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CHAPTER 46

Magical Moments and Places: Part I

Probably everyone has magical moments from the past, sometimes the far distant past, that pop in as thoughts uninvited and unexpected. With a strict regime of elevating my legs six or seven times a day for 40 minutes each time, I have had increased time for recalling magical moments. The vignettes are vivid and in great detail, including sounds and smells. However, the moments are brief and are only loosely connected with what happened before and after them.

Brief Meeting

One particularly vivid memory is almost entirely detached from events before and after it occurred. During World War II, I had taken a bus to State College, Pennsylvania, the location of Penn State University where Jeannie and I had met and where she was still a student. I only had part of the day before I had to catch a return bus to the US Navy facility where I was stationed. In my remembered moment, we were sitting on a tiny grassy bank surrounded by trees and just above a railroad track on a warm, sunny day. While we were sitting there, the coal train passed on the single track. We waved to the two people in the locomotive and they waved back. I have tried to remember how we happened to be at that magical spot and what we did when we left it — but recalling those facts are a total failure. Jeannie and I met in October 1941 at Penn State just before World War II began, a period of turbulent times. However, that brief period of time, probably less than one hour, was an idyllic moment that remains in my memory, and my subconscious sometimes sends me back. Even though I cannot recall what happened before or after the moment, that brief time was perfect!

Climb Any Mountain

Another magical moment involves one of the pictures on the home page of my website. Jeannie and I had hiked up one of the mountains around Rustler's Gulch near Gothic, Colorado, with two friends from Blacksburg, Virginia. The summer day was splendid and the view was spectacular! In the picture, Jeannie is pointing out and naming some of the mountains, all of which have great names. Every time I look at that picture, I remember that day and looking down at the splendid valley below and around at the tops of the mountains. I am reminded of the years up to and including 1994 when both Jeannie and I could still hike in those mountains. We saw all the wonders of nature on those hikes — swarms of hummingbirds visiting the flowers in an alpine meadow, the alarm signal of the tiny pikas at the foot of a rock slide, the eagles gliding far overhead, the elk on a distant mountain slope, the marmots on a meadow near Copper Creek trail to Copper Lake, the pack rats in a small cliff, a water ouzel diving for insect larvae in the East River, the tiny flowers in high alpine meadows, the barn owls resting high in a pine tree, and beavers frantically repairing their dam after a flash flood (Jeannie threw small branches to them, which they quickly accepted). In the assisted living facility where I have used a walker since 2002, I am blessed with these magical moments!

Family Gatherings

When I was a boy, most family members lived a short distance from each other. My father's parents lived one block away, and my mother's parents lived in Philadelphia, a train ride of about one-half hour. My father's sister, Aunt Margaret, and her husband and son lived with her parents (it was the depression era). My mother's family all lived in Philadelphia or in nearby suburbs, with the exception of Aunt Margaret and Uncle Walter, who lived first in Manhattan, Kansas, and then in Salt Lake City, Utah. Since my father could obtain free coach passes on all US railroads, we visited this aunt and uncle once in each place.

However, after World War II, many families, especially academic families, became widely separated. Our four children were educated in distant colleges and universities, except for Duncan, who received his BS at Virginia Tech (although he has two graduate degrees in Florida). After graduations, the children lived at times in Michigan, Washington State, California, Texas, Maine, and Florida.

Consequently, Jeannie and I had a magical week each year for over a decade when the entire family, including grandchildren, met from Christmas through New Year's Eve at St. George Island on the Gulf Coast about 70 miles from Tallahassee, Florida. Except for the first time, when I rented only one beach cottage, we had two adjacent

beach cottages. Jeannie and I watched our grandchildren grow up and play with each other, and the entire family got reacquainted. We mostly swam, except on very cold days, walked on the beach, and just enjoyed being together. One cool day, we walked on the beach to the inlet on the opposite end of the state park. The walk was about six miles each way. On the long table in my current living room, opposite my writing table, are two pictures from one cool day walk. Jeannie and I are both wearing wind breakers and we are raising our arms in exultation after reaching the inlet — Jeannie's high and mine less high; perhaps I was contemplating the return trip.

