

33. A SOFT LANDING, CAMBRIDGE, 1999-

The rest of my story is a gradual contraction of the area over which Beatrice and I wander. Our wayfaring has come to a stop. First, about 1994, we stopped travelling by plane, but still drove every week-end to our place in New Hampshire. In the year 2000 we sold the North Hampton house, and gave the car to Robert. After that we would still dine at the Harvard Faculty Club or Gianino's. Now even that is rare; we just dine at home, and we invite to our home for a catered dinner. So our range now is essentially the two apartments that we inhabit on Massachusetts Avenue, say about 1800 square feet.

In anticipation of the next contraction of our area of movement we recently visited Mount Auburn Cemetery and arranged for our cremation and burial in a part of the cemetery reserved for Harvard Faculty and their spouses.

So Beatrice and I now look back over our lives, and reflect, comment, and assess what has gone on.

Looking back: How I was robbed! Cali, Rome, New York

With all the travel I have done in my time, I must have often been in the midst of crooks. One would think that I must be besieged by confidence men, pickpockets, and other riffraff. Yet exposing myself as I did over the years only three episodes come to mind in which I was personally attacked.

One was in Cali, Colombia's second city next to Bogota, and I was walking through the rather disordered market place when I was attacked from behind, as though I was run down by a horse. The thief who came up behind me pushed his hands into my right and left pockets simultaneously, seized paper that was in them and ran off thinking he had a handful of bills. In fact money didn't come into this, I had been to the local telegraph office that morning, and taken a number of blank forms, with the idea of sending a message back to Beatrice. So there was a robbery that cost me nothing and a criminal act that gained nothing.

A more sophisticated and more successful thief caught up with me in Rome. It was Sunday afternoon, and Beatrice and I decided to take a bus to the Piazza Navona, one of the most beautiful squares in the world, with the famous Bernini Fountain. We would walk about the Piazza, and look out at it while comfortably sipping tea.

As the bus neared the Piazza Beatrice and I stood up and approached the back door, Beatrice in front of me, a rather well-dressed man lurched against me as the bus pulled to a stop. I courteously helped him right himself, we stepped down off the bus, the doors closed and the bus

moved on. Then feeling in my pocket, I found that my purse had been taken. I was the victim of a maneuver in which I participated, and the well-dressed gentleman was the culprit.

I had cautiously taken with me only the money to buy tea, so the financial loss was slight. And the gain in knowledge of humankind out of all proportion. The Italian is as great a civilization as there is in Europe. When the inheritor of such a civilization turns to crime, he does so with finesse and delicacy. He is no vulgar hold-up man with a gun depending on threat to extract your money.

Going to New York some thirty years ago I descended from the plane at Kennedy airport, found a taxi, and asked the driver to go to the Henry Hudson Hotel in New York (I often went to the Henry Hudson, which was clean, modern and inexpensive.). When we passed a lonely spot on the road the driver pulled over and stopped, and said "Twenty dollars." When I started to argue, he replied only, "Do you want to get out here?" It was as unsubtle as holding a gun to my head. I imagined myself standing by the side of the road with my luggage, stranded. I forked over the twenty dollars, and we continued on our way. I concluded that Kenya is not so abnormal as one might have thought.

Aside from these, I had a watch stolen in Dakar, while I was in the swimming pool, but that was quite uninteresting--there was no contact with the criminal and the watch was easily replaced.

A more interesting case was (and at this writing still is) my tangle with AOL.

This example of corporate crime involves no violence or threat of violence. It is white collar crime at its slipperiest. Nothing less than the unauthorized removal of funds month after month from my credit card.

For years my wife and I received e-mail via AOL. Each month we were charged forty some dollars. I am a slow-witted fellow, but after a few years I began to wonder how come I could send and receive free email with Netscape, whose service was if anything better that of AOL, in that that Netscape had little advertising and no spam, while AOL had plenty of both.

I phoned and asked the genteel lady who answered why I shouldn't just drop AOL and choose Netscape, or Yahoo, or Drivetech, all of which are free. She was evidently pained by this idea, and pleaded with me, immediately dropping the price to \$4.95, a reduction of 90%. That seemed such a trifle, and Beatrice after all was in the habit of AOL, and the AOL representative seemed like such a friendly gracious person that at the price of \$4.95 I could afford to humor two fine women.

