

Best and Worst of Times, San Francisco, 1969

Two other people I had met, somehow, also wanted a ride out to California, so we piled ourselves, and our stuff, into the Rambler station wagon my father had given me, and headed west. By the time we got to Boulder, Colorado, it was obvious why my father had given me the car. It was on its last legs, particularly as the altitude increased. Boulder is at about 5000 feet, and the car simply had no zip. Somehow, we found a place to stay for a few days, while we considered what to do. A mechanic told us the car would not make it over the Rockies, that if we wanted to continue, we should go through Wyoming, but we might not make it over the Sierra, in California.

Stay or go. The people we were staying with told us they wound up in Boulder because of a similar problem, and really liked the town, but we decided to press on. Looking back, I am amazed that such complete strangers to each other, the people in the house, and the three of us in the car, could make such communal decisions. It was just the way it was back then, or at least, for those of us “on the road.”

We limped through Wyoming and across Nevada. I remember most clearly getting off the highway one night, in the middle of Nevada, unrolling my sleeping bag, sleeping under a magnificent starry night, and waking up to realize that we were in a cow pasture. Further on down the road, we picked up a hitchhiker. He sat in the back seat behind me, while I drove. The other two guys in the car started making some noise, I looked around, and pulled over and told him, “Either you put that machete away, or you get out of the car!” He put it away. All is well that ends well.

We made it over the Sierra, going up from Reno very, very slowly, because that is all the car could do, and arrived in San Francisco just after some thunderstorms rolled through. It did not mean much to me, but someone told me that it is very rare. [I just checked this on google, and it turns out to be once every five years or so. Odd. Go to my [blog post](#) to see when it happened again for me.] Walt, the guy who was starting the independent school that was supposed to hire me, told me that many people in the Bay Area would consider this a portent.

He also told me that he was not going to be able to hire me, which was a disappointment. John had told me of a friend of his who offered his couch to strangers, so I stayed there for about a week, until, one day, he said that he needed some work

done on a piece of property he had in Noe Valley. I said, "Sure", and he dropped his pants. I knew I could no longer stay there.

Walt had a room in his apartment, where I could stay. I think I went to the State employment office, and got a simple office job through them, and then Walt said that, through the American Friends Service Committee, he had met someone who was creating a group house, and I might be interested in that, which I was, so I joined about 6 other people, most of us in our twenties, camping in out Conrad's living room.

I had started hitchhiking when I lived in New York, once out to Antioch, and another time all over the Midwest, and, in San Francisco then, it was an accepted way to get around. Even a Muni bus once picked me up. But it could be dangerous, as I found out, when I got in a car, was beaten about the head, and dumped out on the street. I had a concussion, but the good news was that, while I could not work, I could get minimal public assistance, and staying at Conrad's was free. I think welfare contacted my parents, who were of course concerned, but did not send money.

The draft board was after me to sign up for my alternative service. Through the AFSC, I talked with a lawyer, who wrote them a letter, pointing out that their procedures were in error, and that since I was over 25, I did not have to do the alternative service. The lawyer did this for me for free. Now, had I been slightly more cunning, I would have figured out a way to work for this lawyer, well known and respected in San Francisco. Five years later I could have become a lawyer, without going to law school, because, in those days, California still recognized the old system of "reading the law". Two of the years would have been alternative service! Forest Gump again.

Of course, that is a fantasy I tell myself. It would not have come true. He was Bobby Seale's attorney at the Chicago 8-1 trial, and as I learned from the film, he died within a year or two after I met with him.

I had been looking into where I might do alternative service. One of the authorized non-profits was the San Francisco Mime Troupe, so I talked with them, but then, what with the necessity gone, and the offer of a real job with the EYOA, the Los Angeles War on Poverty organization, I decided to go to LA. That way, my justification was, I could save up some money for the nascent commune that was forming at Conrad's house, which was scoping out places near Mendocino at which to establish itself.

Things were moving fast. Between September, and December, when I went to LA, I had

joined with this group of people, gotten to know the Bay Area, gone to my first Grateful Dead concert, their last one at the original Fillmore, and started taking LSD.

LSD changed my life. The first trip was all fun, on the back of a motorcycle going up the Pacific Coast Highway to Mendocino, watching the absolutely spectacular ocean, the rock formations, the pastures, the redwood trees, glorying in the astounding beauty of nature which LSD reveals in all its hallucinations.

The second trip I had an aha! Moment. I realized that there were men in my life with whom I had been in love. My Oberlin college roommate. My calculus teacher at Columbia. My honors government teacher at Columbia, though she was a woman, I had not realized that I had had a crush on her. Before LSD, I was sort of normal, repressed, American male. After LSD, I was a love child. In fact, on one of my trips, I felt my hair growing out, growing long, and so after that, I let it grow long. I had become a full blast hippie.