The Last Family Week

The last entire family get together was from Christmas through New Year's Day 1999. Jeannie's Alzheimer's was becoming apparent, and we all worried about taking her to Florida. That year, we had three adjacent cabins in Bluestone State Park in West Virginia, which is just across the state line from Blacksburg. I drove the hour trip into Roanoke to pick up Duncan and his wife Debbie at the airport in the 4-wheel drive Isuzu Trooper — it was that kind of day. We picked up Jeannie in Blacksburg and apprehensively left for the Bluestone State Park because driving was a challenge, especially on the secondary road to the park. Each cabin did have an inviting fireplace, and the grandchildren enjoyed using toboggans. The highlight of this gathering was New Year's Eve when the teenagers demonstrated their latest dances. I have memories of Jeannie, her face alight with joy, watching the dancing.

Our Hidden Stream

My father owned a small cottage in Surf City, New Jersey, between the Atlantic Ocean and Barnegat Bay. I had a small wooden boat with a 2.5-horsepower outboard motor. Barnegat Bay had some tiny islands that were used as nesting sites for one of our favorite birds, the skimmer — gulls that fly over the water with their lower beak in the water. When they locate a fish, they snap the upper beak down on it and fly back to the nesting site to feed their hungry chicks. With hungry youngsters to feed, the activity on and around the island was busy but purposeful — each bird flew directly to a particular nesting site, put food in the gaping mouths, and went out again for more fish.

One day while exploring the mainland side of Barnegat Bay, we found a small stream deep enough to run the boat up for about one-fourth mile. From there we walked on the sand bottom for about another one-fourth mile. The banks were heavily vegetated and the water was cool and refreshing. No traffic noise intruded and we could hear only the sounds of the birds. Because of the long ride across the bay, with just a 2.5-horsepower outboard motor, Jeannie and I only visited this peaceful oasis once or twice each summer, but it was always a memorable experience. At present, Barnegat Bay is in ecological decline. Degradation has been the story of our lives with ecosystems; we had to seek relatively or almost entirely natural systems when the ones we were fond of became less attractive. When we moved to Lawrence, Kansas, and then to Blacksburg, Virginia, we only returned to Surf City once. The area was crowded, and we were told that access to the beach was restricted.

Our Old Gatehouse

Our first house was a tiny tract house in Plymouth Valley, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. It had three tiny bedrooms and a detached garage on a very large lot, and a large empty tract of land adjoined our lot because a large electric power line was on it. When I had completed my PhD, we learned that some very old houses were available in Gladwyne with wonderful locations. The school system was superb. We contacted a real estate broker and were sent to a gatehouse on an estate where the main house had not been occupied for many decades, but the gatehouse had always been rented. It sat on 2.5 acres of a wooded area just down the hill from the Philadelphia Country Club. The first floor was stone and the second was cedar wood shingles. When we went to see it, we observed a deer, a fox, a pheasant, and several rabbits. The realtor had given us the wrong key, and even though we were unable to get inside, we told the realtor we wanted to buy the house. The lot was mostly old trees, and huge iron, ornamental gates were attached to two stone pillars with a hand carved door between one of the stone pillars and the gatehouse. The house was in one corner of the property, about 30 feet from the boundary of a huge empty field. The front of the house was only about 15 feet from the road and only two other houses sat on Woodmont Road in 1953. Across the road was another huge field with some trees, but no houses. A large, old yew tree was between the large living room window and the road. I had easy access to the newly completed Schuylkill Expressway. In those days, I could get to the Academy of Natural Sciences parking lot in 25-30 minutes since no traffic lights hindered the entire trip.