Little did I suspect that this was the thin edge of the wedge. After a few months, on November 28, 2002, the billing on my credit card silently went up to \$14.95. So what? I said to myself. The amount still seemed too small to make a fuss over. But it seems someone in AOL was lurking, watching, testing my attentiveness, and there being no protest, raised the price again the following month. In February a withdrawal of \$46.72 was charged to our credit card. I still said nothing, and on January 28, 2004 the price became \$51.30. Was there a ghostly figure lurking behind the scene, standing over the billing machine, and feeling out each customer, judging for each how much he/she would stand? Since that time there has been one further rise -- to \$62.23 dated March 23, 2004.

Now I am waiting for the next unauthorized price hike. I have no reason to think that the series is converging. Will it go to \$100? to \$1000? I am sitting and waiting, saying nothing, patient as a cat watching a mouse moving closer and closer to the range of its killer claw. The killer in this case would be publishing this tawdry history on my site on the Web. I doubt if it would kill AOL, but it would certainly humiliate that once-proud corporation.

Looking back: I got lucky

People have wondered how I, with abilities undistinguishable from those of my classmates in high school and college, get invited successively to tenure posts in Toronto, Chicago, Berkeley, and Harvard. Never having to make application, work up a cv. or otherwise exert myself to get the post. Once having been offered and accepted the post I did work very very hard. So hard work, not any special mental endowment, is my secret.

If the intellectual power that would explain the rise in the world is lacking, what could the explanation be? Fundamental was my happening along in the van of the baby boom, when universities were stocking up in anticipation of a major increase in the student body.

So my career suggests that if parents could at birth of a child choose between brains and luck for it, they ought to choose luck.

When I was a student I had the idea of becoming an actuary, and actually wrote the examinations for the Associateship degree and passed. Fortunately for me there were no jobs to be had. If I had succeeded in getting a job with the Sun Life Insurance, owner of a vast building on Dominion Square in the center of Montreal, or the Prudential in New Jersey, both of which I desired greatly, I had already mastered all the mathematics that was needed in actuarial practice and what remains in the way of research is the icing on the cake--pleasant but not essential. I would have had a middle level bureaucratic-type career. So a major factor in my elevation in the world was the unavailability of actuarial work in the 1930s.

In quite a different sense I was lucky--the people I met while at home or abroad.

Looking back: Crazy behavior

I mentioned above using my mouth as a pump to clear the fuel pipe on my first car, so swallowing a certain amount of gasoline in the process. This must have happened eight or ten times, as I said, and only afterwards did I learn that gasoline is a deadly poison.

I did a good deal of skiing on Mount Royal in my high school days, often venturing far from the beaten trails. I remember one spot where there is a steep cliff overhanging a well-trod road. Along that road passed people walking, skiing, riding horses moving in horse-drawn carriages. (At that time motor cars were not permitted on the mountain.) I climbed by a roundabout trail to the top of the cliff, and then let go. I gained tremendous speed down the cliff and totally out of control scooted across the road and down the other side. It never occurred to me that if a horse or carriage was coming at the wrong time we would collide and I would surely be killed.

Another example: one day in January the temperature was 27 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, unique even for Montreal, and for no special reason I walked down to McGill, a distance of about two miles. There were plenty of busses and street cars but I walked--just to be able to say I did it. Breathing was difficult, and we had been publicly warned to stay indoors as far as possible, and in any case never to stop to rest. I did stop to rest, but ultimately made it into McGill's well-heated Redpath Library, and later in the day took an electrically heated street-car home.

More recently I sped up my treadmill, faster and faster, up to the fastest it could go. It was far too fast for me to keep up with, and I was thrown down. I just managed to reach the emergency switch and bring the machine to a stop. I could have been badly injured by the fall, but got away with a skinned knee.

Such are the escapades that I recall at the moment.

Looking back: What Economic and Social Development means for rural life, Indonesia 1952 and 1989

The bad news coming out of Indonesia on its urban economy, its stock markets, its balance of trade, so important for better off people in the cities, and so forth, do not weigh heavily in the countryside. At least this is the sense I take out of a comparison I was able to make over the span of some 40 years between my first visit and my later visits. .

