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← INTRODUCTION →

A shilling life will give you all the facts, but here I have something else in mind. My life, with its multiple careers and wide-ranging experience, has led me to ask what useful sense I can make of it: how does one reconcile university teaching and scholarship, heavy academic administrative work for nearly twenty years, equally heavy involvement in a unique optical company for almost thirty and decades of writing poetry? Do the pieces go together in a coherent, informative way? My conviction that they do has emerged clearly as I consider the varied events of my life.

The last sixty years have been a time of remarkable change in higher education. It was my good fortune to be in the last class to finish Yale before the Second World War. There I enjoyed the best of a great genteel tradition. I was lured at an early age into university administration and forced out of it at the end of the tumultuous 60s. My diverse experiences over the following decades have invariably involved some form of educational activity—much of it outside the academy. As I have explored them I have realized

that their real value lies not in myself but in those educational and social events where I played some small part.

It is the unique nature of a memoir to confront reality, but to be highly selective about it. A memoir makes constant judgments about society and yet is bound to the life of its writer. It is not a comprehensive historical account of events but an illumination of those experiences that give body to a life. It has a major text—the action—and an equally important subtext that grows from the action but plays against it both as commentary and as motivation for the action still to come. I hope to bring to life this duality of action and inference that is, indeed, at the heart of all enduring experience. Neither novel nor biography, a memoir shares its character with both. In that sharing an intimate texture of life emerges—must emerge—but it is wedded to a growing separation between the immediate narrative actions and the trajectory they assume. That arrow of time has not only a path but also a purpose: it reveals the meaning of those myriad decisions which much of the time seem unrelated and without any large implied meaning.

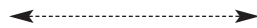
In counterpoint to my personal experience, for example, we have the great sixty year drama of American education itself, revealing its remarkable pattern of change and growth as our culture shifts from the euphoria of the 50s to the unforeseen turbulence of the 60s and the tightening both of structure and management which took place in the 70s, to be succeeded in turn by a steadily increasing dispersion of educational means and purposes in the 80s and 90s. (Surprisingly, this emergent pattern is evident even in the worst aspects of the period.) This dynamism has resulted in the exuberant diversity of education that we find at the end of the past century and the beginning of our new millennium. Contention in the formal academy will be matched by the larger energy of myriad new ventures and their ability to adapt to the whole country's felt need—a far cry indeed from the minority privileges of higher education sixty years earlier. Both the text and the subtext of this book relate intimately to the development of these patterns in higher education.

There are two distinct periods of my experience. The first, from 1938 to 1969, takes the logical, though accelerated, shape

of an academic career, a career that ended abruptly, to my great regret, at the midpoint of my life. The sequel has been a thirty-year journey through entirely new country. That journey has led to a radical extension of my views of education as an active—indeed central—part of our culture. I am privileged to have had a new career quite beyond anything I could have imagined, and it redefined for me the central meaning of the educated life. That discovery defines the second major focus of this book with its emphasis on that duality which embodies the central purpose of liberal learning—to live simultaneously the action and the perceived significance of it. This dual activity is a dance with two dancers—the dancer of the action and his twin who shapes the critical and creative effort that sustains the action. We cannot know the direction and value of our action without this constant partner who brings a sympathetic but critical and indeed tutorial eye to bear on each step we take. The underlying order of this book, of my life, emerges as a story within a story—an apologia for a certain way of living based on the great traditions of liberal learning. This unity of direction comes from an understanding of the action, of the critical judgments and emerging convictions that lend it substance and direction. The great physicist Richard Feynman said that underlying his life's work, and driving it constantly, was the pleasure of finding things out. I would say the same of my own life, and therefore of this book. It is an attempt to find out through my active life what the world of our personal and yet communal existence is about—partial and limited as the result must be.

The title of this memoir comes from the concluding lines of Yeats's poem, *Among School Children*. This image, which Yeats develops brilliantly in several poems, is a testimony to pattern in life and, beyond that, a particular sense of it with a complex relevance to our common experience. Yeats captures the creating function of our actions; they build a sustained pattern for experience beyond their individual and partial nature. More deeply, perception and the expression of that perception become one. We do not know what we understand until we articulate it; then our articulation becomes the meaning. Yeats thus describes all creating activity, which must fuse the creator and the creation, whether

it be the making of a poem or a career. The “action” creates the meaning of the event or the person; it seems to me the right image for this book, which is concerned equally with the experience of one person and the large substance of his encounters. The latter is objective to him and at the same time only seen as he manages to see it. This is a book of myself and of much that I have seen and tried to influence in the varied worlds of education, which, in some bizarre forms indeed, have been the substance of my life.



