One day you turn around and its summer
Next day you turn around and its fall
And the springs and the winters of a life time
Whatever happened to them all?

— Sammy Cahn & Jimmy Van Heusen

After putting on Beethoven’s Pastorale Symphony No. 6, I scanned the horizon, the wind gauge, and the knot log. At that moment I realized I was living my life about as well as I could. The sun was preparing a colorful departure to the other side of the world, and the breeze was preparing holding steady. I offered my friend another glass of wine and steered west...

— Jimmy Buffet, Margaritaville

In a never finished novel about a novelist who could no longer write, Dashiel Hammett advises, "if you are tired, you ought to rest, I think, and not try to fool yourself and your customers with colored bubbles.” (Wolfe 1980)

I am not really tired, just a little weary. Besides the illusion offered by colored bubbles ain’t all bad and the hustler has a kind of perversive appeal. I fortunately don’t have Hammett’s health or drinking problems. But I do have nothing more to say about the academic career issues treated in this and other recent books. Thanks to the serendipity that defines so much of life, I wrote far more on the subject than I ever planned to in spite of an inclination to reticence in personal matters. 1 Table I summarizes my advice to beginning scholars.

I will instead write about a topic that has been scarcely touched in the burgeoning academic self-reflection literature—retirement and being out of the academic organization.

There are many reasons for reflecting back on one’s life. The pleasures of good memories and nostalgia; revisiting people and places that were formative in one’s development; musing about roads not taken and imagining what might have happened if they had been; answering the question who am I now and how does that connect with who I was at the beginning of a career; finding the knowledge (or perhaps just new beliefs and interpretations) that can emerge from straining a career through five decades of experience; and channeling one’s lingering narcissistic needs into a socially acceptable form under the rationale of leaving a record for family, friends and fellow travelers. 2 Furthermore, if it is correct as Eli Wiesel observes in Night that we are our memories then involvement with them is fundamental to our sense of self.

Such reflections are like reversing the vista of a telescope by looking in the wrong end,—taking in the width of a life and narrowing it to one’s present. We can’t with much certitude turn to an unknown future. But the cornucopia of a lifetime’s memories, however blurry, faded and selective are there to be worked with.

Getting one’s cognitive and emotional bearings on the terrain as a human and as a cultural and biological descendant is enhanced by knowing ancestor’s stories. How I wish I had the life stories and moral precepts of my hundreds (the number doubles with each generation) of grandparents, great-grandparents and their siblings going back to the first ancestor born in 1642 whose name I know. Among them were rabbis (one who traced his ancestry to the Maharal of Prague (a humble guy who claimed he was a direct descendant of King David), merchants, leather workers, horse traders, revolutionaries, jewellers, peddlers, ragmen, maids, sweat shop seamstresses, a circus worker, a hooker, farmers, soldiers, developers, gamblers, restaurateurs and manufacturers—even an imbibor of rat poison—and the 19th century owner of an abode overwrought with Renaissance paintings (the Villa Hertziana) next to the Spanish Steps in Rome.

What written record would be left by relatives who sailed to Surinam from Amsterdam in the early 1800s; the imprisoned leaders of the failed 1848 revolution in Bonn; a plantation owner whose South Carolina home was reportedly burned down the day after a Sabbath dinner was shared with General Sherman; a great grandfather who left the U.S. in 1906 for Palestine to be buried on the Mt. of Olives in order to be on hand for the messiah; a great uncle said to have been with Lenin in Switzerland and with him on the sealed train back to Russia and a great grandfather, the Mayor of Borisov who died in the civil war following the revolution; or a rags to riches almost rags grandfather who lost ownership of a square block in downtown Los Angeles and his large estate in Topanga Canyon in the depression. A golfer lover and hater of Roosevelt, he was a founder of Hillcrest Country Club because people of his persuasion could not join the established clubs. Since 1938 his ashes have been part of the turf there. As well, I wish I knew even more about the seller of California Mohave desert land to suckers in the early 1930s (he was smart enough not to buy any himself) and the owner for a short time of a pre-Bugsy Siegel gambling casino in Las Vegas (the Kit Kat Club) and later a restaurant on the Sunset strip. 3

Silent Grass-Growing Moods

I'm goin' up the country
baby don't you wanna go?...
Got to get away.

—Canned Heat

In 1851 Herman Melville wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a [person] ought always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine.” (Melville 19)

But that is the case no longer. In 1996 I became an emeritus professor, retiring but not shy, while still at the top of my game and earlier than most colleagues.

In these remarks I will compare the situation of the retired academic to others and suggest some reasons why retirement may be easier for the former; note the increased importance of retirement as a third major stage of life; and reflect on career success and failure and visits to places that were formative in my growing up.

Common complaints for the newly retired include loss of an important identity, boredom in the face of so much unstructured time, unease over the absence of a distinction between workdays and weekends, and loneliness. I have been fortunate not to experience these in any serious fashion. Being an academic offers some natural preparation for retirement.

There are of course honorific titles such as "professor emeritus" which portage a bit of esteem for the informed, relative to those who can only say, "I worked on the assembly line at Ford.” But beyond what you can say about yourself is the issue of how you see yourself relative to your work career. I feel fortunate that my identity as a social studies scholar is strong and I don’t need a literal or locational badge or tag to remind me who I am. In most settings it doesn’t matter whether others are aware of my former activities. My identity involves commitment to the discipline rather than the profession, a given organization, or place per se. 5

As a result of light and flexible academic schedules with abundant leaves and holidays, the limits of time and place tethers were modest—be on campus several days a week for a few hours to meet a class or two and be available for meetings. Early in their career successful academics come to terms with the enormous amount of...
Nor have I experienced the loneliness or lack of direction many retirees report. Living close to our offspring and having made some new friends (although far fewer than as a youth) helps. But so too does the kind of work done. When experienced as a calling or a compulsion, mental work is portable and migratory. It is always with you (although there is a down side there as well). Scholars and artists live to a significant degree in a symbolic world of imagined interactions that can be called up at any point, apart from the constraints of physical location and time period. One doesn't have to be at work to work. You still have a job, you just don't get paid for it. Changes in geography and unpursuing the clock don't effect this. Moving slowly out of the regular job and occasionally dipping back into it has also smoothed the transition. But there are other issues.

On my last major move from Colorado to Washington state in 1996 I shipped 90 boxes of assorted unsorted books, journals, correspondence and documents and two trunks that had been shipped to Colorado from Boston in 1992 in a prior move and not opened since then. After unpacking a few high priority boxes, most remained unpacked. With continuing deadlines or the seductions of new leisure, I just did not want to spend the time unpacking and sorting them. Most of the boxes continue to gather dust (and no doubt worse in our barn), whether from the weather, insects or rodents. The more time goes on, the harder it becomes to face them.

The boxes generate ambivalence and a solution to that is of course avoidance. I feel affection and curiosity toward their contents, but also feel pushed away by them. They bring a certain lingering sadness and melancholy involving disillusionment about the profession (if not the discipline), a bemused view of what all the sound and fury was about, less than full enthusiasm about the continual weakening of the borders between the university and the society—especially the commercialization of university research and efforts to run universities along business models, to judge faculty by the size of their grants and a share-the-spoils politicization in the distribution of university resources that seems more appropriate to big city politics than to the repository of the highest ideals of western civilization. The boxes contain bittersweet reminders of defeats as well as victories—some weakened, if residual, bad feelings about the former and sadness that the latter are no longer a significant part of my life. A career stored in boxes also leads one to ask, why, if I am now likely a better scholar as a result of so much accumulated knowledge and experience, am I not still formally part of the institution that most values scholarly work, let alone at its apex? Yet there is also much to be said for moving on.

My twice almost colleague at the University of California at San Diego Joe Gusfield (1990) put it well:

The thought of being outside the swirl of institutional life is appealing to me. The idea of a life without a schedule of places to be at set times, without guilt of responsibilities not fulfilled or deadlines not met, and without the need to manufacture opinions seems an attractive utopia.

Robert Merton (1990) captures a tension experienced by the highly motivated (driven?) over-committed scholar when he notes that for Schopenhauer, "the chief sin against the Holy Ghost of the intellectual life is to put down one's own work in order to take up another's." Of course helping others can improve one's work as well, not to mention being politically useful, or a reasonable expectation for a member of a community. Being away from such demands on a daily basis however is salutary, even as some loss is felt. The demanding swirl of academic life which serves to socially locate and validate the professor goes, but the time to reflect on what the activity means and the choice of how much of it to continue with is gained.

It's the little things you notice—waiting in line at the post office, paying for office supplies and computer help and doing your own copying. Then there are the occasional meetings with new colleagues who seem to evidence a vague familiarity with your work (or perhaps they are just being polite). This is reminiscent of the person who said to the retired actress, "didn't you used to be Joan Crawford?"