As mentioned above I spent a year in Indonesia in 1952 and lived in the village of Balarjo for some two months of that year. Balarjo was typical of the rural parts of one of the poorest countries in the world. After I was told some of the detail of how a family lived, or observed some activity, I would rush back to my room in the headman's house and write detailed notes--some 150 pages in all, typed on the portable typewriter I had brought with me. At the time I made no use of them--they lay buried in my files at home.

Then I returned to Indonesia when it was winter in Vienna each year for 5 years--1985-1989. I took advantage of that return to revisit Balarjo. The first surprise I had was to be recognized as the visitor of more than 40 years earlier. A man who had been a boy in a group I had addressed at the earlier visit was now village Headman, and talks with him supplemented my observation. .

The changes were highly visible. In 1952 the young boys, practically naked, were splashing around in the mud with the water buffaloes of which they had the care. By 1984 the boys were at school part of each week-day, and when they were free kicking a football on a level field in which goal posts had been set up. They were now neatly dressed in knee pants and shirts--none beyond infancy went naked.

At the earlier visit education (meaning ability to speak and write Indonesian, and work simple sums) was limited to the Headman and one or two senior citizens. By 1984 everyone under 40 had been to primary school in the village, and many had followed through with secondary school in a neighboring village.

In 1952 a badly rutted dirt road ran through the village, nearly impassable in the rainy season. Thirty years later the village had a modern paved road, on which automobiles could drive through the village, peasants could take a bus to Malang and even travel to Surabaya. I saw those same neatly dressed boys riding their bicycles up and down that road.

Electricity was coming through to the village, and there were already several television sets in use. The primitive tiny home-made houses of 1952 were now inhabited only by the very poorest landless villagers; by 1984 most lived in architect designed and professionally built houses. So the paved road and the houses along it now give the village a totally different aspect from 1952.

But when I asked older villagers what was the biggest improvement in their lives they mentioned ahead of any of these the change in diet. At the earlier visit they had enough rice for no more than three or four months after the harvest. Rice was a luxury that ran out and was replaced with corn. But then the corn ran out, and in the time to next harvest villagers had to fall back on cassava, that they knew was not nutritious but very easily grown. This was the season of they called *paceklik*, a Javanese word conveying chronic hunger and resignation, a condition of semi-starvation.

Then came the Green Revolution, the greatest gift of all development aid. With the use of better seed, of varieties that could get along in the dry season, with the use of fertilizer, crops were multiplied two, three and four-fold. By 1984 rice had become available all year round in Balarjo. And one of the details--rice has to be hulled before it can be cooked; the hull has no nutritive value. Hulling had always been done by putting the rice in a tub and pounding it with poles, essential work left to the village women. Now the village has an electric hulling machine to which the peasant-farmer can bring his rice and have it hulled for a few rupiahs, i.e. a few pennies, while he stands by. The women are saved a long, boring and arduous task.

And finally, birth control had come. With the earlier large families, despite high death rates each generation was more numerous and, land being fixed, poorer than the one before. Now it is from those smaller families that the neatly dressed boys above mentioned come.

The changes above mentioned are to my view and to that of the vast majority of the population the essence of development. Never mind whether the stock market in Jakarta is up or down, how foreign investment can be attracted, making Indonesia an industrial power the way that Malaysia and now China are becoming. First things first--adequate nutrition, at least elementary education, decent housing, nutritious food. At least that is the view expressed by the villagers to whom I talked.

Looking back: Violence in my life and in society

My father wanted to be obeyed and respected in the family for which he was providing the bread. I on the other hand had strong views on many subject, and I never took the trouble to state them tactfully. My attitude was regarded as disrespectful, and I got many a wallop, something that no other member of the family incurred.

When I was in elementary school there were occasional jousts among the boys, and I did not flee them--any pacifism in my nature came later--but joined in with gusto. Making an enemy of someone, i.e. provoking him, and then fighting him was good clean fun. And when we went to it on a vacant lot there was no enforcing of the Marquis of Queensberry rules.

That passed away long before I got to high school. There I was peaceful and decorous. I joined the Officers Training Corps, and in nice weather we did some drill outdoors. I was undistinguished in this and especially undistinguished in rifle practice. I will never forget the Saturday morning when we were in the basement of the school, set up as a rifle range. At one end were the targets, at the other end a number of benches on which we marksmen would lie on our stomachs and take aim.