Our gatehouse was the tradesman's entrance to "Woodmont," the estate built by Alan Wood, Jr., which had been unoccupied for many years before being purchased by Palace Mission, Inc. to serve as the primary residence of Father Devine, a religious leader. The huge mansion is now a National Historic Landmark (http://www.upspring.com/palace-missiion-inc-gladwyne).

Before purchasing the house, we asked that the easement on the private road leading to the estate be removed because we had young children and the main entrance to the estate was on Country Club Road. Palace Mission, Inc., graciously honored our request, and all our interactions with their staff were most cordial. When our

daughter Heather took her children to see the house where she had lived from birth, she was graciously invited to see her former bedroom.

Picture 1 (http://www.libertynet.org/fdipmm/word3/51012505.html) shows the gatehouse —with a new garage and the gatehouse painted white. When we lived there, the stones on the first floor were not painted white, neither were the second floor shingles. The stone pillars and the hand carved door are still there, but the picture does not show the lovely wrought iron gates. The original chimneys remain. Most important, the wonderful trees are still there. Picture 2 (http://www.maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&cp=33&gs_id=11&xhr=t&qscrl=1&nord=1&rlz=1) shows the trees in the area — the driveway to the gatehouse is on the right between the two Woodmont Road labels.

In Picture 3 (http://www.google.com/maps?hl=en&cp=33&gs_id=11&xhr=t&gscrl=1&nord=1&rlz=1), the balloon "A" marks the location of the house. The Schuylkill River is in the upper left-hand corner, and next to it is the Philadelphia Expressway – Route 76. I can visualize the area with most the houses removed, and it becomes the magical place where we lived for well over a decade. It was also special because it is the only house that Jeannie and I, plus Karen, Stefan, Duncan, and Heather, occupied together as a permanent residence.

Picture 4 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Woodmont_Moses_King_1902.jpg) shows "Woodmont," the Alan Wood, Jr. mansion (built in 1891-1894, William Price, architect). I still remember our first sight of the gatehouse — we knew it was right for us immediately. We did add a bedroom and bath on the side not shown in Picture 1. The addition had a large picture window overlooking the woods.

The gatehouse was where our family forged strong bonds, and the place from which we confidently set out on great adventures such as summers at Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL) and University of Michigan Biological Station (UMBS) and, finally in 1966, to a life in universities where I could carry out transdisciplinary research. During talks the week of Thanksgiving 2011 when Stefan and Heather were visiting, we decided that the gatehouse was our most magical home. Karen and Duncan would surely agree. For all of us, it will remain a magical place.

Our "Tree House"

Jeannie and I lived in our Bishop Road, Blacksburg, Virginia, home for 29 years. Before that, we lived in a large, new, comfortable tract house that we had bought without seeing. It was the only available house that Marion Paterson, the wife of the head of the Department of Biology, heard about during her bridge game in Blacksburg while we were still in Lawrence, Kansas. We knew any house that Marion picked would resell quickly, and it did in1971 at about the price we paid for it.

In 1971, Jeannie found 12.5 acres of entirely wooded land on a steep hillside on Bishop Road, just outside the town limits of Blacksburg. In a few years, the town limits engulfed us. Jeannie selected the location for the house — near a big outcropping of rocks —and found a geologist to check the site and decide that blasting would not be needed. She also found a small, prefabricated house that she thought had a good design, and we contracted with Sonny Dillon, a reliable contractor, to assemble it. Then the firm that sold prefabs had a strike, and we were told that no delivery date could be guaranteed. Fortunately, Sonny Dillon felt he could build a similar house for the same price. In the meantime, we had put our other house on the market and the realtor found a buyer who was anxious to move in as soon as possible. I had agreed to return to RMBL to teach the course "Stressed Ecosystems" during summer of that year. We would be gone eight weeks, including travel time. The contractor knew that he could have the new house finished by that time. Our furniture was taken out of storage and moved up our long, steep, curved, gravel driveway — no mere feat — and we were not greatly concerned because we only had the final payment to make. The couple who bought the house from us in 2000 said "This is it!" before even seeing the inside of the house — our reaction precisely when we first saw the house in 1971 after returning from the field station.