The recognition that comes with longevity can be bittersweet. I was surprised and pleased to see myself referred to as "the doyen" of the kind of research I now do. But I must admit to ambivalence in another account in being referred to as "the grand old man of surveillance studies." I can accept the first adjective, but the second is a blow to the solar plexus of a guy who, although he can no longer palm a basketball, still does over 150 push ups and likes to run and bike long distances, having fun and trying to avoid being, and being seen, as too old. Yet moving on in life requires coming to terms with how others see us and getting out of the way of those who run faster or at least more freshly. Having been in the academic biz for five decades it is ok and maybe even accurate to be called old and to slow down without apology or self-depredation. With time can even come surprising good news—some of the old worries about consuming too much chocolate, liquor and coffee turn out to be misplaced.

Beyond any literal slowing down (which might be balanced by greater experience and wisdom), there is the increased difficulty of effectively communicating with (and understanding) students who are forever young and always undergoing a unique cohort experience. The currents of life carry (or sometimes catapult) the teacher ever further down stream away from the slang, dress style, media culture and sentiments of the students. One risks being seen either as a pathetic, emulative poseur or as hopelessly out of it, even a bit quaint and comical in one's datedness. Not sharing as much of a common culture makes communication more difficult. Most students, for example, are only familiar with films and current events that appeared when they reached adolescence. We must acknowledge American society's fetish of youthfulness, but not accept it. As Popeye might have said, "we y'am what we y'am." We can not be what they are, nor what we were. The deliciousness of having been on the right side of the 1960s generation gap with one's students I experienced as a young teacher remains memorable, but not reliable.

Another lesson is realizing how much sociability among colleagues is intermingled with instrumentality and when the latter goes, the former can decline precipitously. When you have no official position and no specific reasons to interact and can't directly help or harm others professionally (and even worse have moved geographically away) you are out of sight and given lower priority. I am struck by the number of times letters or emails sent to colleagues (e.g., a note congratulating them on an award or promotion, a request for information, a paper I sent, a suggestion to get together, an offer to give a talk, a query about a part-time job) have gone unanswered or belatedly responded to, relative to when I had a regular position. This is not out of malevolence, but simply reflects prioritization among busy, instrumentally oriented people. Being out of the game erodes the veneer of civility that often envelops work relationships, even holding apart the information overwhelm that the internet has brought.

Not to worry. The limelight can blind and burn as well as warm. Mark Twain got it right when he wrote, "obscenity and a competence—that is the life that is best worth living." (Twain ...) It is even better if one can add "and the time to be left alone and do fulfilling work, in serene and beautiful environs surrounded by those you love with serious delights, challenges and recreation never far away."

When I look out at Puget Sound and see great blue herons and bald eagles against a backdrop of the Seattle skyline and the Cascades and hear the seals and coyotes it is easy to forget the larger world and to agree with a neighbor who wrote:

I find more and more that I don't like to leave Bainbridge Island very often. It worries me, now that I think about it, but no destination seems to me worth leaving home to get to.

—Andrew Ward (1991)

As Mose Allison sings:

I'm a certified senior citizen
Its true it could happen to you
Raise hell in Arizona.

Being nourished by the warm sands of the Ringtail Trail at the Arizona Sonoran Preserve, while seeing the sunset through the Cholla cactus, smelling the creosote after a desert rain and sidestepping an ancient tortoise, it is easy to reverse Yates and have an abiding sense of the good life which can sustain one through temporary periods of tragedy.

Early in my career I recall historian Oscar Handlin who was about to retire proudly recounting that he did not read a daily newspaper. I was shocked and it even seemed a major dereliction of civic responsibility.
Wills need to be drawn up, attics cleaned out, correspondence and libraries culled. Such house-cleaning and preparing for the big move is not only fair to descendants, it is the reverse of the initial stage of preparation for life. It is a time for passing on the baton and preparation for departure, a time to think about the unthinkable and Adieu bidding forays have the same quality. Mountains he now climbs in Asia said he would never think of having done that until after his children were on their own. My modest mountain biking and kayaking risk-taking another one. The desire to do this can be intensified by a dirty little secret—what if I die before I get to enjoy enough of this hard earned money and the leisure it offers, while you still can. Don't wait for next year in Jerusalem. This is the last chance cafe. As the folk song says about the last train, "If you miss this one there'll never be that trip to Alaska." The stage of active involvement is just doing it—getting married, raising children, working and perhaps moving up. The degrees of freedom are less now. This is your life for that rainy day or emergency that could always arrive. But those demands are largely behind you. You got through it. You are free. What is more, given the growth of the economy, wealth transfers from parents, smart or lucky investing, tax-deferred savings for retirement and health insurance, you are comfortable and don't have those worries.

But who cares? With this change there has come time and the need for new kinds of reflection and even leisure. By self-definition, I am not retired and have never taken up golf (which is different from putting it down). Research and writing continue to be deeply engaging. Yet I am organizationally homeless, even as I feel well-riched in some broader dispersed community of social studies scholars. Can you gracefully move from status defined by respectful placement in a prestigious organization to status defined (for most of those you encounter, especially if you move away) by general attributes such as gender and age? Who are you stripped of the resources, symbols and borders that organizations offer? There is a strong link between identity and organizational affiliation and our culture doesn't provide ready identity pegs when that link is broken.

I am uncertain how to respond to the ever-present demand for occupation on questionnaires and the eternal, "what do you do?" question. I still publish and occasionally lecture, yet I can't honestly say I am a college professor. While I have been writing professionally for forty years, it doesn't feel quite right to think of myself as a writer. Given the largesse of research support and occasional work, I have not dipped much into my retirement funds. I certainly don't feel retired, yet I do not have a regular employer. By the standards of the Bureau of Labor Statistics I might even be unemployed, since I have unsuccessfully applied for jobs. But it doesn't seem right to say that I am unemployed.

The amplitude of requests from students, colleagues, editors, administrators, journalists and others and the constant meetings and classes to prepare for (or to feel bad about not having prepared for) moves from a flood to an ever smaller trickle the longer one is out. In facing far fewer external demands there is time for inner dialogue and the slow replaying of a life. As Frank Sinatra sang, "nice work if you can get it"—most of the time.

**Stages**

I always thought there were two basic life stages: growing up and being a grown up. The growing up stage is essentially preparation for life—learning the culture and all that entails. This is the standard material of introductory social science textbooks involving socialization and rites of passage—going to school, experiencing and experimenting, getting certified and selecting a career.

Then graduation arrives and you are out in the world. There are an astounding array of choices regarding what to do, where to live, how to live, who to live with and what kind of a person to become. For the privileged this seems a time of almost infinite possibility. It is relatively open-ended with untold degrees of freedom.

The stage of active involvement is just doing it—getting married, raising children, working and perhaps moving up. The degrees of freedom are less now. This is your life as an old television program proclaimed.

Yet with the good fortune of affluence and health, the above is only two-thirds or three-quarters of the story. There is a third stage which is harder to characterize because it is relatively new as a result of people living longer with greater affluence. This stage is more contradictory and less linear than the earlier two stages—involving both new freedoms and new restrictions. Many people will spend as much or more time in retirement as they did in their career.

Four components of this third stage are: enhanced consumption and leisure, risk-taking, departure preparation and nostalgia/interpretation/ sense-making. I will emphasize the last after brief mention of the others.

**Consumption:** For the privileged (but not wildly rich) middle classes, it can be a time for consumption and expenditures on a scale previously unimaginied (or if imagined, seemingly unrealizable). Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s with parents as the walking wounded from the Depression, you didn’t have to be Protestant to love deferred gratification. Being successful and being moral meant deferring or minimizing immediate gratification for the long run.

In addition you likely had very little wealth and were too busy saving to meet your needs for a home or a car and then for better ones, for children's needs and of course for that rainy day or emergency that could always arrive. But those demands are largely behind you. You got through it. You are free. What is more, given the growth of the economy, wealth transfers from parents, smart or lucky investing, tax-deferred savings for retirement and health insurance, you are comfortable and don't have those worries.

You also have the time to enjoy indulging yourself in activities unrelated to work. You were too busy before to do enough of that. A sense of impending (or at least closer) doom can also generate a sense of abandon. There is greater awareness of the ticking clock.

The illness and death of mentors and even former students is a jarring awakening. There might not be time to finish a book, undertake a long planned project or take that trip to Alaska. This recalls the hedonistic and indulgent arguments of the later 1950s and early 1960s when we thought the world would soon face nuclear destruction summarized in the song "enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, its later than you think." That was a time of both heightened anxiety and hedonism.

