

A Visit to Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs, New York
Fall Semester 2004

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Abstract

This report tells the story of my visit to Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. I went there as a STINT¹ "Excellence in Teaching" fellow during the fall semester of the academic year 2004.

¹The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education.

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Foreword

What you are about to read is a report of my visit to Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, during the fall term of the year 2004. I went there as a STINT "Excellence in Teaching" fellow.

As of spring 2005, I can assure you that this report is not like any of the previous. This is not to say that it is better. It's just different.

Perhaps the proper metaphor is to say that my stay in upstate New York was a journey, an intellectual and academic journey as well as a journey in space and time. It was also a dream come true. Once in the mid 80's I was offered a job in America, but it came to nothing due to circumstances out of my control. Here's the part of the story that I know about.

For a year or so, at this time in life, I shared an apartment with one of my brothers. After I moved out to take up living with my wife, my brother kept the flat and the telephone number. Somewhat later, at a time when I was applying for post-doc jobs all over the western world, my brother and his girlfriend went on a long trip to Asia, including China. They rented the apartment to another couple. So when a professor from the University of Chicago called to ask if I was interested in a post-doc position in Chicago, he got the answer that I was in China! I knew nothing about it at the time. When I learned of this story some years after the fact, what could I do except laugh? And anyway, I wouldn't have wanted to give up the years I lived in London, UK.

But now, amazingly, I got a second chance to live in America.

So the format of the report is the "travel book", and there will be personal stories and reflections throughout. Some readers will not like that, they will want the facts, the practical details, the stern comparisons between a Swedish University and an American College. You will find that stuff here also, but unfortunately scattered about, and perhaps not that stern. On the positive side though, the facts will appear in a more interesting context. And again, I had from the very beginning the feeling that this cannot be written as an academic text. That would make it jolly boring, as

the English would say.

For those of you who still just want the facts, those parts are marked in the list of contents with the symbol ‡. Inside the text, there are also subsections tagged by a ‡, these also contain thoughts and reflections on academia. For the rest of you, I hope you will enjoy the whole thing, just as I enjoyed my visit.

For facts about Skidmore College, the best source is the college's web page², where there are links to useful sources of information.³

* * *

Just one last thing. It goes without saying that you can spend a visit like this in many different ways, all depending on who you are and where you go. And you can write your report in many different ways. As regards both the stay and the report, I simply did it my way.

²<http://www.skidmore.edu>

³For example, the College catalog. In particular, I want to recommend the document "Engaged Liberal Learning, The Plan for Skidmore College: 2005-2015".

Acknowledgments

First of all I'd like to thank my students Howard Austin, Amos Epstein, Thomas Kehrer, Andrew Matusiewicz, Daniel Pratt and Paul Legan for attending my course, though fairly conventional in delivery, was very experimental in its contents.

Among faculty, a very special and deeply felt thanks goes to Sarah Goodwin and Steve Goodwin, who did so much to make my and my family's visit in Saratoga and at Skidmore such a rewarding social and intellectual experience. Thanks for all the good food and interesting conversations. In particular, thanks to their children Eva, Hannah and Stephen for many funny discussions and points of view!

The same goes for Mark Huibregtse and Renee Hostetler and their daughter Lydia, colleague, friends and neighbors on Pinewood Avenue and Monika's classmate.

A great thanks to Chrisana McGill who paved the way for my Skidmore visit so efficiently that there was not very much for me to do, except enjoying both the April planning trip and the fall term. Thanks also to Barbara Optiz who sorted out the visa procedures for me and for my son Olof and daughter Monika. Thanks to Anita Miczek for helping out with everyday things at the department of Mathematics and Computer Science.

A very special thanks to Bob DeSieno, with whom I had many interesting conversations about science and its role in society and for sharing many scientific interests. Bob became a new friend.

On the behalf of my daughter, my very sincere thanks goes to Roland Baril and Carla Gandy at the Waldorf School of Saratoga Springs, who as a teacher and admissions officer respectively, did so much to make Monika's time at the school a great experience. Thanks also to Cindy Ford at the Van Lennep Riding Center for riding lessons.

To Penny Jolly and Jay Rogoff, who I only met briefly in April, I want to send my gratitude for renting their beautiful and cosy house on Pinewood Avenue. It became our home.

Then I want to extend my thanks to rest of the Skidmore faculty, in particular to Mark Hoffman, Mary Crone Odekon, David Atkatz, Jill Linz, Michael Eckmann, Tom O'Connell, Alice Dean, Gove Effinger, Laury Silvers, Susan Bender, Michael Arnush, Cornell Reinhart, John Brueggemann, Ann Hendersson, Grace Burton, Tad Kuroda, Michael Rohlf and Annelies Wouters. A special thanks to John Weber for inviting me to give a public talk at the Tang Teaching Museum.

I also like to thank Philip Glotzbach, who as President of the College,

was instrumental in bringing Skidmore College into the STINT "Excellence in Teaching" program, thus giving me the opportunity to visit this very dynamic, charming and high quality liberal arts college.

I want extend to Sheldon Rothblatt a special thanks for his very kind appreciation for early versions of this report and encouragement to continue writing it in the present format.

Thanks also to STINT itself, and in particular to Charlotte Elam, for providing me with this fantastic opportunity.

Thanks also to my home institute, the School of Engineering, for putting up with that extra funding, and thanks to Charlotte Bengtsson⁴ for supporting it. Furthermore at home, thanks to Michael Tittus⁵ for first asking if I wanted to apply for the STINT fellowship.

Thanks also to Olof Lundqvist⁶ for encouragement all along and to Said Irandoust⁷ for that final crucial decision!

Last but not least, I'd like to thank Charles Joseph, the Dean of Faculty at Skidmore College, who was the first person at Skidmore that I contacted in the spring after having earned the fellowship. Thanks Chuck for making me at once feel welcome and comfortable in the Skidmore Community. Hope to see you all over there again!

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Chapter 1

The Planning Trip

1.1 Prelude

Newark Airport.

I was sitting in Jake's Coffeehouse waiting for a connecting flight to Albany. I had ordered a medium Cafe Americano, thinking it was something exotic, but it was that very special weak American coffee that you can drink gallons of. Many people don't like it, but I do. Good start to the trip!

A short flight later, I was finally in Albany, upstate New York. I had to wait for half an hour before I got my car at the Alamo counter, but as a compensation I got a bigger car, a bronze Buick Century. Nice car to drive! No noise, you don't have to wear hearing protection as I normally do at home. Only problem was, there were two bronze Buick Centuries in the garage, and of course, I tried to start the wrong one. I didn't realize it was the wrong car at first, as the doors were unlocked. But I could not open the luggage compartment. What made me confused was the fact that the license plate number was not written on the pair of keys that I had. The number on the keys was totally unrelated to any license plate in the garage. I suspected something was amiss when the car was not in the number 32 spot that I was directed to. But then I didn't believe the number I got was correct, because the man behind the counter, though nice, didn't seem to be completely on top to me. Then when I tried to start the car and couldn't turn the key, I thought I had just got the wrong keys. So I picked up my luggage and started to haul it back to the terminal. Luckily, a man working in the garage taking care of returned cars, stopped me and helped me find my car.

Off I went. It was already dark, which I had expected. I first thought I

had missed the Interstate 87 entrance, and for a couple of minutes I planned how to get off the big road I was on, which might very well be headed towards Omaha, Nebraska. Then I saw the reassuring I-87 North signs coming up.

I followed the directions to Saratoga Springs that I had got from Chris McGill at Skidmore College. I had actually looked up the directions at home on the Yahoo Interactive Map so it was easy to find the way. Now, I drove down Union Street past the horse racing tracks and the old Victorian houses, then took a right onto Circular and then a left onto Spring, and finally onto Broadway where the Downtowner Motel came into sight at once. I checked in for one night and got to bed after eating a salad on the other side of the street. I was back in the USA.

1.2 How I got there

I first got the opportunity to apply for a STINT Excellence in Teaching scholarship in the fall of 2002. That was for the class of 2003. I wrote my application in a rush, because the week before, I was asked by my department to go to India the first week in December and visit a private technical university, the BITS Pilani, in order to discuss plans for student exchange and things like that. So my application was written at the same time that I was preparing for the India trip. I made the mistake to write the application in Swedish, a manifestly silly thing to do. Then I had to translate it to English. If there is one thing that is doomed to failure when it comes to writing, then it is first writing in Swedish and then trying to translate.

I wasn't nominated by the University College of Borås, but I don't think it had much to do with my application. It was just that there was another well merited person who got it instead, and I wasn't really disappointed. The opportunity to apply came out of the blue, so to speak, and disappeared the same way.

Next fall, that is, in the fall of 2003, I got a second chance. This time I put in a good job with the application. I managed to salvage last years text from the wrecks, and with the help of Olof Lundquist¹, who forced me to clarity, it came out quite good.

This time I was successful with the nomination. Still, I didn't really count on it, as I knew there would stiff competition down the line. But towards the end of December, I got the first positive indications from STINT that they were trying to match my application with an appropriate American college.

¹Vice-President of the University College of Borås

1.3 What I did before the trip

The night before my departure was crazy. At 2 a.m. in the morning I submitted my application to the Swedish Research Council for a research grant for 2005. Then there were a few more things that needed attention, and packing was on of them. I went to bed at 2.30, and of course, I couldn't sleep.

More seriously, at once when I got the final confirmation from STINT in early April, I sent an e-mail to Professor Charles Joseph, the Dean of Faculty at Skidmore College. He welcomed me to the college and directed me to Chrisana McGill², who subsequently became my main contact. A couple of e-mails back and forth, many things were sorted out, such as contacts with faculty members within my fields of interest and contacts with faculty members willing to rent their homes. Before the trip, Chris sent me an itinerary listing meetings and contact addresses.

I also read reports from former holders of STINT scholarships and found a couple of useful hints in them. Being optimistic by nature, I didn't worry much. And indeed, I was very lucky. Chris wrote back and told me there were two members of the faculty that would be on leave of absence during the fall semester, and were willing to rent their houses. One of them, Penny Jolly, Professor of Art History, even offered me to include their cars as part of the deal.

As regards my family situation, I have a grown up son, Olof, age 20, who would like to accompany me. My younger son, Erik, age 18, on the other hand wants to stay behind in Sweden and finish the "gymnasium". He has a girlfriend, and I understand that he is not that eager to be away for the fall. At that age, four months is an eternity, at my age, it is just four months. What difference does that make in a lifetime? Well, staying home, it does not make a difference, but getting the opportunity to live and teach in the US makes a lot of a difference. But I'm straying away from the subject here. Erik is not very fond of traveling, and anyway, he has been with me on a four week vacation trip to the US back in 1997 when he was 11 years old. We visited thirteen states on a cross country trip from New York City to San Francisco. Now, we can't leave him alone for the entire fall, so we have decided within the family that my wife Marianne, and my dear daughter Monika, age 11, will come over and visit me and Olof for about five weeks in the middle of the semester. Perhaps Monika will stay until Christmas and

²Administrative Coordinator, Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs & Dean of the Faculty

go to school.

Since this family situation very much resembled what former scholarship holder Karin Rudfelt had, I wrote to her and asked a few questions on how she had arranged with courses for her daughter and about visas. I got very helpful answers back.

1.4 The first day in Saratoga Springs, April 19

I woke up at five in the morning, but forced myself to stay in bed till six. Then I got up and went through my suitcase which had been checked by security. I could understand why, I had packed a disc drive, a compact-disc player, the battery charger for my laptop computer and some other electronic stuff. Or perhaps it was because it was red. Anyway, a hint is not to lock the case, then at least the lock will not be damaged. Luckily, the newly bought bright red suitcase could still be closed and locked. But of course, the nuisance of having your suitcase checked is small compared to the risk of otherwise being blown to pieces. Everything turned out to be neatly packed back. Thank you guys out there!

At nine I was picked up by Professor Mark Hoffman, head of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, for breakfast. I drove after him up to campus. It was a warm spring morning and you could imagine a trace of green in the trees lining north Broadway. I parked the car and we continued in his van. He showed me around campus and then we went to a small restaurant off one of the highways going out of town.

I stared at the menu and didn't know what to order. Having been in the US before, I knew very well that a foreigner should never ask the waiter about what to order. That only results in a rapidly recited long list of meals with lots of variations and exceptions that leaves you even more confused. Actually, you are not really confused, your mind is completely blank since you haven't been able to follow the list. Furthermore, whatever you say after this, you come off as a complete idiot. Better then to order the same thing as the person before you.

Ham and eggs and toast. Why don't you get these things more often at home?

We talked about various things, comparing courses, examinations and all those things having to do with university teaching. We talked a bit about the two course ideas that I had presented in an e-mail. It became clear that the easiest thing to do would be to offer one of the courses to the first year students, since the others have already made their choices. That would

mean some tuning of the course, making it more "popular". We decided to talk more about these things the next day when I should meet with the computer science and mathematics faculty. Then we drove back to campus where Mark showed me around the Dana Science Center, and I said *Hi* to a few people, and finally I met with Chris McGill.

Chris had been my major contact during the three weeks that preceded my trip to Skidmore. She'd been enormously helpful, planning meetings with faculty and staff, looking for houses to rent, investigating the possibilities for my son Olof to take classes at Skidmore, advising me on schools for my daughter. An invaluable help. Now she helped me check into the Surrey Williamson Inn, just across Broadway from Skidmore College.

Then I had lunch with Sarah Goodwin, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, and we spoke about my expectations for the fall and what courses I could teach. It seems to converge on the one I call "A Computer Science Paradigm in Fundamental Physics" which is a cross-disciplinary course drawing on physics, mathematics, computer science and philosophy. It turned out that this is precisely the kind of courses that Skidmore wants to offer to their students.

Then we talked for a while about horses and horse riding. I had heard from Charlotte Elam at STINT that the college has its own stable for students and staff. Since I have been taking riding lessons since a year, inspired by my daughter, I had asked about this in an e-mail.

After lunch, I had the afternoon free. Sometimes, it is a bit nervous to meet new people, but Mark, Chris and Sarah were all very nice to me, and made me feel comfortable.

I went back to the Surrey Inn and left the jacket and took on another pair of shoes and collected my cameras, before I went back to the college to take stroll on the grounds. I checked out the Tang Museum, the sports arena and the college shop, and decided to come back another day to buy a few things. Then I went inside the Scribner Library. I just had a quick look, there will be plenty of time to investigate its books in the fall. As I sat down with an ice cream on the terrace outside the Case College Center cafeteria, looking at the students enjoying what was presumably the first warm day of spring, I began to like the place more and more.

The idea of having a campus is really good, I think. Skidmore College is not built modeled on old Greek buildings, rather it consists of beautiful red brick buildings. It moved to its present locations just outside town in the beginning of the 60's after growing out of its downtown setting within old Victorian palaces. The move became possible after a huge donation by the Jonsson family, therefore the campus is called the Jonsson Campus. The

library is beautiful. Environments like these are inspiring, you feel closer to the great deep thinkers of earlier times. Perhaps you can think something important yourself. It is a contrast to the rather dull Swedish university buildings. My own institute at home is housed in an old office building. I like my institute, its a good place to work at, but it is not really an inspiring environment.

There are more contrasts. Of course, Skidmore is a private college, relying on donations, sound finances and tuition fees. It must be dynamic in order to survive and develop. And it has apparently been very dynamic. It is impressive to read its history, and the work that has gone down by its faculty, staff and presidents. Skidmore is definitely a very good place.

Next, I drove downtown to take a look at the shops on Broadway, and soon ended up in the Borders book shop opposite to the Downtowner Motel. I asked for Native American music, and bought a record by Joanne Shenandoah just on a hunch because I liked the name. On my way out, I spotted a Dylan 1964 bootleg series record that I hadn't seen before, and I bought that one too. Then I bought cheese in a deli, and then it just remained to check out the local beer. I went into Price Chopper and found "Saranac".

I listened to the Dylan record while tasting the beer, relaxing in my Surrey room. Apart from it being a very good record, this concert recording from Halloween night in 1964, shows that Dylan had definitely distanced himself from the protest songs he sung. To me at least, it is quite clear from his jokes in between the songs. You always learn something new. The beer tasted much like Irish red ale, perhaps not surprisingly, as a lot of Irish people immigrated here.

In the evening, I ate at "Little India". For some reason the waitress kept on asking if everything was okay. She did this while at the same time talking with someone else in a hands free cell phone. It might have been that I was absorbed in a J.F. Kennedy biography that I had bought at the airport. I enjoy reading while eating if I'm on my own. Everything was okay!

1.5 April 20, Tuesday

I hadn't yet figured out how to use the coffee machine at the Surrey, so I drove downtown and got a coffee and a big cake for breakfast at the Starbucks. Then I went to visit the Waldorf school for Monika. As of a coincidence they had an open house for prospective parents this day. But I had got the wrong address and came to their high school instead. However, one of the teachers gave me new directions to the elementary and middle

school. I came late for the tour of the school, but in time for the presentation. I more or less got the information and the necessary papers that I needed, as well as information about required vaccinations.

I got a positive first impression of the school. Of course, Swedish elementary school teaching is partly inspired by Waldorf ideas and other alternative pedagogical ideas, so I felt at home with their description of their methods, although there were distinctly American parts to it, as the emphasis on the fact that you can succeed in doing anything you want. Inspiring that self confidence and go-ahead-just-do-it mentality is not very common in Sweden. Be that as it may, they were eager to have international pupils in the school, and there would be no problem for my daughter to join a class. But the tuition fee is huge, even when cut down to four or five weeks. They wanted some document from Monika's teachers about what she has done at school and here progress. That seems reasonable.

After that I walked around the neighborhood, before driving back to Broadway to get another coffee and a bagel, before going to the college. At the college I first meet with the Dean of Faculty, Professor Charles M. Joseph. He asked me a lot of questions about the specifics of my stay, what I was planning to teach, when I would come, how long I would stay and what were the aims and requirements for the STINT project. We discussed these things and I explained the openendedness of the project. The basic aim being, as I understand it, for me to learn as much as possible about American liberal education in practice by participating in their work, talking to faculty, staff and students, going to lectures and meetings, and giving a course on my own. I once again described my course idea, as I had done for Mark and Sarah, and got a very positive response from Professor Joseph.

The Dean of Faculty told me about meetings I could attend to get a feeling for how things are run at Skidmore. He also asked me if I would like to supervise a few senior students doing project work (there was a special term for this, which I don't remember), which to me sounded like an interesting thing. I was very pleased to hear that he thought me to be a perfect match. The reason being that Skidmore is working on strengthening its profile in the Sciences. In particular, he wanted to hear my opinion about courses and teaching at the end of my stay. I felt that, apart from learning myself, I could also contribute.

Then I went to eat with Alice Dean and Gove Effinger from the Mathematics and Computer Science Department, who were kind enough to take me to lunch at the faculty club. After lunch I met with the rest of that faculty. This was a very constructive and businesslike meeting and I presented my course idea. Practical things like how to slot in the courses among

Skidmore courses were sorted out. We even got down to the level of which days I would like to teach, and it came down to Tuesdays and Thursdays. The course will be primarily for first year students with perhaps a few from higher grades. I volunteered to write down a course description before Friday when I would meet with Mark again to go over the details. I also said that I could give a series of advanced seminars for faculty on the topics covered in the course.

Well, then I met with Professor Mary Crone Odekon at the Department of Physics. It is funny how you at once feel at home amongst physicists. I'm a physicist of course, but after having studied computer science for four years, one would have thought that I would have absorbed another culture, or sub-culture perhaps.

I also met David Atkatz, whom I knew by name, since he has done research in high energy physics and cosmology. He was a post-doc at Queen Mary College in London some years before me, and we both know Michael Green. But as Dave said, that was before Mike became famous for his work on superstrings with John Schwarz of Caltech and my former supervisor Lars Brink.

Talking about Skidmore, he warned me that I will be surprised when I meet the first year students. Of course I understood what he meant by that, but then again we have the same problem with declining standards in Sweden. It seems to be a general problem in western countries. Sometimes you get the feeling that standards are always declining, and has been doing so since the time of the great Greeks. Soon there must be an all-time low!

Before leaving the College for the day, I went back to Chris McGill's office to make a phone call to Penny Jolly just to confirm next days meeting at her house. But of course, Chris made the phone call, and also gave me some information about the shopping mall, the Adirondacks (a piece of the northern part of the Appalachian mountains), and a few more sights in the area. One of my projects this fall will certainly be to learn to pronounce "Adirondacks".

I went to St. Clemens School, the Catholic school, but it was closed for the day.

Later in the afternoon, I went to the mall and spent most of the time at Barnes & Noble book shop. I ate at Taco Bell. I sort of decided that before going to the mall. Was it good? Well, it was Taco Bell. It simply has to be done. But just once.

* * *

The Surrey Inn is a beautiful old house just on the other side of the road

from Skidmore College at the north end of Broadway. Inside it is all dark wooden panels and thick mats over a squeaky floor bed. Portraits of people from the college history hang from the walls, clocks that hasn't shown the proper time since long ago stand solemnly in the corners, and bookshelves with long forgotten books beg for your attention.

At the mall I had spent some time at Barnes & Noble, as already noted. By the way, American book shops contain a lot of books, you can spend days there. Anyway, I looked for historic books on the region, and my eyes fell on table with books about ghost stories in New England and haunted houses in New York State. I was on the verge of buying one, when I realized that there would be lots of time for such leisure reading in the fall. My suitcase was already heavyweight.

Back at the Surrey, I made some instant Cappuccino, collected a few maps, the historic book on Saratoga I had bought and the Skidmore catalog and went down the stairs to the big sitting room. It was very dark so I lit up a few more dim lamps and sat down by the fireside which wasn't burning. Two weird-looking kids stared down at me from one side of the walls and a hooded woman looked at me from the other. It was a quiet nice spring evening, but you could easily imagine a November storm raging outside.

Suddenly, the doors crashed open and in bursted Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, their hats dripping from rain. Holmes sternly demanded me to leave my cosy chair in front of the hearth, take up my hat and coat, grab my walking stick and follow them out into the night in pursuit of Professor Moriarty.

But nothing of that sort happened, unfortunately.

1.6 April 21, Wednesday

It is remarkable how fast you get to like a place like Saratoga Springs. I've just been here for two full days and I already feel strongly that I will have a fantastic time here in the fall. I've been driving around town a bit and have fair overview of it. It is a distinctly small American town.

Ten years ago, while idling away the time waiting for my number to come up at the passport office in Göteborg, I read a newspaper article about a travel book³ by the American journalist and writer Bill Bryson. I tore out the article and pocketed it.

³Bill Bryson, *The Lost Continent, Travels in Small Town America*, Secker & Warburg 1989.

At that time, Bryson lived with his family in England, but went back to the United States for one fall and one spring to drive through the country in search for the perfect American small town, the one with one main street, one bank and one post-office, a soda fountain and a diner, a newspaper boy at the corner, and two well-suited men in hats, forever briskly striding across the street.

I bought the book, and has since then read it three or four times. It is a very good read, funny and absolutely essential if you want to understand what you see when you are an European traveling in the United States. Bill never really found Arcadia, or Amalgam, as he called it, though he came close. One close hit was Livingstone, Montana, a small town that I took the opportunity to visit in 1997. It would be interesting to know what he thinks of Saratoga Springs.

Here main street is called Broadway, and it starts downtown with shops, restaurants and coffee shops on both sides, goes north past large houses for people with more money than they can count. Some of them are only used for a couple of weeks in the summer. At the end, where the speed limit of 30 mph is released, the Surrey Inn is on the right and the entrance to Skidmore College to the left. Then the road turns into a rough unpaved country road vanishing into the woods, and you wonder why you would like to drive faster than 30 mph. Downtown, the Adirondacks Trust is housed in a white cubic building, just like in Duck City.

When I went to the post office to get stamps for my post cards, I was struck by the differences to Sweden. In a sense, Sweden is a more modern country than the US. We all know what has happened to the post offices in Sweden. The ones that are left are either extremely high tech and modernly designed, or extremely low tech and housed within supermarkets. There are no real post offices any longer. In Saratoga Springs, the post office is housed in an old beautiful building on main street. Exhibits from the office history is on display. The old and the new at the same place, a sense of continuity.

And didn't I see two men in hats, briskly crossing the street just over there?

* * *

In the morning I went to Penny Jolly's house to have a look at it. I was immediately greeted by Otto, the cat that I had imagined to be a big yellow cat. He was small and black. He had been found abandoned with pneumonia in the snow outside the house when he was a puppet, so he didn't grow that big. Now he was fourteen years old. Penny Jolly showed me around the house which was very nice, and would suit me and my family very well. We

discussed the terms of me renting the house, and agreed that I would come back on Saturday to meet Penny's husband, Jay Rogoff, who would show me practical things like fuses, the snow blower, et cetera.

I also went to the St. Clemens Catholic School which is nearby. I talked to a lady in the office and a few minutes later I talked to the principal! It is really amazing how easy it is to get information and access to people here if you just present yourself and your question. They give you a few minutes and you get the information you need to proceed. I got the appropriate papers and forms, in principle there would be no problem to admit Monika for the few weeks she would be here. There were certain formalities, but that's it. They need to know what she has studied, her level of English, some paper from her teachers, grades or evaluations or whatever. There are formalities like vaccinations and health records and things like that. That is, roughly the same as was required at the Waldorf school.

Then I went to the Adirondack Trust to open a bank account. It turned out to be very easy, but after discussing it for a few minutes, I came to the conclusion that it was better to wait and open it in the fall when I have a permanent address.

Next, it was finally time for breakfast at a small cafe, the "Country Corner Cafe". I had eggs, bacon, fried potatoes and toast and lots of ketchup and gallons of coffee. I sat reading the St. Clemens papers, when the waitress passed by, and I asked her if she knew of any public schools. A minute later I was introduced to the landlady who had her two children in the Saratoga Public School. The waitress asked if I had anywhere to live, and I was rapidly introduced to a realtor who happened to have his breakfast at the counter. I got his business card. If there is one piece of good advice to give, then it is: talk to people, ask questions. In this case I didn't actually need the information I got, but that could very well have been the case.

I had planned to do some driving in the afternoon, but I first went to the public school. It was modern, seemed to be very well organized, but it was very big with guards sitting in the corridors, and far from where we will be living.

I also went to the Van Lennep Riding Center, the stables that belong to Skidmore. I talked to Cindy Ford, and we are very welcome to take riding lessons in the fall.

After that I drove east into the historic country of Saratoga where the decisive battle of 1777 stood, when a large British army was defeated by the Colonial Army, paving the way for the victory of the American Revolution. I had planned to drive down to Cobleskill where there is an Iroquois museum, but realized that it was too far, so I just made one big loop around Saratoga

and came back from the west. I never get used to how big this country is.

On the way, I drove through a small town on the Hudson river with the charming name Mechanicville. There were certainly some framework constructions to be seen, but I didn't know what the name derived from. At home again, I read on the town's homepage that it has been an important crossroads since Colonial times and that later on it was affected by the 19th century Industrial Revolution. The homepage furthermore said that the city was a key point on the Erie and Champlain Canal systems and was a hub for railroads and other industries, attracting a succession of various immigrant groups. A tale of Americana. I also found out where the name comes from, but I will tell that later, when I go back there in the fall to take a closer look!

1.7 April 22, Thursday

I spent the morning writing a course description which I then e-mailed off to Mark. Then I went downtown for breakfast and then up to College again, to check with Chris if anything had happened that I needed to attend to. Everything was calm, so I took the afternoon off.

I have this book "Road Trip USA"⁴. It charts out five east-west and six north-south trips. The last trip I read about actually passed through upstate New York on route 20 into Massachusetts. This book is a gold mine if you want to investigate small town America. It also points out good places to eat. I particularly became interested in the New England "diners", a story which is too long to tell here, but it is some sort of pre-fabricated, small railway carriage like restaurants, built from the 20's up to the 60's. It's not fast food, it's real American blue collar grub. Anyway, there was one such in the town of Adams, Massachusetts, a two hour drive from Saratoga Springs. What was I waiting for?

The "Miss Adams Diner" was closed when I arrived at 5 p.m. I wasn't really surprised. The book had said something about breakfast and lunch. But sometimes lunch extends far into the afternoon, and I saw a place in Saratoga serving breakfast all day. Of course, it is a bit crazy to drive 78 miles just to get something to eat, especially if you cross an alp-like mountain range on the way. Now I had dinner at a place next door, "The Red Carpet Restaurant" which also turned out to be a down-home American restaurant.

I ate so much I could hardly see straight. I had shredded ham on top

⁴Jamie Jensen, *Road Trip USA, Cross Country Adventures on America's Two-Lane Highways*, Avalon Travel, 2002.

of a mountain of cabbage, mashed potato with gravy and broccoli. Healthy food! For dessert I took "Butter Scotch Delight", and it was precisely what the name said. And the piece was not small either. It consisted of the usual bottom of baked crunched cakes, two thick layers of caramel with a creamy topping. The caramel was warm, while the topping was cold. How they managed that, I can't figure out.