San Francisco at the time was and had been a haven for homosexuals. That is why my first host was so comfortable about dropping his pants. But while my feelings for those men were definitely love, they were not at all sexual, But I was confused, and could not figure it out, and in many ways spent most of the rest of my life wondering how to express this part of my being.

It was also about this time that I started going to Monday Night Class, at the Family Dog out on the Great Highway. Just typing these words brings back the smell of patchouli. But it gets better. The Family Dog was an old wooden ballroom on the ocean edge, where bands like Quicksilver played. I think they recorded [Happy Trails](#) there. It is worth a listen, if you like 60's psychedelic dance music. Anyway, Steve Gaskin, every Monday night, Steve Gaskin would gather the tribe by blowing a shofar, and then talk, rapping, about whatever seemed to come to his mind, big ideas all, the teachings of the Zen Masters, what he learned in the Marines, lessons from LSD, his poly-amorous, bisexual relationship with another couple, the idea of everyone getting an old school bus, converting it into a camper, and leaving the city to find a rural home. I thought seriously about joining them, but it was just too loose and unstructured, with no clear exit strategy for me if it did not work out. They left town, and after wandering for a year, settled in rural Tennessee, became The Farm. There is an excellent Swedish video about them, available on [YouTube](#), subtitled in English, and a much longer film which describes their successes and their failures entitled American Commune.

Anyway, on to LA. Richard was head of the planning department at the CAP agency in LA, and I had come well recommended from people in Washington. They admired me for what I planned to do, and for what I had done. My job was to write papers on issues such as housing and job development. The other planner in the shop knew of a place for me to stay in Venice, so I wound up staying there. Richard would show me the materials that I should use for my research, and I would cut and past them into ten or twenty page papers. I found it easy, and, apparently, I was good at it.

I took off the week between Christmas and New Years, and visited some friends from the summer, one of the couples who had lived across the street, who were living in San Francisco. Of course we took some acid ... I was invited to a fantastic New Years Eve party in the city, and can say, I remember the day the sixties ended. It was the next morning, for at the top of the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle, the date was January 1, 1970.

Venice was next to Santa Monica, which was close to UCLA in Westwood, and I connected with the local radicals. They asked me to give them a hand in moving some equipment. I agreed. One Sunday, we drove a rented truck to the San Fernando Valley, went into an office, and began loading an early version of a computerized publishing system into a rental truck. Halfway through, I realized that we were most likely stealing it, so I got them to hurry up, and get out of there. Whew! That was not my first encounter with crazy leftists, but the first time I was aware of how unhinged they were.

One day, Richard suggested I go over to UCLA, hang out there, get to know the campus I did that. The previous summer, after the Weathermen had successfully destroyed SDS, they went off on their Days of Rage. Some of the Columbia SDS chapter members were instrumental in this. They had also begun a campaign of setting off bombs, one of which killed three of their own. They were underground. The Post Office had pictures of some of my friends on the bulletin boards. The Chicago 8, then 7, were being tried as provocateurs of the demonstrations at the previous year's Democratic Convention. I knew several of them from when I worked at SDS. The times were very intense.

So, sitting in a cafeteria, drinking up a coffee, I looked up and saw someone I knew from Columbia. He was one of the Ten Most Wanted in the Post Office. I looked at him; he looked at me. I went back to what I was reading. When I looked up, he was gone.

Now, was it really that person, or just someone who looked like him? I am not sure, but the next day, Richard asked me how I liked UCLA. "Okay," I said. He asked, "Did you see

anyone you knew?" I gave him a long look. Previously, he had told me that he worked for the "firm" in Venezuela, which I took to mean the CIA. I can tend to be paranoid, but, there I was, working for a government funded agency, and he had hired me basically sight unseen. In the back of my mind was the worry that he was part of what we now know as the Nixon's Cointelpro operation. After all, I was the first person who got fired after Nixon became President. "Just because you are paranoid, does not mean they are not out to get you," as a mid level manager in Washington had said to me the previous summer. I answered Richard. "No", but I could tell that he knew the answer was yes.

The agency had a couple of floors in an office building downtown. In the central part of my floor were forty or fifty desks, with people working there, working the phones, doing things, I had no idea what. Then I found out. My take on the Black Panthers, at the time, was that they were doing real community organizing in black neighborhoods. I did not like the violent rhetoric, nor their emphasis on guns, but I saw them as a force for positive social change, what with their breakfast program, and their street organizing, especially against the police which, as we all now well know, were then, and continue too often to be, an occupying force in communities of color.