When it was my turn I was just getting myself into position on the bench when the gun went off, with the bullet going right through the bench. I still don't know quite did it, but obviously I must have pulled the trigger. Mr. Somerville, a veteran of World War I, was over in a moment, examining the damage to the bench. I shuddered as I thought that with such a hair trigger I could just as easily have shot a fellow student.

The following Monday I went through the formality of resigning from the OTC, so ending my military career. I am sure everyone felt safer once I was out of the Corps.

When World War II broke out, agreeing with the news sources that for once our side indeed was the side of justice, I tried to enlist for the Navy. Better to be drowned than shot if one is to die for his country, I thought. But I had no chance to do either. I was rejected on grounds of eyesight.

In later life I had two chances to observe violence at first hand. One was about 40 years ago at the University of Chicago. At that time the administration building was on the west side of Ellis Avenue, and on its ground floor was a branch of one of the local banks in which faculty and students could do their banking business without leaving the campus. I was cruising on Ellis Avenue in our ten year old Oldsmobile when two masked men who had held up the cashier were escaping to their getaway car. The thought flashed through my mind that I could just stop slantwise across the road so as to block their getaway flight. With good timing they could crash into our ancient Oldsmobile and bring its career to a spectacular end. But before I could get into position to do this they sped past me, with the campus police in hot pursuit. I believe they got away. That was Chicago.

In somewhat the same way but much more recently the Cambridge Trust in Harvard Square was held up when I was passing through on foot. Two men came running out holding the loot, followed by a guard firing after them. He hit one of the men in the leg and arrested him. I never heard the fate of the other.

More organized such as that by Americans in Iraq or Israelis in Palestine creates more violence. If I hit you, and you hit back there begins a cycle with no ending and no winner: both sides lose. Among the people I have talked to the ones who most thoroughly understand this are Quakers.

The alternative to violence for settling disputes is negotiation and compromise, and rare are the cases where these are not applicable. Why has violence been used to solve disputes since the beginning of the world when both sides are almost certain to lose by it? The only answer I know is Freud's: the impulse to injure or kill our fellow man is built into our very natures; the id, only controlled--when it is controlled--by the much weaker ego and superego.

Freud spoke of the impulse to love one's neighbor as weaker than the impulse to seize his possessions, to seduce his wife, to torture and to kill him." Whereas Marx saw conflict between social classes, Freud saw conflict within the human mind itself. Civilization tries to combine individuals into families, races, peoples and nations --ultimately into one great unity. "But man's natural aggressive instinct," wrote Freud, "the hostility of each against all and of all against each, opposes this program of civilization."

That is institutionalized in Malay culture by the ailment of running amok. Much of the story of Malaisie, by Henri Fauconier, a great work of fiction, is built around it.

Would that Southeast Asia was the only place where this Freudian manifestation appears. The Holocaust, most wars, including the recent war on Iraq, are other instances where the killing seems to go on just for its own sake. Of course there are political and other arguments--but the sheer irrationality of war is proven by the outcomes. What did anyone gain from the First World War? What did anyone gain by the killing and destruction in Iraq? Americans who favored the war--and these were in the majority--were yielding to their id's plus their greed for oil. The stated reason--the mushroom cloud that would kill us in the millions--could be said more plausibly in respect of a half-dozen other countries than Iraq. .

Our use of violence excites violence on the other side. Our attack on Iraq was interpreted as an attack on Islam. Rightly or not the Iraqis believe that the attack of May 2003 would have not have occurred if the Iraqis had been Christian. And radical Muslims around the world have taken up the struggle. The reporter of the NYT is puzzled by his observation that while Al Quaeda has slowed down the struggle has been taken up by many far-flung lesser groups. It is as though what was planned as a small quick war in Iraq has ignited the passions of nearly a billion Muslims around the world. People of good will can only hope that the United States will now offer an olive branch to the enemy we have created. It would cost nothing to apply half a trillion dollars over the next few years to reconstruct and develop the Muslim world. We would simply turn the arms budget to this peaceful purpose.

Looking back: my contact with movements of money by terrorists and drug dealers

At the end of a lecture in Columbus, Beatrice and I went to the back of the hall and up into the projection booth to retrieve the slides I had used. The projectionist had left, and my slides were not in sight, so we looked around, and saw a large attaché case, opened it, and did not find slides, but, astonishingly, hundred dollar bills. It was packed with them -- the total value could have been a million dollars. Figuring that was probably drug or terrorist money, and not wanting to get mixed up with some violent group they belonged to, we cleared out, saying we could get our host to chase up my slides the following day.