I staggered out the door, somehow managed to cross the street, fumbled with the keys and collapsed behind the steering wheel. No that's not entirely true. I actually dizzily walked up and down the main street, investigated a backyard, and went into the very beautiful town library, where I finally managed to focus my eyes. I then hit upon the history section, and found an interesting book about everyday life on the frontier. I made a note of the title and author for future reference.⁵ I've always been fascinated by the American frontier, especially the first frontier, the one at the foothills of the Appalachian mountains in the eighteenth century. I guess that started when I was a boy, reading the Prairie (a misnomer) strip comic books about Davy Crocket and the strange Professor Occultis. They roamed the woods of the mountains. Perhaps they still do?

Just outside of town I saw a sign on a roadside shop selling trains, that is, model trains. Being a model railroader myself, this was something I had to check out. I jumped on the brakes. The store was packed to the rafters with modeling stuff. And the prices! Track, which cost a fortune at home, cost five dollars here. What a country, out in the countryside, in the middle of nowhere, or so it seemed to me, you find a store which is at least as well stocked as the biggest modeling shop in Stockholm.

1.8 April 23, Friday

I spent the morning hours shopping presents for everyone at home. Ear rings for my daughter Monika and my wife. For my son Erik (and myself), I bought the X-files season 3 DVD-box. For Olof I had bought a guide to Simpson's Springfield at Barnes & Noble the other day.

Then I went home and put on a suit, went to college to meet with Mark again, for final adjustments to my course. Mark introduced me to Robert DeSieno, and we had an interesting chat. He had read my course description, and we briefly discussed some of the topics I plan to cover. It turned out that we have similar academic interests. When speaking to people here at

⁵Loius B. Wright, *Everyday Life on the American Frontier*, Life in America Series, Capricorn Books, 1971.

Skidmore, I realize that I will have a great time in the fall.

At 3 p.m., I had a brief meeting with the College President, Phillip A. Glotzbach. I was actually a bit nervous. The president welcomed me to Skidmore.

Then I said goodbye to the people at the Dean's office, went back to the Surrey and drank a coke while watching *Bonanza* on TV. It was Friday afternoon, and all official meetings was over with. Later on, I took a closer look at the downtown Borders book shop, before eating a nice dinner at Porrecas Italian restaurant just outside downtown on highway 29.

At the Borders I found an interesting book⁶, re-investigating the 400-years old mystery of the lost colony at Roanoke island, that I had first read about in Bill Bryson's book. I bought it of course. Roanoke was the first British colony on the east coast of north America, and under mysterious circumstances, it disappeared completely, or almost completely. Bryson writes that there are people living in the Appalachians that might be descendants of this ill-fated colony. But there is much more to the story according to this new book I bought.

I sat in the sitting room reading the first chapter before returning to duties. I had brought some work from Sweden. There was a paper to make corrections and additions to, so I went upstairs to start looking at that.

1.9 April 24, Saturday

I spent the morning making corrections to my paper. Then I went out for breakfast, and ended up in the same place as the day before. I had planned to buy a fancy hat. I saw one the other day at a western store which I just happened to drive by. Now on the table in front of me there was a piece of paper advertising this store. It was located where I thought it would be, out on highway 67, not far from Saratoga Springs. I was considering going there again and have another look. But I decided first to go to the mall again to check out what was on offer there. The traffic was considerably more dense on this Saturday.

I went into the Wal-Mart Super Store. After five minutes I understood how the cold war was really won. I went to the book shop on the other side of the highway for a Coffee Caramel Macchiato instead, where I sat down to write on this report.

At 4 p.m. I meet with Jay Rogoff at 35 Pinewood Avenue. He showed me practical things about their house and we made final agreements. The

⁶Lee Miller, *Roanoke: Solving The Mystery Of The Lost Colony*, Penguin 2004.

rest will have to be worked out by e-mail and neighbors since we will not overlap in time. He and Penny will leave for London, UK, in the middle of August, and that is a bit too early for me to go to Saratoga.

This night I ate at Shirley's restaurant on West Avenue. I started with a salad, then had two big pieces of baked chicken, spaghetti serving at least three persons, everything drowned in sauce Bolognese. Fortunately, I declined the mashed potatoes that was offered as an aside, otherwise I would not be here to tell about it. I drank root beer, which I don't recommend. I did, however, find room for a New York Style Cheese Cake with strawberries. It was delicious! This time, I had planned my retreat carefully by parking the car just outside.

I went home, drew some coffee from the coffee machine, and sat reading another chapter from the book about the Roanoke mystery. Then I worked a while on the paper.

1.10 The last day in Saratoga Springs, April 24

It was Sunday and it was my last day in Saratoga Springs. I got up and had some coffee, and for the first time managed to defrost the blueberry muffin without having it burned steaming hot. I went for a walk on the campus just to try and summarize the week in my head. Then I took the car and drove down to the Western Store and bought myself a hat. I talked to the lady in the store for a while. She told me there would be rodeos every Friday night in the summer. If I'm here by the last weekend in August, I might go there.

Then I sat in the car pondering whether I should drive to Cobleskill to check out the Iroquois museum, but I decided against it. It was really too far, and I sort of felt that the trip was singing on its last verse, so to speak. Instead, I went back to Saratoga for a late breakfast. Now I discovered that all nice places were full. Since I don't like crowds, I looked into several places, before ending up in the same old diner again!

In the afternoon, I sat at the Surrey working for a couple of hours, then went to Barnes & Noble for some coffee and to have a last look at all the books. This time I found a book about the Oregon Trail, written by a contemporary historian, Francis Parkman, who had actually traveled the trail in the 1850's. That will be good summer reading.

Just to pass time, I drove a couple of miles north on route 50. It had started to rain and I felt a bit homesick. I passed signs towards Corinth, six miles away. On a normal day, I would have gone there to see what it

was like, but the trip was definitely over. I drove home to the Surrey, and started to fiddle with the packing. There was a rerun on TV of president Bush talking to a gathering of journalists, and then there was Senator Kerry doing the same thing. It will be interesting to be here during the election in the fall.

In the evening I sat down in the Surrey dining room and wrote on the report. The rain was pouring down outside. I like the sound of rain. When I woke up here last Monday, the trees were all barren after the winter. That first day here turned out to be very hot for the season, people told me. Now when I'm about the leave, the trees are beginning to green. When I get back it will be fall.

I found out I was not alone in the dark house. Since I had been here for a week I had the pleasure to show new people the coffee machine and how to get access to the Internet. Strange, just now a night-watch man turned up, "clicking his flash-light".

It rained all night and continued in the morning. I looked at the Capital News on Nine to see how the rainfall affected the south going traffic on the Interstate. Everything seemed normal. The flight left Albany at 1.10 p.m., but I left the Surrey already at 9.03 a.m.

It was a grey morning and I was on my way home.

1.11 Summarizing the planning trip

All in all, everything worked out very well. But that is my impression about America. If you only tell what you want, you get a yes or a no, and if it is a yes, you get all the help you need. But, of course, you can't be shy, that doesn't work. You're expected to ask question and put forth your ideas.

I think that giving one of your own courses is a good idea, because then you are contributing. At least for me that seemed to be best thing to do. But then I had a fairly concrete idea, connected to a research and book writing project of mine. And it is cross-disciplinary by its nature. I was lucky that it was well received at Skidmore.

Of course, you could join in and help out with other peoples courses, but that does not seem to be a very American way of doing things. But I may be wrong on that. Here you have an idea, you present it, and if people thinks it good or at least worth trying, then it is go ahead. But it all depends on who you are and where you go. Reading other peoples reports from earlier years, makes it clear that the variation is wide.

I was also lucky in that I could rent Penny's and Jay's house, and at

the same time use their cars for local driving. Therefore, two problems were solved in one stroke. Of course, it was Chris who helped me with all this.

Skidmore seemed to be a great place to be at, and I was looking forward to the fall, and I already knew how to pronounce "Adirondacks"!

Chapter 2

After the planning trip

I came home from the ten days planning trip and discovered that ten days had passed at home. I was hopelessly beyond schedule. I knew this spring semester would be busy, since apart from administrative work, I was involved in three courses, two of which were new. I also spent most of February and March reviving my old research by writing a new paper on it. I simply got a good idea and had to write it up. Then I had my computer science masters thesis to finish. So I worked all day and all night for the rest of the spring up till mid June, only taking a week off for a planned family vacation in London. The situation was aggravated by my tendency to do the fun things first. Among other things, that meant writing up the report from my planning trip, which brings me back to the subject.

2.1 Why write such a report?

I asked around my colleagues if they wanted to read my report and e-mailed it to the twenty or so who were interested. I don't know how many actually read it, but I got some comments. Someone thought it a bit wordy and wondered why I wrote so much about what I had eaten. Another one was worried that I would not seem to be working very hard over there. Now this is a patently Swedish thing to worry about, even though the person making the comment did it half jokingly. The prospect of someone not working hard enough is difficult to deal with for Swedish people. What you achieve does not matter much, what is important is that you work hard. I don't mind working hard, I often do, but to me what matters is efficiency, which means that I often take it easy too. I'm not much for layabouts, but then I'm not much for workaholics either. But this comment made me think that perhaps

I should not write such an easy-going sounding report in order not to elicit envy?

- Now this lazy jerk Bengtsson went to America and fooled around in comfortable cars on back roads eating strange food while we were left struggling at home ...

But another colleague and friend said that my report had changed his, somewhat negative, view of the United States. I took that as a compliment. So in the end, I decided to continue in the same style.

I wanted to write a report that was different from the reports I had read myself. There is no point in repeating what others have done before. But more importantly, having earned this scholarship and getting this truly fantastic opportunity, it was for me at least, a total experience. It was not just about academics, it involved all parts of life. I wanted to describe that. Whether I succeeded or not is not for me to judge.

Some years ago, in April 2001, I went to Seattle to attend the CHI-2001 conference¹. Olof wanted to accompany me and suggested that we stop off in New York City on the way home. I thought this to be good idea. I remember one afternoon we walked in downtown Seattle. Olof, having just vague ideas of what I did for a living, asked me if I couldn't get a job in the US. I thought about it while walking a block and said something like "Who knows. I will certainly look out for opportunities."

Now, this opportunity had miraculously materialized.

2.2 A broader context?

I had just finished reading Robert Dallek's biography "An Unfinished Life" of John F. Kennedy. It had been on my reading list ever since last fall. When I saw it at an airport bookshop at Newark en route to Albany, I bought it. Apart from many other merits of this very readable book, I enjoyed it for the insights it gives into the cold war era. It was also a great read since it concerns itself with a period that is just on the border of conscious memories for myself. I don't know if I remember the Cuba crisis and the Berlin crisis or if I just remember hearing and reading about them later on. I do remember the assassination and I remember the short sequence of film running on TV over and over. I remember us kids playing out the assassination on the schoolyard the days after, so strong was the impact in Sweden. Even as a kid of nine years you could sense the feeling of loss.

¹Computer Human Interaction 2001, Seattle, Association for Computing Machinery.

Now we live in an era which is described as an era of terrorism and war on terrorism, and it is difficult not to comment on the situation in the world. There is (at the time of writing) also an upcoming presidential election in the United States, and there is a temptation to comment on the political happenings of the day. But at the very moment of writing this section, I hesitate. Political commentary has often a very short shelf life, even when it is well informed, and I cannot say that I am that well informed. Anything I write will have little lasting value, and even though current affairs might be part of liberal education, I feel, that it is not appropriate in a report like this.

Thus my silence on the election and current politics in the pages to follow is not due to any lack of interest, but rather to my conviction that history is only interesting when viewed from a certain distance.

2.3 Me and America

This section is a bit personal, and those who do not like to read that kind of stuff, can skip to the next section without missing anything of importance.

I've always been fascinated by America. I guess that does not come as a surprise for those who have read the text up to this point. My wife often asks me about what exactly it is that fascinates me. I try to answer, but I never really succeed. Perhaps it is easier to do it using the written word. This is a story which is fun for me to tell, and this seems to be an appropriate place to tell it. It is nothing important, just a curiosity and please skip to the next section if it is not to your liking!

When I was six years old in 1960, two important things happened. We moved to a new apartment and got a TV set. My very first memory of TV was Donald Duck. As an aside, shortly after this, Disney disappeared from Swedish television apart from a one-hour show at Christmas, not to reappear until the late 80's when my own kids were small. This is strange, I don't know the deep cultural and ideological reasons behind it, but someone ought to investigate it. But we did get other American TV series. The 60's was dominated by Bonanza, which went under the name "The Cartwright Brothers" in Sweden, and other wild west TV series. I particularly enjoyed bar room fist fights where they slammed chairs in each other heads and threw people sliding on top of the bar counter and then out the swinging doors crashing into the dirt outside.

The other thing was that my parents bought a small piece of land and built a country house. At first we had no car, so we had to go there by

railroad. It was an hours journey on a creaky old train along dilapidated tracks. The area itself was a real backwoods area at that time. It still is in a way, fortunately. Two landlords had decided to sell off a few hundred acres of woodland for people to build country homes. This was the beginning of the 60's and an industrious skilled worker like my dad and a nurse like my mum, could afford to build a country home.

It is not that hard to imagine a seven year old boy being carried away by a kind of "pioneer" feeling. After all, my father was building a house out in the woods with the help of granddad. To begin with there was no road, just a tiny trail leading up into the hills from the road following the shore from the nearest little town of Ljungskile. We used dynamite to blow away big stones. Hiding behind a big tree, I was allowed to spark off the explosion with a battery. The dynamite was stored in an old coffee jar on a shelf in the little five by seven foot shed that we slept in. We worked hard, me and my brother, we were not just playing. We really contributed to the work of carving out a piece of summer home civilization in the woods.

Then there were other boys in the neighboring lots. There were the usual games of hide and seek, playing "Indians and Cowboys", spying on the few girls around, building and running cars made of odd pieces of board and baby carriage wheels down the road from our house. Of course we built tree houses, but the big thing was to build tepees. We built a lot of makeshift ones, but Bo, who was three years older than me, had bigger plans. He had blueprints for a real big tepee. We cleared an area up in the woods from vegetation, but the project was too big and faltered. Still, forty years later, if you know where to look and look close enough you can still see the traces of our work, where we removed the shrubs and moss. Those few summers in the mid 1960's, they were real Indian-American summers, they shaped my outlook on life.

I watched wild west series on TV, sat up that July night in 1969 when Apollo 11 landed on the moon, I read Davy Crocket comic books and Mad Magazine. Then came the Bob Dylan album "John Wesley Harding" which I for some reason thought was quintessential American, perhaps it was because I listened to it a cold and damp winter while reading Wilhelm Moberg². Now I realize that Dylan is of course America through and through, just like Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young.

I know this might sound strange, but all these impressions coalesced in my mind into a kind of internal, romantic America. To me, that tiny area

²A famous Swedish author who wrote a quadriology about Swedish immigrants to Minnesota.

on the west coast of Sweden where my childhood country home is located *is* America.

Then many years later, I went to the real America, to Santa Barbara in California in the summer of 1985 and in December 1986 to Superstring conferences at the Institute of Theoretical Physics. I certainly enjoyed it, but it did not really connect to my inner America. I was too worked up with the pressures of my research. But gradually, the idea of making a big trip to the United States formed in my mind. About ten years later while sitting around the dinner table discussing travel plans within the family, I came up with the idea that my wife and Olof would go to India, and Erik and I would go to the US. It was such a natural idea, that it was sort of agreed on at once. It was natural because Monika was too small to travel, and Marianne wanted to go to India and I wanted to go to America. We had made split trips in Europe before and found that it is very nice to travel with just one kid. You get close and you don't have to negotiate as much as when the whole family is traveling.

Erik and I went to the United States in June 1997. We landed in New York City and spent three days there, living at the YMCA, and seeing the usual sights like the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, the Museum of Natural History et cetera. Then we took the train to Washington. We got our pre-paid car at the Avis, drove downtown to get a hamburger, got a parking ticket, drove past the FBI head quarters, made a turn around the White House, and then out on route 66 (not *the* Route 66, but we did listen to the song Route 66 on the cassette player). I was actually traveling into the interior of America, it was a strange and serene feeling. I still remember vividly when we had checked in at a motel in Front Royal, Virginia, a small town at the foothills of the Appalachians, and we took a stroll up and down the road. My feet were on American soil. Finally, I *was* in America!

2.4 Practical things ‡

In the best of worlds, you would spend the rest of the spring and the summer planning the trip. Really getting down to it, writing long lists of things to pack and things to do before, during and after. Ascertain control over the tiniest little bit of information.

I actually did do some of that. I had a "To do" list and a packing list evolving in the computer over the summer, and these were very helpful when it finally came to the last two weeks before departure. I also had an old

cardboard box where I kept everything important relating to the trip, like visa application documents, passports, the lease contract for the house in Saratoga Springs and things like that. But the only part of the preparations that I found distressing was the visa application procedure.

Applying for a visa ‡

Before I left for the planning trip, I read the US Embassy homepages about getting a visa. It seemed to be a complicated procedure that could take weeks, even months. Okay, I said to myself, let us deal with that after the planning trip.

But on the flight home I became a bit nervous. I saw in front of me months of delay getting the visa. Furthermore, my passport was running out of time, so I would have to apply for a new one. Even though I very well knew that this only takes a week, I saw a mile long queue outside the passport office with impatient people longing for Mallorca and the Canary Islands with screaming kids at their feet, cursing themselves that they did not put more money into the parking meter. And then when you come up in front of the counter, you are told that you've forgotten that your application must be signed by twelve different unrelated people and that the passports themselves nowadays are manufactured in Timbuktu and that it takes at least three months. Due to unreliable mail services, the passport might never arrive, and then the procedure must be repeated, but only after a ten year delay.

I came home disheveled at around 11 a.m. I slammed down the suitcase and was greeted by my son Olof. He asked me if he could use the car. I was flabbergasted, hadn't I phoned home saying that I needed the car to drive headlong down to the passport office to join the queue?

He got the car of course, and I took the tram which is actually more convenient. There is a stop just outside the passport office, and you don't have to worry about the parking meter.

The new passport arrived a couple of days later, and Charlotte Elam at the STINT told me over the phone to calm down. It was not such a hurry to supply the information for the contract. For a couple of weeks I did not think much about it, work took over and then we went to London. But then I started to read the information on the US Embassy home page and started an e-mail discussion with the other scholarship earners. Most of them did not answer, die-hard cool obviously, but Filip Sebek did answer. And we managed to get ourselves into a state of frenzy. Having fell off a ladder and broken a leg, he had plenty of time to study the fine print of the visa rules

and even managed to dig up a contradiction.

This reminded me of the funny story about the logician Kurt Gödel when he applied for US citizenship back in the 30's. Albert Einstein volunteered to help him through the procedures. On their way to the interview with the officials, Kurt told Albert that he had been able to logically deduce from the US constitution that the clauses in it implied the possibility to turn the US into a dictatorship. Einstein urged Gödel not to bring up this issue during the interview. Of course, the judge's questions precisely lead Gödel into this direction anyway. Obviously the judge took no offense, or he was just impressed by Gödel's knowledge of the constitution, either way, Gödel got his citizenship. Question was, would we get our visas?

In retrospect I realize that it was my situation at work that made me jumpy. Instead of really sitting down and getting to the bottom of the application procedure, I just skimmed the pages, got frustrated and did something else, just to come back a few days later repeating the same mistake.

If I am allowed, let me also venture into a bit of criticism against the STINT. I got the impression at the introductory meeting in March that it was important to start the application procedure early, since it might take time and things get slow during the summer. I also got the impression, falsely as it turned out, that STINT could help us with the application, especially if anything went wrong. But it turned out that STINT actually knew very little about the rules.

As it turned out, none of this matters much. It is actually an easy and fast procedure to get a US visa provided you just send in all the proper documentation. Of course, the information on the Embassy home page covers the worst case scenario, like Fidel Castro shaving of his beard and applying for a US visa under a false name like Ortsac Ledif.

But perhaps, if you normally sport a Fidel Castro beard, it might be a good thing to temporarily shave it off.

In the end, people at the Embassy were kind and efficient, i.e. the normal American way. Olof and I traveled to Stockholm July 1. We took the early morning train and then a bus out to the Embassy. After waiting in line for an hour outside the Embassy we were allowed in. An officer took all the documents, and we sat down for another half hour wait. Then our names were called and we went up to a counter. I was asked one question, if I was going to do research in the United States, to which I replied yes. I also asked about my daughters' visa, and had it confirmed that it was alright to send in her application at a later date. Our visas were mailed from the Embassy the very same day!

To conclude, and as a help to coming fellows, the visa application pro-

cedure is basically simple, although it takes some time to complete. You should allow three to four hours to fill out the forms for one person, and a little less for the subsequent ones. As of July 2004 the following holds.

Visa application as of July 2004 ‡

To begin with I had no idea what kind of visa to apply for. However, it is really not up to you to worry about that, the type of visa is decided by the Embassy. It is more important to know what documents to supply. It gradually became clear that we need a special form called DS2019.

We are considered "Exchange visitors" and the type of visa we will get is J-1. But you don't apply for a J-1 visa, you simply apply for a visa. It is the American Embassy that determines the type of visa based on the form DS2019 that you must supply.

The DS2019 is a form that is prepared for you by your American college. Since these colleges all have international students, it is more than likely that they have someone in their organization who works with these things or is at least familiar with them. Your college prepares this form for you based on information that you must supply. This information is copies of your passport id-pages, as well as information about what you teach at home, who pays for your visit (STINT) and the dates of arrival and departure.

I did supply this information using fax, but of course it might be a good idea to fix it already on the planning trip.

I can't refrain from telling how it went for me. Before I knew this, and after receiving the contract from STINT, I sent the contract by fax to Chris McGill at Skidmore and at the same time e-mailed some questions. However, Chris did not receive the fax, for the simple reason that I used the wrong number. This number however turned out to be to Barbara Optiz, who is responsible for international students and visa issues at Skidmore! After some confusion, the situation was in tune again. Then I got an e-mail from Chris which I read at 5 p.m. before switching of the computer for the weekend (this was a Friday), saying that Barbara was going on holiday, and if I could supply the information during the day, they could fix it, otherwise I would have to wait till end of June. I was saved by the time difference. At 5 p.m. in Sweden, it is only 11 a.m. in New York state. I hastily wrote an e-mail with the required info, filled in the Word forms and e-mailed them back and recruited my wife when she came home from work to drive back to her work to fax copies of the passport.

You must be prepared that there is no one to ask questions. You cannot phone the Embassy and they don't answer e-mails. What you can do is to

fax your questions to the Embassy. I did this and got handwritten answers back after a week. My questions related to my daughter's visa.

There are three forms to fill out: DS-156, DS-157 and DS-158. The first one is the application form, the others are for supplementary information. They can and should be filled out electronically. As said, it takes time. It takes time for three reasons. There are a lot of information that you need to collect about your family, work history, relatives and friends et cetera. You easily spend hours searching your family home archive. Even though the forms are electronic, there is sometimes a lack of space making them difficult to fill out. And you will make mistakes and have to start over. I strongly recommend using a fast Internet connection. Using a dial-up connection is asking for trouble.

Other practical matters

Looking back, the planning was quite easy. As regards the dates of arrival and departure, the first approximation turned out to be good. We settled on me and Olof leaving for the US August 23, and after some discussion on coming home December 22 or 23, we settled on the 23th. Marianne, who is very fussy about Christmas, worried that we would be very jet-lagged and tired. But I argued that Olof is always tired no matter what circumstances prevail, and that I can always shape myself up. What clinched the matter was the final exams at Skidmore and we did not want Olof to miss an exam on any of his three classes. Marianne and Monika will arrive in Saratoga Springs October 15 and Marianne will leave November 22. Monika will stay until Christmas and go to the Waldorf school.

I phoned Saltour in mid June and they were able to book flights for these dates. I always find it hard to make final decisions like this, and I sat for a long time just staring at the cell phone before finally dialing the number.

2.5 The summer

This was a very special summer. It was raining all the time and I spent many hours rebuilding an old garage at our country house into a guest room together with Erik. I usually read a lot during the summer, but this summer I read almost nothing.

Some time in mid July the idea occurred to me that I should have a closer look at the concept of liberal education. I don't remember consciously studying the subject before, but reading a lot as I normally do, I had a vague, intuitive idea of what it meant.

A few years ago, my university college ran a set of courses designated "Liberal Arts" courses. At one stage, the institutions were asked if they were willing to provide new courses. I heard about this and thought about it. I remember one day on my way to the supermarket I conceived of a course "Behind the Screen". It focused on topics that I was thinking about at the time. At home again, I quickly wrote down a course plan which I submitted. It got accepted. At the first occasion, too few students applied, so I did not run the course, but the second time, 22 students applied. I got an e-mail from another teacher at the college, someone I did not know at that time, saying that my course was the only liberal arts course in the whole curriculum. Obviously, I had a knack for this kind of thing.

In July, I started to read Sheldon Rothblatts paper "The Limbs of Osiris: Liberal education in the English-speaking world"³ and quickly realized that this was tough reading and I decided that this article had to be read a few times. But I pressed on for the time being. A few pages into the article I was encouraged when I read that liberal education is about "gentlemen learning to play the flute but not to well". Now that's a very good description of me! I know a lot, but often not that well. I hastily grow bored by detail. Having recently turned fifty, I know what I'm good at. I'm extremely good at getting the gist of things! I seldom misunderstand the large scale structure of what ever it is, but I can be confused or wrong about the details. This is both a blessing and a curse.

2.6 My proposed Skidmore course ‡

I don't quite know where to describe what I plan to do at Skidmore. This might be a good place. I proposed to offer a course of my own making. At the time of the planning trip the students had already made their choices for the fall, so it was uncertain how many students I would get, or if I would get any at all. But then again, I could also give a series of seminars for the faculty. So any way, nothing would be wasted.

As I said, I just turned fifty. That's a time in life when you might see clearly what you've spent your life doing up to that point. For me it is also a point where I decided to restart my career. I've spent a lot of time with my kids, but now they are growing up, except Monika who is still just 11 (fortunately!), but I will always have time for her. So there is more time now to devote to the topics that I've always loved to study, read about and

³In: The European and American University since 1800 - Historical and Sociological Essays, Rothblatt & Wittrock (ed.)

think about.

In my youth, I was a voracious reader of popular science. At the library I borrowed everything there was about mathematics and physics. Apparently, a lot of popular science books were written in the United States and in Britain in the 1950's and 1960's. Most of them were translated to Swedish and turned up on the library bookshelves in the 60's and early 70's. I read it all. I subsequently became a theoretical physicist. I knew precisely when I made up my mind. I was quite young, I must have been twelve or so. It was winter and we were towing our sledges up a steep snowy hill and my friend asked what I was to become when I grow up. Instantly, a picture from a comic book appeared before my eyes, it depicted the hero saying "I'm a nuclear physicist". "Jag ska bli kärnfysiker" I said in Swedish.

Ironically, in the mid 70's I became involved in the Swedish environmental movement, arguing against nuclear power. But I never lost my interest in fundamental physics. I did my PhD research in theoretical elementary particle physics. Nuclear physics was the fundamental physics of the 50's. In the 80's, fundamental physics had moved on to much smaller scales inside the nuclear particles themselves.

When I started to study computer science in 2000, I quickly became intrigued by the many deep connections between physics and computing science. I studied the new subject of quantum computing, and I discovered that for over twenty years some physicists and computer scientists had explored the physics of computation. One upshot of this is the, not any longer so unknown, but indeed fashionable, speculation of the universe being a computer. More adequately, the idea is to describe the universe as an ongoing computation in some as yet unknown discrete substratum.

I began to sketch an outline for a study of a critical assessment of these ideas, trying to bring together all the different strands of knowledge involved. The idea was to eventually write it all up in a manuscript for a popular science book. Then when the STINT fellowship at Skidmore came up, it was only natural to propose to give a course covering these topics. I laid the last hands on the proposal sitting by the in-doors pool in the Downtowner Motel in Saratoga Springs in April waiting for Mark Hoffman to pick me up for breakfast.

The course, as I was thinking of it, was meant to be a cross-disciplinary course involving physics, mathematics, computer science and philosophy, a kind of modern attempt at discussing "Natural Philosophy". After the planning trip, I realized that I would indeed have to tune it to popular level, where everything would be explained as it progressed. The topics of the course would be used as motivations to begin studying appropriate parts of

physics, mathematics and computer science or whatever subject that would turn out to be relevant during the course. Thus going from the elementary to the advanced, it would require sincere study.

Chapter 3

The visit

3.1 The first eight weeks

On the SAS Airbus flight SK925 over the Atlantic I realized that I don't like intercontinental flights. I don't like flying at all. There is no way to get around the fact that you sit badly, it is noisy even though you might wear hearing protection as I do. A whisky or two alleviates the situation for a while. You can't, or at least I can't, read with any pleasure. But what's really bothering me is that I don't like seeing the world from above. When the sky is clear and you can see the ground unfolding beneath, I always imagine myself being set down in some desolate place, perhaps by the side of the road with no idea of where I am, and then having to knock on a door to find somewhere to sleep for the night. The world is uninviting from above! We weren't meant to fly, otherwise we would have had wings.

