I said, "and it didn't seem like a place I'd like to explore again. Let's wait and see if there is a conference or gallery opening somewhere else, something I might like to attend."

"Perhaps a cognac or schnaps?" she continued, determined to find another way to prolong our meeting. Back then, I hadn't developed a taste for beer or wine, nor had I ventured into the realm of spirits. Even if I had, I couldn't afford it. Today, thanks to Ilona, I appreciate almost all liquors, including the world of distilled flavors. She helped me to overcome the antipathy I had developed living with my father's alcoholism. In that and similar moments, I couldn't resist her offer, and we indulged in talk for another half an hour over cognac.

Ilona found it amusing that my research didn't fit into recognizable disciplinary fields, certainly not in the Marxist-inflected fields of the humanities in East Germany. It crossed anthropology, law, political science, and history. She and other GDR scholars were encouraged to define their work within disciplinary boundaries, and in terms of Marxist theory when possible. She also thought it truly strange for an anthropologist to use ethnographic methods to study an advanced socialist country. That people could not easily understand what I was doing worked unexpectedly in my favor. It gave me tremendous freedom in a state where social contacts and academic research was tightly controlled. A Humboldt sociologist I met was astonished by my methodology when I mentioned I was simply talking to people.

"We have to submit our questions beforehand for approval," she explained.

That elicited a smile, and I added, "I prefer not to lead with questions, at least not initially. I prefer to wait instead for people to introduce me to their own issues and the kind of questions with which they are concerned."

The Law Faculty at Humboldt was housed within the university's main edifice on the historic Unter den Linden in the heart of the old capital. Its eighteenth-century architecture radiated historical significance and magnificence. Despite still bearing a pock-marked façade from flying bullets during World War II, the building retained its grandeur. Upon entering, imposing Roman and Greek columns greeted me, between which stood an ugly control booth—an unfamiliar sight from my experiences in American or West Berlin universities. Etched on the wall behind, Marx's call to social activism—"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change

it"—set the tone for a profoundly solution-oriented intellectual milieu. My quest was not to change the GDR but only to comprehend it, to grasp the active steps being taken to reshape postwar Germany into a socialist society.

Unlike Harvard, where it was graduate students who shared offices, at Humboldt faculty members accommodated themselves to this arrangement. When I met scholars in their offices, which was infrequent, a cacophony of simultaneous conversations made it difficult to hear what was being said. The rooms lacked the expected ambience of the architecture, amplifying every sound.

Most of my interactions with Ilona were thus outside the university, though the appointments she set up with other faculty consistently unfolded within the law school's walls. She made it clear to me that she identified as a Christian rather than a Communist, steering clear of membership in the ruling SED (Socialist Unity Party). Despite her criticisms of the GDR, she remained devoted to the socialist ideal—the vision of a cooperative society built on equality and a fervent commitment to peace.

I never anticipated that the law school would become my academic haven, nor that the faculty would assign a junior scholar to advise me. And on top of that, such a down-to-earth and helpful person as Ilona. In fact, I was unprepared to be assigned to anyone for help or advice.

I asked her about this appointment, and her response was candid. "Honestly," she confided, "there weren't any other Law Faculty members suitable for the task. They were either too reserved, too formal, too distant, or reluctant to associate openly with a foreign scholar. Very few Americans took an interest in the Law Faculty, never in family law, and my colleagues might have hesitated to align themselves with an American." Her eyes conveyed enthusiasm as she continued, "But I'm not concerned with my career. I'm just a curious person, and I want to know more about America. Professor Borneman, I genuinely look forward to spending time with you."

Although we never explicitly broached the subject, I strongly suspected that she was tasked with observing and reporting on my activities. In hindsight, it would have been highly unusual if the government had not assigned individuals to monitor me, given the circumstances of Cold War interchanges. Ilona likely faced some pressure to agree to be an informal collaborator for the Stasi and submit reports detailing my activities. Our discussions spanned our respective countries, political and religious outlooks, and our perspectives on the interface of law and

family—a plethora of information undoubtedly of interest to the GDR's intelligence service.

I was consciously elusive when referring to specific people or friends or a particular milieu. And initially, I was evasive when discussing the nature of my research, who I was meeting, and how I spent my time. I met any questions about my sexuality and its place in my own concept of family with a stern look that suggested the question was out of line.

Early on, Ilona inquired, "So tell me about your family. Are you married?"

"No, I am not married. And my family, where I was born, you mean? In northern Wisconsin on a farm, with seven siblings."

"I meant your immediate family. Any children?" she probed further.

"No, and I don't have plans for any. Don't assume," I reprimanded her in a measured tone, "that unmarried or living with parents means lack of family. We all have family but define our close kin differently."

Ilona promptly apologized, but as soon the words left my mouth, I felt discomfort at my dissimulation.

She was obviously hunting for some explanation for my single status, perhaps assuming I was gay. I feared giving her that explanation, knowing the risk: spy services, not only the Stasi, had a history of recruiting gay men and using blackmail tactics. I aimed to protect myself from potential exploitation. But my inability to be candid with someone trying to be kind disturbed me. We'd be spending a year together.

While mindful of potential surveillance, I consciously suspended judgment regarding motives when people asked personal questions. I aimed to shield my awareness of being watched from influencing either my conduct or how others perceived me.

Simultaneously, I refrained from disclosing to Ilona or other academics that I was suspicious of the fundamental premise of East German family law. I questioned the assumption that a legal framework emphasizing the ideal reproductive family could effortlessly produce and sustain that model without provoking resistance. I presumed the existence of diverse family forms—unmarried individuals, childless couples, single parents, widows, cooperatives, and homosexual couples—even within the GDR. My research aimed to document these alternative households and intimate relations in their relation to laws seeking to eradicate or standardize them.

Shortly after arriving in East Berlin, Ilona introduced me to Anita Grandke, a tall, serious woman with an authoritative presence, who held

the position of Chair of Family Law at Humboldt. "Welcome to the GDR," she greeted me. "So you're coming from Harvard University? Why did they permit your leave from teaching to be here in the GDR a whole year?"

"Yes, I'm from Harvard, but I am still completing my doctorate. And ethnographic research is the basis for my study," I clarified.

Grandke ignored my explanation. She had read my condensed and edited proposal, sent to the Fulbright Commission and subsequently forwarded to the GDR's Ministry of Education. With this proposal in hand, Grandke inquired, "What do you mean by 'territorial belonging'?"

"Uh-oh," I thought. My core concept, "belonging," hadn't much currency among scholars in the West, nor here either. Most scholars in both Germanies favored examining objective affiliations such as ethnicity or party membership, sociological markers, rather than finding a way to investigate the subjective significance citizens attached to different forms of belonging. Highlighting "familial, political, and territorial" belonging was also suspicious. Grandke's apprehensions likely revolved around scrutiny of my potential disloyalty to the GDR as an autonomous territory. She might have also been cautious, uncertain about my intentions or any covert agenda. If she suspected I was a spy, she had no way of knowing or refuting it.

"This is somewhat challenging for me to articulate in German," I responded. (I only spoke in German with these scholars.)

"I want to explore how different cultures define belonging, especially in a nation like Germany, divided since 1948. Citizens here might possess a distinct sense of place and territory, unlike those in West Germany."

Navigating around this topic wasn't easy. Despite my attempts at clarity, Grandke remained skeptical, evident from her furrowed brow. I swiftly reassured her, "I'm not aiming to challenge the GDR's existence. I'm simply interested in understanding how law has adapted to and impacted the shifts in family dynamics since 1948. Areas such as divorce law, birth control, and women's rights evolved faster here than in the West."

We went on for about thirty minutes, more of an exchange of information than a conversation. As she rose, Grandke expressed regret, "I am sorry, I have another appointment."

After a brief pause, she added, "You know, Humboldt University is the Harvard of the GDR."

I kept a straight face, but I thought that she was conveying her insecurity. I wasted no time in acknowledging that what she said was true.

"Absolutely, I'm aware of this. It's a privilege to be able to learn from the scholars here, not just in law but in history and politics also."

Later, when I asked Ilona how it went with Professor Grandke, Ilona sighed and chuckled, "Not well."

"I wasn't able to express myself effectively, I'm afraid," I admitted. "Maybe next time I can better explain what my research is about. Sociocultural anthropology isn't a field here, so you have no comparisons."

Ilona diligently arranged several appointments with scholars in Leipzig, Rostock, and Dresden, always expressing a desire to accompany me. Our mode of travel usually involved my ten-year-old green Volkswagen Golf, purchased in Rotterdam on my way to Berlin. Opting for the car over trains, I had purchased it in the Netherlands because of the affordable auto insurance available there. My NL license plate marked the car as belonging to someone from the West.

Whenever I hit the major roads on leaving Berlin, even amidst bustling traffic, the license plate occasioned routine police checks. With sirens blaring and lights flashing, a car would pull behind me and I would slowly maneuver my Golf to the roadside. These controls unnerved Ilona greatly. She and her husband, both law professors—she at Humboldt University, he at an institute in Potsdam—had traversed every corner of the GDR in their own car without ever facing such interruptions. Her first experience witnessing this with me was particularly distressing for both of us. I could sense her tension, her sudden silence palpable. I was likely holding my breath as well. Once the police checked my license and passport, they waved us on.

Apart from traveling with Ilona, my explorations that year encompassed extensive travel beyond East Berlin to experience the country and connect with people outside the capital city. Chance encounters through new acquaintances in Berlin led to companions eagerly joining me on every trip. I would usually let them drive, if they wanted to, assuming they knew the rules of the road better than I. They marveled at the modest Golf's horsepower and my audacity in maneuvering highway intersections, whereas their Trabis had zero power to accelerate. They would remind me, "It has the motor of a lawnmower. A lawnmower!" Our contacts in cities and small towns graciously hosted us overnight, usually on a spare sofa. We stayed up late discussing their work and lives, and they posed many questions about American politics or culture. I was usually the first to need sleep. When I'm tired, I can't hide it.

Surveillance was a known entity, yet Ilona and I paid it no heed. I never discussed it in groups, except to joke about "Big Brother." Even one-on-one with most others, I did not discuss the mysterious presence of informers. Four times during my initial research stint I visited Prague with East German friends. Czechoslovakia was the only country they could easily visit spontaneously. When in Prague, the morning after arrival involved a form-filling session with the police to list my accommodation and contacts. With a residency permit for the year in the GDR, local travel within the country didn't necessitate registration.

The longer I lived in East Berlin, the more I started to become conscious of my own repressed awareness of surveillance. And Ilona seemed the most likely candidate, though certainly not the only one. She had done nothing nor changed any behavior to arouse my suspicion. I think it was that I had started to write more. Reading some of my descriptions on my desktop Apple computer—I reread continually to revise and add things—led me to note the accumulation of fear.

To objectivize in writing what was happening and reread it later was the quickest way to more awareness. I had been quickly repressing any suspicions of people I met regularly, and after a few months I had grown dependent on Ilona's help and was unwilling to think of her filing reports on me. I lacked a word to name our relationship. Interlocutor, yes, but too technical; collaborator, yes, but too conspiratorial in this context; informant, perhaps the most accurate term, literally, but misleading in its most negative connotations of a spy. Ilona was always a guide, upbeat and helpful, evolving into a friend with whom I could share a wide range of issues.

She once likened the GDR to a zoo, portraying the Wall as a protective barrier that preserved lives within. The premise underlying her portrayal was widely shared: a socialist economy could only flourish when sheltered from profit-driven motives and unregulated capitalism. The assumption was that open borders would signal the GDR's demise. Ilona saw herself as a custodian, safeguarding her fellow citizens.

Roughly every ten days, I embarked on a half-hour stroll from my studio apartment on Mollstrasse near Alexanderplatz—a tiny residence on the ninth floor of a relatively new high-rise—to the American chancery, a few blocks from the Brandenburg Gate and the Wall, known as the US Mission to East Berlin. At the time, the US maintained embassies in both East and West Berlin, with the official embassy located in Bonn, West Germany. The chancery urged Americans and their numerous foreign employees to embody freedom and exude approachability,

maintaining a welcoming and relaxed approach to visitor control. That was despite, an Israeli who worked there told me, that they suspected many of their visitors were GDR spies.

Within the chancery's premises, I frequented a public library and immersed myself in West German newspapers. Even GDR citizens visited this space, accustomed to routine questioning by their own police after departing. However, my primary objective was to befriend the librarian, who came over from West Berlin daily. She kindly agreed to smuggle my letters and fieldnotes to an address in West Berlin. I feared that my notes might vanish while living in the GDR, and I didn't trust the postal service to send them without also reading them beforehand. I was fairly certain that my apartment was under surveillance, likely bugged, and perhaps even entered to read my written fieldnotes and access my computer.

On my way to the chancery the policemen stationed nearby consistently approached me a block or two before I reached it, though they never stopped me on departure. Wearing their dull blue uniforms, they all looked alike to me. They'd greet me, request my passport, check the visa, and pose some routine queries. I'd answer them with a smile, hiding my irritation, and they'd hand me back my passport and wish me good day. I quickly acclimated to this ritual of control without getting upset.

Given a plausible explanation, I readily dismissed any potential paranoid theories, despite being a prime target for surveillance. One young, shapely woman who was part of a circle of friends, told me she was stopped all the time in the evening and asked where she was going. "What do you say?" I asked.

"I say, 'I come from fucking, and I am going to fuck.'"

Her humor wasn't the usual reaction I observed. Many people were angry about being stopped or questioned and most were to some degree fearful. I heard stories of confrontation with the Stasi, but only a few people told me of being terrorized by them. The odd thing was that I sympathized with the informants, perhaps because I was unaware I'd met any and, if I had, I was uncertain who they were. I assumed those who spied on me were coerced in some way into it. That may not have been true. They did have a choice not to do this, an argument lodged against them by those most critical of their complicity.

But I also felt that I was implausible to others. A researcher not sent by his government or university to spend a year with us, in the GDR? Most people didn't think they were that important to be a focus of my

attention. Who was I? It wasn't far-fetched to believe, as many people did, that I was recruited by the CIA; my age and gender seemingly fit the profile. Additionally, an anthropologist's pursuit of detailed knowledge might resemble espionage, though the intent differs. I was gathering data not for the state but often with the backing of my own government. Consequently, I took it in stride that most people would be skeptical of what I said, even or especially when I spoke critically of the United States. So why would Berliners, in both parts of the city, nonetheless place trust in me?

On the other hand, people had some sense, even if unspoken, that one of the Stasi's missions was to foster distrust among citizens. This sense led them to lean on me for truth, and to grant me more latitude than they normally might, precisely because they distrusted the Stasi. Its primary tool was misinformation—a tactic known as *Zersetzungtechnik* that dated back to the Nazi era and was aimed at distorting perceptions of reality. People I befriended often thought I had access to unvarnished truth and was willing to share it, assuming I had nothing invested in manipulating their perceptions. And I didn't, because what I sought was the unvarnished truth of their perceptions.

The only individual I knew who in fact turned out to have worked as an informal collaborator was Sascha Anderson, whom I had encountered during my initial visit to the GDR as a tourist. At that time, neither I nor any of those people who recommended him to me, were aware that he was functioning as an informant for the Stasi, as a covert operative who surveils friends, neighbors, and foreign visitors. He meticulously documented our critical viewpoints and personal relationships. In 1986, the Stasi facilitated his move to West Berlin, where initially he continued his artistic endeavors—while also writing reports on his associates in the West.

With the breakdown of formal authority in 1989 to 1990, during the change of the regime, the Stasi headquarters was sacked and raided, revealing Anderson's extensive reports for both East and West German spy agencies. Reports on me, unfortunately, disappeared. Anderson's defense was rooted in claiming that he became an informer only after facing arrest and imprisonment twice, for disseminating leaflets and poetry without official approval. His clandestine activities had repercussions for individuals like Wolf Biermann, a former friend, singer, and lyricist, who, upon learning of Anderson's actions, disdainfully dubbed him Sascha Arschloch (Sascha Asshole).

I wrote about Anderson in the early 1990s and tried to understand his role as a double agent, grappling with the perplexing dualities of being both in opposition to the regime while contributing to the construction of its authority. Describing his prose as "dispersed, stagey [and] marked by a personal schizophrenia," I pondered whether by the 1980s the age of the virtuous dissident had ceased to exist.

Eliciting Painful Memories

In the fall of 1986, still immersed in my first sustained period of fieldwork in East Berlin as the trees began to shed their leaves and a chill set in after the sun went down, I was sitting in Regina's living room, a fire lit in the tiled stove that haughtily dominated a corner of her fourth-floor apartment. Its shiny surface impressed me as beautiful, but I also knew how unhealthy the lignite was, emitting toxic chemicals and poisonous heavy metals as it burned.

Regina had joined a group with three other women to practice their English, and they asked me to replace a young British Communist, also with the name John, who had returned home. I had been living in East Berlin for a few months and accepted any invitation to do things with people I met, whether it was an evening dinner, drinks in a bar, shopping, traveling to other cities, visiting their workplaces or children's schools, or just walking with them on the street in the direction they were going. Although I would have preferred a group to improve my German, I understood that access would depend on my ability to make people want my presence. In her case that involved, at least initially, speaking English.

Some months after the group started, I arranged to see each member in their own home. This was my first meeting alone with Regina to discuss my research. For starters, I wanted to know how she had experienced the end of World War II as a young child, and what it was like growing up in East Germany in the 1950s. She was divorced and now shared an apartment with her eighty-some year-old mother and her sixteen-year-old son. Regina's mother was already seated in the living room when I entered; she stood up to shake my hand, then sat back down, and listened. Her mother's presence made Regina uncomfortable, or at least she looked that way to me, but she said nothing about it. That was Regina's way, hesitant, gentle, a nervous quiver in her quiet voice.

For my project, I assumed that people did not experience history as it had been told by historians. They often attached significance to events other than those historians or the media paid attention to. Postwar Berlin was filled with political events of historical significance. I could read about them in every textbook, and each year I could attend the ceremonies commemorating them. But historians in the East had different stories to tell than those in the West, and when it was the same story, they had different perspectives. Rarely did either East or West German history books begin with the postwar period, so at the time what I asked was a provocation, which was to begin with 1945, what Germans call Zero Hour.

When I talked to historians about my work, many in the West would say, "Where is Weimar? You should begin with Weimar." Others would ask, "What about the Holocaust?" as if there were no German history outside (and sometimes before) the Holocaust, which followed a long prehistory of exclusion and pogroms targeting Jews. Many scholars in the West had focused on the rise of fascism in the 1930s. That remained for them The Big Question.

To be sure, historians were in one way correct. Twentieth-century Berlin was indeed central to a sequence of world-historical events: Weimar, the rise of fascism, World War II, the Holocaust, the Allied occupation, the founding of the two German states, the West German economic miracle, the building of the Wall, just for starters. But that view did not recognize how people change the value they ascribe to such events because of their varied personal experience of them, nor how they might revise their understandings based on subsequent experiences.

Regina reformulated my question on how she experienced the end of World War II, so her mother could understand why I was there. "You mean, what it was like as a child back then? Everything had been destroyed, there was chaos and hunger, and then the Russian troops came, and I had to go to school. But many teachers were missing." Her mother was alert to the discussion and observed us for a while, but when Regina asked if she wanted to add something, she unexpectedly offered to talk of her experience and began to talk about being raped by Soviet soldiers. This took me, and Regina, aback. It was unusual, Regina later told me, for her mother to tell this story. And to an American stranger like me? I was shocked, and I reacted that way, uncertain as to how to proceed.

The extent of Russian rape of German women and its influence on their subsequent lives and their families was not unknown to me before

I began my research, but it was not a topic I was well prepared to think about. No other American or German researcher had told me of hearing such a personal story, though I am sure some had been told of such experiences. It was also understandable that most women of this generation simply did not tell their stories to others. But since my research was motivated less by the historical record than by the memories of history that were about this record, it became for me more important than ever to include this story in my attempt to make sense of postwar history. Regina's mother continued with a brief account of why she stayed in the Soviet-occupied zone: her husband was missing; she had a place to stay; it just happened to be the Soviet zone. She spoke matter-of-factly, without much detail, and then we all went silent.

Eventually Regina broke the ice to tell us, in much more detail than her mother did, of her own rape as a young woman. Again, I was stunned, not really by the rape itself but that this violence was being told to me, an anthropologist, by a recent acquaintance, not a friend, and following the revelation by Regina's mother. To simply write it down, as an ethnographer was supposed to do, conflicted with what I felt as a person, which was to sit still and listen. Yet I did take a few notes, perhaps out of nervousness. What else was I to do? Regina later said that she had not told her mother before about her rape. Again, I was taken aback by this fact. She was on a bicycle on a country road when a young man accosted her: he knocked her off her bike, pulled up her dress and satisfied himself; then he just as quickly walked away.

What I learned from this encounter was that I had to find ways to prepare myself, as an anthropologist, to listen to stories where I was asked to contain an emotionally overwhelming experience that had been rarely if at all previously shared. And I kept learning, as I talked to more women, that for many the experience of the end of the war began not with the historical events I had learned about in textbooks—capitulation, armistice, occupation—but with rape, or the fear of rape, a story that historians began attaching significance to only decades after my encounter with Regina's mother.

And what about the memory of German men who had fought in the war? This was a memory I had come better prepared to listen to, I thought. But such men did not readily share any experiences of this sort with me. Their sons and daughters in both East and West Berlin told me that their fathers—if their fathers had survived and returned—were also reluctant to share with them experiences of the war. This was true

especially but not only for those who had been on the Eastern front. Unlike with women, my presence as a male anthropologist gave me no advantage in eliciting men's stories of war.

Anyhow, I was more invested in the recall of postwar experiences and therefore tried to convince men to reconstruct the early days after the war: their return from prisoner of war camps if that was the case, their reeducation by the Allies, their relations with wives, mothers, and children. With little success. Nearly all these experiences I had to learn from their children, the first postwar generation. So it went, for example, with a man called Lutz, who had served in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republican government fighting the fascists. A committed Communist, he then went to Yugoslavia, where he experienced gruesome fighting—shaking his head in horror as he recalled events. There he was arrested, imprisoned, and released after 1946. From Yugoslavia, he went to the Soviet zone, in which the GDR was established in 1947. He was interested in sharing his theories of politics and the structures conditioning his history, but not in sharing any details of his own personal experience in the GDR.

The next generation, most born after the war, heard stories of the postwar period from men their seniors, but they also had difficulty eliciting any detailed personal accounts from them. What they knew and told me were often stories about their fathers told them by grandmothers.

I concluded that the murder and terror of the war, which many men had experienced as members of military units, filled them with shame. And perhaps the shame grew as time passed, after their return to families, when they felt humiliation for the defeats, regardless of the side they fought on. Back in Germany, it was only through the efforts of their wives and mothers that they had any sort of home left to return to. Much as German soldiers had destroyed the cities of their enemies, their enemies had also destroyed many German cities. For men who returned to this destruction, it must have been psychologically devastating.

My initial research was not about memory per se, at least not consciously. Only on my return to Harvard after fieldwork did my advisor Sally Moore remind me that most of what I was writing was not the past but Germans' memories of it. For men who had been active during the war, talking about their lives in the present inevitably took them back to memories before 1945. That often caused them to stop the recall. Less so for women of this generation. For the subsequent generation of men and women—often called *68er* in German—most of their childhood

memories were about the end of war, and woven into their memories were stories told them by adult women about themselves and their male kin and neighbors.

In writing my dissertation, I realized I had to depart from the standard ethnographic conventions of the time. Conventionally, you observed a small group of people and a place at one time and wrote a synchronic account, without acknowledging how radically history often erupted into their lives, or how places themselves changed or even disappeared, or how the passing of time itself created revisions in thinking and new internal divisions and affiliations to think about. Large numbers of Germans had suffered from severe dislocations as their cities were destroyed. Germans were also subject to a large postwar ethnic cleansing from areas in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In these flights, children were often accidentally separated from their mothers and siblings. But these young children and adults didn't all experience separation and loss the same way.

I did not work with children, but adults were nearly always willing to tell me stories of their childhood. In the telling, if not before, they would often interrupt their narrative with the statement, "I was too young then to understand what was going on." They had difficulty registering the significance of whatever traumas they had lived through as children, in part because later traumas—such as losing friends who left for the West, or discovering that neighbors and friends had reported their experiences and intentions to the Stasi, affecting their careers and life trajectories—led to revisions of feelings attached to earlier experiences.

For many children, events after the war were not traumatic because they normalized the rubble and debris in which they played and the ruins in which they hid from adults. For others, trauma is the apposite word: at first they were unable to know what was happening to them, but then, in the drive to survive a series of overwhelming events—war, murder, hunger, disappearances, abandonment, cruelty—emotional survival meant "forgetting," repressing their feelings from the time of those events. Memory of those events nonetheless remained stored and active in the unconscious, a space of deadness until some outsider elicited their memories.

But who wants to bring such memories to life? For adults, this outsider who brought their memories to life was often initially their own child who had matured enough to make provocative demands for remembering. Such demands were understandably felt as accusatory, especially with the increased awareness of the gravity of German crimes.

Many of the adults I met, even though already in their seventies and eighties, began their recall to me with tears that fell to replace the words and scenes they sought to remember. What they remembered were highly individual stories, not the collective narratives that unify the group under one perspective.

Dance in Karl-Marx-Stadt

In late summer 1987 I visited Karl-Marx-Stadt to attend a dance and listen to a reading by Jürgen, whom I had had the good fortune of meeting in East Berlin the previous year. Warm and funny, a great listener and storyteller, he had become my best friend and, in anthropological jargon, my main interlocutor. In East Berlin, we often went to the theater and bars together. Outside Berlin, we traveled in my ten-year-old Golf to Rostock, Warnemünde, Görlitz, Leipzig, Dresden, and even three times to the Czech Republic.

Tickets to the dance sold out a month in advance, so Jürgen asked Ruth, a divorced woman in her early forties who worked in Karl-Marx-Stadt, to buy them for us. She was an acquaintance of an acquaintance—connections worked that way—and though she had never met us, she was delighted to host two men from Berlin. When we arrived, Ruth was excited about my car. She had just purchased a new East German-made Trabant, for which she had waited thirteen years. "But I don't have a car," she scoffed, "I have a Trabant!"

My connection to Jürgen had come about in a similarly roundabout way. I was scheduled to move to East Berlin for the year and needed a place to stay overnight in West Berlin. Earlier that summer, I had been traveling in Italy with Gary, a fellow Harvard graduate student. On the steep cliffs of the Italian Riviera, he introduced me to a drag queen friend I'll call Sandy, and to Thomas, who had been traveling together.

Thomas approached me on the beach and declared, "Hi! I'm from West Berlin." Lucky me, I thought! He'd been a foreign exchange student in Minnesota, where he'd met Sandy. He was full of effusive praise for America, with a constant refrain of "America is so great, America is so cool, I love America." This quickly irritated me, as it overlooked American Cold War politics, which I found hard to stomach. Despite this, I liked him for his genuine sincerity and easy-going nature. Knowing no one in the East, I was grateful when Thomas suggested, "You have

to meet Siggi. He's from the East and was recently released from prison and allowed to move to the West."

Once in Berlin, Thomas brought us together. Siggi was a thin, muscular redhead from East Germany, and he told me right away he loved Italian-looking men. (I am not Italian-looking). That night, Siggi invited me to stay over. Hearing of my plans and interests, he said, "You really have to meet Jürgen. He was one of the few friends who stood by me while I was in prison and helped me as I was preparing to leave."

"Not your family?" I asked.

"Ach! They didn't want anything to do with me. On the petition to leave, I'd given 'gay' as my reason, that I couldn't live a gay life in the GDR. That was too much for them."

The next day, I moved into my university-assigned studio apartment near Alexanderplatz. Three days later, I nervously navigated trams, buses, and cars to drive a few kilometers outside the city center to Hans-Loch-Strasse, where Jürgen lived. The newer street names, like Hans Loch, were unfamiliar to people I met. When I looked Loch up, I read that he had been the Finance Minister of the GDR for the first six years after its founding. It was a heroic task in those early years to rebuild an industrial economy after a devastating war while many workers fled to the West and the Soviets plundered machines and raw materials as retribution for the German destruction of their economy during the war. By 1987, few people recognized Loch's name.

Jürgen was completing a manuscript titled *Ganz Normal Anders*, which roughly translates as "completely normal in a different way," based on gay East German life stories. He gave readings at various venues—churches, literary clubs, and bars—driven by curiosity, a desire to educate, and aspiration for recognition as an author. Although my research centered in Berlin, I accompanied Jürgen to many of his readings, eager to explore gay life outside the capital in a socialist state.

