

The Work of a Middle-class Activist: Stuck in History.

I was born in 1945, midway between VE and VJ day. As I was growing up into political consciousness in the fifties, it was easy not to like parts of the world I saw around me. After all, I was an adolescent. It was also easy to take for granted all that my suburban life offered me. After all, I was an adolescent. What was not easy was to put the two together. In 2005 when I first wrote this essay and now in the middle of 2017, times were going awry, and some of my choices feel dangerously exposed and frayed. In the following morality tale, or rather tale in pursuit of morality, I will present the issues as they appeared, filled with the limitations, contradictions, and struggles of trying to make sense of the world as I went through it, making the limited choices life handed me.

Both my parents had known real hardship and injustice, immigrating with their families from the pogroms and famines of eastern Europe to the poverty of Brooklyn tenements just after the First World War. They both came into adulthood during the Great Depression. One of my grandfathers was a sweatshop tailor, with a sewing machine in the living room to do piecework. My mother nostalgically sang me picket songs: "The Shirtmakers Union is a no good union, it's a company union by the bosses...Dubinsky is our leader, we shall not be moved..." David Dubinsky was president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) from 1932 to 1966. My parents met at the Young Communist League and courted at party picnics. My father nearly was expelled from City College for raising money for the Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. It was clear what not to like in their world, and clear where the remedies lay if you were young, working class, Jewish in Depression-era New York. Struggling against injustice was struggling for the interests of yourself, your family, and friends.

There was another set of remedies, individual remedies, to protect yourself against injustice. So the college my father nearly got kicked out of, but graduated *magna cum laude* from, was a business school—the downtown branch of City College, later to become Bernard M. Baruch College. By the time I knew my parents, their membership in socialist organizations had lapsed, and my father was a storm window salesman, eventually to become partner in a small manufacturing company. When I was five we moved from Brooklyn to the post-war suburbs and my father drove us around in his Oldsmobile, then a black Cadillac with legendary tailfins. On Saturdays he brought me with him to work so I could earn spending money by packing hardware for door installation kits. I felt a tinge of fear that if instead of being the boss's son I were to become one of the minimum-wage hourly workers on the noisy and dangerous drill presses and fabricating machines.

So I learned the lessons of class from the top side. Even as my parents divorced, and my father went bankrupt trying to become a stock broker, then at age 48 died of a heart attack, I still benefited from post-Sputnik enrichment programs targeted at the middle class, hobnobbed with academically successful kids, graduated near the top of my suburban high school, and went on to the Ivy League—though needing help from scholarships and social security. My brother (who became a patent attorney) and I never doubted we belonged to the comfortable middle class from which we would meritocratically make our way (though anxious about how easy it would be to fall into the victimized classes). The sociopolitical remedies our parents sought had gotten no

further than New Deal bottom-slung safety nets, but individual remedies had brought their children up to the professional classes.

Nonetheless, the social and political problems remained for me to notice as I grew up on the quiet streets of Long Island. Television brought the McCarthy hearings and the investigations of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, Edward R. Murrow exposés, and school desegregation confrontations. While Eleanor Roosevelt told us to light candles, newspapers brought ground-zero target maps of the New York metropolitan area, and school brought duck-and-cover drills. My father's brokerage company underwrote the stock offering of a fallout-shelter producer. Even Broadway musicals brought critiques of racism, class exploitation, militarism, and international animosity; off-Broadway productions of Brecht brought a great deal more. Enrichment programs brought me into Manhattan where newsstands sold me left-wing magazines not found in Bellmore.

The world clearly needed to be made a better place. I declared my allegiance by pasting SANE cartoons on the school walls during bomb drills, writing history papers on Marx, English papers on Lorraine Hansberry and Mark Twain (safe beginnings), then Langston Hughes and Bertolt Brecht. I wrote a paper on the psychological and social consequences of nuclear devastation. I joined civil rights picket lines around local restaurants and bused to Washington for marches. I listened to lots of folk music.

But the biggest gesture toward humanity was to commit myself to science, because we all knew that scientists were morally pure, rational, and out to make the world better—both the US and the USSR agreed on that. Although knowing I was benefiting from post-Sputnik national security programs and aware of the ethical dilemmas of scientists (I and my friends were quite firm that we would never work on bomb technology—after all, we did read the *Bulletin of the Union of Concerned Scientists*), not until much later did I clearly understand the military-industrial reasons both governments invested so much ideological and financial capital in science.