How much more pleasant would it not be to cross the Atlantic on a big liner like the Gripsholm or the Kungsholm, which, as late as in the 1960's, you could embark in Göteborg to arrive a week later in New York. I know, because a friend of our family worked as a steward on these ships. Their large apartment on Sveagatan was crammed full of exciting stuff from America.

When traveling on the ground, the environment unfolds in an orderly fashion and you can easily avoid ugly or boring environments by turning around. You can stop and think or you can go on. Most places look nice, even derelict industrial sites may have a certain charm to them. I even remember enjoying the overlook over the Mesabi range, the iron ore strip-mining site at the edge of old North Hibbing in Minnesota.

We had an hours delay in Washington, Dulles airport, sitting listlessly in the plane, waiting for the "paper work" according to the crew. Man, can

these Americans talk! The pilot and the stewardess were constantly on the line telling us what was happening and apologizing for the delay. Apparently there were some kind of "runners", people actually running with hard-copy flight data from ground control to the aircrafts. For some reason they were held up. It sounded like they all had decided to take a nap at the same time.

This constant talking kept us reasonable happy. I felt a little like the crew on the space shuttle must feel while waiting for take off and the countdown is suspended while ground staff is frantically searching for a lost monkey-wrench in the engines. How can you really complain?

We arrived in Albany just after 7 p.m. I called Capitaland Taxi as advised by Jay Rogoff, and a car came ten minutes later. The chauffeur was chatty and it was a nice journey in the falling dusk north on Interstate 87. I then realized one of the virtues of the planning trip, it almost felt like going home. The chauffeur found the address easily from the directions I had got from Jay. We passed the horse racing tracks, then went down East Avenue past beautiful houses, then turned into Leffert's street. And suddenly there it was just around the corner, 35 Pinewood Avenue, the empty house cosily lit up in the summer night, the crickets making noise, the air warm and humid. I paid the driver, and as he was not familiar with the area, made sure he would find his way back. I turned the key to "three o'clock", pushed on the door as instructed, and it swung open.

We were immediately greeted by Otto, the cat. Once again, I was back in America.

3.2 The first week

It was Wednesday morning as I was sitting in Penny's study, writing these very words. I was naturally eager to get to work with planning the course, but on the other hand it didn't make sense to rush ahead. I would be here for seventeen weeks, so I had, almost unconsciously, decided to let the first week pass at a leisurely pace. It couldn't be denied that I was tired after the long travel and after the last week at home getting everything organized. I made a mess of the packing, but I will return to that later.

I wasn't alone in Saratoga. My grown up son Olof was there and it was a new situation to once again live close to each other. We are quite used to live in separate constellations within our family. I have made vacation trips with Olof and Erik separately and Marianne has done the same. In the summer, there is always a couple of weeks with just Erik, Monika and me at our country home, and Marianne and Olof in town. It is actually

nice to split the family in this way. You get to know each other better, you become more focused. It easy to understand mathematically. In a family of five people (not counting the cats) there are $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$ different two-person relationships to keep track of. If you're just two people, there is simply just one relationship! But that one has to work then of course, there's no hiding.

Our situations were very different. I knew as precisely as possible what I would do. For Olof it was much more open-ended. He's very social and has lots of friends at home. He wanted to do things. He suggested that we should drive down to Albany to take a look at the town. I was a bit reluctant at first, but then thought it was a good idea. Let's take it easy the first week and have a look around! So we first made banking arrangements, putting off going up to college for Thursday, when Chris McGill would be there. I was eager to get the Internet working, partly for banking reasons, and Olof had to register for courses.

* * *

Let me first tell about the car battery mishap. After coming home from buying food for breakfast Tuesday morning, I must have forgot the lights on, or even more silly, turned them on when parking! I remember driving down Pinewood Avenue wondering whether the lights should be on during daytime or not. A few hours later when Olof wanted to drive downtown the battery was completely dead. I spent some time poking around in the garages, looking for a battery charger, but couldn't find any.

But a good thing came out of the battery debacle. Getting restless in the afternoon, I took to walking downtown. It just took fifteen minutes, and on the way I asked about having the battery charged at Mobil Service, a car repair shop. It was a nice walk down Lake Avenue, whence I came directly upon the Adirondacks Trust Company. I took a note of the office hours, then went looking for a shop to perhaps buy an extra shirt or two. You see, I made a lousy job of the packing.

Many weeks before departure, I started to write a packing list and a to-do list. I even had them on the computer so that they could be constantly updated. Everything was well organized and I had devoted the last week at home for preparations both for the trip and for being away. I then arranged places in the house to put things temporarily before packing them. I spent a night or two going through scientific papers and books relating to my Skidmore project and related research stuff that I wanted to bring. I even weighed books and papers on a bathroom scale. So far so good, the week passed without surprises. I went to work on Monday and Thursday

to attend to being-away preparations there. I cooked dinner for the rest of the family. The family would be split for eight weeks, and I wanted so savor every moment.

Then came Sunday, the day before departure. We visited my mother in the morning to say goodbye. In the afternoon, we eventually embarked upon packing. We had three big suitcases, one big backpacker as well carry-on cases. Olof and I started to pile up things, mostly shoes, clothes, winter jackets, riding gear et cetera. It quickly became apparent that neither weight limits nor space limits could be met. In mid July, four times thirty six kilograms of luggage had sounded like a lot, now it turned out to be awkwardly insufficient. My stuff was scattered downstairs and upstairs in my study and our bedroom. I ran up and down trying to figure out how to pack everything. I simply panicked, the plan broke down. There was no way to bring the pile of books and the several piles of papers I had lying on the floor.

When I work with my projects at home, I'm used to have lots of literature at arms reach. But of course there is no way to bring a library to America given the weight and space limits. So I had to bring the most essential. But there is no way to determine that in advance. For an hour my wife watched the madman leafing through books, throwing them away, then picking them up again, suddenly jump up and run down the stairs, coming up again with a desperate look on his face. Then she said, "I'll pack your clothes." Ten minutes later, everything except the books and papers were packed. There were space for those too, but not exactly a lot of space.

In the end, I wearily closed the suitcases with the feeling that my choice of brought items were essentially random! When contemplating this fact on the flight over the Atlantic, I consoled myself with the thought that I will have to start fresh, thinking new thoughts, not being prejudiced by the writings that normally cover my desk.

But now I was downtown Saratoga Springs walking on Broadway. After buying the shirt, I could not resist Borders. But I promised myself just to look through the physics books and then leave (this counts as work, doesn't it?). I was surprised to find how well stocked they were. I found Julian Barbour's book "The End of Time" which I had planned to buy and read in the context of my Skidmore project, but had sort of forgot about during the summer. I also found a book with a debate between Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose about the nature of space and time.

Late in the evening, we got a strange phone call. I answered in the American way with a "Hello!". Then followed a confused discussion with me trying to explain who and where I was. After a while the old person

at the other end started to say "Who am I speaking to?" in an annoyed and demanding tone. I said my name, which apparently did not fit the bill. This was repeated a couple of times, and when I was asked for the fifth time "Who am I speaking to?" followed by "I want to speak to Father Phisio", I was about to answer "You are speaking to the Devil, and you can send the money to me". But as it is impossible to figure out what would be the consequences of such a statement, I just politely said that "You must have dialed a wrong number". I didn't want all the old man's friends calling me up, in case he remembered the number he had dialed. The conversation ended with the old man promising to ring back the next day. This he did not do. Perhaps it was a missed opportunity to earn a few extra bucks.

* * *

Back to Wednesday. We first opened bank accounts in the Adirondack Trust Company, and then drove down to Albany as planned. Albany turned out to be a disappointment, a really dull town. There is no genuine downtown. What goes for downtown is just a jumble of big hotels, banks and official buildings and the Empire State Plaza. I guess you are supposed to be impressed by these large monumental places, but why haven't someone told the architects that most normal people just get tired, bored and most of all long for an ice-cold Margarita. We drove back the same way we had come, checking out some record stores along the highway out of town.

Back in Saratoga Springs, we picked up the battery at the car repair shop where we had left it in the morning. They charged (no pun intended) me nothing! Encouraged by this, we went for coffee at the Barnes&Noble bookstore. At home I cooked some pasta, watched an X-file and went to bed early.

Next morning, I organized my new study. I'm surrounded by books on art and art history. I'm using Penny Jolly's study, professor of art history at Skidmore. Once again an inspiring environment. It does not matter much that the books don't relate in any obvious way to my own subjects, their mere presence is inspiring. But I did find a source book on ancient philosophy on one of the top shelves. This will give me the opportunity to read Parmenides, Heraclitus and the other guys in original.

It turned out that the papers that I had packed was not such a bad selection after all. They were the latest, unread pertaining to my projects. Never mind about the rest. I had plenty to read. When we arrived on Monday there was a box from Amazon waiting for me with books related to my Skidmore course. So I sat in the easy chair reading, but my mind soon started to wander, a sure sign that I'm not settled in yet.

* * *

When I was out returning the battery to the car, I heard the sound of a phenomena that I've read about somewhere, but never have come across myself. In America, the power lines sing. How charming! Olof asked me about the sound at breakfast, he had heard it in Albany the other day when we walked down a 19:th century street and had I commented on the wooden poles bearing the power cables and the tangle of cables going into the houses. I did not hear it then, and when I heard it now, I first did not know what is was. But of course, it was the power lines singing.

In the afternoon we went to the college. I got my Skidmore ID, and Olof got registered as a auditing student. After that, I had planned to do some quick shopping and then go home and try to do some work. But shopping food on Price Chopper at the mall took its time. Now, we have big supermarkets for food in Sweden too, but here it is scaled up by a factor of two or three. This, together with the fact that everything looks a bit different, while at the same time being roughly familiar is somewhat confusing. Once you've found the counter for butter, you have to make up your mind on what brand to choose. In the case of butter, it is essential to weed out all the fake stuff from the real stuff. When it comes to butter, I'm purist. In that case you have to be careful not to come home with something "You Can't Believe Is Not Butter!" but which really isn't butter.

I must expand somewhat on the topic of cooking. I'm a fairly good cook, in fact, I once enjoyed cooking, but for some reason I don't any longer. Now walking up and down the aisles at Price Chopper, I realized that it does not work to have your old, torn and frayed recipes in mind and trying to find proper ingredients. You just won't find them. Better then to just grab things that look interesting and try to cook something from them. I mean, picking a can of canned gravy and fresh chicken, asparagus and brocoli and red peppers, can't fail completely. It didn't fail. A few hours later, we sat back from the kitchen dinner table, solemnly contemplating one of the first in a row of Swedish-American home style cooking experiments.

On Friday, I went to college and met with Barbara Optiz at the international office in the Starbuck Center. It was Barbara that arranged with my and Olof's DS2019. Now she will make the corresponding arrangements for my daughter.

Here is a piece of information that might be useful for others. I first thought that since Monika is going to attend the Waldorf school that they should issue here documents. But according to Barbara, Skidmore might just as well do it. Then Monika will be filed as a J-2 dependent, and she can

go to any school. If Waldorf would have issued her documents, she would have been filed as a F-1 student, and there would be additional fees. Now I only needed to supply a photocopy of Monika's passport, and Barbara does the rest. Furthermore, it is alright to apply for visas at separate times, even though you are a family. You don't have to apply all at the same time. Of course, this information is of fall 2004, and things might change.

I met with Mark Hoffman for a brief chat. I wanted to know if there was anything in particular that I needed to do in preparing my course. It turned out, as I had envisaged could very well be the case, that very few students had enrolled. Indeed, there was just one! The problem being that my course was announced very late. We discussed this, and as said in the spring, I could always give a series of seminars for faculty, or with some luck more students might enroll when they come back after the summer vacation. We simply have to see what happens.

Since it was a Friday night, I took Olof out eating. We ate at the Porreca's which I had checked out in the spring. We were both tired and just wanted to get the food down and drive back home to watch a couple of X-files episodes.

Saturday was extremely hot. I took out the garden furniture from the garage and sat out in the garden and got down to reading David Deutsch' book "The Fabric of Reality". This is a remarkable book. It will be the first reading assignment in my Skidmore course.

In the afternoon, we went to the mall, ate at KFC, and then ended up in Barnes&Noble. Suddenly it began to rain and a thunderstorm crashed down. We ran to the car to drive home to close the windows.

On Sunday, we drove up to Glens Falls and Lake George, and then home again through the Adirondack National Park. The countryside is serenely beautiful and we decided to make a longer trip up into the mountains.

On the way home, I bought the Sunday New York Times. What a fantastic newspaper with lots of well written articles. I read an article about vote-buying in eastern Kentucky. This is apparently an old tradition in Appalachia, dating from the early 1900's. And there were many other interesting articles to read, about the republican party, about the 9/11 report and much more. It will last all week. I decided to just get the New York Times every Sunday, and not bother with other newspapers. It is a bit expensive though at \$4.50, but this is less than the amount of quarters and dimes that you accumulate during the week. I actually paid with coins, and since you never use these coins anyway, effectively it was for free. I had to put up with the lady behind the counter looking strangely at me. You seldom see people paying with coins in the US. Perhaps she thought I was a

bum who had collected the coins on the street corner outside the bookshop. I'll have to put on a suit and a tie next Sunday.

3.3 The second week

It was time to get down to work!

I managed to spend most of Monday working. Now I have a confession to make. I had planned to do some research while at Skidmore. I know this is a teaching scholarship, but I did take myself the liberty to bring a research project of mine. I know this might sound like bragging, but when it comes to teaching, I'm sort of a natural talent, and I don't have to spend very much time preparing. The point is also that if you know your subjects well enough and if you're enthusiastic about them, preparation is a matter of making up your mind about what to do. Then what actually comes out in class comes naturally. At least that is the way it works for me.

I learned this way of working from my PhD supervisor Lars Brink. The story is well worth to tell. I was part of the Elementary Particle Physics group as a graduate student. The group had meetings, really seminars, every Friday afternoon throughout the academic year. We took turns giving seminars. We just went down the corridor so it was easy to calculate when your time was up. You just had to count the number of doors. One fall semester when our research group gathered after the summer vacation, Lars had an announcement to make. This year, no one was allowed to make any preparations for their Friday afternoon seminar. The idea was that you should know your subject well enough so that you could stand up and talk about it with no notice. Harebrained as this might sound, the idea stuck in my mind. I stopped preparing and instead I learned the subjects. I cannot tell how much I have benefited from this strategy over the twenty years that has passed since then. I never prepare lectures anymore, I just go there and get the job done. Instead I use my time to understand things.

Of course, it does not always work. I sometimes do a bad job in class. But it works most of the time, and it lends an air of enthusiasm to the class, it helps preventing your classes from becoming dull affairs. I have also discovered that I do my very best classes when I get a question and I'm expanding on that, that is, when I'm completely unprepared. This is fascinating, to create the lesson out of questions and comments posed by the students.

Furthermore, being free from administrative chores, there is plenty of time for teaching, studying the liberal education system and for a bit of

research. I was also encouraged later on in the week on when I was talking to Sarah Goodwin about my stay. She said that research at Skidmore is definitely part of being "Excellent". So I need not apologize for blending teaching and research.

In the afternoon I went food shopping again. It was a little easier this time, but the place was full of people, it was some reopening event. I managed to pick my stuff fairly quickly. Being a little more relaxed now, I saw Americans walking up and down the aisles looking just as perplexed as I must have been the other day. I went home to cook dinner while listening to Sgt. Peppers for the first time in my life. I know it sounds impossible, but honestly, I haven't listened to that record before and now I found a CD in the kitchen record shelves. It was like opening an old bottle of wine. The songs were alright, but nothing special, just a set of nice old ditties.

Tuesday was a copy of Monday. Olof was a bit restless, waiting for his money from Sweden to come through and appear on his Adirondack Trust bank account. He was set on spending money, a daft idea if you ask me, but it is none of my business any longer. I went to the Waldorf school and made arrangements for Monika. In the evening, Olof cooked dinner. We had tacos. At 11.30 p.m. they tasted marvelous!

On Wednesday, Sarah Goodwin wanted to see me to talk with me how I could get into the Skidmore community. We made an appointment to meet at 4 p.m. This made it possible for Olof and me to squeeze in a trip to the Saratoga Historical National Park. It's a park commemorating the 1777 American victory over the British at Saratoga. I'm not much for battlefields in general, but since this one is such an integrated part of local history and culture, it seemed well worth visiting. And then you never knew how long the nice summer weather would last. Indeed it was warm, temperature running in the 90's and humidity, ... well, we were soaking wet. We've had rain and thunderstorms for three consecutive nights.

Going to the park raised a few questions. I realized that I do not know very much about the War of Independence. Now I learned that in 1777 there was a great battle between a British army under general Burgoyne and the American Colonial army headed by first Schuyler and then by Gates. The Red Coats had come down along the Lake Champlain and the Hudson River valley. It was the only possibility, the rest was a vast hostile and impenetrable wilderness. This rugged area is described in the opening paragraphs of James Fenimore Coopers "The Last of the Mohicans"¹. Anyway, the Red Coats were on their way to Albany to quell the rebellion. Burgoyne had

¹Penguin Popular Classics, first published in 1826.

expected support from other British forces coming from Lake Ontario along the Mohawk River and a group coming up from New York along the Hudson headed by general Howe. The plan was to finish off the stubborn Americans in a joint effort. But Howe instead sent his forces towards Philadelphia, the patriot capital. Furthermore, the forces from Ontario also failed to arrive. So to make a long story short, the Red Coats got a real beating at Saratoga and Burgoyne surrendered on October 17th. This is considered to be one of the turning points of the War of Independence. The big British army was dissolved and many of the soldiers stayed in America and became naturalized.

There were lots of interesting books at the Visitors Center, but as I had my meeting with Sarah, we did not have time to linger. In the car driving back to Saratoga Springs, we began to wonder about the history of Canada, of which we knew nothing.

On Thursday we paid a visit to the horse races, dutifully I must confess, since everyone is talking about them. Although I enjoy horse riding myself, I'm not much for racing. But it is a special event for which Saratoga Springs is famous. The races go on for five weeks in August and into the beginning of September. Everyone seems to love the races except the ones who live near the racetrack. A day at the races can be a quite dull affair if you're not a gambler. This is how it goes. First you figure out when the next race is. This is easy, because you are told all over by monitors hanging from the roof. Then you make your bet, after which you wait for half an hour or so for the race. The horses start off far away on the other side of the track. Even with binoculars you will not see anything. After a minute, the horses appear to your left coming out of the curve, galloping at full throttle down the dusty track, some of them without jockeys. It is all over in a few seconds. If you win, you throw your hat into the air. If you lose, you tell yourself it is only money after all. This repeats itself throughout the day with an hours interval.

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On Friday I went to a day of introductions for new faculty at the Surrey Inn, the old Inn that I had stayed at during my planning trip. One of my first impressions of Skidmore College was that it is very well organized, and this impression was reinforced during this day. We were welcomed by John Brueggemann², a man radiating enthusiasm and competence. There was a quick round of presentations where everyone said a few words about

²Associate Dean of Faculty Development

themselves, just as we do at home. It was familiar, but at the same time different. Here people come from State University of New York, Harvard and UCLA, to name a few. This is another world.

Then John had prepared a set of case studies to discuss, of things that could occur in the classroom.³ At first I thought this to be out of place. But at once there ensued an enthusiastic and serious discussion about the situations that the cases depicted, and I changed my mind. This gave the day a sense of realism, a sort of backdrop to the informational speeches that followed. I have the impression that Americans are very down to earth. It's like "We're supposed to put a man on the moon. Okay, where do we start?" It is naive, but at the same time it is charming, and it's effective, things gets done, at least eventually.

After this we had information from Grace Burton⁴, and Ann Henderson⁵. They talked about policies and procedures regarding students and everything having to do with their academic work. According to what they said, and the way they said it, it really impressed me. It seemed very well organized and thought through. Apart from taking care of all the usual administrative stuff around courses et cetera, they also saw themselves as a resource for faculty which they could turn to, should problems occur in the class or with students. Of course, I don't know how it works out in practice, but they seemed to be on top. Thinking back on this part of the day, I realize that I don't know very much about how these things are done at my home university college. In this context, let me cite extensively from a paper from the Office of the Dean of Studies Office explicating their philosophy:

"Students: we treat students as young adults who need increasingly, as they move through their college careers, to gain independence of judgment and choice. Our role is to offer information and guidance to students so that they can make their own informed choices, take advantage of academic opportunities, and overcome academic difficulties. The Office also supports research and study opportunities for students with strong academic records.

Faculty: the faculty in their roles as teachers, scholars, and academic advisors are at the center of the mission of the College. The Dean of Stud-

³Just to give an impression, the two first cases was: 1. You notice a pattern of late arrivals, bathroom breaks, and a general lack of civility as students engage in discussion with each other. How do you tackle these patterns of behavior? 2. Sarah submits a paper that has major sections paraphrased from a web site, something your syllabus clearly discusses. When you confront the student with this, she indicates tearfully that she did not intend to plagiarize, but simply had not known how to cite web sources. How do you proceed?

⁴Dean of Studies & Associate Dean of Student Affairs

⁵Registrar & Director of Institutional Research

ies Office seeks to help faculty effect the most active relationships with their students, especially in the faculty's role as advisors and teachers. For the faculty the Office develops, and provides information on, academic policies, opportunities, and procedures and holds workshops to promote effective advising practices."

It is interesting to contemplate these statements for a while. Note the mention of support not just for students having problems, but also support for students doing well. Note how the faculty is explicitly set in the center. Neither providing support for students doing well, nor setting the work of the faculty in the center, are common in Sweden. At least, that is my impression.

Next there was a stretch of short introductions by people responsible for things like the library, academic technologies for example WebCT, research and campus safety. After lunch there were welcome talks by Charles Joseph, Sarah Goodwin and Philip Glotzbach.

The day ended with perhaps the most interesting part. Two faculty members talked about what it was like to teach and work at Skidmore. Unfortunately, I did not take notes, I sat transfixed by the simple but insightful things they had to say about academic teaching. But I remember one thing clearly. They stressed that you must think in the long term and don't let yourself get bogged down by the little things and let them take all your time. You must take care of your scholarship. Teaching takes a lot of time, but you must carve out time for your scholarship because that is what you bring into the classroom.

Excuse me, I may be unfair here, but it is not often you here words like these from faculty or administration at home in Sweden! This together with the above quoted emphasis on the "*teachers, scholars, and academic advisors at the center of the mission of the College*" made me begin to understand that this really is another world.

With a light heart, I drove down to the Amtrak train station and bought tickets to New York City.

* * *

In the evening Olof and I was invited to dinner to Sarah and Steve Goodwin. It was a nice and warm evening and we sat out in the garden until the mosquitos drove us in. We spoke about many things, ranging from my STINT project and my course, over to the upcoming election and politics to film. Sarah and Steve had introduced European film to their children and we spoke some about Ingemar Bergman. I've never been particularly interested in Bergman, I've seen some of his later films, but not the old black

and white ones for which he became famous. I think I was a bit too young. Those were the films my parents, or my mother at least, went to the cinema to see. I've been thinking about seeing them, but have never got around to do it. The Göteborg Film Festival ran them all some years ago, but I did not see them then either. In order to get a flavor of how Bergman is viewed in contemporary Swedish culture, I tried to tell about the spectacular re-appearance of "The Seventh Seal" in Sweden last Christmas in the televised Advent Calender.

But I was on firmer ground when the discussion turned to the Marx' Brothers. I once made an attempt to introduce the Marx' Brothers to my own sons when they were around ten years old. It failed completely. Still, I now and then entertain the thought of setting up an all weekend Marx' Brothers DVD festival at home.

Now, I was amazed to learn that the Sarah's and Steve's kids had seen the films, not once but many times, and actually knew a lot of Groucho non-sequiturs and double entendres. So we traded some for a while. But the kids soon outdid me, but I managed to pull off my favorite; "*Those are my principles, if you don't like them, I have others*". I realized that not having English as your native language you miss a lot of the fun and word-play. This also explains the empirical fact that if you watch the films on DVD without Swedish sub-titles, you have to see them several times in order to grasp the jokes. Of course, when I was a child and saw them at the Saturday matinee, they were sub-titled and what you really laughed at was the brothers appearance. Ever since those far-away childhood days, Groucho has been my hero.

3.4 A trip to New York City

At a quarter to six on Saturday morning, I turned the ignition key on the 93' Honda and soon we were headed south on Interstate 87. It is always a special feeling to set out in the early morning hours, a sense of anticipation and adventure. We took the 7 a.m. train to New York City from the Albany-Rensselaer train station. The line runs very beautifully along the Hudson river all the way south. Half way down the line we passed the military academy West Point. I had no idea that it was located here. It lay like an eagle's nest in the rocks on the other side of the river. An hour later or so, the train slowly rolled through the Bronx and onto Manhattan. At 9.30 a.m. we stepped up into the daylight at the back of Madison Square Gardens where the Republican Party convention had been held just a few

days earlier.

We had a sleepy breakfast in a simple place on Seventh Avenue waiting for Macy's to open. Now, what do you do in New York City? Olof had no idea, apart from shopping, and neither had I. I've been in NYC before and I'm ashamed to admit that I had made no plans this time. Well, I had one plan, and that was to visit the childhood home of the Marx' Brothers on the Upper East Side. Last time I was in NYC I did not get around to do it, so why not make a new attempt now?

My feelings towards big cities like Gotham are somewhat divided. On one side are all those tourist traps, which in a city like NYC are scattered all over Manhattan. Not just souvenir shops, but clothes shops and electronics shops. In particular those electronics shops which have a narrow front towards the street, but then stretches way back into the building with counters on both sides. The front windows are crammed by stuff, often dusty and tatty looking. Men, who by the look of them, are bored to delirium by hanging out for years in the same shop, jumps you as soon as you set foot within the store, or rather once you are far enough within not be able to easily escape. They seem to live under the strange delusion that you happily says farewell to 299 dollars for a gadget you don't need. Its funny, exactly the same kind of shops were strewn along Tottenham Court Road when I lived in London in the mid 1980's. They are still there, as I saw when visiting London on vacation this very spring.

No point in wasting more words on this. There is another side to NYC. I could easily drift into an imaginary New York City and walk the avenues and streets up and down for days, a New York of 1961 when Bob Dylan hung out in Greenwich Village. A New York of the early 19th century when the Marx' Brothers mother struggled to keep the boys off the street by sending them out as a Vaudeville entourage, and their father "Frenchie" cooked dinner to the family and tailored suits for customers without taking proper measurements. An even older New York with dirty newly arrived immigrants roaming the streets. A New York from the 1950's of Mad Magazine where you could expect Alfred E. Neuman to jump out of a dust bin on Madison Avenue any minute. A New York with Superman in silhouette over a night time Chrysler Building. A summer New York City with splashing fire hydrants and kids playing in the water.

What did we do? We walked leisurely south, sometimes on Broadway, sometimes on Fifth Avenue, drifting in and out of record stores and clothes shops. We had some lunch before walking the final stretch to Ground Zero. As I had expected, you don't see that much if you have not prepared yourself, which we had not done. We just stayed a few minutes before taking a train

uptown. Later, I read in Sunday New York Times about how to best take on Ground Zero. But then again, I don't know how interesting it is, it is bit macabre to go there just to look. But it has its strange attraction. I guess in the end it will all be absorbed in that general Gotham City mood.

We walked slowly north, we passed Times Square, before we actually made up our minds and took a train to 97th street on Upper East Side. This was clearly not downtown, and the atmosphere was perceptibly different. Boys were playing basketball in a backyard. We walked a few blocks south, and there it was, the childhood home of the Brothers, a tiny insignificant house on 93rd street between Lexington Avenue and Third Avenue.

It was not marked out or anything. We sat for a while on a staircase on the other side of the street as the dusk slowly fell. I could imagine a young Chico running down the stairs, jumping onto a bicycle and head off to deliver another one of Frenchie's badly tailored suits. Frenchie had a theory that customers never came back for a second suit, and anyway, there were enough people in New York City not to run the risk of running out of customers.

We ate at a nice Chinese restaurant and then walked swiftly south. But on 68th street we took a train down to 33rd street, otherwise we would most likely have missed the 9.45 p.m. train to Albany. It takes between one and two minutes to walk a block, depending on the traffic and waiting times crossing streets. This means that walking thirty streets can take up to an hour! And most probably you have a couple of Avenues to cross as well to reach your target.

What a city! What a day!

3.5 The third week

I woke up on Monday morning facing two vexing problems. The first one was how to get down to business and get my brain working. There is nothing so debilitating as a long summer. Not being exercised, your brain takes leave of absence, being content to keep up with simple functions such as coordinating arms and legs well enough to be able to walk to the fridge. The other issue was how to organize my work. There were tough decisions to be made. Over the years, I've become a home worker.