Of all GDR cities I saw, Karl-Marx-Stadt was the most barren. I could hardly believe residents when they told me that at the 20th century's start, when the city was called Chemnitz—to which it reverted in 1990—it was Germany's richest city, a hub for textiles, machine construction, and later automobiles and military hardware. This explained why Britain and the US heavily bombed it during World War II.

My visit, more than two decades after the rubble had been cleared, revealed neglected old buildings in ruins and expressionless new structures. It left me numb. The destroyed or decayed architecture had been replaced with forbidding socialist-realist boxes, showcasing brutalist

style. The central square, unimaginatively named Zentraler Platz, was a concrete wasteland framed by large, monumental buildings. The steep vertical surfaces of Congress Hall were covered with peculiar polygonal concrete precast elements, repeated in rows from top to bottom. To me, they looked like frightening Lego blocks. Surrounding the center were low- and high-rise Plattenbau, large precast concrete housing blocks, each identical in its square, nondescript uniformity.

In a literal sense, Karl-Marx-Stadt was dedicated to one of the most important of Marx's projects—industrial development—with ninety thousand workers producing almost one-fifth of the country's products. In its name, in its functionally rebuilt center, in its mimicry of Russian realist aesthetics, and in its activities—or lack of them—the city epitomized actually existing socialism and held significant symbolic value for East Germany.

We arrived an hour before the reading, and Ruth gave us a walking tour of the center. One addition from 1971 stood out: a gigantic statue of Marx's head, his hair flowing horizontally about a meter on each side, with "Workers of the World, Unite!" inscribed on the base in the four languages of the occupation powers. It was said to be the world's second-largest bust. Ruth mentioned that the Russian sculptor, Lew Kerbel, was asked why he only depicted a head, and reportedly replied, "Karl Marx needs no legs, no hands; his head says it all."

Jürgen's reading in a local club drew a packed audience of mixed men and women. He read selections from several biographies of East German gay men. I remember the audience listening closely, with only the organizers asking questions, primarily about how he had gathered these histories. I sensed that people came out of curiosity, unsure of what would be said. The theme of sexuality was certainly a draw, but there was also the allure of potentially subversive revelations in the personal histories. At that time, as state authority and socialist ideology slowly crumbled, discussing homosexuality provided an opportunity to think outside the norm.

Our admission tickets for the next night simply read *Tanz* (dance), with no hint that it was a gay affair. The event took place in a nondescript pub on the outskirts of the city, typical of the restaurant and bars that dotted both Germanys. It typically opened at lunch and closed before eleven at night, but once a month, from half past eight to closing time, it was barred to those without tickets but open to host a dance for gay men, lesbians, and other adventurous souls. We left my car in the city, took a streetcar for several kilometers, and walked a couple more to arrive

shortly before seven. Ten minutes later, the first group from other parts of Saxony arrived, warmly greeted by locals. Before most of the others arrived, we ate an orderly meal of typical GDR fare: schnitzel with potato salad, or fried pork neck with fried potatoes. Kassler, my preferred option, wasn't available that night.

Joining us at our table of seven were Ruth and four friends, including two young Cuban men, a female friend Ruth introduced as a coworker, and a man whose name I don't recall, though I do remember that he danced passionately later in the evening despite a severe curvature in his spine. Ruth talked about her dismal life as a divorced woman and the long hours she had to work, Jürgen about his book manuscript. I kept quiet until the man with the spine curvature, seated next to me, asked, "So how did you arrange to live in the GDR?"

"I'm only here for the year," I replied, "on a GDR-USA scholar exchange program. Six Americans come here; six GDR citizens go to the US."

Obviously curious as were most East Germans, Ruth commented, "Friends who noticed us walking around the city yesterday were wondering about your connections to the CIA."

We all chuckled, and I gave one of my standard responses, "That's a reasonable suspicion, but I am an academic and writing my doctoral thesis at Harvard on your experience. The CIA isn't really interested in that." The others chuckled again, and the conversation found its way to disability.

The man with the spine curvature explained that he had a disability pension, but it wasn't enough, so he did part-time work advocating for the physically disabled. He bemoaned the loneliness and ugliness of Karl-Marx-Stadt, and the difficulty of finding partners living there. "But," he added, "I'm still here! You can't find an apartment in Berlin or Leipzig." Ruth said two of her male friends were living with their mothers. Despite being American, I felt treated as just another patron in a friendly conversation.

As the evening progressed, the lights dimmed, and the dining tables were pushed aside to make room for us to dance. A disco ball started spinning, and loud music filled the room. The two Cubans on government contracts who worked at a local plant took to the dance floor. At my table they called them, "the little pair", ostensibly because they slept together in a cuddled-up fetal position. They danced with infectious rhythm oblivious to the stares of the others, who seemed intimidated by their skill or just enjoyed watching for a while.

I caught the name of only one of the Cubans, the fair-skinned Orlando, whose partner was dark-haired and brown-skinned. Despite being closely monitored by the Stasi and their fellow Cuban and German coworkers, they seemed relaxed. Ruth's friend whispered to me that Ruth had been in love with Orlando and jealous of his friend. She had tried to come between the two, but the issue was now settled, and they hung out together. She said that Cuban workers caught in homosexual acts were sometimes deported.

"What kind of music is playing?" I asked, unable to identify most of the artists, clueless as to the mix.

"Oh, that's *West-Musik*," said someone, and listed the singers: Marianne Rosenberg, Frank Schöbel, Modern Talking, Rod Stewart, Smokey, and Boney M. Jürgen later called it "real gay music." I heard someone say, "I couldn't sleep tonight until after I heard Boney M." The dance floor filled completely when the Village People's "YMCA" played. About an hour into the dancing, the Cubans and some Germans performed a drag show, lip-syncing to Cuban songs.

The last call for drinks was at a quarter to eleven. The last tram left shortly after eleven, so suddenly people gathered their coats and ran in what Jürgen called a "pig's gallop" to catch the last ride back to the city.

A young man with whom I had been dancing quite intimately said he was waiting for someone, perhaps to foreclose a proposition from me. In any event, he was still waiting as I left. The pub was strict about its closing time. I suspected the Stasi were fully integrated into the planning and monitoring of the dance evening. But even the advantage of hindsight doesn't enable me now to reconstruct who—among the dancers, waiters, and bartenders—was doing the surveillance and would write the report. At the time, it didn't seem to matter much to anyone.

The next morning, Jürgen and I visited a middle-aged man who had inherited his father's small farm. "It's even smaller now," he said, "since the local authorities expropriated some land for the state-run agricultural cooperative. But it's better this way. I couldn't handle all the animals and land alone anyway." He had tried to find a partner to help run the farm, but the last two men who responded to his ads were too *tuntig* or "queenie" for him. "And they couldn't do farm work anyway," he joked, but was serious.

Large, old trees and gently rolling hills graced the landscape around his home. His solid Biedermeier and Art Deco furniture looked like

museum pieces. "Living near Karl-Marx-Stadt means this is all I have to offer a partner," he said. "Nothing more than this house."

We stayed overnight and drove back to Karl-Marx-Stadt in the morning to say goodbye to Ruth. She insisted on giving us a ride in her new Trabant. Crossing a busy intersection, we held our breath, unsure if her inexperience and the car's inability to accelerate would get us across safely.

Back in East Berlin the next day, the bars and clubs were hopping. A city known for its greyness seemed exceptionally alive and cosmopolitan by comparison with Karl-Marx-Stadt. Clubs such as Schoppenstube and Burgfrieden stayed open until the early morning hours.

A few months later, I moved to West Berlin, which boasted a large, vocal, and flamboyant gay culture celebrating multiculturalism, hipness, and cruising. It also had an in-your-face heterosexual pornography culture. I initially lived around the corner from a Beate Uhse shop on Uhland Strasse, known for awakening a range of heterosexual fantasies and promoting tantric positions. The difference with the East was striking, the contrast grist for debate and speculation.

PART FOUR

IN THE FIELD AND AT HOME

The Opening of the Wall and the Return of German Jews

The news of the breach of the Berlin Wall reached me while I sat in a café off Harvard Square with Vera Oelschlegel, a strikingly elegant blonde actress, singer, writer, and theater director from East Berlin. It was November 9, 1989. Vera was a renowned international star, with a prolific career spanning forty films and television productions. Hailed as a leading interpreter of Bertolt Brecht's works on stage, she had received numerous prestigious awards in her country. Her astounding professional success ran parallel to an equally intriguing personal life, marked by three marriages, including one to a prominent member of the ruling Politbüro, whom she had divorced three years before we met.

Our encounters had been only brief in East Berlin. I'd first met her at an experimental production of Jürgen's *Ganz Normal Anders* that she directed at the Theater im Palast, where she served as head director. My connection to this book ran deep by then. In 1987 I had clandestinely transported the unedited manuscript across the border to West in the trunk of the car of a librarian who worked in the Permanent Representation of West Germany. I simply slipped it among my other papers and research notes without drawing attention to their content. A couple of months later I carried it with me to the US and enlisted the help of seven American and British scholars to translate its chapters, resulting in its publication as *Gay Voices from East Germany* in 1991.

On the night of the performance in 1989, I arrived through a side entrance, bypassing the spectacle of lights that greeted those entering from the front. Jürgen awaited me inside, and he shared the tragic news of the recent passing of the dramaturg who'd turned the interviews into a play. He had worked hard on creating emotional tension within the monologic stories. Upon learning of an AIDS diagnosis, he had taken his own life at the Baltic Sea. Despite this somber backdrop, the play captivated the audience, selling out every night. And Lemke's book was flying off the shelves in bookstores, which had to limit buyers to a single copy.

That Vera and I found ourselves in a quiet, nondescript Cambridge bar sharing this momentous occasion could not have been predicted. She had not been a regular presence in my social circle. Fate intervened just before our meeting when she received a phone call in her hotel room: the Berlin Wall had opened, and East Germans were flooding through the border controls. We shared a surprised chuckle at the unexpected news. Raising our glasses, I proposed a toast to the future of Berlin, and shared with Vera my research on division, adding "I didn't anticipate this but feel prepared to think about it. I expect there will be a reversal of developments and a rewinding of Germany's recent history."

Reflecting on this happening, Vera remarked curtly, "This will be the end of the GDR." Our emotions were a mix of excitement and melancholy.

"I wish I would be there to celebrate," I said. "The Wall had to come down sometime. But I do feel this as a loss. The socialist dream fading away before our eyes, despite its many flaws. As an anthropologist, I've dedicated six years of my life to studying this uniquely divided Berlin that is now disappearing."

Vera appeared contemplative rather than sorrowful as she reflected on the implications, "Indeed, the GDR will collapse. I've lived through its entire history, and now that chapter is closed."

Her lack of dismay seemed initially naive, but she stated pragmatically, "I'll likely lose my position as theater director." Which indeed happened. Upon her return, the Theater im Palast was shuttered. We finished our drinks, both eager to tune into CNN and watch the unfolding events in Berlin. She returned to her hotel, while I headed back to my apartment.

It just so happened that I had embarked on a new project in the summer of 1989, five months before the border opening, a comparative study of German-Jewish repatriation. My focus lay on those who had fled the Third Reich and sought refuge in one of the Allied countries—the Soviet Union, the US, France, or the UK—before returning to either

East or West Berlin after 1945. Fresh from completing my dissertation on belonging in the two Berlins, I was teaching in the Social Studies Program at Harvard.

Working with a German Studies professor, Jeff Peck, with whom I had crossed paths as a graduate student back in 1981 at the University of Washington, I resolved to tackle a more tightly defined project that wouldn't demand another six-year commitment, as had my dissertation research. We began by compiling lists of current German-Jewish residents of East and West Berlin, reaching out to acquaintances and inquiring whether they identified as Ashkenazim or Sephardim—the former originally from Germany, France, and Eastern Europe; the latter of Spanish or Portuguese descent—and where they had experienced exile during the era of the Third Reich.

Unlike for my dissertation research, where for the East Berlin work I had been assigned to the Law Faculty at Humboldt, this time I was affiliated with the Institut für Ethnographie. Our assigned mentor, Ute Mohrmann, welcomed us warmly into her office at the Institut bordering the park Friedrichshain. But since the project lay outside her usual interests, she graciously deferred to another acquaintance of ours, Kostja Münz, employed at the Centrum Judaicum, to advise, and—I presumed—to keep track of us.

Kostja enthusiastically agreed to help us find interviewees. When the conversation turned to the question of feasibility, he proposed we also make a film. Suddenly, we found ourselves planning to film all our interviews, provided our subjects were willing. Kostja helped us obtain permissions for filming in public spaces, frequently reassuring authorities, including the police, who were caught off-guard by our activities as two Americans running around with a cameraman.

With no script and only limited time, we confined ourselves to conducting interviews. I regretted that I couldn't engage in participant observation, which deprived the film of the rich contextual insights that I am now writing about.

Every evening, I intensely prepared for the filming the following day, briefing myself on the person we would be talking to, revising or crafting new questions, and reflecting on the successes and failures of the previous day's interviews. Initially, we hired a young, inexperienced German cameraman for the job. He kept interrupting with questions from behind the camera, grilling our interviewees like an investigative reporter, undermining our own confidence and eroding the trust of our interview

subjects. After three weeks of work, we bought out his contract and replaced him with a Czech filmmaker and friend, Martin Patek. Given Martin's extensive filmmaking experience compared to our lack thereof, he took on multiple roles, serving as soundman, director, editor, and producer, and even provided his own car to transport us and the equipment to interviews.

That summer, my time was completely consumed by the filming, leading me to neglect most of my other friends, acquaintances, and other research interests. But I do recall, amidst this intensive filming schedule, noticing small acts of rebellion on the subways: people riding without paying, a surge in youth sporting punk styles, and open, critical discussions about politics in public, free from whispers. In the conversations I did manage to have, the topic often shifted to Mikhail Gorbachev's initiatives of *glasnost* and *perestroika*—transparency and restructuring—in the Soviet Union. These were juxtaposed with Erich Honecker's apparent resistance to any notion of political reform.

In November 1988, the East German state had prohibited the sale of the Soviet monthly magazine *Sputnik* after it began featuring articles that broached formerly taboo topics such as reform, free speech, and non-conformity.

Friends mocked Honecker's decision to ban *Sputnik*, with comments like, "What, are we not supposed to follow Big Brother's lead anymore?"

One said, "A figure like Gorbachev is only possible in a vast and disorganized country like the Soviet Union; the GDR is small, and the Party's control is so tight that they would never allow such changes to occur here."

But change did occur. People took matters into their own hands and began demonstrating, initially every Monday in Leipzig. Supported by the Lutheran church, peaceful protesters demanded freedom to travel and the right to elect a democratic government. Demonstrations quickly spread to other cities, and toward the end of June 1989, Hungarian officials reacted by dismantling their barbed wire fence at the border with Austria. By mid-August, tens of thousands of East Germans were traveling to Budapest as tourists, hoping to cross into Austria and then make their way to West Germany. Every night, as I wrote up questions for our filming the next day, I watched the TV coverage. West German broadcasts were accessible in the East, and they reported extensively on East German discontent and the exodus through Hungary, while East German news attempted to downplay or ignore what was happening.

That was the summer of 1989. My research had located me in a fortuitous convergence of distinct times and places. On the one hand, I was preoccupied all day with a project about history: remembering the postwar Jewish return to Germany, traveling to different districts in East and West Berlin to meet German Jews, tape recording and filming their narratives. In the evenings, sitting in a small apartment in the old Scheunenviertel a few blocks from Alexanderplatz in East Berlin, transfixed by the day's turmoil, my attention was drawn to the making of history in the present. That marked my initial encounter with a series of mood shifts, from a stagnant mood to the tragedy of abandonment and East German flight, and from anxious anticipation of the end to eager anticipation of change. These moods would keep changing and rippling through Berlin over the ensuing decade.

The weather had been unusually hot and humid, perhaps contributing to my sense of feeling dizzy and my inability to keep up with so much going on. Anyway, this mass exodus of young East Germans to the West was radically alarming and destabilizing to the government and to people around me. Even though I fully supported East German desires for the freedoms I enjoyed, I took no comfort in unsettling the borders and boundaries of the postwar order. Rarely do such individual transgressions go unpunished. The thought of a borderless world was naive, I thought. A new border regime with different exclusions would take its place. Amidst the mounting pressure on the GDR and swirling speculation about the outcome of protests, we wrapped up the filming, and I headed back to Cambridge in early September to resume teaching at Harvard.

That fall, in letter exchanges and telephone conversations with my Berlin friends, I kept abreast of their diverse reactions to the unfolding of the GDR's dissolution. They always had something new to report to me. They struggled with the fear of participating in demonstrations and working openly with known dissidents, and with a sense of abandonment because friends and neighbors sought a better future by leaving the country.

About November 9, 1989, they all made the same observation. On that day, a member of the Politbüro improvised a slightly mistaken answer to a question about the future of the Berlin Wall. Border guards did not know how to respond, so they simply let people leave to visit the West—and let them return. Those people were euphoric, changing the atmosphere of the city, inaugurating a mood of *Verbrüderung*:

intense fraternization between Germans on both sides. Fraternization on amphetamine.

Bound by a shared sense of culture and a turbulent history of loss, destruction, and renewal, Germans from all corners of the GDR poured into West Berlin, collected their hundred marks of "welcome money"—approximately fifty-six dollars at the time—from the West German government, and explored the half of the city they had only seen on television. The majority of the sixteen million East Germans supposedly made this crossing before January 1, 1990. After that the West German government ended its Cold War policy of offering such welcome money.

A significant number of West Berliners, including some recent refugees from the former East, crossed the border in the opposite direction to visit friends or relatives or simply to get a glimpse of Berlin, the Capital City and its *Ossis*, as those from the *Ost* were increasingly called in an act of othering. Soon enough, the *Ossis* merged with West Berliners, including those from West Germany, into the broader category of *Wessis*, to celebrate the dissolution of political and territorial division. As Berlin became one, its German residents adopted identities that had been rarely and casually used in my previous experience, cementing *Ossi* and *Wessi* as labels. Another new term, *die Wende*—meaning the turnabout—was now widely used to characterize this rupture, leaving open which direction change would take.

From afar, at Harvard, I joined in their jubilation, swept up by its contagious energy. I told students in the seminar I was teaching, "You are witnessing a historic event that will change the world. This is the end of the Cold War." They didn't seem to know how to take that in. Of my German friends, never had I witnessed such exuberant celebrations, of unexpected unity. Some acquaintances opted out, hesitant immediately to embrace the idea of a united Germany. Among those I knew in West Berlin, it was often a lack of curiosity that held them back. Most of those who visited the East did so for idiosyncratic reasons. One friend from West Berlin told me he wanted to visit different *Mensas*—the dining halls of theaters, universities, government agencies, and companies, where highly subsidized lunches of varying quality were offered—because they represented a socialist world that would soon disappear.

West Berliners had grown accustomed to their separate existence, tethered to the broader world yet contained within a heavily subsidized and insulated enclave. Many now voiced grievances about the congested public transport, the pollution from East German-made Trabis. They

mocked the fashion choices of their Eastern counterparts: predominantly black attire for women, and an abundance of drab grey or beige clothing styles that had fallen out of favor in the West, such as men's tie-dyed jeans.

One female friend from the East confided, "I was overwhelmed and slept for two weeks. It was all just too much." A male acquaintance experienced a nervous breakdown within the year. Yet, the majority I knew embraced the moment as a rare opportunity, despite lingering anxieties about the uncertainties of the future.

On my return in December, I purchased a hammer and headed to Friedrichstrasse to claim a piece of the Wall for myself. I hacked off a piece—graffiti artists on the Western side had desecrated the Wall with bright colors—and saved it in an empty Pepperidge Farm cookie package. In that spot I took a photograph of a West German engaging in a handshake through a sizable gap in the Wall with an East German border guard. It wasn't a spontaneous moment. I had to request their participation. Nonetheless, they readily smiled and complied, and the next year I featured the image on the cover of my book, *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin*.

Yet, amidst the celebratory atmosphere and my sympathy for their joy, I couldn't shake my concerns about the idealization of a single German culture poised for reunification. While I identified with the yearning for unity after decades of division, I remained skeptical about the assumption that only positive outcomes would follow from this illusion of unity. My initial foray into Germany had been motivated by a desire to comprehend its division, a consequence of its collective culpability in World War II. Now, as the formal punishment drew to a close, the Pandora's box of freedom would open right-wing, neo-Nazi sentiment to public expression. My privileges as an American would certainly diminish, and that was only fair, but I did not welcome being assigned the status of a mere foreigner, like countless others.

The First Democratic Election

I returned to Berlin during my spring break in March 1990, to witness the first free, competitive election in East Germany since the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. A decisive moment for what some commentators dubbed "the Autumn Revolution." The government of the GDR had resigned, and the entire regime was imploding. Was this just a change of

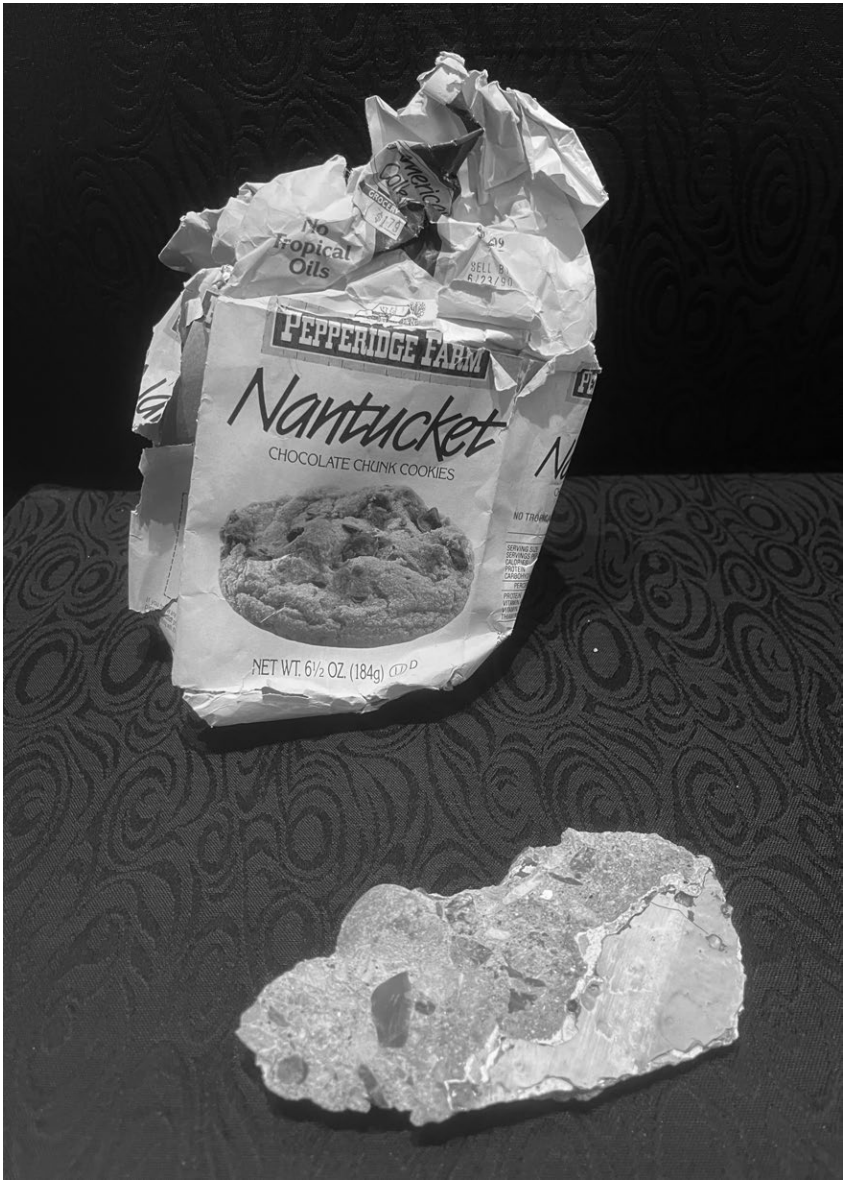

Figure 11. Piece of the Wall

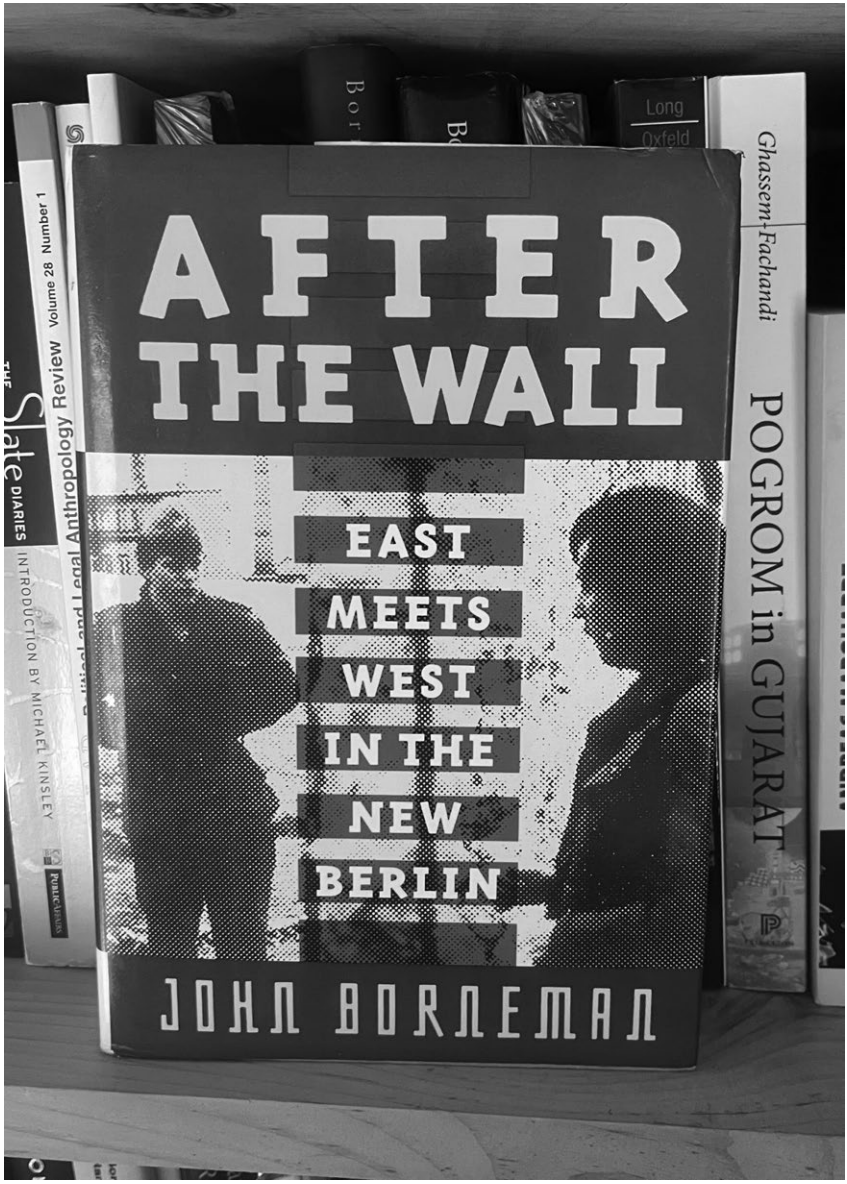

Figure 12. East Meets West in the New Berlin

government, or was it the dissolution of the entire regime and even the people of the East? On this and each of my subsequent visits, my focus was on research: I was hoping to document the experiences of acquaintances and friends in the East during this peaceful revolution.

On the day of the vote, March 19, the skies were clear, and the sun shone brightly, taking the edge off the chill in Berlin as winter drew to a close. I spent the day walking around Alexanderplatz, made famous by Alfred Döblin's 1929 novel by that name which depicted the pandemonium of the city through the mixing of people from various milieux around a public square. This prewar transportation hub in the eastern center of the city had been reduced to ruins during World War II. The GDR had rebuilt the square in the 1960s, and it became known for its World Clock, Fountain of Friendship between Nations, and the Television Tower, which rises above the entire city's landscape. All these were intended to showcase the strength and achievements of a socialist society in East Germany. What would become of them, and the ideas they represented, if that society disappeared?

The mood that day had an undercurrent of indeterminate anticipation. People appeared festive, whimsical, relaxed, without a hint of anger or violence. My observations became part of *After the Wall*, which I completed in four months while teaching two classes at Harvard. Contacted by Basic Books, which had somehow heard about me, I was offered an advance of ten thousand dollars. An impressive sum.

