

Dec 3 2019 last notes Draft

**Final Words for DOING THE LORD'S WORK
: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE: Excavating the Familia
(Memory Scraps): AN EPISTOLAR**

The first time I went to school my mother told the teacher I taught myself to read at age four. All that got me was my own reading group, silent sustained reading ostracized from the other kids. I don't really know if I taught myself. My mother loved books. So did my dad. She seemed to be reading every time she had the chance in those moments of calm caring for four kids ages six to birth in the sweltering heat of Louisiana age 28, circa 1956. All I know is my mother loved to read. Sometimes I thought she loved books more than she loved me.

I didn't know it then but my true gift, if you will, was deep listening, and over time an acquired skill of detailed observation. Perhaps this was nothing more than the heightened sensitivity to compensate for my undiagnosed and nonlabelled learning disability. Some teacher might have noted that I had a "learning difference" but no one ever told me about it. In later years as I struggled to learn foreign languages which my parents seemed to master, I understood I had trouble encoding what I heard. Except in music. Like my Dad I had a "natural ear" and in every choir I sang in I could sing any note I heard with perfect pitch. But I had trouble remembering the words to a song and so at an early age became a prolific

hummer. At night I could easily discern frogs croaking in the bayou below our house through the constant whirr of the attic fan. And with my ear next to the heating vent in the floor I could make out my parents' muffled conversations in the den below. I could make out usually bits of conversational whispers and scraps of intelligible phrasing, that cobbled together, led to some reasonable and often unreasonable notions of what was being talked about. Years later my mother would label those adolescent quasi accurate interpretations as "Walter's logic," that often applied to much of what she disagreed with.

One evening after we were hugged and kissed and prayed over, I could hear guests coming into the house and settling in the den. I recognized the deep, baritone voice of the Reverend and Mrs. Aiken Taylor. Dr Taylor was senior pastor of Alexandria's First Presbyterian Church where my parents, I guess all of us, were engaged, teaching Sunday School, serving as an elder, singing in the choir, earning my five years perfect attendance pin. He was funny, kind, and serious- a good storyteller, his "sermons rang with the truth," my mother said. He had mesmerized me with his stories of growing up an "MK" (missionary kid) on the frontier of Brazil's Amazon basin. He was the only person I had ever met who had a pet monkey and python for childhood pets, and he had a black-white photo album to prove him. Of course, we would have believed him without proof, that's how much my parents respected them both.

#Could make out words assembled together like a scrabble game: Atlanta, Missions, Seminary, Church Support

#Several weeks later: Seemingly unrelated events: an almost new used 1957 Ford Del Rio Ranch station wagon; packaging materials from Atlas Van Lines; the 1958 World Book, 24 volumes bund in red "leather"

#move to Columbia Theological Seminary , Decatur, GA; July 1958 to two-bedroom apartment; Dad preps for ministry; Mom for Christian education; family candidate for "mission field" through Presbyterian "World Missions," class of 1961

#1st month of school in barbershop one Saturday with Dad; the school bully (a year older) comes in and sits next to me; starts hassling me, twists my nose; Dad watches from chair through mirror. Turns around and tells me to pay him back. Twist his nose or else. I do. Kid cries. Leaves, Barber says he's fatherless. Kid beats the crap out of me the next Monday. Dad gives me the old Marine/Presbyterian message: 1st time: Turn your cheek; 2nd time: turn the other cheek; 3rd time: beat the crap out of him

#Join Gray-Y through Decatur YMCA League in school, coached largely by seminarians. Year round: Football, B-ball, Baseball, Track for three years: become tenacious, fierce, competitive-play running back and catcher

#Summer 1959 (and 60) live in Anderson South Carolina. Beginning Fall 1959-Spring 1961 each Sunday leave at 5am and drive 125 miles to Andersen SC where Dad is "supply minister" for small church and 9am service. Then drive to Sandy Springs (close to Clemson) for 11am service. Often have lunch with different parishioners (mostly wealthy farmers) or in preparation for mission field, use Green Book to find restaurants and gas stations to stop at- "being different in different environments"- often welcomed, sometimes ignored.

January 1961-parents choose to go to Japan over Brazil, Congo, Korea; kids' education important; potential work in Hiroshima

steal white socks from Ham Ansley; prayer group parents

VIGNETTE 1# Summer MONTREAT, NC, 1961 Age 12

- *mission family "training" for six weeks

- *see film Swiss Family Robinson

- * break out in boils, hives, bedwetting (stress)

- *go to "doctor" Dr. Nelson Bell, former missionary surgeon to China; segregationist; father in law Billy Graham; daughter Ruth has tea for mother

- * therapy- Puritanical: You're oldest; your family "Doing Lord's Word," ministering to "heathen"; be a Marine's son; get your shit together son!

- *pays for me to go to right-wing boys summer camp, Camp Rackmount- on grounds of former Black Mountain College;

must give a five minute “testament” to younger boys on the mission field and serving the Lord (Dad helps me prepare)

by train to LA- stay with Dad’s cousin, James King Chorus; Disneyland; to San Fran, staying large home with ten other families going to Asia; see Willie Mays play at Candlestick Park; take British liner Orsova to Hawaii, Yokohama (August 15); stay at Tokyo Imperial Hotel (Frank Lloyd Wright)

to Kobe and move into mission compound at Yamamoto dori. Start Canadian Academy 1st week of September (1st thought_ diversity of kids: race, nationalities, languishes; “I love it!”; Kobe Union Church; parents language school (for two years)

VIGNETTE 2# SHINTO SHRINE, Kobe, Japan. Age 12 Sept. 1961 Began on Saturdays to explore neighborhood walking, by bike; find a large Shinto Shrine one Saturday morning (first three weeks in Kobe); seemingly vacant; from main buildings walk through Torii Gates (bird abode) symbolizing entrance from mundane/profane to sacred; upside of hill for 1 km; every hundred meters a small shrine with offerings of fruit and Japanese coin; eat all ‘mikan’ and take monies (just “dong the Lord’s work”; that night nightmares being attacked by guardian at entrance to shrine, the Komainu (lion-dogs); after church Sunday, borrow 100Y from mother fir school supplies buy mikan, return to Shinto Shrine and replace fruits and coins. Leaving Shrine encounter old priest, wo bows, smiles, and says in English, “Thank you for coming back son!”

The last time I saw him, he was leaving Hiroshima City on the way to Miyajima Island to buy a piece of god.