Let me explain. When it comes to work inside academia, there are basically two kinds of work, frontstage and backstage work.⁶ Frontstage

⁶Adapted from: E. Goffman, *Stages of Articulation of Organizational Culture*. Thanks to Marie Arehag at Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg, Sweden, for the refer-

work is when you teach because teaching is not that unlike entertainment. Everything else is basically backstage work, and that includes talking to colleagues, administrative chores and even research. But of course there are other ways to look at academic work. If you ask me what I'm basically paid for, I would say that I'm paid for thinking. In the long run, you can't teach without taking care of your own scholarship. And taking care of your scholarship means basically to think and read, at least if you're a theoretician as I am.

At work, I teach, I do administrative work and I talk to colleagues and students, but it is impossible to think. It is impossible to do research or taking care of scholarship. The reason is that when you have done your classes for the day, when administrative chores are cleared away and when you have finally managed to throw students and chatty colleagues out the door, you are either too tired to think, or if you're not, sure as hell someone knocks on your door.

So I do all my thinking at home, either during daytime when the rest of the family is away at school and work, or late at night when everyone else is sleeping (well, except Erik). I got into the habit of working late at night during my time as a post-doc research fellow in London in the mid 80's. It has been a habit since then, but of late, possibly due to getting older, the fascination of working into the early morning hours have waned, so I seldom do it nowadays. But of course, here in New York state it is all different.

So I was lying in bed thinking about how to organize work this fall. The decision was clear. The only sensible thing to do was to jump out of bed, get some breakfast and then drive up to college. Work there the whole day. Then get back home and be done with work for the day, except reading and possibly writing which I do not consider to be work. Here at Skidmore I am an outside figure. People don't chat me up that much, and being kind of shy, I don't chat people up that much either. And thank God, I'm completely free from administrative work.

‡

Taking the wise words about scholarship from last Friday at face value, I spent Monday attending to my scholarship which meant spreading out papers and calculations pertaining to my research all over the desk. But I took some time off from this, ever faithful to the STINT project, to attend the very first seminar of the Liberal Studies 1 course (LS1). I will tell more about LS1 below, but it is an interdisciplinary series of lectures

ence.

and discussion seminars focusing on "Human Dilemmas" that all first year Skidmore students attend. This very fall semester, the course was initiated by a reading assignment the students had had over the summer. They should read Mary Shelley Wollstonecraft's novel "Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus". Myself being an ardent reader of Mad Magazine in my youth, my first encounter with the Frankenstein "myth" (I think you can use that word), was through satires in that magazine. That experience is not so strange as I learned on this first seminar. The Frankenstein myth is ubiquitous in American popular culture. Later on, I read the novel and I saw the film. When I was at Skidmore in April, the eerily illustrated edition with prints by Barry Moser was on display in the Scribner library. So I was naturally curious about this.

The seminar itself was very good. It was started off by Professor Michael Marx. The theme of his introduction was "transformations". He talked about college as a transformative experience, the transformation from high school to college, and what that entails in terms of approach to studies. He pulled this off real nice by beginning to talk about the room itself. We were in the auditorium of the Janet Kinghorn Bernhard Theater on campus. But now, it was used as a lecture hall, as a place for seminar discussion. Thus the very act of having this first set of introductory lectures in the auditorium of the theater, transformed the room into a classroom.

Then he turned to education. What is the difference between high school and college, he asked, almost rhetorically? College is interdisciplinary. In college you are supposed to think critically. You don't just mechanically copy what is on the screen. Then he went on to talk specifically about the LS1 course and its theme of human dilemmas. He said something that I'm extremely sympathetic towards, namely to emphasize questions and analysis, not answers. It is a sad fact that too many people want answers, and when they've got them, they want to stick to them.

He concluded by coming back to the high school-college transformation, the transformation to critical thought, problem analysis and interdisciplinary study. Good job! I was also impressed by the student participation in the seminar.

Then the word was passed to three lecturers who talked about different aspects of the Frankenstein novel. Interesting as this was, I will not review what they said. When I got home, I actually found the illustrated edition of the novel in a bookshelf in the sitting room.

* * *

On Tuesday and Wednesday I worked on preparations for my course.

Then came Thursday morning. It turned out to be a rainy day. It had rained all night. It was one of those days that you would prefer staying home, putting on Dylan's Blonde on Blonde on the record player and listen to Rainy Day Women no 12&35 and all the rest of the songs. This is the record where Dylan thought he had attained "that wild mercury sound". But you could just as well say that it is the sound of north country rain dripping on your window sill.

But there was no turning back. No time for silly dreaming. This was the day my course would start.

I amazed myself by being reasonably well prepared driving up to college. I even managed to photocopy a plan for the course and make some transparencies. I was all set to go, and had still 30 minutes to take off. Darn, wasn't I a bit nervous, that is not like me. I took a walk on campus when I realized that I was not prepared at all. I had no idea of how to start off this class. Or rather, I had at least three different ways of doing it, and I could not make up my mind which one to choose even if I could keep them separate. In effect thus, this was the same thing as being unprepared. Good, let's take it from there.

Well, it came off not that bad after all. I got six students and four faculty members sitting in. The students seemed to think that it was going to be a cool class.

After my performance, I went to the Case College Center to get something to eat. I had two slices of pizza and a I sat there for quite a while looking out at the pouring rain. I don't mind the coming of fall. It had been cooling off the last couple of days, even though it was still warm in the afternoons. I relish the end of summer, the vanishing of the sun. It is the time of getting to work. But just now I was exhausted by the effort to get my course started. I drifted into the Skidmore shop and browsed the books. I found myself sitting in a reading chair perusing a book claiming to refute Michael Moore, but after a while I realized it was not entirely serious, and I left the bookshop with a big book celebrating the Mad Magazine artists instead. It was perfect reading after a day like this.

* * *

On Friday I went to my first faculty meeting. It was the first meeting for the academic year so there was a lot of welcoming back from summer talk. The president said something that really amazed me. I don't remember the exact words, but the point was that, being aware of the important work the faculty is doing, he wanted to do three things to relieve the burden and making it possible for the teachers to do a good job. These thing were

reforming the governmental structure for the college, securing more resources and working on a better functioning of the administration.

I've never heard anything like this at home! The faculty is up frontstage, the rest is backstage. If backstage does a better job, then frontstage can do an even better job. This all puts the emphasis where it should be. Now this might be unfair, but in Sweden it sometimes feels like the backstage people have their own agenda which have very little to do with what the frontstage people does. And sometimes it feels, I say feels because honestly I can not prove this, but I'm perfectly willing to discuss it, it feels like administrative work is dumped on frontstage people so that backstage people can spend more time pretending they are frontstage. Just to be clear, I respect and value good backstage work, but if you want to do frontstage, you better become a scholar and a teacher, that is, learn something to perform.

Next, Sarah Goodwin introduced new faculty. I did not think that she would mention me, but she did. I actually got more time than anyone else! After this, everyone knew who I was, in fact many people knew me even before Sarah's nice introduction. This is just another side of the fine reception that I got at Skidmore College. Even though it might not always be apparent, I am sometimes a bit shy, a bit of a loner indeed. I'm not the one who chats with everyone at cocktail parties. But at the reception at the Scribner house afterwards lots of people came up to have chat. When I left at around eight, I realized I was hungry, I had not had time to eat enough. What a shame on all that good food and drink!

Talking about food, on Saturday I did some theoretical culinary research. On Sunday evening, Olof and I was going to have dinner with Sheldon Rothblatt⁷, and Sheldon had left it to me to suggest a place to eat. The week had passed without me attending to this problem. What could be a more appropriate preparation for such an undertaking than a late breakfast at the Country Corner Cafe?

The Country Corner Cafe is definitely on my list of the best breakfast places in downtown Saratoga Springs. I had noticed that on Saturdays and Sundays, there were always people hanging around outside on the corner. Though I vaguely understood that this must be folks waiting for free tables inside, I wasn't sure. It didn't look like a queue. As I parked on the other side of the road I quickly made up my mind. If I ask if it is a queue and the answer is yes, then I won't get any breakfast. So I did something which I'm a bit ashamed of. I just gate-crashed the place and sat down at the counter.

⁷Sheldon Rothblatt is professor emeritus in history at Berkeley University in California and is mentor of the STINT "Excellence in Teaching" program.

I guess my action was so much out of the ordinary that the waiter just asked how I wanted my eggs. I said "both sides". I promise I won't do it again.

While waiting for my food I read through a small brochure listing places to eat in Saratoga. I marked off a few places to investigate, both downtown and out on the highways. Somewhat later while walking Broadway I had the good luck of bumping into Laury Silvers, Assistant Professor of Religion, whom I had spoken to at the reception. It turned out that "Hattie's" serving southern food, that I had checked out were in fact a good alternative.

Sunday was a miserable day. I had coffee reading in the study and I ate a doughnut that really made me want to cut down on carbs. I tried to write on my lecture notes, but did not manage to put together three coherent words. In the end I gave up and went looking at digital cameras at the mall before it was time to meet Sheldon Rothblatt at the Prime Hotel. Sheldon was not interested in southern food so we skipped Hattie's and instead just strolled down Broadway and went into Lillian's Restaurant which turned out to be quite good. Hattie's had to be checked out another time, that's the kind of food you don't do at home. Anyway, we had a nice evening at the restaurant, chatting about various things, then took a stroll on Broadway before it was time to call it a day.

Before going to bed, I made the final decision to straighten up my work habits: full days at College, no work after 5 p.m. Period.

Let me, before closing this week, tell about one of my side projects. I had started to collect quarters. On some of the quarters, as you might have noticed, the backside features a state. I got the idea to start collect them and see if I could get all fifty before Christmas. Furthermore, it is an interesting experiment in statistics to see what the frequency distribution (i.e. how many of each state) you get just when you get the last missing one. So I was keeping track of the order in which I got the first specimen of each. In practice, I just lined them up on the window sill. One question is whether there is any regional distribution of the coins, so that perhaps New England, or north-east states are more common around here. I wouldn't think so, but at the time of writing, I had three Rhode Island, and this is the tiniest state.

For the record, here's my distribution at the time of writing in order that I got them.⁸

⁸Texas(2), Rhode Island(3), Maine, New Jersey, South Carolina, Florida(2), Connecticut, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Maryland

3.6 The fourth week

The decision from Sunday evening bore fruit at once. I woke on Monday morning at half past five and got up and made some coffee and sat down in front of the computer. Words poured out on the screen at once. I got some breakfast, and shortly after eight I was in my office. I worked all through the day except talking to Sheldon for an hour or so before noon. I quit at five and went home and had some Greek salad with Olof before I went to the mall. This time I investigated books relating to the Adirondacks and New England. My intention was to plan a few trips in the surroundings.

I've been thinking about buying a digital camera, and this week will be forever colored by my attempts to do just that. I brought my video camera, but I could not find my old well worn chemical camera, so I left without it. Electronic stuff is quite a bit cheaper here than in Sweden, so it got into my head to really economize. But at first I could not make up my mind about the price range and what kind of camera I wanted: a big one with good optical zoom, or a small convenient one. Eventually I settled for a Nikon CoolPix 3200. It looks nice, and I know it takes good pictures because my son has a similar one. As you understand, I had been to lot of shops. Wal-mart was quite cheap with the price tag at \$228, and I grew tired driving around looking in different places. Of course I had checked out Pricegrabber dotcom. There were some really cheap online stores there, going down to \$189. But there is a problem. Once you've chosen a site at the lower end of the price range, you decide to buy. But then you have to enter personal information. Well you know, it takes some time to do. Then you find out the real price with taxes, fees and delivery, and it surfaces at \$238. And you have to wait an arbitrary number of days for delivery. Some places were closed down due to the hurricane Ivan. OK, let's try again with another one. Same thing happens. Why am I doing this? To save dollar ten?

I drove to Wal-mart. They did not have the camera in store. Next day I drove to next Wal-mart up on the Northway outside Glen Falls. No camera. So I ended up buying the camera for \$249 plus tax at a real camera store, the Ritz cameras in the Wilton shopping mall. The guy was nice, and I got a some of extra useless stuff. Satisfied I drove home with the goddamned camera. I decided not to buy anything in the next four weeks.

* * *

I woke up Saturday morning after a long good nights sleep to the sound of rain on the roof.

Meeting Sheldon Rothblatt last Sunday solved an internal problem. I've

been torn between my natural urge to hit the road and investigate the back country and an equally strong desire to sit down and do some serious intellectual work. As I said to Sheldon over dinner, it does not make sense to spend these precious months on two lane highways. But of course, Sheldon encouraged me to do some traveling, although I'm not quite sure that we were thinking about the same kind of places. But that's not the point. After contemplating our nice conversation later that night, I decided to do some traveling after all, but only in New York State and New England. That's why I bought some books on the region on Monday. I started to read them during the week that passed. So my initial plan was to drive down to Cobleskill on Saturday and drive up into the Adirondack mountains on Sunday.

But now the rain did not make the Cobleskill trip look any attractive, so I decided to stay home and read and perhaps just take a short trip to Schuylerville, or perhaps just take a walk in the neighborhood and try out the new camera. And there was a rationale for skipping the Cobleskill trip. The book I've been reading divided New York State in different parts to visit. I've read about the mountains, but not about the region to the south, the Mohawk Valley and that's where Cobleskill is situated. So why not just make one good trip to the mountains tomorrow and wait with Cobleskill and do that next weekend and do the Mohawk valley at the same time?

So I sat down in the study with the cat in my lap and with coffee within reach and started to read in "Science and the Ultimate Reality", a collection of papers from a conference celebrating John Archibald Wheelers ninetieth birthday.

Wheeler is an extremely influential American physicist who, apart from doing lots of solid mainstream physics, is also known for posing the really big fundamental questions like "How come existence?" i.e. *why* is there a universe, and how come there is intelligent beings within it who can think about it? Another one of Wheelers questions is "How come the quantum?". Now, this is a question that perhaps only makes sense to physicists, but the bottom line is easy enough. According to modern physics everything in the world, at least microscopic things like atoms and even smaller elementary particles are described according to a theory called Quantum Mechanics. In the early decades of the last century this theory replaced, what subsequently became to be known as "Classical Mechanics", as a fundamental theory of matter. Quantum mechanics has certain non-intuitive aspects, not surprisingly perhaps, since it primarily applies to sub microscopic things that we can only study indirectly using elaborate apparatus. But according to the paradigm of quantum mechanics, the theory really applies to everything in

the universe, also macroscopic things. Thus we get a lot of problems to discuss. One of them is to understand its non-intuitive aspects, a second is to understand why these non-intuitive aspects do not show up in everyday macroscopic phenomena. For those of you who are interested in pursuing this topic for a while, I have included the section below. If you're not interested, just jump the next section, but before you do that just let me say one more thing about Wheeler. His question "How come the quantum?" is meant to dig deeper into the structure of reality and try to find a rationale for quantum mechanics. Another of Wheeler's catch phrases is "it from bit". This is meant to capture the idea that perhaps reality, *it*, can be derived from *bit* i.e. from a theory of information and computation. This is really a form of the speculation that the universe is a computer, placing this Wheeler-ism squarely within the topics of my Skidmore course. That's why I was reading this book.

Later that day, while cooking myself some lunch, Steve Goodwin called me on the phone. He and Sarah had seen a play at the Rensselaer Polytechnical institute last night. It was "The Fly Bottle", A Shakespeare & Company Production of a play by David Egan about the three philosophers Karl Popper, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell. Since we now and then touch base in philosophy in my course, Steve thought I might be interested. I did not realize it while speaking to Steve, but the play is about a famous debate between Wittgenstein and Popper that took place at the Moral Science Club in England on October 25 in 1946. I cannot refrain from citing the presentation of the play:⁹

"Wittgenstein was the club's chairman and Popper the invited speaker. Russell was in attendance. Speaker and chairman had never met before, and the two were in the same room for only ten minutes before Wittgenstein stormed out in a rage. The two are said to have engaged in a heated exchange that culminated in Wittgenstein's vigorously gesturing with (some say brandishing) a poker that hung by the fireplace. Eyewitness accounts differ considerably, and the play confronts this disparity by examining the event from multiple perspectives. One of those eyewitnesses was Bertrand Russell, the eminence grise of British philosophy ...

... In scrutinizing the triangle of mutual mistrust and respect between these three philosophers, the play explores the complex matrix of the history, philosophy, and psychology behind the ideas that shaped our world, says Egan. Nearly 30 years later (Wittgenstein safely dead), Popper bemusedly retold his version of events in his autobiography. The story was met with

⁹EMPAC Rensselaer, Experimental Media & Performing Arts Center.

outrage by Wittgenstein's devoted followers, and a heated exchange ensued between Popperians and Wittgensteinians in the pages of the Times Literary Supplement ... Those ten minutes at the Moral Science Club have had no discernable impact on the course of Western philosophy and yet they have been made the subject of memoirs, articles, a best-selling book, and now a full-length play."

Since I had heard about this incredible story,¹⁰ I hurriedly reserved tickets. There's nothing like a piece of real life philosophy if you want to cheer yourself up on a Saturday night! At least as long as it is not Derrida.

So a few hours later, Olof and I drove down to Troy and found the Rensselaer Polytechnic without trouble. We parked in a dark parking lot on the campus, and managed to ask our way to the Biotechnology Building where the play was. It was a beautiful modern auditorium, and the play was very good. I really enjoyed it. It depicted Popper as a somewhat naive, but earnest philosopher.

Popper is special as a philosopher in that he actually solved some problems. He solved the long time problem of induction by finally having the courage to say outright that it is quite useless as method of science. Furthermore he proposed a theory of science that actually described the way science is conducted in reality, and not just in the imagination of philosophers of science.

Popper's ideas, towards which I'm generally sympathetic, came across. At this time he had "The Open Society and its Enemies" behind him. Wittgenstein came off as a choleric, disillusioned man, fed up with philosophy. Perhaps not surprisingly, since he considered himself to have solved all philosophical problems and that what remained was mere "puzzles". Russell was the world and time weary old philosopher who had come to realize the basic futility of philosophical thought. I don't know to what extent this is true historically, but as the play had it, Russell had exhausted his mental powers trying to base all of mathematics on logic together with Alfred North Whitehead during the first decade of the twentieth century, producing the three volume work "Principia Mathematica". There is a joke among mathematicians that only two people have read these volumes cover to cover, namely Bertrand and Alfred themselves.¹¹

When I was a teenager, our local library had a copy of a book Russell wrote in 1900 as a kind of prelude, "The Principles of Mathematics". I

¹⁰D. Edmonds and J. Eidinow, *Wittgenstein's Poker*, Ecco 2002.

¹¹Seriously, logicians and mathematicians like Rudolf Carnap, Hans Hahn and Kurt Gödel read it at the time.

borrowed it, but did not get very far. But I read most of Russell's other books which are much more accessible. Those were the works that now were derided as light-weight and popular by Wittgenstein in this Rensselaer Polytechnic auditorium. How strange are not the twists of life.

* * *

On Sunday I made that Adirondack trip. I left home at 9.15 a.m. and drove out of town on route 9 West. It was a nice morning and I enjoyed the first 25 westward miles through rural countryside, with the mountains to my right. It was a bit early for autumn colors, but you could see a hint of yellow in the trees. In Broadalbin, I turned north on route 30 towards the mountains. At 10.20 am, I pulled up by the shore of Great Sacandaga Lake. This is the lake where a UFO crashed after being hit by a Air-force fighter plane in the "Time Fugit" episode of the X-files season 4.

My initial plan had been to drive up to the Adirondack Museum, but of course I realized that it was not possible in one day, so I reverted to plan B, which was to drive to Speculator. This town drew my attention because of its name, I thought there must be a great outlook over the mountains there. Well, as you might guess, I was disappointed, and I hastily left the town the same way as I had arrived. I drove on through a hilly, woody landscape and I did see a lot of trees, but it was not exactly exciting. As I pulled into the small town of Johnsburg, I had the good sense to stop and eat at a diner. I was beginning to get hungry, and this was the kind of situation where, if you press on, you will not find a decent place to eat, and you will sit fuming behind the wheel cursing yourself for not having stopped in the place you passed 25 miles before. I had a good dinner of turkey, mashed potatoes, and what I first thought must be hominy, but I don't think it was. Never mind what it was, it was delicious. I took a walk up and down the main street taking a lot of photos. I can't imagine using a chemical camera again.

The rest of the trip was a nice drive, but that was all. I drove through the apparently very small town of Sodom without noticing. Isn't that strange. I mean, at the very least you would expect some smell of sulphur? I passed a place outside Luzern where you can go on horse-back riding trails through the wood. They were open through October weekends. I was home at 4.15 p.m., 165 miles later. I went to the fridge to get a beer as my first action.

3.7 Crash course on Quantum Mechanics ‡

It would be an exaggeration to say that quantum mechanics is a buzz word, but it is certainly something that the liberally educated person has heard about. It belongs to science, and science is nowadays considered to be a more or less accepted beast in the zoo of the liberal curriculum. In fact, it is the black sheep, but more on that later.

Words like uncertainty, non-determinism and probabilities are often associated with quantum mechanics, making the whole business sound scary. The reader might perhaps have heard about the abominable Uncertainty Relations of Werner Heisenberg?

Fortunately, I can relieve the reader of any fear. There is nothing uncertain about quantum mechanics. But before explaining why it is so, let me also dispel another misunderstanding. There is nothing mechanical about quantum mechanics. The "mechanics" in the name derives from the historical context that the theory was discovered within.

In the second part of the 19th century, physics seemed to be in good shape. The mechanical theory of Newton was two hundred years old and still going strong. It was applicable to everything from the solar system to windmills and machines, except electric and magnetic phenomena. But these phenomena and the mathematical formulae describing them were synthesized by James Clerk Maxwell into a comprehensive theory. Perhaps then, it was natural to expect that everything in reality could be explained by combining these two grand theories, the mechanics of Newton and the electromagnetism of Maxwell. But it was not to be. From the middle of the 19th century, the emission and absorption of light by matter was studied. In parallel, chemistry had disentangled itself from the hermetic grip of alchemy. Matter was conceived as being made of atoms. Obviously it was the atoms that were responsible for spectra.

The emission and absorption of light by matter had been known for a long time when the phenomena was systematically studied in the 19th century. The phenomena can be observed in your own kitchen. If you boil potatoes in salted water on a gas stove, it might happen that some water spills over the rim of the pot. Then the flame, which is normally blue, turns brightly yellow. This yellow color comes from the emission of yellow light from the sodium atoms that are part of salt. It can also be observed by just throwing some dry salt into the flame. What happens is that the atoms of sodium in the salt absorb heat energy from the flame and subsequently emit this energy in the form of light of a certain frequency corresponding to bright yellow.

All elements absorb and emit energy in the form of electromagnetic radiation. The experimental study of these phenomena is called spectroscopy and the diagrams of absorbed and emitted energy are called spectra.

It was clear to the physicists of the 19th century that the study of atomic spectra yielded clues to the inner structure of atoms. In practice one had to heat the elements in order to study their spectra. This had two effects, apart from absorbing energy, the elements were gasified. It was clear that the regular spectra one found could not be due to the irregular motion of the molecules and atoms in the gas, but had to come from the interior of the particles themselves. The fact that each and every element absorbed and emitted radiation at definite wavelengths hinted at an inner structure. It was natural at this time to associate the spectra with some kind of internal vibrations of the atoms, possible of their electrically charged constituents. But none of the classical models of the atoms worked.

The electron had been discovered by J.J. Thomson in 1897 in experiments with electrical discharges in vacuum tubes. The electron was considered to be a constituent of the atom. To compensate for the negative electric charge of the electrons, the atoms were supposed to contain the corresponding amount of positive charge. But the nature of this positive charge was not known. There were various models proposed. One of them was Thomson's "plum-pudding" model in which the electrons were supposed to be embedded in a homogenous background of positive charge, much like the plums of a pudding. The plum-pudding model was falsified by the famous experiments of the young Rutherford. By radiating thin foils of gold by alpha particles, Rutherford could show that all the positive charge of the atom was concentrated in an extremely small nucleus. The rest of the atom was essentially nothingness, except for the electrons moving about far from the nucleus.

There were different models of the inner structure of the atom. Actually, the history of atomic models is very complicated as might be expected when we are considering structures that are submicroscopic in size. That is, there is no way to *see* atoms, even less so see inside them. All evidence as to their inner structure is indirect and derives from the spectra of emission and absorption of light. No matter what model of the atom was proposed, when Newtonian mechanics and electromagnetic theory was applied to such a system, it implied that the system could not be stable. To interpret the spectra, and to use the spectra to build models of the inner structure of atoms was a tremendous achievement of the human intellect. No wonder then that the road is scattered by the wrecks of discarded models that did

not work.¹²

At last, Niels Bohr proposed his atomic model which fundamentally departed from classical mechanics. The new theory that was subsequently developed became known as Quantum Mechanics. The old Newtonian mechanics became known as Classical Mechanics.

Thus, far from making the world uncertain, quantum mechanics is in fact responsible for the very stability of matter! A world governed by the equations of classical mechanics would be very different from the one we are familiar with. Indeed, we would not be around to worry about it. And far from being just a mechanics, quantum theory is thought to apply to everything in the physical world, it is like an overarching paradigm for every description of fundamental physics. Perhaps not surprisingly, it has a few un-intuitive aspects that has puzzled physicists and in particular philosophers of science ever since the mid 1920's. It will take us too far to pursue this topic, suffice it to say that quantum mechanics is an essential ingredient in the course I'm giving at Skidmore. And John Wheeler, referred to above, is one of the most original thinkers that has grappled with the question of the role of quantum theory in the understanding of reality.

3.8 The fifth week

It was an uneventful week. It was a sunny week and for a change I walked to college a couple of days taking pictures on the way. It is just one and a half mile and takes just about fifteen minutes. My course had got onto the tracks, and I wrote up the contents of my classes in a series of lecture notes. I also started to plan which courses to attend to myself in order to get an impression how teaching is done here. Olof said his teachers were very good, but naturally I wanted to get first impressions myself. I planned to go to classes in mathematics, physics and computer science as well as in subjects outside my own expertise. Since I'm interested in American history, I took a look on what was on offer. I found a course on American Colonial History.

Then I got conflicting referee reports on the paper I wrote in early spring, so I had to think of a good answer to that. I did some thinking on my research project. I read a lot of research papers pertaining to this project, and strangely enough, it started to interact with the course itself. Or perhaps it was not so strange after all. My research project is about applying computer science concepts and methods to a notoriously difficult problem

¹²For those who wants to study this history, a good reference is A. Pais, *Inward Bound, Of Matter and Forces in the Physical World*, Oxford University Press, 1986

in field theory that I started to work on as a PhD student in the 80's. So in a way it is contingent to the kind of questions we were discussing in my course.

In this context, I must say something about the college library, the Scribner Library. This is a fantastic library. The building is beautiful both outside and inside. Not being primarily a research library, it nevertheless has an impressive collection of books. At least as far I can judge within my fields of expertise. You can't find research journals, but when it comes to books, it has a good collection of standard texts on all levels as well as popular books. It is a true pleasure, and a little bit painful, just to browse the shelves. So many books, so little time!

On Saturday I finally summoned the courage to drive down to Cobleskill. I say summoned the courage, because the problem is that looking on the map, it seems so far away. Furthermore, you have to cross the Mohawk River and Interstate 90. These lie on the map as thick blue and red ribbons dividing the Adirondack region from the Mohawk region. I remembered talking to the lady in the western store where I had bought my hat in the spring. She said that it *is* another region. And it was. I drove south on route 50 and veered to the west onto route 67 in Ballston Spa towards Amsterdam. As I neared the Mohawk valley a chilly fog blotted out the sun and draped everything in grey. It cleared up in Amsterdam and I blundered into the outskirts of town not knowing where I was. Driving down an arbitrary road, I suddenly came to a kind of overlook. I stopped for a while admiring the houses and the outlook over the river that was barely visible beyond the trees. After taking a set of photos I found my way towards the river. But I had to circle downtown Amsterdam twice before I could negotiate the Mohawk.

It was already past twelve and there was no time for the other sights that I had noted on the way. For those who are interested in large scale engineering of the 19th century, there is a place on the Mohawk river called Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site where one has collected artifacts from the Erie canal. I would have enjoyed seeing this, but it would be crazy to get off the highway and search for that place, it could take hours.

So I pressed on in the general direction of Cobleskill. The countryside changed. This was farming country, rolling hills and pastures, of to infinity. No not really, to the south, the next immense mountain range hovered on the horizon, the Catskill mountains. And beyond that lay Pennsylvania. Sometimes, I find this enormous country depressing. So much space, so little time. I have one dream. When I get old and retire, I want to spend three months in this country every year behind the steering wheel investigating

every nook and cranny. One-day round trips like the one I was on this very day just doesn't make sense, you can't go in circles.

This was once the country of the Mohawk of the Iroquois federation, the first united states. In my ears this rings romantic. As a child I once found an abbreviated, as I now understand, translation of "The Last of the Mohicans" in a closet in my grandparents home on one of those boring Sunday afternoon dinners where you just want to get home to play. I could hardly read it, but the picture on the cover captured my imagination.