This was how my book described that decisive event:

"Alexanderplatz hummed with activity. Two well-scrubbed young men with slicked back hair passed out free Stuyvesant cigarettes. The slogan 'Come Together' was emblazoned on their T-shirts. Already reunification had become a sales pitch.

During most of the afternoon the main stage erected on Alex was occupied by a hard-rock group from the United States, with long, straggly hair and torn jeans, resting their screeching guitars on their genitals. People watched in stunned silence. After one song the lead guitarist ululated (in English, of course): 'Hello East Germany! How are you doing?'

About fifty feet from the stage, right next to the World Clock, stood a grotesquely overgrown Coca Cola can, about eight feet tall and five feet wide, a plasticine, pituitary monstrosity from which someone was selling cola."

I now recall a detail that got deleted. On another corner of Alexanderplatz, an East German band played American Country and Western music. In my years working in East Berlin, I had never heard of this

music being played. Where in the world did the band members come from? Dressed in large cowboy hats and jeans, elaborately embroidered shirts covered with fringe jackets, they were all East Germans. They had learned to reproduce the weeping and sliding tone and feeling of the music, a twangy sound that harmonized with the twang in their voices. They sang with perfect English diction lyrics of love and heartbreak.

It was unlikely that most members of the audience understood the words, as English had not been a major language offered in the schools; it was Russian they were supposed to learn. But even if they didn't understand the lyrics, they undoubtedly felt the melancholy in the music and in the sartorial styles that appealed to a lost and idealized golden American West, memorialized in films they had all seen. This audience was about to lose any sense that they had been a part of the socialist tradition celebrated in the GDR. "Good riddance," is what I suspect most people would have said to me on that day. Among those East Germans standing with me the Country and Western music perhaps reminded them of the loss of any authenticity of their own. They were about to become West German, but a poor copy of the former enemy.

Arnim, a friend I had met four years earlier and wrote about in 1990, agreed to meet me to watch the outcome of the vote. Provisional results were to be announced at six in the evening. The Marshall Foundation had awarded me a small grant to witness this historical event, and Harvard had granted me permission to stay an extra few days after Spring Break.

It was still light and still warm as Arnim and I sat in the spacious grassy area in front of the previous headquarters of the formerly ruling Socialist Unity Party, or SED in its German abbreviation. The headquarters was housed in the former Reichsbank building, one of the few remaining Nazi structures significantly rebuilt after being damaged during the war. The gerontocratic leadership of the SED had been rocked by the revolutionary events the previous fall. On December 1, 1989, the GDR parliament had rescinded the clause in the constitution which defined the country as a socialist state under the leadership of the SED. Two days later the entire Central Committee and Politbüro resigned. Deprived of its monopoly power, the SED dissolved two weeks later before reincorporating as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Everyone I knew expected the PDS to lose the election big time; however, there was no consensus on which parties might dominate the coalition that would replace it.

Why I was spending this day with Arnim—alias Mutter Wolffen, as his friends called him—was not obvious to me, even retrospectively. I had many friends with whom I was more intimate and many who were more astute politically. I could have perhaps learned much more about the parties and election machinery by hanging out with academic or intellectual friends, but I most likely chose Arnim because we ran into each other the day before. He was a misanthrope, neither astute nor an expert though always eager to share an original story.

He acquired his nickname (which he did not appreciate) from his likeness to the main character Mutter Wolffen in Gerhart Hauptmann's 1928 play *Der Biberpelz*, a caring person who was also a petty criminal and followed her own rules. Arnim danced to the beat of his own drum also, hearing what he wanted to hear yet open to the unexpected, stubbornly locating himself as the perpetual outsider.

One of my goals in this early research was to get to know someone well in both Berlins who the regime thought was *asozial*: a pejorative label that translates as deviant and harmful to the social, meaning that Arnim embodied the abject. Although he did not take himself seriously, he never saw himself mirrored in this negative image, and while embodying the term resisted acknowledging its relevance for him. The thing was, I liked him because he rarely said or did the predictable. And I felt sorry for him, because nearly all the people I knew kept their distance from him.

Why was Arnim with me on this important day? He liked me, friends said, because I was friendly to him. I asked him many questions about himself and did not create distance between us. Above all, I did not judge him, as did others. He was proud to tell others, "I just left a meeting with a professor from America."

As the election results came in on a large football-like scoreboard, Arnim's usually expressive face went blank. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which at the time led the ruling coalition in the West, trounced the other parties. Arnim and most of my acquaintances expected the Social Democratic Party (SPD) would win. And so did I, even saying it would be so to my Harvard colleagues in the Social Studies program where I was teaching. Voters could freely choose between twenty-four parties, but in the three-plus months since the uprising the two strongest traditional parties of the West—the CDU and SPD—had created or become affiliated with their closest counterparts in the East. Together they had the support of sixty-two percent of the voting public.

Enjoying West German organizational and financial support, these parties had an advantage over all other parties, including the wounded PDS, which won sixteen percent.

The CDU had a huge advantage over the SPD because in 1946, in the zone under Soviet control, the SPD had been forced to merge with the Communist Party of Germany to form the SED. The SED then absorbed the property and most of the voters of the SPD and sent about five thousand of its members, who had resisted this merger, to labor camps and jails. The newly reorganized SPD in the East had inherited little property or resources. After an absence of four decades, it was unable to catch up. Yet that was not the only reason for their loss; the content of the party platforms also had an influence. The CDU promised a speedy unification with the West, while the SPD was more cautious, and the PDS wanted to retain the sovereignty of the GDR.

Arnim and I were silent as we stared at the election results before us, displayed on a large screen, though a sizable part of the crowd cheered. How wrong I had been in some of my assumptions! As we stood up to leave, Arnim did not seem alarmed by the turn of events. Uncertainty had been a constant since his childhood, he knew how to live well with it. I was now convinced that the GDR would dissolve, that there would be no intermediate solutions, little need for compromise between East and West. With this election, the East Germans had conceded to the West Germans the terms under which the process would take place.

Apparently, most GDR citizens trusted Western politicians more than they did their own fellow representatives. A few years earlier, I recall a friend telling me, astounded at himself, "I know the names of all the West German politicians, but I don't even know the names of the members of our Politbüro." Though formally there were other parties, the SED had a monopoly on power and appointments, and it claimed to represent everyone. This led to a disinvestment in self-representation in the GDR, as there was no forum for individual voices, certainly not for oppositional ones. The election worked to disadvantage new and unknown candidates from the East.

As Arnim and I walked away from the scoreboard, we speculated about what would happen to the lightness of spirit and delight in the coming together of those first months after the Wall opened. Now that citizens could freely travel to West Berlin and West Germany, the only question was whether they would be able to afford the material objects and travel and pleasures they coveted. I feared the jubilation would very soon be superseded by economic and political processes beyond the

control or comprehension of most people. These processes had already begun but were very difficult to understand. They generated suspicion and fear. A few friends asked me if I thought they would lose their apartments and jobs. Issues of what to do with state-owned and collective property and how to redress injuries suffered in the GDR lurked in the background.

In this moment, however, Arnim and I seemed to share a sense of relief that this transition was proceeding smoothly and peacefully—even if the election resolved only the future of political reunification. People would now have to grapple with the reunification of economies, societies, and cultures. I was witnessing a liminal period that I predicted would continue for several generations. Many East Germans and West Berliners found themselves in-between, facing radically unstable futures. There would be no normal to return to. That understanding unsettled me and kept me from fully participating in what I thought was an overly optimistic, euphoric mood among Germans.

This meant the world was waiting for those who could improvise and become entrepreneurs. I met a man who in December opened a business to sell new West German cars out of a corner of an abandoned lot near Potsdam, south of Berlin. He hinted to me he'd already become a millionaire, as, I assume, did all the other men who began to sell West German cars. The backlog of demand was huge. Everyone who had a Trabant, a cheap East German version of a Volkswagen, wanted a solid West German car. I knew a doctor who was preparing to leave Berlin, with wife and two children, and take a good position in West Germany—clearly, his flexibility gave him an advantage. An unemployed friend decided to enlarge his rented apartment, so he knocked down the wall of the neighboring apartment, which was empty. He thought in the administrative chaos of unification his act would be legalized after the fact, as had been the case with many occupied apartments in West Berlin in the 1980s.

I thought about the expansion of the market economy, which would also change people's lives drastically. Those who quickly learned their new rights and claimed legal protections from being fired, and social welfare benefits and subsidies for retraining programs, would do well. Those who waited for help would probably come too late. There are losers in every market economy, but for now, nearly everybody in the East seemed united in excitement about one thing: to become an active consumer and buyer of objects and goods they had been denied in the controlled "shortage" economy of the GDR, such as high-end automobiles,

private property, pornography, year-round fresh fruit, the latest in fad or fashion.

With the completion of my doctorate in 1989, my own future seemed promising, and I anticipated a similar hopeful future for most Germans. However, I did fear that the decision to reunite quickly would create conditions that many in the East would grow to resent. The class of West Germans with property and networks would be such clear winners that their propensity to arrogance would find fertile ground in which to flourish, based on the assumption that East Germans were backward and needed their help. Other West Germans just wanted to make money off the collapsing East. This new enlarged German economy was already generating major income and status gains, for East Germans with political careers or those willing to retrain in professions where they were needed, and for West Germans who were capable and willing to enter markets in the East. But among those from the East, even the winners might become disgruntled and resentful because of humiliations experienced during the transition.

In retrospect, it seemed that the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to seek the approval of the USSR and the other occupying powers to remove their troops and expedite political reunification was a wise geopolitical move. The timing was propitious, with Gorbachev in power and the West German economy doing well. However, I felt that the success of unification would depend on the reckoning with enduring divisions—in technologies, fields of knowledge, sociality, status and class hierarchies, and habits—between the halves, based on the differently organized systems that had emerged during the period of two states.

Graduation Ceremony

My sisters called me out of the blue, three of them: Marge, Joan, and Mary. They did this now and then, usually just to remind me that—despite my distance—I was still part of the family. This time, I thought it was to congratulate me on completion of my degree, which they did. But they also said, "We have a surprise for you. We want to come for the ceremony."

I hesitated before an involuntary smile overtook my face, a smile for me only, as they could not see it, and I replied enthusiastically, "Well,

that's great. We'll have a good time, and you'll get to see where I've been studying all these years."

Mary, the youngest of the three, added, "You know, John, I'll be coming in my wheelchair." She paused for effect, "But it's electric!"

"I'll order tickets and make arrangements right away," I said, "but be prepared for a campus with uneven streets. It's not set up for disabilities."

"Oh!" Mary, in her pragmatic style, shrugged the comment off, "We'll make do. That's not a problem."

I was pleased also because Jürgen had already made plans to be there, six months after the collapse of the GDR. He was coordinating his first trip to America with my graduation and a cross-country road trip with me to San Diego, where I would be teaching on a one-year contract at the city's University of California campus, beginning in the fall.

The summer heat of June had already surged, and the air was unbearably humid, though that was preferable to the frequent downpours on graduation weekend, when the skies would suddenly open and drench everyone in their finest clothes. Jürgen made it to Cambridge alone from the airport, but I thought my sisters needed help, so I met them at the gate after they exited the plane. There they were, Marge leading and Joan pushing Mary in the wheelchair. All were wearing the signature Borneman-girl hairdo: dyed blond, cut short, and slightly ratted to make it look thicker. Usually, a flight attendant would step in, but Joan was always quick to assume responsibility, taking over as soon as Mary was seated outside the gate. They greeted me with beaming smiles, and I gave them all a big hug. We took the elevator down a flight to the taxi stand, folded Mary's chair, and hopped in for the ride to Cambridge.

I was sharing an apartment with a woman law student on the ground floor of a rather dilapidated, uninsulated wooden house, a twenty-minute walk from campus. Thank God it was no longer cold; they wouldn't have to contend with the cold drafts coming up through the floor. Jürgen was there waiting for us. I had already decided that he and I would relocate to sofas in apartments of friends so my sisters could occupy my bedroom. They slept on two mattresses I had spread out on the floor, and shared a shower and toilet with my roommate, who was also graduating.

The next day it proved challenging for Joan to navigate Mary's wheelchair. The sidewalks were indeed so bumpy that the electric motor was often powerless to propel her over the large cracks and between the sunken concrete sections, so they took turns pushing Mary, with beads of sweat forming on their brows. I can't recollect seeing another guest

in a wheelchair, though there must have been. In any event, my sisters were very out of place, reminiscent of myself upon my arrival six years earlier. They seemed oblivious to where they were most of the time, as I probably had been.

However, I had since found my footing and now felt entirely at home in this intellectual community. My full immersion and acceptance into the institution had been transformative, helping me untangle the knot of conflicting emotions that had initially plagued me. These feelings weren't simply class resentment, though that was certainly an element. I sensed they stemmed from a growing awareness of the educational and cultural opportunities I had missed in my earlier years—experiences and knowledge that were now beyond full recovery. It was a bittersweet realization of paths not taken and potential not fully realized due to my background.

Yet, my growing confidence in my new environment came with an unusual perspective. I began to relish the ambiguity surrounding my origins and the difficulty my peers often had to pinpoint my background based on my speech, mannerisms, or knowledge. This inability to easily categorize me became a source of both amusement and empowerment.

The idea of a graduating farm boy was, in fact, unimaginable and thus resulted in comical guesses about who I was. Sometimes I allowed misconceptions to linger, other times I revealed aspects of my true history, both strategies enabling me to move fluidly between different social and intellectual circles. What had once been a source of insecurity transformed into a source of amusement and subtle form of social capital.

My sisters, in turn, took all the pomp and wealth in stride, struck by a sense of wonder that the world of learning had opened its doors to their little brother. Although this was my fourth degree—I had a bachelor's and two master's—neither I nor my family had ever made much fuss about these achievements. The world of universities and "such smart people," as Marge put it, was entirely foreign to them, beyond the realms of characters they had met and certainly not in their dreams. In fact, my father had been particularly proud that all my siblings had earned a high school diploma, since he had completed only the sixth grade, my mother the eighth.

Accompanied by my sisters on such a special occasion, I saw Harvard Yard and graduation through their eyes: marveling at the imposing steps leading up to the massive Widener Library; the turrets and ornate carvings of the High Victorian Gothic building called Memorial Hall, completed after the Civil War; the perfectly manicured lawns, flowers in bloom. They were impressed by the courteous staff helping guests find

their way around; the students preoccupied with hugging friends and saying goodbye; the friendly informality with which I greeted professors and other students alike. What Joan did find somewhat irritating, though, and I did too, was the parents who openly bickered with their graduating children. "Why aren't they just proud and grateful?" she asked me, of course not expecting an answer.

Mary changed the tone of conversation, as she often did, with some totally unrelated remark. Pointing to a distinguished-looking elderly pair, she exclaimed, "They look so elegant, so beautifully dressed. Those are the grandparents, right?" Then, "John, those are younger sisters, aren't they?", adding with a giggle, "They look so bored, don't they? They look bored."

The sense I got from my sisters was one of appreciation, happy that they were able to be with me as family in this august institution. Throughout the day, Joan took pictures of the five of us, and in each one we wear smiles and appear warm and comfortable with each other.

In the evenings, I introduced everyone to culinary experiences unfamiliar to them. On the first night, we ordered New Orleans crackerjack shrimp and blackened fish, which they found amazing. On the second, Ethiopian stew served with its unusually spongy flatbread. We ate with gusto, and they all praised the food, unafraid to try new tastes. Our collective mood was so carefree as to be effervescent; they laughed at everything they saw or heard even if they didn't understand what was supposed to be funny.

My sisters particularly enjoyed hearing Jürgen's stories about life in socialist East Germany, and he loved to tell them, even though I had to translate the details from his broken English. They were taken by his clever and alluring humor, treating him as if he had journeyed from our ancestor's land to regale them about the home they had left behind. Every now and then, one sister would whisper to another, "Is Jürgen John's boyfriend?" He was not, though my sisters wished to think otherwise.

In their innocence, they asked Jürgen remarkably naive questions, and not just of him but of others as well, with no concern for status or propriety. Yet their questions didn't make him, or me, for that matter, uncomfortable. I felt I had earned my place at the table, completing three years of coursework and two and a half years of fieldwork in Berlin, returning to Harvard with a draft of my nearly completed dissertation in hand, defending four months later. To celebrate this occasion, my sisters belonged with me.

During one encounter, Mary, who looked stunning with her big brown eyes and broad smile while confined to her wheelchair, engaged a renowned primatologist from the anthropology department in a conversation. He must have been at least seventy at the time, but he was still particularly fond of his image as a successful Casanova. His lean frame and goatee made him look like a handsome version of Lenin. As he chatted her up, Mary interrupted him with a question: "Do you teach here also?" This left the primatologist flabbergasted, or perhaps embarrassed. With a frown, he admitted, "I do." And sensing this conversation was heading nowhere, quietly walked away. Watching this encounter unfold from afar, Joan shrugged and remarked in her highest-pitched voice, "That Mary! I don't know why she says these things." I, in turn, had an especially warm feeling for her at that moment and was impressed that she never felt the need to put on airs, remaining authentically herself.

Although this commencement ceremony wasn't about me and would have proceeded without my presence, I couldn't escape a profound sense of personal celebration. As the first in any of the communities I had been a part of to achieve a doctorate—and from Harvard, no less—I felt I had done something special.

Over the past decade, my frame of reference had gradually shifted beyond familial expectations. While my degree certainly surpassed anything my family had envisioned, I now found myself measuring my achievements against those of my fellow graduates and the esteemed professors who had guided us. This comparison both humbled and inspired me, highlighting how far I'd come while illuminating the demands that lay ahead.

My distinction lay not in excellent grades, which I found relatively easy to obtain with dedication and effort, but in the originality of my ideas and in my publications prior to graduation. These achievements aligned my future with this cohort of scholars, my new peers. I aspired to become one of them, to fully inhabit this intellectual sphere. Yet, I remained acutely aware that my class background and the prevailing anti-gay sentiment could potentially impede my access to the job market. This awareness instilled in me a drive to excel beyond the norm, to outperform others just to be considered an equal candidate for the same positions.

Between us students, the ceremony that caught our attention that day was the awarding of honorary degrees for extraordinary and lasting distinction, for individuals whose contributions to their fields or

occupations were exceptional. These prestigious awards recognized individuals who had made extraordinary and lasting contributions to their fields or professions. The anticipation surrounding these honors reached its zenith the day before the ceremony, as the names of the recipients were shrouded in secrecy until the last moment. When finally revealed, the list proved to be remarkably impressive. Like my peers, I found myself eagerly anticipating the opportunity to see each of these distinguished honorees in person.

Among them were notable figures I greatly admired: a frail Ella Fitzgerald, the "First Lady of Song," whom I protectively shadowed through a narrow side gate into Harvard Yard, keenly aware of her delicate steps; the radical lesbian poet Adrienne Rich, whose work on "compulsory heterosexuality" I had introduced to my students; the German Chancellor of Unity Helmut Kohl, whose bodily heft seemed to mirror the historical gravitas he carried; the popular sociologist David Riesman, famous for characterizing America as "the lonely crowd," now diminutive and looking frail; and Stephen Hawking, the theoretical physicist of time, wheelchair bound and in an advanced stage of Lou Gehrig's disease, accompanied by his nurse-to-be-wife. Hawkings' spastic appearance stood in stark contrasted to the brilliance of his mind, a poignant reminder of the complex interplay between physical form and intellectual prowess.

After the ceremony, I joined some friends at Adams House for a final hour of drinks and goodbyes but agreed to meet my own guests in an hour at Au Bon Pain, the large café at Harvard Square.

"We're so proud of you," Joan greeted me.

"This is such an honor to be here," said Mary.

Jürgen remarked in German, and I translated, "It's ironic that I meet my Chancellor for the first time not in Germany but in America. My soon-to-be Chancellor, I mean. What were the chances that I encounter him, here, at Harvard?" Just the previous month, Kohl was rushing a political unification, aiming to transform the two economic and social welfare systems into one coherent entity. His reelection as Chancellor in the fall seemed all but assured, though this time he would lead an enlarged country under a single state, marking the end of the Cold War.

Following the March 1990 election, Chancellor Kohl played a pivotal role in reversing the very processes I had been investigating—the division of Germany into two opposed political-economic systems. While he boldly initiated the privatization and restructuring of state-owned enterprises in the GDR, East Germans themselves began dismantling

their administrative structures, aligning their system more closely with West Germany's federal model. Suddenly, the subject of my dissertation shifted from contemporary affairs to history. As I commenced revisions for publication, I meticulously converted all present tense descriptions into the past tense, a poignant reflection of the rapid pace of change.

Solo at Cornell

In the autumn of 1991, I obtained my first tenure-track position at Cornell University in upstate New York, necessitating another cross-country journey. I applied to all openings on both coasts and made the short list at three West Coast universities (including one in Vancouver) and three in the Northeast. At UC San Diego, where I was teaching as a guest, four different departments scheduled job talks me for. I felt very fortunate, as the prior year I'd been invited for no interviews at all.

I bundled together into one trip to the Northeast the three job talks at Columbia, Princeton, and Cornell, hoping this would be manageable. As so often in my life, I was confronted with my lack of experience. It was crazy to schedule talks in three different cities on Friday, Monday, and Tuesday, then take a night flight back to San Diego so I could lecture on Wednesday afternoon. Plus, I already had a job talk written but had neither taken the time to learn the names of the different faculty in these departments nor familiarized myself with their work. Some of the one-on-one interviews did not go well; several of the professors in each place were unwelcoming. Cornell came through quickly, however, with an offer for a position, which I accepted.

I moved there in the fall, took out a mortgage on a quaint two-bedroom house with a fireplace in Ithaca, and began teaching a regular course load of two classes a semester right away. After two years, I was still living solo in this quaint house, now furnished through yard sales, with a salary barely large enough to afford the mortgage. I was diligently educating students, a popular teacher with both undergraduates and graduates. My classes were full, and I found the intellectual life in the department and around the Humanities Council invigorating. Surrounded by a handful of delightful friends, I was nonetheless unable to forge a genuine community.

Over the previous decade, the university had authorized Cornell's anthropology department to search for two new hires. I was the second, and before me the woman who was hired had negotiated a teaching reduction.

The chair was, therefore, adamant not to grant me any of my requests before I arrived. No research money, no course relief or extra time off. After I arrived, I made an unanticipated request: I wanted a new office chair.

The office assigned to me had been occupied by a chain smoker and reeked of smoke. The shelves, the walls, the floor. I was sensitive to smoke given my experience, as a child, seated between my parents in the front seat of their Ford Fairlane, windows rolled up, inhaling their cigarette fumes. To enter the room made me nauseous. When I asked to replace the office chair, the department head told me to wait until he accumulated some collective demands to present the request to the administration. I thought this unfair to me but said nothing. This was not a good start for a relationship.

There were other acrimonious moments, the sour taste of which didn't go away. To my surprise, some faculty were jealous when graduate students wanted to work with me instead of them. I hadn't tried to recruit them; they just came to me because, I surmised, I was the youngest and offered something different than others.

I was put in charge of taking notes in faculty meetings, a "custom," I was told, for the most recent hire. The chair edited out all the internal disagreements that I had noted before the minutes were circulated, which seemed a bit overly cautious to me.

In my second year I was put in charge of the colloquium series, coordinating the visits of guest speakers for our late afternoon Friday seminars. The chair's wife complained bitterly to me when a guest she proposed for a visit told her that my invitation hadn't arrived. After inquiring, I found out that her secretary, who was apparently shared with several departments, had not relayed my message because she had been on leave. I protested that my message to the secretary hadn't been forwarded, but to no avail. I had the sense the chair and his wife didn't believe me.

My story of the city replicated that of the university. Both the Ithaca community and that of the university were decidedly straight. I'd never imagined living in the countryside or in a small town in a rural area. I had experienced farm mentality as a child in Antigo, and rural mentality living on Whidbey Island near Seattle. Now I preferred urban spaces where I could meet new people and enjoy some nightlife. The faculty who ran the department had children, and to accommodate them they scheduled our faculty meetings and seminars on Friday afternoons, with a potluck dinner crowning the event at one of our homes. I actually enjoyed hanging out with the guests and graduate students at these events,

and we had some very good cooks in the department, but my attempt to change the day for the seminar met with a resounding, "No."

In the university, several queer-identified junior faculty had been hired and everyone felt their presence. They did not identify with the norms of masculine and feminine. I welcomed them but was suspicious of some that they feared being identified as gay, and that their identification with victims of AIDS was a show of solidarity only. I respected their decision but also found the situation depressing. It seemed to supplant the interest in gay alternatives. My first week on campus I met a gay psychology professor who said he was the only one in his large department so identified and that he'd given up on a life in Ithaca: he was leaving to work in the private sector. That was a bummer.

The one gay bar downtown had burned down shortly before I arrived, replaced by the Common Ground a few miles outside the city. Men and women drove in on weekends from their rural homes in the region, eager to hear the same popular disco they'd heard the previous week. I felt myself transported to a time of the closet that I'd never actually experienced. At the bar, I couldn't tell anyone that I was a professor at Cornell. I'd just say I was a teacher, to avoid the kiss of death if they thought I was an intellectual.

Once I invited Mick Taussig, the hyper-cool anthropologist from New York, to give a lecture. The room was packed. He asked if I'd take him out to a bar to dance that evening. "Where?" I asked. "We only have the Common Ground, a gay joint just outside the town."

"Let's go," he said, gamely.

Once there, Mick fit in, somehow, with messy hair like Mick Jagger and carrying a weird, multicolored purse made of leather and fur he'd bought in Colombia. He didn't look like the other faculty who'd come along with me. Surrounded by gay men and lesbians, a woman asked Mick to dance. He was flattered. Nobody approached me or the other men who'd come along. The Common Ground was just not a place where I fit in.

I desperately needed a life outside the university. I tried driving to New York City on a Saturday morning and returning on Sunday afternoon, but the eight-to-nine-hour roundtrip left me exhausted instead of renewed.

Another solution I tried was to accept every invitation to give lectures at other universities—and there were many. I enjoyed being in new places, and the intellectual exchange with new people. That also generated

considerable jealousy in the department, however, especially if my invitation coincided with Friday's gathering, which it usually did.

That said, in my everyday interactions at Cornell, people were generous, so I was saddened that I simply didn't feel like I fit into their circles. Billie Jean Isbell, a Peruvian expert in the department—we called her BJ—became a close friend and confidant. Divorced and independent, she had a daughter who was transitioning to male and felt she could confide in me about her loss of a daughter in a way she could not with our other colleagues. I enjoyed her energy, and I loved her tales of working in Latin America, the feel of which permeated the aesthetics of her home, food, and dress. She accompanied me to yard sales on the weekend to furnish my house.

BJ was an excellent reader of other people's work, including mine. I was immensely grateful to have a critical reader who read everything I was writing and gave me honest feedback. Since my advisees kept increasing, I organized collective meetings at my home for them to share their work and alleviate me of having to mentor them all one-on-one. I invited BJ to join us, and her comments were so astute that they reduced the pressure on me to think through all the material before we met.

I recall one conversation about Ithaca with a sympathetic graduate student my age, Jan, a Japan expert, and her husband. "I think the Ithaca community is characterized by what Marcuse called 'repressive tolerance,'" I complained.

"What?" they asked, shocked at my criticism. "We love it here. Ithaca is so open and progressive. In 1973, they opened the first vegetarian restaurant in the country here. Moosewood."

"Marcuse meant," I explained, "the appearance of tolerance can be misleading. Claiming all viewpoints are equal could serve to preserve the dominant ideologies. Despite the appearance of tolerance, I experience here a stifling heteronormativity, a dominance of unquestioned heterosexual assumptions about how to organize things. I have little room to breathe with that dominance."

They were astounded. "Certainly," Jan said, "we don't experience the community in Ithaca this way. I'm sorry you do."

Except for Spot

And so, the universe delivered Spot, my unanticipated companion, a creature to love amidst my unchosen solitude. He made it less solo. He

sported a coat of short white hair, save for one distinct brindle-colored spot on his rump, strategically placed before his tail, and he shed year-round, leaving signs of his presence on sofas, chairs, and our attire whenever he brushed against them. Despite being bred as a show dog with impeccable proportions, he fell short of the model male standard for a whippet. (But just my type, I thought.) Consequently, his owners, in their wisdom, had him neutered and relegated him to a kennel, where he vied for human attention among other dogs. This upbringing left him a curious mix of painfully shy and insatiably needy, always craving human affection. Convinced he needed the exclusive devotion of a single caregiver, the owners bestowed him upon me.