Though as an undergraduate my interests turned from science, I maintained my commitment to knowledge and the professional life to transform society. What I had seen of my father's life left me with a bitter taste about the shallow satisfactions and sharp dealing of business. Of course, in school we had read *Death of a Salesman*. I could see, nonetheless, that money did keep you from being the victim of society and allowed your children to enjoy the benefits of the moderately privileged classes. The professional life, and especially the protected professional life of professors, offered a way to avoid victimage and victimizing. From the Marxian perspective that work is what we do to transform the world to make it more habitable, I was trying to resolve the tension in my parents' lives. How could I make my life and the lives of those immediately around me more habitable without making it less habitable for others? How could I in fact realize what we had been high-mindedly told, that all our fates depended on each other?

This tension was to pull at me once more, as my undergraduate wanderings brought me to the humanities to work on my personal problems. When I asked what kind of life devotion to literature would lead me to, I could come up with no good answers—only devotion to the words of someone long ago, who was no wiser or kinder than anyone else, but likely devoted to outworn aristocratic beliefs. Nor could I answer for

myself what professing those words to students would do to make this a better world. Even satire and critique seemed to me saving your conscience by despising others.

I was also torn and unhappy because of the hovering presence of the Vietnam War draft that monitored my every decision. While I protested and marched and talked with draft counselors, I was not yet ready to go underground or give up my professional niche. During an exploratory trip to Canada, my draft board breathing down my neck, I was overcome by outrage that I was being forced to give up my way of life. Powerless to stop the outrages to the world, having power only to keep myself from immediate complicity, I was thrown back to being outraged by the loss of my personal privileges. Brecht's lines came back to me: "*Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral*—First feed the face, then quote right and wrong."

So here is the melodramatic moment of deliverance. After I spent a year sequestered in grad school sponsored by a National Defense Education Act Fellowship (and you don't believe that the humanities are ideological?) becoming increasingly morose about a literary career, the government ended all graduate student deferments. The only alternative I found to boot camp, jail, or Canada, was teaching elementary school in inner city Brooklyn, through an emergency credentialing program. What could be more of a deliverance—a way to avoid complicity in the war, a way to make the world better by overcoming racial and class inequities, a way to privilege education and knowledge, and a way to maintain a meager, but nonetheless middle class salary and professional identity. A way that almost seemed plausible given my summer jobs in Headstart programs and camp counseling.

In truth, I knew very little about teaching and the summer crash program did little to prepare me. On the other hand, it was the year of the teaching as social action books—Herbert Kohl's *Thirty-Six Children*, Jonathon Kozol's *Death at an Early Age*, and James Herndon's *The Way It 'Spozed to Be*. These books gave me some sense of the classroom and some classroom tricks, but much more a stance towards teaching and a model for understanding the kids. Then there was the exhilaration at the end of the summer, just before I started work, of the Chicago Democratic Convention, getting tear-gassed, charging barbed wire trucks and chanting "the whole world is watching." What did we need conventional classroom wisdom for?

Things got even more complicated and exhilarating. I was assigned to PS 93K, in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, near the corner of Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues and in the shadow of the elevated train that every eight minutes shook the windows of the apartments of the most disrupted and distressed families in the school. The first day of school was also the first day of the divisive Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teacher's Strike over community control. Although unions were an article of faith to me, I saw the community advocates were correct, that the union in the most difficult schools protected the interests of the teachers at the expense of the students. Community control offered some hope of making the schools accountable to the families the schools were supposed to serve. So I started my first day of teaching as a scab. With a community group and two more senior teachers (and the aid of an enormous bolt cutter), we unchained the gates of the school and "liberated" it (as we said in those days). High on political adrenalin, I spent the next two hours trying to amuse 60 kindergartners and first graders in an improvised lesson on upside-down and inside-out. For two months,

until the strike was resolved, we improvised, and I moved around grades—I hardly remember the chaos, but we maintained the politically necessary fiction that the school was in operation without the union teachers.