This ethos is also reflected in the last meal of the condemned person and tales of sexual escapades the night before an individual joins a monastery or convent. Grab it before you are denied. Given the largesse of research support and occasional work, I have not dipped much into my retirement funds. I certainly don't feel retired, yet I do not have a regular employer. By the standards of the Bureau of Labor Statistics I might even be unemployed, since I have unsuccessfully applied for jobs. But it doesn't seem right to say that I am unemployed.

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For the reflective classes it is above all likely to be a time for interpreting, indulging in nostalgia, summing up and pretty final sense making. Strands of research and writing continue to be deeply engaging. Yet I am organizationally homeless, even as I feel well-riched in some broader dispersed community of social studies scholars. Can you gracefully move from status defined by respectful placement in a prestigious organization to status defined (for most of those you encounter, especially if you move away) by general attributes such as gender and age? Who are you stripped of the resources, symbols and borders that organizations offer? There is a strong link between identity and organizational affiliation and our culture doesn't provide ready identity pegs when that link is broken.

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Yet selective memory can be a friend as well. I recall the content and emotion of great career moments, however with moments of great anger and defeat I recall the reminder of the ethereal and ephemeral nature of human experience. It is an eerie feeling to have some evidence from a material record or a current conversation and slowing down of memory. Besides, in our surveillance society, with a little archaeological digging, it is often possible to recover the facts should one be so inclined. 

I am glad I kept the customers satisfied. At the end of a career there is so much more to remember than when starting out. In addition, with age comes the recall, how many names from your high school yearbook are familiar? How many faces do you recognize from summer camp and Sunday school pictures? With each it matter? Does Vicki still remember me and that course? It is quite likely she does not. Does that matter?

Those close, but no cigar musings, and fantasies of greater sports achievement are record was 49'6." Who today knows or cares who held, or even what the class B shot put record for John Marshall High School was in 1956? But there it is replaying in It would not have made the world a better place, satisfied my youthful sexual longings, nor made me tougher on the schoolyard. Perhaps it is liking or needing to think training, video analyses and all the other techniques that now enhance performance? What possible difference could it make since I won the meet?

Hey Sport

One type of well formed memory which is often present involves sports. Why does a man approaching 70 years of age who is not now an avid sports fan, so often think of his own athletic moments, some going back to the 6th grade? 14 —Jumping up amidst a crowd in the end zone to catch a touchdown pass; down by one point, stealing the ball, running down the court and scoring the winning basket just before the buzzer goes off in a high school game on a championship team; and that —Vicki

Memories Are Made of This

While it may well be that, "nostalgia's just another word for nothing left to lose", I find it very pleasurable. There are musings in which I am only partly in control. They sometimes just wash over and mentally carry me away (although other memories noted below with respect to mentors, career events and places, I approach more analytically). They often involve my formative years:

Ayn Rand and her sophomoric characters in The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged, Sinatra's swingingly having it his way, Hemmingway, Chandler, Hammet, Bogart, Brando, Newman, Dean, Traven, Kipling, Sartre, Camus, Kerouac, the lyrics of Cole Porter and the Gershwins, the singing of Chet Baker, June Christie, Charlie, Anna O'Day, Johnny Cash, Buddy Holly, The Beach Boys and Mose Allison, Southern California in the 30s, 40s and 50s, the hazy, lazy days of summer, the beach and desert, palm trees and stucco homes with red tile roofs, on a clear day you can see Catalina, convertibles and girls, girls, girls. In the background Sandburg, Mencken, Twain, Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, Conrad, Kafka, Orwell, Huxley and Europe. And closer to home Groucho Marx, Jack Webb, James Dean, Natalie Wood, Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Shelley Berman, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Bobby Kennedy and Erving Goffman.

These form pieces of a hazy, softly nostalgic puzzle. They provide the psychic backdrop against which to order a life and define a sense of self and an idealized and preferred personal style (its degree of realism is of course another matter).

Some common strands

—the concrete as against the grand abstraction, authenticity/honesty, a distaste for hypocrisy, appreciation of the intellect, rationality, empiricism, irony, paradox, thresholds and curvilinear truths and wisdom, surprise, humor, individualism and a naive belief in an almost pre-social self able to endure the slings and spears of destiny and the pressures of the crowd, courage, perseverance and struggle against the odds, performance, cool, hot, precision, passion, testing but respecting legitimate limits and asking "says who and why?", fascination with the outsider, awe, enthusiasm, nature reverence, challenges, tentativeness but with awareness of the need to believe and act, the struggle for justice and being a person of integrity.

More analytic are thoughts involving less clear memories. Take a note from student written in 1978:

Professor Marx how can I thank you for giving us so much? More than any other professor, you challenged me to think more analytically, to be more objective, and to work harder. But on top of that, you have always been personally warm and receptive, willing to talk, anxious to listen. During my four years at this school I have found very few professors who meet this standard, but that just makes you all the more special.

As I sat in your last lecture for Soc. 10, I tried to comprehend not having someone like you to be here encouraging and helping us to think, to question, to learn. I felt very scared and realized the ultimate goal of the best professor is to teach his or her students to do all of those things for themselves. And, I felt better, confident that once I’m "out in the world" all by myself, your lessons will be with me, confident that now I am prepared to think for myself, to question, to wonder. And for that, I thank you.—Vicki

Wow. I’d like to have a teacher like that! But who is Vicki? I have no recollection of her, nor of most of the other students on the class lists I have kept for 40 years. Does it matter? Does Vicki still remember me and that course? It is quite likely she does not. Does that matter? If you are over 30, how many of your professors can you recall, how many names from your high school yearbook are familiar? How many faces do you recognize from summer camp and Sunday school pictures? With each year the number declines.

Looking back raises deep issues about reality, at least as it appears to us within our individual consciousness. I am not going to lose too much sleep over my failure of memory. I am glad I kept the customers satisfied. At the end of a career there is so much more to remember than when starting out. In addition, with age comes the slowing down of memory. Besides, in our surveillance society, with a little archaeological digging, it is often possible to recover the facts should one be so inclined.

The failure of memory in such matters is not of great import and offers ample fuel for novelists, philosophers and psychologists. But it does give one pause and is a reminder of the ethereal and ephemeral nature of human experience. It is an eerie feeling to have some evidence from a material record or a current conversation and yet to have no memory of the matter at hand.

Forgetting the Bad News (At Least Most of it and How it Felt)

Yet selective memory can be a friend as well. I recall the content and emotion of great career moments, however with moments of great anger and defeat I recall the content, but can’t capture the emotion.
politics of the department (or the university administration) didn't go my way even though I thought I had a stronger record than the persons who were hired. Yet there is

There were jobs I thought I would get but did not, although I was on the short list. Those were humbling experiences, but also productive of cynicism since I knew the

the part of an editor to expose feet of clay.

The more established one becomes, the more writing is done in response to pretty sure thing invitations, rather than to taking one's chances in journals that sometimes

easier to just find another one. With hundreds of journals in sociology and on criminology related topics, one never runs out of hope.

review of taking ideas from a scholar I had never even read (it would have been more judicious for the reviewer to simply say related ideas are expressed by ...)
much room for differences of opinion about the relative merits of a candidate and about what a department most needs. An older candidate may have a much better record, but also reflect more traditional concerns and perhaps soon bail out of productive work relative to a promising young scholar working in an emerging area. Also if non-meritocratic factors work against you, at other times they no doubt work in your favor.

I have learned to take some satisfaction in making short lists and waiting lists, even when one is not chosen. At least you were in the ballpark. You can also sometimes learn what they were looking for, or where you went wrong and that can help in re-applying. In such a competitive world where chance factors play a major role, one can’t expect more. Human existence is dominated by vast contingent forces that we merely try to channel and control. That we sometimes succeed should no more tell us into thinking we can continually pull it off than should failure lead us to stop trying.

If the goal is not redefined and still matters, you need to go with the odds and keep at it, knowing that at some point things may go your way. The future has a wonderful open-ended quality. Also with a career strewn with victories, it is easier to face rejection and move beyond an infantile sense of entitlement and grandiosity.

With respect to teaching (and most else) I came to see the impossibility of trying to please everyone. One student who checked "not intellectually stimulating" on the course evaluation wrote "it was just one big brainstorm —with what about this and what about that? I felt like we were going in circles." Another student who checked "very intellectually stimulating" wrote "the class made me ask 'why' and see that the answer to that often depends." Yet another complained about too many essay questions and another didn’t want any multiple choice questions.

This variety of expectations and evaluations also applies to research. Everyway of seeing is also a way of not seeing. Consider the responses to an article I submitted, "This is the best article I have ever reviewed for this journal—an absolutely outstanding contribution" versus "This tiresome review of things everyone knows does not merit publication here." The response to a grant request: "An extraordinarily important project... absolutely indispensable. I urge strongly and without reservation that this request for support be approved" versus "This study covers little that would improve the infrastructure of science. Do not fund it." Negative evaluations—whether from students or colleagues became less stinging over the years. Some judicious mixture of being true to one’s self and yet trying to be at least somewhat responsive to audiences that are usually heterogeneous is required. Truth in advertising re making clear to students at the start what one’s teaching style is and what is expected of them permits self-selection. In the case of editors, I generally chose to send my missives to those who value qualitative, conceptual, interdisciplinary, issue-raising work.