It took considerable effort by my new and dear friend Anne, a writing instructor at Cornell, to convince me to get a dog in the first place. We became friends largely through a shared interest in horses, but dogs had been part of our lives since our childhoods also. Only in graduate school did I totally give up this connection to animals, which, given my peripatetic existence, seemed necessary.

I knew what kind of intense attachment I would have with a dog, and I also knew it would be like having a child, that my responsibility to him would take precedence over other relationships and travel. Which I didn't want. A dog would settle me in a place more than I'd wished at the time. But Anne, also an avid animal lover with an extensive menagerie of cats, dogs, and a horse, frequently reminded me of what I was missing. And she promised to care for him in my absence, whether I was traveling for talks or on sabbaticals away from the university.

Anne tirelessly searched through her extensive network of pet owners and scoured magazines for advertisements until she found Spot. With the help of a friend, Spot was transported from Canada to Syracuse in the back seat of a car. Anne and I eagerly drove to meet them, braving the harsh winter conditions of upstate New York with subzero temperatures. When we arrived at the designated meeting spot in the MacDonald's parking lot, the sun had already set, and it was pitch black. After an anxious wait of about fifteen minutes, the headlights of a truck finally illuminated the area. Spot emerged, his entire body trembling uncontrollably, not just from the biting cold, but also from the overwhelming fear of his new and unfamiliar surroundings. As a former kennel dog, he had never experienced such solitude and uncertainty before.

As Anne drove us home, I cradled Spot between my legs in the passenger seat. He instinctively curled up, seeking comfort by tucking his

Figure 13. Spot

nose under his tail. I felt a wave of affection wash over me. I cherished the warmth he radiated and his natural inclination to seek closeness with every human he encountered. I admired him in motion, his sleek body

effortlessly gliding as if propelled by the wind itself. And in moments of stillness, I found myself enamored by his alert gaze, his eyes scanning the world around him from the vantage point of his elongated nose as he lay curled up in a fetal coil.

Spot's greatest passion was chasing squirrels, a pursuit that made me worry he might one day disappear in his fervent pursuit and never find his way back. To address this concern, I enlisted the help of my friend Mark, and together we devised a game of hide-and-seek in a spacious park on the university grounds. I'd conceal myself behind a tree and softly whisper his name, "Spaat, Spaat," while Mark distracted him before setting him free.

His sheer delight upon rediscovering me brought me immense reassurance, affirming that I was indeed cherished in a way only a dog could, a sentiment I deeply craved at the time. Over time, Spot honed his skills at the game, but with age came a heightened sense of urgency. He grew increasingly frantic if unable to locate me swiftly, to the point where even a casual stroll with one of my students would find him straining at his leash, mistaking every male passerby for me.

While I was teaching, Spot would either stay at home or be confined to my office. He had a knack for filching things and stashing them away, preferably in his bed if they fit. If not, he'd hold the object in his mouth, drooling and whining in a high-pitched voice, frustration and desperation in his eyes. Once, he even absconded with a small basket of fresh tomatoes, transporting it from the kitchen table to a remote corner of the living room. Despite his penchant for swiping food, he never actually consumed his loot. Even when presented with a large beef bone after dinner, his immediate instinct was, "Where can I stash this?"

Whenever he managed to slip outside, his first order of business was to bury the bone behind a tree in the garden, deftly using his needle-like nose to dig a hole. The following morning, he'd eagerly wait by the door, not to relieve himself, but to dart out and check on his buried treasure. Upon its discovery, his major concern was not chewing the bone but setting about concealing it once more.

Spot was everything I could expect of a partner—loving, loyal, warm, amusing—but he wasn't human. He alleviated my loneliness, for sure, but I was worried about falling into a regression, reverting to a childhood pattern that substitutes for human affection the qualities of love these animals bring me. Cornell remained for me a lively intellectual home, but without the possibility of human love and sexual intimacy.

(Re)unification

Throughout the 1990s, I saw myself as an ethnographer challenged to bear witness to the historic transformation of Berlin and Germany. Political unification commenced with the opening of the Wall, continued with the dissolution of the East German state, and culminated with the incorporation of the GDR's people and territory into an expanded West Germany on October 3, 1990. In Berlin, I observed the consolidation of a single city government, the departure of Allied and Soviet troops, and the erasure of some prominent Communist names from public streets and squares in the East of the city. Leninallee became Landesbergerallee, Thälmannplatz became Mohrenstrasse, Dimitroffstrasse became Eberswalderstrasse, Stadion der Weltjugend became Schwarzkopfstrasse, S-Bahnhof Marx-Engels-Platz became Hackescher Markt. The most dramatic and controversial erasure was the demolition of the Palace of the Republic to rebuild the old Berliner Castle in its place.

Berlin was undergoing a metamorphosis, changing both in content and in form, but initially all in the former East. Many foreigners with capital but above all West Germans with inherited wealth bought up entire houses, blocks, and districts of residential units in a city that had been dominated by apartment rentals and not ownership. They renovated these buildings and with their disposable incomes created a market for up-scale goods and services, doubling or tripling the number of cafés, restaurants, construction-related stores, and boutique shops. The landscape of the city's new Mitte, a borough that combined six sub-districts formerly divided by the Wall, was immediately and radically refigured.

For the entire decade, cranes popped up everywhere. Potsdamerplatz, a public square that had been completely destroyed during the war, became the largest construction site in Europe. Its deep red Infobox—a box on stilts constructed simply to inform visitors about the major renovations in the city center—was an essential stop on my personal tour for visiting friends. Berlin's skyline was punctuated with various stages of building and renovating government buildings and private apartments, commercial buildings and shopping centers. Although this process was concentrated in the Mitte, its effects reached into all other boroughs, though not equally and not at the same pace.

Berlin was thus the epicenter of efforts to reverse the divisions of the country created by partition during the postwar period. My initial decision to live and research there, in a city that had been made geographically

marginal and displaced by the Cold War, rather than research in some other part of Germany or Europe, proved fortuitous. Although the partition and the Wall is what still seemed to captivate most young visitors, I was more intent on observing the process of reversing its effects.

What I found alarming was the swiftness of the shedding of recent history. There seemed to be a concerted attempt to rewind history and return to a pre-Nazi, pre-War era—the Weimar period, a time of intellectual ferment, cultural vibrancy, and social conflict—as a response to the aftermath of occupation and division. As if occupation and division were not a response to the Nazi era. Organizations, entities, or persons in the East were to be made comparable to those in the West.

During the division, there were two of everything significant—two parliaments, two mayors, and two city administrations. West Berlin created parallel institutions to match those already established in the East, the site of the old city center. In the cultural and educational domain, the West Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra rivaled the East German Symphony Orchestra, while the Freie Universität of West Berlin stood in contrast to East Berlin's Humboldt University. Some of these duplicative institutions were now retained, but many were deemed redundant or lacking in quality.

The East, which housed most of the original institutions, underwent a rigorous evaluation process to determine which should be eliminated and which should remain. To manage this Herculean task of selling, restructuring, privatizing and closing state-owned and managed enterprises, the East German government before its dissolution established a special Treuhand or fiduciary trust, the work of which continued throughout the next decade. In contrast, West Berlin and West Germany were not subjected to the same evaluations and eliminations.

My attention and emotions were all over the place, vacillating between exhaustion and exhilaration in keeping up with the speed of change, unable to find a stable point from which to observe. One day I was saddened that so many familiar places were being renamed. The city's topography I had come to know disappeared, and with it the specific histories of the Cold War were erased. Another day I was eager to explore the changing contours of the city, new routes to take on my bicycle that crossed the former Wall, new migrants to run into, new bars, cafés, and restaurants.

On my return visits, I usually resided in the West Berlin district of Kreuzberg, staying with one of my best friends, Barbara, and her daughter

Theresa, whom I had initially met in East Berlin. Their petition to move to the West was approved the year before the opening of the Wall. Barbara was a psychiatrist, and she continued working in that field in West Berlin, but then retrained as a psychoanalyst, a field of knowledge we shared exploring. Soon Theresa began studying anthropology at Humboldt University.

I immersed myself in the city's dynamic neighborhoods in East and West, now free to travel among them without a visa, and my tapestry of acquaintances grew larger and more diverse. What had been on the periphery both within Berlin and within Germany slowly reacquired the status of the country's center.

I became acquainted with a young man who was one of the last conscripts in the GDR military. He had been promoted to lieutenant because, he said, nobody else was willing to lead his unit. I asked him how he managed this, since he'd never exercised authority before.

He laughed and explained, "The other conscripts wouldn't listen to the lieutenant who was supposed to train us. He ignored infractions like not showing up for rollcall, or fighting with a fellow conscript, or not having clean boots because so many of us resisted his orders that he couldn't lock us all in the brig. Not enough room for that. I don't know what happened to him—he didn't show up one day. Maybe he went to West Germany. So, when we were asked who wanted to replace him, some conscripts nominated me. I am an easy-going guy; I get along with everyone."

"Didn't you have an authority problem being gay?" I asked.

"Nobody asked," he said. "And a couple of other men were pretty open about their homosexuality. After the border controls were relaxed, every now and then men would suddenly disappear. I didn't even try to discipline anybody, and the higher-ups were too busy saving their asses. Privately making deals with the West German army. Or starting new businesses. I don't know."

While I had no other contact with soldiers in the GDR army, my sense was that by late summer 1989, there was a feeling of purposelessness in many institutions, not only the army. Many of my friends began discussing new careers.

The spirit of rebellion at the time was contagious and attracted young people from other European countries to Berlin. Another young man I met had graduated from the highly selective Sciences Po in Paris, destined to become a member of the French elite. He escaped this fate by moving to Berlin and working in the Wintergarten theater, singing and dancing in their variety shows.

An East Berlin woman who won a contest to produce a film recruited me to narrate a section on the fate of the huge Lenin statue on the former Leninplatz. It had been removed. On a very humid day we wandered for nearly an hour in the Köpenicker forest in southeast Berlin, unsuccessfully fighting off aggressive mosquitoes, searching for the statue, which had been dumped there a few years before. We had a small map drawn by a friend, but the vegetation around the statue grew amazingly fast, making it difficult to recognize locations.

Off a narrow gravel road in the middle of nowhere, we found a large mound of dirt, overgrown with grass, vines, and young saplings. Only Lenin's forehead and nose, chipped by a sledgehammer, stuck out from the mound, likely vandalized by some punks. For the film, I talked about the loss of the GDR and the lack of opportunity to mourn this loss. This unusual burial of a statue on the outskirts of the city might have been an attempt to prevent extremist gatherings around Lenin-worship, but it also prevented mourning or any sense of closure regarding this past.

Despite my shifting employment and geographical relocations from Berlin to Cambridge to San Diego to Ithaca, my excitement in ongoing research in the newly invigorated and ever-evolving Berlin was undiminished, even as I juggled full-time teaching responsibilities at Cornell. I undertook and completed three studies on various aspects of German reunification: one focused on German-Jewish repatriates, another on "moral injuries" in the aftermath of the GDR's dissolution, and a third on the relocation of the capital back to Berlin from Bonn, where the West German government had been relocated in 1947.

While investigating these three aspects of unification, I observed Berlin residents navigating a series of mood shifts and reckonings, characterized by the two German concepts of *Abwicklung* and *Stimmungswechsel*. Both concepts defy exact translation into English, but they frame the unique experiences of the decade's transformations. In approximate translation, *Abwicklung* refers to dismantling and bringing to an end, while *Stimmungswechsel* refers to an inescapable change of mood, simultaneously private and public. When the city and country were still partitioned into halves, a distinct collective and individual mood, such as stagnation, manifested itself in both East and West Berlin. The period of German unification that followed generated a pattern of such mood shifts, such as from joy to indifference, or from ambivalence about the foreign to either xenophilia or xenophobia.

The initial pleasure of overcoming divisions and the prospects of a new future often splintered under the strains of reunification, giving way to anxiety, anger, and frustration in adjusting to new socioeconomic circumstances and fates. For instance, anxiety about one's indeterminate future, anger at the speed with which the dissolution occurred, frustration with having to redocument one's life with new government bureaucracies and banks. The excitement of new cars and West German products—groceries, clothes, washing machines—gave way to frustration that many products were much more expensive and most food did not taste better than what people already had. I recall clearly, for example, the bitter complaints about imported limes from Italy. They were much larger than those the GDR imported from Cuba but hadn't nearly the taste of the Cuban ones.

Not having to make these adjustments, I frequently found myself out of sync with the mood changes of Berlin residents. I was sometimes skeptical when others were full of joy, caring when others were indifferent, committed when others were ambivalent, xenophilic when others were xenophobic. Through my observations of others, however, I learned how the evolving cityscape demanded constant attunement and adjustment to transformations over which most people had limited control.

One of the most difficult attunements to a mood shift occurred among the German-Jewish returnees I had been working with since the summer of 1989. At that time, the public mood in the GDR of assumed stability and stagnancy, as many observers called it, began to change. The following summer in 1990, as many young people from the East were fleeing to the West, I returned to conduct follow-up interviews. Three months later, in November, the celebratory occasion of the border opening prompted further visits to Berlin the following month and again the ensuing March, to begin research on the dissolution of the GDR.

Among most German Jews, the prevailing mood quickly became anxiety due to the resurgence of neo-nationalism, right-wing movements, and antisemitism. Their rationale to return to East Germany—the vision of building an anti-fascist, socialist state—was suddenly untenable as they found themselves residing in what was in fact the capitalist successor state to the Third Reich. As someone of non-Jewish German heritage without a history of persecution, I was not visited by the fears that plagued them. Although suspected homosexuals had been persecuted in the Third Reich, prejudices across political and ideological differences had softened over the last several decades, much more regarding the

category of homosexual than it had for the category of Jew. Interacting with individuals who were suddenly insecure and fearful inevitably influenced my own mood. Whereas my curiosity was stimulated by the radical uncertainty and chaotic pace of change, along with the sense of new beginnings, I was also reminded of the precarity of my own outsider status.

The process of the *Abwicklung* was the major source of fear for many in the East. It frequently served as a turning point—hence the aforementioned phrase, *die Wende*— that altered the trajectory of imagined futures that were both personal and collective. Although an old technical term, the meaning of *Abwicklung* evolved to encompass liquidation, administrative unwinding, and restructuring.

The most extensive form of this restructuring involved the privatization of state-owned enterprises, including land, factories, and real estate. This was necessary, economists argued, to increase efficiency and modernize the antiquated infrastructure of the GDR. It was assumed that the creation of a market economy like that in West Germany was the best way to achieve this. However, many factors lent themselves to corruption: the sheer number of firms to be evaluated, the complex integration of industries that formed the *Kombinat* (conglomerates), the ambiguity of property ownership and titles, and the large scale of activities stimulated by the opening of frozen borders. With the justification of increased efficiency and profitability by selling off state-owned property, the restructuring contributed to the growing domain of *Regierungskriminalität*—state criminality—for which a special division of the police was created to investigate new networks maneuvering on the border of illegality.

A banker friend employed by the new fiscal trust was charged with overseeing the second and third privatizations of companies, which initially confused me: why privatize more than once? The problem was that buyers often tried to evade fulfilling the conditions of their contracts, such as retaining employees to avoid putting them on state welfare rolls. Some buyers had no intention of ever meeting such terms. Most were simply given assets at minimal cost with only the promise of making them profitable and no enforcement mechanism to control this. They would then retain or sell the most profitable assets and "return" the unprofitable or bankrupt ones to the trust to be privatized again.

The criteria for *Abwicklung* were arbitrary, fluid, and ideological, ranging from lack of qualifications to redundancy if there was already an

efficient West German equivalent. For East Germans, it often meant job loss, retraining, and geographical relocation, while for West Germans, the integration of Eastern companies into their Western counterparts presented new opportunities for advancement. To be sure, many of my East German acquaintances who worked as teachers in elementary and secondary schools, as scholars in fields of medicine and history, and as automobile mechanics, for example, also experienced advancement. Yet when we got together, they shared with me a general sentiment, or a resentment, that this restructuring targeted only those born in the East.

The first person I knew to lose her job through the restructuring was Irene Runge, an ethnologist and assistant professor at Humboldt University. We had met in 1987 while I was affiliated with Humboldt, though not with her department. Of German-Jewish descent, Irene had immigrated from the US to the GDR as a child with her parents. At the first meeting of the newly renamed Institut für Europäische Ethnologie following reunification in 1990, when asked if anyone had worked for the Stasi, Irene bravely raised her hand and voluntarily admitted her past involvement. This self-denunciation led to her immediate dismissal without due process. The files of the Ministry for State Security, the Stasi, had become public and revealed she had indeed been an informant—for seventeen years. Although she had quit writing reports in the late 1970s, she was put on an informal blacklist that prevented her from finding employment where she could make use of her journalistic and ethnographic skills.

But Irene Runge was not the only one with a Stasi history. The leadership of the institute and other potential East German appointments were also compromised, increasing the likelihood that all future appointments would be West German. That led to accusations of colonial occupation. In response the institute, now directed by a West German professor trained in folklore, offered temporary positions to three East German scholars from the former body and from the Academy of Sciences. Their appointments were periodically renewed, enabling them to maintain steady employment and qualify for a decent pension once they reached retirement age.

I remember the three, all women, sitting erect in their chairs in the back row of seminar events, silent, unsmiling, looking uninterested. They appeared to be holding their breath, as if waiting to be relieved of a colonial charade of inclusion. The *Stimmung* of the department could not but be affected by this. I attended events there often but was never fully attuned to its moods. The three women from the East never asked

a question and never introduced themselves to me. Yet their presence made me feel uncomfortable, as it must have done also for those who had arrived from the West to occupy prized positions in the newly accessible labor market in the East. For them, East German scholars were an embarrassing reminder of the former GDR's fate following the *Abwicklung*.

"Reunification" was first and foremost a political-economic event orchestrated by capitalists and politicians. But it was also an everyday experience, whose success or failure ultimately rested on the judgments of the people affected. In general, those in the East experienced it as unfair even if their lives had improved in the absence of shortages and the authoritarian hand of the state. East-West divisions from the Cold War grew stronger while they were supposedly being dissolved.

The assumption that underpinned the optimism behind reunification was that history could be reversed, and Germans could be reconstituted into a single group fully aware of itself and in harmony. In earlier times, anthropologists might have framed Germans as a group with a shared culture. Despite the obvious internal cultural schisms of class and region that are always present in modern societies, many people, including scholars, still held to the notion that shared culture would ameliorate or overcome some forty years of division.

Anthropological studies of divided and polarized societies, and of those embroiled in endemic warfare or conflict without end, inspired me to think more critically of research in political science and international relations that suggested we could produce stable systems without these schisms. Such studies demonstrated that perpetual conflict, where it was systemic, wasn't something easily resolved because it was a dynamic process that kept opposing groups intimately connected in their self-conceptions.

Additionally, I drew from psychoanalytic observations that the deep-seated human desire for unity builds on the primal yearning for a lost oneness with the mother. Although the original oneness is forever lost, new visions of unity seek to renew the unconscious demands for it. In my writings, I proposed that the envisioned social unity in German reunification would require generations to materialize, while still always falling short of the ideal. Indeed, what initially seemed like a unifying triumph—the peaceful revolution of November 1989—soon gave way to unforeseen social fractures. New political parties gained attention by mobilizing anti–European Union and anti-immigrant sentiments, culminating in 2011 with the success of the far-right Alternative for

Germany. The dream of a unified Germany became a complex, ongoing saga, revealing deeper layers of unconscious societal tension as the terms of membership and conditions of social coherence changed.

The Last Time I Saw My Mother

Five months after my father's passing, in February 1996, my sisters had urgently summoned me: "Mom is very ill, we believe you should return home immediately." She was eighty-two, hadn't been eating, and her lungs were congested.

"I'll book the first flight available," I assured them.

I asked my department chair for approval to leave for a few days, which he readily granted, and promised to make up the classes at the end of the semester. Early the next morning, I began the long journey back. On the way to the Syracuse airport, I drove by Anne's house to drop off Spot, then to Milwaukee by plane, followed by a bus ride to Wausau. Finally, a taxi deposited me at the front door of the Langlade County Memorial Hospital in Antigo. This farewell to my mother was one she deserved, and one I deeply felt the need for.

The day was marked by freezing cold, tall snowbanks everywhere, the northern Wisconsin winter I had fled. It was mid-afternoon by the time I arrived. My sisters were waiting for me in her room, at the same hospital in which Mom had given birth to her eight children. They insisted I enter her room alone.

As I stepped inside, Mom was resting on her bed, struggling to breath, appearing so small under the white sheet that I asked myself if I were seeing a shroud. No, her face peeped out from above the sheet, and I was first struck by her hair, a radiant white that seemed almost otherworldly, more akin to platinum grey. It possessed a remarkable fullness and was expertly styled into the hairdo favored by my sisters, as though it had been meticulously prepared by a skilled hairdresser, though it had not. My sisters had lovingly attended to her. In her final days, my mother exuded an eerie, saintly repose, her hair framing her head like a halo. A palpable sense of her impending death hung in the air, irreversible and undeniable.

She reached out with one hand to greet me. The hand itself was a testament to her life: enlarged knuckles, swollen from milking by hand and pulling weeds; enlarged veins the result of lifting bales of hay and milk cans weighing as much as she did; arthritic fingers that could no longer grasp my hand.

Then I gazed into her anxious blue eyes—a deep blue I did not remember—pleading silently for solace or guidance, perhaps for her to share some profound insight from the depths of her being. "Oh, Mom," I murmured, as I edged closer to her bedside. Leaning in, I rested my head on her lap, though in her fully reclined position it settled on her belly. She was so frail that I was afraid to rest it there, fearful of adding any pressure, so my head hovered just above, a gentle touch without burden. In response, she placed her hand tenderly upon my head.

While bent in this awkward position, the image of my mother laughing came to mind. She was laughing at a joke my father told at her expense. Hanging in our kitchen on the farm was a small ceramic statue with the inscription underneath: The Silent Woman. A figure of a woman, absent of her head. I didn't appreciate my mother's laughter at that moment. To me, it seemed disrespectful. She ought to have spoken up, I felt, to my father and our guests, informing them that such kitsch was demeaning. That there were wise women, and she was one of them. But she remained silent, offering a smile, laughing along. It wasn't like her to engage in confrontations around such abstract issues as women's rights.

Indeed, my mother was always practical, the kind of person who managed to save from her meager social security payments so that each of her eight children would inherit something from her. She received about a hundred and fifty dollars in social security twice a month, yet managed to save sixteen thousand dollars, determined to be generous even after death.

It's truly remarkable how she achieved this. With money from the proceeds of the farm auction, my brother had invested in stocks for my parents' retirement. Sadly, those stocks collapsed within a few years, and shortly after, my father suffered a second stroke. This led to his admission to a nursing home for long-term care. My mother agreed to a suggestion from her daughters to sell the rest of the farm immediately. The house was too large for her, too far from neighbors. She needed no convincing, just someone to take on the burden of organizing the sale, which Nancy and Judy did. With the proceeds from that sale, she had just enough to purchase a small, one-bedroom house overlooking a graveyard across from a park, the only park, in the city of Antigo.

Over the years of her retirement, my sisters would pick her up and take her to their homes, in Milwaukee and Wausau. They usually found her sitting silently in her living room, not even watching television.

Silent to save on electricity, no doubt. But, they told me, she was restless in their homes, reticent to talk about herself, not eager to talk to her grandchildren. So after a couple of days, she was ready to return to her own home across from the graveyard, and they drove her back. These were not particularly happy years for my mother—children gone, husband unappreciative and distant before he died, body aches from all the hard work on the farm, emphysema from smoking. Yet she was never one to complain. Never one to impress her needs on others.

I whimpered softly and then gathered myself enough to express, "I love you. Thank you for taking care of me, thank you for loving me." She said nothing, though I sensed she heard me. It was just a feeling, but I wanted to believe it was more, that she heard in my voice how grateful I was to her. What I heard, however, caught me off-guard: a ghostly death rattle emanating from her throat. It was a phenomenon I'd read about and probably seen in movies, but experiencing it in person was terrifying, and more tears welled up in my eyes.

My sisters—Marge the oldest, Nancy who lived nearby, and Mary in her wheelchair—waited for me in the hall outside the room, understanding the gravity of the moment. They heard my crying through the closed door. Stepping out of the room, we came together in a collective embrace, hugging, holding, though we had rarely touched in my childhood. A small circle of inconsolable intimacy. Without words, we shared our sorrow, our tears mingling in a silent communion of grief.

Here and There

My very first sabbatical began in September 1994. Such a wonderful academic institution: every fourth year off to do research. Awarded a Fulbright Fellowship for a semester at Humboldt, I took a full year's absence on half-pay, sold my car for some extra cash, and left Ithaca for Berlin several months before my fellowship began.

On June 29, a picturesque summer day with friendly-looking cumulus clouds floating in the sky, I sat in front of the Reichstag, my eyes filled with awe. As I lounged on the expansive lawn, where men and boys had until recently played soccer amidst Cold War tensions, I marveled at the breathtaking spectacle before me: the historic building enveloped in a monumental artwork by the renowned artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

The Reichstag had served some civic functions during the Cold War era—memorably hosting events like a gay and lesbian conference and a gathering of human rights activists, both of which I had attended. Yet it had lost its political and ceremonial functions, much as Berlin had as the former capital of the Reich. The parliament had moved to Bonn in 1949, which then became the provisional capital of West Germany. With the four-power division of Berlin into sectors, the Reichstag building that previously housed the government landed on the West side of the border in the American sector, only a few meters from the Soviet sector. The East Germans had no access to the building for their capital. The West Germans had no use for it.

For two weeks the Reichstag became a work of performance art, wrapped in thick woven polypropylene fabric, secured with blue ropes and twelve tons of steel chains. In the radiant sunlight, the aluminum surface of the cloth shimmered, undulating and fluttering in the wind, breathing life into an edifice that seemed to transcend its somber history. At sunset, it took on a soft pink hue. Surrounded by a relaxed and captivated audience, reportedly five million over the two weeks of display, I pondered the significance of this grandiose display by artists renowned for their bold aesthetic ventures drawing attention to landscapes.

The atmosphere was euphoric and without demands. The Germans sitting on the grass around me seemed to cherish the moment. Did they imagine it as a means to blot out their troubled past? Could this artistic intervention, first conceived by Christo and Jeanne-Claude twenty-four years prior, serve as a symbolic cleanse of the landscape, paving the way for a new chapter, their chapter, in German history?

It was clear that, without the Cold War, Berlin needed a new function to finance repairs and sustain itself into the future, to become more than a monument to time. Journalists and academics had been debating this issue throughout the Cold War. On June 20, 1991, the German federal parliament had resolved the issue of function, voting to make Berlin the capital of a reunited Germany. That decision accelerated the transformation of the city, initiating the process of relocating governmental employees and ministries from Bonn and renovating old buildings and building new ones.

The Bundestag had last convened in the Reichstag building on February 27, 1933. That was the date of an infamous arson attack four weeks after Hitler assumed the position of Chancellor. To use the building again would not escape this past in people's memories, at least not for

the generations who had some memories of the war or of the division that followed. While seated in front of this glorious wrap, I even heard a discussion about the fire. The Nazi leadership had claimed that the Communists were responsible, that they lit the fire to incite a violent uprising. In fact, the fire was a ruse for the Nazis to pass emergency legislation, an excuse to abolish many constitutional provisions and pave the way for a dictatorship.

The younger generations present may have had a vague idea of this history, but they were confident that, whatever that history had been, it was definitely not repeating itself here. This empty building in its shimmering fabric was a negation of that past, sharing none of the tension or drama that preceded the fire, no demonstrations, no refighting of the battles of Left and Right. I found myself in agreement with the confidence of the youth, that after the federal ministries finished relocating to Berlin—which would take years—the German Bundestag would reconvene in a Reichstag committed to a democratic future.

In other ways, the city had already decisively changed since the fall of the Wall, slowly becoming more self-important, and a magnet for other types of residents. The new arrivals included gold-diggers who came only for money and new business or career opportunities. I ran into people from Sweden, Norway, and Russia seeking to buy new apartments.

For me, the arrival of so many conservative state civil servants from Bonn—West Germans known for their provinciality—was the greatest danger to the spirit of the city. Perhaps the changes occasioned by their arrival were inescapable, but I knew they would increase inequality, create new divisions and tensions in what had been a predominantly middle-class society. I feared the city would soon no longer contain the contradictions—capitalism and socialism; war dodgers and four armies; war widows, a large Turkish diaspora; a vibrant oppositional youth culture—that had made it such an attractive puzzle to live in.