Thinking about the matter, it is apparent that I was not a good citizen. If I were I would have phoned the police to come and set a watch on the place, and see who came to collect the attaché case.

A second incident. I was on a plane over the Atlantic, seated beside a man who had a small suitcase with him. Getting up, apparently to relieve himself, he left the suitcase on the floor, encroaching on my space by an inch or two. Idly pushing it back with my foot I found it terribly heavy. Something as heavy as that just had to be gold. And if it was it could only be an underground movement-conventional international movements of gold don't go with a messenger in a third class seat.

I should have informed the steward, who would let the captain decide what should be done. He could easily have radioed ahead asking that the plane be met by police

There must be a good deal of movement of money for the drug trade and for terrorism, and what I saw was the result of some participant's carelessness. In short these two incidents were only a trifling suggestion, a tip of the iceberg, of the very large movements of money outside the regular banking system. Carried out by criminals who above all don't want to leave a paper trail. Even by respectable business men who want to hide some of their income from the tax authorities.

The Congress has been concerned about this, and reported that "The Government still doesn't know how terrorists move their money." (NYT, Dec. 14, 2003.) Perhaps my two observations provide at least a hint? I wish I had reported while the trail I chanced to pick up was still warm, and so might have contributed something to the congressional question.

Looking back: Close calls

I was invited to give a paper at the sixth Berkeley Conference on Mathematical Statistics in 1965. I chose to present some work I was doing on the degree to which the number of women made a difference to births as compared with the number of men. Add 1000 men to the population: how much will the births increase as compared with adding 1000 women.

Beatrice and the two children came to Berkeley, and they went touring while I attended the conference. My turn came and I got to the platform and started to perform. When I was half-way through I wobbled a little and had a terrible headache. I managed somehow to complete my presentation and went back to our hotel. When the family returned I said "I am sick, part of my sight has gone; we must go home right now". They had been enjoying California and were very disappointed but we were all aboard the red-eye express when it took off for Chicago, arriving in the early morning.

At home I phoned Billings Hospital, and was instructed to come down immediately. A distinguished neurologist, authority on stroke, was brought in, and he interviewed me, and was shocked to find that I had the practice of working 15 hours a day, keeping myself awake with a dozen cups of strong coffee. . He asked for extensive tests, including use of a precursor of today's scanning machine that makes a picture of the brain. Nothing could be done, and I had to be grateful that the damage did not occur at a spot just a couple of millimeters away, where it would have left me completely blind. As it was I would recover most of my sight, though there would be a missing quadrant; I would never be able to see anything in the upper right quarter of my visual field. This particular stroke is apparently well-known. Most other strokes are much more serious, causing anything up to death.

The one good outcome was the change in my habits of work, in my physical activity, in my drinking coffee. These much better ways of living are what have enabled me to be alive at the age of 90, 38 years later.

In the year 2001 we were celebrating Thanksgiving. Beatrice had cooked the dinner and was setting the table. I was trying to move a bookshelf across the hall of our apartments to where it would be more useful.

Then I tripped and fell. My head hit the corner where the kitchen emerged into the hall, and my scalp--that has many blood vessels--started to bleed profusely. Beatrice dialed 911 while I lay on the floor, and in less than 3 minutes the ambulance was parked at the curb and two orderlies with a stretcher were in the apartment, after somehow getting through the front door. They taped me up enough to stop the bleeding so that I only lost about 2 cups of blood, strapped me in to the back of the ambulance and Beatrice into the front seat, and set off for the Cambridge Community Hospital. That was a mistake, Harvard's affiliation is with the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, and there we went at full speed aided by a siren that cleared the road of other traffic.

I was treated well--exquisite courtesy on the part of the staff, a double room, with a cot in which Beatrice stayed the night, and four days later I was released. But not before tests that were done showed I was low on sodium, and I was started on the treatment that would build up my sodium. Since lack of sodium can be extremely serious, perhaps it was lucky I struck my head on that Thanksgiving Day. Everything was good about that hospital, except the food which was execrable and the germs that were on everything--I got home with a bad cold.