Perhaps repression is functional. But more likely increased sophistication and maturity made it possible to understand and sometimes to even agree with the rejection. In place of an infantile, egocentric, insatiable need and sense of entitlement, I became philosophical and grateful for the use of the hall and the chance to try. No one can win them all. Perhaps there is a dilution effect in which failures are drowned out by successes. It seems petty and greedy to wish for more when you are already full. In some cases I agreed that there was a poor fit between my approach and the need of an institution or an editor, or that I had not developed my argument or data in a clear enough fashion, or that I had not adequately changed an already published article, or I could see that the winner was more qualified.

Deeper emotions are involved in reflecting on what the competition means. I have written about that elsewhere (Table 2) and will try not to repeat.

The Good News Still Feels Good

While the above memories are very clear, the anger and pain I felt are long gone. In contrast, with respect to good news, I can recall both the content and the intense positive emotion I felt.

As a first semester graduate student I was worried about whether or not I would flunk out—especially after our orientation meeting in which the unsupportive faculty advisor said, "look to your left, look to your right, next year at this time half of you won’t be here." Having drifted into graduate school with moderate preparation and socialization I was scared. That was no doubt functional and drove me to study harder than some of my overconfident and intimidating fellow students from Ivy League schools who wore ties and carried briefcases. I wore Bermuda shorts and was carried in a Corvette.

Our task for the required methods course was to write a research proposal for the secondary analysis of survey data from the Academic Mind study by Lazarsfeld and Thielens. The comment on my paper:

This is a very good effort. I will be most interested to see what you come up with next semester.

Shout it from the hilltops! I felt a great sense of relief and excitement. I had a reprieve! At least I would be there another semester before they discovered that I was just pretending.

Then there was the gracious letter I received from Professor Morris Janowitz of the University of Chicago about my thesis on Father Coughlin. Janowitz offered some critical suggestions, but was appreciative of the thesis. One line I read over and over, "I look forward to reading your future work." Wow, I hadn’t thought that far ahead and had no confidence that there would be, or could be future work. Here a leader of the field just assumed there would be more. Such small steps built my confidence and changed my self image. Becoming a professor became a desirable and realistic goal. Previously I had been simply exploring and having fun learning.

But my best memory was that beautiful Berkeley day in November 1966 when the mail brought a formal job offer from Harvard and the mock up pages of my study by Lazarsfeld and Thielens. Our task for the required methods course was to write a research proposal for the secondary analysis of survey data from the Academic Mind study by Lazarsfeld and Thielens. The comment on my paper:

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But my best memory was that beautiful Berkeley day in November 1966 when the mail brought a formal job offer from Harvard and the mock up pages of my forthcoming book. That day that will live in famy ([doesn’t seem to be any such word but there should be given infamy]. I sat outside on a bench by the Campanile with its two bridge view and very slowly opened both letters feeling exultation beyond words.

In April 1970 I vividly recall standing in a phone booth in Grand Central Station calling to get directions to the building where I was to give a paper and being told by the department chair I had been awarded a coveted fellowship. Another senior colleague had told me not even to apply because the odds were so small. The sweetness was enhanced by the tenured job offer that followed my visit. But I could not envision raising a family on an associate professor’s salary and living in Manhattan. Instead I used the offer to negotiate a higher salary and longer contract in Cambridge.

After a recent presentation a colleague I didn’t remember came over and said, "Good to see you again. I’ve never forgotten that great talk you gave at the American Political Science Association meetings in Washington DC in 1968 when we first met." That must have been a helluva talk. I wish I could remember something about it.

In an evaluation a student wrote, "I have never had a class with this much intellectual stimulation —this professor rocks." Something must be going on because a few months later a graduate student at a conference left me speechless (not easy to do) when she said, "Meeting you for me is like meeting a rock star"—yeah and how do you like my limo? Then there was the colleague whose class I visited and at semester’s end jokingly said he was angry because I made him look bad. I was bewildered until he explained that in response to the course evaluation question, "what was the best part of the course?" several students said Professor Marx’s lecture.

Then there are the times when one feels good about one’s work not because of praise but because it touches other’s lives or effects public policy. Here I put being asked to write introductions to colleague’s books and receiving dedications such as, "I hold him in the highest regard as a mentor, scholar and human being. He provided encouragement, scholarly guidance, and I much appreciated his words of wisdom on living the good life."

Kind words from students and seeing them (and their students) succeed has been very rewarding. Among the most satisfying aspects of teaching has been working with 13 students on co-authored papers (in most of these cases this was only once and was the student’s first published paper). Sponsoring and supporting international students, including several from China was particularly meaningful.

Work on the Kerner Commission, the Senate Select Committee on Undercover Activities and on privacy and equity issues in new information technologies for various national committees has been very satisfying. The results of my first book Protest and Prejudice helped in civil rights fund raising and brought data to the topic of black-white and the connected black-Jewish relations.
and lubricants. Ads are prominent for This was not your father's Berkeley.
section for security reasons.
affirmed crazyness. In this political milieu liberals are called conservatives and few conservatives will cop to it.
Much of current Berkeley was run down, tired, dirty and dreary—a caricature of its former self. Reflective not of the British philosopher for whom it was named, but
The visits share something with Woody Allen's character in
Launching pads needn't (and perhaps shouldn't) be homes, even if they remain tourist attractions.
Puerto Rico that make one aware of the limitations of bi-coastiality. I wouldn't agree entirely with Joan Didion who
as well as to Chicago to imagine what life was like for great grandparents in the 19th century and
and Europe and given lectures in over 100 other schools. Now, not having a regular job means even greater freedom to take advantage of such travel.
The subsidized travel opportunities available to academics (whether for meetings, summer or sabbatical teaching) have been highly beneficial. Travel counters the
Confidence may come by accident. I once drove a hundred miles to give a talk and as I approached the podium realized I had forgotten my prepared remarks. I winged
our ability to control personal information, yet sharing is central for intimacy and in a democratic society, openness and encouraging accountability through visibility are
indicating an atypical relationship with her father.
from youthful frustration in the face of duality, irony and paradox to patronly appreciation (or at least tolerance for these) and to (at least initially) suspicion of certainty and simplicity when contentious social issues are involved.
In the last scenes of the film Chinatown, Jack Nicholson is interrogating Faye Dunaway about her relationship with a young woman. Dunaway alternatively and
states, "she is my daughter" and under Nicholson's more coercive questioning, "she is my sister." Finally she says, "she is my sister and my daughter," indicating an atypical relationship with her father.
So it is with our research, we are posed (and in the best of cases also poised) between a rich variety of tensions and the answer sometimes is "yes and no" and "both." Thus societies need both liberty and order; group life is impossible without normative boundaries, yet rule-breaking can be creative and a factor in positive social change: environmental surveillance and boundary maintenance is central to any life form yet when inappropriate it can also destroy life; our sense of self is defined by our ability to control personal information, yet sharing is central for intimacy and in a democratic society, openness and encouraging accountability through visibility are
fundamental. These concerns have helped frame a life time research agenda.
Newspaper stories such as one that referred to "Karl Marx's stimulating lecture last night on surveillance" and being cited several times in book reviews—not for one's

Confidence may come by accident. I once drove a hundred miles to give a talk and as I approached the podium realized I had forgotten my prepared remarks. I winged it and gave one of the best talks ever. After one has been in the biz for awhile, it is almost a sign of weakness to rely on the security of the written lecture, although the mores of the disciplines vary here. The written talk fails to honor what can be the bubbling creativity of the mind and the colliding and overflowing of ideas when one is cranked and into the topic and the synapses are firing. I now prefer to talk from an outline.
In an overflowing cauldron of work experiences, among the more memorable was having a student from India introduce himself and say, "Just call me Sid." His full name was Siddartha, a name hallowed by 1960s seekers of the way. The occasional unsigned love notes were interesting, as was the careless student who wrote a fine paper on riots that seemed familiar. It should have, I now know that this is the direction I want to head in...I wanted to thank you for a great class and for helping me find what I really am interested in." God save the law. What might have been written if the student had received an A grade? Then there was the student who gave me a poor grade in the course evaluation because, "he uses far too many big words that get you lost in what he is actually trying to say." Calling Brutus on the fault-line.

Off and On the Road Again: California Dreamin'

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Newspaper stories such as one that referred to "Karl Marx's stimulating lecture last night on surveillance" and being cited several times in book reviews—not for one's ideas but because of sharing a name ("the only Marx in the bibliography is Gary Marx") were amusing.

