

PILOT OF DREAMS

A DEGREE IN FREEDOM
(WITH FLYING COLOURS)

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Foreword

Herein lies the partial story of one Brad Walker, describing the events which shaped him and the dubious nature of the decision making process that he acquired in an attempt to change his life for the better. These are the days played out during his undergraduate studies at Selwyn College, The University of Cambridge, between the years of 1990 and 1993.

Whilst the author has gone to great lengths in order to explain his actions and moments of importance, there has been some amount of creative licence with the details.

The names of his companions and peers have been changed to protect the innocent, and indeed the not so innocent, as they also require some protection on occasion. Some room has been allowed for a kind of looseness with the interpretation of the behaviour of these characters, and this room has been amply occupied.

Written some thirty years after the facts, many details are probably lost or inaccurately reported but the author has asked me to ask your forgiveness for any mistakes or errors, and I sincerely believe no lies have been purposely fabricated. As I understand it, 'The Truth,' as

difficult a customer as always, has been served by offering an overall "Coherence Theory". The idea here is to provide a finished picture which holds together all aspects of the story, giving Brad Walker a chance to produce the best unifying whole he can to his account. A synergy has been aimed for, whether it has been achieved is up to the sensibilities of the reader.

Some individuals involved in the substance of these stories will take centre stage in what is effectively a fictionalised autobiography, whereas there are those whose peripheral standing nevertheless often makes for crucial elements of cause and effect. All in all, some may recognise themselves in the narrative but an effort has been made to be kind at the very least. If nothing else this is a portrait of good friends.

The essence of this tale may best be summarised by the myth of Icarus. The man who, despite advice from his father, flew too close to the sun and fell to the sea where he drowned. The "Icarus Complex" is a term in psychoanalysis and personality theory first used by Henry A. Murray to describe a particular type of over-ambitious character. Psychosynthesis has applied it to those in whom spiritual ambition exceeds their personality limits, leading to a backlash.

Brad Walker is undoubtedly an incredible individual but the choices and decisions he made

during his time at this most prestigious of educational institutions may have served him badly later in life. The story can be seen as a warning for others to take more care than Brad in their individual decision making, and in this sense it is a cautionary tale. However, whilst alluding to this in the body of the work, the overwhelming stress is largely to be made concerning a pure joy in life and the understood privilege and freedoms which were given, accepted and exercised to their fullest.

In close parallel to these re-remembered memoirs is the meaning and personal definition of both ambition and success. These interwoven concepts live large upon the pages which follow. For many they were to lead to financial satisfaction and great strides of status in terms of careers and personal gain. For Brad Walker the desire to succeed at whatever he found to be in his hands led directly to great adventure but indeed also to dramatic and spectacular failure. Those later events are enough to form the basis of another book. For now I will leave it to Brad to describe in his own words, from his own point of view and in his own certain style, the story of his life as an undergraduate.

Proof-reading this document was a lighthearted task as Brad's true life was revealed to me page by page. I was very happy to teach

Brad Walker as part of the second year Metaphysics course and I feel he might have done well at an academic career in other circumstances. However he decided upon another, perhaps more colourful path through life.

Dr. Robot Flower Petal

Cambridge, England. Sunday 30th June, 2019

Preface

There's very little you really need know about me, unless its all the crazy stupid things I've done as an example of what you shouldn't do, unless you might end up like me. You don't want that, really, you don't. So what's the point in all this?

These stories are not just about me, I don't actually like talking about myself much anyway, but what they are about is the relationships between; places, spaces, people, activities, moments, history, ideas, hopes, dreams, money, journeys, creativity, words, work, love and laughter.

So this is for your entertainment, I guess, and that little amount of knowledge you might gain by seeing how what one does has great impact on who one becomes. "To do is to be" wrote Bertrand Russell and "To be is to do" as Jean Paul Sartre put it. Of course maybe it's the other way around, that's just one of those slightly confusing mix-ups that can easily occur in the world of Philosophy. I think you get the general idea though.

The problem is that the more I tell you about myself, the more you'll know about one part of me, but the less you will know about the rest of my psychological make up. You see you

won't be able to build up a general picture because here I will tell you one thing and then again I will tell you something else, and they won't match up, not logically at least. Nietzsche had the same problem regularly contradicting himself but, if you indulge me, you might gain a complete image of how I once was and how I now am.

It's my belief that the actions one takes through life can begin to define you. However, the choices we make and the subsequent decisions we take are generally based on a limited set of available information, therefore these choices can lead to both unwanted as well as desired for ends. The chain of cause and effect from decisions to outcomes can move fast or slow, be in action for various different lengths of time, and may lead to an unmanageable spiral of outcomes, as was so in my case. Those outcomes are material for another book.

Taking a degree is in itself a considerable decision for all but the most flippant, and most people's experience of this incredible form of education is full of processes, choices and goals. Lucky students tend to move away from simple goal attainment (the winning of the highest degree result can become an all consuming and destructive force for many). These students are able instead to embrace the learning process

itself, which they know will likely never be repeated in such a creative and all encompassing way.

Here I'm talking about every single aspect of being the central person in your own undergraduate degree experience, with all the surrounding people that one comes across. It can be a very special time, it certainly was for me, I've decided to write a whole book about it so it must have been at least interesting to me at the time. Either that, or this is the end result of having far too much time on my hands. The devil has certainly found work for their idle nature as they scoot across a QWERTY keyboard, resting only to sip from a latte in this cafe outside in the sunshine by the river of my home town.

Purposely restructuring personal goals as you progress in life is a natural reaction to change. It is one of the ways to develop, to evolve and to reinvent yourself, should you so wish. You may have little control over your starting point in life or the conditions you come from but you may decide, when you've started to have a little look at the world, that you are able to have some significant influence over how you proceed and how you finish. There may be many starts and many finishes. Taking control of your decision making processes in this way may apply not just to the nature of the degree itself but to

the totality of who you are, your life-style, and not to put too finer point on it, your whole life.

As I said earlier I don't want to persuade you to be just like me, far from it. If there is a message to this book its that I want you to be just like you. I'm not trying to be a 'life coach' either or a motivational self-help manual, this is just the way I see it. Thankfully there is only a little more of such life-style advice from here on in.

Life is art, or at least it is in a constant and forever changing process of becoming art. Indeed the material by-products of living this way can be seen as pieces of art in themselves. If any of this interests you, in particular the way you can navigate and proactively alter your life for whatever reason you wish, then don't let others dictate your journey.

In some ways I was a sheep as a student, albeit one following a particularly small and elite crowd. In other ways I stepped up, and away from, everything I knew at certain crucial points, and it made me into me, a person I quite like. Be truly original, and authentic and in this way you'll know for sure that you are unique.

It is slightly vain, but I like to think that many of the strengths of youth have remained with me since the times of this story. Closer to the truth is that I have retained many of my weaknesses, and indeed some of them may have even multiplied.

The inescapable reality is that everything that was changeable has changed, and this leaves little else as a factual thread to connect the past with the present.

An essence of myself, that which is essential to identify who I was then with who I am now, may itself have been lost over time. Is there any reason to assume that we are, in any significant ways, the persons we once were? Isn't it more beneficial to realise that, with regard to our own self image at least, we are strangers to our former selves? I write in a way to fight this notion.

I believe that by reflecting, as I write, I might connect with the best parts of my former self and learn from the negative aspects of that character, if only to show that such traits were once, in the past, in control of who I was.

As to who I am... Through the catharsis of the creation of this book I feel emboldened to say I am a multifaceted person with some depth. I am made not only from the sum total of my actions but by the relationships to those with whom I have been able to share my life. Furthermore I feel I understand that I am a greater whole than the mere sum of these parts, as are all who attempt to appreciate their lives and add value to them.

If I was a dreamer then, I still am now. The change is that now I am an experienced dreamer who knows that many dreams can be perfectly realised.

Brett Walpole, MA

Thanks to these people for their influence, direction and talent;

Mr and Mrs Streete, Dr Anthony Hansford, Mr. William Jaundrill, Mr Dai Jones, Mr Holland, Dr Isabelle Silberzan, Mr Oliver Thomas, Professor Ken Wallace, Dr Susan James, Margaret O'Farrell, William Sutcliffe, Ahmad Abu-El-Ata, Rupert Wallis, Jonny Galley, Martin Galley, Ric Bearisto, Katie Green, Steven Martin, Neil MacDonald, Toni Allen, Mary Rosambeau, The Fellowship of The Pen, The People of The Riverside Cafe, Lisa, Andy, James and Isabelle Gosling, Mr and Mrs Reece, Mum and Dad.

Prologue

The time period involved in what follows, some three years, was incredibly intense and packed with so many tremendous people and remarkable events which all hurtled by at an alarming, breathtaking and overwhelming pace. My desire is to retrieve this data from the far corners of my mind, organise it, form it into a story and present it as a whole rather than the fractured and chaotic mess it currently resembles.

It just feels to me that everything in my life before these events were somehow merely a prelude to them, and everything that happened afterwards was as a direct consequence. I want to know if this feeling is justified. In this theory, the time-frame I consider is therefore not just a snapshot of the present, as it was at that time, but also a container that holds clues to the past and the future. The concepts of Identity and The Philosophy of Time are central and key to this project.

At the risk of drawing this whole thing out, there is a lot of material to consider here, I want to try to set the scene. There are many reasons why we find ourselves in later life in the places and circumstances that we do and the journeys here are long and at the end of winding paths.

In spite of modern methods of storytelling which will jump from here to there quicker than you've had a chance to take a breath, I find myself to be a bit of a traditionalist and hence choose to tell a tale from the beginning. Going back to the source, to the origin may seem unnecessary but I've learned that initial conditions have great effect on final outcomes. Further to this I also choose to be old fashioned in that this is a linear story, as much as I can make it so, told in chronological order so that it may be made clear why one thing happened as a result of something happening prior to it.

There's a need to tell this story in the first person, so as to retain the immediacy of the sensations at the time, but in order to do this I must first introduce some characters whom I met prior to the events of the main body of the tale, as in some instances, they have great parts to play. Whilst we're here I might as well fill you in on a few of these backstories in slightly more textured detail, some of them are rather good. It's tempting of course to dive right in to the main course but I hope this little starter will prove to be a tasty preamble as well as essential exposition.

One last, not so little detail, concerning the zeitgeist at that time — there were no mobile phones. There was a friend from school who's dad had a Motorola in his car but save for that in

the 1990-93 time frame in which the story takes place I knew of no others. Certainly they existed in the City of London with the appearance of the Yuppie in the mid 1980s but to all intents and purposes for this time-frame, for students, there were none. In fact their ubiquity in the years that followed must have altered the student experience almost beyond recognition, beyond how I can imagine the way the information revolution has fed the communication revolution.

Now people can actually talk to each other whenever they want and wherever they are, which seems like a small thing but imagine *not* being able to do so and you will have some idea as to how I, and those described in what follows, managed. Mostly people depended on random and spontaneous meetings and the use of a watch. As for the World Wide Web, don't even think about it. It wasn't until December of my first year that the first and only Web page was published. So as for Social Media, there was none, think instead about Social People because this is a story about them.

So now to go back, way back, back further than many will care to attempt, to the Autumn of 1977, to a time when all of this may have only been a vision or a dream. I go back this far to register the first seeds that were sown for what was to follow. Back so far that I have

precious few memories preceding. Back to the first day at a mixed prep-school where everyone wore blazers and caps, but where I arrived dressed in a black polo-neck jumper, black tracksuit trousers and black trainers.

I was six years of age and although I didn't know it then I was already on my way to The University of Cambridge. The question of whether you might say I was groomed for such a journey and its subsequent status I will leave for your consideration.

For now I wish to address the particular wardrobe anomaly I just mentioned. It is silly and secondary but even the cause of this minor memory sent waves through time to affect the decisions I made and the life-style I was to choose. I still own a pair of black trainers, Nike Air Max, but I have wisely steered clear of polo necks largely due to reasons concerning the outfits worn by Roger Moore in the late '70s and early '80s. A pair of Adidas tracksuit trousers albeit of a different colour, red, made an appearance in another role at a specific moment in the future when I felt it was appropriate, I will get to that, but as to the advisability of this fashion statement I leave it up to your good judgement and assumed good taste.

Brad Walker

Early Ideas

Cheswyks Preparatory School was a small, private, mixed prep-school run by a husband and wife team - Mr and Mrs Streete, and the teachers they no doubt carefully chose. There were maybe one hundred pupils of ages 3 to 11. I remember it as a special place where the teaching was not just of subjects but of all aspects of human understanding and behaviour.

The uniform for boys was black shoes, grey trousers, 'Airtex' shirts, school tie, Burgundy V-neck jumper, blazer and cap. Girls wore similar attire, except a dress and a rather striking cape for the Winter. In addition a pair of brown 'indoor shoes' were required to be changed into upon entering the school and these were kept in a foot locker below a coat peg.

Having moved to the area only recently and in mid-term these items were out of stock during my first few weeks hence my all-black outfit. This I first hated as I stood out like a sore thumb, but slowly I grew to like it as I began to discover the advantages of not blending in. By the time I had the necessary uniform, it was uniforms in general that I began to dislike.

My first day and Miles Mallen was assigned to look after me and show me around. He was

younger than me, at five years of age but this has had little to do with the friendship we made which has lasted some forty-three years or so. Now Miles is a doctor, a Psychiatrist in fact, who runs a music studio and has a wife and two boys. He was a funny boy and he is funny man, he makes me laugh and does so for many others who are lucky enough to know him. This is not the last you will hear of him as we crossed equatorial Africa together from East to West coast and wound up attending the same University.

It was at the age of ten, Miles had by then left the school to be a student at another place, when I was first introduced to the idea, the concept, of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. We had recently started playing 'Mini Rugby' under the tutelage of Mr. Streete, the Headmaster. Having played several other schools and watched various videos of Barbarians tours he thought it might be good to go to see the Oxford versus Cambridge Varsity Rugby Match, or just 'The Varsity Match'.

It was the 100th fixture of this historic event and on a cold and very snowy Winter's morning perhaps five of us set off for Twickenham Rugby ground in The Head's lengthy, large and very futuristic Citroen CX. We were in full uniform with coats and scarves and gloves.

The 1981 game was won by Cambridge 9-6 on a pitch three inches deep in snow, only the lines had been cleared. It was very exciting and on returning home I stuck the ticket on the outside of my bedroom door so that I could see it whenever I went into my room. I believe this gesture was the beginning of a nine year journey to study there, Cambridge were winners and they were in my consciousness for good.

Just like the paper aeroplanes and later the model aeroplanes I had made and painted, which now hung from the ceiling of my room and which represented the dream of flight, the dream of being a pilot, so this sports events came to represent for a while at least the dream of being a student at Cambridge. You will see I believe in dreams.

When I left Cheswyks via the 11+ exam to The Royal Grammar School, The RGS, in Guildford I remember telling the Headmistress Mrs. Streete that I was going to apply to Cambridge. She asked me what was I going to read when there. "Books," I said, "what else does one read at University?!"

Exam Machine

There were four other boys who went to the RGS from Cheswyks but, and here is both honesty and the beginnings of the type of conceit which intelligence combined with a good education can bring, these boys I was not interested in. Their paths and dreams and lives were of little interest to me for the next seven years. The precocious, arrogant and therefore ignorant attitude of an eleven year old who believes himself to be 'better' probably had a great grip on me.

Funnily Cambridge was forgotten too, I was too busy just growing up, and it wasn't until the age of sixteen or seventeen that there was a need to think of what you might 'read' and where you might read it. Going to University was, at the RGS, simply expected. It was a fee paying, independent school which stopped short of being a public school but prided itself on it's 'A' level results and University entry statistics. At this time Miles Mallen was currently in a public school and indeed also being corralled and gently directed towards degree selection and of course the question, not just of which University to apply to but to which College in particular.

Friends at this time included; Bob Wingwell, Rick Smith, Stan Rhys, and Dafydd Hunkly. Bob,

Rick and I lived close to each other and took the train to school together. Upon earning our driving licences we took it in turns to do a school run, which developed into a racing competition on the way home, when all three of us drove our 1.3 litre cars as fast as we could through back country roads and lanes. It was very dangerous and a lot of fun but I realised we had gone too far when I found myself driving at night with no street lights and only my indicator lights flashing on and off to illuminate the twisty road ahead at forty miles an hour with Bob and Rick lying on the roof, clinging on for dear life. The fact that no-one was killed or injured doesn't excuse this behaviour, how different my life would have been had I been convicted for taking a life in this way. It was fun though, it was crazy, it was mad, it was insane. Bob went to Bristol University to read Zoology. Rick read Economics at Durham.

Stan and Dafydd also went to Bristol, Stan to read Zoology also and Dafydd to study Psychology and (very exotically) Philosophy. I had thought this was the first time I had heard about the subject of Philosophy but I recall now that I had given a ten minute talk in a Religious Studies lesson at the age of 14, and that I chose to talk about Existentialism. The teacher and my fellow pupils didn't really 'get it'.

Stan and I were in the same Physics set and were both applying to The BP Research Centre for Gap Year jobs. Stan is six feet five inches in height and beat me at tennis by virtue of his unplayable serve. We both landed well paid work and were to travel to and from Sunbury-on-Thames together for the best part of nine months.

I applied pre A-level to Christ's College and in the Winter, in the snow, went to be interviewed by a crusty old Don who resided in Charles Darwin's original study. I recall it was crammed full, floor to ceiling with stuffed animals and one couldn't help thinking the Don was just one among many of these. It was a terrible interview and I didn't receive an offer of a place. I was gutted.

Having obtained my three A grades at 'A' Level I applied 'Post' to Selwyn College, whilst I was already working at BP in the Laser Spectroscopy unit. The interview went very well, largely because I knew more about lasers than my interviewers, who were fascinated with my work, in particular the research which was led by Dr. Dave Cellarman at the unit. I recently connected with Cellarman who is now working at The University. He's now Sir Professor David Cellarman and he'd sold the company he founded for speeding up the process of gene

sequencing for something around \$600 million. David was a Cambridge man, Churchill College.

Whilst working at BP I befriended two others who were Cambridge bound. Bob Smythe was a keen Scuba diver, who got me into the sport and with whom I went on a camping trip once. We got on well immediately and I learned he was going to Jesus to read Natural Sciences, the course I was applying for. Marilyn Feather was a beautiful young woman whom I went out with once, picking her up in my MG Midget. She was perhaps a bit too good for me, having studied at St. Paul's, perhaps the best all girls school in the country. I don't remember which College she was going to but it was probably 'one of the best' if that really means anything in Cambridge.

The only other place I applied for was at UMIST, The University of Manchester Institute for Science and Technology. The course for which I was offered a place here was Physics and Astrophysics. I had been for interview and it was super geeky and super techie which was just what I liked. They showed me around a satellite they were building and I immediately felt like some kind of SpaceHead Astronaut or a student at JPL, the Jet Propulsion Lab in California. Should I fail to win the place to read Natural Sciences at the invitation of both Cambridge University and Selwyn College I would be more than happy,

ecstatic in fact, to spend my undergraduate days there.

I got the place, the place at Cambridge! I went wild. I phoned Miles who was working for the large American pharmaceutical research centre where my Dad had worked most of his life. Miles had also been offered a place, to read Medicine at Corpus Christi College, one of the oldest. We agreed we should leave our respective jobs at the nearest possible opportunity and spend our hard earned monies on an adventure of epic proportions.

It would be just that, we were going to Africa for three months. I was going to fall in love, we were going to see mountain gorillas in the wild, we were to spend a couple of days with a tribe of semi-nomadic pygmies and we were both to contract Malaria. In addition to this we were happy to make the acquaintance of one Mr. Volley Humous, a tall and rangy ginger man who loped into our lives in Nairobi and whom we were soon to learn was going to Emmanuel College to read Economics. It seemed everyone was doing it!

Upon returning I immediately went on holiday for a week with Bob (Wingwell) to his native Scotland. We drove, we listened to The Rolling Stones and The Velvet Underground, we camped by Glen Nevis, we ran on the sacred turf

of Murrayfield and we cooked and ate on open fires. We exchanged stories of adventure and I believe I confided in him my concerns at that time.

On arriving at Cambridge in the Autumn of 1990 Miles and I were as tanned as it is possible to be, we had long hair and we were each some two stone lighter in body weight than we had been three months earlier. I believe the Malaria we contracted, whilst mercifully not being Cerebral Malaria or a recurring type, was a contributory factor to the mental breakdowns we both suffered later in our lives, in our mid-twenties, seemingly independently from each other. The large amounts of Marijuana we smoked may also have had its input into that particular equation.

You Are Here!

We'll the car's all packed, Dad's driving, me in the passenger seat and Mum squeezed in somewhere behind. Next stop Selwyn College, Cambridge University, who would have believed it! Actually we were currently on a little detour to pick up a bonus item, a bicycle.

We find our way to the outskirts of a small town, a residential road and a house with a driveway. The bicycle, I assume its this one, leans up against the house. Within half an hour the bike has been looked over by Dad using his overly competent skills as a Mechanical Engineer, test driven by yours truly and strapped to the roof rack of the car using a generous number of bungee chords and an excessive, in my opinion, amount of string. We were soon on our way again but now in possession of perhaps the most essential of transport devices for the task ahead.

What was that task? To acquire an Undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree of the highest order possible from one of the most famous and highly thought of Universities in the UK and maybe even the world. That's some kind of a goal, that's the work to be done, but the way in which this is achieved and the hours put in specifically towards achieving it is largely up to

the individual. This is process oriented thinking, broadly speaking the journey is often more important than the destination. Having said this it seems quite pressing that one actually reaches the destination however one might have seen fit to arrive there.

There are many other things I wish to find myself involved with along the way and some of them I have yet to even imagine. Foremost of interest will be the people I will meet and I haven't a clue what 'types' I might chance to befriend. My expectations are fairly open, I have only my current friends to base things on and I wonder whether I am wandering into completely unknown waters. I already know Miles, Bob Smyth, Marilyn Feather and Volley Humous and as examples of people they couldn't be more different. Could it be the case that there would be no 'type' at all? Would the defining characteristic of people in this place be that they would all be perfectly original with no defining characteristic to speak of?

Taking the appropriate exit off the M11 we cruised in along Grange Road, arriving at Selwyn College via a route that did not go through the city. I had been here once before for the interview but now everything seemed more immediate and vital in the present. Selwyn is a five to ten minute walk from the city centre, a fact

that would prove to be most advantageous as there were no crowds of pedestrians, especially tourists to contend with. The overall first impression was one of peace, peace and a kind of serenity that would prove to be the perfect backdrop for three years of fun and study.

We pulled into a small car parking area at the front of college and I left the car to find the Porters Lodge. Finding myself in a kind of reception office, speaking to an older man in a bowler hat who had unfeasible large ears (I learned soon enough that he was known as 'Wing-nut') I was directed to the JCR (Junior Combination Room). Here there were a series of 'pigeon-holes', one for every student, where I found my name in its alphabetical place and a large amount of folded papers wedged into the space. It was here I made my first friend.

Sol Zenith was checking his pigeon hole too. We introduced ourselves to each other, then crucially began to laugh about our shared novice situation, the fact that we both had long hair and that we had both recently been travelling. Strange what a deep tan and a lack of a hair cut does for ones confidence. It was an odd way to meet, but many friendships are built on far weaker foundations and at that point I had no way of knowing that we would become very

close friends, most especially for the first year of our degrees.

Sol was a Historian, I was a Scientist, a Natural Scientist to be accurate, these labels were specific and I thought at that point, permanent. Even then it occurred to me I wanted to meet the most diverse of people studying here, not be limited only to those in any category to which I was already assigned. Firstly and seemingly already of some relevance there were those of us who'd had a gap year and those who hadn't. Those who had were a year older, and probably had some derision of others who were straight out of school. We also believed ourselves, rightly or wrongly to be more experienced and wiser in the ways of the world. Certainly we'd had more time to ponder our lives and the state of Mankind, whilst gaining valuable insight, getting tans and growing our hair.

Right here there were two elements that came to the fore in small but significant ways, namely pretension and vanity. I considered myself to be quite grounded but these learned vices were both quite naturally acquired, I believe, given our current surroundings and indeed also difficult to avoid. The only way was to 'wing it' with an awareness of one's true nature and a desire to be oneself, after all we'd all signed up for this, it was new, it was exciting and it

was all so embryonic. After a good hearted and humorous conversation I agreed to meet up with Sol later, in the College Bar wherever it may be, then went to get my parents and to find my allocated room.

The first year accommodation was in a '60s block called 'Cripps Court'. My room was M1 on the ground floor with access via a road around the back. Dad parked the car and we began to unload. It didn't take long, I didn't have many belongings to my name. Mum insisted on making my bed. I made a cup of tea for us which we drank as I adjusted to my new surroundings. When the cup of tea was gone, I said good bye to my proud Mum and Dad and suddenly I was alone. But not for long.

A couple of Christians knocked on my door and bounded into my room. Would I like to come to a prayer meeting? Would I like to come to a Christian Union 'event'? It was a bit of a shock but I made my first decision here, I would not like to go to a prayer meeting and I didn't want to go to their 'event'. They were nice enough people, and very keen, but I sent them packing in the most polite way I could.

M1 had a small bathroom and was joined to the bathroom of M2 by a single shower cubicle. If one so wished this was a way to walk between the two rooms. My 'neighbour' in this

sense had not yet arrived, but then on cue he appeared.

Cairo Tunes was a British Egyptian. I could already tell that he was a very cool customer with American and French influences in clothes and, I later learned, relatives also. His parents were lovely and very kind to me right from the start. One moment I recall was his Mum pouring a glass of water from the tap, holding it up to the light, tasting it and declaring it to be very good. Yet soon Cairo Tunes' parents left also and knowing that we would be in each other's pockets for at least a year we began to get to know each other.

I was a 'NatSci,' a Natural Scientist, Cairo was a 'CompSci,' a Computer Scientist. He was obviously very smart, but then weren't we all? He had a computer. I had a computer at the age of 14, a Commodore VIC-20 but I'd had no use for it in the last few years at least. Cairo had an Apple MacIntosh, if this wasn't amazing enough, it had an 'A4 Screen,' a screen of A4 size in a vertical, portrait format. I don't think I need to say anything more about that. At this point in time I had no idea that we would become the very best of friends. We still spend time together regularly some thirty years later.

I finished setting up my room as best I could including putting up two "poster sized prints" of two photographs I had taken in Africa that my

Mum had ordered. One was of a Silverback Mountain Gorilla, the other a group of African Children.

Photography had become very important to me, I had bought a Pentax ME Super SLR with a couple of lenses for my travels and had learned much from Volley Humous in Africa as he was already quite an accomplished photographer. I had a pot plant and a few books on a desk, a basic Hi-Fi system with a few records and tapes and a travel chest full of plates, mugs, knives and forks and a toaster. For a few moments I took stock, calmed myself down, looked at my watch and then went looking for the bar and Sol.