Because the house was built on a steep hillside, the upper floor was the main living area and consisted of one large room with a fireplace, dining area, and kitchen. At one end was a bathroom and bedroom (behind the fireplace). The side looking down the hill was taken up with large windows and two floor-to-ceiling sliding doors. All of these windows, plus our bedroom windows, looked out on the leaves of large trees that we had deliberately left close to the house — this configuration is why our children referred to it as our "tree house." Downstairs was a bedroom and bathroom directly under the ones upstairs. The rest of that floor was another large room with a fireplace with an enclosure under the stairs for a washer, dryer, and water heater behind large folding doors. Jeannie's large loom, my old fashioned wooden desk, and a sofa foldout bed furnished this area. At the foot of the stairs was a large closet, and at the opposite end from the fireplace was floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall cupboards with swinging doors. The second floor had a large wooden deck with a cemented area under it. A long, curved, gravel driveway ended in a loop, with several large trees in it, just beside the house. We did not need much space indoors because we had so much space outdoors. The simple, compact house enabled us to spend a lot of time outdoors — we were "house poor" and "nature rich!"

Pandapas Pond

Just a few miles from our house was Pandapas Pond, a recreational area established by a Blacksburg business man. The hiking trail downstream of the pond provided a view of a beaver lodge and several hiking trails that led up to the mountain ridges. In the late 1990s, we went there several times weekly. One winter, we even "adopted" (daily feeding) a duck that did not go south with the other ducks. We left the duck when we went to Hawaii for a Pacific Rim Meeting of the American Chemical Society where I received the Morrison Medal. When we returned, the duck was gone. We have always hoped that it decided to fly south rather than thinking about other less appealing possibilities.

The Appalachian Trail

For over two decades after we arrived in Blacksburg, we went on the Sunday afternoon campus YMCA hikes (Jeannie actually led them for about a decade), which were often on parts of the Appalachian Trail. Those of us with cars provided rides for students (often from other countries) who had no car. I still hear from some of the students who went on these hikes, even though over two decades have passed. The Appalachian Trail is a magical place. Just setting foot on the trail brings a sense of tranquility and peace. Jeannie and I also felt joy to share the trail experience with students who were seeing the trail for the first time. Places on the trail offered the observation of hawk migration, and side trails led to shelters where we often stopped for lunch on an all-day hike. Jeannie was fascinated by the log book in each shelter, which contained "trail names" of individuals hiking the entire length of the trail and their experiences, plus advice on where to eat and stay in towns close to the trail.

One of our favorite hikes was from a valley floor that crossed to a mountain ridge that had the Audie Murphy (a World War II hero) Memorial (he had crashed there in a light plane many years ago). Notes and flowers indicated that the site was visited regularly. An access road from the valley on the other side of the mountain allowed for driving to a parking area for a nearly level trail to the Memorial or for a long hike along the ridge. The trail is maintained by dedicated individuals who live in towns fairly close to the trail, e.g., repainting the trail markings when they fade. These markings are reassuring, especially when "first-timers' are involved. The people who maintain the trail also feel it is a magical place. After an ice storm or high winds, they often work long hours clearing the trees that have fallen. I had one graduate student, David Jones, who took time off to hike the entire length of the Appalachian Trail. He told me that, when he reached Mt. Katahdin in Maine, he felt a deep sense of loss at the end of trail. He also felt it was a magical place.

University of Michigan Biological Station (UMBS)

In 1963, Dr. Robert Enders, Director of RMBL received a call from Dr. Alfred Stockard, Director of the UMBS asking if Enders would mind if Stockard offered me a summer position. Enders was also my advisor at Swarthmore College and thought it would benefit my career to work at another field station. As a result, I was given a contract for summer 1964. I had already agreed to be a discussion leader at a Gordon Research Conference the week before, so I would miss registration day on Saturday, which Dr. Stockard approved. We left New England on Friday afternoon, drove across Canada, and arrived so early on a Sunday morning that only one person was up and walking around at the Station. We did not know which cabin was ours, the location of my classroom, or where the dining room was. We soon were told everything.