By the fall of 1994, the auspicious start to my year continued as Humboldt's Institut für Europäische Ethnologie advertised for a new professorship. After three years teaching at Cornell, I expected a tenure process there to begin after two more years. Friends advised me to apply for other positions in case I was not promoted. I had already been reappointed after my third-year review, which consisted of two authored books and one I had edited, along with nine peer-reviewed book chapters and articles in major journals. After this, I should have felt secure about a positive tenure decision, but I did not. Still, too much was at stake for me to

take the tenure review for granted. I'd started graduate studies later than most others and felt my window of opportunity for a position elsewhere, should I lose this one, was closing.

Except for the reunion with Spot, I did not look forward to returning to Ithaca. The stimulating intellectual atmosphere at Cornell was insufficient to overcome the stifling social atmosphere of my private life. I began to entertain the idea of relocating to Berlin if a permanent position became available there. My life was in any case bifurcated, moving back and forth between Cornell and Berlin several times a year, but the lively and more satisfying place was not Ithaca.

At Humboldt, I was teaching a course on the acceleration of time, focusing on security and insecurity, and the increasing demand for jobs that provided a sense of security amidst the rapid changes in Berlin's landscape. Many people found this quickening an overwhelming Rip van Winkle experience, akin to having to compete in a race right after waking up from a forty-year slumber. Students who had read some of my work didn't expect this topic from me, and were disappointed. Those who had no background in anthropology engaged with the new insecurity and wrote some excellent final papers.

My own job presentation delved into the field of legal anthropology, which was not well-represented in German anthropology or cultural studies. Specifically, I examined how perceived injustices in the GDR before its dissolution were being addressed under new rules, which were a mix of GDR and West German law. Later, this became the focus of my 1997 book *Settling Accounts*. Originally I had titled the book *Unsettling Accounts*, uncertain as to final effects of attempts to redress wrongs. Any form of accounting inherently involves both settling and unsettling conflicts. My study centered on the efforts of a commission established within the restructured (then eventually dissolved) GDR Radio and Television Company, to address injustices suffered by its employees.

Most of the perceived wrongs, such as denunciations, political discrimination, and manufactured grounds for arrest or imprisonment, existed in a grey zone, not strictly legal or illegal but considered politically justified in the GDR. Drawing on the scholarship of political theorist Judith Sklar, I termed them moral injuries. Sklar expanded the definition of harm to include acts of indifference and moral cruelty. I evaluated the effectiveness of the company's apologies and pension adjustments, the primary remedies offered, from the perspective of the victims, whom I surveyed and visited in their homes. I argued strongly for the social significance of retribution, emphasizing the importance of holding

perpetrators accountable while also providing redress for victims in the pursuit of justice.

Ultimately Humboldt appointed a Hungarian citizen for the position in social anthropology. The institute lacked diversity in its hierarchy, and it seemed that the decision to hire an East European scholar specializing in Eastern Europe was the response. Once I learned he had few publications and few previous ties to Berlin, it was clear to me that I had never stood a chance; my qualifications simply didn't matter. While the rejection didn't come as a complete surprise, it was nonetheless profoundly disappointing. I had already started envisioning a permanent move and research projects in Germany and across Europe that could have opened up research directions not much present in German anthropology.

In the end, the university paid a high price for its choice, and I admit feeling a hint of schadenfreude. After nearly a decade at Humboldt, the Hungarian professor borrowed money from several of his colleagues under the pretext of illness then abruptly left for Budapest, leaving a wife and child behind in Berlin. He remarried and started a new family in Hungary, was later elected to the European Parliament, and then became the mayor of a Budapest suburb. Despite efforts by the Ethnology department to reach out to him about his well-being and whereabouts, he chose not to respond and never repaid the money owed to his colleagues. Humboldt continued paying him his full salary for two years before finally terminating his appointment.

While my presentation did not go as well as I had hoped, during my year I did befriend some of the junior faculty members in the department. While I maintained a friendly relationship with the director, it was apparent that he did not endorse me for the position. From what I gathered, he was hesitant about hiring an American. There were other considerations, such as his preference for a colleague who would align closely with his vision of an empirical cultural studies that focused on popular and material culture, and who might not be too independently minded. Regardless of the reasons, my conceptual framework and research questions did not resonate strongly with scholars from the reformed folklore studies. Their focus was primarily on local cultural representations rather than broader, more contentious issues of experience, such as what I was pursuing at that moment: the justice and injustice evident in the dissolution of the GDR.

This sabbatical was also a serendipitous year in that I crossed paths with my future partner, Parvis, at a "Hegel in Berlin" exhibition. Keen on

anthropology, with a lively, engaging demeanor—he smiled much more frequently than most Germans—Parvis immediately caught my attention, not to mention that I found him quite handsome. At the time, however, he was involved with a girlfriend, so our connection remained intellectual for over a year.

Parvis was pursuing his master's degree in social anthropology at the Freie Universität and had recently returned from conducting fieldwork in a village on the Indian side of the border with Pakistan. His study impressed me with how he seamlessly wove his own experiences into descriptions of the authority of a Muslim holy man, a *Pir*, who was revered by Hindus also. This was not a conventional way for Germans to write ethnographies, as they were usually expected to write dry scientific accounts in which they were personally absent.

Growing up in West Berlin with a German mother and Iranian father, with childhood years in Montreal and Paris and a six-month visit to Tehran, he had a profound depth of experience, and I encouraged him to draw from it. Our discussions often turned into psychoanalytic explorations of our relationships with our families and the dynamics of our respective fieldwork encounters, fostering a mutual interest that deepened our connection in a way I had not experienced before. Despite the intellectually propitious beginning, it wasn't until three years later that our relationship evolved into a sexual one.

In the early spring semester of 1995, I was invited to teach six-week seminars in Stockholm and Bergen respectively. There I got to know new colleagues and different ways of organizing graduate-level instruction. The students all knew of my work in Germany, and I was invited to be one of the keynote speakers at the Swedish anthropology association meetings. What I found most stimulating was the attention my seminars focused at both universities. In Stockholm, all the active graduate students took part and carried the discussion of texts and topics outside the classroom. In American education, there is little flexibility for such unexpected extracurricular concentration, as students are more occupied completing departmental requirements in multiple courses at the same time. That intensity of concentration added to truly memorable dynamics in the class.

On my return to Cornell that fall of 1995, I asked the chair how I should prepare for my tenure review. He was evasive and said it was too early; I should wait another two years. Between my doctorate and arriving at Cornell I had already taught for two years at Harvard and at UC

San Diego. I asked him to consider my contributions in those years in my tenure decision and bring me up early. He refused, without explanation. I thought the delay unfair.

In the fall of 1997 my tenure review began, and the chair began sending me emails complaining about aspects of my performance. Each morning before teaching, I found another email in my box asking me to address some problem. I showed these to a trusted colleague, who recommended I share them with the dean. The dean then requested the chair recuse himself from organizing my promotion, and the chair appointed a trusted colleague to run the review

Toward the end of the academic year the department recommended tenure and promotion to associate professor, but five senior faculty members abstained from voting. I had no way to interpret the results and thought the abstentions meant opposition. The tenure letter shared with me summarized over forty scholars who had been contacted and wrote positive reviews, but the colleague running the review suggested after each of his summary comments that the positive reviews weren't to be trusted. I was extremely upset to read these summaries and started to cry. How could they? The dean went out of his way to assure me I shouldn't worry. Although I was in the end tenured and promoted, all I could think of was how to leave.

With that decision, my life speeded up. I began to look for positions at my new rank. In the interim, *Settling Accounts* had been published and the department then voted to promote me to full professor. Meanwhile, the department at Berkeley was looking for a chair, and asked me to come and teach for a semester so the faculty could get to know me during the search. Before they made a decision, I was offered a position at Princeton, where I had also applied. In any case, I was obligated to return and teach a year at Cornell first.

Cornell had a new provost, and I informed her of my offer. She immediately called to ask what the university could do to retain me. She proposed making me the second-highest-paid member of the department, and was open to other wishes I might have, including taking a turn as chair. I really appreciated the offer but that was it for me. I was exhausted and demoralized. I had been through enough there. I accepted the position at Princeton.

Parvis entered the graduate program at Cornell in the fall of 1998. We began living together and became a couple within the department and university. We also began to travel together to South Asia, Southeast

Asia, Mexico, and Canada on vacations and semester breaks. At home, four hands were better than two for managing a household. Most important for me was that I no longer felt lonely and was no longer out of place as a "single" gay man.

By 1999, I had concluded several research projects on reunification in Germany and now wished to develop a new field site outside of Europe, specifically in an Arab country in the Levant. To prepare for this reorientation, I began to learn Arabic and visited Lebanon and Syria in the summer for the first time, while Parvis was in India doing research. The ambience in all three countries—Germany, Lebanon, Syria—was different and distinctive at the turn of the century.

The hot and humid climate of Beirut and Aleppo created a temperate environment that embraced its residents, even smothered them, in contrast to the personal distance produced by the occasional bracing rain and cold in Berlin. While the political-ideological divisions of Berlin had been laboriously sutured together into a single city, the sectarian cleavages in Lebanon remained solid, strengthened by external neighbors, threatening a violent storm that might tear the country apart again. Yet both Lebanon and Germany maintained democratic traditions, in contrast to Syria, whose repressive, authoritarian regime enforced a model of stability by blocking and repressing all change to its various divisions. And whereas the revolution in the GDR and the end of the Cold War brought with it a release of pent-up tensions amidst the hectic of the new Berlin of the 1990s, Lebanon and Syria in 1999 were tense places that shared a sense of no release. Syria seemed frozen in time, wary of any outside intervention, while Beirut was recovering from a long civil war. Lebanon had a palpable feel of impending repetition, though welcoming of the West's dynamism. I then settled on Syria as my next field site.

PART FIVE

LIFE FROM PRINCETON

Life at Princeton

In 2001 I was appointed professor of anthropology at Princeton: a calling, and social climb, that nobody had expected of me—not my parents, not my seven older siblings, not my many friends, nor least of all myself. Princeton itself was never an aspiration, but when the opportunity arose, I embraced it. In my early twenties in Seattle, my aspiration had been simply for stable employment. I had been desperate to find a job, and any job with long-term prospects would have sufficed. I even considered working as a garbage collector. My journey into anthropology began at age thirty-one, and it wasn't till thirty-nine that I secured my first tenure-track position at Cornell. Joining the faculty of Princeton University ten years later felt like a validation.

It was summer, and the move from Cornell to Princeton unfolded amidst oppressive heat and humidity in both places. The differences between them were startling. The natural charm of Ithaca, with Cornell steep above a deep gorge on one side and large fields with horses and cows on the other, was unlike the refined ambience of Princeton's sophistication, surrounded by meticulously manicured lawns, majestic trees, and elegant homes set amidst wooded areas. Nassau Street with its old two-story buildings was the quaint boundary between the city and the campus. The artistic splendor of the campus was inspiring, adorned with sculptures by renowned artists Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, George Segal, and Richard Serra.

I settled into a large university-owned house—weirdly sliced in half, the other half across the street—just a stone's throw away from Aaron Burr Hall, the home of the anthropology department. As a senior professor, my transition was eased by a salary increase, reimbursement for relocation expenses, and a lighter course load during my first semester. It was immediately evident that demands were less pronounced at Princeton than at any place I had been. Some colleagues complained about the intensity of teaching and shortage of time. Once they secured appointment, they tended to take our circumstances for granted. Not me. If irksomely to some, I kept reminding them how privileged we were compared to our colleagues at other universities. In addition to the staff support and tremendous resources, I thought the intellectual exchange fostered at Princeton rendered the institution a rich environment for scholarly work.

Parvis was engrossed in research in India and couldn't help with the move. I found myself yearning for his presence, particularly in caring for Spot, whom I naturally brought along. The transition left Spot deeply unsettled. The unfamiliar surroundings disrupted his calm. On the day the movers arrived in Ithaca to collect our belongings, I confined him to an upstairs bedroom to prevent any escape. His distress was palpable; he whimpered and barked and whined incessantly—behaviors quite uncharacteristic of whippets—leaving long scratch marks on the door in his frantic attempts to reach me. It was as though he believed he could claw his way out of his predicament. Whenever I ascended the stairs to soothe him, he greeted me with frenzied exuberance, leaping up and down as if on a trampoline. I was alarmed that he might injure himself in his fervor, while he, in turn, seemed to dread the conviction he had reached that I was abandoning him.

As I settled into Princeton, Spot's attachment to me became even stronger. I found this touching, and bewildering, until I began to see some parallels in my own experience. Ever since graduate school, I had been living a transient life. Each move demanded a shedding of my belongings and attachments: from people such as my parents, siblings, Madison college friends, Seattle friends, fellow graduate students, and from animals and material possessions, such as my horses, riding gear, household items, books, and cherished childhood mementos. I looked forward to each move but nonetheless knew they entailed great losses. Spot was my rock, my continuity—and I his.

But his dependence made me feel as if I were caring for a child, and I couldn't bear leaving him alone. He became a priority, demanding

reassurance of our stability and his security. To provide him with that sense, I stayed in Princeton with him that summer—a departure from my annual routine of research trips to Berlin every summer since 1984.

Our residence was near sprawling fields where Spot could frolic unleashed amidst lush greenery and occasional squirrel chases. Once the academic year started, I began bringing him with me to campus, equipped with an additional round woolen bed for my office. During my seminars, which predominantly took place in intimate settings, Spot became a regular attendee, nestled comfortably in his bed, which had become more than just a security blanket—it was an extension of himself. At the mere hint of my intention to lift it, he would try to jump in.

During the initial hour of our lengthy three-hour classes, Spot would curl up in his bed and drift into sleep. On awakening he would survey the scene with a hint of boredom before rising gracefully, stretching into a perfect yoga "dog pose," and embarking on a leisurely stroll around the large table at which we all sat. With a cold nose nuzzling the students' hands, he sought from them affectionate pats and strokes, a gesture that elicited either wide smiles or slight alarm.

One particularly memorable incident occurred at the conclusion of a session when a student suddenly exclaimed, "My lunch is missing! It was in my backpack, I'm sure of it." A collective glance around the room ensued, and to our astonishment, there it was, still in its plastic baggie, concealed within Spot's bed. He sat innocently atop it, harboring hopes he had deceived us and might clandestinely abscond with his newfound treasure and bring it home with him.

It took some time to adjust to the Princeton undergraduate students. While undeniably diligent and impeccably conscientious, they exhibited a marked aversion to risk-taking. The admissions office favored students who were best in their high school class and exuded a polished veneer of confidence. Students, in turn, were anxious if there were any ambiguity in our expectations. The syllabi of my colleagues expanded constantly in response, giving students ever more detailed directives aimed at assuaging their worries. In contrast, I opted for brevity, listing minimal directions with few extraneous rules. During classes I reiterated a mantra: "Tell me what I don't know, don't repeat what I've told you." This made some uneasy, as their prior learning had seldom encouraged bold or courageous thinking, and that formula of caution had proven itself successful for admission to a prestigious university.

Of course, there were many exceptions to the anxious student. A number were admitted either as "legacies," because members of their family had studied at Princeton, or because their parents were famous politicians, or billionaires, or athletes. The university denied this, which was patently false. Most students went to public schools, usually the best in their communities, but many had gone to private schools. Born with silver spoons in their mouths they coasted through classes, rarely taking advantage of opportunities to learn. Some were so confident of their future that they backed off academic work to take advantage of Princeton's rich social life structured around the university's sports teams and "eating clubs," elsewhere called fraternities and sororities.

Then there was the exceptional subset of students who possessed extraordinary talents, surpassing my own or anyone else's reasonable expectations for people their age. Regardless of origin, they exhibited prowess in comprehending complex concepts, articulating concise summaries, and demonstrating complete mastery of grammar and syntax, both in verbal communication and in writing. Nearly all of them excelled under pressure, juggling my seminars with finesse alongside two or three other courses of comparable intensity, but usually demanding even more reading.

Many anthropology students hailed from diverse ethnic backgrounds, having grown up in a mosaic of cultural influences. Many were already exploring tastes and expressions, be it in culinary traditions, musical genres, sartorial choices, dance forms, or intimate relationships. Yet they had had little opportunity to reflect deeply on cultural shifts, except when that became the focus for their senior theses. I took pleasure in guiding them through introspection in the intimate setting of seminars, where the small class size—typically no more than twelve—allowed me to assess how each was reacting to me and to the material, as well as to their peers.

Regardless of class size, I took the opportunity show filmed portrayals of intense experiences. These included Srdjan Dragojevic's 1996 film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, where young soldiers are forced to sacrifice their elementary school teacher in the Bosnian war; Tom Joslin and Peter Friedman's 1993 documentary *Silver Lake Life*, where two gay lovers document their own dying from AIDS in Los Angeles; Ulrich Seidl's 2007 *Import/Export* on dehumanizing exchange of laborers and goods between Ukraine and Austria; and Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's three films of 1983, 1989, and 1992 that make up *The Highlands Trilogy*.

That trilogy documented the first encounter of gold-prospecting Australians with people of the highlands Papua New Guinea, following a mixed-race son's development of coffee plantations and the descent into violence among Papuans with the collapse of the coffee market.

I wanted to mirror in the classroom the immersive nature of an anthropologist's encounters during fieldwork—encounters that surprised or shocked, such as experiences of love, loss, cruelty, and the brutality of war or domestic life. All this without trigger warnings. Unlike the polished accounts of fieldwork often found in published anthropology, which tend to gloss over moments of acute embarrassment or conflict, I assigned many raw, less filtered perspectives. Moments charged with erotic tension or marked by our own ineptitude in navigating unfamiliar cultural terrains are intrinsic to the fieldwork experience. I wanted students to appreciate modes of learning beyond the confines of traditional classroom discussions and assigned readings. I called attention to many of the simple things we take for granted, such as listening closely to conversations or observing people go about their lives in their own settings.

Despite most students' commendable work ethic, extracurricular pursuits cut into the time for intellectual ones. Team sports were popular, and Princeton's strong athletic programs catered to both men and women. With practices and competitions often occupying much of the weekend, many students were sleep deprived, unable to keep their eyes open for a full afternoon seminar. As a result, learning beyond the classroom took on special significance, providing a respite from the sheltered campus environment and the demands of reading and classroom discussion. Because the university supported field trips, I scheduled at least one into each course. I thought they offered an avenue for students to forge connections with one another while unveiling latent abilities overlooked in the classroom as such. They afforded opportunities to engage people in real time, to navigate the potential for rejection, and to confront unscripted scenarios head-on.

Every year I changed the field assignments. One year, students visited the Russian Sauna in Manhattan, a no-frills bath house located in the East Village, open for men six days a week but only one day for women. It was an authentic Russian-Finnish cherry-wood sauna, with a white-tiled Turkish steam room where an attendant entered to put eucalyptus on the hot rocks. Students were to enter the sauna without their classmates to have at least one conversation.

I well remember one written report on this assignment. The student had made her way into the city easily but hesitated to enter the sauna.

"Could she do this?" she asked herself. Through the front door, she found herself in a locker room with women in various state of undress. Some fully naked. As an athlete she was used to states of undress in locker rooms, but the scene of nude women of various ages laughing and teasing one another was something she had neither experienced nor wanted to experience. She left without changing her clothes, went outside, and called her mother: "Mom, I can't go through with this."

"Why?" her mother asked.

"I was just so uncomfortable with them; some didn't have any clothes on."

"You get back in there. You do as the instructor told you and learn something from this."

She went back in and, as she described in her final essay, the other women went out of their way to make her feel comfortable. They showed her the ins and outs of the rooms, how to use a towel, why never to sit on a bench without it; they laughed and joked, and she joined in. She came away thinking of herself not as a spy or an informant but as a young Princeton student whose presence gave the other women an opportunity to share experiences with her in a cultural setting with which she was unfamiliar.

My Princeton colleagues tended to maintain greater privacy compared to those at Cornell. In a way I appreciated this, coming from Cornell's all-too-cozy confines. But it had negative effects on the department's integration. The chair feared conflict, often avoiding it by scheduling minimal meetings. This seemingly served him and certain others well but provided for little dissent, maintaining a status quo that satisfied those content with existing dynamics before my arrival. They had brought me in, I thought, to instigate change in the department, but conservative institutional forces resisted many of the changes I proposed.

My support for expanding the faculty, for example, and for outreach to other departments, did not meet agreement. There was, I felt, a harmony ideology—in anthropologist Laura Nader's phrasing—that hindered opportunities for constructive dialogue. This impeded the evolution of the department.

One colleague, an associate professor who'd become a good friend, was particularly resistant to the chair and secretaries, calling the leadership Maoist. During meetings she would often start with a minor disagreement, but as tensions escalated she resembled a tightly coiled spring ready to snap. And snap she did. Eventually consumed by rage,

she would abruptly stand up, curse us, slam the door shut, and storm out. In her wake, we all collectively exhaled. I tried to talk to her about her behavior, but I was helpless in containing her outbursts. Her dramatic exits effectively diffused any energy for productive discourse on the meeting's agenda.

Despite her outbursts I supported her because I always supported the underdog. I was rarely like-minded, and didn't enjoy being like-minded. This often positioned me in opposition to the majority in the group. Even before entering adolescence, I had broken with the first authority in my life, my father. Before graduate school, I'd gone through my undergraduate years with no experience in academic groups, joining no networks within the academy. I was not averse to groups, but I wasn't a joiner. I had been learning how to live independently, both as a lone soul and as a free thinker.

Given the prevailing atmosphere of privacy and the sense that many of Princeton's social circles were closed to me, I decided to create my own. On Parvis's return from India, we began hosting guests—typically six at a time—at our home, often twice a week. Having traveled abroad together every Christmas and attended cooking classes in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hoi An, Oaxaca, and Kerala, we had amassed recipes and a collection of cookbooks. My culinary repertoire had evolved significantly since my days cooking for the student collective in Madison.

Drawing inspiration from these cuisines, I experimented with spices and fusion, inviting graduate students and faculty to join us for meals. While a few close friends reciprocated our hospitality regularly, most of my acquaintances at the university were not accustomed to entertaining or cooking. That was disappointing, but I refrained from expecting reciprocity, a departure from a fundamental virtue I had always espoused in my writing.

Parvis and I found the conversations in our home vibrant and enriching, as we welcomed guests from diverse backgrounds as well as graduate students who brought their own expertise from new fieldwork. Our reputation for hospitality grew and we seized the opportunity of hosting for at least one dinner visiting scholars from the United States, Europe, Syria, India, and beyond. We often extended invitations to faculty members who wished to join us.

At the start of each semester, I also invited students enrolled in my seminars—typically a mix of graduate and upper-level undergraduate students—to join us for a dinner. I'd prepare a variety of dishes—one

vegetarian option, one fish, and one meat, alongside salads and a dessert. My intention was to cultivate camaraderie among the students, although the extent to which this was successful remains uncertain. I did write hundreds of recommendations in the following years, and a few of these students have made the effort to keep in touch. I also had the sense that our guests were intrigued to observe how we collaborated: orchestrating the meal preparation, coordinating hosting duties, and leading engaging conversations in which we openly disagreed. The concept of a gay couple was at least no longer a novelty at Princeton.

Sri Lanka and the Day I Almost Died

2004, the morning after Christmas, we were in Unawatuna, a village on the southwestern tip of Sri Lanka. For several years, Parvis and I had been traveling together in Asia during semester breaks. As curious anthropologists—are there any other kind?—we used the opportunity to visit places we'd never been that were also crucial to Parvis's budding career as a specialist of South Asia. These travels were enriching, personally and professionally, providing both of us with experience in a wide array of culture outside our research sites. For us it wasn't just tourism. We selected places in which we might immerse ourselves, thinking our visits like pilgrimages.

After a morning swim, we were enjoying breakfast in our hotel's dining annex, a small concrete structure with three open sides and a corrugated tin roof facing the beach. Our rooms were in the main building across the road. By nine we were finishing our meal when Parvis turned to me and said, "The beach has disappeared." The water was nearly at the level of the dining room, which stood about eight feet above the beach and twenty feet from the water. We stood up to look over the edge of the deck. The water was lapping at the chairs put out for sunbathing. They began to float into the sea. Noting this but still unprepared to be alarmed, I said, "The chairs are disappearing. That's too bad."

We watched a waiter help a young dark-haired girl in a fashionable black bathing suit climb over the wall from the beach. The water seemed to be suddenly engulfing her. But she let go of his hand and tried to climb the stairs on her own instead. She was halfway up when the rising water swept the stairs away, then the waiter grabbed her hand and helped her out of the water after all. She laughed and ran out of the restaurant. Everyone laughed along with her.

A wave splashed over the wall, and we got a bit wet. By then all the tables in the restaurant were occupied by tourists from our hotel, and everyone laughed, again, amused at this unexpected wave. Within seconds, however, the water was rising above the three-foot restaurant wall; dishes, teapots, silverware fell off the tables, which began to float and overturn. The water was dark, not the clear blue in which we had earlier swum. It poured over the top of the wall and small waves lapped at everything inside the breakfast room.

The Sri Lankan waiters looked as dumbfounded as their customers. In an orderly fashion, without exchanging a word, everyone rose to leave. No rush here in paradise, which is where I had told my friends I was going: a sunny spot in a lazy, friendly beach town on the southwest Sri Lankan coast.

It was all happening too fast for us to know what was happening. I felt helpless as I realized that the waves were going to cover us. They turned into a wall and threatened to overtake us as we stood silently, watching. I asked myself, "Is this a tidal wave?" Parvis stood in front of me and seemed to be waiting for others to clear out, not in any hurry, unfailingly polite as always. I rushed toward the exit and yelled, "Let's get out, Parvis, don't wait!" But he was thinking, he told me later, "Don't panic, take your turn."

Seconds later, I was one of the first to depart down the steps to the street, to the hotel on the other side. I was helped with an aggressive push by the gushing water on my legs and lower back, which swept me off my feet. It was a ride down the steps on my ass as if on a waterslide. With my left hand I held high our guidebook, *Lonely Planet: Sri Lanka*, with all the addresses of places we were going to visit. This was only our fourth day out of seventeen planned in Sri Lanka. The water grabbed the book from my hand. There, I thought, goes our itinerary.

I sensed a middle-aged woman, also sliding, close behind. I landed about two yards away, but tables and chairs followed, threatening to knock me down, so I stumbled toward the wall in front of me. To the left of the entrance, I saw two windows above the water, which was rising about a foot every ten seconds. A Sri Lankan girl wrapped her arms around my neck. She was so small and thin I hardly noticed her weight, and I dragged her, or she floated behind me, to the windowsill. A Sri Lankan boy hooked his arm in mine as I began to climb the wall. Or were we simply floating up the wall?

The windowsill provided no purchase. I was afraid of falling back into the water, which was coming straight at me. It was a river that began to

roar, and threatened to carry me to my left toward the other end of the village. I suddenly found my hands could grasp the latticework between the upper windowpanes and I grabbed it, as did the girl and boy. They were screaming hysterically, their dark, round eyes betraying a deathly fear, and a plea for my help. I was silent, though; Parvis later described me as "bewildered." "Just hold on, John," I told myself. "Just hold on. Just breathe."

The water shattered the windowpanes, pouring into the hotel rooms and allowing us to resist its pull down the street. But it was still rising, and in less than a minute we were submerged. I held my breath. The water went down, then re-submerged us. This pattern repeated. The boy and girl screamed loudly each time it went up, then caught their breath as it subsided. After our second submersion, the boy gestured that we should go through the open window into the building. But I noticed the low ceiling and thought it better to ride the water outside, since we might get trapped in there. So we climbed to the next level's window, getting as high as we could. Nothing went through my mind but to focus on the immediate task, to hold on, to stay calm, to relax—no prayer, no thoughts of others, nor of what to do next.

I did, however, take note of the absurdity of the moment, as the water waxed and waned, came up, went down. I kept thinking, it won't stay up forever, it will eventually retreat, and we will keep rising to the top. But its intensity increased, threatening to pull us into the river, and it got louder, competing in my ear with the screams of the boy and girl.

My glasses caught in the girl's hair, close to a ribbon that held it in place but was coming loose. She turned her head back and forth and struggled to climb the hotel wall with me, to stay above the water. Then my glasses nearly came off, and I thought, if I lose them, I can't see! "My glasses are caught in your hair," I told her, hoping she heard. But she was in no state to understand me. Perhaps she didn't speak English. Eventually I tore them free, but a piece of her hair came with them. We endured this for what seemed an eternity but was more likely less than ten minutes.