Getting Familiarised

As I walked across Cripps Court music began blaring out from one of the upper windows. I later learned it was Nat Dealer, an English student, who had put his hi-fi speakers out the windows, turned his amp way up and was playing The Rolling Stones' "Sympathy For The Devil" to everyone. I thought this could get interesting. I continued past "The Diamond" a kind of events hall and went on to find Sol and a drink.

There were very few people in the bar and Sol was not amongst them. I knew pubs, I knew drinking with friends, I knew getting drunk but I wondered how much time I would want to spend here. Was I a drinker? Was drinking a lot as a student something I wanted to do? Would it be something I would feel pressured to do by the people I met? Would I find it to be something I felt I needed to do to cope with things such as relationships, course work-load, and other pressures that were not yet apparent? I certainly didn't know any one here and no one knew me. I was just weighing up whether to order a pint and sit and wait, or to leave, when Sol came in looking nervous but pleased to see me.

We both liked Guinness, another reason to be friends. With the alcohol came an ease of

talking and laughing and sharing of our thoughts for the near future. It was easy for us to talk of our travels too and I found myself narrating my recent romance in Zaire with the twenty-four year old Australian divorcee, Sonna Earle. Now though we agreed life was all about the unknown and how best to be prepared to navigate it.

With that first pint I felt everything would be all right. With the social lubrication of drink many other students of life came into my life. It's impossible to know what impact my character had on these people. As with many events and people that disappear into the past, the memory of them can wither and die until they become permanently forgotten. For those who wish to be remembered by others, there is a need to do as much remembering for yourself as is possible.

Memory, the quality and power of it, would become a primary element of the degree 'game'. In order to get a degree one has to sit finals and as if things such as sport weren't competitive enough the one thing I had not counted on was the competition of the Mind.

We were all brainy enough to get here, but who would get a First? Who was smartest? Where did I rank in the hierarchy of intellectual endeavour? These questions may not have been particularly pressing at this stage but very quickly it became noticeable that the 'game' I talk of

was very real. Could you be outsmarted? If so by whom? Where did humour and wisdom meet? Who was at the bottom of the pile, and why? How would this affect any kind of alpha male standing?

Of course no one would admit to playing such a game, or even wonder what the rules of such 'play' would entail, but it is an accepted part of communication. Even so, right from day one in this 'hot-house' environment I for one was aware of a certain vying of position in these respects.

Perhaps just my being aware of such psychological activity at least gave me an advantage but was it possible that the cerebral machinations I perceived were illusory, was it 'all in my head'? These are just people, teenagers at that, what possible use could there be involving oneself in intellectual one-upmanship? We all compete, its part of natural selection, but here, in these dreaming spires, it became clearer that there were levels of intelligence. How might this play a part in winning the attentions of a 'mate'? We were all the brightest of our schools, only two of us came up to Cambridge from my school, but now, here, how would we fit in and find our natural level? Perhaps, just perhaps, in any relevant or important way we were all equals? A hard pill for some to swallow I thought.

Student life can be hard because of so many pressures. Talk of mental health was rare at this point in time and thankfully the mental health of students has been firmly put on the agenda in recent years.

At Cambridge, if one can categorise people in a meaningful way, it is by confidence and introversion. There is spectrum of both and just because one is extrovert it may not necessarily follow that one is truly confident. Introverts may be exceedingly confident in their own way, and extroverts may build their characters on very insecure footings. I was lucky, I was quietly confident and so were many of the people I knew, but where this confidence came from was never questioned and there were many times when it left me almost completely.

If truth be told we were all 'inward looking' in the last analysis and although this condition may have left some of us in later life, I fear the ability to put oneself in another's shoes and look outwardly to the world from such a perspective is one that cannot be taught, only experienced and gained.

I have very few real memories of the next week although I do recall there was a matriculation photograph for all new students. I wore my grandfather's tailored suit, which fitted me perfectly and was made by Cordings and Co.

of London, a men's outfitters in Piccadilly, London whom he had run from the position of accountancy since World War II. My father's father had died some three years previously and only two weeks after my grandmother had died. I wore his gold signet ring too, which had a 'turk's head' on it, part of the family crest.

I can imagine during those days there was a lot of drinking in the bar, not that I can remember but this was most likely what was happening when I was making most of my early friends.

The most important decisions I had to make were which subjects to study. I had come to Cambridge primarily to study Physics which meant the hard Mathematics course was also required. I could choose two more and after flirting with Experimental Psychology I decided to pick Physiology and Geology. Some fourteen years after meeting him this meant that I would be schooled alongside Miles Mallen once again as Physiology was a required subject for Medical students.

It was hard for Miles and to be good friends at University whilst at the same time tentatively developing our own singular characters. In fact we saw very little of each other during this time and had completely different sets of friends. Corpus Christi was right in the centre of town so I

did on occasion pop in to see if he was around and he made the great journey to Selwyn on just a few occasions. We were both "Out of Africa" and just happy to be alive.

For several days of the first week I was still ill in bed. At one point I remember being quite delirious. There was some idiot racing a remote controlled car, up and down the path directly by my window. It went on and on until I eventually got up, put my dressing gown on and went outside. In a kind of controlled psychosis I walked up to him.

"Excuse me. I am recovering from Malaria and am trying to rest. The sound you are making, racing your toy car up and down is extremely annoying. Would you mind going away and doing it somewhere else? Somewhere a long long way away."

"Yes, of course, I'm sorry to bother you."

He left and I went back to bed.

Cairo next door was incredibly helpful and made me cups of tea. Occasionally he would bring other people to see me. Once this person was a girl he used to go to school with who was just beginning her English degree at Newnham College which was very close nearby. Chantelle Seine was blond, blue eyed and very friendly. She made me laugh and over the next few years we became quite close. Upon returning for a

second time she brought with her a home-made card with a picture of a rabbit in bed, which said, "Aw... Brad's a Poorly Bunny."

Fairly soon after meeting me, she wanted to know all about my friend Sol, and lo and behold, very soon afterwards they became an item and would remain so for the rest of the academic year. Maybe if I hadn't been so bed-ridden I might have stood a fighting chance to win the affections of the bubbly Chantelle myself. Damn those fiendish mosquitos!

On The Water

Without really intending to, and with only a little persuasion from one Chuck Twickenham, a doctor in the making, I tried out for the novice eight rowing program and was selected as the Stroke for the first novice boat. This was made up of students who had not rowed before and both Chuck and Sol were selected too, in central positions in "the engine room" of the boat. Also at one of these positions which provided the real power was Steve Slighter, a tall Philosopher.

It always surprising to me that I made the cut as I was so weedy following my total body decimation at the hands of Malaria. I must have had something because the Stroke was a crucial position who sat in the number one position in front of the Cox, occupied by Nat Dealer. The Cox steered, called out the strokes per minute and the Stroke responded accordingly for those behind to match.

Our coach was the third year College Boat Captain, a man by the name of "Mule," there was a time when I knew his real name but its has been lost in the mists of time. I can only imagine his nick name had something to do with being a well endowed gentleman.

Monday to Saturday, at 6am, nine of us plus the coach, would assemble on bikes outside the main entrance to the college. Mule would insist on punctuality and if anyone was late, someone was dispatched to fetch them. Often tardy was Aberdeen McWales, a powerfully built Welshman who featured heavily in some chaotic way in many peoples lives throughout College.

Fully assembled we would cycle the wrong way down one way streets through the city which was deserted at that time of the morning. To get to Selwyn's boat house on The River Cam was fifteen to twenty minute ride. Once there we would take our slightly old fashion wooden, 'clinker' boat from the boat house and get on the water.

Mule had made it very clear to us that the College had a fine reputation for its novice boats. At the end of the term we would be entered into the Novice Fairburns, which was a time trial and also The Clare College Regatta which was a knock-out tournament. There are 31 colleges and each as two to three novice boats so that the total number of entries would be between 60 and 90. The previous years Selwyn novice boat had finished first in both competitions and we were expected to do the same.

To this end we were always to be 'first on the water' every morning for training, and we

always were. Before 7am we were rowing. Sometimes it was very cold, sometimes it was raining, and occasionally a mist would come down and sit hauntingly a metre or so thick over the surface of the river.

We put in 'sets', periods of 'work' and 'pieces'. Sometimes we rowed slowly but with great accuracy, sometimes we sprinted. We 'sat' the boat, meaning that it stayed level and true. Often we perform 'steady state,' rowing at a constant speed for a great length of time. We practised starts and 'Power Tens'. Under Mule's constant direction we became very good.

Rowing one way up the river for forty minutes, we came back the other way to meet other, 'less committed' eights rowing the other way. We were to keep 'eyes in the boat,' looking straight ahead so as to signal to others our superiority. We were an example of perfection.

Occasionally Mule couldn't make training and so sent his second year vice captain, Pedro Ryder. Pedro was a relief in that he was less disciplined and allowed us some ease, less disciplined but just as focussed, Pedro pushed us too.

In addition to this on the water training we went to the Fenners gym, once a week. This was a basic and free facility a cycle ride from college. An hour here and I realised the great difference in

strengths between us all. I was the lightest, still putting on weight and in our weekly Ergo (a rowing machine) I consistently came last. But I had a quality of stroke and I had rhythm. One week Steve Slighter, the only person studying Philosophy in our year, booked the eight and Cox into a Selwyn girls aerobics class. To music we stretched, leapt and gyrated, I had rhythm of course.

We endured this entire arduous process for nine weeks. Being part of a dedicated team is quite a thing, there is camaraderie and a high level of focus. As a discipline I don't think I've ever prepared for anything with such motivation before or since.

The night before the time trial we met as a crew and ate an enormous meal of Spaghetti Bolognese which we cooked together and the next day the Novice Fairburns arrived.

We took our starting position of number one, given to us by the previous year's crew and rowed our hearts out. Sol wore a Pittsburgh Steelers baseball cap for luck. Our time was something just over ten minutes, and in fact the seconds were crucial as the Clare first boat, our closest rivals, managed just a fraction slower time. We were 'the fastest boat' on the river and many of our friends had cycled along the footpath to see us do it. There were great celebrations.

Cairo was in the Selwyn College second boat which was Coxed by Kaye Forlife, a Veterinarian student. She borrowed my Kansas City Chiefs baseball cap for luck for their time trial and I think they did very well.

Just a few days later there was the Clare Regatta. The Clare first boat was tipped for good things. The knockout style meant that there were some six races between us and the final. Race after race we bested our peers until we found ourselves in the semi-final with none other than our own college second boat. We had a third boat too and incredibly it was stroked by Jay Bigg, who was blind. It really made me think of what was possible for a person if there was a will and dedication. Furthermore I believe they did very well in the tournament. For us, lined up at the start, for a place in the final against our second boat there was a matter of pride at stake.

I looked over briefly to see Cairo wearing his Stanford University cap and Kaye with my Chiefs cap. In that moment I really wished I'd had that cap. We were wearing college colours rowing tops, golden yellow with Burgundy trim. The gun went and we were off.

We matched each other for a long, long way. Side by side for many minutes until Nat told us to put in a Power Ten and we pulled away. We won and were into the final, a final against the

hosts of the regatta, the Clare College novice first eight.

When rowing there is the possibility of a kind of zen-like trance where all bodily movements and mental control are in harmony. We had this when racing Clare and pulled ahead of them. Half a boat length up we were half way through our Power Ten, ten extra long, hard strokes, when the unthinkable, and hitherto unprecedented, happened — equipment malfunction. Sol's blade, just popped open the bolt on the rowlock which holds it, and was pulled hard into the water, it was pulled out of his hand and the boat decelerated rapidly and came to a grinding halt. The Clare boat flowed past and we became basically stationary in a matter of a few seconds.

That particular dream was all over and we were all devastated, not least of us Sol. I've honestly never felt more for a guy than then, it could have happened to any one of us and I never really knew how hard he took it, or how hard it was to dismiss and just get on with things. He certainly looked pretty cut up for a long time. We had put so much time and effort into the thing but you know I think it might have been a great lesson in life. Wanting to win that badly might not have been so good in hindsight.

As a matter of note those mornings spent rowing may have changed the course of my life. When we were done and put the boat away sometimes we would do 'graveyards'. These were a run, by the boat house through a graveyard of a local church and took about a minute. Four of us would make the run then tag the next four who would run the course whilst the first four recovered, the next tag would set us off again.

As a result of all this physical exhaustion I would regularly be late for my lectures which usually began at 9am. In Mathematics in particular, which took place in the huge 600 seat capacity Babbage Lecture Theatre, missing crucial introductory information was instrumental in not being able to follow further exposition. Plus I often fell asleep at my post and would wake up half way through a lecture with not a clue as to what it was all about and what was going on. This happened in all subjects.

We had to take exams at the end of the first year and it started to become clear that I was falling behind. I even began to wonder whether I was enjoying my subjects and where studying them could possibly lead.

I made the decision, along with all others in our boat as a matter of interest, not to join the boat club proper in the second term. Continuing

to row seemed to be a way of ignoring the facts of its impact on my studies. Evidently this was not so for those who managed to balance both. There is a certain cache in rowing whilst at Cambridge which I had gratefully been a part of for a short while.

Those who rowed for the senior boat club boats, in either the first, second or third boats had a chance to row in the competition in the Summer, the May Bumps, and to earn the right to buy and display a full size blade (oar) with the names (and heights and weights) of those in their boat. I could see the merits of this but had to concede that you simply cannot do everything if you want to do what you do well.

It's a trip... Man!

Somewhere during that first term I had a visit from Bob Wingwell. He came up from Bristol with a friend of his called Ben. Strangely Ben knew Jean Roux Well Ace a friend at Selwyn who was reading Theology. Bob and Ben slept on my bedroom floor for a couple of days and whilst they were here things got a bit odd.

Drugs. I was not a stranger to grass, hashish, and Ecstasy. During school days these had become common in many subtle and not so subtle ways. I smoked but not regularly and the friends I had made were all familiar with drugs at parties, clubs, raves, after the pub — pretty much anywhere and at anytime. I thought maybe that this was a phase but for myself and many I knew, drugs would be a constant presence during University and afterwards.

Miles and I had gone to town with vast stocks of Cannabis in Africa and you know it was beginning to take its effect on my short term memory, something quite vital if you are to study a subject effectively to any decent level. On reflection it occurs to me now, something which I was most likely in denial of at the time, that within my year at College, some one-hundred or so people, I was almost certainly the one with the

greatest history of drug misuse. Then arrived Bob and Ben to teach the lesson that there is always someone more extreme. Ben was known affectionately as "Two Ounce Ben," as he often carried with him two ounces of hashish.

They arrived at the same time as Cairo was being visited by another friend of his from school days, but this time one who was studying Philosophy, I believe at Southampton University. Zara Heart also knew Chantelle, the three of them along with Sol were around and about at this time.

The first night Bob, Ben and I went to visit Miles at Corpus, Bob knew him from before via me and we found him in a spacious room with a couple of his friends. Ben produced his stash and the night began.

Later I recall going to an 'event' (meaning a kind of club with a DJ and drink). At some point I took a tab of LSD, for the second time in my life, and spent the whole of the rest of the night until morning walking around the city centre with Bob and Zara and Sol. Sol and I were walking around with a large piece of artificial grass over our heads, it must have been leftover from a market stall earlier in the day. I was convinced we were 'underground,' that we were in fact a lawn but we found it hard to convince a random policeman that this was so. After that encounter

Sol was insistent it was the long arm of the lawn. All in all this was rather a pathetic, pointless and foolish night, however important it felt at the time.

Once one has had any interaction with drugs of any kind, it seems to be the case that you gravitate to others of a similar mind. After this occasion I can say that I was basically drug free for a long time, but as anyone will tell you it is hard to remain 'clean' and so often you choose not to try. There was to be a situation in my second year when my attitude towards drugs and indeed to all the friends of mine who took them often, was to be tested in quite an extreme way. For now I was liberal, open, and never one to refuse the generosity of others.

Ben had a difficult time of it with drugs in the future with a breakdown. At the time I remember thinking how stupid he was, but only five years into my future, it was to happen to me too.

Getting Creative

One day, going back to that first week of term, I decided that I was well enough to get out of bed. I took a sketch pad and some pencils and wandered around the city for several hours to explore the environment of the place I had chosen to study. I reached a place called Kettles Yard, an art gallery and then on further to a church where I drew some plants and flowers.

There is no Fine Art degree as such offered by Cambridge University, which is unlike Oxford and just about everywhere else, and to be honest I think it suffers because of it. In my second year I would meet some Architecture students; Strafe Bartman and Eclair O'Bubble. Eclair and I had something for a while and I often visited her and Strafe in their department. This was the closest thing to an Art School that there was and it was quite amazing with paintings and sculptures and models of structures and buildings. Also it was in a state of constant flux and chaos and just being there for a while was a blessed antidote from the structure and discipline of my studies.

Back at my room I finished by sketching my left hand holding a pencil. I felt fit enough and able enough to present myself to the world and almost immediately I met Feeyana Airmax. I liked

her immediately, her smile and her cool and welcoming manner. I don't remember what we talked about. She was studying languages, French and Spanish I think and we just wound up together in a kind of haphazard way. Feeyana lived in my block and was really only just upstairs from me. We hung out a lot but didn't spend all of our time together, there seemed to be so much to do in the way of studying as much as anything else, Cambridge was like that, keen on the studying thing.

The way it worked out we were only together for that first term. I think we were good as a couple but you know that stupid arrogance and conceit that was often in the air in these parts got its grip on me and I ended our relationship before it even had a chance to get started. Knowing I'd made a mistake I tried to repair things at the beginning of the next term but quite rightly Feeyana let me know that what I wanted wasn't good for her.

We were friends for the rest of our time there, we lived in the same house in our second and third years but I was always out of things to say and I think I embarrassed Feeyana in some way, to my eternal shame. It's stupid because I think we could have helped each other in some vital ways but I was to remain unattached in any real sense for the rest of my degree. This was

probably not so bad a thing, as I am easily distracted and had I given someone like Feeyana the attention and time she deserved I may well have flunked my degree. That was how it was. I would have loved to have had a 'steady' girlfriend, I needed it for a whole heap of personal development at the very least. Maybe sometimes I tried too hard or didn't see the opportunities right under my nose.

Meanwhile Cairo had secured the attentions of a wonderful Geography student called Tawla. They were to have a very tumultuous and colourful relationship throughout the course of our studies.

On one unfortunate occasion I redirected a drunken Aberdeen McWales, who had broken into my room. I suggested he go and annoy Cairo instead, he bundled through the shower cubicle joining our two rooms where Cairo and Tawla were otherwise engaged. A few minutes later, having dispatched Aberdeen, Cairo steamed into my room and unleashed a whirlwind of swear words in my direction. The next day he left a note apologising for calling me what he had called me. I guess it's little things like this that make friendships instead of acquaintances.

He didn't hold a grudge and quite the contrary took it upon himself to begin for me a course of sustenance and regeneration. He

bought industrial sized packets of chicken and we cooked spicy jerk dishes in the nearby kitchen for weeks on end. I really needed that and will always be thankful to him for it.

Friendliness

Sol and I are hanging out a lot with each other and a lot of second and third year students whom we have been sort of adopted by. Primary amongst them is a third year Biologist called Steward East. He's introduced us to other friends of his including one Tracy Bong, who is just beautiful. Sol is now spoken for but with my success with the older woman whilst travelling, I fancy my chances. We joke that she is probably The Master's daughter and is either off-limits or forever in some chaste state. The reality couldn't have been more different.

Steward tells me she is Bi-Curious, a term I've never heard before, but it makes me strangely curious in my own way. Fundamentally she is a lesbian but has wandered from the pure discipline once before with Steward himself, and so I am spurred on with a kind of crazy optimism. One day drinking with a group of their friends, she comes up to me and whispers in my ear "Brad, you're ripe for the plucking," I think I got scared at this point and only had the nerve to view Tracy from afar from then on.

When Steward left at the end of that year, he went on to take a PhD somewhere in London I

think and we stayed in touch for a while. I wondered where Tracy ended up and in which direction her sexual compass pointed in later years.

Being with these more senior members of the College was a great bonus. They were people who had great advice on how to run the Cambridge machine, people who had experience and wisdom in the ways of the world and were very friendly and funny. They were also hedonists of the most general type and I believe Sol and I in particular gained great insights and had a significantly heightened introduction to College life because of them.

Most first years were, from this perspective, a rather green, insecure and frail type of people. There was some posturing for coolness and credibility but I am sure we all gained in a myriad of different ways for the approaches we took in the first few weeks in making friends and settling in. There was a price to pay for every choice, a balance to strike. There were many I feel who went about the business of becoming a Cambridge University undergraduate in subtle ways which gave them improved status within the College. The friends I gravitated towards could be said to be the more wayward, more wild, potentially more original and of a more rebellious character.

Katie Stealem and Feeyana became close friends early on, and I often saw them together. They even started taking the same course when Feeyana changed from her Languages to Anthropology at the start of the second year. Katie was cool and classy and of few words, I wouldn't say we were great chums but every time we spoke I was rather impressed by her, especially her ability to put me in my place in ways I probably needed to be.

Nat Lotus, or 'Nat with the hat' to distinguish him from Nat Dealer the Cox of our novice eight boat, was also a 'rogue' type of person. Nat had been suspended from the sixth form of his school having been found in the process of coitus in the school grounds with his girlfriend of the time. He had been allowed back to take his 'A' levels and had subsequently been accepted into the bosom of Selwyn and Cambridge in totality. Nat was a happy go lucky type, reading History. He hailed from London and is someone whom I would talk with when we bumped into each other, but someone I wished I knew better. We should have drunk together more.

There were in fact many things I would like to have done more of at University and many things that I could have benefitted from doing less. I have few real regrets however and instead

a certain knowledge that hundreds of moments I enjoyed on a daily basis, moments of wonder and awe, are forever lost and forgotten but will always continue to feed my soul.

Second Years also made their presence felt in those first few weeks. I think some of them were interested in making new friends, in particular romantic relationships. Often 1st, 2nd and 3rd years would mix in this way and it was always good to see solid relationships and folks just having fun across these divides which really were so arbitrary and meant so little.

Frank Sighmans was a second year Economist. In his third year he got together with a girl who was a first year, Penny. In my books they were the perfect couple.

Frank, Cairo, Pedro and I made good friends and formed, under Steward's counsel, a group known as "The Russian Croqueteers" whose exploits will be described later.

There were those in my year who teamed up early on. Nat Dealer and Madison Dodds (Theology) were one such couple who lasted as a pair throughout our time there. Madison could often be seen with a Violin case thrown over her shoulder as she was a member of the University Orchestra.

This type of thing was a common occurrence. It seemed to me, and perhaps to

any objective onlooker that in some ways we were all overachievers, or at least so multifaceted in some fairly unusual ways that there was some unfair distribution of talent going on around these parts. I had only to wonder what my 'special additional talent' was or how it might emerge, if at all. I feel around this time I began to seek for it, searching for something that may or may not have been there. My feeling was that if I looked hard enough and took opportunities when they showed themselves, I would soon begin to develop in ways that could only be positive. There was no other further definitive goal only a blind faith that I could benefit by virtue of my environment and by association with the apparently great and good.

Who Are These People?

These were early friends I met whilst knocking around College. I began to find friends through the courses I was taking too.

The basic fact of the matter was that right from the start I realised I wasn't going to make any friends through Mathematics (the hard course) or Physics. The sad truth for me was that I just couldn't adapt to the surroundings of these courses or the mentality of the people who were taking them. I tried, I did, but no joy. Friends for me were going to come from Geology and Physiology. Indeed it was these 'extra' subjects which began to interest me more, more than the ones I had originally intended to specialise in.

Early days, in an old lecture theatre I sat down next to an attractive young woman with long blond hair in a Physiology lecture. We spoke a little before the lecture began and then again at the end. I learnt her name was Rio Tall from Queens College, we got on well and I looked forward to the next lecture when I would hopefully sit next to her again.

I didn't have to wait so long though, because later in the afternoon I found her again in a Geology lecture, we talked from where we had left off and if anything I found her even more

beautiful. After the lecture I made some remark about the Physiology lecture earlier in the day, asking her if she could illuminate something that I didn't understand. She told me that she didn't study Physiology and that I must have been talking to her twin sister, Rio. Her name was Elly Tall and you know, although I became friends with both of them to some degree and there was one I knew a lot better than the other, I'm not sure if I have them the right way round even now. They were very tall however, I remember that, and one of them was a Blues Volleyball player who, as with all 'Blues' earned her Blues status playing for the University against Oxford (also known as 'the other place').

A good solid friend was Alice Sunrise Culprit. She was a Geologist, and I was very keen on her. We nearly hit the jack pot on a couple of occasions but it was not to be. Playing tennis one Summer on grass we were a great match for each other but we somehow couldn't convert the points into prizes.

Of course I was in regular contact with Bob Smythe and Marilyn Feather from BP and Volley Humous and I made a point of catching up with each other as often as possible.

Further friendships, of even greater substance were made on the fly through friends of friends. The second year was especially

important here, as everyone seemed more strongly established and genuinely confident in their studies and personas. There is much to unfold prior to this — the journey to the beginning of the second year became rather spontaneous and unpredictable.

I was not someone who easily settled into my course, my friendships, a relationship and indeed to any particular lifestyle. I was a student in liminal flux, in that I was forever changing and moving between and across certain boundaries of my constantly adapting identity. Despite having this place in mind since the age of ten, nothing had prepared me for this one thing in particular; the weight of expectation placed by myself on my own two shoulders. I couldn't just coast, I couldn't drop out. Far from it, I had to continue to excel and I had to do so whilst continuing to be myself.

Talking to my old school friends, especially Bob and Rick, in the holidays at the end of the first term, it was clear we were all having very different University experiences, and not one necessarily more stressful than the other. But it did feel to me, perhaps to them also, that we were changing in different ways, ways that we maybe did not understand and in ways that would ultimately see us drifting apart in either a natural or affected manner. Our friendships were very

strong but time and exposure to extreme angles of experience could pull on us. I told my tales, they told theirs and weirdly perhaps I thought that we might not have mixed had we met each other fresh at each of our new educations.

It was already clear that after our Africa experience, which was also very negative as a balance to all the amazement we felt, Miles and I needed to spend a lot of time apart and it just happened naturally that we did. Being in such close proximity to anyone for such an arduous experience needs subsequent time apart.

You can be too close, people have to explore and grow, move and make mistakes, and I'm guessing here but I imagine any and every university is a good place to do this.

'Uni' means one and there is certainly a unity of student life but there is also a unity of personality, and deeper, of character which needs to be addressed. I, for one, was horribly fractured in my identity, although I didn't know it yet. The clues were there because the people I was drawn to as companions all had something of the same depth combined with a subtly troubled psyche which hinted at the need for slow and careful, calm and loving attention. I can only speak for myself here but, in some ways Cambridge, as a pressure cooker, was the worst place for this. In addition there was just so much

to see and do, so many wild and fascinating people to meet and I was becoming greedy in my desires to satiate as many appetites as possible.