Suddenly, I came upon the museum. It wasn't located in the city of Cobleskill itself as I had imagined, but some miles outside of town. I must admit I got a bit disappointed by the museum. It did not speak to me, I didn't learn about the Iroquois as I had expected. I took a walk on the trails behind the museum, but the heat soon brought me back. I bought a CD with native American music. I also bought a book collecting stories written by people who had ventured, for various reasons, into Mohawk country during the 17th and 18th centuries, eye witnesses report so to speak. The book was one of many results of the Mohawk Valley Project that ran in the 1980's. This was a project to rescue as much as possible of the archaeological information about the Mohawk Valley and the native people who once lived there. A part of the project became to collect eye-witnesses reports.¹³

3.9 The sixth week

It began to get hard to distinguish the weeks in my memory, a sure sign that routine was setting in. For lunch I often had one or two pizza slices at the Spa down at the Case College Center. It was really out of convenience, there were other counters to chose from, but the pizza place was the fastest, and with a Pineapple Mango Medley Tropicana Antioxidant Boost Smoothie for drink, the slices tasted alright.

As regards my course, I had been lecturing a lot for the three or so weeks it had been running, and I felt it was time to get the students engaged. On Tuesday I rounded up the first stretch which had been a kind of walking through parts of fundamental physics, and asked the students to think back on what we've been going over and prepare questions till Thursday. It actually worked, I got questions and comments, and the Thursday class turned out to be more of a discussion. So I asked the students to get down to reading the first book so that we could discuss it next week.

¹³D. R. Snow, C. T. Gehring and W. A. Starna (eds), *In Mohawk Country, Early Narratives about a Native People*, Syracuse University Press, 1996

This week I also started to visit other teachers classes. I went to a Calculus I class with Mark Huibregtse on Tuesday. Then on Friday I went to Quantum Mechanics with David Atkatz. Both these professors are sitting in on my course so it felt natural to ask them to visit some of their classes. As I had expected, these were good classes, but at the same time not very different from what we do at home. Not surprisingly, science is taught much the same way everywhere.

One Wednesday afternoon I went to a class on American Colonial History with professor Tad Kuroda. I had planned to visit classes outside my own expertise, and I chose this one since I'm interested in American history. And it was really interesting. This class was about Bacon's Rebellion and slavery in Virginia in 17th century. I decided to follow this course just for the fun of it.

Bob DeSieno picked me up on Friday morning just before nine to go to a Science Planning Group meeting. Two topics that were discussed at this meeting was the campaign to strengthen the sciences and the Middle States accreditation process. I will tell about these things later on.

In the afternoon there was a faculty meeting that I almost missed. Olof had just peeked in together with his friend Ben to say that they were driving out to Boston and would be away until Saturday night. After that I got absorbed in thinking about strongly homotopy Lie algebras. But around 3 p.m., there was some perambulation in the corridor outside my office that woke me up. This was the meeting where the final debate and decision to replace the Liberal Studies course with the First Year Studies course took place, and it would have been a real blunder to miss it. I often do blunders, but seldom real big blunders.

* * *

After the meeting I drove downtown. I went to Putnam Market, a nice deli on Broadway. Since my wife and daughter would arrive in Saratoga in two weeks time, I wanted to prepare some nice food for a celebration. They would arrive a Friday night at 6 p.m. if there would to be no delays. So I figured that even if they were tired after a long journey we would have a nice Friday evening together. I bought some Parma ham, some Italian salami and a piece of Shropshire Blue. I had already bought some California red wine in another downtown store.

I bought Newsweek. They featured an article about Bob Dylan's biography that was due to be published in just a few days. I started to read the article at the Starbucks, but soon my thoughts wandered to the food I had bought. So I drove home to the quiet and empty house, put on a Dwight

Yoakam record, poured me some of the wine and made a tomato-mozzarella salad. I sprinkled it with salt, pepper, olive oil and balsamic vinegar. With bread and Parma it was delicious, not to speak of the wine. I sat reading the Newsweek article as dusk fell outside the kitchen windows.

I cannot refrain from making a few reflections. Now, writing about Dylan is just about the most corny thing you can do, but bear with me. I grew up listening to Dylan, as many others did around the world. But since I was a bit too young, I started to listen to the 65-66 records, only later going back to the early 60's folk-days. My clearest memory was when "Positively Fourth Street" was on the air. The people on the radio and in the "pop" magazines you read in Sweden all spoke how difficult the songs were and that nobody understood them. I always found this annoying. Of course you understood the songs! Only, I did not, but that was not the point. I think most normal people who listened to Dylan understood that these were just songs, just like the man himself told the journalists, but they could not take it in. It was too simple that they were just songs. But they were personal songs, clever songs, general songs, so that many people could relate to them no matter where they lived or age or anything. That is, a sign of great art. But this was apparently totally lost on the journalists.

Reading the excerpt was, in way, sad reading. How the man was persecuted in the late 60's by the press and weirdos of all sorts! If you listened carefully, Dylan had all along claimed that he is and never was any spokesman of any generation. To me, and I think to many others, this was obvious.

In a way, I feel ashamed that I drove all the way up from Chicago to Hibbing, Minnesota in 1997, just to see the town he grew up in. As anyone knows who has done a silly thing like that, there is nothing to see. It is just a small American town. I think there is a little museum, but when I went into the tourist center and asked two old ladies with big blue beehive hairdos, in there about it, they did not first know who I was talking about. Then one of them lighted up and said "Oh, you mean Bobby Dajlon, that singer?" She actually said "Dajlon". But she did not know where the museum was, so I left and just foolishly drove up and down the main street trying to imagine it was a bleary fifties winter day with everything in black and white. It was then that I drove a mile out of town to have a look at the Mesabi range. When the mining operations edged their way towards the town, it was simply dismantled and moved. You can still see the square pattern of blocks and streets, and some of the street corner signs are still there. Very strange.

How many times have we not read artists, authors and other creative

people say that everything is in their art, there is nothing else to see. If you read biographies and memoirs, I think you will see that the people themselves are just like you and me. There is nothing extraordinary about their lives, except their art.

I think Dylan's music is quintessential American. It is songs about America, a timeless America. The man himself is also very much American. There is this scene in Paris way back in 1966 when Dylan is waving an American flag and people in the audience shouts him down about the Vietnam war, and Dylan draws back: "You started it!" This says much about European hypocrisy.

He was just an extremely talented kid having a good time, but the lefties thought he was new messiah about to bring down capitalism. If you listen carefully to some of the old records, especially the jokes between songs, you realize that he was also a very funny kid. He was a singer-songwriter-comedian. I think he really couldn't care less about bringing down capitalism, and it wouldn't surprise me that deep inside the cronies knew this all along, that's why they became so furious when Dylan picked up an electric guitar and started to pump out songs celebrating chaotic crazy America. Many of his songs are really funny. That does not mean he was not critical.

OK, I've said this much, now I won't write any more about Bobby Dajlon, I promise.

* * *

Before closing the report on this week, I must comment on my coin collection. At this stage, I was actually a bit mystified. I had just got New York State the other day, but before that it had been a stand still for weeks as far as new states went. I'd got some doublets, but that was all. For a while, I kept on getting new Rhode Island and Texas, and other states that I got early on. That made me formulate a tentative theory that at first seemed plausible. If you keep track of the order in which you get the coins, and assuming that they are equally probable, then you would expect to get more of the coins that you got early on. Of course, they might not be equally probable if there is some regional bias.

3.10 Skidmore College - some of the facts ‡

In the logotype for Skidmore College there are two years inscribed; 1911 and 1922. But the college was in fact founded in 1903 by Lucy Skidmore Scribner as a school for young women under the name "Young Women's

Industrial Club of Saratoga". Mrs Scribner started the school as a response to the lack of any practical educational opportunities for women in Saratoga Springs. The industrial club was so successful that in 1911 it was chartered by the New York Board of Regents as the "Skidmore School of Arts". The school was named for Mrs. Scribner's father, Joseph Russell Skidmore. Then in 1922, the school was chartered as Skidmore College, a four-year degree-granting institution. A liberal arts curriculum was developed that became the basis for Skidmore's present curriculum. At this time, the college was located in downtown Saratoga Springs in several Victorian Mansions overlooking Congressional park. It continued to grow in this setting up to the 1960's. A library, an infirmary, residence halls, and dining halls were built. Old homes were bought and became dormitories. Carriage houses became classrooms, studios, and laboratories. But eventually the college grew out of its downtown setting. At that time, a board member of the Skidmore College Board of Trustees, Erik Jonsson and his wife, Margaret, offered an alternative to the difficulties of maintaining and restoring the old campus. The Jonsson family donated sufficient funds to purchase a 650-acre tract on the outskirts of the city. The construction of what is now known as the Jonsson Campus started in 1964. After the move to the new campus the college was transformed from a women's college to a co-educational college.

Of course, parallel, to this physical transformation and growth of the college there is a history of curriculum development and recruitment of qualified faculty as well as work on securing the financial stability of the college. The sciences, though, are a relative newcomer at Skidmore.

So it is clear that Skidmore is a fairly "young" college. Such outstanding parts of the campus as the outdoor sports arena and the Tang Teaching Museum dates from the last twenty years.

Today, Skidmore college has 2200 students. It is ranked as number 45 on the U.S. News and World Report (a magazine), and it is thus considered to belong to the top-tier of liberal arts colleges. I'm not at all surprised by this, I saw quality shining almost at once during my planning trip in April. And that leads me over to the next section.

3.11 Skidmore College - my impressions ‡

It seems to me that Skidmore College is very well organized. As far as I can judge there are routines and procedures for everything that is needed to run a college. Of course there are problems also, but the fact that the college staff and faculty is aware of these also speaks for the college being well run.

One also seems to be realistic about what problems can be solved by working systematically and what problems are not that easily solved. In the first category comes the campaign to strengthen the sciences. In the second category comes the fact that Skidmore is very homogenous college. Diversity is a problem, but perhaps not in the way we see it in Sweden. In Sweden, diversity becomes a problem when we have it, here it is a problem when they don't have it.

I went to a Pedagogy Meeting on September 10. This is a regular event that occurs twice a semester taking up various issues having to do with education and college life. This one was about diversity, mostly cultural and racial¹⁴, but also political. Although upstate New York is predominantly republican, Skidmore College students are roughly 90 percent democratic. Apparently republican students may occasionally feel like outsiders.

A wide range of questions were discussed at this meeting. We were presented with some pages of statistics pertaining to the diversity issue. Some were the expected issues of minority students sometimes feeling outside and special and the problem that this might lead to. But what dominated the discussion was more like mainstream white-American students expecting to meet young people from other strata of society; Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, republicans, gays, et cetera. But they don't, because Skidmore is so homogenous. Skidmore has a policy for issues having to do with the problems diversity can lead to. I refer the reader to the Skidmore College web page. But the problem of how to make the college more diverse is not that easily solved.

Then one student brought up the fact that there are examples of students and even faculty using derogatory statements about other people. So, all is not well, but that is not to be expected. But what struck me most was not the strategies to deal with the problems arising from diversity, but rather the wish to provide more diversity at the college. Again I was impressed by the head-on, realistic way Americans tend to deal with problems. On the practical side, the students are required to complete one course in a foreign language, and one course designated as either "non-Western culture" or "cultural diversity study". The aim of these requirements are for the students to learn that culturally based perspectives and values are not universal and thus enhance their ability to interact with persons from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Then it can't be denied that there is a certain naiveness over the college. But this is a naiveness that I find very much American, and not in particular

¹⁴People use the word "race" in non-intimidating way here.

Skidmorish. I remember one discussion I had with Sarah Goodwin the second week I was at Skidmore. She told me about the fierce competition between colleges and the focus on academic achievement and excellence, and that this has the paradoxical consequence that everyone claims to be, or at least wants to be above average. So in American education, everyone is above average!

I got the impression that there is an open-minded, easy-going atmosphere permeating college life. Its a young college, still working on finding its character. A back side of this might be a certain laid-back, easy-going attitude among the students.

3.12 Liberal arts at Skidmore College ‡

The Skidmore Curriculum, which could be considered as the local implementation of the platonic *Liberal Arts Idea*, is built from a set of components. Let me, for once, be a bit systematic here, freely quoting from the Skidmore College Catalog where convenient. I will also intersperse my own comments for the readers convenience. Here are the components:

1. Foundation

The idea here is to strengthen the incoming students' writing proficiency and capabilities of quantitative reasoning. "*The ability to read critically, to write clearly and precisely, and to reason quantitatively lie at the heart of a liberal arts education.*" This is implemented by requiring the students to complete one designated writing course by the end of the first year. The quantitative reasoning requirement is implemented by a range of mathematics, computer, economics, and statistics courses, but also by faculty support. "*All students will demonstrate competence in basic mathematical and computational principles by the end of the sophomore year.*"

I would like to comment on the balance apparent here. It is just not reading and writing that is stressed (as so often one-sidedly in Sweden) but also quantitative reasoning. In my opinion, requiring educated people who eventually chose a career in the humanities or social sciences, or any non-natural science area of knowledge, to get a basic understanding of science and computation, is just as important in a modern technology based society, as it is for people who chose the sciences to get a basic understanding of other human issues.

2. Interdisciplinary Study

"The ability to integrate ideas from several different disciplines lends coherence to a student's entire college education and may be applied to many areas of life."

Up till the present academic year this objective have been implemented by the courses Liberal Studies 1 (LS1) and 2 (LS2). LS1, titled "Human Dilemmas" *introduces all first-year students to contemporary problems shaping our human experience and initiates students into thinking critically about complex topics such as human identities, justice, and human ecologies*" This course has been run as a series of lectures and seminar discussions centered on designated texts and reading assignments. As I will try to tell below, this course is now given for the last time, being replaced by what is called First Year Seminars.

3. Breadth

The purpose of the breadth requirement is it to *"ensure that students come to know and understand the central questions, content, and type of analysis that characterize the major knowledge domains of liberal arts: the arts, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences."* Well, this speaks for itself, I think. In practice, the requirement is implemented by the students completing one course each in the mentioned fields.

4. Culture-Centered Inquiry

This one I have already commented on above.

This constitutes the core curriculum. Based on this, the students chose subjects for their majors and minor, usually at the end of the sophomore (second) year.¹⁵ Skidmore offers bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degrees.

3.13 Skidmore College in transition ‡

It seems that I happened to arrive at Skidmore at very interesting time, a time of changes and transitions. On the other hand, reading the colleges history, it might be that this liberal arts college is more or less in constant flux. Be that as it may, at this time at least three important processes are

¹⁵freshman=1st year student, sophomore=2nd year student, junior=3rd year student, senior=4th year student

going on. One is the Middle States accreditation process, a second one is the replacement of Liberal Studies with the First-Year Seminar, more about this later on, and a third one is the campaign to strengthen Skidmore's profile in the sciences. I will try to describe and evaluate these in turn in the next sections.

The Middle States accreditation

Colleges are periodically "reviewed". In this part of the United States, the mid-Atlantic states, a regional accreditation agency, referred to as the "Middle States", oversees this review process and the accreditation of colleges. Every 10 years colleges have to undertake a self-study in which they present information that proves they comply with the standards to be an accredited liberal arts college. Those standards are systematically laid out and address most aspects of the college, including; finances, buildings, student advising, academic freedom and integrity, the quality of the faculty, resources, et cetera.

According to Sarah Goodwin, who directs the process at Skidmore, colleges have to document everything and write a self-study, and it is a quite tedious process. But now a new process have been established that allows colleges to limit the self-study to a focused topic, and write only about that. But still, documentation in the form of data, reports, and other documents must be provided proving that the college comply with all the standards.

There is no ranking involved with the Middle States process, as I first mistakenly thought. Colleges either get accredited or they don't. There is of course no risk of Skidmore not being accredited, but in the process the college will be publicly visible, and it is important that everything goes well.

The Middle States accreditation process begins fall semester 2004 and will last two years.

The college's leadership has decided to conduct a focused review. The focus is on the ways Skidmore is planning for and working to increase the degree of students' engagement in their education. Within that focus, three areas will be studied closely

- designing a new model for the students' first-year experience
- strengthening the sciences and recruiting students earlier and in greater numbers into the sciences
- engaging the students more fully in a more culturally diverse environment and course of study

One of the reasons behind this focus is the problems Skidmore presently have with first year student engagement and retention rates. Last year, Skidmore participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Somewhat to the surprise of the college, the data showed that Skidmore freshmen students are less engaged than freshmen students at aspirant and peer colleges, while the same data for senior students show that they are fully engaged at a level equal to or greater than peer institutions. This data has been confirmed by other information gathered by college projects and committees. As regards retention rates, Skidmore typically lose 10% or more of the first year class after the first year, while similar colleges in general do not. For some students, Skidmore is a springboard to more prestigious colleges.

It speaks of a serious attitude to chose a topic for the self-study where the college have problems, and not an area where everything is fine. And I can not refrain from quoting a document outlining the self study¹⁶, since once again we find this emphasis on the role of the faculty:

"All of them relate to what we see as a major challenge for the college: to increase the degree to which our students, from the moment they arrive, eagerly and energetically undertake the transformation essential to the liberal arts education. The key to that transformation is, of course, the faculty, and we understand in this review that the faculty, in their passion for their own professional work, exemplify engaged learning for our students."

Liberal Studies or First Year Seminar

During my fall term stay at Skidmore, the faculty made an important decision to change one important feature of the first year student experience when arriving at Skidmore. The Liberal Studies courses in the first and second year have been in place for the last twenty years, and has been a distinctly "Skidmore" experience, especially designed for the freshman students entering the college.

I don't think that I've been able to understand all aspects of the debate and the reasons behind this transition. But off what I've been able to glean from the discussions I've heard and what I've read, it seems that, over the years, it has been increasingly difficult to staff LS1. Apparently the enthusiasm of the faculty, or parts off it, has waned. Perhaps as a result of the workload in the other "disciplinary" courses. I get the impression that the college is somewhat understaffed. Thus, the LS1 have been staffed

¹⁶Middle States Accreditation, Design for the Self-Study, Skidmore College 2004.

to some extent with adjunct teachers, and adjunct faculty have been hired to fill in for tenured faculty who are doing LS1. The problem with this being that temporarily hired teachers cannot be expected to project that special "Skidmore" approach. But I think that the faculty still agrees on the ideas behind LS1, its just that the implementation does not work out well any more. Another problem was that faculty found themselves teaching in sections of the LS1 outside their own expertise. Then, Skidmore has some problems in retaining its first year students, as some students transfer out of Skidmore to larger, or more renowned schools. This adds to the impetus to do something to the first year.

The new implementation, called First Year Seminar (FYS), has been developed for two years by the CEPP (Committee for Educational Policies and Planning), an elected group of faculty, staff and students with the purpose of recommencing long-range educational plans for the college.

FYS is meant to be part of a broader context for the freshmen, called First Year Experience (FYE), thus hoping to be able to address the problems with decreasing retention rates. FYE involves, apart from curricular aspects of the first year, also co-curricular and residential aspects.

So what's the difference? As I understand it, The FYS will consist of a set of courses taught by faculty members within their own respective field of expertise, based on their own academic interests and research, The hope being that allowing the faculty to teach topics close to their research interests will help building community and relationship between students and faculty, and that the intellectual enthusiasm of the teachers will encourage the students to take their studies seriously and begin to appreciate a "life of the mind".

These courses are not required to interdisciplinary, even though it is hoped that many of them will be. The new set up is also meant to be flexible enough for parts of the LS1 and LS2 to be integrated if faculty wants to do so.

The teachers of the FYS will serve as mentors and advisers to the students. One tool in this is the new Reflection and Projection Plan (RAP). This is meant to be an academic plan constructed before the students enter the college and then routinely revised, with the help of mentors and faculty, throughout the college years. The point of the RAP being to focus the student's engagement and ownership of his or her own personal academic vision.¹⁷

At the faculty meeting when the final decision was made, several faculty

¹⁷First-Year Seminar Proposal, CEPP, Skidmore College.

members aired their concerns about the FYS proposal. I got the impression that this was concerns that has been formulated for a long time. One was that by letting the students chose from a set of FYS courses, some of them, or many of them would just chose topics that they were already interested in, and would thus miss the opportunity to come across new subjects and ideas. Another concern was that the inter disciplinarity would be lost. Some teachers feel confident giving interdisciplinary courses themselves, others do not.

But as the clock neared 5 p.m., I detected a certain weariness of the discussion, and someone proposed the meeting to go to a vote. FYS won the vote by 93 yes, 44 no and 3 abstained. In the end, the transition was inevitable.

The science campaign

On October 1, I was invited by Bob DeSieno to a meeting with the Science Planning Group. One topic off this meeting was the "vision" or "campaign" for the sciences that Skidmore is planning to undertake.

Skidmore is a liberal arts college. Traditionally, the Sciences has not belonged to liberal education. But of course, in the modern world it does not make sense to exclude science from the curriculum. It should perhaps be noted that by the term "science" is meant what in Sweden should be termed "natural science", though at Skidmore, psychology is also included. So Skidmore, as most other liberal arts colleges, I presume, has a science curriculum. Furthermore, Skidmore is in the process of strengthening its profile in the sciences.

Charles Joseph spoke briefly about the background and the plans to raise new funds from the board of trustees for such a campaign. But you can not just ask the trustees for money, any such proposal must be backed by firm analysis of needs, firm plans for how the new funds should be used and what the expected gains would be. Let me cite from the minutes for the meeting: *"... the leadership of the College is committed to strengthening the natural sciences, to increasing the populations of students who major in these disciplines, to enhancing their educational experiences, to providing logistical and staffing resources that support delivery of the best possible science education at Skidmore. Attaining the campaign objectives will help the sciences evolve toward intermediate enrichment and foster planning that will lead, five to ten years from now, to the construction of a comprehensive natural science facility on our campus"*

The representatives for the different departments were asked to analyze

and list needs for strengthening. Then a process of prioritizing would follow. In that process, inter disciplinary, was mentioned as the uniting force. As already mentioned, the science campaign is tied up with the Middle States accreditation process.

A week later, October the 6th, I went to a meeting of the IRC, Information Resources Council. This was one of three meetings that specifically concerned itself with resource questions pertaining to the Middle States accreditation self-study. This one, the second one, targeted the needs for the sciences. There seems to be a general feeling among the science community at Skidmore that the sciences are underfunded, and that substantial new resources are needed. The head of the Chemistry department pointed out that the sciences are in constant change and development. It was not said explicitly, but it was clear that she meant this to be in contrast to many other disciplines where change is at a more leisurely pace. There is no way in which one can make a one-time effort and then sit still. The sciences are important both for attracting new students and for retaining first year students.

3.14 The seventh week

To think that I've been here for six weeks!

Thinking back on the seventh week now, a few weeks later, I didn't remember anything in particular about it. I thought about the continuation of my course, which was now into the computer science part. I read papers on quantum mechanics, and thought about the relation between this theory and the classical theory of computation. This is an essential part of my project, and I must come to grips with it. It is really a three edged project, the Skidmore course, the popular book writing project and a research paper, all about roughly the same circle of ideas. Now, in mid term, it was all chaotic, a good sign that something will come out of this eventually.

I tried to write on the report, or at least plan some more sections, the difficult sections about Skidmore College. I was thinking about how to be more systematic in my attempts to understand Skidmore and in abstracting one or two good ideas to bring home.

It was simply a good week of intellectual work. A week to remember and cherish!

3.15 The eight week

When I stepped through the doors into the Palamountain Hall and the Dana Science Center on Monday morning, it felt like it had been a long weekend. I went home early on Friday, for the simple reason that I was sleepy and unable to think. On the parking lot I met Sarah, who could not find her car, so perhaps it was something in the air. I found my car and drove home to what was to become a weekend of good work.

As already told, I've been tinkering with my old research on higher spin gauge fields. On Friday afternoon I was on the verge of giving up the line of attack that I've tried for a couple of weeks, when I arbitrarily perused a few preprints that seemed vaguely relevant. Then I realized I'd made silly mistakes. Disgusted I went home. I don't remember if it was before going home, or later that I got the idea to go back to the base line and try to do the simplest thing possible. Certainly, later on Friday night, I cleared the desk in Penny's study and went through all my notes and organized them in a folder. While doing this, I discovered a Hupman cigar that I had brought from Sweden, and as it was a nice warm evening, I sat out in the garden smoking it while contemplating the weeks that had gone by.

Then on Saturday, after having spent the morning reading articles relevant to my course, I wrote down the simplest approach possible to the problem that implemented all the vague ideas I've had and also satisfied all constraints. And it looked so nice and natural! I worked more on it on Sunday.

* * *

This was the week when my wife Marianne and my daughter Monika would arrive on Friday. It was also the cat and car week. When I took a short trip down to Mechanicville on Sunday, I became aware of how noisy the Honda had become. I sounded like a leak on the exhaust or muffler, which was subsequently confirmed when I took it to the repair shop on Wednesday. But problems with cars are one thing, problems with cats another. At the end of last week I had seen a strange white spot on Otto's back, and Olof also commented on it when we saw him laying on the front steps one day. I did not think much about till I saw a huge patch where the fur had come off revealing a nasty bite. I knew there were one or two big mean cats in the neighborhood that sometimes engages themselves in fights with poor Otto.

Then on Tuesday morning the house was eerily quiet. Otto always makes a lot of fuss in the morning when he wants you out of bed to go down and pour some more of that special dry food diet he's on because of his bad

kidneys. But now, no cat, you could feel his non-presence, and I actually became worried. I called his name and clapped my hands inside and outside the house, but no cat. I had breakfast in a dreary mood.

But then suddenly, much to my relief, he appeared from the basement. He looked really sluggish, he did not eat, and his back was swollen and smelled bad. I decided then and there to take him to the vet after my class. I also wrote an e-mail to Penny and Jay in London about Otto's condition.

I came home at 1 p.m. to find a groggy cat with a nasty draining wound. I phoned the vet and got an appointment at 4.10 p.m. I took him in a cardboard box because there was no way I could force him into the carrier. The vet drained the wound, gave him a shot of anti-biotic and pills for 10 days. The very next day he seemed okay again. Martha, the lady who cleans the house, thought it might have been a fox when she saw the bite. That reminded me of the neighbors next door talking about having seen a fox. Scary stuff. But in the end I think it was another cat. At PetSmart I leafed through a book on cat health and it had a picture in it showing a cat bite looking just like Otto's, and in the same position as well, just above where the tail is connected to the rest of the cat.

Apart from this, the week was just like the other weeks of late. The coin collection did not move. Contemplating it, I suddenly realized that apart from Missouri itself, I had no coins west of Mississippi-Missouri rivers. This made me think once again that perhaps coins do migrate very slowly, western coins staying out west. But as some of you might already know, and jumping ahead of time, some weeks later, a much more devastating explanation occurred to me.

I did some extra planning for nice food for the family reunion on Friday night. Did the shopping on Thursday fortunately, because Friday became busy with cooking. Then at 5 p.m. Marianne called from Washington saying that they were locked up in along security queue and would miss the connecting flight to Albany. And just a few hours before I had walked downtown Saratoga Springs and had thought that they were at that very moment 30000 feet above. Now it seemed uncertain that they would arrive tonight. I drove back to college where the Internet connection is faster than at home. I managed to find out that the flight was delayed, so there was a chance that they would not miss it after all. I drove down to Albany where I found out that the flight was further delayed and would not arrive until 8 p.m. This made it almost 100 percent certain that Marianne and Monika would be on the plane. So I relaxed with a muffin and a scolding hot coffee that burned my lips and tongue.

Some time past 8 p.m. Monika came running through the gates jumping

up into my arms. A long awaited and dear reunion.

3.16 Family almost reunited

When Marianne and Monika arrived, the pace of life quickened perceptibly. Time passed very rapidly, but at the same time it felt almost like a long vacation. As I think back on the five weeks my wife was in Saratoga, the days all coalesce into family life, but in new context. When they arrived the trees still carried yellow and red leaves, when Marianne left at the end of November, they were all barren.

I still went up to college in the mornings, but I came back home early to have afternoon coffee with Marianne after she had picked Monika up after school. Some days I managed to put in an hour of work in the afternoon, but mostly we did everyday things like shopping, taking walks and strolling on downtown Broadway.

* * *

But now it was Friday night October 15, and we drove north on Interstate 87 in the dark evening, talking about everything that had happened since we last saw each other in late August, and how the journey was and everything else, all in a jumble. Back home at Pinewood Avenue, Monika was at once greeted by Otto and I showed the big house to her and Marianne. Monika's first impression was that the house was spooky in a cosy way. We had some of the food I had prepared, then Monika went to bed and Olof went out with his friends. Marianne and I sat talking in the dining room that we hadn't used up till now. It was nice to have the family united again. Well, almost united, Erik was back home.

On Saturday morning we went to the Waldorf School on York Avenue. They had a fall festival and it was a nice opportunity to show the school to Monika. The school which started in 1981, is housed in an old school building from the end of the 19th century. Except for a brief period in the 70's, it has always been a school. The red brick building is the oldest still surviving school building in Saratoga Springs. Inside the floors and stairs are worn down dark wood. The walls are painted in gentle pastel colors in the Waldorf way, very harmonious.