The whole family was together again for summer — Karen had joined us from Colorado College. Because of six in the family, we had a large log cabin with bedrooms and a bathroom with a hot water shower and even a laundry room with a washer and dryer. At RMBL, two old wringer Maytags that Keith Justice and I had purchased for $15 each were used, and the clothes were hung out on clothes lines to quickly dry in arid Colorado air. We were initially intimidated by all this luxury, as field stations were supposed to be primitive, but we quickly became accustomed to the conveniences.

UMBS is located on Douglas Lake, which is about 5 miles long and shaped like a fish. The Station itself is on south Fish Tail Bay. One can actually take water samples into Lakeside Lab by boat, although this process was rarely necessary. The tip of the Lower Michigan Peninsula is blessed with bogs, fens, swamps, wetlands, lakes, and streams — an ideal place for the study of freshwater protozoan colonization processes.

The total area of the Station is 4,048 hectares, and it is also a UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve. The area was heavily logged before the Station was established in 1909, but, by the time the Cairns family arrived in 1964, it was heavily forested. The simple but adequate cabins clustered in a small part of the total acreage enabled one to feel a part of nature rather than apart from it. All residents shared a love of nature.

Most field stations are like the mythical Scottish village of Brigadoon that reappeared for one day every 100 years, but the villagers were not aware of the interval and acted as if no time had passed. Similarly, each field station has a number of faculty and staff families who are regulars and a few graduate students with multi-year research programs. These individuals resume relationships with a brief acknowledgment that an academic year intervened. Even a few undergraduates are multi-year returnees. This situation provides a sense of continuity and stability for

families, such as ours, who changed academic year residences (three times for us) while teaching at UMBS. Our children also keep in touch with individuals who grew up with them at UMBS.

Field stations are also big on sharing. Each time the Northern Lights displayed, the first to see them would run through the Station banging on a large galvanized tub or similar noisemaker. Jeannie and I would paddle out to the middle of Douglas Lake in our folboat and watch, relatively free of mosquitoes.

Nonsuch Island, Bermuda

Nonsuch Island is a magical place for two reasons. First, it provides an indication of what Bermuda was like before humans colonized it. Jeannie and I had the honor of being escorted to Nonsuch by David Wingate, whose holistic, ecological approach restored not only the native forest but also Bermuda's endangered petrel, the Cahow. Extensive culling of invasive exotic plants was originally mandatory, but the need for this activity diminished, but not vanished, as the forest matured. Every eco-region of the planet should have a Nonsuch Island. Second, William Beebe had trod on Nonsuch, and a special feeling is associated with any place where a "world-class" person has been for a significant amount of time.

Cascade Falls Recreation Area, Jefferson National Forest, Pembroke, Virginia

Before leaving Blacksburg the week of Thanksgiving 2011, our oldest son Stefan and our youngest daughter Heather and her husband Carl hiked to Cascade Falls (http://gilescounty.org/cascades.html). It was the first hike Jeannie and I took after arriving in Blacksburg. The hike up Little Stony Creek, a superb trout stream, has always been the most magical part, but Cascade Falls are also memorable. They are not huge like Niagara Falls, but they are magical because they are small and bring peace of mind. Jeannie and I hiked to Cascade Falls at least once a month from 1968-1998, when Jeannie's Alzheimer's made the hike too trying.

The secret of truly magical places is that they never lose their magic, unless they are developed by humans. I am thankful that I had the good fortune to meet Jeannie, who shared my love of magical places and who generated magical moments, and I am thankful to our children who shared our love of magical places and produced magical moments that make life a joy!

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