At the end of the first term it snowed, heavily. Mule asked me and Sol if we wanted to make ten quid by delivering 'Varsity,' the University newspaper, to a few of the colleges. We said yes and Chantelle came along, wrapped up in a faux fur coat and bobble hat. We had a lot of fun, walking along 'The Backs' by the river and delivering to Kings and Clare and Trinity. A lot of snowballs were thrown, and some talented individuals had made a huge and highly detailed snow sculpture of Kings College Chapel, which lasted a week or so. Sol and Chantelle laughed a lot as a couple and I got a lot of love from them. They were both Londoners and this was a novelty to me.

I think in me they saw a slightly goofy guy who was nonetheless capable of holding a reasonably mature and lucid conversation, even if it did often descend into absurdity and lack of direction or purpose. We were a trio quite often that term, worries and cares were banished and a kind of dreamlike memory is associated with those days. Mule never paid us for delivering the papers, I don't think he even had any intention to.

Now Cambridge May Balls are famous and occur in the Summer. Selwyn however had the peculiarity that it would sometimes also throw a "SnowBall," to play with the idea. We had such a Ball at the end of that first term in December and Sol and I were roped in to decking out a large room on an Australian theme. Our effort was useless, with cut outs from magazines we found of Aussie soap stars, Kylie, Jason and the like, stuck to the walls.

The only thing I remember of that night was singing a karaoke song with Saul. We chose one of Stevie Wonders very worst songs, 'I just called to say I love you,' it was feeble but I believe I was probably very, very drunk and therefore would not have really minded.

There is also some vague recollection of being hypnotised on stage to pretend to be the drummer Phil Collins. Perhaps its best if I don't try to remember that!

In that first short ten week term the moments were non stop and there was rarely a free space to reflect. At different times Cairo, myself, Jean Roux and Chuck Twickenham played a lot of table tennis, we all got quite good at this and hours would pass, knocking that little ball around. Another game we would take on as serious leisure the next year was frisbee.

The term ended, a wild whirlwind introduction to the modern ways of an institution some 900 years old. It was hard to explain to my family the intensity of it all. My sister, Carolyn, was then in her third year studying Banking at The University of Loughborough, and I don't know what she really made of it all. I think she was proud but possibly saw a change in me which might have been less than authentic. Summer of the next year she would come to The Selwyn May Ball, to see what all the fuss was about.

Right now I was packing my bag for a skiing trip to France with Cairo Tunes, Jean Roux Well Ace, and Zara Heart (Cairo's school friend) who had organised the whole thing.

There's No Business Like Snow Business

We took a train from London all the way to the resort in The French Alps. I took my camera and a few rolls of film for the week. It was a long journey but we talked and slept and somehow made it to our destination, a couple of small rooms in a chalet style hotel. Zara's friend was working at this hotel, hence the connection, opportunity, and I think a reduced rate.

A typical day was up early, get as much food in as possible for breakfast then head for the ski lifts with all our clobber. Roux hadn't skied before but being an athletic sort picked it up quickly. I wore skis for a couple of days, then following Cairo and Zara's lead switched to a snowboard. It was both full on and high energy and a sublime mix of good friendship, humour, food and drink.

Skiing is like many things that you hear about in superlative terms, you simply can't adequately describe to someone how good something is but instead must suggest with all you have that they try it for themselves. To race, and glide and carve a line through powder snow on a board is to achieve a natural harmony of mind and body. It can be easy and free, and, depending on the terrain and the state of the

surface, hard and tough. Often you find a freedom so profound which lasts for many a moment in open expanses of snow fields and then suddenly you have to focus with a fierce intensity and fight to navigate trees and rocks and ice.

If you don't fall over you're probably not trying hard enough to improve. Such improvements come with a visceral learning and maybe random pointers from friends. Pushing yourself to your limits means that you are often 'on the edge' for breathtaking amounts of time. Pushing limits of all kinds would become for me a kind of foolish obsession. Physically the rush of speed is a fundamentally exhilarating state and when you stop to catch your breath you can feel your heart beating ten to the dozen and your muscles aching with a healthy dose of lactic acid.

There is a way of watching others, learning from their styles which too becomes natural. You observe, you feel, you try and you improve. The better you get at this sport, the less you have to think, the better you feel, and it's a drug that is as addictive as it is expensive.

If you have a blue sky and a vision of mountains with their crispy white peaks cutting into that blueness, combined with the awareness of tranquility, the piercing quality of just being

alive in this environment comes to the front of your mind.

We stop for a hot mulled wine or a coffee and prices as always in these chalet restaurants are high, but maybe you treat yourself to a pastry too. You need the energy.

The end of the day, maybe a shower and dinner and you really don't have much left in the tank. Apres ski, the idea of socialising and drinking with others can be a real heightener if you can afford the extra cost, but honestly, at the tail end of a day that you want to repeat the next morning, a few beers in your room and some goofing around is just perfect.

Roux, Cairo and I had already gelled but it was Zara who really made that week. A tomboy in many ways she knew how to play with us individually. It was here I think that I first talked to someone about Philosophy. Zara's description of her course seemed exotic, esoteric and bizarre, and became more and more intriguing to me, as did she.

The photos of that week show us all long-haired and daft with some action shots on the slopes and one of perfection lying back on our boards taking in some rays. Six days of hardcore physical exercise meant the train ride back was sleepy and non eventful. We were four undergraduates, healthy and happy ones at that,

and now we were bound together, tighter than before, with eyes on the future, its unknowable character, and the possibilities that it might bring.

Practically Speaking

The second term seemed to be a way of consolidating and building on the madness of the first.

I spoke to friends I'd made who I'd bump into in Old Court, Selwyn's main set of buildings. There were certain people whose names I knew and who knew me through others, whom I'd acknowledge in passing. Amongst these were several more second years, Stefano "Cocaine" Brain and Charles Le Sabre being two. Often it was hard to know why they wanted to talk, what value they might find in me, just a green first year but it was part of the friendly atmosphere of this college that made us very laid back in comparison to others and one that encouraged much cross fertilisation of ideas between students.

Like my peers I was concentrating on work, at this stage and particularly with my course it was very difficult to avoid. I would have at least three lectures a day, and four supervisions a week, usually with one or two other first years and usually taken by PhD students as the supervisor.

The lectures were variously tedious and difficult to understand. I would make copious quantities of notes for later review and be directed to appropriate sections of some of the

many text books that I'd been instructed to buy. These I'd source from Heffers, a gigantic store of tomes, mainly tasked with serving the substantial student population. I had selected one of each of the books I needed from those piled high. Sometimes these piles consisted of multiple piles amounting to hundreds and hundreds of copies of just one text in one corner of one shop.

It was already becoming clear to me that I wasn't enjoying my studies as much as I had hoped. There was a boredom and tedium setting in and I didn't know whether it was me or the quality of the course. It was hard to believe that the great University of Cambridge would produce courses in the Natural Sciences that were somehow substandard, but in denial that I had lost my passion for Physics especially, I began to feel that the teaching was not of a style that held my interest. It was a disappointment that I was not prepared for but I endeavoured to continue to apply myself as best I could.

Part of the problem with Physics was how exclusively Mathematical it was. There was little separation between the two and with my experience at BP conducting real experimental Physics in an industrial framework I decided that I had peaked too early. My secret goal of becoming a 'Mad Physicist' had already been achieved in those Laser labs at the hands of a

master in this respect, the now Sir Professor David Cellarman. How would I ever surpass this achievement? Did I already think myself better in some ways than my peers? Was I indeed somehow more of a real Scientist than my teachers? What kind of arrogance was this?

The further element to each of the three sciences were Practicals and they were the most interesting aspects of my course. In one Physics practical I was given the problem, armed with the necessary tools and equipment, to measure the strength of gravity in a large lab on the outskirts of town. This was not to be marked as part of an assessment but it seemed simply an opportunity to exercise one's experimental muscles.

I did what I was asked and arrived at a figure which seemed accurate and indeed I was told that it was so. But riding my bike back to college I had to ask myself. What was the real point in that? Didn't we already know the value of gravity?

Physiology was a little more challenging. We teamed up in pairs and were asked to make a calculation of the potential difference in volts required to motivate the muscle of a frog's leg. There was a requirement to follow a manual of sorts to do this. This A4 pamphlet was incredibly illustrated with highly detailed but cartoon-like drawings by Tony Hiller, a professor with whom I

was fortunate enough to have my Supervisions. Recently whilst trawling the web on a random search I put in his name and was able to buy a poster he had drawn in 1988 of seven or eight caricatured Cambridge characters. I bought it without hesitation.

Geology provided the most fascinating of practicals, largely because I was faced with 'real' things to look at. This included not only a selection of scores of samples of different types of rocks to analyse in ones own hands but also later the same deal with a fascinating array of fossils. The Sedgwick Museum has the second greatest collection of fossils in the UK after the Natural History Museum in London. Foremost among these was the full-size Iguanodon skeleton which stands in the entrance, with both thumbs up!

As for Mathematics you might be forgiven for thinking that there could be no practical. We were in fact given a problem to do with a sphere's trajectory as it moves down and around a spiral funnel surface. This exercise in topological gymnastics was to be solved with the use of FORTRAN, a computer language which I knew of through my Father's work at Aldermaston. It is derived from 'Formula Translation' and is a 'general purpose compiled imperative programming language, especially suited to numeric computation and scientific computing'!!

We (600 or so) Mathematicians were given slots to learn this language and solve the problem in a place called the Mond Console Room. I found it frightening with the feeling that I was slowly turning into a robot. I did however complete the assignment with a little help from Roger, my supervision buddy.

All in all I felt I was struggling. Struggling to keep up the required standard and struggling to stay focussed on what were chosen and favoured subjects with any degree of keen interest. These were supposed to be 'my thing'. I was getting bored and distracted in lectures and in the environment of any University there were always plenty of other competing concepts that would easily fill these intellectual gaps with more stimulating ideas.

Old Rugby Boots

The Selwyn Rugby club was not the most professional of outfits. There were a series of leagues within which each college played. Selwyn was in the bottom league. We shared a sports ground with another college, I think it was Peterhouse, and it was a ten minute cycle ride.

Joining the Rugby Club was not something I was really interested in. Before coming up to Cambridge I imagined the idea of a rugby club to be about drinking and swearing, a lot, behaving stupidly and getting injured in undisciplined games against far faster, weightier and stronger opponents. I was to find out that I was right about all of this.

I had played Rugby since those days at Prep school, say from the age of eight. I had continued to play at Secondary school right up to the School second team in my sixth form. I was a Full-Back at number 15 and although I prided myself in my tackling ability I was not a natural kicker of the ball and did not have great speed.

Being asked to play for your college and we had only the one team, was a bit like being press-ganged by the Navy. It was somehow known that I was a player, I believe Chuck Twickenham may have had something to do with

this, and one day I was asked if I had a pair of boots, I did. I had brought them with me as a sentimental or nostalgic thing but I had put them on for the last time nearly two years ago. Nevertheless I had brought them. I was given an old Selwyn College Rugby shirt and signed up.

Sol (Flanker), Jean Roux (Centre), Cairo (Wing) and Chuck (Fly Half) had all been harassed in the same way and we found ourselves running around a pitch on a Saturday, passing a ball between us, trying to get in touch with those rusty skills.

We gave it our best and it was good to link up on the pitch with these new friends. The play was hard and we were outplayed. I tackled well but it was against a greater team and after two forty minute halves, I was truly beaten, as was the team.

There were no showers but the captain, in his wisdom, had organised pints of shandy as we came to the club house to analyse the match. A pint of shandy, is quite a thing, when you walk out of rugby match, knackered and thoroughly exhausted.

There are some sports that one must be fit to play, rather than play to get fit, I think Rugby is one of them, unless one actually wants to get hurt. I think I only played a couple more games. One I remember because I met on the pitch, on

the opposing team my old friend from BP days, Bob Smythe. He was doing well at Jesus and played the game at Hooker, a surprising position for him and quite a feat considering he has a two foot long stainless steel rod running down his spine. He'd recently bought a 'De La Soul' album on Compact Disc, "Three Feet High And Rising," one I'd recommended to him a year ago. He was really enjoying it.

Earth Science

The Geology course proved to be the most 'human,' in spite of the nature of Physiology and the theory of Physics. Maths didn't get a look in. The Geology students also had the edge when it came to personality and sheer downright, down to earth character. There was a humour about the subject, the University and the absurdities that we all sometimes found surrounding us. Perhaps it was the basic make-up of the subject that attracted this reaction, it was the most natural of the natural sciences.

So it was that I looked forward with great anticipation to the Geology Field Trip. This wasn't just a ramble around some rocks or caves in a nearby location. No, we were going to the Isle of Arran off the coast of Scotland, for a week.

Throwing a bag in the cargo bay of a bus I hopped on and made contact with some on the folks I knew. Principle amongst these were Alice Sunrise Culprit and Elly Tall. The journey and ferry trip which followed were uneventful and we arrived at a large hotel. It was raining, it continued to rain, it rained all week.

That night we ate and drank and were generally rowdy. The next day we braved the weather and went walking along the coast,

dressed in hardcore waterproofs, in search of various Geological features unique to this island. I was fully involved with the group and the tutors. I felt in my element. I knew what I was looking at with these rock formations and was comfortable asking and answering questions. I may have made some impression with some of the tutors, some of whom I hadn't met before. I surprised myself that day.

In the evening I found myself in conversation over several drinks with one of the tutors who was questioning me about my time at BP. He felt with this experience and a degree in Geology I could walk straight into a well paid job with this huge organisation. The cogs in my mind started to turn, slowly at first and then with greater fluidity.

"Its true," I told him, "I have been considering leaving Physics as my principal subject." He was keen to convince me that this might be a good step and I considered it, I really did.

The problem was that the business of Oil Exploration was to me a fairly soulless albeit profitable venture and I had spent long enough at BP to know that it was not satisfying me in some profound ways. A great number of the people I had come across at this research facility were fine people indeed, from the lab technicians to the

glass blowers, the biochemists to the management. All this was very well for the ten months or so I spent there before I had decided to leave early in order to visit Africa. But here's the thing, my heart just wasn't in it.

I had been a science and technology kind of guy since my Design and Technology O'Level where I made a wind speed indicator, an anemometer. This was featured in the Times Education Supplement. I had been hands on with cars since I bought a 1967 VW Beetle 1500 at the age of 15. I had programmed my VIC-20 computer with games I had even taught a twelve year old Danish boy the first year Chemistry course at school at the request of my Chemistry teacher. I had helped to design an experiment to measure the Second Harmonic Generation of L.A.S.E.R. light reflected from a corroding surface, and although I loved all this in one way, now I was thinking of packing it all in, I must have been crazy. No, not yet, that would happen with the next thing I said.

"Actually I'm thinking of reading Philosophy." Now I really was crazy.

"Why would you want to do a thing like that?" He asked.

And I didn't have an answer. But I was determined to find one, and that was the beginning of the end of one thing and the end of

the beginning of the other. I spent the rest of that week really letting my hair down, relaxing and enjoying life and I noticed that truly, for the first time, I was doing the same thing as almost everyone else. What a decision, what a relief.

Of course there was a lot to do and the next day I began to realise exactly what it was that I was suggesting to myself. I would need to talk to Dafydd Hunkly my school friend who was studying Philosophy at Bristol, I needed to talk to Zara Heart more and I would need to pick the brain of Steve Slighter, Philosopher also and one time rowing companion and leg-warmer wearer. Most vitally I would have to talk to my Director of Studies Ken Wallace to see if this was even possible.

I returned to Cambridge with a renewed vision and confidence in myself and made the appointment with my Tutor.

It was possible, in theory. More surprisingly than this revelation though was that some of my friends were considering similar options. Feeyana was looking at a move from Languages to Anthropology, Volley Humous was considering the leap from Economics to History of Art and Cairo was deep in the decision to make a strategic move from Computer Sciences to Management studies.

Selwyn College had no Philosophy Director of Studies, there simply weren't enough people studying the course. In fact Steve Slighter was the only one in our year, one in a hundred or so. Instead my existing Director of Studies put me in touch with a Philosophy Director of Studies from Girton College, a lady by the name of Dr. Suzie Janes. Suzie was one of the most formidable minds I have ever come across. In the hour I was with her she had given me a subtle but comprehensive intellectual once over.

Suzie Janes made the point that she needed to know whether I was not only committed but also had an aptitude for the subject. I told her of my friends who were studying at other Universities and she was pleased I would be talking to them.

Her requirement was that I achieve at least a 2:2 in my end of year Natural Sciences exams and that I stay up at Cambridge to receive some tuition of the first year Philosophy course which I missed. She would hook me up with a PhD student who would give me some reading and then set me some essays and if all was in order she would allow the change to read the second two years of the Philosophy Tripos, Part 1B and Part II.

Cycling home I was beaming with energy and happy that my life seemed at last to be in a

state of positive flux. I knew the reality of this direction would be difficult, but crucially it would be the substantial challenge of the type I had been looking for.

That spring holiday I met Dafydd and grilled him on his studies to date. I borrowed a few essays of his.

I met with Zara too, who drove to my family home in a blue automatic mini. We had a picnic down by the river and she told me all about her studies. Zara and I had something of a mutual fascination I think and we'd fooled around a little but when she talked about Philosophy she came alive and seemed even more attractive. The subject sounded so alien and esoteric, which of course it is. The words used and the ideas explored were fresh to me. Such an ancient subject, perhaps the most ancient of intellectual subjects, yet now it felt as though I was being given the keys to a bright new world that few had even heard of and yet fewer had set eyes upon. The prospect of letting go of ALL previous knowledge in ALL other subject areas was a feeling of release combined with the slightly naughty thought that I would no longer have to carry around with me the education that I'd had up to this point. This was an incredible idea and irony, because my education to date would first have to be realised and tested with the

application of all my knowledge in order to be able to dispense with it. You have to learn it before you can forget it.

To Be Tried and Tested

The third term led inexorably to exams at its end, just eight weeks to learn some more, consolidate and revise. Everyone, nearly every one, was concerned with doing the best they could but I had a further incentive. I can't say that I was a model student of the sort I imagined working hard all day and into the evening too, but I was determined to meet my target of a 2:2. As I worked, with a mental adjustment to a more positive attitude, I did start to enjoy my subjects in a more productive way. Geology was fun, Physiology was profound, Physics was deep and Maths, well Maths was just hard.

There came a time, nearing the exams, when I was working on a Physics problem. It required some convoluted Mathematics. I had been focussing on it in every way I could for an hour or so, trying to convince myself I was only a small leap of understanding away from finding the solution. Then I just stopped. Spontaneously and naturally I put my pen down and stood up from my desk staring at the messy papers covered in diagrams and Greek symbols. "I can't do this." It wasn't just an admission of defeat, it was a wholesale submission to the demands of the course, the subject and THE PROBLEM. It was

my way of realising that I had met my match, I could go no further, my limits had been reached and breached. This statement covered not just the specific problem but the entirety of the Physics I had come here to study and the Mathematics needed for its development.

Here follows a sample of some subject areas which I had to understand, and commit to memory for the Natural Sciences Part 1A Tripos Exam. I will stop short of listing some of the questions from the exams because they are just too scary, especially the Maths. I have zero memory of the exams but I got my 2:2, weirdly doing best in Maths. I think my lack of memory of these exams was due to what was now possible, i.e. the replacing of the focus of my mind from the facts of the past onto the life changing decision I was in the process of making for the future.

Geology

- Rocks and Minerals
- Radioactivity Dating
- The Geological Timescale
- Crystallography
- Optical Mineralogy
- Earth as a planet
- Structure of Ocean Floor
- Paleo-continental Maps
- Surface Processes of The Earth
- Weathering, Erosion, Transport
- Ice Ages
- Glaciers
- Rock Petrography
- Sedimentation
- Sea Level Changes
- Calciferous Facies and Limestones
- Continental Margins
- Abyssal Fans
- Ocean Basins
- Plate Tectonics and Ocean History
- Paleo-biology; Fossils

- Biostratigraphy
- Biogeography
- Evolution, Extinction

Mathematics

- Vectors
- Limits and Series
- Complex Numbers and Hyperbolic Functions
- Continuity, Differentiability and Integrals
- The Gradient Operator
- The Divergence of a Vector Field
- The Curl of a Vector Field
- Differential and Partially Differential Equations
- Vector Calculus
- Matrices

Physics

- Zero Momentum Frames and Inertial Frames
- Relativistic Kinematics and Dynamics
- Gyroscopes in precession
- Special Relativity
- Space Time
- Relativistic Mechanics
- Gravitational and Electromagnetic Fields
- Harmonic Systems and Resonance
- Wave Motion
- Thermodynamics
- Quantum Mechanics

Physiology

- Nerves
- Muscles
- Breathing
- The Heart and Circulation
- The Kidney
- The Digestive System

New Directions

The Selwyn College May Ball was a celebration to look forward to and one to save money for. At something like one hundred pounds per ticket it was not something that everyone went for but many were buying double tickets to make the occasion complete, with their partners on their arms.

Marquees went up on the Old Court grounds and spilled over into The Gardens, these preparations being controlled by a special committee whose members lived for this special kind of event. It was a black tie occasion for the gents and ball gowns for the ladies. I had invited Bob Wingwell who came up from Bristol and my sister Carolyn who had brought with her a current boyfriend from Loughborough. Mobius Wellwood was a very tall man who was destined for service in the military and then a seat in the Houses of Commons as a Conservative MP. There is a black and white photograph of us with Volley Humous and Sol taken in Cripps Court, all of us have long hair except the MP to be.

There was a shuffling line of partygoers who were slowly ushered in at the front gates of college to receive a glass of champagne upon entry. Here I would love to tell you in great detail

of the layout and indeed a description of what one received by way of one's one hundred pounds. I would like to tell you of the bands that played, the food on offer and ultimately the power of my charm over any number of suitable free young women, dressed in such finery as to make any young buck both weak at the knees and yet courageous enough to make an adequate advance. Although all these elements were present and although I'm sure I had a lot of fun, I believe I spent most of my time dancing, drinking and just talking to people and this is all that I recall. It was a gigantic way to let it all hang out and forget the pressures and stresses of academia. Everyone was having a wild time.

There was a moment caught in my memory when I stood in front of a blue laser which directed it's moving beam onto the facade of the college Chapel. It created patterns and pictures as it raced across the scene. As it came down to a more earthly level I was looking straight down and into an oval cone, a tunnel of light, made visible by a smoke machine. It was tunnel vision and somewhere at the end of it was my destiny.

I was mesmerised not least because I had never seen such a thing put to exactly this use before but also because of my experience with a multi million pound blue pulse laser in the labs at

BP. It seemed this was the end of that story for me and the inspiration for a way forward into the next. Bob found me, I must have been standing under the spell of that magical light for a long time.

I'm sure my sister and her partner had a good time but I didn't see them all night. In point of fact, if I remember anything more at all about the whole night it was that I must have drifted through it largely alone, bumping into friends and staying with them randomly before stumbling into the next. Also I think my memory of the affair is mixed up with other Selwyn Balls that occurred in the next two years. This was not to say that they were all the same, in fact the Ball in the third year stood head and shoulders above the other two for other reasons.

I must have crashed late that night and Bob too. Carolyn and her partner for the night were booked into a hotel. The next day seemed like the end of a long journey for me.

Carolyn's car, parked near College had been broken into overnight, the rear window having been smashed in. I immediately imagined it to be the work of some local hooligans but could drunken idiots in dinner jackets be the vandals?

There is a long history between 'Town and Gown' in fact the thick, high walls and castle-like

defences of the entrances to colleges were originally design to keep undesirables out and such measures would of course have been a red rag to a bull for those shut out from these havens of privilege and the well healed.

Aberdeen McWales trained for, and then fought in, the annual Town vs Gown Boxing match held in the centre of town in The Corn Exchange. It was a barbaric event with much blood on the canvass of the ring. Aberdeen put up a good fight, went the full three rounds but eventually was fairly soundly beaten.

Things such as where to have a drink were an example of this divide. Most students would probably imbibe at their college bar but those a little more adventurous might saunter into town in search of a nice pub. But although some pubs were student friendly, indeed oriented to the student customer there were other pubs that were thought to be off limits. Which of these was which came down to either personal experience or the knowledge shared with those who knew. On the whole, compared to my friends at other Universities I would say that Cambridge students drank less during term but were more likely to binge drink at certain chosen events. The drug scene was thankfully minimal and on the whole I was able to avoid it despite my past predilections for becoming entangled in its additive web.

It was the end of term, people were going home, except me. I had to move out of my room, like everyone else at the end of the academic year, but only to reinstall myself in another College room, part of a house in the College grounds. I was going to be in Cambridge for the next two weeks to meet with a Postgraduate student who would set me some reading and essays and give me some feedback as to how I was doing.

The day before the last day of term Cairo's parents arrived and invited me out to dinner. The four of us went to a really cool Chinese restaurant called "Charlie Chan's". They were great as a family, Cairo had no brothers or sisters, but plenty of cousins I learned. They were keen to know everything about our studies and I felt truly humbled to be made to feel so welcome in their company, also it was the first time I dried crispy duck.

The final day of term and everyone's parents showed up to collect their offspring but I just watched as cars were packed and one by one they drove away to all corners of the country. Later that day tragedy struck.

Everything in Flux

I got word of it from someone who had seen Sol in trouble. His father had driven from London to collect him and had been in a horrible car crash. Sol had gone to The Addenbrookes Hospital where his dad was in a critical condition on life support. I couldn't believe that such a thing had happened but it had.

I waited around all afternoon and into the evening until I found Sol. His dad had been badly injured and had not regained consciousness, but he was alive. I think that night we may have had a quiet pint of Guinness in the College bar but as I tried to fall asleep in my new room I felt for him deeply. I closed my eyes but couldn't clear my mind, when I opened my eyes it was to see hundreds of fluorescent stars that someone had stuck all over the ceiling. Sol was the real star.

The next day we met briefly, Sol had been at the hospital but there had been no improvement in his father's condition. As a gift, he'd bought me a "Mr. Men" book from the hospital shop as he knew I was collecting them. It was such a genuine and funny thing that raised a smile but there was no doubt this was going to be hard from him. The next two weeks we met every

few days as I was having my extra tuition. Sol's father continued to be unconscious in a coma.

Essays were set by a young woman who was doing her postgraduate studies at Kings College. It was great to go there and see a much older and far grander set of buildings than at Selwyn. Our college looks great but is 'only' a couple of hundred years old. Kings goes way back and of course its famous Chapel is a sight to behold.

My reading, taking notes and writing of essays was a serious new challenge but in these two weeks I improved greatly. It was a bit of a shock to the system, writing essays instead of crunching numbers and solving problems, but from Geology at least, in which I'd written several essays, I had some preparation.