Off and On the Road Again: California Dreamin'

California here I come
Right back where I started from

—B. De Sylva and J. Meyer

A clear sky was almost the most important thing.

—D.H. Lawrence
An advertisement for a religious meeting advocates the need to "transcend all forms of Jewish chauvinism and goyim-bashing—and recognize that we are part of the Unity of All Being." The gathering is "perfect for families, welcoming to singles of all ages, to interfaith couples, and to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals."

In 1963 students were invited to "Join the Shop-In at Lucky's Market—Fight Discrimination in Employment." Today they (at least those of a certain non-hue) are invited to join a group that promises "UnTraining White Liberal Racism" for only $10. "The UNT training offers personal work in a supportive setting for white people to address our unconscious racial conditioning." This appeal is offered adjacent to an ad promoting "Massage Therapy for Pets."

There are new issues such as MCS (multiple chemical sensitivity). According to an article in the Berkeley Daily Planet MCS is a "legitimate disability under the Americans with Disability Act." The Berkeley city council adopted a resolution asking not to wear scents at public meetings out of respect for those whose health is compromised by fragrances.

There are the changes in culinary culture. Food carts have largely displaced advocacy tables from the corner of Bancroft and Telegraph. The formerly more bohemian Northside of campus is now known as "the gourmet ghetto." Restaurant signs promise "no pesticides, hormones, anti-biotics or msg"—to which some might add "no taste." The faculty club serves soy milk. The Ratskiller, that rah rah sporty American paragon of steak and potatoes, favored in my day by alumni, football players and sorority sisters, features tofu and wraps in barbecue sauce in a punk environment. Diversity now comes in many forms, including the addition of a real delicatessen with "challah french toast."

The Berkeley Gazette contains an ad for: "Help Wanted: experienced baker with collective interests."

In the 1960s bumper stickers said, "make love not war" and "question authority." Now one sees "Dykes on Bikes," "Question Reality," "I take my pet to a holistic vet" and "All those who wander are not lost."

Yet Berkeley remained inspirational and provocative. Not many other cities declare a Nuclear Free Zone or seek their own foreign policy. If there are political eddies there are also kernels for a better world. With the passion and optimism of youth, it was a place pulsating with question-asking, experimentation and innovation. It was nostalgically reminiscent of one prong of the good society which must forever involve questioning, imagining and taking nothing for granted. With worldly experience, maturity and distance from Berkeley, the second prong of the good society, involving appreciation of tradition, ritual and institutions and awareness of the limits of human perfectibility and the horrors of trying to achieve it at any cost, can cause one to forget the first prong.

The significance of utopian dreams lies not in their failure, but in the search they inspire. Many ideas that seemed wildly utopian in the 19th century became partial realities in the 20th. The 1960s matter as well. The times did not change to the degree that Bob Dylan claimed they were, but they did change. The moral high ground is also needed to remind the realpolitiknicks that there must be limits to compromise.

All the professors I knew are now retired or dead. The few still around the campus seemed frozen in another era, rarely venturing from the cozy consensus of Berkeley, perfectly cast for the role of aging radicals. If I had stayed there and taken an assistant professor position (which I never gave serious consideration to), I no doubt would have ended up the same. Wombs are hard to leave. However given a more peripatetic and varied career with respect to geographical places, intellectual areas, methods of inquiry and kinds of departments and audiences, I feel very privileged to have been able to see more "of the world and what it is" as the Bible advises and to have been at and left Berkeley when it was at its height.

While the current sociology faculty contains leading scholars, in general they don't seem as towering as those who were there in the 1960s, nor are they likely to be as important as foundational figures for the discipline. Herbert Blumer was brought to Berkeley in the 1950s and given resources to build the best department in the nation. There was little competition and he was able to recruit laterally, something rarely done today. Philip Selznick, Reinhard Bendix, Marty Lipsitz, Erving Goffman, Kingsley Davis and Neil Smelser, along with younger leading colleagues, established Berkeley sociology as a mecca, drawing on the best of the Columbia, Chicago and Harvard traditions in rapidly expanding fields that required founding figures. Important as foundational figures for the discipline. Herbert Blumer was brought to Berkeley in the 1950s and given resources to build the best department in the nation. They were sociology's greatest generation.

Glory Days
And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it but I probably will
Yeah, just sitting back trying to recapture
a little of the glory of well time slips away
and leaves you with nothing mist but
boring stories of glory days...
Glory days well they'll pass you by
—Bruce Springsteen

Another form of looking back is to consider who one was in high school as against who one is today. I was initially enthusiastic about going to my 50th reunion. I drafted the requested 500 word life story and read with great interest about the lives of others. I was unfortunately unable to attend the event. A large majority of the class (or at least those who wrote) had stayed within the greater Los Angeles area (why would they want to leave?) and I remembered far fewer persons than I thought I noticed. The fuel of my high school experience was competition. This meant persevering and often winning—whether elections, writing and speech contests, basketball, track events... Related to this was a desire to look "sharp" and to impress girls. Perhaps if excellent grades had come more easily, I might have added them to my personal impression arsenal, but alas they did not. I did just enough work to qualify for college admittance. But as with the other endeavors, it was the prize not the process that mattered. I have since learned to reverse the emphasis. Note the words of poet Henry Newbolt, "to set the cause above renown, to love the game beyond the prize."

In reflecting on the image of that person I am no less competitive, but that is mostly because I can't help it. It's like a reflex and it is fun. I am curious to see how well I can do, whatever the activity. Yet it is no longer "look ma no hands" or a quest for the days of yesteryear Bruce Springsteen sings of. Rather it is part of an ethos linked to doing one's best and giving it your all. The emphasis is on competing with oneself rather than besting others. I no longer have the need to prove anything or for the acclaim/recognition success can bring in advertising to others. Giving up the avaricious and insatiable carrot always in front of the donkey ghost of status acclaim has been salutary and among the best parts of being a lapsed, but recovering academic.

Qualified Angels
A related aspect is giving up an unenviable self-righteousness acquired during the 1960s Berkeley years that involved a never doubted moral superiority and political correctness. In this view Los Angeles was seen to epitomize all (or at least most) of what was wrong with society. It was easy to form an identity in opposition to this.
One of the enduring banalities of the middle-class mobile (whether geographical or cultural) learned from Hemingway and Wolfe is that you can’t return. But you can visit, filtering impressions through the strainer of age and experience. As both sustenance and opposition, my identity was resolutely shaped by growing up in Southern California.

My recent time in the Los Angeles area was certainly not Yogi Berra’s déja vu all over again. It was more a dream-like experience in which recognizable fragments of a past were interwoven with architectural and cultural cliches from contemporary mass culture. The street names and grid pattern of east Hollywood between Franklin and Santa Monica were the same, but most of the buildings were new. Some of the previous structures were hidden behind face-lifts. The few recognizable buildings were in disrepair and some were boarded up. Yet the generic video, convenience and fast food outlets were all too familiar. There were constant jarring reminders that this was not chez moi. Missing was the unreflective sense of familiarity, security and predictability that flows from the automatic emotional pilot of a known environment.

How can you describe the feeling of going to your father’s factory on Sunset Boulevard (where in making cardboard boxes you drove a staple into your thumb or read the Amboy Dukes in the privacy of a labyrinthine stock room) and seeing it as a parking lot for Circuit City? What is there to say about the Brown Derby restaurant on Los Feliz that is now Louisa’s Trattoria? Where are the words to express the feeling of seeing the stately home on Mariposa Avenue your grandparents built in 1914 replaced by a crumbling apartment building with broken windows and “For Rent” signs? How to express the indignity of seeing Mariposa become a dead end—literally slashed at a rakish angle by the Hollywood Freeway?

The palm trees, birds of paradise and other exotic plants, decaying stucco buildings, dirty streets, street vendors offering everything from oranges to furniture to themselves, along with the scrubbed, buttoned up, tightly guarded quality of the structures inhabited by the more privileged (with armed guard signs, video-surveillance, controlled entries, and high walls and fences) seemed vaguely third world and mysterious—a place better suited to my adulthood encounters with Graham Greene than my adolescent encounters with Raymond Chandler.

To see that the Pacific Coast Highway (that ultimate California symbol of care-free youth, openness and infinity, with its western ocean and eastern golden hills views awaiting the driver of a convertible who has hurtled down Sunset Boulevard to the sea to come to the end of the country) has become just another six lane traffic clogged highway with strip malls and pseudo-Mediterranean developments with streets named after the developer’s daughters or wives, was a final reminder of the perils of returning.