We met Carla Gandy, the admissions officer, who showed us around inside the school and the room of class 5 which will be Monika's class. It was fascinating to see how what was in April just an option among others materialize into a fact of life. But of course, when I visited the school in April, I knew almost at once that this was a good school for Monika. It was also confirmed when I met with Mr Baril, the teacher in fifth grade, a few weeks before Monika arrived.

We spent some time out in the schoolyard, having cakes and some coffee. There was a band of parents playing guitars and violins. If you felt like it you could try your hands at spinning yarn, or even at sheep shearing, but we were content to just admire the pleasantly colored balls of wool and other Waldorf handiwork.

Then we walked downtown and strolled up and down Broadway. Monika was fascinated by the way the streets and houses looked. To her it was unreal, it looked just like in a Walt Disney movie. She also commented on the Halloween decorations that were coming up outside a lot of houses. I had my digital camera and Monika took a lot of pictures of the everyday marvels of America. We went into this crazy shop who sells Christmas decorations all year around. Business must be slow in July.

In the afternoon we relaxed at home, enjoying family life. Monika packed up her things and decorated her new room with horse posters.

On Sunday we drove out to the Skidmore stables, or the Van Lennep Riding Center, which is its proper name. We looked at two beautiful horses out in the enclosed pasture. I student from Skidmore then showed us around the stable. We stayed for a while in the riding ring watching the jumping competition that was going on.

3.17 The ninth week

Monday was the first day in school for Monika. Both Marianne and I accompanied Monika and stayed for most of the day. I just left for an hour to go to the high school and sign the contract. Monika was greeted by Roland Baril, the fifth grade teacher, and of course, the other kids knew she would come and they were very curious.

The first lesson in the morning is "Main Lesson", generally it is assigned to a theme or project the class is working on, but it can also be used for mathematics. Now it was in the final stages of a Tree Project. The lesson started out with singing a morning verse, like a hymn, and then declamation of a poem about trees. Some days the class play the recorder. There is always some physical action, this first day the kids practiced juggling. It was fun to see the commotion that ensued. It is obviously a good idea to start out the day in this way with organized chaos!

Marianne stayed with Monika on Tuesday and I stayed most of Wednesday, but on Thursday Monika was comfortable enough to be in school by herself. On Friday the class made an outing to the North Woods to collect seeds to plant in the spring. This was part of the tree project.

Wednesday was Marianne's birthday and Monika and I prepared for that on Monday and Tuesday. We spent a couple of hours downtown looking for a present and I was up baking a cake late Tuesday night.

On Friday Monika had her first riding lesson. Arranging for horse riding turned out not to be that simple as it had seemed in April. I eventually managed to book lessons for Monika, but I gave up riding for myself.

My wife claims that horse people are, what should I say, "different" in some way from normal people, like a separate subspecies perhaps. I sort of see what she means, but I believe I understand them most of the time. My wife don't understand them at all. In the stable and in the ring, the horses are in focus, and there is a lot of talking to the horses going on. But since horses neither speak Swedish nor English, at least not as I've heard, the communication must be non-verbal. Now, if you can communicate non-verbally with the horses, why not do the same with people? Well, that's the clue to understanding horse people. Many things are never stated explicitly, they just are the way they are.

But I now realized that understanding American horse people is an altogether different business. I'm not much for all the talk about cultural codes and stuff like that, but the anthropology and equestrianology of an American stable is subtly different from a Swedish stable.

When home from the stable, Mark, Renee and Lydia picked up us for dinner in a downtown restaurant. We went to Sushi Garden. This was actually the very first time I ate sushi. For some reason I have never been attracted to that kind of food, but it was good.

Mark Huibregste, professor of mathematics, is one of the Skidmore faculty who attends my course. A few weeks earlier Mark had asked me if my daughter was in Saratoga because there was a Swedish girl coming to his daughters class. So it turned out that Monika and Lydia became classmates, a very fortunate coincidence.

* * *

As already noted, my coin collection is slow in progress. Nothing had happened for several weeks. But then I got one Arkansas and two Iowa the same day. And the next day I got one more Iowa. This was curious. Could it be that the coins were issued in bursts? My suspicion was strengthened when I kept on getting Iowa. So I took a closer look at the window sill, and it indeed turned out that a certain state coin was issued a certain year. Iowa was a 2004 coin. A devastating thought then occurred to me. Perhaps I will not get them all for the simple reason that they do not yet all exist! I had for a while detected a regional pattern in that I had no coins west of

the Mississippi-Missouri. I had attributed that fact to the slow circulation, so that western coins had not yet in any large degree migrated into the east. A more likely explanation was that western coins did not exist yet. There simply is no Montana coin. Some Internet research corroborated my hypothesis. Since 1999, five new state coins have been issued every year. With Arkansas and Iowa, I now had 23 states out of the 30 available at the end of 2004. So there was still hope to get all existing ones. If nothing inadvertent happens, like World War III or China buying up the Western states, I simply have to wait till the end of year 2008 to get them all.

3.18 The tenth week

On Tuesday we went to the Sunnyside Gardens Pumpkin Party out on highway 9N West just outside of town. This is a real El Dorado for kids who love Halloween. Monika enlisted me in an attempt at counting all the pumpkins. All in all we counted to more than three thousand pumpkins.

On Friday there was a Halloween party at the Waldorf school. It was more of a masquerade, the disguises and costumes were not just the usual scary things but could be anything. Mr Baril, Monika's teacher was a baseball player and another teacher came in an old dressing gown. The kids came as fishermen, monks, Arabs, Greeks, wizards, or whatever crazy stuff they could find in attics and closets, you name it. I thought it was a funny celebration, but one of the parents said to us afterwards that this was the least interesting of American holidays. She preferred Thanksgiving.

Monika had her second riding lesson later that day. It was tough, there are actually quite a few small but significant differences between Swedish and American riding and I'm not talking about Western riding now, but ordinary dressage. I learned that American riding is more geared towards jumping, therefore you sit differently, leaning more forward in the saddle with shorter stirrup leathers and using your legs more. It is a little bit more aggressive, in fact the very opposite to Western riding which is much more laid back and concerned with subtle horsemanship. I had to learn a lot of riding terms in English, like "posting trot"¹⁸ and "check your diagonals"¹⁹. I had to simultaneously translate the instructions that Cindy Ford, the teacher, gave and shout them back to Monika. It was tough on Monika.

Exhausted, we drove home and picked up Marianne and drove to Roma

¹⁸Lättridning

¹⁹Byt sittben

Imports²⁰ to get some Italian food for a Friday night meal. Monika got a Happy Meal at MacDonalds.

It was Halloween on Sunday and I got an e-mail from Penny Jolly in London warning us. She wasn't sure we knew about the tradition of kids going house-to-house asking for treats. She wrote that they usually get about 80 to 100 kids, a little less if the weather is bad. Of course we were prepared, but not prepared for such a barrage, so we bought more wrapped up candy.

According to Penny, the general rule that many observe is that the candy should be pre-wrapped, packaged candies, since there are sometimes nuts who would put something dangerous out for kids. But parents generally feel that the Pinewood neighborhood is a very safe place to trick-or-treat, although many would still tell their kids to eat only candy that is commercially wrapped. She ended her long mail writing she was amazed to see that Halloween is becoming a "thing" over in London, suspecting we don't do this kind of thing in Sweden. But of course we do.

The smaller kids started to come around in the afternoon and it continued for some hours, there was no one after 9 p.m. We sat in the dining room eating dinner and every minute or so we had to get up and answer the doorbell. It was great fun. Monika and Marianne went out with Renee and Lydia and few more girls. I held sway at home, and towards the end I had to start ration the candy. Poor Otto, being a black cat, he had to stay in as it is not safe for a small black cat to hang around outside on Halloween night. I locked him up in the Sun Porch, he sat in the window, sadly watching the craziness from indoors.

American culture ... what can we say?

3.19 The eleventh week

On Wednesday morning, Marianne and I took the early morning train from Albany-Rensselaer to New York City. I had booked a hotel on Lexington Avenue at 30th street.²¹ Olof and I stayed there a couple of nights in April 2001, and the hotel was still there but under a new name. It is a nice and clean hundred-bucks hotel suitable for a few nights in NYC. You can walk to a lot of Midtown places and there is a convenient subway station nearby on 33th street.

²⁰222 Washington Street (Route 29 West)

²¹Ramada Inn Eastside, 161 Lexington Avenue.

This time, the trip was not so haphazard. Marianne had checked out a lot of museums and her idea was to do museums. So instead of surfacing in Manhattan, as is the normal thing first time in NYC, we took a train to Brooklyn from Pennsylvania Station. We came up in the daylight outside Brooklyn Museum. We walked a few blocks down a street that looked like it could harbor a place to get a decent breakfast. I think it was Classon Avenue and unfortunately I did not take a note, but we got a terrific breakfast with scrambled eggs, ham and toast and lots of scolding hot coffee at an Italian looking place. They even put a brand new unopened ketchup bottle on our table. In a cheerful mood we went back to the museum.

Brooklyn Museum is the second-largest art museum in New York City and it is well worth a visit even if, or especially if, you're not the artsy type. It has an incredible wide range of exhibitions so let me just mention a few of the long-term installations that we found time to peruse. We started on the top floor with "American Identities: A New Look".

I particularly found the first two sections of the exhibition capturing the 17th and 18th century, perhaps because of its bearing on the liberal arts. These featured objects of art from the Colonial Period and the Early Republic. Isn't it fascinating how old ideals from the Greek city states and Rome got transplanted by the original British and Dutch immigrants to the American Wilderness? There is really a great divide between the old colonial parts of America east of the Appalachians and the far west country. Strangely enough, the fast-moving progress-loving America provides us with time telescopes looking back at the 17th century in the east and at the 19th century in the west.

If you, like me, would rather eat sand then go to another Egyptian museum, then perhaps the exhibition "Egypt Reborn" could make you reexamine that decision. This exhibition gave a much more nuanced, and almost lighthearted, impression of Egypt than the rather dispirited feeling that you often come away with. If you think that Egypt in museums means dark hall upon dark hall with dusty old mummies, then you will be surprised not to find a single mummy here! Oh, perhaps there was one, but it looked like it had been thrown in just as an afterthought, so that the museum wouldn't risk being sued by disappointed mummy freaks. So even though there is the usual focus on the after-life, it is not depressing, and I actually enjoyed strolling through the well-lit halls among the many objects of art on display, illustrating "the balance between permanence and change" in ancient Egyptian art.

Unfortunately, when we wound up on the ground floor, I was too tired to really appreciate the exhibition on native American art, "Living Legacies:

The Arts of the Americas". But even a cursory glance told me that it would be worth a second visit.

The next day we took a train down to Battery Park to catch the ferry to Ellis Island. I was a bit sceptical about this project, but in the end the museum really fascinated me. This was the United States' main entrance port for immigrants from 1892 to 1954 when it was closed down, I guess partly as a consequence of the rise in mass air travel.

Just when it was time to leave to get back to town, I found myself in a room on the top floor with photographs from the time the Island lay abandoned in the New York harbor mist and drizzle between Manhattan and Staten Island. They were taken by a man who had visited the Island in the early 60's. He had observed the forlorn island and the dilapidated overgrown buildings out in the bay and one day he took a small boat and landed on the Island. He entered the buildings and walked around in the creepy corridors and offices with their since long abandoned furniture and equipment. It became a habit to go there, and he started to take photos. These photos were now on display at the museum. He never met anyone on the island or in the buildings, but he could feel the presence of people. What a romantic story.

3.20 The twelfth week

It was Monday morning the twelfth week and I went to the Case College Center cafeteria. I had brought a book and bought some coffee and sat down by the windows facing the college green. I picked up the latest Skidmore News and read about diversity. The issue was more complicated than I first thought, perhaps more research would be needed and that part of the report revised. I overheard some students talking about Fox News calling states ten minutes before CNN did on election night. There is so much to learn and understand about this country, you feel belittled by it. With a sigh I went back to my office to face preparing for this weeks classes.

I'm happy to say that, due to the location of my office just around the corner from the Dana Science Center atrium, I had the opportunity to promote the Skidmore open door policy. There was often tours of the college, presumable for prospective students and their parents. When the guide, always a senior student, came up with the entourage to the second floor and turned into my corridor, the first thing they saw was my open office door. So they always said that there is an open door policy, the professors leaving their doors open if they were in their office, making it

easy for students to ask questions.

Walking in the corridor, I met people all the time, and everyone was asking me "How you doing?" or "How are you?". My standard answer was "I'm fine thanks!", but for some strange physiological reason it had started to come out as "Tha-iinks!", or something silly-sounding like that. I wanted to vary my responses a little bit. I tried with "Good, very good!" or "Not that bad!". But it was impossible, every time that annoying "Tha-iinks!" came out instead. The only thing that worked was preemptive strike, that is, me asking the person "How you doing?".

Lunch with Michael Arnush ‡

Sometime in midterm, I had decided to be a little bit more systematic in my information gathering and learning efforts regarding Skidmore College. Up till then, I had just been hanging out, and letting things unfold as they wanted to. I e-mailed about fifteen people, faculty and staff, that I thought would be interesting to sit down and talk to in a more structured way.

This was not really interviews, more like conversations, often over lunch, but also in peoples offices. Sometimes we talked about Skidmore stuff, sometimes about intellectual things and sometimes politics. I set out trying to be organized and systematic, but in the end it came off quite impressionistic. Well, that's my way of doing things.

I met Michael Arnush in the Faculty and Staff Club for lunch. This is a somewhat formal "restaurant" serving soups, sandwiches and light meals. They also have a salad bar. It is not a place you go alone, but it is a good place sit down and talk over lunch. I guess it is an equivalent to the English "Senior Common Room", though you can't get a pint of bitter. Remember this is soft drink America.

I had planned to ask Michael more about the Liberal Studies 1 - First Year Studies transition. As chairman of the CEPP, Michael is one of the chief architects behind the new FYS scheme. But as our conversation went we spoke mostly about politics and the election. Perhaps that was inevitable at the time, and anyway it was interesting. We also did some comparison between the Swedish and American university systems. I find it very hard to describe our Swedish system in general and our system at my home university college. In part it has to do with my inattention to, and lack of interest in administrative details, but it also has to do with a problem of finding the proper English words describing the structures we have at home. As you run into these comparisons all the time, it is perhaps a good advice to try to prepare for this before departure. At least if you don't want to

fall back on sterile stereotypes. I would most likely have neglected such an advice.

* * *

We had intended to fly to Chicago on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning, thus being able to take opportunity of the fact that Thursday was a day off from school for Monika. But when I checked the flights on Friday after coming home from New York City, the cheap flights were all gone. The prices had tripled, and all because our inability to make up our minds about exact times. So we eventually decided to fly out early Saturday morning instead. This turned out to be even cheaper than the first alternative, and also had the good byproduct that Monika could go to Nora's birthday party on Friday. Nora is a girl in Monika's class.

The kids were picked up after school and taken to the party by some parents. It was some way out of town, along route 9P in South Corinth. When I was out on the front lawn raking leaves in the afternoon, one of the mothers who lives on the street drove by to say that Monika had safely arrived at the party. We were to pick her up ourselves at 6 p.m. I had the directions, they were easy to follow, apart from the fact that it was pitch dark. The American countryside is much darker than the Swedish. Luckily we found the place at once which turned out to be a mobile home. It looked nice and cozy, but the smell of kerosene from the heating system was noticeable. It stuck inside my nose and I could smell it all way home.

3.21 Chicago, Chicago, I love the town ...

On Saturday morning we flew to Chicago. Marianne has a cousin, Bibi, who lives in Chicago since the late 50's. When we lived in London in the mid 80's, our neighbor, Jean Capellos, in the apartment above our basement flat was a teacher from Chicago. She worked in an East End school out in the Docklands, very different from the middle class school she taught in the north Chicago suburb of Barrington.

We've had a standing invitation to visit her for eighteen years. When Jean left London, Olof was just two and a half years old. It's been a lifetime since then. I'm happy that we kept up the contact over all those years. I'm not very good at those things, I guess it was Jean who sent Christmas cards and I sort of did it too. When the first card arrived in 1988, I remember that I sent a New Years card. When Erik and I made our cross country trip in 1997, we visited Jean sometime in the middle of the trip. We stayed for

three days and then we drove north to Duluth, but that's another story.

Having touched down at Chicago O'Hare airport we went to the Alamo Counter to get our pre-booked car. There, something strange happened. I was standing in line, there was really just one person before me, but I was naturally eager to get the car as fast as possible. But just when it was my turn, a big bearded man with a baseball cap forced himself in front of me with a polite apology. I had noticed him and he apparently saw that I got annoyed. He had looked strangely familiar, and when he flashed his grin towards me he looked just like Michael Moore. The thought passed through my mind to ask him but the moment disappeared and he was gone. I still wonder, I could have got an autograph.

We hit the Interstate 94 and drove north, it was an easy three quarters of an hours drive to Barrington Center. Driving into town, I recognized the street I was on. It was the same street Erik and I came down in 1997. We turned left onto Main Street and came upon the Jewel Osco supermarket, or the grocery store as Jean called it. Very strange, so we were going to meet at exactly the same place as Jean had picked us up in 1997. Nothing had changed as far as I could tell.

Jean lived in an enclosed condominium area at Lake Barrington. She had moved there after retiring. Swedish readers might perhaps be just a little surprised to learn that when retiring as a high school teacher at the age of 55, she earned \$85,000 a year.

We had lunch and then Jean showed us the village of Long Grove, an old town which had been converted to a nice little shopping center with small shops. We spent the evening reminiscing about the London time in Kentish Town. We had a great time with Jean in Barrington, and in retrospect, we should have stayed longer, but life is all these time constraints.

We did not see that much of downtown Chicago, except seeing the high-rising buildings when driving into town from the north, and then we saw it as a mile upon mile long facade from the waterfront at the Millennium Park, and we just walked a few blocks. Chicago gives of quite a different impression from New York City. Whereas New York is bustling with people with garbage piled up along the sidewalks, downtown Chicago is much more clean and well-ordered, almost austere, there aren't that many people around it seems. Perhaps it is the wind from Lake Michigan that sweeps the city clean and forces people indoors. But we liked what we saw and we said to ourselves that we must come back soon and stay here for a couple of big city holiday weeks.

We spent most of a day at the Field Museum which is like a mix of a Natural History and Anthropological museum. This is a at-most-two-things-

a-day city if you're organized and a little bit lucky. The logistics of driving into town, negotiating the downtown maze of highway connections along the waterfront, and finding the proper parking garage leaves just enough time and mental powers to do two major sights a day. This we actually managed the next day when we did both the Science Museum and the Aquarium in one day, add to that the fact that this was the day we had to catch the flight back to Albany, and you see that it was quite an achievement.

Since Jean lived in north Chicago and Bibi in south Chicago, we drove the incredible distance of 357 miles in four days!

Interview with Mark Hoffman ‡

Liberal Arts colleges are primarily teaching institutions, but I had heard many people at Skidmore emphasizing the importance of research. So I started by asking Mark Hoffman about this.

According to Mark, Skidmore must be have good teachers, otherwise kids will not come here. The importance of research is different in different disciplines. For example in political science, if you are not up to date with the latest research, then you're not doing a good teaching job. In mathematics, computer science and physics it is harder to connect your teaching to your research. The basics of those sciences, as taught at the college level, do not change that fast, or at all. It is not that easy to involve the students in your own research, which is often too advanced. Rather, if your doing your own research, then in a sense you are doing the same thing as the students are, namely learning new things, only at another level, and you have a greater chance of being wary of the kinds of troubles the students might have grasping new stuff. And you don't get stale.

In other natural sciences like Chemistry and Biology, collaborative research is more common. In big research institutes, it is graduate students who are research assistants, at Skidmore it is rather undergraduates who can play that role, simply because there are no graduate students.

So in conclusion, Skidmore is primarily a teaching institute, but research must be there in the background as an ingredient, or as Sarah Goodwin had said to me earlier, it is part of being excellent.

Then I asked Mark about time for research, since everyone knows that research takes a lot of time. Mark said that time is the biggest issue. The teaching load is five courses per academic year, and Mark figured that might take half of the time all included. Committee work takes a lot of time, over the years Mark had served on every committed at least once. Committee work tends to get more time consuming than teaching. When pressed for

percentages, Mark figured that if teaching takes 50 percent, then perhaps 35 percent is research and the rest administrative work and committees. Up till now a head of department had got one course reduction, but it is now up to two courses next year. To summarize, time is not regulated in any formal way.

Then I learned some technical terms I've heard but did not know the exact meaning of. When you start out at Skidmore on a tenure track line, you start as an Assistant Professor. If and when you get tenure you become an Associate Professor. After another six or seven years you might become a Full Professor. Pay raises (apart from following the living costs) are generally connected to these career steps. Tenure track means that you are on the track to become an Associate Professor.

I then asked Mark whether there are any requirements of having taken pedagogy courses. As I had expected without thinking much about it, there are no such requirements. I told Mark about the situation in Sweden, where you are expected to have taken some pedagogy or promise to do it during the first years of tenure.

So here people learn how to teach in the time honored fashion by simply being thrown in as teaching assistants during their own graduate and PhD studies. When faculty are interviewed for a position at Skidmore they are asked to give a talk at college level. During the tenure track years there are also yearly reviews, in particular after the third year, based on course evaluations and impressions by other faculty visiting classes. There has indeed been cases of people not getting tenure by failing to be good enough.

My last question to Mark was about science in a liberal arts context. We didn't get very far with this difficult question but just as a small point Mark said that going to a liberal arts college, students could try their minds on many different subjects and decide what to do for a career later on, thus in some cases increasing the chances of being attracted to the sciences.

Interview with Chuck Joseph ‡

Talking to Chuck Joseph, the Dean of Faculty, I learned a few interesting things about Skidmore. I was interested in the Science Campaign which is part of the Capital Campaign. The Capital Campaign is a fundraising campaign aimed at securing \$ 200 million over the course of four years. Within this goal, the science campaign is aimed at \$ 13 million. Of this money, about \$ 8 million will be set aside to finance four new tenure track lines within the sciences, the rest is for other resources and support like lab technicians. In the longer perspective, there is a vision to build a new

science facility on campus, but that is not within the present campaign. Chuck Joseph is himself a musician and thus belong to the arts, but he is very much committed to strengthening the sciences at Skidmore. The logic being simply that in order to be competitive, Skidmore must have a strong science component, it must increase the number of students going for majors in science.

One reason for the new tenure track lines is to lift the burden of teaching in order to give faculty more time for research.

We talked about the differences between the financial situation for liberal arts colleges in the US and the universities in Sweden. I mentioned the situation at my home institution, the School of Engineering at the University College of Borås. In Sweden, basically all funding comes from the State, and there is not very much you can do in times of weak economy but to cut down. In the US, the economic sources might be just as vulnerable to economic variations and changing student preferences, but at least they are more diverse, consisting of endowments, tuition fees and money raised from trustees and other sources like alumni et cetera. Skidmore is not wealthy as compared to other colleges. There are liberal arts colleges with endowments a hundred times that of Skidmore. One reason for this is that up till the mid 70's, Skidmore was a girls school, so the alumni are generally not that wealthy for the simple reason that it is still the men who make the big money.

The college is backed by the board of trustees consisting of roughly 36 people. The long time power over the college resides with the trustees but the short time executive power is within the college leadership, like the president and the Deans office. I learned that Skidmore is somewhat special, even in the US, by letting quite a few issues, like curriculum changes, be decided by the faculty by vote.

Though the college leadership is strongly committed to the sciences, science is a newcomer to this college. As said, Skidmore started out as womens school and up till the 1950's it was primarily an art school. It is just for the last twenty years or so that science has been a visible part of Skidmore. Not everyone within the arts are happy with the present focus on the sciences, but according to Chuck, the need to strengthen the sciences is inevitable.

Lunch with Bob DeSieno ‡

I had lunch with Bod DeSieno in downtown Saratoga Springs at a place called Sperrey's. I had a rather hot jambalaya that was much better then

the one I got at Hattie's. It was so hot that I momentarily lost my speech at the very first bite, so Bob had to do all the talking for a couple of minutes until I recovered. Let me also mention the cheesecake which I took for desert. It was absolutely the best one I've got so far, it almost left me speechless, but for different reasons.

Anyway, as our conversation veered from topic to topic, I cannot be very systematic. Bob asked me about my impressions of Skidmore. I had now begun to think that this question becomes increasingly more difficult to answer as I realize how little I know about Skidmore compared to how much there is to know. So I resorted to my initial impressions, which at least carries the freshness of authenticity.

One of my first impressions was that Skidmore seems to be a very well organized place. Another thing that struck me was the emphasis that is put on scholarship and research.

Bob thought that getting time for research is the responsibility of the individual faculty member, and that includes obtaining external funds. You have to divide up the time and make sure that you are using time in the best way.

I had asked Chuck Joseph if there was any conflicts surrounding the Science Campaign, and Bob corroborated the impression that I had got from Chuck that there are indeed such conflicts. Of course, this is not unexpected. If the college is focusing on the sciences, even though it is not done by taking money away from someone else, there will of course always be people who think that the new money could have been better used by themselves. That's human nature as Bob said. This goes under the name "opportunity costs".

This led us into a discussion of the two cultures in the sense of C.P. Snow's famous essay. Since it was a long time since both of us read this essay, we did not dig very deeply into it. It is my own impression that science and technology occupies a very strange place in modern society. It is the black sheep.

It is as if everyone that actually ponders the role of science and engineering, admits its importance, perhaps reluctantly, and perhaps not entirely consciously would have hoped that it would not be that way. "OK, we need science, but we don't want to study it." We don't even want to think about it if it can be avoided. It would not surprise me if such sentiments are even stronger in a liberal arts colleges than in society at large.

A problem is that any serious study of mathematics, physics and the other sciences requires a sustained mental effort, often over a period of decades. And we are different, not everyone has that talent or that interest.

I also asked Bob about pedagogy. Bob talked about the general distrust towards pedagogy among faculty. We have that distrust in Sweden too, it's just that it is not something you can get away with publicly at the present time. It is strange this distrust towards pedagogy, as a science in itself, among teachers, even very good teachers. I have some thoughts on the reason for this, but I will save that to some other context.

‡

The second Pedagogy Seminar on Friday was devoted to the Teacher-Scholar Model at Skidmore. Let me just quote from the invitation to get you a feeling for the Skidmore approach: *As we try to do our best for our students and negotiate all the other claims on our time, one of the agendas that gets squeezed is our scholarly and creative work. Our students' learning rightly constitutes the highest priority at the College. This seminar will be devoted to thinking about how our scholarship contributes to that learning, how we can secure and protect the time, energy and other resources necessary for such work.*

Three teachers gave their personal views on this issue, and this as well as the ensuing discussion showed the many different views and approaches on how to combine teaching with scholarship. I think a consensus view was that teaching and scholarship indeed go hand in hand, even though in the short term, teaching tends to be dominant. One of the invited teachers said that you have to accept the fact that you are a teacher, and that there are limits to what you can do simultaneously. But without long term care for scholarship, teaching will eventually become stale and dated. The view that scholarship was something selfish that did not contribute to the quality of the college was rejected. When it came to combining teaching and research in practice, there were two, sort of polar ways to do it. Some said that they never found time to do research during the terms, and consequently did all their research during breaks, especially during the summer break. Others said that they just couldn't jump start their scholarly work like that, they had to keep it going throughout the terms albeit on a low level. There are always data to analyze, routine work, proofs to read, references to look up, like if you always try to have a paper in the pipeline.

John Brueggemann said that there is an egalitarian culture at Skidmore, and that as research becomes more important, that can make the atmosphere more competitive. I think the discussion reflected Skidmore's transition towards more emphasis on research without compromising the focus on teaching. My view is that eventually the teaching load must be lessened, so the question is dependent on the college being able to secure its

financial resources.

3.22 Sitting in on classes ‡

In order to get a feeling for what was going on in the classrooms I sat in at some classes. This I did throughout the term from roughly mid September when I went to a Calculus I class with Mark Huibregtse up till the very last one on North American Anthropology with Susan Bender. In between that, I found time to visit Introduction to Computer Science with Tom O’Connell, Quantum Mechanics with David Atkatz, American Colonial History with Tad Kuroda, Islam with Laury Silvers, Astronomy with Mary Crone Odekon, Robot Design with Alice Dean and Programming Languages with Michael Eckmann.

I saw a lot of good quality classes, but nothing out of the ordinary, not the kind of tightrope acrobatics that university administrators sometimes like to fantasize about. No, this was good teaching job done on a regular basis, and let’s be grateful for that! The teaching I saw was delivered with enthusiasm and obviously grounded in good scholarship.