The hardest part was grappling with and grasping new concepts then relating them to each other in coherent statements that gelled together to make logical statements. However, this was what I had dreamed about as the Idea of Cambridge - a place where one can comprehend and express one's own ideas through those of others who have made a mark in their chosen field.

During these two weeks I noticed a great difference in the complexion of the city. With thousands of students having vacated the place

there were next to no bicycles flying around the city centre. Instead the number of tourists had multiplied many fold. Mainly American, Chinese and Japanese travellers flocked to photograph the Colleges, arriving in great coach loads, most probably from London. The town did well from them, as they were most definitely spending a lot more money than students.

As money is mentioned, its best for me to explain that at this time it was revealed to me by my parents that I had inherited a large amount of it from my Grandfather. They had kept this a secret as it was intended in his will that I have it at the age of twenty-one. It's difficult for me to say how this affected me, but it did, in both good and bad ways.

With enough money to buy a small London apartment I was now somehow fundamentally in a different position from my friends. A lot of doors suddenly opened for me, at least in my mind, but of course now I was not quite in the same boat as my peers. I was glad I had made up my mind to switch courses before I knew about all this because it may well have altered my decision. That decision had not been about money but rather a personal quest and what might also be described as a dream of some sort.

It's true that there is a lot of money and a lot of class at Oxford and Cambridge but there is

something else too, something more universal. Gone are the days when privilege and status alone will get you a place to study at these Universities. To be offered a place by virtue of who your father is, or just by what school you come from may have been common place in the past but not now.

Selwyn has one of the highest ratios of state to independent school admission, I believe it may now be up to fifty percent. It must be said that if you go to a school which is GOOD, whether it is a public school, a private independent school or a state school you stand a much better chance of success, whichever University you go to, and it will always be so on merit.

The fact is that those who do wind up in these 'dreaming spires' have at least these two qualities; they have been able to realise who they might become and they have the imagination to see how they can enable this. This isn't just opportunism, it's simply the positive ability to lift one's expectations and one's self-belief to meet a challenge.

The only problem with this is that sometimes certain character types can strive with unbounded ambition to overcome all that is in their way in order to reach a sometimes undefined goal. They may climb so very high and

'succeed' only to find the victory empty, or that they are in fact falling a very long way back down to Earth. This 'Icarus Complex' can be a very real condition for those who might overestimate their talents, which can be compounded when in competitive surroundings peopled by those who have indeed an abnormal excess of abilities.

I was the perfect candidate for unknowingly subscribing to this complex and it was only going to get more real as the next few years unfolded. The essential lesson to learn here would have been to become well acquainted with ones limitations. I knew all this back then, but honestly I really didn't think it applied to me, and for just two reasons; I thought I was both 'special' and that I was being 'original'.

Having said this, due to the abilities of my grandfather at playing the stock market, I now had some opportunities that I hadn't had before and I decided I was going to spend a little of my lucky windfall in search of more. I was going to Paris for the rest of the Summer.

A friend at BP, one Isabelle Caucheteux, had become engaged whilst I was there. Her fiancé, Pascal Silberzan owned a "bachelor apartment" in the Fourteenth Arrondissement of Paris and she had impressed upon me that should I wish to use it during any Summer I was more than

welcome. I had contacted her and all was good. We picked a date. I told Sol he was welcome to come and visit if things changed with his Dad or if he just wanted to get away for a while. I gave him the number where he could contact me and the address.

The University language lab was available and virtually empty during my prolonged stay in College and I made use of it to brush up on my rudimentary spoken French. Isabelle had suggested that I join the Alliance Francais for a spoken language course and, considering I was now financially energised I thought why not. My confidence was beginning to grow.

Isabelle instructed me on the best way to travel, not a ferry and coach but the airport and then a particular numbered bus from which I could disembark on the outskirts of Paris just a couple of hundred yards from her family home.

With the last part of the trip a walk with my backpack on my back I arrived in the Summer heat at a large, almost mansion-like example of a French townhouse. On every window a set of wooden shutters, light blue paintwork beginning to peel from the walls and in the foreground a dry and dusty garden. I approached the front door and rang the bell.

Francophiles

Isabelle answered and I was welcomed in with great gusto. She joked about my long hair, it was now down to my shoulders and stood out in all directions. It had been a year since I had seen her and in addition to my hair a lot had changed. She was now married and had a baby, in that order just! Her waters had broken just minutes after the wedding ceremony and she was rushed to hospital, officially married, to have hers and Pascal's baby on the same day.

I was quickly introduced to the little fella who was only a few months old. He was tiny and cool and seeing Isabelle with him was a perfect picture. She asked me if I wanted to hold him, I did and this was a first for me, holding a baby.

The house was empty save for the three of us and Isabelle insisted that since I was now in France we should speak only French. I complied but this didn't last long. I could ask questions and state things but my problem was listening to and understanding the answers. Parisiennes tend to talk faster than other French people, certainly faster than the lady on the other side of my language lab tapes. I kept trying, Isabelle kept correcting and then we switched to English every now and then.

She put me straight to work topping and tailing French beans and she cooked us a marvellous meal. Afterwards she breast fed her son and put him down to sleep. We talked into the night and then she showed me to a room where I was able to collapse and sleep, ready for my trip into central Paris the next morning.

A grand breakfast, a short drive to the train station, an au revoir to Isabelle and suddenly I was alone again. Surrounded by foreign signs, car registration plates, fashions and the entire infrastructure of the transport system might have been daunting, but I was already feeding from the differences. Vive La Difference!

With a change of transport from the overland train to The Metropolitan I was suddenly racing along underground. This was not the same as The Tube, all sensations being heightened, all variations from my comfort zone being absorbed, processed and integrated into a new version of myself in flux.

When I disembarked I was walking. I had a map, a destination and a key. It was hot, my pack was heavy. I tried to focus and be single minded but I had been in Paris once before with Bob Wingwell on an "Inter-railing" trip three years ago and the memories were now fusing with realities and current feelings, all sharply in the present tense.

I found the building, at least I hoped it was the right one, a ten storey complex of what age I couldn't be sure, 50 years? I entered, I'd been told not to take the lift, a cage inside an open metal structure that provided a central spine to the building. So it was a climb up the relatively narrow staircase, a climb to nearly the very top. At the Seventh floor maybe four rooms to a floor, I took my key and turned it in the lock, the door opened, I went in.

When Isabelle had said it was small she hadn't been kidding, it was dark too. Ahead of me a small bathroom with a shower, a loo and a basin and then just one other room about 12ft by 6ft. The shutters to the windows were closed. I took off my pack and put it down then opened both the shutters and windows. Light streamed in and I was able to see the building proper. There was a courtyard at the bottom, the size of a tennis court and all around it rose the other rooms, all looking in at each other.

I poured a glass of water from a kitchen area, just a tiny sink and a single ring hob, sat down on a couch that I had been told turned into a bed and took in the sunshine. I took my shirt off drank my water and decided that I had arrived, it's important one does that in a new place as a traveller, otherwise you end up taking

everything with you from before and never begin truly to just be where you are.

I slept for several hours not addressing what I needed to do but when I came to there was the matter of food to consider. I would need to explore, I would need to go outside on my own and speak to French people. What was I doing? Why exactly was I here? I was hungry I knew that much, so like a hunter I went out to hunt.

There were French people, everywhere, obviously! There were many shops and after walking for only fifteen minutes I found a small supermarché. I don't know what I bought, stuff that I thought would last I expect. The beauty of it was that I recognised nothing, except for International branding, all around me was deliciously different. If it was in a can I went by the picture. I bought bread and milk and eggs, I had a small fridge back at the pad. I bought tea and coffee and pasta, most probably.

I carried my goods in plastic bags and when I was home, for that is what it would be for over a month, I put the shopping on a small table which, with a couple of chairs, completed the itinerary of the place. I ate heartily. The day was still hot and I experimented with closing the shutters different amounts to throw parts of the room into shade.

It became later, the sun dropped below the apartments on the opposite side of the courtyard. It grew darker, I switched on the lights, I put a classical CD from a small collection into a little Hi-Fi and listened to something so sublime I fell asleep once again on the couch listening to the mellow sounds. When I awoke again it was late evening and a little chilly. I shut the windows and curtains, made the couch into a bed and went to sleep.

Waking and checking my watch I was late. A quick change, up and out. A walk to the Metro, purchase a Carnet (10 tickets), short trip to another stop, quick walk to the Alliance Francais.

The language school was bustling and alive with young students. There was so much colour and socialising here, just on the front step and I immediately felt part of the scene. I went in and joined a mass of students registering for classes. I soon found the correct way to go and was processed very quickly. They did a quick assessment of my current spoken and written abilities and then assigned me to a class. I paid, I was given an identity card and that was that. I just had to show up the next day and go to a particular room. I left without trying to befriend anyone, especially as I already had a friend with whom I had to make contact.

I made a phone call from a public phone. After some small delays I got through to Cairo. He was working at Apple headquarters in the city and we arranged to meet that evening near the Pompidou Centre.

It felt that we were less travellers or tourists but more akin to temporary residents. At this time many Parisians vacate the city for their holidays, typically to the South of the country. This gives the place a unique quality that invites you to explore and feel at ease as you do so. Cairo and I wandered. We agreed another time and place to meet again in a few days and I went home. The next day I would be facing a unique learning experience and a surprise liaison with a beautiful person.

Nice Frisbee!

The class number was small, only eight of us, maximum. We were all from different European countries as we introduced ourselves in French. The tutor made it clear that French only was to be spoken at all times and this made perfect sense as not only was it the language we had come to learn to speak more effectively it was the only language common to us all.

Opposite to me in the small room, in the seated circle we made, was a young Italian woman whose name was Benedetta.

Benedetta spoke accomplished French with an Italian accent which was soft and beautiful. Every now and then, when she was searching for a word or phrase, she became frustrated and animated, this too was attractive especially as she would smile and laugh upon remembering.

Without a feeling of pressure, and my language lab work paying dividends, I did not embarrass myself finding that the selection process of putting people together with similar abilities was effective. We were all a part of something, a natural desire to communicate in another language and as this was purely spoken French there was no need to write anything

down, there would be no tests, just a progression over a month of ways to talk and listen.

The bonus of finding myself only a few feet from a lovely girl, who was of a similar age, was a perfect distraction and motivation rolled into one. I wanted to impress. We made eyes at each other the whole class and when it ended I managed to talk with her outside the room. We spoke in our best French for a while, but it was Benedetta who switched to English which was to our mutual advantage as it was preferable way for her and us to express ourselves.

Even so I ran out of words, but spontaneously, realising I was not wearing my watch I asked her the time. She told me and I asked what she was doing later that evening; Would she like to walk through a part of the city with me? She said Yes! Our rather formal way of talking to each other ended and a friendship founded on the need to communicate, amongst other things, began.

We chose the Left Bank and wandered slowly along becoming slowly acquainted. We went into the famous Shakespeare and Company book shop and I bought a slim volume of what I hoped was an easy to read story. We took a coffee and had some food, it was late afternoon by this time as the hours had passed quickly.

After many hours in each others company we fell into a rhythm of talking punctuated by long quiet moments which nevertheless felt easy and natural. As the sun was beginning to hang low in the sky we sat down in front of Notre Dame Cathedral. Benedetta said, "Why don't you kiss me?" I thought why don't I, and we kissed.

This was all shaping up to be a sound plan. My feelings at the time were one of a relaxed young man with his entire future ahead of him. Here I was with a beautiful foreign woman in an idyllic setting in one of the most incredible cities in the world, certainly one famed for romance. Yet I took in my stride, this was natural for me, I needn't count my blessings for they would count themselves as I simply passed through them. It was a kind of arrogance to any casual onlooker but for me it was just my life playing itself out in colour vision and crystal clear sound.

Benedetta and I eventually pulled ourselves away from each other and returned to our respective domiciles. I would see her tomorrow and five days a week at least for the next four weeks. I had struck gold and saw no way that my luck could be tainted or diminished. The next evening she came back to my place, we made love and the dream was complete.

We spent a lot of time together and Benedetta introduced me to her friends who were

a rather large number of Italian girls, all in Paris for various reasons. There was one meal I remember in a small restaurant were amongst nine or so I was the only male and the only non-Italian. They spoke quickly in their mother tongue laughing and gesticulating in ever more expressive and expansive ways and then occasionally their attention would turn to me. Questions were asked in English, I answered and laughter ensued. That was the pattern.

Cairo was all over me for details and wanted to meet this exotic new person. We hung out, the three of us, visiting the Louvre and other museums and galleries and Benedetta added to the group two of her closer Italian friends, Monica and Louisa.

The day out I remember most vividly was the five of us visiting Monet's house and garden and then onto The Rodin Collection at his old home. Monet had created a garden of dreamlike quality which he then set about painting and Rodin's Museum, which Isabelle had recommended as her favourite, was populated both inside and out with his vast stone sculptures including with vast presence and fame, "The Thinker".

We spent days after class and then at the weekends with Cairo eating baguettes and cheese and drinking cheap wine in the parks.

When we saw a cafe we liked we stopped for coffee. One time, whilst we sat chatting outside at one such cafe there were two young men with their shirts off throwing a frisbee nearby. Monica and Louisa were interested, "They play a nice frisbee." "Yes, nice frisbee." Then looking at Cairo and I, "Do you play frisbee?" Cairo answered for us both "Yes we play frisbee". Then she asked me, "Do you two play a nice frisbee?" "Yes, we play a nice frisbee."

Conversations such as these were peppered with laughter as we appreciated the subtleties of language. That we spoke mostly English was to our favour, Cairo and I, but there was always a playful exploration of the three languages we found ourselves inhabiting. Anytime later we saw someone playing frisbee, or just some beautiful person, the cry went up, "Nice Frisbee!"

Monica, Louisa and Benedetta cooked fresh pasta that they made for Cairo and I, and all on the single hob in my flat. We ate a large meal and drank red wine before they all went to their homes and left Benedetta and I to each other.

Benedetta and I continued our love affair, for that is the best description of it I had, but mostly we behaved without public displays of affection. Ours was a private closeness that we

shared intimately and playfully but in groups we were all just friends, albeit international ones. I think for us both and at only the age of 20 these weeks were of great importance. It all seemed so easy yet we enjoyed the chance to push each other in small ways.

Sometime in that first couple of weeks Benedetta asked me if I had always had long hair. I replied that it had been three years since I had last had a hair cut. She wanted to know what I would look like with short hair. Without really thinking about it and passing a Barber's shop I went in a hippy and came out with a very short crew cut. It looked good. Monica and Louisa made endless jokes about how Benedetta had control over me now but the thing was I needed the change in image to match my change in status. I was no longer the 'Mad Scientist,' I was truly a 'Philosopher' now.

When in the flat, alone, I was reading quite a lot of Philosophical texts, which I had brought with me all the way from Cambridge. The Heffers price tickets on these books seemed to echo a feeling of novelty as they represented something that was both so far away and yet so close to my state of mind. Books on Logic and Ethics and a little Sartre and Descartes thrown in for good measure, having considered my location.

The funny thing about this was there was no real pretension about how I was feeling and acting, it was all just 'appropriate' when everything was considered. Although I was most definitely 'in a bubble' of my own creation there was no hint that I was doing anything wrong in any way. I was just being myself.

Then I had visitors. A phone call on the landline in the apartment was from Sol. The sad news was that his dad had died and Sol was really ready to get away from it all, of course there was just enough room on the floor for him. He gave me details of his flight in a few days time and I gave him directions how to get to me, I would make sure I was in to receive him.

Sure enough around the appointed time there was a knock at the door.

Sol and I went a little crazy because firstly I no longer had long hair and secondly because he now had a large black beard. He was Jewish and explained later that it was part of tradition not to shave after the death of a father and indeed he impressed upon me his need to visit a synagogue every day of his stay in Paris.

The other reason I went crazy was that Sol had brought someone with him, my African travelling buddy and soon to be Art Historian, Volley Humous. They had got the same flight together and kept the surprise from me as a bit of

fun. It was great to see them both and I hoped they wouldn't mind a certain degree of closeness, sleeping in the small living area.

It was a mid-week afternoon as I had already been to my class. Cairo was working, but Sol, Volley and I went out straight away to explore. For some reason we went to the United Nations building. We went in and saw the Picasso painting of Guernica. We went further in and found ourselves in the main assembly hall which was totally empty. There was no security anywhere to be seen and we simply walked amongst the desks where the representatives of all the countries sit. There was a tall step ladder with steps on both sides, erected on the centre stage at the front, maybe in use for some kind of maintenance. Feeling bold, Volley and I climbed up either side and hugged in a symbol of peace at the top whilst Sol took a photograph. What would have happened if someone had come in I don't know.

Sol found a synagogue and Volley and I waited. On the way back to the apartment on the Metro we stood, the three of us, looking at each other: young guys on the verge of some kind of manhood. There was a joke we had, I don't know where it came from, but it served to unify us in some way. Spoken out loud and in unison we said for us alone "Not one, not two, but

Three Whole Eggs!" I think it was a kind of assertion that we were 'good eggs' as men. Maybe I read too much into this, maybe we were just goofing about, maybe a bit of both.

Over the next few days Volley and Sol met Benedetta and Monica and Louisa. We went to a cinema and sat in the back row, drinking beers and smoking a joint whilst watching Luc Besson's 'Atlantis'. This was an underwater documentary with no words, instead set to an original score.

I have to say all this was new ground for me. The problem was that Benedetta and I now had no way of being alone together. There was an initial discomfort with having so many people around the fragile relationship that we'd grown together. I felt protective of her and didn't want to 'share' her with people even if they were good friends. Then I didn't want her to be around when these male friends of mine were about. It was confusing because I'd never had to deal with such a situation before but I was learning. It sorted itself out when myself, Volley, Sol and Benedetta all slept together in the room. It was a tight fit but the closeness and the humour that ensued served to break my irrational concerns.

Then, to throw another spanner in the works, Miles arrived with a couple of his friends, a guy and a girl and for a few days we were one happy, sweaty pile of seven bodies inside a room

not much bigger than a snooker table. Miles had taken my invite at face value but I wasn't sure about his friends who it seemed were planning some kind of an insurance scam by reporting some bags stolen to the police, obtaining the police report and then claiming on their travel insurance. Good luck with that!

Thefts were not uncommon in Paris, especially in certain areas. I had bought a good pair of Ray Bans, and had even photographed them in black and white in the pleasing light from my windows. They were swiped the next day in Montmartre by a quick teenager. I took them off my head and lay them on my bag next to me for just a few seconds. Bing! They were gone.

Pascal, Isabelle's fiancée, came to see me in what was most definitely HIS apartment on one of these evenings. As I had turned my solo invitation into some sort of compressed commune he was not happy and asked me out onto the landing of the floor to explain myself. I told him the truth and he calmed down, he was a decent enough guy and Miles and his buddies were leaving the next day. I was happy seeing so many friends, but I couldn't help feeling things would have been better had it just been Benedetta and I with the occasional company of Cairo. Still, given the bigger picture, it was very difficult to complain.

This crazy mix of loving people was a heady concoction which was a dream scene in its own right. When it came to an end I was more fluent in French, I had short hair, I had begun an intellectual exploration into the history and life of ideas, I was for the first time in ages both in good health and fully relaxed in mind and body and I had discovered myself with a beautiful Italian woman with whom I would correspond for many years to come. We always used blue Airmail paper and through this medium we were able to meet on just two occasions over the next five years, once in London and once in New York. She had said that what we had experienced between us was a "Story," I think she was right.

What a Summer, what a city, what a girl...

Our House

The start of the second year and virtually all of us new second years had moved out of the Cripps Court accommodation. A few remained, moving to large rooms at the tops of the corridors, making use of the great cooking and washing facilities.

Most couldn't wait to get out of the rather imposing concrete structure and move into a big old room in Old Court. Cairo Tunes was one of these, his room having a large ceiling and sharing a bathroom with a few others. The biggest draw of these types of rooms was the style and status. To live 'in college' had a certain prestige and on a practical level quick access to all college amenities. The prospect of living close to all this activity and the greater part of people in the college, and in such beautiful surroundings too, was one I considered for a long time before deciding on an alternative option.

Twenty-three and twenty-five Grange Road were a couple of three storey houses pushed up against each other maybe three hundred yards from college. They were owned by the college but were sufficiently distant from it to make a kind of difference. They were symmetrical to each other in plan with huge front doors leading into each but when inside there

was a large door in the separating wall through which one could pass from one to the other. Downstairs there was also a pay phone, a kitchen and a living room. Out the back was a large garden.

The assigning of rooms was on a kind of first come first served basis, you put in your request and if you were lucky you would get what you wanted or maybe your second choice.

A group of us had decided to stay together and we applied for some of the rooms in these houses where we already knew some of the second years, who were now third years. There were twenty or so rooms and it was a good situation all round for those of us who wanted a little more privacy and freedom from the college surroundings. It was a cool place and we were after all, very cool people.

In No.25 at the top of the flights of stairs in on the third floor, Room 10 was me. I had a desk in front of a window which looked over Newnham College Gardens. This view was beautiful all year round as it changed colour and composition with the seasons. The room was small, just a bed and a chest of drawers with heat provided by a rather dangerous looking electric heater.

Opposite me in no.9 (or was it no.11?) was Chuck Twickenham. He had an even smaller room but he folded his six foot plus frame into it

seemingly with little trouble. Scattered liberally around other rooms in the two houses were; Feeyana, Katie Stealem, Sol and Nat Lotus.

The kitchen was always a disaster zone and I rarely braved it. The lounge had a tv, and I seem to remember there was always some discussion as to whether or not we had a tv licence. Still the picture looked the same either way. Its primary purpose was to bring us the latest 'Twin Peaks' episode for which the room was always packed.

The other rooms in the two houses were occupied by third years. Some doors had an ominous quality as you weren't sure of the identity of the person who lived behind them, but it was a community of like-minded people and this was one of the main advantages for living there. Third years I was friendly with included; Becca Blanc, Liddy, Donimic Vor Ray and Baz Revans.

Steward East and Tracy Bong were now gone and this was the new order of things. We were now all part of the process of change that had been going on for hundreds of years, moving forward to the next level of education and seniority. There were of course now a whole new year of first years who had suddenly materialised and some of us were to get to know some of them too.

Pedro Ryder was now the rowing captain and had therefore taken over a special set of rooms dedicated to the position. It was a huge room, bedecked with rowing memorabilia and even furniture made from boats. His buddy and Economics friend Frank Sighmans was installed in another plush room nearby.

Early on in that term Becca Blanc, a petite and perfectly complete English student, made a meal for a large group of us, as a kind of welcome to the house which she and several of the others had also inhabited the year before. This was no ordinary meal. It was not a formal occasion but we were asked to be prompt.

Her genius in the kitchen meant that, at a long table-clothed table in her room we were, the ten of us in total, served a three course meal. I remember the home-made tomato soup and freshly baked home-made bread in particular. This kind of excellence shone from Becca's smile. After leaving in a year's time she would move with Pedro and Frank into a vast lower ground floor apartment in the rather expensive Gloucester Road. I imagine the two guys were subtle but persuasive in their abilities to get Becca to cook for them on occasion. Her meal was incredible.

Those of us who moved into 23/25 Grange Road all stayed there the next year too. By then

there were many who were now first years who came to the house as well. There was always a good vibe and at the end of our time we had a party in the garden with a whole bunch of friends from other colleges.

Right now I had two things on my mind; my new academic course, and what I might take part in as an extracurricular activity. I felt I needed something in order to better myself, improve my life, enrich the student experience, add flavour to my curriculum vitae for the consideration of future employers and highlight my original character in order to land the perfect female companion.

It was around now that I began to try to think about exactly which career paths Philosopher's generally tend to follow and indeed just what kind of women are attracted to the whole Philosophy thing. Perhaps I might have attempted these calculations a little earlier.

The Fresher's Fair, primarily for first years, was taking place the next day and I asked Chuck if he would go with me to check out any opportunities. He was up for it and we cycled across town first thing in the morning. He was a great friend and very loyal too, always dependable and solid company. He had an elder brother who was a teacher and in some aspects Chuck was both a brother and a teacher

to me for my time at the house and during several periods in the future.

Winging It

The huge sports hall was brimming with a keen panic of students fighting for space amongst hundreds of stalls, displaying and advertising their very special and unique types of past-times. Chuck and I meandered around the stalls carefully stepping around the overly keen first years who were lending to the space a grand babble of voices.

It didn't take long for one stall to take my attention, mainly because they were the most organised and well constructed of units, but also because one symbol tapped into my soul.

The characteristic target or 'roundel' of the RAF with its red centre separated in white from its blue circumference went straight to my heart. From the stories of World War II which I had heard from my mother's father, via my Air-Fix models, Aviation books, and playing 'Top Trumps' as a boy with friends, the RAF were a kind of legend in my mind. I had no particular desire to head straight for the nearest war zone but their main banner drew me in like a moth to a flame. It read "Learn To Fly For Free". And in this moment that was exactly what I wanted to do.

The Cambridge University Air Squadron had been kicking around since 1925 and along

with similar operations at other Universities fed the regular RAF with would-be pilots. Joining afforded one the rank of Officer Cadet and in addition to attended a group meeting once a week where there was a formal meal and a lecture. Student pilots could take to the air up to once a week. The airport used for this was, in my time, at Teversham airfield which was about a four mile cycle ride, thirty minutes or so from Selwyn.

I talked to those guys at that stall for maybe only ten minutes but I was sold. I asked Chuck if he thought it was a good move, he said, "Go for it!" There was a small matter of an interview first to see if I was suitable.

I turned up to this interview in a suit, as requested, it being my Grandfather's again, which was the only suit I had. The conversation was between me and two RAF senior Captains, perhaps in their late forties or early fifties. We talked all around the subject and naturally I had a lot of questions which they answered easily. They seemed most interested in my eyesight which was 20:20 but this wasn't a normal interview. There was of course the usual protocol of any interview of seeing if this was something good for me and for them to see if I was made of the right stuff. However, in addition there were a few little 'extras'.

Towards the end of the interview they wanted to ask a couple of little things I hadn't quite factored in to the whole "Learn to fly for free thing." Would I, for example, have any problem dropping bombs onto positions about which I knew nothing other than their coordinates? Was I comfortable with the term 'Collateral Damage,' when applied particularly to innocent victims of genuine targets? I paused, found myself nodding and said that I was fine with all this. I guess I just really wanted to fly.

Right in that moment I knew that I would almost definitely not be making a career as pilot a primary life-goal. I just really wanted to fly and I think they must have known this, had seen it before and were actually ok with it. My questions as to the commitments I would be making if I was offered a place probably highlighted this. With assurances that my signing on the dotted line would not represent a permanent or undoable operation I was satisfied that I was all in.