Los Angeles is not a world I chose (or perhaps it rejected me). The slickly marketed Hollywood worlds of eternal youth, beauty and acquisition are all too familiar. Yet the university was not quite Universal City and Camarillo, the Bay area and the Northwest are not Southern California. But like scars which are clinically functional, if aesthetically displeasing, childhood experiences don’t really go away, even as we build upon them. I now view those early years in LA as a vaccination giving me a mild version of an illness in the service of later protections enhanced by twenty-five years in Boston. I feel very fortunate to have grown up in, and then to have escaped from Los Angeles. But I now feel more bemused than critical.

Whether it is seeing that the tentacles of the L.A. culture are everywhere or the mellowing that comes with age, I am less certain that Los Angeles is peopled with a disproportionate number of vain, materialistic, instrumental, superficial, shallow plastic people. And even if it is, why should I spend time judging them? Today I would not so automatically take Dustin Hoffman’s side in the film The Graduate.

Plastic clearly has a place in the economy and in self-presentations and interaction. One must choose one’s battles and fight the important ones. Self-righteousness and fundamentalism of course must be challenged, even as one tries to avoid sinking into an indefensible moral relativism. Among the many good lessons from one brand of sociology is the need to take the point of view of the other and to realize the extent to which choices are socially determined (excusing to a degree individual responsibility). Perhaps that is what maturity in its best version is about—perspective and tolerance.

One aspective of that perspective sees the evolving nature of human experience and existence. Things change and nothing lasts. Life can be thought of as a series of temporally and often spatially bounded events. Some are of short duration such as thirst, a sporting event, a play, a meeting, a visit to the dentist, a job rejection. Others are cyclical. But a shared feature is beginning and ending. One can rally against this dynamism, but it seems far more productive to apply some cognitive jujitsu and go with the force. When a life event is good, appreciatively seize it and soar in the moment. If it is bad, there may be solace in knowing that it may pass. What endures, at least in the short run, are temporal sequences of varying durations.

There can be optimism here for the social reformer otherwise prone to pessimism. The less than full realization of the inspiring ideals of the 1960s was a surprise to the youthful and inexperienced idealists of that era. Most abandoned activism for more personal concerns, believing that change was an impossible dream.

However, George M. Hauser, a leader of efforts to end colonialism in Africa, an organizer of the first freedom ride in the South in 1947, and a founder with Bayard Rustin of the Congress of Racial Equality, has never given up.

In an interview he reports that his experience has taught him that over the stretch of history, a small group of people can have a large impact. (New York Times, Dec. 12, 2007). It is necessary to take the initial steps even if one does not know where they will lead. His theme comes from an old hymm, “Lead kindly night against the advent of the dawn.” His message is one of faith you’re doing the right thing to begin with.”

A Grandparent Not A Conquistador

Erich Goode in memorializing his distinguished father, sociologist Si Goode, notes a common, if rarely openly acknowledged sentiment among successful academics and a sociological explanation for the perennial unhappiness among many players.

Si wanted to be an intellectual conquistador… a sociologist in the grand scale of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. He didn’t appreciate the fact that in a fractured, fragmented field, and in an era, like ours, such titans do not and cannot exist. Si felt his work on social theory was insufficiently appreciated, believing that lesser scholars received greater acclaim. He told me about his bitter disappointment at the response to a book he had just published. He thought he was commanding the field, “Come on, everybody, let’s take that hill!” Yet when he looked around, he realized no one was following him. (Goode 2003)

Perhaps surprisingly, success has been much more conducive to reflection and analysis than failure. I am not sure why. But now with time and perspective and removed from the daily validating impact of colleagues, I have become more doubly much of the social science and humanities academic writing status hustle enterprise. The more time goes by, the less I am a firm believer. Too much of it is self-promotional and mutual back scratching involving esoteric, arcane ramblings among isolated tribes—unread, unremarked, and unremarkable—and sometimes stronger on technique or ideology than scholarship. I feel I have pretty much left the profession but not the discipline. There are also issues about the payoff.

For example, I spent the better part of an uncompensated year working on a very long book review essay on recent empirical studies of surveillance. (Marc 2005) The assignment gave me the impetus to read material that I needed for the book I was working on. I feel very good about the article and know from a webpage counter that it has been read many times. Yet almost no one has mentioned the article. That enormous expenditure of effort went into a void. It has generated no interactional wave to ride, nor even any current to fight. Just a lot of ideas poured into a swallowing ocean of words.

Yet as Henry James wrote, “We work in the dark. We do what we can. We give what we have.” And of course one can never know the impact of ideas and I would have done it even knowing the modesty of the direct response. But it does give one pause. Is this what I really want to continue to do with my shrinking commodity of time, once my current book is finished?

There is also the issue of being a commentarial spectator rather than directly involved in the action and making a difference in some immediate sense. One of our sons
Imperatives for Aspiring Social Scientists

recognition and success and see their accidental and environmental correlates; try and merge means and ends; appreciate dualities, polarities and ironies and the physical limits; stay engage à la Sartre with whatever moves you and doesn’t hurt others; keep the faith and the passion; come to terms with the transitory nature of memory-maps of biography and place with the quest for a life lived with truth, integrity, love, civility, beauty, humor, fun and challenge.

I am very appreciative of the greater time now for family, recreation, consumption and citizenship activities. I am thankful for the indulgence of imagination and the faded opportunities to pursue. But I am moving closer toward the leisure that might enable me not to feel like such a failure at woodworking and guitar playing.

acceptance of polarities and a deft wending of one’s way through their contradictions. But certainly not at a cost of having fun or denying one’s self a drink. Amidst the enduring pulls between the individual and the community, the national and the international, the earth and the world, ideals and practices, the present and the future, as W.C. Fields said, “A man’s got to believe in something.” His solution, “I believe I’ll have a drink” will work for some. But for others, salvation may lie in the acceptance of polarities and a deft wending of one’s way through their contradictions. But certainly not at a cost of having fun or denying one’s self a drink.

Climbing high up can bring hubris, but it also brings a view of the immensity of the fields wherein reputations may lie (with homage to Goffman 1956) or better perhaps don’t, you remain insular and parochial.

Reputations are not only perishable and short lived, but they are not very transferable across fads and fashions, disciplines, cliques and countries, nor translatable into other languages. You might be a hero on your block in our own time, but you tread on dangerous ground if you portage that reputation very far from home. Yet if you don’t, you remain insular and parochial.

I sit comfortably in park-like settings and write while listening to classical guitar music. I sometimes feel almost parasitic and a betrayer of Teddy Roosevelt’s stirring words about being in the arena. I know all the fine rationalizations about effecting climates of opinion and training students in the highest liberal arts critical tradition (whether those we teach or who read what we write). But it does seem more than a little removed and safe within the confines of the university—clever retorts, secret ballots for tenure, anonymous reviews, and with tenure, a job and salary whether one succeeds or fails.

In the roads not taken genre, I miss the risks, action and having a more direct influence on other’s lives that an alternative career would offer. At times I identify more with an unfavored character D.H. Lawrence (1993) described as “a buck of the King Edward school, who thought life was life and the scribbling fellows were somewhere else” than with the sedate life of the professor. Even granted all the good civicizational issues for the life of the mind, when you deal with social questions that concern you, impact matters. Most of us lack the energy, the means and the will to take our ideas to market. In contrast, the widely heard (if not always agreed with) George Soros, who almost got a PhD with Karl Popper, is correct in observing, “I have a platform because I made a lot of money. If I were just an intellectual, an obscure university professor I wouldn’t be saying these things and I wouldn’t be heard.” (Solomon 2006) Take it from an obscure university professor George, you got it right! Or rather you might be saying them, but no one beyond your sub-specialization would hear them and, with ever new cohorts appearing, long remember them.

Being out of the game brings some redefining of what is most important in life and of what success means. There is less need for occupational self-promotion and the courting of public exposure once you have had time to see how rapidly books go out of print and unreads journals are given or thrown away, —there is always a fresh morning paper, another edition of the six o’clock news and the arrival of the next issue of a journal. New scholarship replaces the old, only to be replaced itself. Reputations are not only perishable and short lived, but they are not very transferable across fads and fashions, disciplines, cliques and countries, nor translatable into other languages. You might be a hero on your block in our own time, but you tread on dangerous ground if you portage that reputation very far from home. Yet if you don’t, you remain insular and parochial.

Climbing high up can bring hubris, but it also brings a view of the immensity of the fields wherein reputations may lie (with homage to Goffman 1956) or better perhaps don’t, you remain insular and parochial.

I am very appreciative of the greater time now for family, recreation, consumption and citizenship activities. I am thankful for the indulgence of imagination and the faded opportunities to pursue. But I am moving closer toward the leisure that might enable me not to feel like such a failure at woodworking and guitar playing.

I continue with my academic projects, even though after forty-seven years there ought to be time off for good behavior. Yet, I am not quite at the same place as a recently retired colleague, who said, “I looked back on my career, declared victory and now am moving on.” There is still writing that I want to do and some fellowship opportunities to pursue. But I am moving closer toward the leisure that might enable me not to feel like such a failure at woodworking and guitar playing.