I particularly enjoyed Tad Kuroda’s class on American Colonial History which I tried to follow in midterm. It was fascinating just to sit and listen to Tad telling the story of different aspects of Colonial America. I learned how very different the first colonies were, and that it was kind of a miracle that they could come together into a new nation.

Colonial New York itself was a very diverse place. It was originally colonized by the Dutch but then taken over by the English, but it still had a big Dutch population. It was a mix of rural society and city living, being the only colony with two big cities, New York City and Albany, somewhat in competition. Albany was the most important city in inland Colonial America. Then there were the Iroquois which was a major force upstate and the pressure from Canada up north, and the Atlantic trade to the east. New York, being a commercial colony, had different governing structures in different parts, again different from the much more homogenous Cavalier Virginia in the South. But what fascinated me most was the story of the colonization of the back country, the piedmont of the Appalachian Mountains, the first frontier, where as Tad said cryptically: ”This is where America is going to be made.”.

I saw, as in a film, the Anglo-Irish arriving in the early 18th century, moving west through Pennsylvania and being deflected south by the Allegheny mountains, diffusing through the foothill woodlands, setting up their back

country rough societies, displacing the Indian tribes who still lived there. They came as free people, not as indentured servants. This was not established colonial areas. I bought the heavyweight course book.²²

Apart from formally sitting in, I saw a lot of chemistry experiments by just walking through the chemistry department every day. Perhaps it was because it was so near I didn't properly sit in on any class. My office was in the physics-chemistry corridor. I like chemistry, it is the quintessential experimental science. Matter is made of atoms, and it is chemistry that you really come as near the atoms that is humanly possible. Isn't it exciting to take a U-shaped vessel, pour in a solution of copper sulphate, put in electrodes in both ends, connect a battery, and then just watch the copper atoms piling up on the negative electrode? What kitchen sink experiment can be more fun?

* * *

It felt very strange when we drove south on Interstate 87 for Marianne to catch the home bound flight via Washington. The weeks had passed rapidly, we had done many things but there were also things we did not get the time to do. This was Marianne's first trip to America, and I was happy that she had loved it so much. Not that I had doubted it really, but Marianne has never shared my fascination over all things American.

I may be a very naive person. I remember traveling the Trans-Siberian railway in 1978 when it was still the Soviet Union. I had a great time there and then also! Life is too short to spend it fretting over what's not good, better than to roll up your sleeves and try to do something about all the not so good things.

Being an academic you can perhaps feel that what you do is insignificant in the big picture. In my youth, I was part of the environmental movement in Sweden, and I think we really contributed to environmental issues now being part of mainstream politics. I look back on those days, naive as they were, as days when we contributed to making the world a little bit better. And I got to know some of my best friends then.

I have deliberately chosen not to write about politics in this report although as everyone knows this was an election year, an election year where many people perceived America as more divided than ever. I cannot really judge this, I always had the feeling that there is a much wider variation in America than in Sweden. One reason why I have chosen not to comment

²²David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed, Four British Folkways in America*, Oxford University Press, 1989

on the campaign and the election is that I realize that my knowledge about American culture and politics is not up to the standards to write anything that is not simplified.

People approach me and apologize for what's happening in America now. But what can I say? I am an outsider here, and anyway America is for me much more than present day politics. I am comforted by the thought that knowledge, rational and critical thought is something that mankind needs more than ever, and isn't that what liberal education is all about? To this I can contribute as an academic.

3.23 The last stretch

Now it was just the three of us, Olof, Monika and myself, yet a new constellation. It was four more weeks and a couple of days to go. I imagined late nights poring over my research, just like back in the good old days in London when I sat at the kitchen table in my dressing gown late into the early morning hours working away on the higher spin problem. But it didn't work out that way. Then I could sleep till 9 or 10 a.m., which is impossible here, even in the weekends since Otto always wakes me up by sitting outside the bed room miaowing.

3.24 The fourteenth week

It was November 28 and it was the first Sunday in Advent. Rain was pouring down outside our windows. I was sitting in front of the computer in Penny's study struggling with writing something clear about the mind-body problem and the problem of the external world in ontology and epistemology.

I believe I understand the issues involved quite well, but my historical knowledge about who wrote what is too weak. There are so many people who have been thinking and writing about these things, and their thoughts are not always that clear. Even reading good overviews as you can find in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, you get confused over all the muddled thought that has gone down. But my course, and in particular the book, would be seriously incomplete if I don't treat these long time philosophical problems in the context of my discourse. I sat thinking that perhaps it would be a good idea to follow a course in theoretical philosophy when I get back home to Sweden.

Monika was sitting in Penny's easy chair, reading a book about horses and with Otto in her lap. We were hoping for snow, lots of snow. We had spent the day before shopping things to make Christmas decorations. There is lovely shop on downtown Broadway, the Soavé Faire, that stocks just about everything, from artists material to Western saddles, from Elvis Presley posters to the kinds of hats you throw up in the air when your horse has won.

It is a Swedish Advent tradition to have four candles in a row and burn first one candle, then two, and so on, on the Sundays in Advent. So we arranged for that by buying white candles and then poking around the dining room cupboards for candle holders. It came out looking just like at home. Then up in the attic we found white and colored tangles of light.

We hung the white ones above the kitchen windows and some of the colored ones we arranged around the front entrance.

Looking back at the week that had gone by, I realized that I hadn't been able to do very much work, at least not at the face of it. But I've been able to restart my research project, I've started to rewrite my lecture notes in a slightly different format that will be more suitable to convert to the book I'm planning to write. And I've started to write on the report again. Perhaps you can't expect more, after all it had been Thanksgiving and you're supposed to take it easy.

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving was a busy day. In the morning I was invited by Chuck Joseph to the weekly Dean of Faculty Staff Meeting. Being a regular meeting, I was able to just tap into the stream of items passing through the Deans office. One issue was the policy that adjunct teachers on one and two year contracts were supposed to do six courses a year whereas tenured teachers does five courses. If you're on a short term contract you're not expected to be that involved in committee work. The main topic of this meeting was strategies for recruiting a more diverse faculty into the predominantly white Skidmore community.

Then in the afternoon I had an interesting conversation with Mary Crone Odekon.

A conversation with Mary Crone Odekon ‡

Mary Crone Odekon is an astronomer. Her office is just across the corridor from mine. Sometimes with people you see every day, you never get around to sit down and talk to them in earnest.

I've always been interested in astronomy, but not deeply so, more in a general way as I guess any physicist might be interested in neighbors in the physics community. I guess I'm more of a small scale guy. But I did buy myself a 2-inch refractor last fall so that I could have a closer look at Mars when it was close to Earth. Actually it will not be that close again in many, many years. There is something sad about astronomy. I remember when I was in London in the mid 80's and Halley's comet was passing the Earth on its 75-year long orbit. I failed to see it of course. I always fail to see spectacular things in the heaven. Now it still 55 years before Halley's comet shows up again. Hey, I'm not going to be around then.

But I did see Mars, though the telescope I got was really to small. It is good enough to get a close up of the moon though, and you can see some of Jupiter's moons on a clear morning. One of these days I'm going to get myself a real good telescope.

Just the other day, Mary asked me if I had seen the lunar eclipse. Well, I had missed that one too. But speaking to Mary, I realized that astronomy is a little like soccer, if you lose one game, there is always a new game coming up. There is always something new showing up in the heavens. This cheered me up somewhat, and we scheduled a time for a chat.

As I knew Mary had students involved in collaborative research, I asked her about this. Collaborative research is required of certain majors, but not of all students at the college. Physics and Chemistry both require it. For the teachers, it does not count as a course towards the teaching load, even though it can be quite time consuming. But then again, you are expected to get research out of it.

Mary said that the actual content of a collaborative research project vary much depending on the student. The projects must really be tailored to the particular student, depending among other things on their background and their future plans. Naturally, a student who plans for a future career in astronomy, or even in science, is much more easy to fit into a research project in astronomy than the more casual student. One thing that can be learned from a project like this is what it means to write a research paper.

In general, since Skidmore is not a research university, undergraduate students in collaborative research projects plays a similar role to that of graduate students at larger institutes. Collaborative research projects are meant to be real research project aiming at getting new knowledge, not the kind of high school research which is really just library digging. It can be contrasted with "independent studies" which does not aim at securing new knowledge, but rather has students studying some topic independently but with some guidance from teachers.

The actual form the projects depend very much on the area of research. And there is always a training time involved. As a project counts as a course, there is a limited time available, usually a term. Projects must be chosen carefully.

* * *

We were invited to Sarah and Steve on Thanksgiving day. Steve's brother and his wife was there also. They are from Massachusetts. I had no clear idea how to dress for an occasion like this, though I knew it would be alright to come in casual clothes. I had brought a suit, but never used it, and I did not want to use it now either. A suit would be to formal. But then again, Thanksgiving is one of the biggest holidays in America, and in a way I saw myself as a representative of my country, so I ironed a white shirt, put on black trousers and a jacket and wore a bow tie. I came out looking quite

formal. Steve first thought I wore a tuxedo. But I did not feel awkward, I like to dress up, even to the extent of being in disguise, masquerading as a gentleman.

Since we were so many people, the dinner was served buffet style, so we actually did not have the Turkey on the table as I guess tradition demands. Anyway, the food was delicious with lots of side dishes but I will not bore the reader with details, but I ate a lot. Neither will I bore you with details of our conversation, except for one of those silly things that I like to tell.

We did "charades". We have it in Sweden too, but I have not done it in many years. Anyway, one of the topics was Mohammed Ali. When this came up in the discussion later in the evening that reminded me off when I was a kid, and I came out to play one February morning in 1964, and a group of older boys was standing in a circle discussing how Cassius Clay had won the heavy weight boxing championship title *this night* by defeating Sonny Liston in seven rounds. The boisterous Clay had delighted and stunned the Miami audience with his rapid footwork and dazed poor Liston. What caught my imagination was that it apparently had happened in the middle of the night. Having once heard this expression, I heard it more often later on. At this time there was a quite famous Swedish reporter in New York City, Arne Thorén, who always reported from America in radio and TV with an eager voice, as if he was leaning into the microphone, trying to keep up with the rapid American pace. And what he had to report always had happened *this night* in America. So everything interesting in America happened in the dead of night. Strange country.

But name the thrills of life that are allowed to remain. Nowadays, the reporters always add "Swedish time" thus taking away all the magic!

Well anyway, in much the same way, the evening passed away in easy conversation.

* * *

When I was down in the basement running the washing machine my eyes caught sight of a bottle of "Skunk Odor Eliminator" for pets. Skunks is something I thought only existed in comic strips, something that only happened to the always unfortunate Donald Duck. I read the elaborate washing instructions. First you should shampoo the pet, then rinse it and dry it with a towel and while still somewhat wet, apply the odor remover, rub it in, and so it went on down the side of the bottle. This sounded just as the instructions for washing a piece of rug. For my inner eye, I saw myself washing a screaming and clawing Otto who has come home sprayed by a

skunk. Better keep the old cat inside.

I had a bunch of young people in the house. Olof had two of his friends from Sweden on a couple of weeks visit. I enjoyed them visiting us, but there is a tendency for everything to rotate around their preferences. Just now I had come home and had planned to cook an early dinner, a kind of farewell dinner, since they were leaving the next day. I had planned to put in a good evenings work after that. Only problem was, at 5 p.m. in the afternoon, they had just got breakfast and wanted to go to the shopping mall. Well, you guessed it right, dinner will be 7.30 p.m. Luckily, I had bought some eggnog at Price Chopper. Now I diluted it with some dark rum, if you understand what I mean. This cheered me up somewhat. I needed that. I really needed cheering up that day, and it was not because of the rain.

I sometimes use hearing protection since I have a slight problem with tinnitus. I have two sets of small plastic, personally made earpieces that filters out noise. They cost \$200 a pair. On Wednesday, the pair that I always carry around disappeared. I used them in the morning while grinding up some coffee. Then in the afternoon, again setting about to grind some coffee, I could not find them. I searched everywhere, even in the refrigerator and in the garbage can, but they were nowhere to be found. Later on in the week, I went back to Price Chopper and Pizza Hut where I knew I had been. Then this very Sunday, I went to the small pizza place on Lake Avenue just around the corner where we did not buy pizza that unfortunate day. Yes, they had found them. Hope flared up for a moment, until I was told that they had put the little black leather pouch with the earpieces in, outside on a windowsill. I was incredulous.

How could anyone be so dumb as to put them out on the windowsill? Isn't it apparent that they will disappear? For once I must say that this would never had happened back home. Swedes may be dull, but they are not in general outright stupid. But I will not put the blame on anyone else, I could have gone there earlier. It is a really strange feeling when something disappears inexplicably. Now that I knew what did happen, it was still a strange feeling.

Well, worse things can happen, and at least I didn't have to sift through the garbage again in another vain search.

But I was about to tell what happened to the youngsters. On Friday night Olof told me that they planned to drive up to Buffalo to see the Niagara Falls. I thought that might be a good idea, and I helped them a little discussing car rentals and things like that. I did not want to get too involved though. It is all too easy to get dragged in, helping them out. It

is not good for them. At this stage there was several idiotic things I could have done, like letting them borrow my credit card et cetera. I did nothing like that, I just recommended Olof to bring his passport.

Off they went to Albany Airport to try to rent a car there. Some hours passed, and obviously they had managed to get through with the rental, since I did not hear from them. Monika and I meanwhile went to the National Horse Racing Museum which is situated here in Saratoga Springs.

Just after the young people left I started to worry what would happen if they drove into Canada. Even the most cursory research into a Niagara trip ought to show you that the falls are right on the border, and that you might want to cross the border to see them from the Canadian side. Since I instinctively did not want to get too involved I did not think of this when I spoke to them. Now I started to worry that Olof had not brought his DS2019 documents. Well, it was too late now, and what's wrong with the prospect of a young man staking out his future in Canada?

As it turned out, they had actually found themselves on a road leading straight into Canada, and before they could turn around they were in Canada. This was no problem for Olof who had his passport, but the other two had not. Luckily, this is apparently a common occurrence, and they managed to get back into the US again after being questioned by a weary Homeland Security Guard.

3.25 The fifteenth week

I was determined to press as much work a possible out of the last weeks, but that was easy to say. I was preparing the last stretch of my course as well as writing up the lecture notes, but work progressed slowly.

I realized that my way of working is like a railroad train. I start out derailed. It can go days, even weeks without anything worthwhile is being done, or at least it feels like that. I've had such a stretch now, ever since my wife went back home. It got worse and worse, this week on Monday I was sleepy and sluggish, presumable after the long thanksgiving holiday. But I did go to a very interesting Astronomy class. The question of dark energy in the universe had come up, and Mary Crone talked about that, and how dark energy could explain the speeding up of the cosmological expansion of the universe that has been observed. I thought dark energy was much a more speculative idea than it apparently is. Once again, I walked from a class actually having learnt something new myself.

Then on Tuesday, I was literally unconscious! I had a bad class, I apol-

ogized to the students, by saying that I slept bad, which was true, and that I was sleepy. They could sort of understand that, they are often sleepy themselves. Anyway, I started to despair, because there are so many things I would like to do. I want to edit my lecture notes and make them more complete, as a prelude to the proper book writing to start in the spring, I want to finish the, not so difficult, calculations on my research project, so that I can start writing up the paper which is really the fun part of research. And I wanted to write on the report.

But then suddenly I was on the track accelerating, and I got things done. The day had started out raining again. If all that water had come down as snow we would not have been able to get out of the house unless we'd been prepared to crawl out the attic window. I went to college a couple of hours, but went home to start write simultaneously on the lecture notes and the report.

For the last week or so I've been struggling with "Dualism", one aspect of which is the mind-body problem. These issues are peripherally related to my course. But I have tried to keep questions as to nature of consciousness out of it. There are many reasons for that, not the least that it is a very complicated issue, but my main reason has been that discussions about consciousness tends to take of at a tangential path and once you are down that line, it is hard regain order.

As I sat happily typing away, it was getting dark outside and hard gusts of wind were rocking the windows. I told Monika it might be the snow that everyone talks about will come that was finally arriving. We were hoping so.

* * *

Monika and I went out to the mall to A.C. Moore. It is the American version of "Panduro", but scaled up by a factor of ten or so. I bought her an Advent Calendar with 24 small pouches in which you can put one little present for each day. I took some time to find presents for all 24 days. So late at night, I sat by the kitchen table, drinking green tea and wrapping up small presents and putting them into the Advent calendar. I listened to old Rolling Stones records that I found in Jay's collection of CDs. It was actually quite cosy. Then I read a chapter in Frankenstein while tasting some eggnog. Thus a day that started out in complete frustration, ended on a cheerful note.

* * *

On Thursday, Monika did not feel well, so I canceled my afternoon meet-

ing with Tom O'Connell and just went to college in the morning to meet Ann Hendersson.

Interview with Ann Hendersson ‡

Ann Hendersson is Registrar and Director of Institutional Research. She seems to be the most busy person at Skidmore, having the responsibility, among much else, for the transition to a new college database system. I was happy that she could find half an hour in her crowded schedule for me asking a few questions. I had become interested in the detailed and extensive data on students that apparently was available to faculty and decision makers at Skidmore. I wanted to ask Ann more about this data collection and the work of the Institutional Research Office.

It turned out that much of it is done nationally through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP).²³ This is, quoting freely "... a national study of the American higher education system established in 1966. The CIRP is the nation's largest and oldest empirical study of higher education, involving data on some 1,800 institutions and over 11 million students. It is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students." There is the annual report of the CIRP Freshman Survey which provides data on each year's students entering college. Furthermore, there is the College Student Survey (CSS) that "... helps institutions respond to the need for assessment and accountability data by providing information on a broad range of student outcomes. The CSS offers valuable feedback on your students' academic and campus life experiences, information that can be used for student assessment activities, accreditation and self-study reports, campus planning, and policy analysis." Another source of data is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).²⁴ Apart from all this, Skidmore now and then performs their own surveys, one of which is the Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ), which is really done through the College Board for Educators.

Thus an impressive amount of data and statistics are collected.

I'm not sure if Sweden has any similar surveys, I don't think so, but I might be wrong. My impression is that academic decision making in Sweden are often done in the blind based on hunches and newspaper surveys, or at the best, based on the work of special purpose investigations ("utredningar").

²³<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/cirp.html>

²⁴<http://www.indiana.edu/nsse/#>. This was the study that provided the surprising data on student engagement.

Talking to Ann, I learned that a few years ago, Skidmore used to compare itself with the top colleges in the United States. In the end this became depressing, as there was no way to compete on equal terms with colleges with endowments perhaps a hundred times that of Skidmore. If such a college have a problem, "they just pour money on it, we talk about it", Ann said. Now, Skidmore instead compares itself with a group of twenty or so "peer" colleges which resemble Skidmore.

After talking to Ann, I hurried home to take care of Monika. She wasn't well at all with a high fever, and in the evening I phoned Renee, Lydia's mother to ask about a doctor to phone just in case. Luckily, after a nights sleep, she felt better.

By the way, apropos of consciousness, I remember that I read somewhere about a theory that this is property of human beings that occurred late in history, perhaps just a few thousand years ago. Note that this is younger than many of the old civilizations. I mentioned this once in class, but did not delve on it, since I could not remember the reference. Now, I was down in the basement room which has shelves filled with books all around the walls. All of a sudden I saw the "The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Brain" by Julian Jaynes. I immediately realized that this must be it, the reference itself! I started to read it at once with the intention to finish it before going home.

According to Jaynes' theory, the human brain once worked in a "bi-cameral" fashion, with the left and right hemispheres of the brain having somewhat different functions as regards consciousness. At the risk of oversimplifying what is really much more complicated, the right hemisphere, having no speech areas of itself, instead "told" the right hemisphere internally what to do. People heard voices, coming from their own heads, telling them how to act. Let's say you go fishing upstream and you don't have the modern conscious brain which lets you narrate your future a few hours ahead: "Hey, I'm going fishing and I'm gonna stick to that for a few hours!". Instead, in order that you don't loose focus a wander off into the woods and gets eaten by a tiger, your right hemisphere tells you over and over again: "Your supposed to be fishing, fishing, fishing, you silly fool!".

* * *

On Friday the last faculty meeting of the term was held. I did not go as I had to stay home attending to Monika who was still sick. But Olof came home in the afternoon, so I could go to the reception at the Surrey that was held afterwards. I've never seen such a Skidmore crowd before, there were cars parked everywhere. And this was indeed a special occasion, the

achievements of the twenty years old Liberal Studies curriculum should be celebrated. There were speeches and people being thanked, but what drew my attention was the food. I wasn't going to repeat my mistake from the reception at the Scribner villa in early September when I was chatting the evening away missing out on the food.

The invitation sounded interesting enough: "Skidmore College Dining Services and US Food service welcome you to the Surrey Williamson Inn for a feast for the appetite, for the eye, and for the mind." This very night I did not care much for the mind, nor for the eye, I was only in it for the appetite.

I decided to work systematically not letting myself getting bogged down in conversation, no matter how interesting the topic was. Thus, I let the other guy do most of talking while I attended to my plate. When it was finished, I politely apologized myself and made my way back to the serving tables. I skipped the beer and went for the red wine at once as I knew that there is nothing that can ruin your food storage capabilities as beer. I started with a rich plate of prosciutto, salami, mozzarella and red sweet peppers stuffed with goat cheese. No bread of course, that's even a bigger mistake than beer. Only cretins go for bread and beer. I went back for another serving and now I found smoked salmon and small pieces of grilled chicken stuffed with some tasty filling. On my next round they had started carve steaming hot baked ham and roast beef sirloin. I switched over to this, which together with whole grain mustard was delicious.

The only problem is how to eat conveniently at these cocktail parties, you would really need a third arm. But I did rather well. There was also a wine testing session going on in the big sitting room. So I suddenly found myself balancing two glasses of red wine apart from the plate. There was nothing I could do except quickly finishing one of the glasses. Having done that en passant the serving table, I snatched up a few funny pieces of fish rolled into rashers of bacon.

Sarah told me that they had asked the College Dining Services to show what they could do, and they in their turn had apparently asked their purveyors to show what they could do. The result was delicious. The great thing with really good food is that you can eat a lot of it.

But sadly I missed the seafood display with shrimp and stuffed clams, I had to be content with the eye here, I just managed to catch some of the Sushi. The clams disappeared before I had time to attend to them. At this stage I decided that it was time to switch to the cheeses. There was at least seven different sorts in another room, brie, cheddar, many of them with spices. I served myself from all of them. I had to go back for more wine

several times. I noticed that the young lady who served the wine was very shaky when she poured from the bottle. I know it was her hand that shook because when I focused my own plate it was steady enough. Reassured by this I surveyed the serving tables one last time before going for desert. I then discovered the grilled mozzarella that I had missed before. This reminded me of the delicious small stuffed peppers, and as they were piling up more, I had some more of those as well, and if I don't remember wrong, I think I had some more ham and mustard.

After eating this much, you need something sweet, although sometimes it is hard to find place for it. But not this night. Thanks to my determination, I now had a piece each of the four different cakes that was on offer. But I admit that I had to ask for a coffee when I worked on the last one. The crowd had begun to drop of and I went into the sitting room and sat down in a sofa with the cappuccino to contemplate my achievement. A young couple who had apparently watched my forage at the food quickly rose and left as I sat down. I don't blame them, who wants to sit next to a lunatic?

3.26 The sixteenth week

I had not done much over the weekend. Monika was still tired and weak after her illness. When not attending to her or doing household chores, which by the way takes an incredible amount of time, even in a small micro-family like ours, I mainly sat reading Julian Jaynes book. We had Mark, Renee and Lydia over for dinner Sunday evening so I spent much of that day cooking.

I observed Otto and it became clear to me that the sweet old cat is obviously not conscious. I don't mean that he is unconscious in the every day sense of the word. Indeed, Jaynes makes an important distinction between consciousness and reactivity. If you get hit on the head, what you lose is consciousness, but not necessarily reactivity. According to Jaynes, you can have reactivity, that is, you can react to outer stimuli without being conscious, without having that internal "I", that narrating inner mental space. I decided to read the book without looking up the secondary literature and the critique in order not to spoil the fun.

If you live with cats, you get used to their extremely short attention span. Two cats can be locked in a fierce battle, a car honks on the street and both cats look up and then lazily walk away, having completely forgotten about the fight. The poor cats react to stimuli and move about and do things, they might even be thinking, but they are obviously not conscious in the human sense of the word. I think they are automatons. This doesn't make

them any less charming.

On the topic of cats, we did some baking over the weekend. Monika and I baked a special kind of bun, a so called "lussekatt" which is "Lucia-cat" in English. I actually heard them referred to in that way by Mr. Baril. All went well except that we forgot the salt, so they came out of the oven tasting somewhat bland. But we made a new set a couple of days later. We also baked Swedish ginger breads. We got the recipe by e-mail from Marianne. They actually came out much better than at home. I think it was because of the gas oven which is very good for baking and cooking. They were crisp, yet not burned.

Luckily Monika had written her book review assignment before she got sick, so now I just had to translate it into English. I did this on Monday evening, printed it out on Tuesday, and we handed it in as scheduled on Wednesday. The kids were supposed to read their reports in front of the class. Monika went second and read her report in Swedish. The other kids sat completely silent, you could hear a feather drop. Then I read the English translation.

This was the last week of the course and I struggled with writing up the lecture notes for the final classes. The all of a sudden, and much to my surprise, I wrote four pages in one and a half hour! From where did this text come? Can it have been the right part of my brain who had silently worked away, while the left part was engaged in talking and discussing, and when the job was done, simply transmitted it to the left part "Here you are, lazybones.". Well, thank you anyway, right hemisphere, and keep up the good job!

"Exit" meeting with Philip Glotzbach ‡

My Tuesday morning meeting with Philip Glotzbach could perhaps be termed "an exit meeting", at least that's what Chuck Joseph called it when he advised me to book it. We chatted for a few minutes before Philip asked me what I wanted to talk about.

As I'd been, I don't know the proper word, but perhaps "surprised" will do, when I'd heard him speak at the start up faculty meeting in September, I figured that would be a good starting point. This was when he put the faculty in the center of the fulfillment of the college mission. I told him about this and the reason that his words had struck me as extraordinary. Now Philip assured me that his words had been serious and deeply felt. The college has been through a period of uncertainty and financial troubles the last ten or fifteen years or so, but was now emerging with new vigor and

expectations for the future.²⁵

Then I asked Philip how he looked upon his role as the president of the college. He said that the role has essentially three aspects, as an outward symbol, as an inward symbol and as leading the governing and administration of the college.

Philip Glotzbach has a background in philosophy, especially in epistemology. He is interested decisions, how they are made and what is the basis of decisions made by organizations like Skidmore. How do you base decisions on data? He saw that as one of his responsibilities as president of the college, to move the college towards making better decisions based on good data. Since many decisions in the end rest on him, he wanted to listen to as much discussion as possible and getting the best possible data to base them on.

One of Skidmore's goals is to educate responsible citizens, but how do you measure to what extent that goal is attained? That was where our conversation stopped.

Shop talk with Tom O'Connell ‡

With Tom O'Connell I spoke mostly Computer Science shop. I learned that Skidmore is actually quite weak in computer science courses with just the basic core courses on the curriculum. There are no upper level elective courses like Compilers, Operating Systems, Software Engineering, Networking or Databases. Apart from himself there are really just two other full time faculty. Happily, within the ongoing science campaign, Computer Science will get one new tenure track faculty position.

We talked about the inadequacy of C^{++} as a first learning language, and in this context I spoke about an idea of mine. I'd noticed that when you're teaching programming to newcomers, then almost inevitably you're mixing up two, in fact different aspects of programming, namely the intuitive, creative aspect of solving problems algorithmically and the formal, exact aspect of writing syntactically and semantically correct programs. For professionals, these are two separate, but interacting aspects of programming, even though they might not think much of it consciously. For newcoming students, it often leads to confusion. The intricacies of the syntax of the particular programming language used for the course gets mixed up with general and language independent aspects of what it really means to write programs. My idea was to separate these two aspects as much as possible in

²⁵Described in the document: *Engaged Liberal Learning, The plan for Skidmore College: 2005-2015.*

two different introductory courses. Tom was sympathetic towards this idea, and had had thoughts in that direction himself.

Tom spoke about the immensity of Computer Science. He thought that the science must eventually split up in two parts, one of which would be Software Engineering and Computer Technology, the other being a more theoretical and mathematical theory of computing in general. I haven't thought about this myself and can't really judge it, but then again, building and maintaining web sites for large organizations is very different from deep issues in the theory of complexity.

Lunch with Susan Bender ‡

My lunch-time conversation with Susan Bender came about as a consequence of my last round of visits to classes. Again looking through the list of courses I found North American Anthropology. I sent Susan an e-mail and was welcomed to her class. This was at the very end of the term, so I saw one of the last classes, mainly devoted to student presentations. I realized that I had missed a very interesting course. Now the last words were said about the Moundbuilders of the Mississippi valley and the Hopewell culture in the Ohio valley, both ancient Indian American cultures. The Hopewells dating from about 200 BC to 500 AD, and the Moundbuilders from 900 AD up to just before the coming of Europeans. Susan said that she had always wondered what would have happened if the Europeans had not arrived interrupting their natural development. Now we will never know.