At the end of the strike I was braced to be fired by the returning principal. But the principal was greeted at the door by a large funeral wreath sent by someone in the community. He turned around, a community appointed principle took over, and I had my job for the rest of the year. I was ostracized by all the teachers except for those two who opened the school. A new third grade was formed for me from the children the other teachers wanted to get rid of. All the supplies I received were a ream of crumbling yellow paper and a handful of copies of a Dick and Jane reader. I was given advice on how to get the children to sit quietly. It was a year before Sesame Street was to debut and Bank Street had barely begun to produce its inner city reading series. So I improvised. A local used book store owner would buy children's books in bulk and sell them to me for pennies above his cost; I left them at the back of the room, to be used in class, to be taken home, to be stolen. To produce class reading the whole class collaboratively composed (that's what we would call it today, but then it was just a lot of screaming and jumping up and down) a script for the then popular Crusader Rabbit cartoon. The kids knew those words, understood the story lines, and could read the scripts we wrote. I bought a box of spirit masters and reams of paper, and liberated a key to the copy room. Every morning I would get up at five a.m., and rapidly compose directly on the typewriter onto the Spirit Master that day's episode of the Marcia and Willie stories—basic vocabulary inner city adventures that the class could relate to. I also made some math work sheets and transcribed the previous day's Crusader Rabbit group writing. I got to the school a half hour before other teachers arrived, so I could break into the copy room and print this all off. Some days after school I was naive enough to visit unescorted the houses of the children who were missing class; it was obvious from the junkies in the hallways, urine in the stair wells, nodding-out mother, and train rumbling every eight minutes why the kids had problems. I don't know that my visits did any good, except to get the kids another beating. I did manage to avoid being mugged and I learned how bad some kids lives could be. On Saturdays I took three or four kids to museums. And then I collapsed until 5 a.m. the next Monday.

I don't know what I accomplished, but it did at least feel honest, and I survived the year. However, my class was far too noisy and unconventional for the community chosen principal, and I was again fired. Again the community stood up for me, and I got rehired into a sheltered program for kids with emotional problems. Again I improvised, but had the support of a team. Some kids made real progress, and others were deeply troubled and I could do little with them. Again I was fired for not following the rules, the way it 'spoized to be. In 1970 I took that as a badge of radical honor. By that time I also was sufficiently an emotional and physical wreck to get a 4F draft classification.

I came away from those difficult and transformative years with an important lesson. From those children who succeeded in school I could see how literacy transformed minds, personal bearing, and place within society. And for those who didn't I could see the enormous costs. As I watched my third graders move into fourth grade, I could see those who would make their way in schooling and those who would choose the streets. They were already getting tough. I could see chaotic first graders turning into

students as they caught on to reading and writing. I also realized how fortunate this privileged child of the middle class and Ivy League had been, and how different my experience was from the meager, painful educational scraps offered to the kids of PS 93K. I understood literacy was something an adult could devote a life to, something that would help people and communities—something that might even ameliorate race and class divides. However, because composition was still unformed as a field and I was ignorant of the possibilities in education, I returned to graduate school in literature—for want of any better idea what to do with myself.

After a rapidly written dissertation on Renaissance poetry, I landed a part time job at Baruch College, City University of New York. This soon turned into a regular position funded by an equal opportunity program tied to the recent open admissions policy. For the next nineteen years I taught in the same building my father studied in, helping an ethnically diverse, but homogeneously poor and working class, group of students follow the same path of upward mobility my father had. I was happy to know my job was to teach writing to those students who had never had that opportunity before—in a few years Mina Shaughnessy was to help us label these students "Basic Writers." Some of them seemed the older cousins of the children I had just taught in Bed-Stuy, but only the ones who had succeeded to make their way through a failed school system. Though graduating in the upper parts of their class (large numbers never graduated), some were reading at a sixth grade level, writing at the third grade. I saw my task as sharing the cultural capital my fortunate education had given me. I thought of it as spilling the beans on class secrets. I began to unpack what it was that I knew that allowed me to do well at elite institutions. But I also knew enough of their lives that I could not, should not assume they had the same experience, motives, knowledge I had. As savvy human beings they brought plenty to the classroom, but not the same things I did. So my teaching started in two places, looking at the students, what they knew and could do. Then looking at what I knew and could do. The pedagogy was to try to bring the two together. Bring their energy, concerns, knowledge, skills, communicative impulses into the academic place I knew well, and provide the tools so they could take possession of it.