Just as quickly as the water had arrived, it began to recede. That revealed the boy's leg, and he saw the gash above his thigh. He whimpered, then pulled himself together, at least in sound. His mouth remained open for a long time, silently screaming. The girl looked at his wound, then at me, uncomprehendingly. I no doubt looked equally shocked to them.

When the water went below the windowsill I jumped down. The boy and girl made garbled noises, grunts, whines, pleading that I should take

them with me. I said, "Just stay calm," and motioned, "Wait, wait, the water is going down. I'll get help." I waded back to the restaurant, the roof of which had collapsed. I found a concrete slab to stand on.

Could I make it to our hotel room on the second floor? I noticed electric wires in the water and thought: electrocution. The street was empty: no noise, no barking dogs, no people's voices. Risk it, I said to myself. As I moved, a young Sri Lankan man emerged. He approached and extended his hand. I said, "No, I am okay, get the two kids on the windowsill."

Then I heard Parvis calling in a panic-stricken voice, "John, John, John!" I turned the corner, and he spread his arms wide and rushed toward me. We embraced. "I thought I lost you," he said, "I have been calling for minutes, didn't you hear?"

"No," I said.

We waded through the devastated ground floor of our hotel. The street was still a river, now shallow instead of ten feet deep, littered with furniture, instruments, the head of a Buddha, odd pieces of things. We climbed to our room. It was untouched. The bathing suit I had put out on the balcony was dry. The sun had continued shining through this whole thing, whatever it was. Why, I thought, do I expect the sun to coordinate its activity with the ocean?

We looked out on our balcony, where another couple were already standing. They had probably floated in from the river as it reached the height of the hotel's second floor. Parvis told them to stay as long as they liked. We thought out loud: should we leave or stay? I sat on the bed to take stock of what happened.

Parvis pulled his camera out of his backpack. "There's always a second wave," he said, yelling to people as they appeared in the river-street below us: "Get out. Get out. A second wave. Leave. Leave." They looked dazed and didn't respond.

"You wouldn't believe this," he said to me while snapping pictures, "Look at this, come and look at this." I stood up and joined him at the balcony. "Look at the water," he said, pointing to the ocean. It had receded to about a kilometer from the beachfront. Furniture, house parts, trees, tuk-tuks, cars, clothes, everything human filled the exposed ocean bed.

We discussed what to take. Parvis suggested one computer. I said, "Oh no, both." We gathered our documents, passports, money, left our clothes, and went downstairs, planning to go inland. The people on

the street appeared to be mindlessly wading through the water, then it dawned on me that they were looking for their missing.

Parvis went back upstairs for some reason and found the boy who'd shared the windowsill with me, resting on a bed. Some tourists had bandaged his thigh. I waited for Parvis, anxious and impatient—the second wave! I yelled for him. He answered then got angry and refused to answer again. I went upstairs and found him. He had offered to help carry the boy up the mountain. The boy was in shock and could not put his weight on his leg. He held tightly onto a blanket and a pillow. Parvis had handed his computer to someone. I retrieved it. As they carried the boy downstairs, the water tugged at the end of the blanket. He dropped it, then he dropped his pillow, saying nothing.

Residents were urging everyone to leave for the higher ground behind the hotel. We began climbing, stumbling over large, slippery rocks. We took off our shoes to scale them. Halfway up the mountain, women were wailing under an open-sided hut. Men were gathered around a woman under a blanket. I realized she was dead. There must be more bodies, I thought. Further up, a Japanese nurse was treating people's wounds with nothing but a bit of cotton and alcohol. I had scraped knees, several deep cuts on my left foot with glass embedded in both soles, and a few other scratches. Parvis seemed to have no wounds, though he discovered a cut on a toe that later became infected.

We reached the top. Everyone had a story they wanted to tell. I sat at the nursing station and listened. I wanted to take pictures, but it seemed obscene to photograph people in that state. Some were seriously wounded; others, like me, merely cut and bruised. A young man borrowed a notepad and a pen from me to make a list of the missing: a Czech girl, a Polish boy, Japanese, Australian, British adults—and that was just the start of his efforts. He said that nine tourists and twelve Sri Lankans from our village had been confirmed as dead. The dark-haired girl in the fashionable black bathing suit showed up, totally in control. She was from Singapore and traveling with her boyfriend, who had sustained a few deep cuts and scratches across his chest.

"You're the one who climbed out of the water in our restaurant," I said.

"Mheh," she chuckled, explaining that, as she was being pulled out of the water, the concrete wall of the restaurant was scratching her legs, so she let go to use the stairs, which then got swept away. "I was laughing as it collapsed," she recalled, "because I thought, damn, there went my cigarettes!"

We American, European, Australian, and Asian tourists gathered in the villages atop the mountain, and local people served us tea. The second wave came, and the third, but Unawatune had been evacuated. Some watched the second wave from the hillside. We had water and a few boxes of cookies, but no other food. Local phone lines were down. I ran into Australians and Brits with cellphones, but their networks only allowed them to call home, which they did, and people at home watching CNN told them that a tsunami—I'd never heard the word before—had hit. That thousands of people were dead. A few villagers came by and offered us beds or floors in their huts to sleep on, but most of us planned to sleep out in the open. Having survived the water, we had only mosquitoes to fear.

Just before dark, the men from the village returned from a search for the missing. One of them, middle-aged, came up to me. He had found the body of his closest friend, who, he said, had greeted him endearingly every morning on his way to work. He'd miss that. He offered Parvis and me his bed for the night. Anything to avoid the hard ground, I thought, but I hesitated to accept. He repeated his offer. "I am an honest man," he asserted, "a carpenter, and my house is on the way to the bus route." We offered to pay what our hotel charged. He agreed.

Parvis felt bad about leaving. He wanted to share the fate of the others. I thought: no food, no communication, no sign of rescue; we're only a burden; let's make our way inland. It was late, and there were only candles, no electricity, in the carpenter's house, so we declined his offer of food and only drank tea with him. He offered us his explanation for the tsunami. The culture of the beach, the drugs, the tourists, the sex: the wave was revenge for these pleasures. The last time something like this happened was two thousand years ago, he said, as recorded in some mythical texts. I did not sleep a wink that night: it was either a mosquito that got under our net, or the hardness of the bed.

The next morning, we climbed down a steep mountain passage and walked along the beach road to Galle amid massive destruction: debris everywhere, upturned buses, uprooted railroad tracks. Eventually we hitched a ride with an empty ambulance to a hospital, and once inland, caught a bus to Colombo.

There I switched on my computer, and nearly a hundred emails awaited me. My fieldwork in East Berlin and Aleppo, places where I'd been identified as an American spy, had been dangerous, but I had never been caught in a catastrophic event where my life was at stake. Friends from

Ithaca contacted Parvis's mother in the former West Berlin, and other Berliners asked if we were alive. Eventually they all reached the secretaries at Princeton, who knew where we were traveling. They, in turn, got the latest information from my retired colleague Gananath Obeyesekere, who'd sent an urgent message for us to call him, wanting to drive down from his home in the central Sri Lankan city of Kandy to find us.

My friends and students in Syria, where I was teaching in Aleppo as a Fulbright professor, made anxious inquiries. "I am really concerned about you and happy new year *alsalam alikom* bye," wrote Abedasalam, a young waiter who had just been fired from his job at a restaurant I often visited. "I and Rami ask God to you the full health and coming back quickly," wrote Husam, a clerk who worked down the street from my apartment in the al-Medina *souk*. When I replied "bruised but alive" to him and other friends, many Syrians wrote back to express relief and joy that their prayers had been answered.

I am not a believer, and the experience of the tsunami only confirmed my agnosticism. It was an arbitrary, capricious event. Nature calling. It had nothing to do with my being human, and in that respect, it was infinitely humbling. To my Syrian friends I wrote, "But God sent this tsunami, he tried to kill me."

The Hunting Grounds

"John, you better get out here," Bob chided me on the phone. "We're getting old! Some of us are not in great health. You don't know how long your sisters and I will be around anymore."

Despite the urgency in his voice, the familiar banter brought a sense of relief—they were indeed all still alive.

It was summer 2005 and Parvis had just returned from a year in India, I from two months in Lebanon and Syria. We flew to reconnect with my siblings, nieces, nephews, and the farm I once called home. Bob and Leona hosted us in their suburban ranch house. We'd rented a car in Milwaukee and parked it in the driveway next to their large SUV and full-size Chrysler. Their children had left home over thirty years ago, but in the bedroom we were to share there was no place to put our suitcases. The closet and floor were filled with boxes of kids' things they hadn't been able to throw away.

Eager to show us around, Bob took us on an afternoon stroll through the suburb. With literally no traffic, or defined sidewalks, we ambled

along the quiet streets. Everyone knew everybody, and the neighbors came out to greet Bob as we walked by. This time, however, Bob had Parvis and me in tow. We were strangers and the neighbors were inquisitive; they followed our movements. Midwestern curiosity. And after we left, we strangers became the talk-of-the-neighborhood. The first thing I noticed were quizzical looks.

As we made the rounds, Bob introduced us with varying degrees of hesitation. "This is my little brother John," he said to the first neighbor, momentarily forgetting to include Parvis. The oversight notwithstanding, the neighbor exchanged pleasantries with us, commenting on the good weather and questioning Bob about when she should next mow her lawn to avoid rain.

With the next neighbor, Bob summoned the courage to acknowledge our relationship. "This is my brother John. He brought along a friend," he declared, his words tinged with a hint of uncertainty. Openly acknowledging that I am gay has never been easy for him. Although he has always quietly accepted these facts, he has struggled to put them into words. The right words. In private, on the telephone with us, the last few years he has been able to find them. In public, however, he still stumbles.

Leona was having a rough time with back pain. She could not sleep flat in bed at night, so instead she camped out in the living room on her overstuffed leather recliner, waiting impatiently for her upcoming doctor's appointment. The pain made her cranky, and especially short with Bob, who bore the brunt of her frustration. She snapped at him every time he spoke to her: "You got that wrong, Bob, we did that trip in July not June," or "Just get out of the way here while I am cooking; you're always in the way," or "Can't you get anything right?"

Leona's a trooper, like all of us in the family, but that day everything seemed to rub her the wrong way. When Bob mentioned Leona's promise to make her "famous lasagna," I could sense trouble brewing. Bob, bless his heart, never quite mastered the art of cooking, so he relied heavily on Leona's culinary skills. I remembered her as a good cook, but that had been forty years ago.

The meal was a disaster. She forgot to boil the noodles before layering them with meat, cheese, and tomato sauce. In a desperate attempt to remedy this, she left the lasagna in the oven for far too long, resulting in burnt béchamel sauce and rock-hard noodles impossible to cut with our kitchen knives.

Bob tried to salvage the situation by offering some encouragement. He stood up and fetched some steak knives. "Here, try these," he said, hoping to ease our struggle. At the same time, Bob nonetheless complemented Leona on her cooking, and Parvis and I loudly agreed. "Oh, this is so tasty." "Excellent." "Something special." We made small talk while strenuously chewing and swallowed the rock-hard noodles whole.

The following morning Bob's son Mike dropped by to say hi. He surprised us both with a warm hug, a gesture that hadn't been part of our interactions back when I lived in the area. It seemed like someone had expanded the next generation's bodily comfort zone. Maybe Mary had taken the initiative, I mused.

Aware of my stance against gun ownership, Mike wanted to share their extensive collection of hunting guns with us. They had quite the arsenal, totaling around ten firearms, all safely stored in a cabinet securely bolted to the wall.

Always one to spark a debate, and much like me, ready to argue, Parvis decided to question Mike about the essence of hunting. "Is it all about the thrill of the kill?"

"We are not in it for the kill," Mike countered firmly. "We aim to stage a fair contest with the animals we hunt."

Keen to illustrate his concept of fairness, Bob fetched two rifles from his cabinet. "Take a look through those scopes," he instructed. "Now, look at the field across the street." Suddenly, distant objects loomed unnervingly close. "Precision," he explained. "You don't want to take a shot without ensuring a clean kill. That would just prolong their suffering. We're all about compassion here," he concluded with a slight chuckle.

Mike then steered us to the collection of high-tech bows and arrows neatly stowed away in the adjacent cabinet. "It's a bit more technical with these," Bob chimed in. "It's all about the sport, really. It's something I can do with Mike and his son Mitchell. They bring their friends to our cabin. We enjoy it together." As I observed their enthusiasm, I couldn't help but ponder the underlying motivations. If they kill the animals as an aesthetic pleasure, I thought, then it is not about any notion of utility. There's no economic need.

"It would be much cheaper," Bob chimed in, seeming to read my thoughts, "to buy meat and fish in a store."

He offered to take us to his hunting grounds the following day, a prospect we readily agreed to. For Bob, hunting was essential to the pursuit of happiness, while for me, such fulfillment came from reading

books and writing. Perhaps during our excursion, we could find some common ground and explore how hunting and fishing represent essential freedoms.

Neither Parvis nor I had ever hunted, but he is an expert on ritual sacrifice. In his study of a pogrom in India, he argued that human hunters rarely just kill their victims; they must also affirm the honor of the victim. Perhaps he could engage Bob on this topic.

Bob stressed the importance of safety during the hunt, but he also emphasized the desire to be free from external regulations. "That's one reason I bought my own land for hunting," he explained. "To avoid those damned regulations. I don't have nothing against the government issuing licenses. It's important for them to control who can hunt and how many deer or other animals a permit allows. It's dangerous to hunt with too many inexperienced hunters."

Around 1985 Bob had acquired a parcel of land comprising forty acres of pristine, secluded forest, not too far from his suburban residence. On this land he erected a cabin complete with modern amenities like electricity, heating, and running water, ideal for overnight stays. Bob transported us to this rustic retreat in his generously proportioned, ultra-comfortable SUV, which sat so high off the ground that boarding it felt like climbing a ladder. From this elevated vantage point, observing the road ahead was akin to enjoying a show from the comfort of a plush theater box. When I mentioned our modest cars, a petite Kia Rio for Parvis, a subcompact Ford Fiesta for myself, Bob found this highly amusing—and, he said, "Very unsafe!"

This secluded piece of paradise brought Bob immense satisfaction. "I like having my son and grandson, and we invite my friends, their pals and buddies, to join us in the fall for deer hunting," he explained his source of pleasure. "The rest of the year, we hang out and just have fun." It was evident that hunting was an all-male activity for them.

"Come weekends, we pack a cooler with steaks and burgers, pick up some potato chips and pretzels, then crack open a few beers and horse around. During the offseason, I stay occupied with cabin maintenance, renovations, and clearing paths of fallen trees and overgrown brush."

Bob's retreat felt like a recreational haven where grown men could indulge in outdoor activities safely. He offered us a tour of the trails on all-terrain vehicles. While I typically don't enjoy vehicles, I must admit it was quite exhilarating. Bob owned four quad bikes, each seating two people, and additional friends brought their own on weekends, loading

them into the backs of their pickups. Maneuvering these bikes over uneven terrain added a sense of adventure and danger, far more exciting than the simple freedom of riding a motorcycle on an asphalt road.

We traversed zig-zag paths where unexpected encounters with wild pigs, deer, skunks, possums, raccoons, or even wild cats were possible. When we encountered a fallen tree blocking one trail from the last storm, Bob took charge, expertly clearing the path with a chainsaw and chopping the wood into manageable pieces for the cabin's winter fuel. This entire scene, deep within the forest, felt like Bob's version of country living but without the farm chores and duties. Bob was reclaiming his connection with the land, free from the childhood traumas of his rural upbringing, where life meant endless work and minimal relaxation. In his private hunting grounds, the countryside was transformed into a playground, a space of leisure and sport, equipped with all the right toys: animals, guns, and land rovers, available at his leisure to be shared with friends, children, and grandchildren alike.

On our second-to-last day my sisters organized a farewell picnic, complete with Kentucky fried chicken, canned beans, and a store-bought macaroni salad. To think I had boasted to Parvis about my sisters' culinary skills. One of my nieces remarked that Parvis was a keeper.

"What's a keeper?" he asked me.

"You are," I replied.

Parvis noticed scars on another niece's legs and asked me, "You think she's been battered by her husband?"

"I don't know," I replied. "It looks like it."

"Should we say something?" he inquired.

"They know, they must already know," I said, resigned to their acceptance of such matters.

An embarrassing moment stuck in Parvis's memory from the picnic: an attempt to discretely play footsy with me under the table. Instead of touching my foot, he accidentally reached for the foot of my nephew's wife. Later, he expressed incredulity, "I was playing with her foot instead of yours? I can't believe I did that."

"Don't worry," I reassured him. "She's too embarrassed to tell anyone. Besides, it's summer. My sisters are busy and usually have their own agendas. You were just distracted; nobody'll make a big deal out of it." We laughed, though it still bothered him.

On our last day, Bob drove Parvis and I up to Antigo to visit the original farmhouse, now uninhabitable and abandoned, with missing

windows and doors ajar. It looked in worse shape than what we typically describe as a dump. We waded through the long grass to get a view of the back. Two ticks took the opportunity to burrow into my leg.

Bob shared a story about the final resident of our house, before the floors caved in and part of the roof collapsed. "He was the last renter. Ya know that after Mom left nobody really lived there. They just rented it out, real cheap, like a few hundred dollars a month." He added as an afterthought, "A member of the nearby Menominee Indian tribe, he lived there. Isn't that fitting?"

I thought the condition of the house was piteous and felt a dark fog rolling over me as I took in the state of the farm. It seemed right that a Menominee man had made our former home his. But in such a dilapidated state? That was disheartening. As I roamed from one structure to another, a sense of aimlessness consumed me. The absence of one of the towering maples from the front yard further impoverished the landscape. The once expansive yard now seemed diminished. Venturing out to the old lane, where my father had sent me off as a seven-year-old to find the cows in the back woods, I was disheartened that the once familiar path was now so overgrown with unruly weeds and prickly thistles.

I gazed back at the barn where a few stone walls stood as a somber reminder of the farm's former vitality, its roof nowhere to be seen. The absence of livestock added to the desolation, leaving me to ponder the purpose of this place in its current state. Only the towering silo remained intact, a resilient structure amidst the decay, yet serving no practical function. The atmosphere weighed heavily on me, and I found myself anxious to depart, the scene too disheartening to linger.

At the same time, I didn't lament the disappearance of the family farm. While I had experienced its decline, I was grateful to have personally escaped its terminal stages. My life of adventure—being a riding instructor, competing in dressage and three-day-eventing, traveling the world, pursuing anthropology and becoming a university professor—had been exceptionally rewarding in ways that dairy farming could not have been for me. It is perhaps fitting that I, a farmboy by origin, ended up marrying a man from Berlin of German-Iranian background, and embracing a cosmopolitan urban life far from the town and farm.

As we circled back to Wausau, our trip led us through the heart of Antigo. Standing prominently at the convergence of Superior and Fifth Avenue was the majestic Fidelity Savings Bank where in 1965 I'd made my first deposit. Now called Chase Bank, it was still an architectural

emblem of ageless grandeur, presiding over the nearly empty crossroads. Surrounding it were modest single-story shops with occasional street traffic.

In a poignant juxtaposition, where once stood the venerable Antigo Public Library now rose an unmistakable emblem of globalization: the Golden Arches of MacDonald's. Every other week, my mother would drop me off to read books in the quiet two-room library while she did grocery shopping. The transformation was stark, symbolizing a shift in cultural priorities, as a learning tradition yielded to the lure of fast food.

One block further, Antigo High School, the venerable two-story structure of wood and stone masonry, had been torn down. In its stead stood a nondescript one-story schoolhouse, a testament to contemporary architectural sensibilities, constructed in cold brick and cement. Bob commented ironically, "This is progress for ya, John."

Parvis asked me, "What do you feel now?"

"Nothing," I replied. "Nothing."

I found a janitor and humbly requested entry, explaining that my sole intention was to glimpse the showcase of school heroes adjacent to the gymnasium. In the recesses of my mind I recalled that every school boasted such a display case, a repository of triumphs and glories frozen in time. True to form, this school harbored its own shrine, the trophies celebrated only the most recent exploits of football champions and track and field virtuosos. Conspicuously absent were any markers or mementos hinting at the possibility that this institution had a past.

As I walked through the halls, I found it appalling that there was no hint this school had once housed my education. Who were the excellent teachers back then, of literature, advanced algebra, and Latin? What had happened to their students? No visitor could possibly guess that an anthropologist had begun his education here.

Bob took us next to the Langlade Cemetery near the tranquil banks of the Wolf River. I'd never been there. Large evergreen sentinels encircled an expanse of open field, with undulating hills and freshly trimmed verdant carpets. I recognized the bright pink and white petunias and golden yellow daffodils that punctuated the green. The entire field appeared devoid of any encroaching weed. Amid this serene tableau, Bob directed our attention to the final resting places of all my German forebears who had forged their roots in Langlade County.

After locating the smooth granite tombstones of my parents, along with numerous Bornemans and a sprinkling of Bornemanns, I couldn't escape the stark reality of my shrinking lineage. Occasionally, I'd squat

down and trace my fingers over the engraved names, feeling only a profound disconnection. These were people I knew so little about, even those who were still alive during my childhood. As the youngest of eight siblings, my connection to these ancestral bonds was inevitably diluted. I recognized only my parents and a few uncles and aunts. They'd endured a hard life, and my initial thought was that their tombstones were all that remained of them. But then I laughed. Of course there was more. Wasn't I part of their legacy, writing books, teaching students? And Bob too, who'd built many houses? Still. Although traditional kinship was part of my parents' experience, and perhaps of my older siblings' too, I had through my travel and research developed nontraditional connections with new kin. As for those deceased, I had too few memories of most of them to feel the weight of their absence.

Despite my Catholic schooling, I'd become radically secular, unmoved by ideas of the afterlife or spiritual traditions generally. If anything, this somber pilgrimage stirred within me a deep sense of aversion. A connection to my German heritage, even to those relatives in America, felt more distant than ever, tethered neither to the soil of the United States nor to the ancestral lands across the Atlantic. In that moment in the cemetery, a sense of finality washed over me, accompanied by the unsettling realization that I had no desire ever to return.

The Loss of Spot

As Spot aged, his health issues became more frequent, as did visits to the veterinarian. She prescribed heart and pain medicine, which I had to administer to him every morning. Hoping to coax him to swallow the pills, I'd warm chicken broth and pour it over his dog food to increase his appetite.

After he developed cataracts and began to lose his vision, he became increasingly anxious. The vet advised against anesthesia for surgery because of the high risks associated with this breed. As his world turned dark, Spot would wander around the house distressed, unable to find me even when I was sitting right in front of him. I wondered if he was experiencing symptoms of canine dementia.

I stayed in Princeton again the summer of 2006, suspecting that his deteriorating health meant he wouldn't be able to pull through much longer. He survived the heat of the summer, although he suffered a stroke one day late in July. After a long run chasing a squirrel up a tree,

he returned to me and collapsed on the grass, eyes glossy and panting heavily. I carried him home and called the vet, who came and gave him some kind of sedative. For a while after, he walked as if the left side of his body were slightly paralyzed and seemed to have balance problems, but he slowly recovered his energy and spirit.

By late winter, though, he declined to eat and began to lose weight. Perhaps it was the cold, as he no longer wanted to leave the house. I had to force him to come outside with me, even to empty his bowels. In the evening, he began to howl out of the blue, a sad, long howl, eerie because he wasn't much for using his voice. I interpreted the howling as a sign of extreme pain. He began running into the furniture instead of walking around it. I kept asking my friend Anne, who'd helped me find him in Canada and bring him to Ithaca, "When will I know to end it?"

She reassured me, "You'll know." But I didn't know, and I felt such despair that I even broke down in the office of my departmental chair, where I went to discuss an academic issue.

During this time of Spot's decline, Parvis gave me the emotional support I desperately needed. But I wanted somebody to make the decision for me as to when to end Spot's life, and Parvis was the obvious candidate. Of course, I knew he couldn't do that. I had to make that decision myself.

I called our veterinarian in the morning and asked her to come out. She said she would after work. The scene of Spot eating from her hand his poison, mixed with tuna, is excruciating for me to recall. Never have I felt such grief. I have lost other dogs who ran away. And pups killed by rough and sporty boys, who at the request of my father drowned them in a gunny sack or drove over them in a car. All because the litter was too large and there was nobody to give them to. The shame of it returns to me as I write. I have lost horses I had been very fond of. Dear friends of mine have died, and as a child, I attended many funerals of relatives I hardly knew. But this loss reached into some internal reserve of sadness that I had kept securely at a distance.

On reflection, I suspect that I was feeling not only the loss of Spot but also of the touchstone to my experience on the farm, the positive experience of a canine friend who stays with you when all the adults around are too busy working. I was losing the last connection to my childhood, the pet who desperately wanted to be my closest companion. Spot was the substitute for all the pets I'd lost in the past: the chestnut foal from the chestnut mare who had an allergic reaction to her mother's milk and died suddenly at two weeks; Skippy who my father had killed

because she wouldn't stop shitting in the yard; Brindisi who ate rat poison in the attic while I was judging a dressage show. The grief I felt while Spot was dying was poisoned with guilt as I was the one responsible for putting him to sleep.

Spot remained present after his death, his hair stuck in crevices of the couch or his toys or bones that were so well-hidden under chairs or pillows that I didn't encounter them for months or even years. But I couldn't understand why he so quickly disappeared from my dreams. It took about a year before he made an appearance, in a confusing story I remember only for its confusion. Perhaps the loss was so overwhelming I couldn't make it available to my unconscious, in which case I was repressing my mourning.

I had needed Spot, I think now, precisely to survive the loneliness and strangeness of academic life. Although I had committed fully to life as an anthropologist, I remained marginal in the academy, a willing participant in intellectual affairs but culturally always an outsider. Some things about who I had been before I entered the institutions of Cornell and Princeton made me not easily digestible.

Spot had been a lifeline to joy that took me back to the most satisfying memories of my childhood. His death marked the end of me as a child, a youth, an equestrian. This heightened the need to mourn but also made my loss more overwhelming and any mourning inadequate. What remained of my first two selves, farmboy and equestrian, were private pictures in which I was no longer recognizable. When students saw a photo in my home office from 1981 with me sitting on Cadiz, at a halt saluting a judge in the dressage competition of an Olympic trial, they would always ask, "Who is this?" I buried Spot's ashes under a small flowerbed near the mailbox outside our Princeton home, and with regret, threw his leash and his round wool bed in the trash.

An Ethnographer's Relationships

In the second half of my life, I have submitted to anthropology as a transformative object. Field research has been the part of anthropology that has functioned for me as a psychological force, a mental need like a sex drive, a death drive, or a drive to survive. Certainly not instinctual but rooted in my bodily impulses and changing as I learned and matured. Even now, in retirement in Berlin, I am driven to do research. I feel I become meaningful through it, because it leads me into relationships with people.

Figure 14. John with Cadiz

I have described how in 1990 Arnim and I watched the GDR's election results together, some four years after we first met. This was the critical moment when his fellow citizens decided in a free and fair election

to dissolve the country. Arnim appeared as a central character in my first book, *After the Wall*. Twelve years later, his experience of reparations was central to an article I wrote about the unique role of money in compensating people for loss. In fieldwork over these decades, I shared in many of his experiences, and this shared intimacy became not only an alternative source of truth—alternative to my own personal impressions—but also changed me and many of my assumptions about who I am as an anthropologist.

What I didn't know in 1990 was that Arnim would embrace the PDS, the successor party to the ruling SED in East Germany. He had always been critical of the SED but suddenly became loyal to its successor, and an activist within it. Although other acquaintances had been provoked into activism during *die Wende*, Arnim's engagement came as a surprise. His embrace of frequent transformations in his life should have perhaps prepared me for this, but I was not prepared to see this political turnabout.

When Arnim was an adult in East Germany, the ruling SED had treated him—a man who often refused to bathe or work—as an abject person, without redeeming qualities. He also had other reasons to resent the party. In the 1950s, the state had expropriated, without compensation, his family's clothing firm Exquisite: that name being the GDR moniker at the time for the finest of fine goods, those available to West Germans but ordinarily not affordable on the low incomes of East German workers. I found it strange that Arnim did not seem bothered by this seizure.

Perhaps, I thought, his experience as a child after WWII was the key to understanding why he now befriended PDS members who until recently had been hostile to him. During the 1980s Arnim had been eager to tell me his memories of childhood, and I followed up by asking his friends about what they knew. Listening to him was always a lesson in the history of the GDR. He spoke of his idols as the "Robin Hoods of my adolescent aspirations": Communist political leaders of the 1930s and 40s, committed to "protect the weak and support the interests of the common man." Yet, after the opening of the Wall, he was the first of my acquaintances to get a job working for a capitalist firm. He had been, to that point, the friend I described as the one who worked the least and drank the most.