Susan suggested a lunch, to which I naturally said yes. It turned out that she was in the process of evaluating a STINT fellowship for the upcoming fall term, and she was therefore particularly interested in my views on Skidmore and the STINT.

* * *

On Thursday, I had my public lecture at the Tang Teaching Museum.

Of course, good preparations notwithstanding, my left hemisphere messed up by forgetting what to say a few slides into the presentation. I was actually speechless for what seemed like an eternity, but perhaps it was just 30 seconds. Eventually the right hemisphere kicked in and put me on track again. My talk, which I gave the title "A Very Digital Heaven" as a word play on the title of the exhibition "A Very Liquid Heaven" was about the attempts to describe the universe in terms of concepts from computer science, that is, a distillation of my course.

I could have done a better job, but many people were happy, even en-

thusiastic with the lecture. I also knew from reading a very good book on rhetoric that it is alright to get stuck and make a fool of yourself at the start of a lecture. If you just regain your posture, you will earn the sympathy of the audience, since after all, who wants to step up there and talk instead of sitting comfortably in the audience. In the audience, you can even take a nap. If however, the lecturer takes a nap, then it is a real disaster.

After the talk, I was invited to a dinner at the downtown Wine Bar by the Tang Museum director John Weber, together with Mary Crone and Jill Linz. John started out by asking us, three physicists, about our conception of time. We talked about this until the food and noise drowned all organized thought. But we had a hearty dinner.

3.27 The seventeenth week

I read somewhere that "Time is what prevents everything from happening at once". Well, in that case, Time did not do a very good job the last week. Everything started to happen at once, not just for me, but for everyone else. I could tell, because people promised to e-mail me back with small pieces or information that I had politely asked them for, like book references and such, but they never did.

On Monday I had a very interesting lunch time conversation with Grace Burton about mathematics and literature in the seventeenth century. We decide to continue on Thursday at lunch time.

Two lunches with Grace Burton ‡

My conversation with Grace Burton came about by a fluke. I was invited by Chuck Joseph to a Dean of Faculty staff meeting in late November. Upon leaving the room after the meeting, I noticed a history of mathematics book that Grace was carrying, and I asked her about it. In this way I learned that she had been reading up on mathematics and history of mathematics for some years, especially the calculus and its development in the 17th century. Walking back to our offices, Grace told me that she was interested in parallel notion of infinitesimals in mathematics and literature. This so intrigued me that we decided to have lunch some day to continue talking about this subject.

So a few weeks later we had lunch in the Faculty and Staff Club.

Grace asked me what I had learned about Skidmore, and I once again tried me, a bit worn down first line about Skidmore being well organized. I've been disproved so many times now, that perhaps I should not go on

believing in this impression any longer. But it is a good starting point for conversations.

I now also realized that we mean somewhat different things by being well organized. My base line is my own, admittedly scanty, impressions from my own home university college. We do of course have a basic infrastructure, but I have the impression that there are some "gaps" in our organization, things that don't get done except on an ad hoc basis. Skidmore people, I think, take this basic infrastructure for granted. What they have in mind are more higher level organization. I know I'm vague here, getting to the bottom with this would require more study, most probably another term at Skidmore which I don't have, and an interest in administrative stuff that I don't have.

Grace said that Skidmore is still a very young college, at least confirming one of my impressions, and that one has not really made up ones mind how to do things. New approaches are tried out all the time. But this also makes it exciting to be at Skidmore, things can be done here that would be much more difficult at other, older and more established colleges. This I could relate to, since that is also how faculty at my home institute, the School of Engineering, look upon themselves as an institution.

Then I mentioned my surprise at the emphasis on research at Skidmore. Grace said that she had been at another college which was purely teaching. At that place, you knew exactly what was your job. At Skidmore, you don't have that certainty. The job is not that well defined, and as I expected, Grace much preferred that uncertainty. To this I agreed.

Then Grace said something very interesting, and even surprising coming from a person who is not a mathematician or a scientist. Speaking about education and the students, if you ask young students what they think about different parts of mathematics; no, not really what they *think*, but rather if they *can do it*, you get different answers depending on what kind of maths you're asking about. Not many students say they can do geometry. But many say that they can do algebra. In algebra there are rules to follow, and if you follow them you get an answer, and the answer is a *thing*, perhaps somewhat abstract like " $x + 3$ ", but still a thing. If you ask them about calculus, you don't get that many positive responses, and the reason is, according to Grace, that in calculus you are working with *functions*, and these are not things. They are relations. Functions connect two variables, a y to an x , and this connection, or relation is valid for a whole range of values, and you can't sort of grasp them all at once (this is my reconstruction of our conversation). And even worse, when you apply the operations of calculus, like derivation, you still don't get things in general, but just new functions.

Kids don't like that. You don't get a definite answer, you don't get things.

Grace's specialty is Spanish literature. One of the advantages of being at a small college is that you are more free to pursue research interest that are not main stream. If you are at large place and want to compete for tenure, research money, or whatever, you are much more likely to be forced into doing things that are within limits.

Thinking about this later, I came to think that this is a double-edged sword. Being at a small place, which really don't have the top-notch people your are unlikely to get cut down if your out on a limb. That can be fine as long as you are self critical enough not go off in a completely crazy tangential. But you also miss out on healthy criticism.

* * *

A few days later, Grace and I had another lunch. She was late by three quarters of an hour, and I was about to leave, when she turned up. I knew she would be late, but not that late. But I'm glad a stayed, because we had a very interesting conversation. Her lateness was due a very long discussion with a somewhat famous parent who had called about his kid. It's part of Grace's job to shelter faculty from parents, who from what I understand, can be quite insistent sometimes. Often parents want to talk directly to faculty members. Grace tells them that that's not what they want to do.

After talking about this for a while we turned to much more interesting topics. Grace asked me about infinitesimals, something we did not really talk about the first time. The way I understood her question, I could only answer by telling about my own encounter with them. I've always found infinitesimals magical, the very term "infinitesimal calculus" rings magical. Or as Grace phrased it, they are *arcane*. They started to intrigue me in my early teens when I came across them in my forages into the popular science literature and the university mathematical literature that I borrowed at the local library.

Strangely enough, I have never before encountered someone who has been profoundly intrigued by the concept. Working mathematicians and teachers usually just brushes the subject away, resorting to the arid Cauchy-Weierstrass epsilon-delta rigmarole. Physicists of course use them all the time, but in a matter of fact way as a useful tool. So here I sat, discussing infinitesimals with a person who had approached them from the perspective of 17th century literature! How strange and serendipitous.

Anyway, I told Grace about my fascination which lasted all throughout my gymnasium years, waning during my years as a graduate and PhD student, to return in mid 90's when I started to read up on the history of

mathematics in earnest. And of course, infinitesimals are in the dead center of the discrete-continuous dichotomy that we've been discussing in my course. Thinking about this, I think that infinitesimals are more fascinating than the infinite itself. Literary speaking you can not focus the infinite, but the infinitely small is in some pictorial way possible to pinpoint, though as you try, it eludes you.

A digression into the infinitesimal ‡

The introduction of zero, **0**, into mathematics is generally considered to be a major invention. Its origins (sic!) are probable forever lost in the mist of history, though we know of cultures who did not have it and others who did have it. Perhaps one must distinguish between the concept of zero as such, and the introduction of a notation for it. It is not obviously clear that in the practice of counting one needs a concept for nothing, even less of a symbol for it.

But once zero was brought into mathematics, Pandemonium broke loose. Zero are one of those concepts, that once admitted on board, it just don't sit still in the boat.

On the practical side, having a symbol for nothing, paved the way for the powerful positional number system, a system that allows for efficient algorithms for the arithmetical operations like addition and multiplication.

What are the properties of zero? Well, if you add zero to something, that something stays the same. If you multiply by zero, you get zero back. But when the first human tried to divide by zero, it was the end to Arithmetic Paradise. Not even a digital calculator can do it, it just gives you back **Error**.

The reason for the conundrum is that division is implicitly defined in terms of multiplication. If you want to divide two numbers a and b say, that is, you want to do a/b and you expect an answer c , what you are really asking for is a number c such that $b \times c = a$. But if b is zero, then there is no such number c for the simple reason that whatever c is, $0 \times c = 0$ relentlessly! Note that there is nothing more than elementary school mathematics involved here. This is normally phrased as "you can't divide by zero". Sometimes it is said that dividing by zero gives infinity. The intuition behind this is that if you divide a number by smaller and smaller numbers you get bigger and bigger numbers back, in a sense going off to infinity. But it is not so much that you get infinity when you divide by zero, as what you get is **Undefined**.

In everyday maths, one never need to divide by zero, so there is really no problem. But as science and technology advanced in the 16th and 17th

century, there arose both a practical and a theoretical need to be able to calculate, on the one hand, rates of change, and on the other hand, areas and volumes of figures.

Now if something, call it f , changes as time x goes by, then one might be interested how f would change in a small time Δx , where the Greek letter Δ signifies a small difference or change. That change in f is denoted by Δf . Then it should be clear that if the interval of time Δx during which we record the change Δf in f , is small, then the change ought also to be small. So small indeed that it could be almost zero. When the change in x becomes smaller and smaller, Leibniz introduced a new notation, dx , for the infinitesimal change in x . The subtle change of notation signifies the transition from the concrete finite difference Δx into the inscrutable, mysterious infinitely small dx . The normally inconspicuous letter d acquires a completely new connotation, something that would defy rigorous definition and elude the greatest minds for almost two centuries. The problem was that one wanted to calculate rates of changes, i.e. $\Delta f/\Delta x$ in the limit where the interval got smaller and smaller. Eventually one wanted to calculate the limiting value df/dx where dx , and even df was infinitesimal. Infinitesimal really being an euphemism for the unpleasant zero. One still couldn't divide by zero, but perhaps by fierce handwaving and ritualistic incantations, it would be possible to divide by infinitesimals. And indeed it was, at least possible enough so that mathematicians and physicist could go on doing it and derive ever more results and applications in mathematics, science and technology. On the somewhat obscure grounds of infinitesimals, a tower of natural science was built. Infinitesimals fell in complete disrepute in the mid 19th century when the foundations of mathematical analysis was secured by new techniques.²⁶ Remarkably though, in the 1960's they were resurrected and understood.²⁷ There wasn't anything wrong with them all along.

Grace talked about the role of equality and the equality sign $=$ in mathematics, and how it is used. This is what physicists, mathematicians and computer scientist know as equational reasoning, that you can substitute equals for equals in equations, and thus move the calculation forward with the dual process of expansion and synthesis.

I told Grace about a point that I sometimes have made to students, half jokingly, when I worked in the gymnasium. Consider the well known "law" $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$. Let us replace the equality sign by double arrows like in $(a + b)^2 \rightleftharpoons a^2 + 2ab + b^2$. This is to symbolize that you can use

²⁶See any, not too elementary, calculus textbook.

²⁷A. Robinson, *Non-Standard Analysis*, North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1966.

the equality to either "expand" towards the right, or "synthesize" towards the left. My point is that if you are a humanities student, the you should be able to move a calculation forward from the left to the right, this is the mechanical, easy way. But if you are a natural science student, then you must be able to move a calculation forward going from the right to the left, this is the creative way. Because if you can't, you will get nowhere in the sciences. Even though she hadn't thought about this before, Grace got the point at once.

* * *

On Tuesday evening we went to a Pot Luck Party for Maths and Computer Science faculty. Monika was a bit bored, until she learned that Lydia should come too, and when Lydia finally arrived, the girls ran off to play. During the last weeks Monika has started to speak English to the other girls in her class. This made me very happy since I had hoped that she would pick up the language. On our way home we saw the most incredible Christmas Decoration. Someone had completely covered their house and garden with colored lights, Santas, Raindeers, Snowmen and Christmas Trees.

On Wednesday morning I sat an hour in Monika's Waldorf class before driving downtown to meet with Michael Rohlf for morning coffee at Uncommon Grounds. This turned out to be the very same place where I had my late night salad upon arriving in Saratoga Springs in April. Its a nice and quite place, ideal for a morning coffee philosophical chat. People sit there with their laptops.

I had talked to Michael at the September reception, and I knew he taught the philosophy class that Olof attended. I wanted to sound out some of my amateurish philosophical ideas with an expert.

Morning coffee with Michael Rohlf ‡

When I read George Berkeley a couple of years ago, I was struck by the very crisp, yet careful presentation of his idealistic ontology. At the risk of vulgarizing what is profound, let me just say that he denies the existence of a physical material reality. Everything is instead constituted by "spirits" or "ideas". Reading his treatise²⁸, I started to think that his view could very well be interpreted in terms of concepts from computer science. The spirits could be thought of as "objects" in the concrete sense of Object Oriented Programming. Objects are entities that carry properties and can have vari-

²⁸George Berkeley, *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710, (various publishers and editions).

ous behaviors among which are the capability to interact with other objects. It dawned on me that Berkeley's whole ontology could be restated in terms on these computer science inspired concepts. I actually think this is an original thought of mine since I have not seen it formulated anywhere else. At this stage it is also natural to think of Plato and his world of ideas. In Object Oriented Programming, the objects are instantiations of more abstract "classes". A class is a kind of blueprint out of which particular objects are made. Thus, at the core of idealistic philosophy, lies basic concepts that also underlies modern programming! Or perhaps it is the other way around, or even more likely, that idealistic philosophy and modern programming draw on a common strand of human thought.

This I now reiterated for Michael who did not look at all shocked or anything. In September he had said that there is no way you can discriminate an idealistic ontology from a materialistic, i.e. whether you call the basic stuff of the world "spirits" or "matter" doesn't really matter (sic!) that much. The reason being, as I understand it, that we are always perceiving the world through our senses, and there is no way we can perceive the thing in it self. Sense organs, often measuring apparatus, nerves, even consciousness, put layer upon layer, like a filter between "us" (whatever that is!) and the thing out there. Well, this is just the basic conundrum of epistemology.

Although I did not "believe" in Berkeley's philosophy, believing in things don't interest me that much, I could think of no way to refute it when I read it first. Later on I read that it can't be refuted and Michael now corroborated this impression of mine. However, Michael directed me towards Kant, and said that Kant's thinking should be interesting to me, judging from the way I described my struggles. Unfortunately I have not read Kant, but he's been on my reading list for some years now. Now I decided to finally get down to it. Of course, if you seriously want to study western epistemology and ontology there is no way to work around Kant.

* * *

I bought a Christmas present for Martha Harrington, the lady who cleans the house, and drove home with that.

Back at the college, I realized I was hungry so I vigorously ran down to the Spa to get a quick slice of pizza. I ran into a complete stale mate. There were no quick pizza slices to get. I went to another counter where they serve more fancy food like grilled sandwiches. But here time had apparently stopped completely. The guy behind the counter worked extremely slow. You're not used to that in America, the whole point with fast food is that you get it fast. People often think that you have to eat it fast. That's not

the point, you can eat it as slowly as you please, but you want to grab it up real fast. Now time went so slow that in an attack of politeness, I let a lady pass me in the queue. Then a girl turned up and I thought that speed would catch up. After an eternity she attended to my order. I ordered Today's Special Sandwich. At this stage I had expected choices to be made, as is the rule. Would I like it with Swiss cheese, Gruyere cheese, tuna cheese, paper cheese, plastic cheese, silly cheese, cheese cheese, or Piccadilly cheese? And what kind of dressing would I like? But there were no choices. Not even mustard choices! I had made up my mind for Sweet Honey Maple Sugar Chocolate Mustard. Instead I got a bland sandwich tasting like a pair of old slippers, and it was not even hot!

All of a sudden it was all over. The seventeen weeks and a few days would soon all be gone, and now, walking down the corridor this sunny day in mid December, I realized that I will not stroll down this corridor anymore, not in along time, perhaps not ever more. I stopped by a window and looked out over the Scribner Library on the other side of the path.

* * *

On Thursday afternoon I went to an end of term celebration with the Physics and Chemistry departments. I just stayed for an hour, long enough to gobble down some food and get back home in time for having Bob, Mark and Steve over for a couple of beers and some "debriefing". We talked mostly about the course, the topics it had charted out and about science in general. Myself, I was somewhat disappointed that I hadn't been able to elicit more response from and interaction with the students. I had thought that this kind of course, cross disciplinary in contents and not very guided or structured as regards the way to study it, leaving much room for independent enquiry, was common at liberal arts colleges. Of course, of this I know very little, but I think my students were unfamiliar with this kind of "experimental" setup. Then again it was fairly conventional in delivery and I did no advanced pedagogical gymnastics. Mind you, I've done that kind of thing in other courses, it is fun, but you can't do every time.

On Friday morning, Monika was tired, but we had breakfast and even managed to look through a book about the construction of a pyramid in Egypt, a homework due this very day. I left her at school, rushed home for a quick shower, and then went off to the Surrey where I was invited to the Chair of Departments retreat. I sat in the back in a not so comfortable sofa with Bob DeSieno.

The meeting started out with questions to Mike West, the new Vice President for Finance and Administration. There was much talk about

deferred maintenance, the heating system was in need of substantial repairs and reconstruction. Since much of the college is built at roughly the same time, thirty or forty years ago, repairs become due all over the place at roughly the same time. At this meeting, depths and details of college life was plumbed that I couldn't really follow. Once again I realized that I've just been scratching the surface.

I had planned to quit the meeting after lunch, but it ended with lunch. I drove home, picked up Monika after school, and we had a lazy afternoon. Monika wrote on her Field Museum story, and I sat reading before going down to the kitchen to make real big pan of Bolognese that would take us through the packing days. After eating we quickly drove down to Price Chopper to get a Santa Claus hat for Monika for the Waldorf Christmas celebration. The celebration was in the large Auditorium of Maple Avenue School, the big public school out on route 9 that I checked out in April. I had time to see the grade fifth juggling before I drove downtown to have a dinner with my own students from Skidmore.

This dinner came about, I think, as a direct result of my impressionistic way of doing things. As you might have guessed, I'm not a person very attentive to details. I drew up the plan for my course, not actually consulting how these things are done at Skidmore. I did not plan with any written exam for the reason that I found it inappropriate for a course like this. I had instead required two papers and accompanying presentations in order to pass the course.

Assessing and grading is the worst part of being a teacher, and I always try to keep it too a minimum, not more than is needed to grade fairly. I must confess that I'm not very good at grading. I always thought that teaching and grading should be separated. Anyway, it so appeared that a final exam was scheduled, as a matter of routine, for Friday evening between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. It got into my head to use that time for something, though of course I could not use it for formal course requirements, since I had not announced that from the outset. I came up with the idea for the students to write a short essay on the following three questions: (1) Write your own resume of the course, (2) What did you learn from the course, (3) What are your questions after the course.

My idea was to let this be something that could add to the students grade, not subtract. But then one of the students remarked that this is dinner time, not exam time. So eventually we decided to go out for dinner. So I can add to the list of forms of assessment: Go to a restaurant for a debriefing!

We spent an hour and a half in the very nice and quite Restaurant "Little

India” on Broadway. It was a memorable and hearty dinner. And as so often happens in life, you spend quite a lot of time together with other people, as you do in your classroom interaction with your students, but it is just at the very end that you get to know them. Just before it is all over.

3.28 Madness of packing, sadness of going home

The weekend was frantic. I had decided to put off packing until Monday and Tuesday, but there were lots of things to do nevertheless, mostly having to do with buying Christmas presents. We were invited to Sarah and Steve on Saturday evening and we sat talking late into the night.

When I know I’m going home, that’s when I start to feel homesick. Eventually you start to long for your own house, to be surrounded by your own stuff. I longed for my own study, where I can dig deep into my papers and books. I was homesick at same time that I was putting off packing.

We had a mini-family Sunday. Olof surprised me by being awake at eight in the morning for no obvious reason. Then he volunteered to go out and buy something nice for breakfast, and I was dumbfounded. It put me in a cheerful mood for the rest of the day. So we had a long Sunday morning breakfast with all the Advent candles burning, and then we went to the mall. We just looked around and I saw a present for my mother. Then we drove home for coffee. Olof made coffee and we had donuts and ginger breads in front of the TV while watching two episodes of Simpson’s.

I had planned to read the students’ papers over the weekend although I knew this was unrealistic. I always procrastinate when it comes to grading, and so this time also. It is better to read them at home in between Christmas and New Years Eve. This will also do the students’ efforts more justice.

It was really time to pack. It was only Sunday afternoon, and feeling a stint of inspiration, I decided I might as well start. I knew that I had to face this challenge alone, struggling with clothes, books and papers. I went to the attached garage and lugged four big suitcases and one small upstairs to my bed room.

* * *

If you have had a great time then there is often a sadness of going home. If you have had a home where you’ve been, then it is even confusing what it means to go home. Monika and I have been discussing these things for the last week. She is going home, but at the same time she is leaving home, never to come back again. As a child you will never come back again, because even

if you do come back, you're not that child any longer.

Monika does not want to go home, she feels she will miss her friends in the school. She will miss our "spooky" house on Pinewood Avenue. I also felt a sadness thinking that just when she's got to know the other girls in her class, especially Lydia, it is time to go home. But perhaps most of all, she will miss Otto. For some weeks she has been saying that she wants to take him home to Sweden. Of course she knows that it's impossible. I never saw a cat that companionable, she can carry him around just like a kitten.

Tuesday was the last day in school for Monika, and she took a long goodbye to the school and her friends. The reason why we chose the Waldorf school was the welcoming atmosphere that I detected at my very first visit to the school in April. Even though it meant saying farewell to 2000 dollars, it was worth every single dollar. The Waldorf school of Saratoga Springs is a very good school indeed and Monika had a great time there.

I won't bore the reader with packing details, but I'm glad I started already on Sunday evening. I packed all Monday and Tuesday interspersed with Christmas shopping, cleaning out the fridge and the stove.

I sent three boxes by mail with DVD's, books and papers. That was not sufficient. On Tuesday morning I had to pack two more boxes which we had to pay extra for when checking in at Albany Airport.

I made a final survey of the coin collection. I had 28 out of 30 coins. I missed Illinois which is strange since that is a 2003 coin. I also missed Wisconsin, but that is the latest issued one (October 25, 2004), and judging from the sudden burst of Iowa, I could have expected to get it, had I stayed a few more weeks. Here's my final distribution for those of you who are interested.²⁹ I can draw no conclusions from this distribution. Well, I did draw the conclusion that not all state coins exist, but that conclusion will eventually be falsified. Ah, the poverty of induction!

* * *

I had planned to make the rounds on Monday and Tuesday saying goodbye to everyone, but it didn't happen. I said goodbye to Mary and to Bob on Monday, but after that, time just wasn't on my side any longer. When I finally made it to the fourth floor of the Palamountain Hall on Tuesday afternoon at 5 p.m., everyone had left except Chris, so I took farewell to her

²⁹Texas(7), Rhode Island(5), Maine(3), New Jersey(2), South Carolina(6), Florida(4), Connecticut(8), Louisiana(2), Missouri(3), Mississippi(1), Maryland(2), Michigan(4), Georgia(5), Indiana(4), Tennessee(2), New Hampshire(6), Virginia(6), Alabama(4), Pennsylvania(3), New York(5), Delaware(3), Arkansas(2), Iowa(10), North Carolina(2), Massachusetts(2), Vermont(1), Kentucky(2), Ohio(1).

and again thanked her for all the help with my visit to Skidmore.

On my way from the Dean's office, I saw the setting sun through the big windows facing west. The big red sun was rapidly falling behind the mountains and I stood for some minutes watching it disappear. It was a beacon, telling me that next time, I will hit the road and go west. I will drive south along the piedmont of the Appalachians, then through the Cumberland gap into Kentucky and back up to the Ohio Valley, and then follow the river to its confluence with the Mississippi and further along the Missouri all the way to Montana.

3.29 What I did not do

"Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana" as Groucho Marx said. Looking back at those seventeen weeks, it seems like a long time, but at the same time, it went by very rapidly. There were lots of things that I did not do. I never drove up to the Adirondack Museum, and we never went horse riding in the backwoods around Lake Luzern. Sadly, I did no horse riding at all, I just not got around to organize it. There was no New England trip, no Berkshire trip, and no trip to Montreal, nor to Boston. As I have noted before, the country is depressingly big, and time is so short. Again I'm reminded of the words of that American chronicler Jack Kerouac, though I don't remember the exact words, nor care to look them up, but it was something about the "everythingness" of America, the "sadness" of it all.

Listening to native American musicians, you can sense the otherworldliness of the immense continent, its strange wilderness in the middle of western civilization.

Not that I had planned to do that much of traveling. In my mind this was the opportunity to simply live in America. I met Americans that had not even seen as much of the country as I had during my trips. So living in America does not necessarily mean doing a lot of traveling. I wanted to do serious intellectual work. In a naive way I wanted to relive those faraway days in London, sitting up at the kitchen table into the early morning hours working away at research problems.

And I did do intellectual work, but not as much as I had thought was possible. I had thought that it should be possible to both read and write at the same time. But this turned out not to be that easy. I read very little.

I did not go down to the Rodeo south of Ballston Spa in August. I did not buy cigars in that downtown basement shop, the lugubrious customers hanging in the doorpost always scared me away.

This stay in America was for me a dream come true. I learned much about the country and its people. I must confess that before this fall in America I always felt compelled to defend the United States against criticism over its foreign policy and things like that. Not so any longer, my affection for America is as strong as ever, but I also see its weaknesses now. I see the sadness and the love for the country in the same person. I see that this country is still not really settled. This is a country based on contradictions, and though contradictions seem to spell disaster, with just a little bit of imagination and creativity it really spells progress. And creativity is all over the place.

Chapter 4

Epilogue

4.1 In lieu of academic conclusions ‡

So what are the main academic conclusions of all this? Having reread Sheldon Rothblatts essays "The Limbs of Osiris" and "The Living Arts"¹ I was about to write that liberal arts is one of those things that might be characterized but not defined. But on second thoughts, that would not be correct. There are in fact many characterizations of liberal education, often overlapping but with different emphasis, but also almost entirely disjoint. Clearly, there is no point in me adding to the confusion from my limited experience and awkward vantage point back in Sweden. What little I have written on this topic in the preceeding pages can be seen as a diffuse mirror image of that bigger debate.

So I opt out of the academic conclusions, it is really to early to see where this will lead, but it will lead somewhere.

4.2 Some self criticism ‡

When I came home, I read and graded the student's reports. I must say I was a bit disappointed, and I dare write this even though some of the students might read this. And I have a little bad conscience about the rather low grades, in the mid range, that I gave them. So what was the problem? When I read the document "Classroom Protocols: Notes for Skidmore Faculty"² it really pinpointed weaknesses in my approach that I had been vaguely

¹Comparative and Historical Reflections on Liberal Education, Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2003

²This is really a very good document

aware of, but could not do very much about during the course. Being a cross-disciplinary, popular science course, it didn't make sense to me to have a regular written exam. I resorted to requiring the students to write two papers on various topics that I listed. Naively I believed that they would tackle that assignment right away, and that there would be plenty of time to discuss their evolving papers with them. Of course I should have put up deadlines, but I did not do that. Strangely enough I don't know why I did not do it. In a Swedish context I would certainly had done it, even though Swedish university students are generally somewhat older and therefore somewhat more mature. I guess I overestimated the average American college student. Perhaps another factor was the experimental nature of the course itself. Half way through the term I started to prod the students about the papers, and I did this with increasing frequency, but to no great avail. In the end the students gave their presentations the very last week and I got the papers just before I went back to Sweden. Of course, there was no time for feedback at that late stage.

But there is no denying that I failed to be clear on the criteria for the grading. It could have been more clear had I familiarized myself with Skidmore grading procedures beforehand. Why I did not do that can only be explained with the fact that there were lots of other concerns in the beginning of the term.

Reading the above mentioned document, I understood more clearly what I had started to suspect while at Skidmore, that college students expect quite a lot of detailed guiding in their studies. They are generally not that independent and self propagating.

Then I don't know how much influence me not being an American had. I got the feeling that the students were somewhat shy, sometimes even in awe of me. I don't really understand this as I'm an easy going person. I had expected more interaction with the students, and although I encouraged them to e-mail me and stop by my office any time, they seldom did. However I had almost 100 percent attendance at my classes, and I do think the students enjoyed the course. Another factor may be the presence of three other professors sitting in. I have no idea what effect this had.

Anyway, you learn by making mistakes, and I don't know if I had been that much happier had I done it completely right. Perhaps the students would have been. Hey guys, if you read this, forgive me! I tried to do my best, and you will all get a sincere acknowledgment in my book! And I can assure you that the long term benefit you will earn from attending this course is not the grade itself, but the experience.

4.3 Last words

Michael Arnush started our November lunch time conversation by asking me about what I would do differently if I had a second chance. As I could not think of anything, I just said "nothing", and it was true, I have had a great time, and there is really no way in which I could have done it differently.

Having said that, we are finally at the very end.

The End.