"One last thing, have you ever taken illegal drugs?" That one stopped me in my tracks, there was a pause whilst I considered my options then I told them straight, "No, absolutely not." I think the pause might have been just a few seconds too long because the two of them just kept staring at me. I had to come up with something fast, I'm not a habitual liar but when put on the spot I can

usually hold my own. "Well, there was this one time in my gap year when I was in Africa with a tribe of nomadic Pygmies." Was it illegal to lie to the military? They looked at each other, "Well it's probably a good idea to get yourself tested with a GP and get the results to us, just to make sure it's not still in your system." "Of course," I replied, "not a problem."

I thought afterwards that this was probably a big deal, drugs being "in your system" probably meant more to them than just being in your blood stream, it was the whole notion of being "contaminated" in a most undesirable way. I know now that there are many people who have never touched illegal drugs in any way shape or form and that in the forces it's a huge NO. I think that their insistence on the test was in some ways to either weed me out (forgive the accidental pun) or to make sure that I wasn't an active druggie. I can't believe they thought that cannabis would remain in the blood stream for over two years.

In fact I checked with Chuck, a Doctor in the making, and within in a day he got back to me with a clearance duration of a maximum of two weeks. No more joints for Brad if I want to take to the sky. I desisted for the necessary period and got a test through a local GP. The thing about this whole rigmarole was that I now

genuinely felt that drugs in any form were history and that this was a new 'clean' chapter in my life that would continue for the rest of my life. I was wrong about that.

I submitted my immaculate test results to the authorities and was soon invited to spend an afternoon "kitting up". A group of us new recruits assembled at the airfield and went through what was obviously a tried and tested formula of pairing us with our necessary equipment. This consisted of brand new; black boots of the correct size, an all-in-one jumpsuit and a pair of kid gloves. Also our heads were measured for a helmet which was the only shared item. We then stowed our kit in assigned lockers at an airfield building which was the meet point for flight training. It was all very military, very RAF. Now I had to wait for a flight slot.

The formal meal and lecture were held in a building about a fifteen minute bike ride away from Selwyn, every Monday night, I think at 6pm. Once again comfortable in the suit that had taken me from sixth form at school, via BP in Walton-on-Thames, to Matriculation and now here the whole thing was a riot.

I don't remember much about this, which I think is the point, but there was what might now be called a "Hazing" ritual. All new recruits, maybe ten of us, were told to take off our jackets

and ties. There was a ball, a bit bigger than a cricket ball, and this was thrown into an otherwise empty room about 20ft on each side. We were told to 'get the ball'. The aim of this exercise was for the individual to get the ball and hold onto it for as long as possible. The game, if you can call it that, lasted about half an hour. In this time shirts were ripped and a great deal of sweat produced. Some people were perhaps unsurprisingly better at this than others.

I did give it my all, and had the ball several times, but standing by the side for a few minutes to catch my breath I met my only friend I would have there, Fred Green. We agreed on one thing, this was pointless. In fact of course it wasn't completely pointless, it was simply a way of making sure that you would DO something that was apparently pointless for as long as needed, without questioning the point of it all, presumably because that is what happens in WAR.

The suit trousers were fine, if a little dirty and after freshening up with some water, dinner was served. This was excellent. A three course meal, silver service, served piping hot to a table of thirty or so men and women, by several staff. However it was not up to the standard of Becca Blanc I must say. There was wine in excess, which I consumed. The atmosphere grew loud but not as much as a Rugby dinner I went to. There was a

pause for one delegated person to tell a joke and at the end of the meal the subject of the lecture was announced.

The first lecture of the term was given by a pilot who had been shot down in his Tornado jet during the Gulf War, and taken hostage to be tortured for many months before eventually being released. He was a proper war hero in the classical sense and his talk was riveting on any level you wished to analyse it. After two hours he said, "Oh I'm sorry, I've been going on for ages, I must be getting really boring." The assembled seated audience all said no, not at all, and he continued for another hour. Some of the incidents he talked about and the graphic, straight from the horse's mouth, details probably came under the official secrets act.

It ended at 11pm and I cycled home in the dark with no light, kind of fazed by the whole experience. I felt I knew more about war and less about myself than at any earlier point in my life. Some things you can't prepare for and what's more there were few of my current friends to whom I felt I could relate my recent experience to. Had I taken a large step too far in the wrong direction?

I Think Therefore I Am (At Least I Think I Am)

I had taken the Part 1A Natural Sciences Tripos. Now I was facing the Part 1B Philosophy Tripos. Despite my preparations for this change of course the reality was that I had missed a whole year; Part 1A Philosophy. AND I had also missed the corresponding exams where this foundational knowledge is tested and aired, where one learns one's strengths and weakness, limitations and specialities. In my third year I would study for Part II, completing the necessary elements to gain my BA, should I pass the exams. There were no exams at the end of the end of Part 1B, only at the end of Part II, at the end of my third year - FINALS.

Although seemingly a long way off, it was clear to me how fast the 1st year had whizzed by and that Finals would be my one chance to gain my degree, given that there were no continually assessed parts to the course. This was the case for almost everybody and the reasons why Finals, when they approached larger on the horizon were such a cause for stress and concern and were a wake up call to anyone who had casually nodded off somewhere in the second year.

Yes, there were a brave/stupid/genius few who seemed to coast effortlessly through in a Cambridge Blue Daze, who sat their finals without an ounce of increased preparatory study only to land a 1st class degree, but they were a tiny, rare few. I knew some of these characters and I'm not sure if it wasn't always a great show and that they secretly revised throughout every night on a diet of Guarana, Chocolate and Coffee. Nice to romanticise the existence of these folks though.

My super brainy Director of Studies, Suzie Janes, told me that in my peculiar situation getting a 1st was impossible and that a 2:1 was only a remote possibility and then only if I had a strange natural skill AND worked incredibly hard. She was giving it to me straight. From my work so far she expected me to get a 2:2, a 3rd being highly likely.

This woman is the only teacher I have ever had in my life who was able to instil both fear and inspiration in the same moment, using as she did a piano forte (soft strong) voice and a merciless stare. If I wasn't studying for myself, I was doing it for Suzie.

For the next two years, I would be playing catch up, be in an almost constant state of confusion and cause my tutors great concern as I continued to grapple with some 'basics' that everyone should know, that everyone else

actually did know. Also I was trying to resuscitate an essay writing style that hadn't had any great exercise since O'Level English. Oh, and this place is The University of Cambridge, I didn't think I was intimidated, but I was TOTALLY intimidated.

I never really knew what Suzie thought of me. She was very professional and never lost her temper, although I did ask what were apparently a lot of stupid questions and I often failed to come up to the mark. I believe she saw me as her 'tabula rasa' (a blank slate) onto which she tried to impress the meanings of the concepts at hand. Also I like to think that the promise I did show from time to time, she believed to be hard earned, which it was, and that I genuinely wanted to learn, which I did.

It would be easy to say that my work-load was reduced from the previous year, which it may have seemed to be so, as I had far fewer lectures but it was a different kind of work.

Typically I had five or so lectures a week on all manner of subjects and one essay to write, set by different supervisors at different times. During the lectures I took notes for later reflection and usually I would take out maybe five or six books from the Philosophy library and/or the University library to read and make notes on for my essay. These libraries and the places where my lectures

took place were all within a very short walk of Selwyn.

The College had a cool library but very few of the Philosophy books that I needed, although I sometimes used it as a place to work. The Philosophy library was 'underneath' the English library on the ground floor of the building and sometimes I met Chantelle there and we might go for a coffee at the nearby site coffee shop.

The University library was a monster and everything I needed. Just finding a book in its vast collection was an ordeal but extremely satisfying, especially when one had to go to near the very top of its tower to some secluded and forgotten corner to find the particular volume you were after. Also in this library was an incredible cafe where I might bump into someone I knew at lunch time or in the afternoon. The main reading room was vast, silent and nearly always completely full of intense students, reading intensely and writing with intense purpose.

The essay title I was given each week was often something to do with the subject areas covered by some of the lectures and had to be handed in at a specific place before a specific time.

I would try to give myself a whole day to consult my notes and write the essay but, distractions being what they were, often it would

get left to the last minute. If I had to hand it in by 9am the next day, on occasion I would stay up the whole night, "Pulling a whole nighter" and cycle to the drop off first thing in the morning. A lot of people did this, and. I'm sure a lot of people all over the country do too. Only once did I fail to complete an essay and instead handed in to Suzie an "essay plan". She was not happy and told me so in no uncertain terms. I didn't do it again.

A supervision would typically last an hour, mine weren't always with Suzie although I think I was lucky that she attended to my special needs personally on more occasions than she strictly had to. Some of the other teachers were sometimes in different colleges, so I would have to go to their rooms for an analysis of my work and to be educated, which is the whole point of an education, right? Everything else was on my doorstep, things started coming together and I began to feel a certain happiness in my stride, some pride in my confidence and yes, a feeling of renewed optimism.

I don't remember it raining much during my time in Cambridge, perhaps it really just didn't bother me.

Here are some of the titles of the essays I wrote in the three terms of that first year studying Philosophy. These were all handwritten.

Part 1B Philosophy Tripos Essay Titles

- "What Reason Do We Have To Believe In A Physical World?" 26/6/91
- "For What Reason Would You Reject The Correspondence Theory of Truth?" 18/7/91
- "Do We Have a Free Will?" 14/10/91
- "If morality is objective, but is not necessarily motivating then the objectivity we have attained is quite worthless." Is it? n/a
- "The Problem of Personal Identity" 23/10/91
- "Can Induction be Justified?" 29/10/91
- "Dualism" 13/11/91
- "Can the Mental be analysed in terms of the physical?" 19/11/91
- "Can we account for beliefs as functional states? What about other aspects of the mental?" 27/11/91
- "Does Davidson show that his three propositions are consistent?" 4/12/91
- "What is Positive Liberty and is it important in politics?" 31/1/92
- "Are Freedom and Equality compatible?" 4/2/92
- "Discuss Rawl's claim that the Original Position is the correct hypothetical position to formulate principles of justice." n/a

- "Explain and discuss Frege's Distinction between sense and reference." 17/2/92
- "Are Natural Names disguised Definite Descriptions?"
- "Is 'Exists' a Predicate?" 8/3/92
- "What Is Truth?" 29/4/92

You Have Control

At the next Monday CUAS meeting I was told I had the ok and was given a date and time for my first flight training. Also I was given a flight manual and told to memorise the check lists. This was a list of about one hundred items and varied from external checks of control surfaces to radio checks.

Finally, and quite comically, I was given a 'cardboard cockpit'. This was thick cardboard which was printed on one side with all the controls and gauges of the Scottish Aviation Bulldog, which was the aircraft I would be flying. The idea was you constructed the thing, into a kind of 'bath' that you then sat in on the floor. I did my best to take it seriously but after a few friends had seen it, especially Chuck, it was a bit of a joke.

The day arrived and I cycled out to the airfield, something over half an hour on my bike, which had developed one faulty pedal. On arriving I changed into my green jumpsuit and boots and sat down with one other guy who I didn't recognise.

First we had about an hour of weather tuition. There was a lot to learn about 'ceilings' and the like. There followed maybe half an hour of basic flight tuition which mainly covered

controls and what we would learn in our first sortie.

The primary flight lesson number one was to fly 'straight and level' which sounded quite straight forward. Far from it, when one considered the effect of wind on the plane and angles of pitch, yaw and roll. This might be more complex than I had foreseen. I had thought that the way it would work out would be something akin to driving lessons and in this I was both wrong and right.

My instructor was in his early 50s and already had my back up due to his unnecessarily strict attitude in the weather and flight briefing. Welcome to the RAF, welcome to the military, welcome to rank and file.

My instructor and I walked out to the aeroplane which was parked some way away on the tarmac. It was a cold day and overcast with low grey clouds. There was light drizzle. On arriving at the machine my knowledge of checks was to be tested. I made a mistake in the order in which to check items and he was on me in a flash, impressing on me how important this was. Every time I made a mistake it was the same grilling and this continued into the cockpit for the whole lesson.

The propeller span up into its full roaring revolutions, the engine drowning out unassisted speech and we began taxiing.

I was in the right hand seat and he was on my left, it was a dual control training plane with almost everything on the left repeated on the right. He took full control, both with the control lever, (do not call it a joy stick!) and the rudder pedals, he also took full command of the radio, getting clearance to take off from The Tower, whilst I was at this stage merely a passenger.

We were up and it was a strange feeling. Unlike a passenger jet, this little thing was moving all over the place in the wind and in all axes. We climbed and suddenly we were up into the clouds with more turbulence and very limited visibility. Not long afterwards we broke through the top of the clouds and it was clear blue sky above, no rain up here. Below there was a deep grey, flat, fluffy carpet and above nothing but horizon to horizon sky blue. We were at 4000ft.

Over the radio, I had headphones in the helmet and a mike on a short stalk, my instructor went over what we had covered in the briefing. Using the controls, which included a 'trim wheel' in the centre console I was to fly 'straight and level'. Once I had signalled that I was ready he said some magic words — "You have control" —

to which I stated my required reply — “I have control”.

And that’s it, I was a pilot, I was flying... sort of. For about five minutes I sat like this, moving the trim wheel a few centimetres from time to time and then it was back to him, he assumed control “I have control” he said “You have control” I replied and removed my feet from the pedals and released the control lever. I was a passenger again and remained so until we had descended, landed, taxied to a stop, switched off and climbed out. Once again it was grey above, the change in sensation couldn’t have been more stark, also it had started to rain more heavily down here.

Unlike learning to drive, where you really need to know everything before you go on the public roads this experience was to me a huge disappointment. I had really done nothing, learned nothing in a physical experiential way and all the time my instructor had been shouting at me through my headphones what NOT to do. Still, I decided this was a familiarisation flight and surely the next would be a completely different thing. Even intense learning curves of complex operations have to start somewhere, somehow, and I had most definitely started.

I cycled home in the pouring rain and bumped into Chuck. I told him I’d just been

flying. He probably just said something like "That's excellent."

Adidas Gazelles

Not everyone is a dancer. Most people in 23/25 were, Cairo was, and Chantelle loved to dance too. This fact of culture had never been a problem to me probably because I started so young. As Nelson Mandela once said, "If you can walk then you can dance."

There had been an under 18 club called 'The Fleet Country Club' that most of the people I knew at around the 14 to 16 age range would go to regularly during the Summer holidays. Sometimes we would sneak a few lagers before going in but the whole thing was about the DJ, the dance floor, the girls and dancing. As a group of friends we evolved an ever developing set of dance moves, this was the real thing and although it was maximum fun, we took this fun quite seriously. The DJ was good.

I met my first girlfriend here as did a few of my mates and the ability and the confidence to dance never went away, so it was with my friends. After the country club, via a few outdoor raves in various locations off the M25, we progressed to clubs in London. The Astoria yes, but also many smaller venues that were popular at the time, The Cross was an exclusive place and Pushka for the New Year. Before University, during

and afterwards, these visits to clubs continued, especially on birthdays and New Years. Pills, fags, beers and dancing. Once, out of term, Cairo and I went to a club in London called 'Heaven' and we bumped into Chantelle strutting her stuff to the music. Dancers dance there way to all sorts of places.

As far as the music goes, on the whole if you need to dance, anything goes. For most of this time it was mainly House music, funky, piano, Italian, hand bag, HOUSE. With a hypnotic beat and crescendos made to make the most of the effects of Ecstasy.

At Cambridge the need to dance was still there of course and eventually those of us who cared enough found the best places to go to. For my money this meant Kings Cellars and Clare Cellars. Ok so there was a bit of snobbery about this but generally without being TOO posey King's and Clare were the two places to dress up and be seen. King's Cellars were a dirty, sweaty place with black painted walls but there was always a good DJ spinning typically elitist numbers for everyone to get down to, and we did, quite often. I wonder how many hours I spent just dancing during this time, perhaps once a week?

The guys I knew down at Bristol were the most into it, from the reports I was getting that seemed to be all they were doing. 'Raving' was

THE thing to be doing. I went down there a couple of times because Cambridge terms are rather short and I could get down to see them before their term ended. Bob Wingwell and Dafydd Hunkly were my hosts and they showed me some of the best of times when it comes to shuffling ones feet and cutting some rug. Although I was well tuned into my hedonism, my studies were also a source for obsession and fascination and I'm not sure it was the same for them.

I also managed to get up to Durham where Rick Smith and Miles Jerry were sometimes studying Economics, and sometimes drinking more, well that's it... drinking more. Still all my school friends got their degrees but I'm sure they also got through a fair pair of dancing shoes. For this, personally, I favoured my Burgundy Adidas Gazelles, I really worked those trainers and in fact wore them all the time.

On the subject of fashion and clothes I guess you could say I was rather laid back in my dress code. Trainers, baggy track pants, grandad top and a jumper, and if it was little chilly or damp a Burgundy retro vintage leather coat (with belt). I knew one girl who wore a Twin Set and Pearls and I knew some guys who wore a suit, all the time. It takes all sorts (Cambridge that is).

Music and Movement

Now, occasionally I'd go around to Volley's college, Emmanuel, to see if he was in, if he wasn't I'd write a funny little note with a pen on a pad that many people left hanging outside their room door. Occasionally he'd be in however, and I could interrupt whatever he was doing with my presence. The presence of another person is generally more important than most other things.

So, next door to Volley lived a man named Bill Coltrane, a dry wit who was not only a member of the comedy troupe "The Footlights," but he also played the saxophone in a band called JFK, or The Jazz Funk Collective. He couldn't have been cooler, he was even studying English which, quite possibly, was the coolest course in the university, after Philosophy.

I knew Bill quite well for a long time. He was kind of down beat about everything in a way that made you look on the bright side of things. He was undemonstrative and easy in his body language and he got me into American literature, an almost taboo area of interest.

I saw him play, I heard him play and it made me move. Suddenly I was a total convert to Jazz Funk in all its forms and began to look out for CDs. The JFK had a strong repertoire of purely

instrument tunes. There were a number of 'standards' and then a whole set of rehearsed and, I suspect, improvised originals. Throughout Bill could blow that horn. Its hard to describe the site of an audience member locked into their performances. On the one hand their rhythmic sets were tight and obviously well rehearsed, on the other, musicians went off on explorations of the form only to come back to the main riff. Some people weren't dancing, they were just staring. It was a pleasure to know him and I began meeting some of his friends too.

Chief amongst these was a certain Stan Hancock who played keyboards in ANOTHER jazz funk outfit named "MuthaFunk". At various events and college balls I saw them play regularly too. Stan's hands were a blur on the keyboard, his light digits dancing crazily over his overworked synthesiser. Always in his trademark body hugging grey T-Shirt, Stan and his band's music was a parallel force yet pleasant alternative to JFK. Their bass player, I believe he was a Welshman by the name of Alved, had a propensity to steal the show with licks of frightening speed on his bass guitar.

There was one time I saw JFK and MuthaFunk on the same night. These were the guys, this was their time, they rocked, they funkcd. I'm sure there were girls and in the case of

MuthaFunk they looked at one point like serious contenders to the likes of Incognito, The Brand New Heavies and Corduroy. I heard their demo tape and I know they kept together for a little while after the end of university, but maybe this time was enough of the busy blast of fame that they wanted.

Another of Volley's friends was Marge O'Farlan an Irish Scot again reading English and through a shared wit we were to become great friends for several years to come.

Above It All

The next five flights in my training were all the same. I learned a little more each time in the briefings beforehand about; navigation, the radio, the tower, taxiing etiquette, the theory behind taking off and landing. But my flights were always near identical, including the weather. If anything, my instructor's anger at my mistakes with the checks, even when these mistakes became fewer and fewer, grew greater and more focussed. Imagine trying to learn to drive a car when the teacher is shouting in your ear all the time. If this was military discipline it sucked.

I was fairly distraught about the whole thing. I was going to the Monday meal and lecture series and one evening I spoke to the only guy I knew there, Fred Green, I knew him to talk to as someone who was new, like me. I found myself saying, "I'm thinking of dropping out." He just looked at me and said, "Me too." We talked it through, quietly to each other, and committed ourselves to this course of action.

I spoke to the Main Man about it. He was nice enough and told me to come and see him at such and such a time on a certain day. When this day came, I hadn't changed my mind and

went in to see him with a stiff resolve and my reasoning clear in my mind.

In his office he was behind a desk with another, much younger Officer, called John Captain, seated next to him. They were in uniform and I was wearing jeans and a T-shirt. I made my mentally prepared statement; the RAF was not for me as a career and I didn't want to waste their time and the taxpayers money. It was all OK. They didn't blink an eye when I complained at the teaching methods of my instructor. In fact they seemed to understand perfectly, commenting that my instructor could be a bit of stickler for protocol. All they said to me was that they accepted my withdrawal from the process but "Would you like to go up again, just once more, with a different instructor? John here can take you up, have a bit of fun."

I looked at them both, this seemed too good to be true, the banner from the freshers fair came back to me "Learn to fly for free". What was the catch? I read later that in several cinemas in the USA which were screening "Top Gun," the US Navy Air Force had recruiting centres, directly outside the cinema. Young guys would go to see the movie, get really into it, then come out and sign up. The number of men who enlisted who expressed the desire to be a Naval Aviator went up 500 percent. "Ok" I said, feeling I

had very little to lose. And that was that. They gave me a date and a time and I turned up.

With a very brief briefing we were ready to take to the skies, and they were clear, not a cloud in sight and the autumnal sun at its zenith. I did my checks, external and internal, almost perfectly and John took off, climbing to just 3000ft somewhere over the outskirts of Cambridge. Once we were flying straight and level, without any fuss John said, "You have control."

I took control and flew straight and level, using the trim wheel as I had been taught. After only a couple of minutes John said, "Why don't you just throw it around a little, see what you can do." I looked at him. "Just fly," he said, and so I did.

All that theory I had carefully committed to memory came alive. I banked left, steeply. I levelled out, using the throttle I climbed and then dived deep to the right before levelling out again. "Good, did you like that?" Said John. "Yeah, that was cool." "Carry on."

Now I noticed, at only 3000ft we were directly above The City of Cambridge. I could see and identify everything. Being perfectly acquainted with the layout, I could make out roads, the river, open areas of park and many of the colleges, including Selwyn. We were low enough to see individual cars and the tiny specks

that were people. It was a unique perspective on the place I had been studying all this time.

It felt like a dream above a dream, or maybe a dream of a dream. Flying freely with confidence and no fear. I really felt I was truly a pilot. I was, just as I'd dreamed as a boy. I was in control, not only of a light aircraft but bizarrely of myself now too, and this so perhaps more than at any other point in my life. The discipline I had learned had got me here and had given me the right to exercise a degree of freedom of which I was previously unaware. A dream of flight had become a flight of freedom.

I imagined one or several of my friends, lying on the grass on The Backs by the River Cam, behind Kings, eating a sandwich and looking up to see this little single propeller, light aircraft. Normally they might expect to hear the drone of the engine as a single note as the plane flies in a straight line, going from A to B, from here to there. But this plane would be making dives and turns, on a soaring and twisting path only 3000ft up above with the note of the engine changing pitch accordingly. Might this friend of mine be wondering who the pilot could be? Could it be Brad?

The lesson, or more of a session really, continued. I was actually flying the plane for about half an hour. I felt like a pilot, I was a pilot.

Jon eventually took over and did some stunts, as much for his pleasure I imagine as for my education. We did a barrel roll, spiralling through the sky and, yes, a loop-the-loop. Then we returned to the airfield and debriefed.

Like Skiing, Scuba Diving and Philosophy, Flying isn't 'like' anything else. It is what it is and if you want to know what that is, you just have to do it. I had really mixed feelings about whether I want to do it more, a lot more, and specifically in this way.

"Are you sure you still want to leave?"

I was sure. I gave back my flying suit and boots and hoped they might find their way to someone more suitable to wear them. It was all done. I did keep the black patch with my name embroidered on it in gold, which I had yet to sew onto the jumpsuit. This was the only memento I had of the RAF, an incredible journey in the sky, and one that had made me into a pilot of my own dreams.

The Arts Cinema

I began going to the Arts Cinema, often, regularly and on my own. It was just a quick bike ride into the centre of town. I always had the latest monthly programme, it was cheap and I loved films, movies, cinema. If I didn't have a lecture, was not in a library somewhere or have an essay deadline looming, I was in the cinema.

It was a small screen with not many seats but often, say at 2pm on a Tuesday there were only a few of us in there. I guess other students were studying, maybe I should have been too. Sometimes I would ask someone else to come with me to see a film I was interested in but on the whole it was my time to relax and begin to acquire some critical assessment and extract the meaning from these stories. It was the perfect escapism.

I was attracted to European films, French, Italian, Spanish. I was increasingly drawn to those films which I deemed to have the best Cinematography. The aesthetic, the art-form of the combination of the director with an original cinematographer, I needed it to look good, then I'd feel good, then the screenwriter would make their presence known and the actors would come alive on the screen.

Incredible scenery, stories, journeys, music and camerawork, I couldn't get enough of it and I felt my life was better because of it.

Then when it was all over and I digested the whole thing including the credits I'd stumble back outside into the light and the realities of student life. This was my secret vacation, I'd go as often as three or four times a week, and it began to kick start my interest in the moving image as a spring-board into the industry. I'd got the bug.

I bought a huge volume which was simply an alphabetically organised encyclopaedia of film, it covered over 10,000 films and for each a summary and the main people involved. I made a great deal of use of this book as nearly all the films shown at the Arts Cinema were either classics, cult classics, low budget or world cinema. There were no recent movies that were on general release except one, I saw The Director's Cut of "Bladerunner" here, which was quite something. The Arts Cinema was strictly for Arts.

Whilst watching a film I would lose myself completely in it. Forgetting about all my worries and concerns it was here that another dream was born. With every step I took I believed myself to be walking closer to becoming a Film Director. It was a powerful motivator and for two years after leaving Cambridge, including one year

working in London and then another travelling around the world, I was always making these steps towards being a driving force behind film production.

This dream was however not so innocent as the desire to fly.

Treading The Boards

Some friends fancied themselves as thespians and very modern actors. The University has a good reputation for its output of actors over the years and I guess the idea was that there might be ways of achieving fame and fortune might be attractive to some.

I had been part of a comedy revue in the sixth form at school. Stan Rhys and Dafydd Hunkly had been instrumental in organising this and we put on quite a show for several hundred or so lucky punters and curious teachers. It was our idea of Monty Python and although it was a huge amount of fun, exciting and nerve wracking too, I didn't feel the need or desire to extend this way of life. As an entertainer I didn't feel especially talented or naturally gifted.

Dafydd, now in the middle of his Philosophy degree at Bristol was a different kind of animal. I'd seen him in a production of 'True West,' a Sam Shepard play and he was truly amazing. I don't think he knew how good he was, or maybe he did.

Miles Mallen was also keen to perform. I had seen him in one of his school plays and he too was quite excellent. Miles knew he was naturally funny and not only gifted as a clown in

that Peter Sellers way but also as a serious actor too. He was fully enabled as a physical actor, tapping into all kinds of emotions to portray his characters. I saw him in a play at University and was unsurprised at how good he was, how good he'd become. He hadn't made it into the Footlights which I think was their loss. I feel in that atmosphere he may have evolved fully into the complete performer.