In one conversation in late winter 1987, Arnim told me that his father had been a high-ranking SS officer and had died in battle near Stalingrad in 1943. The Waffen-SS had been the combat branch of the

paramilitary troops under Hitler's overall command. Arnim's family, which lived in a small town in northern Germany, was now reduced to three: Arnim, his older brother, and mother. Though only five at the war's end, he remembers their fear of the Bolsheviks or *Mongolen*—names given to the Soviet soldiers. "All the men in my family were high-ranking officers," he confided. "My grandfather a field marshal, my father an SS officer, my uncle also in the SS and a Nazi party leader." At the end of the war, he remembered seeing naked men taking the simple grey uniforms off dead soldiers in the street and putting them on, leaving unsaid that these grey clothes replaced the tailored black uniforms of the brutal Waffen-SS.

Their fear of bombs in January 1945 led the family to begin sleeping in the basement of a neighbor's house, but after hearing the fate of basement dwellers in Berlin and Hamburg, where many were incinerated, they moved to a farmhouse in the country. One day, his mother knocked on a neighbor's door, but nobody answered. They were most likely inside, she thought, so she opened the door and she and her sons all went in, only to find a dead woman, her three dead children, and her dead husband. She explained to Arnim that the father had killed his family before shooting himself.

Arnim at that time usually met me for private discussions in my very small studio apartment, owned by Humboldt University and provided as part of my exchange scholarship, on the eighth floor of a high-rise near Alexanderplatz. He sat on the chair by my desk, I on the edge of the bed facing him. It was winter, when Berliners overheated their apartment buildings. I kept a crack open in the door to the balcony to regulate the temperature, causing it to alternate between sweltering and chilly.

I had prepared by buying poppy-seed-filled pastries from the bakery on the ground floor, and we ate them before I reminded him of events from his childhood and youth that he had already told me about but only in passing. Now I wanted the details, and I wanted them on tape. Arnim was proud to be asked about his experience; it made him feel important. And he didn't object to my use of a tape recorder, because I didn't use it in public. I am sure the apartment was bugged, but the content of our conversation was unlikely to be openly political.

"Can you imagine?" Arnim asked me. "If we'd arrived just a few hours earlier, my mother would have left us there, and he would have killed my brother and me too."

"The next morning," he continued calmly, "my mother took my brother and me to a deep ravine and tried to drown us. She was following Goebbels's propaganda. Goebbels encouraged us to commit suicide, because the Russians would kill us brutally when they came. My brother said, 'Uncle Hitler is dead. I want to follow him.' But I kicked and screamed as she tried to hold me under." Arnim's cries were so loud that they alerted the neighbors, and his mother, fearing they would discover what she was up to, let Arnim up.

The residents in another small town nearby, Arnim told me, had all committed suicide. "She wasn't the only mother to try that," he added, as if to normalize her behavior.

I listened to all of this, recounted in a matter-of-fact voice, and struggled to process the incomprehensible. *Medea* came to mind. In the play by Euripides, Medea killed her own children in an act of revenge against her unfaithful husband. But Arnim's mother was driven to this desperate act by fear of becoming a victim of revenge. She wanted to spare her children the anticipated horrors of an advancing army. Unsure what else to do, I simply listened and recorded, trying to set aside my own feelings, struck by the incongruities in the scene I was recording. Before me was a fifty-year-old man who looked thirty, with a handsome face, a thick head of dark hair, and a quirky sense of humor, talking with no emotion about the trauma of nearly being drowned by his mother at the age of five. The disparity between his outward appearance and the weight of his past was jarring. Arnim had already told me about the attempted drowning twice. The second time, he'd said he vividly remembered the ravine, and that the image occasionally haunted him in dreams in which he crawled out of it soaked in mud.

But perhaps he had been revealing his incongruities all along, and I had looked away rather than acknowledge his unusual behaviors as symptoms of past wounds still raw. One such behavior was his adamant refusal to bathe, a habit that was the subject of considerable joking and some alarm among his friends. He had many drinking buddies, but only a few friends. His best friend scolded him repeatedly, and on visits poured bathwater for him. Behind a closed door, Arnim would splash the water around with his hands to create the sound of bathing. He rarely so much as washed. Although friends had encouraged him to seek psychiatric help, Arnim dismissed their advice, justifying his refusal in terms of the dominant socialist ideology of the time: his problems were social in nature, and not to be solved with psychological analysis.

Because of this behavior, Arnim reeked of layers of dried sweat, smoke, liquor, and cheap cologne. He rarely washed his clothes, and sometimes the smell became so strong that it was difficult to be in the same room. This was why, I reasoned, others avoided him; you could tell from a distance, even with your eyes closed, when he was approaching. I began to avoid him myself—the smell was simply too unpleasant. Initially, I assumed his slovenliness was a form of resistance against the German ideal of cleanliness and order. This was a trait I had observed in other German men also, though never so extremely. Yet how wrong I was about Arnim.

By age eighteen he was apparently a bright, promising youth and was accepted into the SED, a membership that had to be earned. Only ideologically committed and talented youth were taken into its ranks. Some ten years later, he began to absent himself from the weekly party meetings. Attendance was mandatory, but he preferred to spend the night having a good time. His local party secretary confronted him with his absences and had him kicked out of the party.

As an adult he always held demanding jobs. I do not know if he bathed for them. I tend to think he did, at least sometimes, or his employers would not have retained him. His aversion to water probably grew with age. After his examinations after the final year of secondary school, he worked as a director in a fashion and design business, initially in the same firm his grandfather had founded and that his father had carried on before the war. Their business had been very successful, so much so that his father was able to afford a trip to the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. Arnim was impressed with this accomplishment, as was I, and mentioned it often.

The business expanded in 1938 after his father bought a similar clothing store across the street from his. The two shops had been in competition. Now he owned both. Only some twenty years after I met Arnim did he reveal to me that the other shop's owners were Jewish, and shortly after the sale were deported and sent to concentration camps. He probably waited so long to tell me out of shame. It would have complicated his family's success story, which he liked to tell. But when I asked about the deportation of his neighbors, he immediately shared the details.

He had never had a similar problem withholding details about the expropriation of his family firm after the war. In fact, when I asked him about it and why he didn't resent it, he described his family as morally superior for submitting to the demand. He was a socialist, committed

to state ownership of the means of production, not interested in owning property himself. It sufficed for him that he had inherited a feel for the business from his family, which helped him contribute to clothing—and building—the socialist society. This ideology propped up his stubborn and resilient sense of integrity. Around 1977, his boss was investigated for smuggling, leading to his arrest and imprisonment. Arnim was the only employee who refused to testify against him.

And then, fired from three successive jobs for not showing up, he suddenly just stayed home. His employers came to visit him in his apartment, which the state required of them. Labor shortages were constant, as both workers and firm owners kept escaping to the West. Those who stayed had to work. Citizens were not only guaranteed employment but could be given a prison sentence if they did not show up for their jobs. When his employers knocked on his door, they couldn't determine if he was hiding or absent.

For more than a decade, then, he locked the door, turned off the heat and electricity to save money, and slept away his days. His response to an environment where self-initiative was often punished was to reduce his needs to a daily portion of alcohol and his life to a politically neutered self-destructiveness, a harmless isolation. For nutrition he ate carrots, turnips, and potatoes: "cheap and good for the teeth," he joked. After eleven at night when his neighbors were asleep, he snuck out to the local bars and parks. The strong safety net in the socialist economy kept him alive. Medical care was free, and it was unheard of for tenants to lose their apartments, least of all for unpaid rent. And when his money ran out he borrowed from friends. In the bars, drunken men treated other drunken men.

No specific event had led him to stop working. It just seemed to happen; he could no longer summon the will to leave his bed. His acquaintances knew him as someone who always had time, and who was, as one friend put it, a "specialist in events that are free: concerts, public readings, museum exhibitions, fairs, celebrations." He could be relied on to know where they were, and whether there was an admission fee. Where Arnim was most alive was at night, pursuing a wildly varied succession of erotic adventures.

He seemed to spend every night cruising the public toilets in the park Friedrichshain. Mornings, when the café near the huge sculpture of Lenin opened, he emerged to have coffee and read the newspaper for free. This was during the time I got to know him. In the evenings, he donned a black leather jacket, tight leather pants, black leather boots,

and shaved his thick hair to look like a skinhead. Scandalized stares greeted his early morning entrances into the café.

One bright dawn, as he sat armored in leather, reading the official party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, a waitress asked if he knew how he looked. "What?" he asked, confused. She advised him to take a look in the bathroom mirror, where he discovered his face was as black as a coal miner's. During the night he had met another leather queen who asked Arnim to lick his boots. Obviously, something had rubbed off. Arnim washed the black off as best he could before he returned to his table to read as if nothing had changed, oblivious to the stares. To the waitress who approached him again to take his order, he merely commented, "I've been to a masquerade and haven't had the chance to wash the paint off yet." Such peccadilloes were the stuff of his life until the autumn of 1989.

Then everything changed, again. All at once, whether moved by the residual stirrings of purpose, by passion for socialism, or by the general air of change that suffused everything as the GDR dissolved, he rose from bed early. Something was happening around him, and he wanted to participate. He sought out work and found immediate employment as a ticket-taker in a cinema. Soon he declared he had a mission: he would devote his life to the renewal of socialist society.

Several months later a different kind of opportunity arose. His former boss at the clothing store contacted him. After eight years in prison, he had been released to the West, and once in West Berlin, he founded a clothing design business of his own. With the opening of the border, he was able to reconnect with Arnim. He thanked his loyal ex-employee for his refusal to give incriminating testimony, which he had never forgotten. He asked the disheveled Arnim to work as the chief sales representative for his flourishing firm throughout Germany.

At first, Arnim adamantly refused: "No. I can't drive. I'd kill myself if I had to drive from city to city; I just can't do that." But his former boss pressed hard. He needed an employee he could fully trust. The West Germans didn't want to work particularly hard, he said, and they wanted too much money. He sweetened the deal and offered Arnim the job just for Berlin. "And I agreed!" Arnim told me. "What the hell. It's a good offer." And then he went to work, though his employer set a few conditions: Arnim must agree to bathe regularly, he must cut his fingernails, he must clean his hands, and he must make an appointment with a dentist—he had lost several incisors in barroom scuffles.

I was astonished that Arnim complied with all the conditions, demonstrating a willingness to be led into the confusing, exotic new world of wonders beyond the Wall. At the age of fifty he was ripe for this radical reversal, and finally in step with history. The question remains what had made him into a paradigm of passivity? Was it the socialist regime of discipline and routine, his stagnant present in which he had seen no future, or was it his mother's attempted drowning, the past he carried with him that threatened him with death?

Whatever it was, the new work and purpose brought him back to a respectable life. I had heard Arnim's friends call him a *Stehaufmännchen*—a stand-up man—but had never met such a man. That indeed was Arnim, someone who after defeat always bounced back. He joined the PDS and attended their party meetings, as well as the funerals of elderly members and all the social activities they organized. He assumed a new job with major responsibilities. After a bit less than ten years into his new job he could claim a pension sufficient to secure a subsistence lifestyle. But this time, subsistence did not mean inactivity.

After conferring with old party friends, Arnim applied for compensation for the expropriation of his family's company and received a modest amount added to his monthly pension. He was too old, he told me, to save or invest this money. He'd use it to catch up to the West Germans. He'd take vacations, inexpensive bus tours with other pensioners to southern Europe, travel to places to which they all had been denied access. And who did he travel with? None other than the retired and disgruntled members of the former ruling party. Although they had thought of him as deviant, now he was one of them, the clock rolled back to his youth. As a member of the reinvigorated PDS, he made a renewed commitment to socialism.

Unable to read English, Arnim had a friend translate the parts of my first book that were about him. The next time we met, at a party organized by a mutual friend, he was bursting with anger for what he thought was a major misrepresentation. He protested, "How could you write that? I never told you my father was in the SS. My father was only a simple soldier in the army! And the other members of my family, my uncle and grandfather, they had never been officers. I don't know where you got that."

"I had it in my notes," I explained. "You told me so; you even showed me pictures of them in uniform."

"No, I didn't. Perhaps," he surmised, "you exaggerated for dramatic effects for your unknowing American readers."

He made it clear that he felt deeply betrayed by my portrayal. Could I have possibly made this up? My notes and my memory were fallible. "Well, I'm really sorry, Arnim," I apologized. "But I no longer recall how I came to such misunderstandings." After that confrontation, Arnim reverted to his good-natured self and never raised it again.

Arnim was indeed a man transformed by *die Wende,* the turnabout. He was working again, he kept himself cleaner, he had renounced alcohol and cigarettes. There was still some reticence to bathe regularly, and every time I ran into him, he was still eager to regale me with stories of his wild nights. Before he went on the wagon, he had found a fellow night-owl about thirty years younger from a provincial West German town and introduced him into the excitement of drinking and camaraderie. The handsome young man had come to Berlin to study, but the thrill of the night provided a much stronger pull than his studies. For a while, at least.

Arnim proudly referred to him as "*mein Sohn*" (my son). Once he was sober, he felt a sense of responsibility for the colorful but bleak life to which he had introduced him. Just when Arnim had renounced his own drinking, his buddy became addicted and was drawn into the kind of life Arnim was now forsaking. Arnim then made it his project to save his new son, to help him find a path to sobriety and back to respectability. That project was Arnim's last. It took him the rest of his life, and it became a success story only several years after Arnim's death.

I was teaching at Princeton when Arnim died in 2008, but I was still able to attend his funeral, a small, quiet affair. He had reached an age when his passing was somehow expected. Nobody cried as a diverse crowd of about forty people—young and old, party members and former dissidents—walked to a large cafeteria for an early dinner.

Arnim had lived on the fourth floor of a building in a quickly gentrifying district, without an elevator. He had no living relatives in Berlin to rely on, so the dissolution and cleaning of his apartment was relegated to his buddy and another friend. It had been forty years since the apartment had last been cleaned. They had to wear masks to tolerate the stench.

Among the objects they found in a box underneath the bed were slightly enlarged black-and-white photos passed down from Arnim's mother, each one perfectly composed. They depicted German tanks and battalions traversing the fields of Poland and Russia on the way to Stalingrad, evoking the ominous atmosphere preceding their defeat in that fateful battle, where Arnim's father met his demise. As the army had

approached Stalingrad the snow began to accumulate, obscuring the dark hues of the photographs and highlighting the wintry chill. Gradually, human figures faded from view, leaving only the stark machinery of war visible amidst the snow and ice-covered terrain.

These were private pictures of the *Feldzug*—the extensive military campaign culminating in the decisive defeat of Hitler's army—that Arnim had shown to me thirty years earlier and let me take to my apartment. I was certain that I had seen them, but it was still strange to look at documentation of the complicity of a friend's family with the Nazi project. Although I had since lost my copies reproduced by a professional photographer, I had given the originals back at the time and now here they were. Among them was a photo of three generations of men—Arnim's father, uncle, and grandfather—in the military uniforms of the armies they served, each wearing insignia of high rank from their respective eras. Another striking image captured men in SS uniforms from the year 1943, the same year Arnim's father met his tragic end.

I of course felt relieved that I had not misrepresented the men in Arnim's family, but I took no comfort in this discovery. I would have preferred that Arnim's recriminations against me were true. I had no investment in claiming or believing his father was a war criminal, even though there was much evidence to support that he was, and perhaps I had been too judgmental in confronting him about the lacunae in his memories. Arnim had constructed his life as an anti-war, peace-loving, anti-fascist, socialist man. This required expunging from his consciousness the uncomfortable moral conclusions he might have drawn concerning his father and uncle's business and military service. His punctum—the point to which his inner eye continually turned—was not the historical crimes of his father but the event in which his mother almost drowned him. In my research before the turnabout, I had resisted that conclusion. I wished to avoid the kind of master narrative that would reduce Arnim to his childhood wound and reduce the GDR to forty years of suffering. My avoidance, in retrospect, skewed my representation.

Despite the relative comfort and freedom Arnim enjoyed as he aged, that childhood event seemed to have pursued him ruthlessly, permeating his body and clothes, creating an internal mood that resisted some radical adjustments to external changes. To outsiders, he embodied the odor of death, which often overwhelmed all their sense perceptions, including the ability to meet Arnim's dimpled smile with one of their own. These were conundrums I had not anticipated at the outset of research. My task as an anthropologist had been to depict Arnim and his world,

to enable a representation of his life under socialism and after its dissolution. I realized now that representation was inadequate without also a plea for compassion.

As I reflect on how Arnim affected me, how he changed me, I believe the challenges he presented made me both a better anthropologist and a better person. He forced me out of my zone of comfort and expanded the horizons of my experience. The challenge he presented to me wasn't only his quirky personhood but also his shameless embrace of abjectness. His smell, above all, disgusted me, and I thought his drinking and descent into disrespectability was a waste of his potential. Nonetheless, I hung out with him, believing he had nascent qualities that he might eventually embrace. The dissolution of the GDR motivated him to climb out of his abject state. He rediscovered his value in work, in political and social engagement, and ultimately in his determination to not let his buddy repeat his former path to abjection.

My own turn to compassion startled me, as it was not part of the ethical demand I had initially made on myself in the pursuit of knowledge and accurate depiction. I had anticipated this integration of empathy theoretically, without fully understanding its practical significance, when I was asked to give a keynote address in 1997 at an anthropology symposium on kinship and cosmopolitanism at Rice University. In the piece I wrote, on caring and to be cared for, I argued the concepts of marriage, kinship, gender, and sexuality should be displaced by a focus on the reciprocity of care in relationships often excluded from the purview of these concepts. Those concepts excluded women friends who cared for a dying gay man, a son marrying his mother's lover, friends caring for a dog abandoned by the death of his owner, a dying man adopting his lover as his son to secure a legal status for him from their relationship. Such were the ways that people made kinship, and expressed their love and care for one another, at a time when their relationships were made as abject and unrecognized as Arnim's had been. This meant recognizing a charge to myself to assume more responsibility. A responsibility, in particular, to care for those with whom I'd engaged in fieldwork, who had unwittingly become my new kin.

Searching for the Truth of a Mother's Death

Jürgen, by now well known to you, has been my interlocutor, confidant, and cherished friend since my early forays into fieldwork in East Berlin.

Initially an economist who also crafted song lyrics, he remade himself professionally following the German reunification and the disruptions of the *Abwicklung* by retraining as a therapist. In my 2015 book *Cruel Attachments*, a work informed by his therapy of men accused of sexually abusing children, I wrote about how I became involved in the search for the story of his mother's tragic death.

In 2001, Jürgen began working with a challenging client named Marquardt, a former pimp with a history of violent crimes. Despite Marquardt's history of resistance to therapy, and his repeated resort to violence, Jürgen managed to facilitate a significant transformation of Marquardt's self. By nearly all metrics the therapy was, in other words, successful. I was intrigued by this success and in 2008 began to research what made this therapy work.

Marquardt served his sentence, was released from prison, and continued therapy for a few years, during which time Jürgen wrote a book about him. The book became a best-seller and was made into a movie, which could have exacerbated Marquardt's narcissistic disorder. I attended some public readings of the book and sometimes the three of us had conversations. I also had one-on-one discussions.

From what I gleaned in these interactions, it seemed plausible that Jürgen had accessed Marquardt's unconscious in a manner that eluded previous therapists. In previous therapy, Marquardt had struggled to establish a sense of trust with his therapists. However, with Jürgen, he found himself capable of opening up to emotional transference. A remarkable bond blossomed, seemingly grounded less in conscious dialogue and more in the shared experience of fractured relationships with their mothers, albeit in starkly contrasting ways.

Marquardt had been sexually abused as a child by his mother for six years, whereas Jürgen's mother had been killed when he was three. One's mother had been too intimate with her son, the other's death created in her son a feeling of abandonment. It seemed as if unconscious communication in the therapeutic settings, coupled with Jürgen's skills, was not just possible but unavoidable, bridging the personal chasm between them.

Jürgen had recounted the incident to me on numerous occasions. It was a rainy winter day, 1945, when he, just a three-year-old toddler, bundled up in blankets against the cold, sat in a stroller pushed by his brother. Their aunt and other relatives accompanied them and their mother as they fled along the country road. Suddenly they were surrounded by

Russian soldiers, who had been visible on the other side of the road in hot pursuit of German soldiers in retreat. Despite Jürgen's vivid recollections, discrepancies marred his account, leaving unresolved gaps in his memory.

Determined to unearth the truth, Jürgen reached out to his brother, whom I had met on two prior occasions. Together, in 2012, we drove to the village near the Polish border where they had both spent their formative years. Seven years Jürgen's senior, his brother was frail, suffering from chronic arthritis and other ailments associated with aging. Remarkably, he had remained silent about the incident for more than six decades.

His warm response to Jürgen's request hinted at a desire to finally unburden himself of the emotional weight he had carried for so long. I suspected that the mere act of sharing held some promise of relief for him. However, his decision to speak stemmed primarily from a demand: Jürgen's compelling desire to unravel the truth that had long been withheld from him.

I had written out a list of events for clarifications about which Jürgen had little memory, and I shared these with the older brother, who then began to talk of what he said he had vowed never to speak about.

He told us that on their flight, one day, the other women for a reason he cannot recall went ahead, and the boys found themselves suddenly alone with their mother, shot and dying. A bullet also hit Jürgen's brother, though it only grazed the left side of his head. The mother said to him, "Keep going, I'm nearing my end." Jürgen's brother then resumed the flight, pushing him in a stroller in the direction the other women had gone.

After several hours, the boys caught up with their aunts and cousin, and together fled further, hiding in ditches and in the woods, eventually heading in the direction of Dresden, which the British Royal Air Force and the American Army Air Forces had firebombed two months earlier, destroying sixteen hundred acres of the city center and incinerating between twenty-two and twenty-five thousand residents.

I asked the older brother to retrace their route on a map. He pulled out several maps and closely inspected them. They were new maps. Some places had changed names and others had disappeared altogether. He recalled other details and images as if he were remembering them for the first time, jumping across places and times then backtracking again.

After a very cold and wet night in the forest, he and his brother and mother had stayed behind while the other women went ahead. I was

still confused why they were twice separated from their aunts during the escape, the second time for two full days when the two brothers appear to have been abandoned. Jürgen's brother said he had learned nothing about what happened from his two aunts. They refused to talk about their experience, even later when living with his grandparents. Nonetheless, he was now ready to speak about what he remembered, and he said he could comment only on the first separation, of several hours, which his mother had opened with the words, "I'm not finished yet."

"Finished with what?" I asked.

Jürgen gestured me to be silent, and his brother simply repeated, "She wasn't finished yet." What she still had to do, he said, he does not know. But he added that she "once turned around and rode the bicycle back home; she forgot to lock the house or something like that." He continued with the story and reiterated, once more, "In any case, we weren't finished."

"Finished with what?" I asked, again, noting the switch in agency from "she" to a collective "we."

Suddenly they had heard shooting and Russian soldiers appeared from right and left, and they noticed they were the last ones there. Our mother, he explained, "suspected what is coming. I must say, now, very clearly, it was all out of the blue, that we really didn't understand, but the soldiers were abruptly standing around her, and we didn't know what they wanted, that we don't know. And then she didn't want [it] so, and they shot her."

On hearing this memory Jürgen exhaled loudly, emitting a sound that punctured the air and reminded me of an abscess that had burst. I was brought into an emotional proximity with an event from which Jürgen had been spared the full impact. It was as if I were intruding on something very private, and I struggled to remain silent. This struggle suggested that I was entering into Jürgen's current emotional register, as in a reverie, or as in the German term *Einfühlungsvermögen*: the capability of feeling into. I was disturbed that, in tapping into some affective register of my own, I may have been blurring the line between their devastating experience and my empathic sadness.

While it was natural to draw upon my own unconscious reservoir of emotions to connect with Jürgen, I was wary of his inadvertently drawing upon mine. My primary objective was to comprehend the significance of this event for the two men, not to influence their interpretation of it. It felt akin to a therapist shedding tears alongside her patient, a

boundary I was reluctant to breach. So I held back, mindful of the balance between empathy and objectivity. My awareness of this potential intrusion prompted me to suppress any burgeoning tears.

As Jürgen's head plunged, he mumbled, his voice barely above a whisper, "I always thought this." Jürgen's brother, although having sustained a physical wound himself during the altercation, made no further mention of the rape. He abruptly and somberly concluded, "We stood there alone." It was now apparent that their mother's death was not the accidental occurrence Jürgen had long believed it to be. The haunting question that had tormented him, whether their mother had sacrificed herself to shield her sons from witnessing her sexual violation, had found its answer. Paradoxically, Jürgen had even more cause now to bear the weight of responsibility for her death. His brother interjected a comment to defuse the tension and shed light on the broader context of the tragedy, drawing attention to the numerous corpses strewn along the road: of horses, of both German and Russian soldiers, of civilians.

In my quest to unearth these painful truths, I reassured myself that I was merely seeking clarity and facilitating the brothers' desire to confront their shared past. I was convinced that unveiling the truth could alleviate their burden of trauma, enabling them to come closer to reality rather than remain ensnared in layers of distortion perpetuated by time and collective narratives.

Now, armed with the complete narrative—the precise sequence of events, the details of what really happened—I have to ask what effect this had on Jürgen? He found little solace in the revelation of the suppressed history. Although his recollection was more closely aligned with reality—his mother's courageous protection of her sons had resulted in her demise—absolution from the self-imposed guilt for her death eluded him. Recourse to a fuller picture of truth did not alter his self-perception. He remained ensnared by the weight of his own perceived culpability, unable to fully reconcile his sense of responsibility for that moment in 1945 with the complex reality of his present feelings.

At the same time, I felt a twinge of regret for having encouraged Jürgen to elicit this painful memory from his brother. At one juncture, Jürgen even gestured for me to stop my questions. However, I pressed on. My approach went beyond mere elicitation. I probed deeply, seeking clarification in pursuit of the truth behind the perspective offered. In doing so, I intruded into the lived experience of Jürgen and his brother,

introducing an unstable element beyond their control, most likely beyond their conscious intentions.

In a sense, I had already become this third element when Jürgen kept urging me, "Talk to my brother." He didn't simply suggest, "Speak with my brother." With all due respect and humility, Jürgen had wanted me to help uncover and acknowledge the truth that his brother had withheld, and that he had avoided. While I aimed to prioritize their experience, I unwittingly infused my own into the situation as I struggled to avoid affecting their intimate exchange.

Within six months of our discussion with his brother, Jürgen experienced the breakup of a romantic relationship and the death of his longtime partner, which precipitated a nervous breakdown. It took nine grueling months of treatment for severe depression, during which pharmaceutical interventions seemed to make him worse, before he recovered. His mind remained clear, and his memory was good throughout, but he lost his desire to continue. He found the simplest decisions, like leaving his bed to have a coffee with me, or calling friends on his phone, difficult to make. He had trouble sleeping, though when he slept, he fell so deeply into a vivid world of past experiences that on waking he could no longer distinguish the dreams from his present reality. His voice turned to a whisper, and he lost so much weight that he looked like a famine survivor, though he said he was eating well. And he became paranoid about people and objects around him. He suspected the person keeping his books had emptied his savings account. Once he picked up a ballpoint pen from a desk and quickly threw it on the floor, as if the pen had attacked him. Yet I was reassured on my visits that he was still there because he didn't suspect me of anything.

Eventually, the doctors resorted to electroconvulsive therapy. I was alarmed. My only reference was the sadistic Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. But it worked. His full recovery was nothing short of miraculous, and I was immensely relieved to have him back in my world.

And yet, after three healthy years in which he developed relations with new lovers, the depression returned, followed by hospitalization and a repeat of the symptoms and failures of treatment. I felt even more helpless this time, as did his prior doctor and friends who tried to intervene. What brought him to the edge again? Was it a prior trauma, and if so, which? I'll never know. Yet I was despondent that I couldn't help, and I still worry that I might have contributed to his first breakdown.

Ethnographic fieldwork can be a high-wire act, balancing on the thin line between academic inquiry and deeply personal connections. The risks aren't just of mistranslation or misunderstanding; they're at the center of unpredictable and shared experience. The pursuit of truth in an ethnographic encounter is as paramount as reflecting on the conditions for its accurate comprehension.