I am very appreciative of the greater time now for family, recreation, consumption and citizenship activities. I am thankful for the indulgence of imagination and the faded memory-maps of biography and place with the quest for a life lived with truth, integrity, love, civility, beauty, humor, fun and challenge.

A colleague near retirement asked me for advice. Bad move. As C.W. Mills said, “in the end a man must go to bat alone.”

To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition;
To know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. That is to have succeeded.

Amidst the enduring pulls between the individual and the community, the national and the international, the earth and the world, ideals and practices, the present and the future, as W.C. Fields said, “A man’s got to believe in something.” His solution, “I believe I’ll have a drink” will work for some. But for others, salvation may lie in the acceptance of polarities and a deft wending of one’s way through their contradictions. But certainly not at a cost of having fun or denying one’s self a drink. 38

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A colleague near retirement asked me for advice. Bad move. As C.W. Mills said, “in the end a man must go to bat alone.” 39 Yet as with temptation, I can resist anything but responding to such questions. To summarize some of this article—be in the moment. Don’t put off things you have wanted to do. ‘Let it be’ as the Beatles sang—both your expectations for, and your anger at others; be appreciative of all that has been, and continues to be, good in your life and in life; stay active within your physical limits; stay engaged à la Sartre with whatever moves you and doesn’t hurt others; keep the faith and the passion; come to terms with the transitory nature of recognition and success and see their accidental and environmental correlates; try and merge means and ends; appreciate dualities, polarities and ironies and the fascinating elements of the individual and the social in which individuals die, but the culture that nourished them and that they contributed to lives on and finally, stay curious and be filled with wonderment and laughter. Remember wherever you go, there you are and that is usually better than not being there.

Table 1: Some Moral Imperatives for Aspiring Social Scientists

- Develop the habits of critical thought, evaluation and observation
- Write with clarity, logic and vigor
- Write everywhere, all the time, on everything
- Have a fresh argument
- Write books don’t read them
- Take short cuts
- Learn how to be an effective public speaker
- Don’t be scriptocentric
- Disaggregate and aggregate
- Be wary of sociologists bearing over-broad generalizations
- Be wary of “Jack Webb-Badge 714 Just the fact ma’am” sociologists
- Avoid the dangers that can arise from rigidly taking sides in doctrinal debates over theory and method
- Diversity, don’t stay a specialist in one area too long
- Be problem and interdisciplinary as well as discipline focused
- Be wary of sociologists denying the desirability and possibility of scientific approaches to understanding society
- Treasure and develop the unique position of sociology as both a scientific and humanistic undertaking and should you choose not to straddle the fence, be tolerant of those sitting elsewhere
Table 2: Seven Characteristics of Success

1. It does not last.
2. You can never be successful enough (at least in your own eyes.)
3. The more success you have, the harder it becomes to reach the next level of achievement.
4. There is a diminishing-returns effect. For those with youthful success everything afterwards may savor of anticlimax.
5. Success may have costly and unintended side effects (apart from the price initially paid to achieve it.)
6. The correlation between ability, or merit, and success is far from perfect.
7. There is no reason to expect that what you do next will be better, by your own standards, than what you have done in the past or will necessarily bring equivalent or greater recognition and reward

Gary T. Marx | Back to Main Page | References

Notes


I had the good fortune to spend almost my entire academic career in Berkeley and Cambridge at institutions a recent Times of London Higher Education Supplement ranked as the three best universities in the world.

Looking back it seems strange and even disingenuous that I could be so taken with a few modest career downturns and moved enough to write the first of these kinds of article in 1990 about perceived failure. Of course I was writing about how it felt, something frequently only tenuously tied to how it is by some objective standard. A part of this was dramatic effect in essay writing and the appeal to others of stories about success and the fall from grace. Yet it also reflects a frame of reference conditioned by social location and, as we used to say, relative deprivation. In such high octane environments one looks up to those more successful in one’s time, although in the best of circumstances these overlap.

2. Such writing as a form of impression management also offers the chance to rewrite history—covering up or correcting one’s mistakes. Something Ben Franklin was accused of doing.

3. The latter was my father Donald. The desert land is now downtown Palm Springs. The restaurant was the Coronet. As a Midwestern migrant to California in the 1920s seeking fame in the film industry (with the added benefit of being able to pick oranges off of trees in winter), my father was not alone. He did find work as an extra in the film industry—as a laborer, following by a few years in the footsteps of John Wayne who began the same way. Wayne went on to bigger things. My father stayed at Warner Bros. moving sets around, although he did sing at least once on the radio. The glamour and opportunity Hollywood offered, however chimerical, elusive, illusory and tainted dies hard. Perhaps with the image of Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca in his mind, my father, wearing his own white linen sport coat (which I was draped in for my Senior Prom), wanted to be “maitre’d to the stars”. The restaurant did well for a few years, carried by a popular singer who refused to expand her repertoire of 5 songs. My father told her to add songs or be fired. Kay Starr (“Come On a My House”) then went on to a record contract with Capitol. My father went on to bankruptcy. I would love to understand why I can recall (or so strongly believe I can recall) short memorable lines of conversation. At the age of 8, I asked (to my parent’s surprise and consternation), “who is right?” My mother in the most serious tone this gentle woman could...

4. With respect to the latter, and being a part time, privileged, resident alien in Scottsdale of course offers problems as well—the biggest finding a place to park in the mega-malls, followed closely by trying to remember where one has parked.

5. The profession refers to Sociology or Criminology Incorporated—the organizations that promote the “professional” political and other interests of those who join them, including offering credit cards and life insurance. Their democratic structure gives all groups the chance to compete over the meager resources the profession controls, and a hunting license to seek out the impure. The discipline is a less tangible ethos or spirit of unfettered social inquiry carried out within the traditions of scholarship and sometimes against those of the discipline. The discipline owes allegiance to a more transcendent and higher set of individualistic, Enlightenment (or at least as our belief system holds, more enduring and universal) ideals, than to those of whatever political winds happen to be dominant at the time, although in the best of circumstances these overlap.

6. In the case of the latter, one might say thought for food.

7. Here we see competing needs for independence and community. It is important to keep moving in a state of almost perpetual homelessness. There are paradoxes to be confronted in saying “yes” to both freedom and connection, while seeing the dangers of too much or too little of either and avoiding both anomic and root strangulation. Paul Bowles (1949) image of the traveler (as against the tourist) who is on the move (whether physically ala travel and exercise or mentally ala changes in topic and perspective) offers one response. In this case the individual may be “somewhat homeless perhaps, but not heartless, staying...
fresh by keeping on the move. Life can be enriched by occupying multiple and changing physical and cultural worlds, like mercury or a boxer constantly in
motion and never able to be pinned down. The “on the road” ethos is a metaphor for much more than physical travel. New environments require and extend
attention. That check draws against the inflationary introspective account, with its risk of solipsistic and self-elegiac bankruptcy that may hit those over 50
particularly hard. Looking outward means not looking inward (although to never look inward is to commit the sin of the unexamined life). (Marx 2000).

8. The extent to which, taken together, they also run further is a challenging issue involving one’s view of the possibility of progress in social inquiry and whether it is
seen as a cumulative undertaking ala the natural sciences or as something else.

9. To take one example a student in a recent class said in describing the scene at a nightclub, “you can get whippets there.” That seemed curious and I asked why
would such a place be selling dogs? There was immediate laughter and the student explained the jargon for nitrous oxide, something previously encountered
only at a dentist’s office or unknowingly in cans of whipped cream. In my brief early career as a box boy I was very familiar with whipped cream cans. In the
1950s they came without safety seals and offered a quick sugar fix to those stocking refrigerated market cabinets from behind.

10. Descartes’ motto, “he lives well who is well hidden” also applies, although it conflicts with ideas of accountability and solidarity through openness.

11. In an age of academics as third rate, wannabe celebrities, instant media pundits who receive phone calls and emails from the media that say, “Professor I’m
working on a deadline can you get back to me within the hour?”; it is very easy to see the wisdom of my grandfather’s saying, “fools names and fools faces are
always seen in public places.”

12. This can also push toward work rather than leisure and can lead to a sharpening of priorities and more selectivity in what is worked on and what invitations are
accepted. I now try to only work on material that will inform the surveillance book I have been finishing for 10 years.

At the same time as noted elsewhere, there is a counter voice which says “hey, let it be”, it doesn’t matter that much, do what feels comfortable, you have done
enough. There is the joke about the old man who goes to see a urologist, complaining about the difficulty of urination. To the doctor’s question, “how old are
you?” The man responds, “80” and the doctor says—forget about it! You have pissed enough.”