One fella who had secured his place in this comedy troupe was Bill Coltrane, the sax player from JFK and friend of Volley. I saw the whole posse put on their show. It was raucous, contemplative in places and quite dark and edgy.

Another friend of Bill's was Mustafa Barton Co-Ed. He was destined for big things. I first saw him at the ADC, The Amateur Dramatic Club. Going here felt like being allowed into some inner sanctum, full of luvvies and thespis, a place that provided a bridge from hum drum studentship to a bigger world.

Mustafa was in a production of "Fiddler On The Roof". He was playing the father, the part played by Topol in the film version. He was quite unbelievable, not only in his more quiet and emotional moments but in his physicality. He was jumping and tumbling and there was even a back flip in there. He went on to star in his own

creation in his own show on Television and then created a number of other characters which developed into feature films. Now in Hollywood he has carved a very nice niche for himself, thank you very much. However, he still has my copy of "Mothership Connection" by 'Parliament,' a Japanese Import CD that I lent him. I'll have that back when you are ready please Mustafa.

Chantelle was a good actor too. She was in a Shakespeare play and another modern, slightly avant garde piece which was pretty odd when I think about it. She also played Nurse Ratched in a production of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest", which I didn't see.

Volley was in something called "Goddess", a bizarre act which I went to see with Marge O'Farlan. He had to make his own mask for this, as did all the players. Contorting his tall and wiry frame this was closer to performance art than anything else. Marge and I couldn't help but laugh in the middle of all this seriousness but Volley would have approved of all manner of reactions to his wondrous and exotic display.

I always felt on the fringes of all this. I loved the feeling of these amateur pieces of work and I wanted to be a part of it. I knew how the creation and rehearsals could be a very empowering and life affirming process and how

those involved would often become a tight-knit group of friends.

Ultimately I was happy to be an 'active-viewer,' a member of the audience who had a 'special interest' and was locked in with full concentration, fully interacting in my own way. As a viewer, I think I was probably one of the best.

These experiences of theatre along with my growing obsession with films played into the idea of being a Film Director. That auteur who had the 'Vision' to take an idea from a concept to it's realisation on the silver screen. In the future it was to become a monster of an idea for me, one that became overwhelming in the power of its temptation and which was impossible to contain in the size of it's exponential needs.

Jay's Vision

Jay Bigg was a Super Man, a super star, an uber mensch of Nietzschean proportions. He had stroked the novice third boat into a good position in the Fairburns and then the Clare Regatta too. I knew how hard this job was; one had to constantly balance or 'sit' the boat so that it was level and the crew's blades could hit the water from a repeatedly predictable height; one had to take instruction from the Cox directly in front as to rate and strength of stroke; one had to be able to manoeuvre the boat at slow speeds to turn it around in narrow stretches of water; one had to lift and carry the boat, a very large and heavy thing as ours were solid wood and aged to boot; one had to place it in the water; one had to strap ones feet into the footplate and lock ones blade into its rowlock and of course one had to get in and out of the boat, not as easy as it sounds. Jay did all of this and Jay is blind.

I first came across him in the queue for dinner in Hall. He was a handsome guy, a bit shorter than myself and solidly built. With a shock of blonde hair he was always with his golden retriever. I talked to him broaching his condition in a frank and honest way as is my wont. He let me in on one of his skills. He wore shoes with heels

which made a good sound when they hit the stone slabs of the college Old Court. From the sound of the echo he could make out how close he was to the wall or the approaching steps to the Hall. His sense of hearing must have been super keen. In a quick moment you thought maybe that he was making some of this stuff up but the more you got to know him you realised that this, and any number of other talents were well earned and developed coping mechanisms to counteract his lack of sight. Super skills.

Jay had a tandem bicycle. If he needed to go into town for any reason, he would ask a friend to go with him, I believe he and Nat Dealer were close. Jay would sit on the back, peddling with those strong legs and the friend would be up front peddling and steering.

He would put his finger over the lip of a glass so that when he poured in water from a jug he could tell when it was full. He had a football which had some ball bearings inside, you could kick that about with him, hearing being his super sense. He was a radio ham. With a large twenty foot pole aerial in the garden of his special accommodation. The stacks of hi-fi type electronics enabled him to listen to radio broadcasts from all over the world.

Jay was a black belt in Judo. Can you imagine picking a fight with a blind man, knowing

this? Seeing the man opposite to you, ready to take you on. How would you attack? What would be your calculations as to how to defeat him? A black belt in a martial art.

Once I read for him. I sat in his room reading from a text book. Occasionally he would stop me and enter the relevant information into some kind of braille enabled computer. I only did this once, Jay would intersperse the session with personal questions. Did I have a girlfriend? How was my studying going? He was certainly my hero. I wish I had been less self-centred and selfish with my time and gotten to know him better than I did, certainly I could have read for him more. I even learned something about the degree he took.

There was one Summer when a few of us hired a punt and went down the river towards Grantchester. We took a picnic and some bottles of wine. Jay was on board and was standing up at the front of the punt balancing with all the ease of someone who knew Judo. We warned him that a very low bridge was coming up, a small metal bridge only five feet or so above the boat. He asked for its description and approximate dimensions. As we slid through the water, the bridge came closer and Jay held his arms up and out. We slowed the punt, it came closer, Jay got a hand on the bridge, grasped it,

pulled himself up and over it, climbing to the other side. When he had cleared it he climbed down the other side and he hung down from it with his hands and arms and then with our direction lowered himself down onto the back of the punt as it passed beneath the bridge.

I'd only had a couple of glasses of wine but for quite some several moments after this stunt I wondered if Jay really was blind, or that maybe it was this big lie, this big deception that I had now been privileged to be let in on.

Jay was blind but he had vision and what's more, with it he earned a 1st class degree in Economics, from The University of Cambridge.

Russian Croquet

The 'Russian Croqueteers' was a small group of guys, a club of sorts that was the legacy of Steward East. It wasn't a sports club, a drinking club or an activities club, if anything it was a society club. I had been invited to join in my second year and now the members consisted of; Pedro Ryder, Fran Sighmans, Cairo, Baz Revans, myself and a guy in the first year who's name escapes me.

We decided to throw an impromptu garden party. That most idyllic of Cambridge affairs where there was a chance to dress smartly and enjoying your peers' company in the beautiful Selwyn Gardens.

We needed invites and the quick thought was to take some photographs of the group of us in various poses around the college, get them printed, print the invite to stick to the back of the photo and then distribute accordingly.

The photo shoot was a blast, making up scenarios on the fly we improvised wherever we could. Baz was unable to make it so we used a stuffed Badger toy of mine as his stand-in for the photos. We wore shorts T-shirts and our Russian Croquet Ties which were Salmon Pink with Silver stripes. Frank had purchased them for their

aesthetic value from a University Outfitters shop. I think they were something like Sidney Sussex College Men's Swimming Club ties, but nobody would know Russian Croquet was not yet an official club and had not yet been fully recognised by The University. They were certainly very sporty ties and suited us well.

The photos included us; jumping up in the air, with the badger; standing in a line arms stretched out to the sides; lying on the grass in a line, along with the badger, with a lawnmower advancing towards us; sitting on the college Hall steps arms out with the badger; standing on the College porters trolley surfing whilst Cairo 'drove' it being pulled by the badger which was harnessed with the ties; and ties tied to the badger being pulled in all directions by all of us.

We had a great afternoon, there was a lot of Vodka with mixer consumed, all the girls looked beautiful and radiant in the after-glow of Finals. Everyone made an effort to look somehow special without appearing too formal. The weather was perfect. People were just standing and sitting around, making pleasant conversation, laughing and feeling fine. In this environment I couldn't have been happier, I didn't even feel the need to drink heavily. The flowers were out, there was romance in the air for some and, as the hosts, we had some kind status

without stealing the show. Its funny and cool to really be part of something, you often don't realise you are, when you're lost in the moment...

Somewhere In The Middle

The Second Year ended with many things all up in the air. There had been no exams, the term sort of fizzled out for me.

Sol and Chantelle had split up. Sol had a load of reasons explaining this, all of which sounded very reasonable. His dad passing away must have had a massive impact on his life. Paris must have been a good break from the UK but I for one couldn't manage to understand what he must have gone through. Change is inevitable. When I saw Chantelle it was clear there were no hard feelings, it was just one of those things. Still it was a shame because their relationship went right back to the start of the first year, the first week, and I guess I'd just kind of assumed that it would go all the way.

Sol found a new girlfriend and I believe she was someone who could understand what he had been through, how to deal with it and how to find a way to move forward. I met her and she was very polite and pleasant to me. Her name was Elixir Reece and she was reading Anthropology at Pembroke. Being friends with Feeyana, and Katie Stealem, as well as Sol, I would see her around quite a bit, especially as she lived nearby.

I realised I had hardly seen anything of Cairo this term, this year. I knew nothing of his new Management Studies degree and just as little of his personal situation. It was hard to try to be present, or to keep in touch with everyone, it wasn't a question of spreading yourself too thinly, it was more to do with personal circumstances and simply what you had time for. I was constantly hungry and constantly tired.

The Second Year had whipped by, and other than the structure of my studies, life seemed to be a random, chaotic, unplanned mess. The walls of my room were now covered in A4 B-Movie posters which I had collected from 'Empire' magazine, this was a clue for me, and for others if they chose, to see in which direction my life was heading. The realms of dreams and movies were not far apart, my life as a dream was under constant pressure and my life as though lived in a film was beginning. I can't describe this transition fully as it was something I felt more than anything.

In the last few days, around the time of the May Ball season I met a man called Tommy Halley who had read Psychology at Oxford and who had recently dropped out of an MA in Anthropology here in Cambridge. We polished off a bottle of tequila together and became quick friends. His brother, Barton, who studied

Physiology at Southampton was about too. I got to know these guys much better later on.

The summer break came, I cleared out my room and went back to my home town and local friends.

Joint Twenty-First

Rick Smith and I had birthdays just six days apart in July and we had talked about a joint twenty-first party for a while. After a few pints upon returning from our respective Universities, Rick was at Durham, it was quickly decided that we should have this celebration at his parents house which was perfect as they had a very large garden and a swimming pool. The invites went out on the grapevine and jungle drums, and soon we had about one hundred people from our combined lives who said they'd come.

This was a big thing. A twenty-first birthday might mean different things to different people but to us at least I believe we thought it would be the last opportunity to get everyone we knew together in one place, and so it was to be. Also the whole 'key to the door' thing meant something too. Was this to be a kind of coming of age, a rite of passage? If so Rick and I would be sharing the honours.

The day drew near, Rick's dad had organised a Marquee, should it rain and some Portaloos - essential. Rick and I took it upon ourselves to organise the drinks. We rocked up at the super market and bought at least two large trolleys full of crates of lager stacked way up high.

The beers were to go in ice water in dustbins so that people could just help themselves to cool canned beverages all the evening.

People arrived and they brought presents too. From Stan Hancock and Bill Coltrane a vinyl record. From Chantelle a Purple Ronnie T-shirt with an astronaut on it and which said, 'Space Head' and also an amazing rope Hammock. I was given books, and Cds, including "US3," 'Hand On The Torch' by Rick.

The night was a gas, it was unreal to see virtually everyone I knew in one place. Rick's friends from Durham and mine from Cambridge blended into one blur. Faces I didn't know smiled and laughed and talked to me in an increasingly drunken drawl. A few parents were present who took backstage positions, careful not to impede on the festivities. Music played with Miles DJ'ing for a while.

My sister was picked up and thrown in the pool by Tommy Halley, soon many more followed in various states of dress. The Hammock was put up. Frisbees were thrown. The dustbins full of iced beers became empty. The weather had stayed good.

At midnight some fireworks went up and a cake was brought out. A police car was parked in the drive for a while, I don't know what that was all about. Photographs were taken.

Some people left, some people stayed, with the floors of the Smith household full of collapsed bodies. The next morning there was carnage to be cleared up and then a few people came back to my folks' house. Hangovers and coffee, recollections of the night before and again an incredible scene that had taken great preparations was over rapidly. These things happen only once, it was cool that Rick and I had done it right.

Rick graduated from Durham in Economics and not long afterwards was trading derivatives on the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Wakey Wakey!

Sol and I hadn't seen each other much towards the end of the last term. It was funny that way, even close friends living in the same house you'd sometimes not see for a while. I think we were all desperately trying to be independent, and cool with it. So in this there was an element of, if you want to see me, come and see me, you know where I am. I was all over the place, I'd try to catch anyone I knew, if they were in and free, a quick drink or something. But as I say I hadn't had time to catch up with Sol at all.

Then of course when you do get the opportunity to talk you've got so much to say; friends, course, sport, music, relationships...

I caught Sol maybe on the last day of term and fairly spontaneously, because that's the kind of guy I am, I said we should do a road trip in the holidays, "Where?", "How about Wales?", "Why not?"

I'm one quarter Welsh on my mother's side, my grandfather is Welsh and my Grandmother had relatives on the island of Anglesey. After I spoke to my mum I sorted out some kind of route and Sol and I spoke about it, setting aside a week at the end of term.

The trip would be to Portmeirion to see the famous village as seen in the 1960s TV series "The Prisoner," of which we were both committed fans and then on and up to Anglesey to stay with my great Auntie Marge and great Uncle Ernie, my Gran's brother.

When the time came we didn't have much stuff to put in the back of the Walker family, yellow Citroen GSA Pallas. We floored it to The Prisoner village and wandered around it in a surreal daze. It's a small village designed and built by what you might call an eccentric architect. All buildings seem to have a similar twisted logic in both colour and style, and so the overall effect is one of a crazy vision of a dreamworld. No wonder they wrote a TV series to be shot in and around it.

We took photos, Sol was just getting into a new camera. We walked on the beach and I got a shot of Sol bending backwards, arms aloft shouting to the sky "I'm not a number, I'm a free man!" This is one of the lines from the TV series and still so relevant in so many ways, along with "Be seeing you".

We drove North looking for somewhere to stay, possibly to put up a tent to get through the night. It started getting late and dark, almost pitch black in the back country roads where we found ourselves. I started getting annoyed and

frustrated and pulled over by a gate saying that I was going no further and that we could put up a tent just over the gate. Sol did not want to trespass but I pushed and got the tent out. We were arguing now, it was ten o'clock or later, I just wanted to get to sleep. Sol sat in the car refusing to get out or help in anyway. Didn't he see we had to sleep here, in the tent?! Eventually I realised the stupidity of the situation, my stupidity, and climbed back into the car.

I had some brandy in a hip flask, we drank and listened to the radio. We forced ourselves to laugh and accept our situation which seemed to represent for me the absurd way we live our lives. We got quite drunk and slept in the car in the front seats.

Waking at dawn with a stiff neck and back and a hangover is not ideal. Knowing that I had a long drive ahead wasn't a nice feeling. I got out of the car, did my business and stretched my legs, then got back in the car. Sol was awake now and did likewise and within a few minutes we were back on the road. I felt as rough as you like, Sol looked like he felt the same. Some kind of equality between travellers often makes room for empathy and constructive conversation but in this case we were just quiet and drove.

Arriving at the coast and ferry to Anglesey we got out and strolled around, taking the fresh

sea air and finding a place to get a takeaway coffee. There was a ferry soon, we drove on and followed the road to my Great Aunt and Uncle's house in the North West of the island.

Great Uncle Ernie was a Gamekeeper, he managed the game reserves of a country estate. Later this estate would be owned by Guy Ritchie and Madonna and their game would be kept by Ernie's son Walter. Walter's son was a gamekeeper too. Their lives were all hunting, shooting and fishing. The gamekeepers cottage was also the gate cottage and soon we arrived at this huge gate, some twenty feet high, next to the cottage.

Ringling a bell, several times, at last an oldish lady came out to greet us. She came to the bars of the gate and looked at me as though she'd just seen a ghost. She had.

"Howard?" she said.

"No, I'm Brad, Velma's son, Merrill's grandson."

My grandmother had inadvertently forgotten to call ahead to tell them to expect us and my Great Auntie Marge, whom I had never met before had mistaken me for my Mother's brother who had died when he had been just a couple of years older than me. I had seen photographs and I did resemble him, apparently to Marge in an uncanny way.

She came to her senses, "Brad, yes Thelma's son. Oh my god! You must come in."

I introduced Sol and we explained ourselves, hoping that our hosts would offer us a bed for the night, and perhaps some food. Of course my Great Auntie was most accommodating. She asked us into their home and made us very welcome.

I met my great Uncle Ernie. He was a large man with a moustache and sat in a large armchair in the corner of the living room. Ernie had recently had a stroke and said very little. When he wanted to say something he drummed his large fingers on the arms of the armchair. He had huge hands and once used to box for the Army. When his fingers drummed, a short story about his time in the War followed. When Sol told him he studied History and was Jewish, Ernie became more animated. He told a tale of how he used to trade his chocolate for biscuits made with pork fat with a Jewish friend he had, fighting on the continent. It was a fantastic evening and what's more Sol and I were fully fed with freshly caught trout.

That night we were put up in beds on the first floor. Sol and I whispered to each other as there was a rather eerie feel to the place. We joked and laughed and the nonsense of the night before was forgotten. We slept.

"Wakey Wakey!" Auntie Marge screeched up the stairs, Sol and I were suddenly wide awake, trying to get a grip on the facts of the morning. "Breakfast in five minutes!"

We got up quickly and descended to scrambled eggs on toast with mushrooms and grilled tomatoes and a great pot of tea. We ate and tried to make small talk before agreeing that it would be best to get underway. Later I realised that maybe we had been rude, we might have been welcome to stay longer, maybe several days, we might even have been taken to see for ourselves the work of a gamekeeper, maybe if my Gran had called. We did have our schedule to stick to though and we left quite promptly.

Driving from high ground over which the weather was clear, up ahead the lower ground was covered in a heavy grey mist. The sight was awesome but came to an abrupt end as we descended, suddenly enveloped being enveloped by the mist. We drove through this mist all the way to the ferry. Catching the ferry and making the crossing the mist hung low over the sea, sound was deadened and Sol and I were quiet again.

Its good to be quiet with a friend when travelling, as long as it doesn't become entrenched silence. To be quiet is to know that your friend is in thought or experiencing

something on their own which they may or may not wish to share. Silence should be respected and Sol's silence was quite a deep one.

We drove South through some mountains as the weather cleared for a while. Coming into country in which there were no inhabited areas or commercial properties the place was fairly bleak and it became more so. We came across valleys and hills that were blank and devoid of the presence of people. The roads themselves were great but wound through desolation. Finally when the feeling attached to this landscape turned extreme we had to stop, get out and explore the scene.

We were on one side of a valley, this was, or had been a slate mine. On all sides of the valley the ground had been worked and all that remained were remnants of the slate that had been quarried. Underscoring the feeling of isolation was the idea that this place had been deserted before all the slate had been mined. All the deep dark grey slate was damp and glistened in the pale light that struggle to play through the clouds.

We both took a lot of black and white photographs and stayed in that place for a long time. Despite its post apocalyptic vibe it was weirdly calming and inspiring. My photographs from there are good and reflect the serenity of a

place that might have appeared rather sinister on superficial inspection. There was a peace there, I needed it, I'm sure Sol needed it too.

The sun came out and we arrived at the final car park at the base of Snowdon. We walked up to the top of Snowdon in the sunshine and down again to the car. It was tiring but pretty good too, really pretty good.

That was our little jaunt to Wales. We didn't talk about it much later on. We showed each other our photos, which were good, but as a holiday it was one to remember. There was no need to do any 'bonding,' I think we were way past that as friends. However there was an air between us, somewhat like in that slate quarry, that was somehow dark and moody. I believe there was some mutual unspoken agreement between the two of us that being men, for that was what we were becoming, was something that might not be communicable. There was a sense and an unspoken agreement that different men may be very different from each other and that these differences may be unreconcilable. The dream bubble in which I had lived most of my life may have burst. All this I feel I learned from the nature of silence.

Computer Blue

At the beginning of the third year I moved into a much larger room on the ground floor at the front of 23 Grange Road, Room No.1. Sol was in the symmetrically opposite room, No.1, 25 Grange Road. Having more space and being on the ground floor was just great, convenient and well, just more space to move around in. I set up my room, with my new pride and joy, an Apple Macintosh computer.

I had been taking all notes and writing all essays freehand with a fountain pen that my parents had given to me as a present upon getting into Cambridge. Although this was great and in fact caused me to really plan my essays and write them carefully, the need came for the appropriate addition of a computer. Above all this would allow me to edit my work, my essays gained something because of it but also lost a certainly personality and quality I feel.

There is a cost to everything, including progress but this was not only necessary for the present it was the future. The week before coming up to college for the beginning of my third year I had located a supplier of Apple Macintosh goods, there were no Apple stores then, and I had chosen something fairly well

suited above the base level. It was an LCII and consisted of the computer itself which was a slab of computing power the size of a vinyl record cover and a couple of inches thick. The separate monitor, which was big and heavy, with a 13 inch screen, sat on top of the computer and there was a separate wired keyboard and mouse. I also had a small black and white printer. The totality of this machine was my essay writing companion. It was a great asset and at the time I was one among very few who had such a thing. Friends would come to look at in awe, wondering at its power and the future of their meagre pens and pencils. In his third year Chuck would borrow it to write an extended essay and several years later my Mum found it to be perfect for the work of her Art degree dissertation.

Case Number 37

"I'm just casually riding my bicycle back from some play or film or something late at night, perhaps near 11pm. You can ride on the pavement to avoid any traffic here as you get nearer the college, which is a good idea if you have a bike light which has been faulty for the last six months or so. And this policeman appears from around a corner! He just steps out into my path and I near as damn it run him down!"

Or.

"I'm just about to finish my beat, I turn the corner, walking along the pavement and this lunatic student comes bearing down at me, speeding along without a care in the world, no light to give any warning and he piles straight into me! The cheek of it, bloody students! He's not getting away with this, not this time, he's getting a fine."

So he took my name and address, 23 Grange Road and advised I got my light fixed or maybe buy a new one, one that works! I would be getting a fine of £50!

I kind of forgot about it.

The first thing I know about it a letter comes through the letter box of no.23 saying - Because I had failed to pay the fine it had been increased to £350. If I didn't pay I would face a criminal conviction. Alternatively I could contest the fine in court and here are the details should you wish to do so...

I didn't have much choice, it was near the end of term and I didn't have that much money in my current account. So I decided to go to court.

Come the day and its on with my trusty suit and I cycle across town. Its daytime so I needn't worry about my light, must get that fixed though. I arrive at the court with plenty of time to make it for my appointment with the Judge.

Cambridge Court is a modern building with a judicial amount of wooden panelling inside making it feel all legal and professional.

These proceedings were, as much as I could figure out a kind of line up and I was in line.

The guy in front of me was charged with driving an unregistered car without a current mot, insurance or a driving licence whilst under the influence of alcohol at a level of x milligrams. He had crashed and caused quite a lot of damage including hurting someone quite badly.

He was found guilty and went down. I was up next.

Charged with riding without lights and non payment of a fine I had to defend myself. I explained the nature of my living situation including the front door to no.23 Grange Road, its letter box and the vast pile of envelopes and mainly junk mail, including Dominoes pizza flyers, that accumulates on the floor. I also added the manner in which this heap of paper was often picked up and placed on a large radiator next to the door. Letters fell down the back of this radiator and were lost forever. However, I'd had a good look and managed to reach down behind the radiator with a coat hanger to find the original copy of the fine (this was true). This I held up for the benefit of the Judge, waving the scrappy piece of torn, twisted and muddy paper which was the original fine. The first notice of the fine I had received was the £350 demand which I simply could not pay, being a poor and simple student. Please let me off with the original £50 fine which I am happy to pay. I was most embarrassed and apologised for the original misdemeanour, so sordid to refer to it as a crime, even though one could frame it as assaulting a police officer. I was sorry. I have a cheque for £50. Please don't put me in prison. It is a first offence. I'm a good person really.

She took my cheque and let me go. I cycled back to college, a free man, without a

care in the world, accept for maybe fixing that troublesome light.

Double Skulls

Cairo had an idea early in that term and having spoken to Pedro Ryder and then to me it was put into action. Cairo and I cycled down to the Selwyn boat house on a fine morning and helped ourselves to a Double Skull. We were out on the water again, but this time both of us in the same boat.

It was a light and relatively small vessel when compared to a huge Eight. When lowered into the river it was not easy to get into and having two oars each we made a bit of a dog's breakfast of it. There was laughter combined with a real need to concentrate, no one was looking but you want a degree of professionalism with these things.

Eventually we were under way, Cairo in front of me had foot pedals to steer the damn thing. After many minutes we had perfected the art of travelling in a fairly regular 'zig-zag' from one side of the river to the other. At one point we got the hang of it and for precious moments reacquired our boating skills learned two years previously in order to sit the boat. Then it was just a question of 'tapping' it along gently which we did, for a bit. Then we went back into zig-zag mode.

There was frustration and patience, there was satisfaction and humour. Most of all there was a clear feeling that the two of us were back again. Back as third year students, back as undergraduates who had changed the course of their degree, back as room-mates, back as friends.

We didn't attempt this rowing challenge again but there was something that we did do. Inspired by Cairo, as often as once a week, we cycled down across Parkers Piece to the free and usually empty Fenner's gym. We worked out and, in a continuation of Cairo's task to bring me back to health with food in the very first week of the first year, we built ourselves up a bit.

Lifting weights or really pushing yourself physically in any endeavour gives a new meaning to pain and pleasure. No pain, no gain, as was the creed in the 1980s and it's true in a way. Upon leaving that gym I could scarcely use my arms to steer my bike, my legs were jelly and I laughed with a kind of pathetic realisation of my weakness. Still there is an accumulative effect and sometimes during a normal day you would realise that you have a strength that you had not had before. It was hard, it required discipline and ultimately it brought us closer too.

There was one morning, when I felt like I had a huge amount of energy within me, more so

than ever before. I put on my trainers and shorts and a T-shirt and ran the entire circumference of the city around the ring-road. I think it took about an hour and a half, I wasn't even tired and I went on with my day with no negative effect.

A Degree Of Freedom

Although the intensity of my course had gone up a notch, the way to deal with it appeared to be to increase my interest in all the other things I was doing. A kind of balance was required, and achieved.

The truth is I was getting quite good at this degree thing, in all the ways that I valued at least. I was able to fit my leisure time in-between the learning and the loving of all things became more of a reality than just a vague possibility. This might only have been the case because I didn't have a steady girlfriend, I was not competing in some full time sport and after leaving the RAF Air Squadron I was to all intents and purposes a free agent.

In this year I started hanging out with Marge O'Farlan a lot more and became very friendly for a while with her friend Eclair O'Bubble, an Irish Architect. I made the acquaintance of Strafe Bartman an Architect whom Marge would later hook up with.

I was able to do a lot of travelling around the country and I got into music in a much deeper and stronger way.