One thing led to another in terms of pedagogy and research, leading me to the ways students used reading to write, the ways their writing and reading were located within disciplines, and the advanced literate practices of the disciplines and professions that provide the high end of aspiration and criteria. This is a story I have told elsewhere in more academic contexts, and the traces are in my publications. This work proceeded through constant engagement with the student writers in my classrooms, almost all of whom were seriously motivated once they trusted I was offering them something real and useful. They were wonderful to work with and their motivations, personalities, and individual growth kept me attuned no matter how many times I taught the first year writing courses, no matter how many papers I graded. Soon the issue became more than survival in college and the economic mobility offered by a degree; it became the increasing sophistication of thought, valuing of knowledge, and maturity of judgment that came with writing that engaged with the knowledge the university offered them. Predisposed by my earlier faith in the sciences and professions, I began to see the work of disciplines as themselves enriching all our worlds, solving problems, fostering cooperations, and improving lives. My pedagogic mission expanded from working-class

mobility to literacy as part of the infrastructure of communication, knowledge, and society. Again this motive can be clearly seen in my published research, theory, and pedagogy.

This appreciation of the value of writing and its engagement with academic knowledge has led me to act beyond advancing the particular lines of research and thought I have become attached to. I have become increasingly involved in discipline building activities. This is another lesson drawn in part from Mina Shaughnessy who established some of the first institutions of the field, the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, the *Journal of Basic Writing*, and then sponsoring Harvey Wiener, Ken Bruffee and Bob Lyons in forming the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors. I particularly saw a need for building the research and theory of the field, and thus have started study groups, founded the Research Network Forum, instigated discussions leading to the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition, served as lead faculty member in the Dartmouth Summer Seminars on writing research methods, developed the Writing Research Across Borders conferences, and established the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research. I have also taken on many editorial roles, from forums to edited volumes, to book series. These editorial roles have provided the opportunity to mentor newer researchers, to foster exciting new work, and to gather collected learning about writing in methods, handbook, and reference guides projects. While these projects may seem narrowly academic, I see them as continuations of an activist commitment to make the world more habitable by advancing the cause of writing. I believe many of my colleagues in the teaching, research, and theory of writing share this commitment and will understand why I claim this academic work as political.

This commitment has also led to struggles in academic politics. Like many in composition, I have had to fight (with incomplete success) to create institutional place to serve students well, to make English departments and universities respect and provide resources for the work of writing, to bring more progressive ideas of writing to campus requirements, to have publications in composition accepted for tenure and promotion, to have universities hire professionals on professional lines to lead the work, and to create graduate programs to advance the field. These issues have been a struggle on every campus I have worked and every campus I have visited. The particulars change and the frustrations accumulate, but on every campus there has been progress, and in the last five decades the profession as a whole has made enormous progress. I feel great pride in working with colleagues across the United States and now internationally in bringing changes to the teaching of writing, impacting not only every college student, but every child in every language arts class. While those in the profession may have very different views of what is important about writing, what theories should apply, or how knowledge of writing should be advanced, we all share a deep experience of the power of writing, and we have all shared in the great struggle of making this new field—a field devoted to improving all people's abilities to think, communicate, and mobilize knowledge for their own purposes in their own words.

The consequence of finding a professional commitment and life so satisfying to my activist impulses was, however, for many years a waning of my overt political life. I had paid at the office. I always voted, sometimes gave money, fumed at TV, was riveted by Watergate hearings, occasionally knocked on doors for candidates or turned up at a

town meeting. I recycled and didn't buy gas-guzzlers. I treated politics as a spectator sport of the comfortable and secure middle class. No matter how the vote turned out, my salary gradually increased, bank account accumulated, and publications list grew. The question that troubled us in the sixties, whether we could work in the system, seemed to have ironed itself out. I saw enough other good people working laudable corners of the system that I could keep alive the belief that in the long run progressive causes moved progressively, especially if thoughtful, educated, generous minded people found their way into positions of power.