13. The journey as experience and metaphor has been central since a boy scout trip across the U.S. in 1950 to the National Jamboree at Valley Forge and the
1960s on the road ethos from 1960 travels in Mexico onward. (Marx 2000)

14. Of course school yard athletes are not alone in having such feelings. Consider fellow UCLA graduate Bill Walton, among the best and most honored college
basketball players of the 20th century, re his 1974 season, “I look back at my college career as one of frustration, disappointment and ultimate embarrassment.
For us to give 4 games away out of our last 10 was just totally unacceptable, and I will never be able to erase the stigma, the stain from my soul about what could
have been.” (italics added) Ok Bill, but how about all that was? I think we need a theory about reference groups here. New York Times, March 26, 2007. B5.

15. I find such invidious designations silly and inappropriate in a professional society of equals.

16. The goals of liberal arts academic research, whether within disciplinary or interdisciplinary environments, contrast with the more pragmatic concerns of those
within (or seeking to join) criminal justice organizations. (Leo 1996, Deflem 2002)

17. My control, or at least common sense in doing nothing at the time, contrasts with the volatile Feuer who was notoriously lacking in impulse control, a philosopher
who earlier in his career actually got in a fist fight over a philosophical disagreement.

18. Awareness of the shelf life of reputations is another insight that comes with time.

19. A highlight here was meeting with Hubert Humphrey and hearing him use my ideas on the national media a few days later. Seeing my unacknowledged ideas
and phrases used on editorial pages also seemed appropriate.

20. On the virtue of persistence in the face of the odds in beginning a career see Ross 2005 and Shaw 2000.

21. This was in contrast to a comment in the files from another professor that same semester, “this is a very marginal student. I would be surprised if he receives a
master’s degree. He certainly will not receive a PhD.” Fortunately I did not see that until I was on the Berkeley faculty and dipped into my file one Sunday
evening. I did receive a B- in the class, but I partly blame the instructor. Re the term paper he said read Durkheim and tell us what you think he is saying. I did
just that with no argument or central question for analysis. I simply followed orders and did not have the slightest idea of what an original term paper looked like.
Was that my fault or the teacher’s for failing to communicate? Maybe both, but it introduced a certain caution in seeing evaluations of students absent a second
opinion, or with only one indicator. I feel the same way about the marked difference in my achievement levels on time pressured vs. untimed tests.

22. I wasn’t sure what she meant here since there actually was a singer named Marc Pearman who sang as Gary Marx with a group called the Sisters of Mercy.

23. Seeing what I was against helped me become clearer about what I was for. I have expressed this in 37 moral mandates that would characterize my ideal
department.

24. In the beginning I didn’t know that I would succeed and that good proportion of other graduates students were better educated and trained, and
more mature, smarter and insightful than I, if a bit square. Gradually I came to see that I could effectively compete and beyond the tangible symbols of that, I
was able to quickly verbally untangle some unseen aspects of complex social issues through distanciation and reflexive thinking. But sometimes the insights were
not grasped by others of a different turn of mind, intended humor went unheard or a serious remark was taken to be humorous. Clever interventions may be seen
as chattering class arrogance or simply be too clever for the audience. There can be a tension here. It is not only what you say, but how you say it. The issue
also applies to teaching—do you aim at the middle, the poorest students who might profit the most or the best students who may not even need you?

25. Among the most influential, distinctive and memorable is that of Erving Goffman, an enduring role model.

26. But things had started to change even by 1965 relative to the peaceful, integrated, drop-in efforts of the earlier period, in which coats and ties and dresses were
worn on picket lines and non-violence was both principled and strategic. I recall my shock and sense of loss in coming to campus in the fall of 1965 and seeing a
student demonstration? that involved smoking dried bananas peels on the steps of Sproul Hall while the Beatle’s sang, “We all live in a yellow submarine.”
That was one end of the disillusionment continuum anchored on the other end by the turn toward violent rhetoric and violence on the part of protestors and
authorities.

27. This is well put in lines from Brecht whose yellowed and brittle pages I still have from the Daily Cal of the early 1960s:

    find it estranging even if not very strange [and]
    We particularly ask you
    When a thing continually occurs –
    Not on that account to find it natural...

28. I have written on Goffman and Lipset as mentors in Marx 1984 and 2007 and on Smelser with Alexander, Marx and Williams 2003.

29. Or better how one remembers that. Note Proust’s observation that he offered a theory of the past not a record. Such recollections have more the quality of
Re her dated comment on Oakland, "there is no there there."

Of course while growing up there I had no conception of how bad it would appear from the vista of Berkeley in the 1960s. In the 1950s imbued with the myths of the promised land found at last, we felt superior to those snow and tradition bound in the Midwest and east. We not only had the ocean, we had Hollywood and all it represented.

Beyond the Hitching Post theater that only showed western films and endless drives up and down Hollywood Blvd. in the hope that the next group of girls we slowed down for would be available (they never were), I had a few vicarious Hollywood moments. My grandfather played golf with Groucho Marx, although they were not related. I tried out for the Al Jolson story and while I didn't get the part, I did get some small change for coming to the casting call. Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh came to our Purim carnival in the parking lot of Temple Israel of Hollywood. Our rabbi Max Nussbaum married Eddie Fisher and Elizabeth Taylor and Sammy Davis Jr. and Mae Britt. I have a copy of _The Wizard of Oz_ signed by "the wife of the author" and the father of a Sunday school teacher was the voice of the cowardly lion in the film version. Parts of _Rebel Without a Cause_ were filmed on my street and at the nearby Griffith Park Observatory. Piper Laurie once rented my grandmother's house above Sunset Boulevard and John Raitt (of the musical Oklahoma) almost bought our Los Feliz house. I had a brief social encounter with Kathy Kohner (AKA Gidget) and once almost took out the daughter of a famous film composer. My friend Noel Blanc succeeded his father Mel as the voice of Daffy Duck, Woody Woodpecker and of course Porky Pig. A brother of a good friend is now a very famous film star with a different name. Not even close to getting a cigar, but certainly growing up in Hollywood in the 1950s was a formidable experience, frequently relived now by seeing films on American Movie Classics.

The former writes, "and for Christ's sake don't ever go back. ...—not under any circumstances" "we can't ever go back to old things" or try to get the 'old kick' out of something...the old things are nowhere except in our minds now." Mellow (1992) p. 168.

Here I read from his facial expression when a family friend in offering advice to the recent college graduate, says, "Benjamin, one word: Plastics."

The centrifugal forces are far weaker today than when I entered the field and there seems to be less optimism and passion. The contrast with the late 1960s is striking. In one case I received more than 100 requests for a paper delivered at a conference and the discussion of social issues at sociology and political science meetings was far more intense and energized.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. Shame on the man of cultivated taste who permits refinement to develop into fastidiousness that unfit him for doing the rough work of a workaday world. Among the free peoples who govern themselves there is but a small field of usefulness open for the men of cloistered life who shrink from contact with their fellows...There is little use for the being whose tepid soul knows nothing of great and generous emotion, of the high pride, the stern belief, the lofty enthusiasm, of the men who quell the storm and ride the thunder."

http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/life/quotes.htm

OK Teddy, riding the thunder we all need edge work, but words give us the means to make sense of things and a division of labor may be appropriate across types of person, as well as within a career. Society would not necessarily be better with more talk and less action, but it certainly would be better with more talk before action and with more empirical, logical and moral analysis of the beliefs that under gird action.

This also reflects an ambivalence that is both generic given America anti-intellectualism and the specifics of my situation. Note the American expression, "those that can do, do those that can't teach."

In an earlier article I wrote of being "...the intensely driven, hardworking, competitive, ambitious person (like those I encountered early in my career) and the laid-back bohemian surfer of my California days; the intellectual interested in ideas for their own sake and one of the progeny of Karl Marx and C. Wright Mills who wanted to see ideas linked to change (perhaps a committed spectator, as Raymond Aron termed it); the quantitative and systematic sociologist and the journalist seeking to describe in language that people could understand what Robert Park called the big story; the scholar and the handyman; the athletic, river-running, beer-drinking, former fraternity man who could admit to still having some Neanderthal-like macho attitudes and feelings and the righteous carrier of a new gender morality...Instead of worrying about what I "really" was and what I valued most, I saw that I was probably more marginal than most people. I came to value being something of an invisible person and social chameleon, able to fit into, and move in and out of, different worlds. This particularly helps when one’s method requires taking the point of view of the other and the tentativeness of science.

Kipling's poem "If" which served as a powerful adolescent guide was among my first cognitive exposures to distanciation and marginality.

One study on having a happy retirement is encouraging here. A central factor is, "learning how to play again"—defined as gratifying activities that offer no economic gain, don’t hurt others and needn’t involve praise or recognition. Fun and games are defined as being ends in themselves. (Valiant and Mukamal 2001)
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