The subjects I was studying seemed to become a great deal more relevant to my personal inner life. Nearly everything I studied was

analysed as objectively as I could but there was a huge subjectivity too as I related the concepts I came across to my own beliefs, wishes, dreams and desires. The Philosophical 'subject-object' distinction had apparently dissolved so that I was 'at one'.

In this way Philosophy became like Cinema for me. My identity with it was total. The full immersion I had submitted myself to in both these areas was now creating a 'bubble' of sorts around me and within me. I had been increasingly interested in the Philosophy of Mind and repeatedly began to draw parallels between the act of watching a film at the cinema with the Philosophies which described all sorts of perception. One could often explain the other.

There began a kind of 'giving myself up' to Philosophy and Film. It was a progression of my life and I didn't consider the need to resist the ideas it was creating. Far from it, this creative energy, fuelled by everything to do with film began to inform my academic work. Increasingly I also began to start creating, and believing in, my own private Philosophy of Film.

Part II Essay Questions

- "What is Paternalism? How, if at all, is it justified?" 14/10/92
- "What is Exploitation? What if anything is wrong with it?" 26/10/92
- "What are the main deficiencies of rights theories within the context of political philosophy?" 19/10/92
- "What are the limitations of Liberalism, with respect to International Relations?" 2/11/92
- "Utilitarianism and Beyond" 15/11/92
- "What is the moral force behind the claim that moral laws should be universalisable?" 23/11/92
- "Can a comprehensive account of morality be given without reference to virtues and vices?" 30/11/92
- "Assess Putnam's Case Against Realism" 27/1/93
- "Does Class Nominalism provide an adequate account of properties?" 3/2/93
- "Is a Relational Theory of Consciousness Adequate?" 10/2/93
- "What does Nietzsche understand by the Apollonian and the Dionysian? How do they contribute to the genesis of Greek Tragedy?"
- "Is Nietzsche advocating a return to the master morality?"

- "Can Kant plausibly argue for a constitutive connection between self-consciousness and our grasp of an objective world?"
- "Why does Kant think that Space is Empirically Real and Transcendentally Ideal?"

Edit This!

A number of new second years had moved into the house, as we had done a year ago. Some of them I knew quite well. Amongst them were; Crimson Doily, who studied English - a short and lively young lady with drive and ambition; Christophe Bleu, a tall good looking dude who played Cricket for the University and whom I saw play in the Varsity match against Oxford at Lords, that was quite a day, he was supposed to be studying History; Vivacious Lost Top - a cheeky and frisky one, studying languages, including Russian; Funk'n Parker, a long haired genuine hippy of an Engineer and Ted White, I'm not sure what he studied and I don't think Ted knew sometimes either.

Crimson I knew as she and Chuck were now together. One day she asked if I would like to help her make a film. Sure, why not?

She wrote the thing, it was about a woman who bumps into a guy on the street who steals her keys, he follows her back to her car only for her to find the keys already left in the ignition. Oh, I must have left them there! She drives away only to discover the stalker is in the back seat of the car. She breaks to a stop, there is a struggle in the car

and then a gunshot. She drives away leaving the stalker's body lying in the road.

We spent a day shooting it in and around the city. It was all fairly amateur but it was fun and you have to start somewhere. When we were done it was my job to edit the thing. I'd never done this before but had found a place called The Audio Visual Aids Unit, The AVAU, which existed mainly to help any students who might need to make videos as part of their degree. I spent a long afternoon with them and was instructed in how to use an edit suite.

The editing facilities were archaic even then. The format was U-MATIC, a kind of huge VHS video tape where the tape was an 3/4 inch across and the tapes where the size of a very large book. The resolution was really crummy too.

For two days straight I sat in that tiny room and edited Crimson's movie for her. The end result was maybe a couple of minutes long and was set to two pieces of music, one chosen by me, the other by Crimson. The 'generation loss', the reduction in quality due to the successive transferring between mediums, was quite bad but my editing was good, I was proud of it and it seemed to satisfy Ms. Doily. She was to go on to work in film in Hollywood.

As far as my ambitions were in this area I had bought, with Volley Humous at a camera fair,

a Super 8 film camera and projector and this was a tool I began using as often as I could. I also bought some reels of actual films to use with the projector. They were mainly old cartoons, like Tom and Jerry but there was some Charlie Chaplin too, all silent of course. I showed these to friends as a kind of novelty, they were cool and made people smile and chuckle.

The camera took magazines of film, which you could then buy in Boots. These lasted about two and half minutes. I bought up quite a few.

I took the camera with me whenever I thought there would be something visual. Because I couldn't edit this film and it had no sound I had to edit 'in camera,' that is shoot short bursts of shots that I thought would naturally go together. When a magazine was spent I sent it off in an envelope which was included and the film was developed and returned as a reel.

I made mini films in these places during this year;

The Lake District with Marge: This included slow motion of Marge diving out of a boat on a lake and it looks superb in reverse too.

Edinburgh: Visiting Volley and Tommy at the Fringe Festival I took a roll at the top of Arthur's Seat, including a 360 degree shot from the rock itself.

Notting Hill Carnival: Elixir lived here and a few of us explored this event, me for the first time. The colours and expressions of people on the floats and walking the streets in the procession are amazing. Film really does justice to the colours which look intense and bright.

France: Bungee Jump. Charles convinced me that this sponsored Charity Suicide attempt was 'A Good Idea'. This requires a special chapter all of its own:

Into The Unknown

It was one of those rushed and crazy trips that didn't stop from getting dressed fast and hurried to finding yourself back in bed thirty-six hours later with a head full of madness playing through the mind. A blur of breakfast and then a walk to the coach station set the pace.

Even when underway on the coach with its load of manic youths, mostly medics the energy level was high. There were moments of calm as the drone of the engine and road noise subdued the excited spirits but even then anticipation rose to the surface in a series of voiced questions and expectation. Chuck and I sat together, shared a thermos of coffee and exchanged dark humour.

"If they say they have had no deaths at this location since they began does it become statistically more or less likely that one will occur soon?" My grasp of applied mathematics was not a strong point but Chuck was always on hand with something that was never quite close to reassurance.

"Given the nature of the enterprise there has to be a first, I guess."

"What are you going to shout out on the way down?"

"I expect some appropriate expletive will come to the fore at the appointed moment."

"All these people seem incredibly jovial and buoyant, don't you feel a period of quiet reflection is in order now."

"Brad, this is for fun, its even for charity, just chill and enjoy the ride."

"Alright, no need to bite my head off, especially whilst I still have one."

The ferry was easy, the sea just a little choppy with less than a stiff breeze. It's amazing what a straight horizon can do for the soul. I felt I was undergoing some kind of transformation, a process where changes were occurring deep within and for once I had no control over them. I welcomed this evolution, knowing that time would bring me to another state where perspectives would change too.

Soon we were back on the road, trundling through France with refreshingly altered scenery scrolling by the windows. The mood on board had changed, perhaps the continental number plates and road signs highlighted the very real nature of the experience that lay ahead, one novel and unknown. There was not a cloud in the sky and by the time we reached the destination the interior of the coach had warmed significantly, it was with great relief that we were

finally here; the trepidation ceased and all were focussed on the singular purpose of our journey.

A.J.Hackett, a New Zealand thrill-seeker and entrepreneur had set this particular facility up as one of the first of a global network of similar projects. The highest jump in Europe was from a disused viaduct, which we were keen to become acquainted with. First there were some formalities to attend to and vital preparations.

In what was no more than a large wooden cabin we were all individually weighed and numbered and these details written on the back of one hand in indelible marker. It was a process that made me think of a cattle market but Chuck was certain it was more akin to necessary information that would be required at a hanging. Gallows humour continued but I made damn sure that my weight was recorded accurately next to my name and number; it wouldn't do for any little errors or slip-ups in this game.

"Do you have life insurance Chuck?"

"Nah, not yet, I'll get some when I'm qualified as a Doctor, my life won't be worth much until then."

How much was my life worth? Currently it was full of anxieties and nervousness but it started a train of thought that lasted all day — how do we value our lives and how much risk are we willing to take to either increase that value or

indeed just to get to where we want to be? A monetary sum just didn't seem to cut it and as the hour of judgement approached I began to value my life in increasingly large leaps of an almost religious nature.

We changed into some specialist clothing selected with care for the day. Chuck had gone for a '70s TV show look, specifically something inspired by an extra he had seen on an episode of Kojak. He did look great and a beaming smile under a pair of Ray Bans showed him to be the man. I had opted for a vintage Red Adidas tracksuit with white stripes down the side. The collars were large the flared trouser bottoms flapped around a pair of complimenting Gazelle trainers. I felt like a new person, ready for what lay ahead, I was in the zone with comments as to my look ranging from Daley Thompson to the Six Million Dollar Man. There was no one who could tell me I was not good to go.

We walk out along the viaduct, every ten minutes seeing more intrepid customers flinging themselves into the valley below. We were jumping in numbered order; scenes from old black and white films of paratroopers bailing out of aeroplanes came to mind.

One girl who I had noted being particularly quiet on the way here was all tied up and seemingly prepared. As the countdown from her

friends of ten down to one reached its ultimatum her knees bent but her body froze. Another count followed but once again she was physically unwilling and unable to complete the procedure. She moved away from the edge and was removed from the process a fragile mess. I felt sure my mettle would not let me down in such a way when the 'do or die' second came. I was next. I downed my miniature bottle of Dutch courage, a French Brandy and walked my walk.

Harness attached whilst seated the final adjustments to the length of the cord were made according to my weight. All checks were made and I stood with help, my feet now bound together to many hundreds of feet of rubber cord. Shuffling towards the edge the expanse ahead began to reveal itself. The happy-go-lucky employees were professional enough but their casual manner, no doubt derived from many repetitions of the same routine, was disconcerting. As far as I was concerned this was a one-time adventure and my corresponding feeling of isolation was growing in strength.

I stood on the ledge arms stretched out as a bird. The countdown began but sounded muffled as though behind a wall. Thousands of yards in front of me were a beautiful vista, a portion of countryside stretching to an untroubled horizon. I didn't look down. Every ounce of my

body screamed 'you don't have to do this', but my mind was strangely calm and accepting of the situation. To jump was a natural extension of mind over matter, the countdown ended and my bird took flight.

My planned cry of 'Geronimo!' was fairly feeble because before I had chance to take a breath, the staggering acceleration got a hold of me. The ground rush blurred my peripheral vision as a point of focus below raced towards me at unfeasible speed. The deceleration was equally forceful as the rubber cord did its work and suddenly my head and upper body were immersed in the river below as I came to a momentary stillness. Now the elasticity of the cord pulled me in the other direction zooming me feet first upwards towards the origin of the jump. I reached a zenith some twenty feet below the viaduct and managed a wave to the crazy people waiting their turn.

Returning to terra firma was by means of a small boat into which I was lowered.

Unfastened and free I ran around like lunatic, screaming nonsense. The powerful concoction of self generated chemicals, coursed through my veins in a riot of life. I was not only alive but expressing it in a wild and uncontrollable way, in an animal way, which easily overtook any sense of composure. My heart was bigger than

my body; in fact some kind of outer-body experience took place whereby my very being grew to fill all space around. The concept of any remnants of a protective bubble surrounding and protecting the idea of personality exploded until the ego, and the fear it had contained, was blown away forever. My soul was one with the beautiful nature surrounding and before I had a chance to shrink back into myself I was sprinting, not running or walking but sprinting up the enormous flight of wooden steps back to the top to see Chuck go through the motion of throwing himself into his unknown.

Arriving just in time, out of breathe but still rampaging under the adrenaline and now lactic acid mixture within, I shouted out the count to see him descend and ascend the insane human Yo-Yo that is a Bungee Jump.

There was more to come. Minutes later Chuck appeared at my side, his energy flowing, as mine, and he had one thought on his mind. Let's do it again, together, in tandem.

We waited for the others to complete their jumps in various, and sometimes hilarious ways. Then we waited some more for a Frenchman, 92 years of age, who came to make the jump every year on his birthday. His composure, mixed with a sense of fun was inspiring.

Chuck and I are standing, facing each other a foot apart, with an expanse to one side. Our eyes are locked. In his I see a mortal fear, set in a blank ashen face that has nothing to do with anything accept survival. We are hooked together on two bungee cords. His serious mien is reflected in my own mind but I feel my face to be natural and relaxed. I have confidence, tranquillity and a hitherto unknown sense of inner well-being. Nevertheless we are connected not only physically but also on some deep psychological level and jump into the void simultaneously.

"Fuuuuuuuck!" all the way down.

Whether this second adventure was a good idea I do not know, but I know that man now in a way that few others can say of even their closest friends.

I let go of my psychological inhibitions completely.

This jump into the unknown had begun as the desire for an adrenaline rush and a purely physical experience. It was a challenge but it came to represent a spiritual moment when I committed myself to being a film director. There was no going back. When I say I let go of my psychological inhibitions it was a total and seemingly irreversible event.

Turn Left At The End Of The Wall

Flower Haythorne Hardly was a best friend of Marge and Eclair O'Bubble, she was also in a relationship with Bill Coltrane, they'd been together for a while.

It was her 21st Birthday during one of the holidays and I had been invited, which was a little surprising as I didn't know her that well. Perhaps someone had put in a good word for me. It was flattering too as Flower had that kind of powerful feminine aura about her that demanded respect. I was a little overwhelmed in her presence sometimes but that may have had something to do with a slight lack of self respect on my behalf. I was always confident but often felt self-conscious with it.

I was at home with my parents and had a really bad sore throat, it was something that recurred whenever I was physically weak, and was a kind of infection. I had antibiotics for it and it was hard for me to make the decision to go to her gathering. But I did.

It rained all the way and was about a three hour drive from Surrey to a place near the coast of Suffolk.

Flower had given me directions over the phone and they went something like this;

You come along the 'A' road and you'll soon come to a 'B' road, turn right onto it and travel about five miles until you get to a village, that's OUR village. Drive straight through it until you get to a 'T' junction with a wall in front of you, that's OUR wall. Turn right and follow our wall for oh, about two miles until you get to a gate, that's OUR gate and it'll be open, turn left there onto our drive and then just come up to the house. I'll expect you for lunch.

So I followed these directions and they were very accurate. When I came to the wall it was quite impressive, when I came to the gate it was very large and when I drove along her drive it was quite a long drive, a quarter of a mile maybe.

The Haythorne Hardly residence eventually came into view over a rise and was revealed to be a stately pile of some magnitude and clearly of considerable historical interest, I imagine that it was several centuries of age.

I parked the car, there were only two others and walked with my bag to the front door, which was similar in type to some of the Cambridge colleges. It was open so I went in.

The entrance porch inside was decorated with a great number of mounted Stag's heads. I went further in.

The Hall, I think it would be called, was vast, its most obvious feature being a sweeping

staircase that curved up one wall and then climbed that wall to the next storey some thirty feet above. The ceiling was much higher. At the base of the staircase was a ship's figurehead, a wooden carving of woman that was clearly real and must have once decorated a large ship. On many of the walls were paintings, classical portraits mainly. There was a fairly threadbare carpet that covered the floor and it was cold enough to see my breath as I called out. There was an echo but no reply. I explored further.

Some quarter of an hour later I found my friends in a small room in one corner of the building. Flower was giving a slide show of her latest travels in South America I think. The audience consisted of Marge, Bill and Strafe Bartman, the Architect. I was greeted with animated hugs, "So you found it ok?"

We ate a good meal and it was decided we should go for a walk, it was raining and cold but this was the thing to do. I had a woolly sheepskin which I buttoned up close and after quite a great walk we found our way down to the beach. A ragged ocean sprawled out underneath shady cloud cover. In the near distance could be seen the Sizewell B nuclear power station, it looked extremely substantial, stark and serious.

I was soaked when we got back. We warmed up around a fire which Flower started in the Hall's fireplace and I was shown to my room.

This was enormous and contained only the four post bed that would be my sleeping arrangements for the night. There was also a fireplace should I want to make use of it. This was all completely insane and thoroughly lovely, just like Flower.

So I think there were only five of us in this incredible place. I learned that Flower's father was a Lord and sat in the House of Lords regularly. I also learned she had a brother and that altogether they owned all the land, literally as far as the eye could see. When she said that the village I had passed through on the way here was 'OUR' village I think she meant it. This was OLD money and it was full immersion into an impressive aristocratic way of life which must surely be so rare nowadays.

I had a good nights sleep, I was a little cold but I was a bit drunk when I went to bed and the idea of starting a fire in my bedroom and sleeping whilst it burned didn't seem like a good one. My throat was improving probably because I'd been throwing down the antibiotics like nobody's business.

It was a nice drive home, the weather had cleared up and like many of the experiences I'd

had since coming up to Cambridge there was a slight feeling of smugness, an assured familiarity with the incredible and fascinating. This was not an arrogance, I can only say that with humility, but it did represent an attitude that would do me few favours in the future.

To experience one particular lifestyle is one thing, to expect for it to continue and indeed for anyone you might meet to have had similar experiences is something else. It can lead to misunderstanding at the very least when trying to relate or describe one thing to one person and then again it might cause completely different and negative connotations to another.

After being welcomed into Flower's world I started to be careful when I opened my mouth to speak in mixed company but perhaps this care was something I should have learned a long time beforehand.

Flower was an amazing spirit. Not long before I met her she had been in a really nasty car crash. She had a long scar running across the top of her forehead the length of her hairline, a scar that I suspected had not long healed. I learned later that visible scars can do strange things to some people, but Flower had seemingly taken this horrible accident in her stride.

She wrote her dissertation by taking the reader on a journey of discovery, following the

progress of a Watermelon from its source when grown on a South American farm to the shelves of a supermarket in the UK. She was to graduate with a 1st in Geography.

Cue The Live Music

Whilst I was with Eclair O'Bubble for just a short while she took it upon herself to educate me in her own way, or rather cultivate me, that would be a better way of thinking about it. As a surprise one evening she bought a couple of tickets to see the University Orchestra give a recital of Bach's Mass In B Minor.

I hadn't seen a full orchestra play since I went on a day trip to The Royal Festival Hall when I was at my prep school, maybe at eight years of age.

Eclair and I sat in a balcony and heard them tuning up and then the performance began. The feeling I have about classical music is that yes, it is incredible from time to time but I can't really find the drive to begin to understand it. This evening was superb, I just sat back and let it wash over me.

Focussing one's hearing to pick out individual instruments and then being able to watch that musician, was a lesson in training one's hearing. Also highlighting an individual's performance within the context of the whole piece of music was a playful way of directing one's attention.

Eclair bought me the CD of this music and every now and then I'd play it and get lost in the sublime beauty of it.

More accessible and less elitist maybe were the bands that I saw in and around Cambridge.

'Arrested Development' were playing at The Corn Exchange, a large venue in the centre of the city and I went along with a few friends. I had been to this place once before to see a showing of the film 'The Doors' by Oliver Stone, which I'd enjoyed. Now the place was rocking, especially when they played "Mr. Wendell," their major hit of the time.

Another venue was Route 66 at the end of Mill Lane. I paid up to hear 'The Stereo MCs' who had a lot more material than their most notorious track "Connected". Chantelle was there getting down and I had a great time with Chuck and a few others. Also as a bonus Gilles Peterson was Dj'ing beforehand, I'd always had a lot of time for him on the radio and it was good to see him do his stuff in person.

'The James Taylor Quartet' were secured as the major band by Cairo for our college ball that year. Apparently they rocked up, demand a bottle of Jack Daniels and didn't hit the stage until it was empty. Their infamous hit "The Theme From Starsky and Hutch" got everyone fired up,

they were real performers and made a great impression even on people who had never heard of them before.

I saw 'Boney M' at one Ball I crashed. The outfit had a huge repertoire of classics, including; "By The Rivers of Babylon," "Painter Man," "Brown Girl In The Ring," "Rasputin" and "Night Flight to Venus". Their sequinned suits were a sight too.

There were musical influences all around but Chuck and I saw eye to eye and shared our tastes as they changed. I think it was when he played a VHS copy of the film "Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music" that I really started to understand the power and reach of music. He had a brother who was really into Jazz and so there was that influence in his collection too.

The height of the Jazz interest was when Chuck and I went to London to see the king of the Hammond organ, Jimmy Smith. In a small rowdy club this diminutive figure and legend of many Blue Note classics arrived on the small stage. There were several painful minutes of Jimmy trying to quieten the people at the bar who were more interested in drinking and being loud than listening to the music. Then he began.

The performance of his music was incredible in that each song was perfect. Perfect in its execution and perfect as a rendition of the

track as it had originally been recorded. Chuck and I were simply blown away. It was sublime.

Another experience of a life-time was had in Bristol. I went there particularly for this. Roy Ayers was playing at The Thekla, a club which was aboard a boat that had been permanently moored to the quayside.

Now the thing about Roy is, not just that we had taken the name of one of his songs, "Freaky Deaky" as the name of our upcoming DJ outfit but that the man was some kind of God.

Playing out of New York in the 60s and 70s he was a vibraphone player. This is like a xylophone except each key has an electrical pick-up and so the sounds can be manipulated electronically. The keys are played with sticks with little balls on the ends of them. Originally he played on the albums of other jazz musicians but eventually the urge must have come and he began to write songs as well as music and he sang as he played.

Songs such as; "Everybody Loves The Sunshine," "Searching," and "Poo Poo La La" were kind of cult anthems and I was going to see him live.

Of course Bob Wingwell had been instrumental in organising this and with his girlfriend, Zath, we boogied on the boat and heard the great man do his thing. We had a great

night, it was really a special kind of feeling with a lot of love.

As if that wasn't enough I got to meet him. I'd just gone to the loo, after the concert, and I bumped into him as he sat down on a chair by a desk. He was signing photographs for people to buy and he talked to me asking me whether I could hold up a torch over the desk as it was a dark corner and he needed the light. I stood there for half an hour, right next to him, as people bought his black and white images. We talked every now and then too, me and Roy, you know, just talking...

Vinyl Finals

Finals weren't that far away, but we were buying records, second hand records, lots of them. We were Cairo, Sol, Chuck, Nat Lotus, Christophe and me. Effectively we became our own Dj collective assembled for a funky purpose by Cairo Tunes himself.

He had been democratically elected Entertainment Officer or Ents Officer. This meant he had a fundamental role in organising music for the May Ball. It also meant that he had access to a budget. Being rather crafty with money he had managed to reinvigorate the ageing audio equipment.

Previous years had to make do with some almost dysfunctional ageing kit and hence 'Bops' or 'Events' if put on at all were lacking in the necessary quality of sound.

Cairo, in his wisdom had secured monies to purchase two Technics SL1200 turntables and a mixer. The turntables were definitive items of Dj equipment. It was like we were going on a musical journey and Cairo had just turned up in a Porsche. He made the decision to put on some events and the six of us went about spending our food money on vinyl.

Initially we were visiting the two or three second-hand shops in pairs or threes or so but, despite the fun and brilliant purchases we made, it quickly became a solo mission event.

From the number of records we were all buying, it was clear that Cairo had hit upon a seam of hitherto untapped enthusiasm, desire to accumulate and something verging on the obsession. Chuck and I shared our finds as he had a super cool Hi-Fi and the need to use it. Many a time I would go to his room to listen to records whilst sipping on a Gin and Tonic with ice, as Chuck had a refrigerator too.

There were six of us and the idea of Cairo was to give us all just under an hour slot each. We had to figure out our sets. Could we each play for that amount of time? Better buy a few more records just in case.

Of course we all had our own tastes, that's the whole thing but generally we centred around Funk. As James Brown said, "I don't care whatever you play, but it has to be FUNKY!", and he was The Godfather. Jazzy, Pop, Vocals, Instrumentals, Disco, and pure Funk. Funky beats, rare grooves, hip rhythms, thirty threes, forty-fives, 7", 12", we had them all covered between us, but were we any good?

Christophe Bleu drew a design taken from the cover of a record and we had a place print

up several hundred flyers. We needed a name and agreed upon a song title from Mr. Roy Ayers, Vibraphone player and legend supreme. We were "FREAKY DEAKY".

There was a budget for all this and we set a reasonably high entry price to make sure we broke even at least. The flyers were handed out to friends, put in Selwyn's pigeon holes and the rest distributed to other colleges.

The venue was The Diamond. It could take no more than 200 due to fire regulations and we had to promise to count people as they came in.

Working together we brought the system into the building and set it up on an elevated platform of wooden palettes. It looked good and a test showed that it worked and also that it was LOUD! With some difficulty we put up some lights and a Disco ball. Nat Lotus was very happy with that.

We advertised on the flyers a discount of a pound if you came "funked up" in groovy threads. How many would get into this we just didn't know. Everything set up we got into our own funky get ups. I sported a red Adidas vintage track suit with large lapels and flared trousers with my Gazelles of course. It was pretty tight but I felt like the real deal.

Drinks were on 'pay or return' from the college bar, we had plenty of barrels hooked up

and the good people we employed to serve the customers stood in a separate area of the building. The rest was all dance floor.

We put a few records on, hit the lights and started getting into the vibe we had created. Cairo was directing operations with a subtle force, unable to relax until he knew everything was just so.

People started to arrive, we started counting at the door with one of those clicker things. People started to drink. People started to move. The numbers began to increase. I think it was Christophe at the decks first, he looked like he was enjoying himself and his music was good, good and different from everything I had in store. Everyone was dancing and drinking and having fun. When we hit the magic 200 mark Cairo started to unwind and enjoy himself. His only concern was that we had started having to turn people away. There was nothing we could do about that.

We each took our turn to spin our tunes, the equipment was holding up perfectly although there was a slight panic when Chuck had some problems with the balance of the stylus arm on one deck. Nat fixed it quickly by blue-tacking a penny on top of the cartridge, not something you're supposed to do but it worked and there was no break in the music.

If not Dj'ing there was some dancing to be done. This of course was nice as you could listen to the tasty music your fellow members of the crew were playing and gyrate and boogie with friends and strangers alike who were evidently having a great time.

My slot was the last one, I think it was 12 to 1am. I was a little nervous as much as excited. I had gone with a strong disco element but had made sure to sway to the side of funkiness as a rule. How would people respond to these sounds?

A couple of classics to limber up and then into more obscure but equally booming beats. Occasionally I looked up from the small desk light illuminating the turntables, up from my crate of vinyl, and there they were, dancers going wild. And then I put on a curve ball, the beats per minute hit a different place in the brain and body and a wave of people rose to the intensity.

Cairo bought me a beer towards the end and when we hit 1am I put on Kool and the Gang's "Summer Madness," partly because it is so cool, funky and mellow all at once, partly because it clearly signalled the end of the night with its drawn out slow feel, but also because it is twelve minutes long, enough for everyone to vacate.

With The Diamond left except for us we began the clear up, this was ok as we were all hyped up and talking and it didn't take so long. The bar area needed more work which we left for the next day. We disassembled the system and when we were all done we went back to my room with the money box, in order to debrief and count any profits.