A word about myself...Although I have

chosen for this book the part of my life that began with my freshman year in college, certain aspects of my boyhood may suggest my later interests. I am an only child. My father was injured in France during World War I, and his additional exposure to mustard gas made him an ideal pneumonia victim. After his death (when I was five) I spent the next five years being encouraged and spoiled by my mother, my aunt and my grandmother. My mother tried valiantly to support us through her teaching, but the demands of my grandparents constantly interrupted this pattern. As a result we moved several times a year, and by the time I entered junior high school I had been in thirteen different elementary schools—and each time was the victim of the craze for intelligence tests, as we called them.

Consequently I was pushed ahead, missing much that I should have learned—the transition from arithmetic to mathematics, for example. Fortunately I matured physically very early, so that I was not a freak in class when I entered seventh grade at the age of ten. Junior high school was, blessedly, all in one place: Boston in the depth of the depression. A footnote on geography: I lived in Boston as a small boy—was born in Cambridge—and returned there in 1930 for orthodontic work. My mother’s work

for the government took me to Washington at three different times, but my strong center in this scattered life was my grandfather’s working farm in Old Lyme, one of the wealthiest towns in the country. Here he employed his great skill with landscaping and plant breeding. Both at that time and later my mother and I were helped financially by a wonderfully generous friend who made it possible for my crooked teeth to be put in some order, and also suggested that I go to a school to which her brother-in-law, Edward Harkness, had just made a major gift for the support of small-class teaching. This was Exeter; I entered the upper middle class as a frightened fourteen-year-old, was overwhelmed for two or three months and was hopelessly in love with the place by the time the Christmas holiday came. Indeed I found that Washington had no magic for me, and two days after Christmas I told my mother that I had work to do, packed my suitcase and headed back. I will never forget the snowy evening of the trip north of Boston; the old Boston and Maine cars had open vestibules, and the brakeman ran through the train at every stop to tighten the brakes by hand.

I remember equally the startled look on my housemaster’s face when he answered my knock. He and his wife were stymied for only a moment; they took me in and must somehow have fed me for a week until classes began. I remember the freedom of the library; it gave me a wonderful center for my life that I had first encountered at the library in Old Lyme.

Exeter gave me exactly what I needed—extreme expectations, great variety, the new seminar system supported by Mr. Harkness’ gift, and that sense of intellectual community that I had never experienced before. After graduating I planned to stay on for an extra year—I was still fifteen—but a bout of pneumonia demanded that I leave the New Hampshire climate and go south to college for the winter and spring. That experience was an innocent but intoxicating glimpse of girls, convertibles, and general *laissez faire*. I left as virginal as I arrived, but with a vivid sense that there was a new world to be explored. In retrospect I realize that it was just as well I had only four months of Babylon although the taste on the tongue was wonderful. To move from Rollins College to Yale was a shock of another kind: a thousand classmates, a pre-

eminent university, and all the apprehensive delight of stepping into a major new world.

For the next fifteen years I savored this new world, as an undergraduate, as a graduate student and finally as a young teacher. I left it to serve for ten years as President of Lawrence University, then for more than six years as President of Duke University where my clearly delineated academic career ended abruptly. There followed years—dark years—of finding a new way in life. These years were a journey that took me to many places, including Iran for prolonged periods. This journey eventually ended with my entering (quite unpredictably) a wonderful and exciting world revolving around the Questar Corporation, a small but extremely fine maker of quality telescopes and other optical instruments. Throughout my post academic life I have remained intimately engaged in various educational interests including my service as Chairman of the Board of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation.

← *A ROOM WITH A VIEW** →

*Behind sweet ramparts
Of well-being, we paraded
Our toys, showed them with style,
Even invited neighbors in
To push the buttons, change the dials.
In that fat time there seemed no room
In the great house for private matters.
They shrank, to fit
The small, left-over spaces. It was
A time for Babel, and the seductions
Of our soft sensuous empires.*

*But once the walls were down,
There was space, a room left
From the ruin: plain,
No trophy cases, no lacquer. But
There is light through great windows.
The landscape has teasing distances—
No foregrounds manicured, no rigid borders.
But a new music for my ears.
I had not known how it might be
Without the guile and clutter—a richness
Of memory but a child's directness.
And a passion to embrace
The infinite depth of now, its
Bounty beyond all reason,
Its refutation of age.*

* All poems are by the author.