I remember the first time I felt this risk with Jürgen. It wasn't in a formal interview or while poring over documents, but during our sharing of the aspirations, fears, and secrets of our different worlds, discovering their point of intersection and moments of divergence. I realized I wasn't just collecting data. I was being entrusted with his inner life coupled with the expectation we'd continue sharing this.

Moments of vulnerability in unscripted encounters are ethically challenging and emotionally charged. Without this affective dimension, fieldwork would be as dry as the desert sand rather than a rollercoaster of human connection. I've felt more alive sharing a simple meal with strangers-turned-friends than I ever have in the most prestigious academic settings. These risks and uncertainties are the crucible in which both my research and my personal growth have been forged.

Every ethical dilemma, every moment of cultural misunderstanding, every tense discussion—they've all shaped me, not only as an anthropologist but also as a human being. And it's not just about my own transformation. I've watched as the people who've opened their lives to me have grown and changed through our interactions. We've challenged each other's assumptions, broadened each other's horizons, and forged connections that transcend the boundaries of researcher and subject. This is the heart of an interpersonal anthropology.

Zaabit and the Syrian Uprising

In 2012, I was invited to give a presentation on my current work in a quaint seminar room at the Sorbonne IV in Paris, with about twelve scholars present. I'd given many such presentations in seminars and conferences in the past, but this one did not go as the others. Twenty minutes in, I could not continue. An invisible force gripped my throat, and tears began to stream down my face. As the flow increased, the text blurred before me. I told myself it was my allergies, but that didn't stem the tide of emotion. I struggled to simply read the words I had written, my composure crumbled, and the weight of their meaning overwhelmed me.

A colleague, sensing my distress, offered water, but that did little to quell the storm within. I garbled the next few sentences, or paragraphs, before I regained control of my breathing, the tears dried, my voice still unsteady as I pushed through the remaining hour.

The title of my talk, "Deaths of Leaders, Transformations of Authority in the Syrian Revolts," seemed to mock me as I grappled with the stark reality it represented. While I sat there at the table, an academic discussing theory, Bashar al-Assad was viciously suppressing the Syrian uprising, and those I knew there were fleeing for their lives.

My mind drifted to Zaabit's family, whom I had met in Aleppo in 2002, during research supported by a Fulbright scholarship on changing father-son relationships. His older brother, Safwan, worked bussing tables in a restaurant near the *souk* where I was living, and I'd often meet him taking a quick smoking break in the alley behind. Conversation between us was easy, and he invited me several times to join his family for dinner, the table laden with aromatic Arabic dishes his mother prepared.

My interest in Safwan peaked when I noticed the very supportive and joking relation he had with his father, in contrast to the frequently tense relations I witnessed in the *souk*, where many fathers employed their sons. At those meals with the family, I met the young Zaabit, then only nine, and recall his striking resemblance to Omar Sharif: liquid black eyes framed by long lashes, hinting at a soul who was eager to take in the world. I don't think we ever spoke to each other back then, though he had a distinctive presence among his older siblings.

Memory of my stimulating time in a seemingly unchanging Aleppo felt like I had been dreaming. As I talked at the Sorbonne, the entire Near East had imploded. Aleppo's inner city was a scene of fighting and my apartment in the *souk* had been destroyed. It was not as if I'd had no premonition of the current violence. In Aleppo back then, I had given a public lecture on rebounding violence, which Safwan and his father surprised me by attending. I analyzed the war in Iraq as a classic gift, conceived by George W. Bush as a gift of freedom that was in fact also a gift of violence. The American occupation would likely instigate a counter-gift, I argued, returning to the US as violence within. That talk had seemed provocative and insightful at the time. Now it felt painfully prophetic.

In Paris, as I struggled through my presentation, the weight of my experiences in Syria pressed upon me. There, the secret police and Ba'ath party hacks had tried to prevent me from teaching at the university and from speaking in public. I was told authorities feared that a violent mob

would gather outside the building where I spoke—as it had outside the American embassy during a film screening a few months earlier. Anything unfamiliar that might encourage critical thinking was anathema to authorities. Recalling these experiences dissolved my academic distance. As I grappled with the human cost of the upheaval I was attempting to analyze, I felt raw and exposed before my peers.

My first visit to Aleppo had been in 1999, my last in 2008. By then, the once vibrant and dense streets, which required me constantly to turn to my side to avoid collisions, had become a labyrinth of suspicion and fear. The secret police, the Mukhabarat, their dossiers undoubtedly swollen with meticulously gathered intelligence, shadowed my every move. I sensed their presence like a constant whisper in the air, following me from my apartment in the *souk* where I slept at night to the quiet cafés and restaurants where I met with young locals during the day.

The effects of the surveillance grew more serious as the Mukhabarat began to intimidate my contacts, knocking on the doors of families, issuing warnings and thinly veiled threats. Zaabit's was one of those families, but they dismissed the threats and encouraged me to continue visiting, as did nearly all my other acquaintances. Realizing the danger that I was bringing to those who welcomed me, I made the painful decision to desist from further fieldwork in Syria, retreating to the relative safety of Berlin to pursue my project on Jürgen and other therapists' treatment of child sex abusers.

Shortly after the end of that Berlin project, in 2011, my Facebook page exploded with messages from young Syrians I had met. The winds of change that had swept up Tunisia had now reached Syria, igniting a spark of hope that quickly blazed into an uprising. The Facebook postings revealed a mix of excitement and trepidation. Among those posting was Safwan, who ignored the risk of reaching out to me while serving his compulsory military duty. He sent me images that encapsulated the surreal nature of the moment. One was of himself in military uniform, rifle in one hand, flashing a peace sign with the other.

As the days passed, my inbox became a window into the unfolding chaos. Live videos of protests and police brutality flooded in, unfiltered glimpses of a country in turmoil. The initial cries for democratic reform—"*Kifaya!*" (Enough!)—echoed through the streets. They were met with a ruthlessness that twisted the peaceful demonstrations into a bloody civil war.

The Syrian uprising shook me like no other event in my life as an anthropologist. In 1989 I had witnessed the peaceful revolution that brought about the collapse of both regime and state in East Germany. But in Syria, the peaceful demonstrations only strengthened the regime's resolve to hold on. Heroic resistance led not to freedom but to catastrophic destruction. My Syrian acquaintances, even those defending the regime, were losing their country—if not also losing their cities, homes, livelihoods, relatives, friends. They appealed to me on Facebook for advice and help.

Safwan escaped to Turkey in 2012, and I made several trips to visit him. Each time, his parents arrived the day after I did and greeted me warmly. They explained that they frequently made the dangerous trip from Aleppo to visit their children. The resistance had splintered into warring factions, and now these factions competed with the Syrian army for control of the roads. Each stop required travelers—whether by bus, taxi, or car—to assess who was in control, determine how to identify themselves, and decide what reason to give for being on that road.

One night, a rebel leader from Homs arrived in Istanbul to visit the family. Sworn to secrecy, I listened to his harrowing tale of starvation, courage, and death in Homs. The military had encircled the inner city, blocking the entry of food, arms, or medicine. With nothing to eat, the people in the city were eating their beloved cats—a horrifying image that filled me with disgust and anger. I couldn't stop thinking about the cats and felt compelled in my talk at the Sorbonne to share this image with my audience. Though I knew I was being cruel by doing so, I couldn't bear being left alone with the image of eating one's cat.

The regime adopted the same tactics in Aleppo that had been successful in eliminating resistance in Homs. Don't discriminate. Punish. Destroy everything. That night it grew too late for me to return to my hotel, so Zaabit's parents insisted I sleep on the living-room sofa. Having to lay on my side without turning over made for a difficult sleep, but their tremendous generosity, even while in flight, strengthened my resolve to assist them in any way I could.

I visited Istanbul again the following year, and then, for the first time, had a brief conversation with Zaabit. Safwan took us to a café, where we discussed their options if they couldn't find their footing. They both enjoyed the city, but as undocumented refugees they struggled to pay the rent. They kept changing employers as each took advantage of their skills and precarious status. I accompanied Safwan as he went going

door-to-door, trying to sell paintings by Syrian artists, some of whom I knew. Shop owners showed no interest.

Hoping to secure better employment for Safwan, his parents bought a used car in Aleppo and drove it to Istanbul. He eventually found work making deliveries with his car for an Egyptian businessman: Zaabit created software for him and maintained his computers. However, the businessman refused to pay them for their work or reimburse Safwan for the car's use. Ultimately, they withheld the businessman's data to force him to pay them for the work they had done.

After two years, both brothers were serious about considering other options. I suggested they flee to the Netherlands, but Zaabit immediately dismissed the idea, saying, "But there are gays there. And the gays are persecuting Muslims." He had obviously read about Pim Fortuyn, the openly gay Dutch politician who spoke of Muslims as backward and dangerous and advocated banning Muslim immigration altogether. I smiled and said nothing, knowing he was experiencing a difficult phase of political disillusionment by embracing rigid but virtuous Muslim ideals.

That was 2014, and Europe, with its liberal asylum laws, was becoming a beacon for refugees. In what became known as "the long summer of 2015," Zaabit joined the exodus, becoming one of the three hundred and thirty thousand Syrians who made their way to Germany. The number of foreigners arriving there more than doubled between 2011 and 2016. Of the almost one-and-a-half-million immigrants who entered Germany in 2015, nearly a third were Syrians who had lost hope of reforming their country from within.

Upon arrival, Zaabit was assigned to a hotel on an island in the Baltic Sea, part of the federal government's effort to distribute refugees and the responsibility for them across all regions. There, he learned German using apps on his cellphone and prepared to apply to universities. After a year, he was released from the hotel and given a month to find an apartment somewhere else in the country. Through a German television crew he'd met on his initial flight from Istanbul in 2015, he found an apartment in Dortmund.

Unknown to him, that part of Dortmund was dense with prostitutes and criminal types, including Arab and Turkish criminals. This milieu was not what Zaabit expected, and he was unsuccessful in his applications to enter a university. From Princeton I texted with him and he sounded for the first time dejected. He was souring on Germany as a place to build a future.

A couple of months later, hoping to lift his spirits, I invited Zaabit to visit me in Berlin. I took him around to places I thought might intrigue him: parks, popular streets, interesting districts. Among places I wanted him to see was the Topography of Terror Museum, which documents the Nazi rise to power and its violence. He absorbed the photos and texts in silence. I had hoped he might draw parallels between his Syrian experience and Germany's Nazi past, but he offered no comment.

We visited the district where many Syrian refugees had settled, opening restaurants and shops. I introduced him to Vietnamese and Austrian dishes. He especially raved about the Vietnamese. He left for Dortmund early the next morning, eager to make it back for prayer at his regular mosque. Six months later, he moved to Berlin, staying with Parvis and me for three months before finding his own apartment.

It was only then, in the context of daily interactions, that Zaabit shared with me his personal story of the uprising. Even his brother, he said, wasn't fully informed of these experiences of his. Arrested twice, he endured the horror of a cell so cramped that the men had to sleep standing. It stunk of sweat and urine. There were no showers, and the prisoners had limited access to the toilets. He was taken out of the cell for interrogations and tortured, then returned.

Upon release he joined fellow Syrians at the Turkish border, working in communications with the foreign media for a Saudi-friendly militia. That work confronted him with the harsh realities of a fragmented opposition. The idealism that had fueled his support for the rebellion suffered a blow. After a year, he quit. Disgusted at the corruption he'd witnessed, he escaped to Istanbul and moved into an apartment with his sister and older brother, who'd already fled there.

While waiting to resume his studies, Zaabit took on multiple jobs repairing cell phones and computers. His ambition to enter the university was frustrated, and he felt like time was slipping away. "I've wasted four years! Can you believe that? Four years!" He was desperate to become an engineer. Distressed by the uncertainty of his future. Parvis and I urged him to slow down. I reassured him by sharing the length and delay of my own professional journey. "With medical advances, we might all work into our 70s and live into our 80s," I said. "You have time."

My relationship with Zaabit brought to light several differing demands my research made on me. My initial preoccupation with the Syrian uprising and its aftermath was more as an activist than an anthropologist: giving talks in Germany, France, the UK, and the US, agreeing to radio

and newsprint interviews. Outside of my life with Parvis and my professional duties, the lives of Syrian acquaintances consumed me. They had supported me in research in Syria, and now I wanted to reciprocate. As they fled to Europe, they conjoined my two research sites, further narrowing the physical and emotional distance between us. Many became both friends and research subjects, and I began to see our relations as mutually informative and caring.

Once I asked Zaabit if he would tell me more about his imprisonment and torture. He had already depicted the conditions of imprisonment, but when it came to the torture, he said, "What if I don't want to?" And that was that.

Later, he mentioned having nightmares. "It's probably because of your recent experiences," I suggested. "It might help to see a therapist and talk about them." I found a highly recommended therapist who agreed to take him as a patient, but when I told him of the offer, he said, "No, I think all I need is a friend."

"I think you also need an analyst, an outside and impartial observer you can trust," I insisted. He ignored my advice, but his nightmares nonetheless lessened in frequency on their own.

It felt strange to suggest he needed more than a friend, since I was his friend. I suspected that his idea of friendship, while capacious in many ways, didn't include sharing such intimate details. Zaabit had many friends, and they bonded with him easily. It was a large, ever-changing circle, mostly young Arab men, some of whom he studied with. He'd meet many at the mosque on Fridays and play volleyball or ping-pong after. They would often just drop by his place unannounced. Always welcoming, he brewed coffee on his espresso machine and served biscuits.

I repeatedly assured him that he could count on me. He knew that, he said, but he also clearly wanted to be self-reliant before leaning on me or anyone else. Even though he was the youngest, he was also precociously able to learn anything quickly and found himself in the role of the family problem-solver. On a Zoom call during the pandemic he told me, "I hope to be able to live through one year without a disaster."

Once, I offered to discuss some issues he had with his siblings. I knew these problems upset him—he rarely complained, but about these he did—yet I also knew he preferred to keep things to himself. After a heated discussion, he snapped, "You point to the problems—I thought I had them solved—but you offer no solutions! What is the solution?"

He was right. I had none.

Incorporation in Germany

The arrival of Syrians like Zaabit during the long summer of 2015 added new kindling to an anti-immigrant fire that had galvanized the public. Although a *Willkommenskultur*—a welcome culture—emerged to embrace the Syrians, many Germans still thought of them as a foreign intrusion that would negatively impact their lives. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees from an Arab country. Most Germans doubted that Muslim Arabs could ever become German.

From the mid-nineteenth century through the 1950s, Germany was a land of large-scale emigration. My ancestors were some of those citizens motivated to leave and resettle in North America. Now Germany had become the prime European destination for migrants, immigrants, and refugees—categories difficult to parse but crucial for European authorities to assign to legal status. The shift from emigration to immigration required Germany to confront how it remakes itself—reincorporated—in the face of increasing numbers of newcomers.

My own incorporation coincided with that of Zaabit's, as I was trying to turn my temporary visa into permanent residency. Every three years, authorities at Berlin's Immigration Office would extend my visa, which I had obtained through my marriage to Parvis, but refuse to grant me a permanent one on technical grounds. In some years, my teaching at Princeton required being away for more than the annual one hundred and eighty days in Germany required for conversion. Each time they recommended that it would be easier for me if I applied for German citizenship, advice I followed only after I completed this manuscript in 2025.

When people hear my surname, Borneman, they associate my features with the look of a stereotypical German. And often when accompanied by Parvis, who has a hyphenated Persian name, I am identified as the German and he as the foreigner.

In my discussions with Zaabit, he'd insist that he could never become German, because, he'd say, "Look at me, I don't look German."

"Neither do many Germans look German," I'd retort, a point he did not find convincing. "Don't look at me, look at Parvis," I'd say, drawing attention to his Iranian looks, browned skin, black hair, large eyes, which resembled Zaabit's Arab looks. "He is German. His name is what most often betrays him." Zaabit's family name is three syllables and does not necessarily code him as foreign.

"You are the future of Germany. You are the new German," I'd say. But to no avail.

I had grown fond of Zaabit in a way that had nothing to do with my research. On his arrival in Germany, he was a refugee with no one to rely on. He needed the guidance of someone who knew the place. I thought the best way for me to assist him was to provide some stability and to advise him about the processes of integrating into German and European society: finding an apartment, adjusting to Germany's Jewish presence, learning German customs, rules of intimacy, norms of punctuality and privacy.

There was one specific moment when our relationship changed. His brother Safwan called me in tears, unable to break the news to Zaabit that their father had died. "I can't. I can't. I can't tell him on the phone," he sobbed. "You have to."

It was close to midnight in Berlin. I called Zaabit, who had recently moved out of our apartment to a place an hour away, and insisted he come over immediately, refusing to say why. When he arrived, I sat him on the sofa and put my arm around him, while Parvis sat on his other side and rested a hand on his arm. Then, I told him the news. Hearing of his father's death, he collapsed inwardly and wept—and refused to eat for two days.

That night I realized the role I had unknowingly stepped into: father figure. I had never wanted to be a father and resisted when others tried to place me in that role. It came as a complete surprise to find myself embracing fatherhood. With Zaabit, I had convinced myself that I was only a special friend. But over the years, I'd developed deeply personal connections with many of my research subjects, blurring the lines between researcher and friend, between simply observing and truly participating in their lives.

How naive I was to think I could be just a friend hanging out with men forty years younger than me. Perhaps I needed that self-deception to survive the research. To the young men I was inscrutable, an oddity. What they knew for sure was that I was an elderly anthropologist, supportive of Zaabit and other Syrian refugees, but also a curious figure. They'd never met an anthropologist, and anthropology was not a subject in the news, or taught at their universities.

For a time, he introduced me to his closest friends with, "John is like a father." He said it with a hint of embarrassment, I thought, since no one could replace his father. I took it as an expression of trust and intimacy. None of his friends asked, at least not in front of us, what that meant,

but some of my German friends who had met Zaabit had commented that he was like a son to me. Usually I said nothing, still stunned by the position I'd found myself in. But looking back, I see that part of the attraction of working with these young men who had lost their homes was the opportunity to act as a trusted elder, offering support when they needed it most. As my relationship with Zaabit deepened, I embraced the joys of our connection.

Because my bond with Zaabit had taken on a paternal quality, it was set apart from my relationships with other Syrian refugees and German friends. This dynamic, unintentionally shaped by my age, and by research choices made decades ago, has led to unexpected consequences on my life in Germany.

For one, I'm likely to outlive many of my older German friends, whereas the young men I engaged in research in Syria are playing increasingly significant roles in my life going forward. We—the Syrians and I living in Berlin—are all foreigners experiencing a recently reunified but deeply divided Germany together. Though our histories and backgrounds set us apart from longer-term residents, we are all active in the reincorporation of Germany.

Family Reunification

For Zaabit, three dimensions of his life were essential to belonging in Germany: education, followed by employment; marriage; and family reunification. After two years in Germany, Zaabit married a bright and lovely Christian woman from Eastern Europe, five years younger than him. One key to their relationship, he said, was that, despite their religious differences, they shared a commitment to a pious life together. With that attachment it became more plausible for him to envision a future in Germany. After finishing his degree, he had several excellent job offers and accepted one. I was so proud of him that Parvis and I invited him and his wife to travel with us in Thailand.

But there was still the issue of family reunification, which had not been the priority for Zaabit after his father's death. I called his mother Om Safwan, the mother of her eldest son. She was still in Aleppo and her inability to leave thwarted his emotional distancing from Syria. She had already endured the exile of her children, scattered in different countries. She had weathered the sudden, crushing loss of her husband, a retired journalist who passed away a week after tasting freedom from

prison. Her own months of incarceration before his death had left invisible scars. Most recently, the very earth had betrayed her, as an earthquake forced her to seek refuge on Aleppo's streets.

Although her children had often expressed their hope for a reunion, she resisted leaving Aleppo for an indeterminate future in a land where she had no friends and didn't speak the language. Knowing the importance of family to them, I encouraged Zaabit's plan to bring her to Germany. But every attempt was sabotaged by unpredictable events: a crackdown on illegal boats from Turkey to Greece; failed bribes to embassy employees in Lebanon, Spain, and Denmark; and the closure of the Ukrainian airport due to the Russian invasion of that country.

After Zaabit obtained German citizenship, he turned to the legal avenues available for family reunification. Each step seemed to unveil another hurdle—an additional document, statement, or fee required, discovered only during the application process. One of the final obstacles was the need for an external financial guarantor for three years' worth of costs.

Zaabit was disqualified because he didn't earn enough yet. Parvis and I didn't qualify either, as neither of us had a German income—savings didn't count. I convinced a close friend, a doctor with an excellent income, to act as guarantor. I had met her in 1986 in the GDR, and she had met Zaabit over dinner at my home in 2018. Although she was opposed to policies that increased welfare dependency, she empathized with his plight. Her generosity and our friendship prevailed.

Parvis and I prepared a welcome dinner at our apartment the day after Om Safwan arrived. Her itinerary had also been fraught with obstacles. In Istanbul a rejected ticket left her stranded overnight in the airport's sterile halls. Zaabit, his heart racing, had scrambled to purchase a new ticket, sending it to her phone like a digital lifeline.

On landing at Berlin-Brandenburg airport, customs officials pulled her aside and interrogated her for two hours. Then came the discovery—or perhaps they'd known all along—that she was hiding her life savings, gold sewn carefully into her clothes, in a final desperate attempt to preserve her past for her future. Border officials presented her with a cruel choice: admit to a crime and yield her savings, or return to Syria. With trembling hands, she signed.

About half an hour into the dinner, I asked Om Safwan why she had shared so little with her children about what was happening to her while in prison, and after her release. She said that most of her interrogator's

questions were about why she was friends with me on Facebook. I was stunned.

"Not about your children?" I asked.

"No," she replied without hesitation.

Could I have been the cause of her arrest?

"What did you tell them?" I asked.

"I told them you befriended me on Facebook, but I did not befriend you. Then they asked, 'You know he is an enemy of Syria, don't you?'"

"And what did you say to that?"

"I said I did not know you."

It didn't surprise me to be labeled an enemy of the state. An out-of-place fieldworker, US citizen, unattached male over thirty, I fit the profile of spy wherever I went. In East Germany during the 1980s, people had regularly asked why I was allowed to do research in the GDR while being an enemy of the state. They often asked with a wink, as if they didn't take their own state or my answer seriously. But they still asked.

Remember the sociologist in the GDR who had been puzzled by the approval of my research: "I'm not allowed to ask people anything without first getting the questions approved by the state," she explained.

"I thought the state didn't know what I was doing because they don't know what anthropologists do," I'd replied honestly at the time. "It took the Stasi a while to catch up to me, and by then, the GDR was falling apart."

In Lebanon in 1999, parents often warned their adult children to be wary of me, though these young adults ignored that advice and were eager to hang out with me. In Syria, however, there was a discussion about me at the university before I even entered the country on a nine-month research-and-teaching visa.

The fuss had stemmed from an interview on human rights and anthropology in the well-respected Beirut newspaper *An-Nahar*. I entered Syria through Beirut and, on the way, conducted an interview with the op-ed editor. Apparently, word of the interview circulated among the faculty where I was to teach. After my arrival they voted that I was unqualified to teach there. Standing before an officer who had to stamp my passport, a professor who accompanied me declared, in a voice full of irony, "Harvard PhD, Princeton professor, unqualified?" After I'd appealed the decision, the university's president and vice president had issued a letter confirming my employment.

Zaabit always thought that his mother's arrest was instigated by her neighbors' denunciation. Only later had the police discovered our

connection by combing through her Facebook friends. Had they wanted, they could have easily found records of my officially approved year of research, seen the outline of my lectures at the University of Aleppo, or read the secret police reports on my whereabouts. They could have read my 2006 book *Syrian Episodes*, where the first chapter analyzes regime change and the domestic and geopolitical context of my research: the death of Hafez El-Asad and his son's inheritance of power despite no dynastic authority.

These writings could have alarmed them, along with the many other articles I had published on political accountability, regime change, and universal jurisdiction: the legal doctrine allowing prosecution of crimes committed elsewhere without legal standing in the country where the prosecution occurs. This could have led them to label me an enemy, endangering everyone I met.

I had already imagined such a scenario, where my interactions would be used to justify harassment or arrest. My decision in 2008 to stop ethnographic research in Syria was an attempt to avoid this possibility. The secret police had begun to follow me closely, and they tracked those I met, even visiting a few in their homes. At the time, friends informed me of these visits but dismissed them as irrelevant. Om Safwan was not questioned about any details of my visits, my relationship with her children, or my joining the family for some dinners.

In an authoritarian state like Syria, a primary function of the police is to create fear and destroy trust by spreading rumors. The status of truth is secondary; it must be undermined. With the uprising, the regime's fear-based control proved inadequate, and they resorted to stronger measures, including arresting innocent people, like Zaabit's father and mother, knowing that they were innocent, to force others to accept the status quo and abandon any hope for change.

Although the arrest of Zaabit's mother caused me, again, to question the risks that I had taken in my research, today I believe I was just an alibi for the regime. Despite my physical absence since 2008 I'd remained suspicious, as my visits had an afterlife in rumors and documents, which could be used as threats. Perhaps the real key was my interface with Facebook—the goldmine of rumors, where I could be found on the personal web pages of many acquaintances as a "friend." Without Facebook, on the other hand, I would have most likely lost contact with all my Syrian friends—and never had the pleasure of knowing Zaabit, to whom I became like a father. Such social media appears to be the iron cage of our time.

The Third Time's a Charm

On May 18, 2018, three years after the US Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriages, Parvis and I finally married in Princeton's not-so-glamorous Mercer County Municipal building. A simple ceremony that followed forty-nine years after my first marriage, to Sky Queen. In between, Parvis and I had been living together in the tumultuous state we called love for nineteen years, initially as registered "domestic partners" at Princeton University, followed by a New Jersey–recognized "civil union," then a "legal partnership" in Germany. When, in 2015, we could finally get hitched, we didn't rush to the aisle. Also, our wedding wasn't exactly breaking news because it was my third marriage in the anthropological sense, even if only my first in the more conventional sense of the term.

The skies were clear, I thought I heard birds chirping, and I was blissfully unaware of the script. Our witnesses, and only guests, were two of my lovely administrators from the Princeton Anthropology Department, Carol and Mo Lin. The ceremony was quick, simple, and strangely uneventful—just two college professors finally getting the piece of paper they never really thought they'd get.

The judge, a charming Jewish woman with a Brooklyn accent that could cut through a New York bagel, asked if we had rings or wanted to add anything to our vows. Parvis and I exchanged looks that screamed, "Oy vey, we forgot!" We shook our heads so vigorously you'd think we were auditioning for a shampoo commercial. But the vows were mercifully brief. We kissed, and Carol snapped photos faster than a paparazzo at a Kardashian wedding. Afterward, Parvis and I sauntered to Small

Figure 15. Wedding Ceremony

World for coffee, as if it were just another day. It was about as climactic as watching paint dry, but hey, at least the paint was now legally binding. No victory gallop, no thunderstorm, no impromptu pizza party,

just a warm cappuccino and the realization that, yeah, we were now married.

So, there you have it—a queer route to marital bliss, and to legal conjugality. After plenty of heartbreaks, I had found my life's partner and secured legal recognition. It was a wild, sometimes confusing, sometimes wonderful journey. I discovered that unicorns might actually exist, and that maybe, just maybe, you'll find love along the way—even if you forget the rings.

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Figure 12 shows the cover of *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin*. It is used here by permission of Basic Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

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I am also immensely grateful to the numerous individuals, canines, and equines, who helped me experience the world and afforded me the opportunity to learn from my experiences.

Selected works

To represent the lives that I've encountered during my own I've turned over time to a variety of forms. In 1993 I co-produced with Jeffrey Peck the film *Sojourners: The Return of German-Jews and the Question of Identity in East Germany*. It was directed by Martin Patek, appearing originally in German as *Chronik einer Rückkehr: Lebenswege deutscher Juden in der DDR*.

I've also published two pieces of creative nonfiction in *Granta*. The first, in 2005, was an earlier version of my account of my experience of the tsunami in Sri Lanka, described in Part Five of this book. It was published as "The Weather Where We Are (Sri Lanka)," *Granta* 91 (Fall): 227-233. The second, in 2006, was about one of the boys I encountered during my research on fathers and sons in Syria.

In *Sapiens*, the online magazine of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, I also recently wrote about my research on the rehabilitation of child sex abusers in Germany. This piece is available at: https://www.sapiens.org/culture/can-child-sex-offenders-be-rehabilitated.

Most of my published work, however, has been academic writing for an anthropological audience, and mostly in English. Below is a partial selection of that academic work that is most relevant to the fieldwork encounters I've shared in several parts of this memoir.

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