Chuck was keen to be accountant and sat at my computer to produce a detailed, costs, income and profit table. He counted the cash, twice and then handed out the split. We made just under £200 EACH!

Many had come funkyed up, many spent plenty on drinks, all were given a treat of vast vinyl variety. The bar had been a winner. We were winners. Cairo was happy and we were all tired.

Not only did we put that night on again, twice more I think, but it meant we could continue buying records. I even found myself at a remote shop at the far end of Mill Road, practically on the outskirts of town but it was worth it to score some forgotten hidden gems, the knowledge of which increased with every purchase. You knew you were going to play these tunes to hundreds of people, hundreds of happy people!

Later, during the May Ball season we also got a couple of gigs at other colleges, but that

first time was special and I've still got all my records.

Mission Revision

The right time to start revising was a grey area but once people began it swept like a fast moving cloud over the consciousness of Selwyn students.

The college library began to fill up with members acquiring permanent status at various desks, their notes and books left overnight to reserve their place. Hidden away between the rows of books, sometimes clustered into clandestine revision groups, heads were down and they wouldn't come up again until after the exams, the finals, were over.

Already cracks were beginning to show with some students failing to handle the mounting pressure. I knew of one girl who was on Beta Blockers and who had to summon her parents to stay with her throughout this test of stamina and endurance.

It's hard to say how long this period of revision was. The whole of the last term seemed to be dedicated to it but it was difficult to know just how early the really nerdy people had started getting into it. Of equal interest was just how late those classy, casual, 'the 1st is already in the bag' types left it before browsing through their notes. I worried about those people.

I surprised myself with my application and knuckled down to regular sessions in the University Library. This was my favourite place as I took some kind of weird comfort in being surrounded by what came to be hundreds of students in the main reading room.

I read everything I had written, notes and essays, I read handouts, I practically read my Dictionary of Philosophy from cover to cover. I made copious revision notes for hours everyday and then I made notes of my notes.

This wasn't all that was happening. It wasn't just some great organisation and memorisation task, I actually began to understand on a much deeper level the work I had done these past two years. Having begun as a very green starter I realised I had progressed only to the point of going through the motions with regard to generating an overall picture of the subject I had been studying.

There were so many gaps in my knowledge, so many blanks in the blind leaps of my logic, but slowly I began to fill in those blanks and gaps, to attend to the cracks. And slowly, very slowly I put the pieces together. This reworking, relearning and rediscovering was essential in creating a harmonious whole that would stand up under test.

Clearly I became aware that even two years of the subject was just scratching the surface. My supervisors, especially my Director of Studies Suzie Janes, were so aware and had such depths of understanding that it was clear to me I would only be properly prepared to sit these exams if I had already gained a PhD (A Doctor of Philosophy) or an MPhil (A Master of Philosophy).

I studied, my confidence grew and there were times when, wondering about what I was going to do after my degree, I entertained the idea, the possibility, of studying even more, for one of these postgraduate degrees.

Finally, You May Begin

The days of final exams arrived and one by one I began talking to those who had sat their first, relating as they did their tales of survival. Some had a nonchalance or 'devil may care' attitude that was clear to me was only a mask to hide their fear and dread. Honest people's reports of The Front were far more realistic and graphic.

I only have the recall of two of my exams, out of five I think. The first was my History of Modern Philosophy paper. I was a Friedrich Nietzsche nut, taught by a very inspiring man called Jorge Fernandez a Spaniard and Boxing Blue. For this paper, amongst many other preparations involving intricate spider diagrams, I had memorised nearly one hundred quotes. I carried them carefully in my fragile mind to the exam.

For this exam one had to write three essays in three hours. Finding that there were enough questions on the paper so that you would be able to provide adequate answers was a huge relief. There were three Nietzsche questions and I set to it.

Three hours went by with my heart rate elevated throughout and the oxygen rich in my brain to create a kind of hot zone aura in and

around my body. To write, with that blue fountain pen that served me so well, to have the opportunity to exercise ones knowledge and understanding was also a relief. It was like training hard for a 400 m race and then finally being able to put your whole self on the line to show what you were capable of. I ran like the wind.

The second paper I remember was the last, the Essay paper. This was a three hour exam in which one had to choose just one essay title from twenty or so and complete this essay in three hours or less.

This was somewhat of a lucky dip. If you had the exam gods on your side you might win a topic on which you could literally philosophise to your heart's content. On the other hand you might find twenty titles all of which failed to play to your strengths. I have this paper and I have no memory of which topic I chose. I have a feeling that the three hours was somewhat of a cobbled together effort, it was a kind of constantly panicking ordeal.

I remember putting my pen down, handing in my essay and leaving the hall. I remember being met by friends who had finished their finals and I remember opening the bottle of champagne that they had brought for me. And then my memory goes blank.

I truly believe I did some of my best work during those final exams. It's a shame that you don't get to see what you've written after the fact, that you don't get to talk about your work with your supervisor, that the only feedback you get is the numerical result of your degree. This had to be waited for.

This is the last exam paper I sat, I don't remember which title I chose.

Friday 28 May 1993

1.30 to 4.30

Essay

Write **one** essay.

1. Consciousness
2. Facts.
3. Conflict of values.
4. Moral scepticism.
5. Ideas and impressions.
6. Rationalism.
7. Transcendental arguments.
8. Genealogy as a method.
9. Angst.
10. Protagorean relativism.
11. Perception in Plato and Aristotle.
12. Refutation.
13. Scientific progress.
14. Infinity.
15. Many-valued logic.
16. Applied mathematics.
17. Reference.
18. Coherence.
19. Certainty.
20. Ideology.
21. Collective choice.
22. Art for art's sake.
23. Authenticity.

In Limbo

What filled the time between the last Finals exams and getting the results were wild hazy days of a Summer blur. The chronology of those days is a random pic and mix of events which may or may not have occurred then or at some time before or afterwards and I present them with this in mind.

One by one everyone finished and the mood was by turns full on celebration to cautious hope. I tended to err on the side of the former as I felt the die was cast, my fate already sealed. The truth was that no-one in their right mind could say for sure how they had done, it was all guesswork and optimism, or pessimism or despair...

We were officially 'Graduands' students in limbo, neither one thing nor the other. I decided to let it all hang out, it would be my celebration and there were plenty of others who were on my wavelength. I can't even tell you how long this period of torture lasted, at least a couple of weeks surely.

I remember Cairo had his car, a MkII Golf GTi which was cool and we drove around in that listening to Hip Hop. I remember Chuck bought a motorbike, a Kawasaki I think. He took me as a pillion passenger to Luton Airport some two hour

round trip. That was fast and cool but altogether pretty hairy. Chuck was also working at McDonalds in the kitchen for some time, I went in with a couple of others and bought a burger.

A guy called Bic Foe turned up for a while, a friend of Jean Roux Well Ace. He was a character and we burned around in his car listening to "Naughty By Nature" for a while. He had worked for the Political, Satirical, Puppet based Tv programme "Spitting Image". I asked a lot of questions as Tv was an area I was homing in on with regard to getting some kind of job after all this craziness was over. For the moment this could wait.

More pressing was the business of unwinding and giving in to the fact that it was soon all to be ending.

Photo Opportunities

I had an idea for the Freaky Deaky crew to hit London. We all made it except Cairo who must have had something else planned.

Myself, Nat Lotus, Sol, Christophe Bleu and Chuck caught the train to London and loped around all kinds of locations fully dressed in our funky up Freaky Deaky Dj outfits. And, and this was the whole point, I directed and caught the whole thing on glorious Super 8.

The Bolex camera was fairly unobtrusive but we did stick out like real goof balls. I rolled a whole magazine and I've looked at that footage recently. I had it transferred to DVD and the result are both hilarious and awesome. It looks like we were taking the whole thing pretty seriously with an ocean of tongue in cheek posing power just below the surface.

Volley Humous with his advanced photography skills was himself recording people for posterity too. He had hired a room in a college basement and had turned it into a photographic studio with a backdrop, and a fancy synched flash set up. Then on this one day he invited almost everyone he knew and booked them all in for a portrait. It was a kind of come as

you are, bring whatever you want with you kind of deal.

I know Flower and Bill showed up, both being good friends with Volley. I'd told Cairo about it. I turned up in some flared Levis, my Gazelles, a Hawaiian shirt and a necklace pendant I'd sort of borrowed from Marge.

Volley went to work and we had a great time. The final photo he took of me was the one he printed and gave a copy to me. It was black and white and I was performing a jumping turn around back handed punch, twisting through the air. I had taken a couple of years of Wu Shu Kwan (Chinese Kick Boxing) with Rick Smith when I was 14 and 15 and remembered this manoeuvre.

Cairo turned up and Volley photographed him and then the two of us as buddies. I never got to see those photos but then so was the case for my friends and the Freaky Deaky Super 8 footage.

The thing was, people kept knocking on the door and coming in dressed in Black Tie asking if this was the room for the portraits. We had to keep turning them away. After several of these we had worked out that there was someone else doing formal portraits nearby. It was really annoying when the fifth or sixth person came in. I said as a joke that if it happened again we should just say that, "Yes, this is the

place you're looking for." And then take their photograph. We agreed on this and soon there was a knock on the door.

This rather chubby Chinese guy didn't know what was about to happen. In his black tie, Volley sat him down and made some photographs. Cairo handed him a long balloon, something we had been using as a comedy prop. Volley did show me a photo of that guy. He was standing, with absolutely no idea what he was doing, holding a balloon in a rather suggestive manner. After we had satiated our rather cruel senses of humour we 'let him go'. I felt really bad for that guy later, but not that bad, not really.

The “Wonder Graduate”

People occasionally talked of careers. Some had already landed high status jobs in finance in London. Some were planning further education, some were going abroad. Some of course, such as the Medics, Vets and Architects had a mandatory further direction as they continued their journey toward fulfilling their vocation. I was caught in the middle of all this.

I had been to the Careers Department and met with a good person who, once I had expressed an interest in film and tv, hooked me up with a BBC Producer, a man by the name of Brain Sheet, who had graduated from Cambridge in History some years earlier. I saw him when he came to visit Cambridge and talked with him about film as well as tv. He offered me some work as a sort of Personal Assistant and Runner.

The film he was making was a 'short,' about ten minutes in length, but it was independent of the BBC and he was funding it himself. The locations we would be using included a soon to be decommissioned Victorian swimming pool where we would be filming underwater, and the entirety of London Zoo whilst it was being closed for repairs. This was a very exciting prospect as

we would be shooting on 16 mm film and using a Steadicam to boot. I felt I was onto a winner.

Also Elixir Reece had arranged for me to meet her brother who also worked at the BBC. I saw him at White City and he explained the selection process for the Producer Program. This was something I was keen to pursue also.

The chance to meet with these people is a direct result of the network of people it was possible to meet. Having such opportunities was not something that I took for granted, I knew this was an element of privilege, I knew these opportunities weren't available to all. However, to respect this, I felt the best I could do in my situation, in my circumstances was to take the bull by the horns and make the most of my luck and convert the merit I had earned into what I hoped would be a wonderful life.

To this end I came up with something that started as playful idea and ended in a job. I created this fictional 'product' called a 'Wonder Graduate' which was of course me. On one sheet of A4 I made an 'advertisement' for this product, explaining what it has already done, what it can do with ease, and how the person and the company couldn't afford to be without one. On the bottom was a portion to be cut-off in order to apply for a 'trial run' of this product for free. If you liked the product you could take it on

full time for a reasonable fee. Returning the cut-off slip in the included self addressed pre-paid envelope was the way forward to enjoying this exciting new product (whose credentials were outlined).

I made a list of all the film and television production companies, in London, using various resources including the careers department and sent just over one hundred of these letters which were basically a way to 'sell myself' in order to get a paid job in London. It felt great to post them all in a mass mail shot.

This was the first action, the first self-motivated event that I instigated towards the goal of becoming a film director. It was my way of saying to myself; "You can be a success, you're in this on your own but you can do this". I knew it was going to be a long road, I didn't know at that time quite how long, but I was doing something to get under way. At that time I didn't realise just how alone I would be on the road.

I waited and one by one I started to get some replies.

Reading The Cards

Elixir Reece's 21st birthday was coming soon and she had decided to throw a grand party at her family home, which was more of a mansion than the farm it was described as. The theme of her party was Tarot Cards. The idea was that you came dressed as the tarot card character on your invite. I'm sure each character was chosen carefully to match the invited guest but I'm not sure as to why I was 'The Magician'. Obviously Sol was going but other than Elixir I would know no one else there. I wasn't not going to go, I love a party and this promised to be a better.

I created an outfit of sorts, including a cape and a tall pointed hat and a huge pair of skiing goggles just to make sure I was cool.

When I got there it was already in full swing. I've got to say it was a little mad with all kinds of tarot card characters running all over the place, maybe a hundred. Elixir was The Sun and Sol was The King. I found Sol and then Elixir, who showed me to the room where I'd be staying the night. After I'd got into my outfit and made myself comfortable in the room I left to join the party.

I did drink a lot, I didn't meet anyone or make any new friends and to be honest I didn't

have that great a time. I went to bed with a swimming head and only woke when Sol knocked on my door.

The next day I woke to find that I was one of only perhaps ten people to have been invited to stay the night. We all had some breakfast and I met Elixir's father.

Elixir's father was a very successful businessman who had come from nothing to create a multi-media empire with any number of branches. His house was incredible, the party and dinner was incredible, Elixir was incredible. Elixir had told me to sent her father one of my "WonderGraduate" letters, just to see what he thought. He was after all one of the biggest companies with respect to recruitment, finding jobs for people and human resources in general was his forte.

He opened my letter, which had apparently arrived only that day. I thought later that Elixir may have somehow arranged this for dramatic effect. Whatever, I was suddenly in the spot-light as we drank coffee outside, overlooking the enormous gardens, which were perfectly kept including much topiary. He read out my letter to all who were there and it was pretty embarrassing. Elixir's mother didn't like it, I think she said it was 'tacky and crude', not knowing the writer of it was right next to her. But I think I

sort of agreed with her. Elixir's father thought it was imaginative innovative and original, he liked it and apparently he liked me too.

The letter was an attempt to find employment in the film and television industry. Elixir's father thought perhaps that I was asking to work for him, an understandable confusion of sending a copy to him in the first place, for which I had Elixir to thank. Anyway he took it upon himself to give me an interview.

This was conducted in a large shed in the garden which was some kind of office. I was in there for half an hour or so. Whilst the other friends of Elixir drank their coffees and had breakfast I was being grilled. The interview was done primarily with the help of a short psychometric test which I had to complete. I was then asked questions based on my answers. At the end of this process he told me that I was "unsuitable for employment within any of his organisations". I think it was with some relief that I left that particular shed.

I returned and sat with the others. Elixir debriefed me with laughter for what was, for me at least, a meeting with a very powerful and wealthy man, something that she was obviously familiar with but which for me was rather an unexpected and intense experience.

The party the night before and this day was, in all my time at University, a close encounter with real new money, hard earned wealth of huge proportions. To see this at such close quarters with such good friends gave me a clearer perspective on my own wealth.

The money I had inherited seemed like a drop in someone else's ocean now and so I was able to put myself in a relative position. I looked at Elixir and knew that coming from real wealth brought with it all kinds of burdens along with its advantages. We are born into the lives we lead and there is a degree of unchangeability about these conditions. The element of free will, if it exists at all, might only be exercised within certain boundaries and with certain limitations on the nature of ones actions, and this is true however rich you happen to be.

Right now I wasn't sure if I was happy or sad, and that seemed more important to me than any thoughts about money. I drove home agitated and confused wondering what was in the cards for my future.

Results, Graduation and Beyond...

I would love to say I got a starred first, and that in addition to this I have become a famous independent cult movie director. But this was not to be. A lot of people want such things and few have the overpowering amount of talent, energy and luck to obtain them. The fact is that in the movie industry you also need more than your fair share of blind ambition, deviousness, greed and ruthlessness. You just don't get anywhere unless you have a fairly ugly mixed bag of these assets.

I got close, too close to having everything I required to realise this rather dubious 'dream'. One of the few, but very considerable benefits of having had a full scale mental breakdown is that you find yourself with plenty of time to reflect upon the human condition and if necessary find it within yourself to turn your life around. Getting perspective on priorities, what truly matters to you, was a breakthrough for me.

Right now all that mattered to me was that I wouldn't embarrass myself. A "Special" was as near as dammit a fail. Aberdeen McWales found himself with one of these and you know it really didn't matter for him. I understand he's very wealthy and lives in Switzerland with a great job and where he's in a band and is an amateur

actor. For me this would have been a disaster where the image of myself and my abilities would have collapsed as the reality of my circumstances sank in.

A 3rd would not have been much better and it was a real possibility. To get a 1st would have meant that I was some kind of undiscovered genius. A 2:1, one could hope, one could imagine, but you know Cambridge doesn't just hand out these things to just anyone.

I heard the results for my subject were out. They were posted on the Senate House in the centre of the town and I walked in with raging butterflies in my stomach the same that I had felt before walking to my first Finals exam.

There was a crowd there, I had to squeeze my way to the front and fight to find the listings. There I was. A 2:2 ! I smiled, a big smile, a very happy boy. It was as though anything else would not have lined up with my psyche.

My first thought was that Suzie Janes would be more than satisfied, I'd always felt she was preparing me to expect and to be content with a third. I'd done my best, this was my best, I could have done much worse and it's hard to imagine how I could have done any better.

My second thought was for my Mum and Dad. I rang them as soon as I could and gave

them the good news. Graduation day was set and they would be coming with my sister.

I got a 2:2 in Philosophy from The University of Cambridge, that's a result, that's a relief, phew!

In my trusty suit, black gown and mortar board hat I assembled with all my Selwyn friends, and the whole year, in the Old Court for The Graduation Photograph. Mum, Dad and Sister took photographs from every angle.

There was a proper hubbub of vibrant happiness as we walked en masse from the college towards the centre of town. It was like a marching army of intellectuals. This was a journey we had all made many hundreds of times before but it felt different now. This was our day, our perfect day but it was also, for the great majority of us, the start of another journey that led away from this wonderful city.

The Selwyn contingent, the college's offerings for this year, arrived at the Senate House and we shuffled in. Our parents and loved ones watched from a gallery. We each waited for our name to be called and then went up onto the stage to receive our degree. Now as graduates, we went outside, and in that photographic moment we threw our mortar boards in the air.

The goal is not the victory, the trophy is not the triumph but right there and then, if you can

put it all into a movie moment, I felt a dream had finally come true.

As for these and other dreams, they are real. They're not just flights of fancy, or clouds in the sky. Bubbles will be burst, hearts will get broken and so will dreams. But hearts and dreams are made of amazingly tough stuff, they can be mended and in the case of dreams they can fly high once again, waiting to be realised, waiting to come true.

As a family we dined at a restaurant called 'Browns' that evening. I had been there once before and it's a wonderful place, the atmosphere is incredible as is the building itself with a very high ceiling from which hang many fans, whirring overhead. As we ordered and drank and ate, a man sat at a grand piano playing moody tunes and the occasional up beat number. He was wearing a dinner jacket and had an undone black bow tie around his neck. Further to this he had one black eye. The whole scene seemed like something out of a black and white film noir from the fifties. As a film the credits were just coming up, as a dream I was just waking up.

After Shock

A few weeks later I had a really positive reply to one of my 'Wonder Graduate' letters. I had an interview with a London based Independent Television Production company. I went to see them, and they gave me a job!

This job as a Runner led to dreams of world travel and this travel led further on, to Film School. Unfortunately, due to the nature of my personality and certain negative qualities which I was unable to understand or overcome effectively, this dreaming led to a complete malfunction in my character. Not all dreams are worthy to be followed.

I found myself in circumstances whereby I was only able to survive in the most basic of ways and my future was dark and impossible to foresee.

My Cambridge experience encouraged me to believe that the sky was the limit, that I was above it all, and that there was nothing above me. These beliefs together with the belief that you are limited only by your imagination can be a dangerous concoction, especially if there is no check on your ambition.

I resented the fall I made for myself from the great heights I felt I had climbed. And I

resented this self generated rise and fall for a very long time. I was very angry, firstly with everyone else and then with myself alone. I was angry that I was not a 'success'. However, although it was a fall from a very high and 'cool' place, it was ironically also a fall from a very dark place. I know this from my recovery as every day, one day after the next became a little brighter, every day.

During that ordeal the stories I have related here of my studies stayed with me as both reference points and a beacon for optimism. All that I have related has remained with me in the detail with which it has been recalled for over twenty-five years and the quality of people and experiences never left my consciousness.

To be happy during a period of time is great. To know that you are happy is another thing, something that lends a quality to memories of that time and something that can be most life affirming.

The perceptions we make, interacting with our surroundings, and the way we make them have a fundamental effect on the life which then follows. Some of these impressions which we create are generated under incredible conditions and it is whilst we inhabit such environments that our memory works its' magic.

Memories of all kinds, are the foundations upon which we build the architecture of our minds. When we do so, we then get to walk around these buildings and their interiors, exploring them and sharing with others the dreams which we may find.

When your dreams are memories, your memories will be dreams.

Epilogue : An Amateur Philosopher For The Love Of It

I didn't go to Cambridge looking for love, but that is what I found, only in strange and wonderful manifestations.

Philosophy has been called the love of wisdom. It's true I learned a lot about many concepts and ideas but in essence Philosophy was, and continues to be, a way of looking at the world.

Scientific method has it ways, through observation of Nature, finding patterns, drawing conclusions, creating theories which can then be tested and verified or found too be false.

Art has its own way of perceiving the world through various mediums, using established techniques to provide subjective and sometimes universal visions of the human condition.

Analytical Philosophy weaves its own fabric, building on, and sometimes disassembling the thoughts and arguments of those who have gone before. It creates systems of thinking, frameworks, foundations and constructions and it is in this sense perhaps more like architecture than anything else.

Computing talks of architecture in both hardware and software, and maybe Philosophy

can be thought of as an Architecture of the Mind. The convenient definitive four areas of; Logic, Ethics, Metaphysics and Epistemology can be seen as arbitrary categorisations, and these are the ones that you would find in an elementary text book.

In my short affair with Philosophy I found that all elements of its study effect all others. There is a knock-on effect of ideas in this architectural design of ideas but no one 'Super Theory,' one that successfully unites these elements in harmony with each other, was ever made clear to me. Design in Philosophy is an ever shifting redrawing of blueprints that are all works in progress.

Rather more impressive in my opinion was the learning required to ask a very specific question, and then to feel confident enough to begin an investigation towards finding the answer, even if it is not presented as THE answer. Finding answers to difficult questions is a skill that many could benefit from.

My very first philosophy essay says a lot to me, in its title and how it invites you to think: "What Reason Do We Have To Believe In A Physical World?" It turns your own world upside down and your varied ability to find an answer may find you clinging onto your sanity wondering if even that is real.

We are often taught that materialism, the love of the purely material is a 'bad thing'. When we put the desire for material possessions in front of the needs of others the world looks twisted, especially when we consider the irony that these needs of others are often themselves material in nature.

Love of Oneself is hard to learn if you need it badly, and hard to unlearn if you have too much of it. If you can find a strong Identity, or even a series of varied identities, if you are brave, then being kind towards yourself becomes real and you may get strong enough to be able to fully love others.

I became a Dancer, a Photographer, a Pilot and a DJ. If that wasn't enough I did a bungee jump to assert my character and roll all identities into one death defying affirmation of who I am. You don't need to go that far but an Identity, even if it is a personal, private one, is crucial to knowing yourself, believing in yourself and loving yourself as you love others. Identity leads to Character which leads to Confidence and Communication.

Lust is not love, that can be hard to see when all around you is beauty and sensuality. The need for intimacy is very real but to find it through friendship first is important. You have to constantly remind yourself of that sometimes. To believe in

beauty is itself beautiful but to want, to expect, to demand and to attempt to consume it is the wrong way to express the harmony that most need as opposed to pure and instant gratification.

Platonic love is a fine thing indeed, something I have been lucky to experience for many years with many people. There is little finer than the acceptance of another in a friendship and for many people this turns out to be enough. The further complications of a sexual relationship scare some people and for good reasons, it's a big step to take to be naked, mind, body and soul with another and allow someone into your microcosmic inner worlds, discarding all fears of rejection and ridicule as you do so.

Unrequited love is a bummer. To heave all your hopes and dreams onto just one person who denies you, sometimes often, regularly and repeatedly is exhausting, degenerating and even dangerous. There are only a few ways to remedy this situation. First one can remove one's gaze from the loved subject and refocus all energies onto someone, or something else. Alternatively, the other option is to seek to improve the love of oneself, to build self esteem and so avoid masochistically encouraging the embarrassment of repeated rejection. Good luck!

If you are the object of the unrequited love of another, the best you can do is make yourself very clear and be kind. The temptation to lead someone on and abuse this position can be huge.

Brotherly, or sisterly love. A particular friend, who perhaps knows you better than you know yourself can provide an objective view on your life. You just need to know how to ask for and gain advice. Trust is vital here. If you are really stuck in this world and you are lucky enough to have a friend, ask for their help, talk to them about why they think about things the way they do, argue with them if necessary but know that if you don't heed their kind words you may not get any more the next time.

True Love is not as rare, and also not as universal as some would have us believe. It may come from any direction, at any point in time and space, you just have to be ready for it. Like this, the ability to love can actually be seen as being ready for love, always. If you're ready for it, it will find you, it will choose you and it will stick with you in many strange and unusual ways. People come and go. Just be ready for love, maybe it'll stay.

My love of family has never been dented beyond recognition or repair.

My Mum and Dad might be represented as a cast of hundreds of extras in supporting roles.

My Mum steers conversation, decision making and trains of thought with a subtle expertise. My Dad can ask just the right question to cast the appropriate amount of doubt over potentially poor choices.

My sister, an ex-Head Girl, is by turns frank, then dismissive, then positive, cutting through dense jungles of thinking with precision and great ease.

My Grandfather was a Headmaster who tries to ask the right questions but essentially all that's important to him is that you know what you're doing. He doesn't want any nonsense, he only wants the truth. Trying to convince him that Philosophy is primarily concerned with this is hard work. He makes you go back to the drawing board, not a bad thing.

My Grandmother just has a look in her eyes that says, "You do it your way".

My Brother-in-law, an ex-Head Boy, will stand you up straight with a couple of remarks.

My Nephew reminds me of how I once was and how age can change you both for the better and the worse.

My Niece thinks I'm a maniac, but we both wear Birkenstocks, so that's cool.

For me, Philosophy, as 'the love of wisdom' has developed to become nothing less than the love of life.

For the love of Dreams, and the love of Freedom in life there is this memory I have as a boy:

One bored afternoon when I was ten or so I made hundreds of paper airplanes and threw them one by one from my first storey bedroom window into our garden below. Each one of these paper airplanes launched into flight was a dream of pure freedom but one or two of them were also a dream to fly...