Nonetheless, the rightward drift of the country; the failure of any ideology to restrain the most unfettered and rapacious versions of free market capitalism after the collapse of the Soviet empire; the increasing power and irresponsibility of multinational corporations, deregulated here and above the law of any country, so powerful as to dictate national policies around the world; the strange alliance between a bullying religious right and these corporate interests; the narrowing ownership of the media; a Republican party so empty of political morality that it was ready to corrupt the entire system for short term advantage, all the while we were ignoring impending environmental and resource catastrophes—these things started to crowd my suburban academic dream. Bill Clinton I saw as Horatio at the bridge, holding these dark forces at bay, but so preoccupied by them that he could get little else done. The last bulwark seemed to be collapsing with the stolen 2000 election. I had a brief hope when the early months of the Bush regime were so corrupt and inept that popular support was falling and the country rapidly seemed to tire of a kleptocratic corporate oligarchy. But when 9/11 came, I feared not another attack—after all, we were just learning that American exceptionalism did not grant an exemption from the insecurity that much of the world lived under for much of the time—but that we would be caught up in an emotional spiral of violence that would escalate hostilities, brutalize our nation, and tear apart the international cooperation needed for pressing global problems. I was actually heartened by a brief period of national maturity, with the media asking hard questions, and people who had never traveled overseas recognizing the complexities of the world, wondering who we were and how we were perceived by others. But then Georgie got his gun and turned our confusion and fear into hate. Like in a bad Western, we were in a corner and going to shoot our way out of it. To where? An Empire. The world had to be made convenient for the U.S. Afghanistan was perhaps acceptable as an extended police action, doing what was necessary to gather criminals and their accessories, but when Bush began to make sounds about Iraq, I knew I could no longer just yell at my television, if just for my psychic well-being and sense of integrity. We were losing the country in the name of a free-market dystopia spiced by religious hopes of final days.

Fortunately, in Santa Barbara I was surrounded by a community that had long been activist. We almost immediately began a series of marches opposing the war, and were early to join the over two hundred cities, towns and counties and states to pass both anti-war and defence of civil rights resolutions. It was easy to join in, especially as the internet had made spreading the word and logistics much easier. It also provided the news not carried by the media. On campus, a group of faculty and staff formed to support student leaders, who soon emerged to organize teach-ins, lectures, forums, concerts, poetry readings, vigils, walk-outs, days of reflection. We saw this well within our educational roles to foster discussion of major issues and provide opportunities for

the growth of future leaders. How could we remain silent and allow the campus to remain silent when major issues of the future of our nation and the future of the world were at stake? Again the internet proved powerful as we created a local list-serve, still in operation, to keep us informed of the latest news. We were lucky to have on campus experts on international law, the Middle East, and social movements. I could add a little rhetorical analysis into the mix.

Although we took our first moves from the sixties play book, we improvised with no unified programmatic agenda beyond opposing the war, joined in solidarity with tens of millions other nationally and internationally. It was a passionate rejection of policies that moved us and a passionate commitment to peaceful solutions for the world that drew us together. Seeing the power of these new communities built around a passion for peace and facilitated by the internet, I challenged the community of rhetoricians to get involved on a professional list serve. The response was large, and almost immediately we were able to establish the Rhetoricians for Peace list-serve, which enabled newly bonded colleagues to create an information table and discussion resources for the 2003 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, during which, fatefully, the U.S. began bombing Baghdad. This energized community became a formal organization, creating workshops, endorsing resolutions, building a website with resources for teaching and learning about the rhetoric of war and peace, (special thanks to webbuilder Randi Cauthen and teaching resource coordinator David Stacey), and providing support for colleagues isolated in hawkish parts of the country. At our workshop at the 2004 CCCC, Harriet Malinowitz fostered the idea of a national 1984 reading and discussion, which rapidly won the endorsement of the Conference and the NCTE. The Rhetoricians for Peace continues through today with its discussions and workshops.

The Obama years provided some respite by showing some understanding of the complexity of the world and our place in it, a commitment to act on climate change despite Congressional resistance, a respect for democratic principles and human rights, and efforts to serve the needs and provide opportunity for the vulnerable. Political pressure and action became possible within ordinary processes, sometimes in the streets, but more often through meetings and programs. Even Black Lives Matter moved from the streets to the media and the courts to push back against entrenched racism. From a personal perspective, I felt my work on literacy in the US and increasingly in international contexts continued to pull on the arc of justice, and I could return to giving at the office. Yet, the arrival of the Trump administration shows how fragile gains can be. The damage Trump is wreaking domestically and internationally has discovered places G.W. Bush and Cheney never imagined. Peace seems on the retreat. The Iraq has left a shell of a country and destabilized the region. Afghanistan continues in turmoil, Syria is in chaos, and Trump bellicosity is heating up situations with Iran and North Korea. Urgent action on climate change is threatened by Trump's intention to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement. Corporate greed and deregulation are winning the day again. Income inequality is only going to increase. The future of health care and other social programs is filled with uncertainty. Xenophobia and racism have surged. The electoral process may have been irremediably corrupted. In such a situation, language education seems a slow and tenuous project—even more so when the

governmental “education reforms” have made the conditions for serious language education near impossible in K-12 and threatened to seriously dampen open communication on university campuses.

Resistance has become the word, but it is difficult to know where one can dig in and find some traction. Electoral politics seem to offer little hope for new directions, action in the streets does not seem to work. Protection of what can be salvaged of rights advances through the courts and institutional action seems to offer the only viable strategies for survival in the moment. Beyond supporting those organizations that know how to use legal action and exert group pressure to preserve rights, I do not know where and how to act. I, along with many others, watch the news, horrified at what is going on, and seeking hope in the drama of investigations. Yet who knows what will happen in this fast evolving and unpredictable story. It is an odd kind of optimism that Trump is even more chaotic, ineffective, and prosecutably corrupt than I could have imagined and the dissension he arouses is leaving his agenda and party in disarray. Yet his erratic, despotic, mendacious temperament that respects no limits—not even the respect hypocrisy shows towards laws, values, and customs—threatens even the basis of our democratic institutions and culture. So illusory optimism and hope float above a sea of pessimism and dread.

Nonetheless, I live in the protective bubble of a progressive state within a secure position in a progressive university with progressive students, so while the urgency I feel is moral and empathetic to those under immediate threat, I do not feel the urgency of personal threat. The personal remedies are ever more distant from the social and political ones. I do not know what I can do except watch, support investigative journalism and rights organizations, make symbolic gestures of solidarity, and wait for those moments when new realities worth acting on will be born.

When I first agreed to write this essay in 2004, I had hoped to tell a triumphal story moving from youthful social commitment to professional contribution, then using the skills and position I had gathered to meet political challenges. When I actually wrote it in 2005, as I turned sixty, I was left with the problem of my adolescence—too easy to see what is wrong with the world, too easy to take my privileged life for granted. How could I reconcile keeping my little corner of the world habitable, if I live at the expense of the turmoil elsewhere? How would it even be possible? What were the actions that will allow me to see my life as honorable? What was a future of activism that made sense? When I revised the essay in 2009, though I had a bit more hope, those same questions stayed with me. In 2017, now in my seventies, these questions have become even more despairingly pressing.

Twenty-five years ago a foolish wag declared the end of history. Fifty years ago, struggling with the politics of Vietnam war and the draft it dawned on me (duh!) that we all lived in history, that history is what unfolds around us by our being part of it. If we must resign ourselves to being in history, we have no choice but to be active in it in the ways our own dim and flickering lights dictate. I guess this is what you call activism. I hope that the good my generation has done is not undone, or our own contradictions exposed nakedly so quickly that we are emptied of purpose while we are still around. On the picket lines of my youth, I remember singing politically rewritten gospels—“Keep your eye on the prize, your hand on the plow, hold on.” “Gonna hold up the blood-

stained banner, gonna hold it up until we die.” Where is the picket line? What is the prize? What banner?

Since I was a teenager, I had been meaning to write Pete Seeger, who had been singing bravely since his early days in the Weavers, even in the face of McCarthy red-baiting and dark times in the cold war. My parents told me they brought me to visit his upstate New York home even before I remember. At every stage in my life I would draw courage and energy from his concerts and recordings, his anthems of freedom and endurance and joy. In early 2003, as I became engaged in activism around the Iraq War, I wrote him a long and rambling letter about what he had meant to me. He sent me a postcard. The picture side was the Milky Way, with a little arrow at one of small dots: “You are here.” On the back he wrote, “You keep singing, teaching. Who knows? Stay well, Pete” And he drew a banjo.

Thanks Pete. I’m here, still singing, teaching, still trying to channel your force.