Back then, this was 1971, the police, and the federal law enforcement, were trying to break the Panthers. They did this with guns. They had done this in Chicago with guns when they murdered Fred Hampton in his bed. They did this with guns in Los Angeles, attacking the Black Panther house.

I learned what all those people, with their desks and phones, were there for. They were community leaders in various neighbors, and their job, that day, was to go back into the communities, and tell people that the police were the good guys, and the Panthers were evil.

I did not agree. I understood then that I was working for the wrong side. I quit my job, and went back up to San Francisco. Richard was disappointed, but we stayed in touch, and when he published a book, based on his Ph.D. Dissertation, he mentioned my inspiration to him for my moral compass in the book's forward.

The Mime Troupe was still looking for someone to handle their bookings, the job I would have had for my alternative service. In fact, it was where Bill Graham, the impresario of the Fillmores, had gotten his start. They paid a small stipend. I needed a place to live, and one of the couples, he the carpenter, she the props lady, had a room

in their house on Portrero Hill, so I had a place to stay.

I wanted to learn about how the arts could aid the movement, and I wanted to explore my questions about my sexuality, and I thought the Mime Troupe would be a good place to do both. I did not realize how impressive my history was, an Ivy League graduate from Columbia, site of the student rebellion, who had not only worked a year for SDS, but knew the people who were being prosecuted in the Chicago 7 trial, and had lead a demonstration in Washington, DC. And a few other things, I am sure ...

They were impressed. I was hired. Their founder, Ronnie Davis, had just left the company, why, I was not sure, but he was still deeply involved. He took me over to a TV studio, where he was taping a friend's dance, the dance being just hands floating in the air. I suggested reversing from black hands, with white background, to white hands with black background, and then combining the two cameras. He was impressed. I was approved. I was impressed that he had access to such a studio, and wanted to go back to do some more playing with the expensive toys, but it did not happen.

My job was to sell bookings to cities and schools. Much of the income that supported the Mime Troupe was from those sources, plus a grant from the Tourism office of San Francisco, plus, as it turned out, hefty support from private individuals, "radical chic". One of the things I learned, during my time at the Mime Troupe, was how important it is to have "outside" financial support if you want to donate your life to the arts, or for that matter, social change. Me, I was never able to do this, plus I would have felt it improper to keep the money I might raise for myself, because I had a very collectivist ethic, what I presumed was, or at least had been, the ethic of SNCC.

In a city that was very hip, especially after the Summer of Love in 1967, the Mime Troupe was very, very hip. Stylish, leading the cultural revolution. I took it as normal --- Forest Gump again. But within the company, the "artists" were favored over the "support" staff, as is often the case in arts groups. Plus, I was the only pacifist. The rest of them, by and large, were upper middle class white people who were financially able to devote themselves to the arts, and found a home at the Mime Troupe. They were more artists than activists. One of them once told me that when he went to a demonstration, he would look to see how people were acting, their gestures, their tone of voice, basically their on-stage presence. [He was also the person who, seeing me struggle with the banjo and Pete Seeger's "How to Play the Five String Banjo", showed me how to play. Randy, thank you.] I was surprised, because I was whole hog an activist, and had always considered that what I was doing was from the heart, and not

an act. But this meant that their politics were not thought through, and certainly not as deeply thought through as mine, plus, being artists, they often lacked the analytical equipment, and interest, to do such work.

So I tried to meet them on their ground. It was hip to be into violent revolution, but I was still a pacifist. I wrote a short play, about how we were all in it together, no matter what our feelings were about pacifism, which they read, one compared it to Brecht's teaching plays, and then dropped. I learned about Brecht, and they learned I wanted to do something a little different. I was stuck upstairs in the office, while the real work was downstairs, in the shop, and on the rehearsal stage. I wanted to spend some of my time there in that atmosphere.

I was valuable to the troupe. Before I had arrived, presentations had been scheduled in a variety of city parks, on both sides of the Bay. We had a portable stage, and one day took our show over to Oakland one day. I was pretty new to the troupe then. We set up in a park, and, then, I was asked to intervene. It seems a local resident wondered exactly what we were doing, a white theater company in a black neighborhood, most likely Black Panther territory. It turned out part of my job was flack catcher. I walked over, and talked with the guy. He asked me what we were doing there, I told him that this had been set up before I was involved, and if he had a problem with us being there, we would strike the set. But, I pointed out, we were trying to work on some of the problems he lived with day to day, and maybe he would like to see the show. He then pointed out that we were all white, and I agreed, pointed out that I was new to the company, and this was one of the things I too wanted to work on, and invited him over to the rehearsal and office space in San Francisco. I was reasonable, he was reasonable, and the show went on.

I realize I am writing a lot more about the Mime Troupe than other adventures in San Francisco, and I think it is because I was doing, I thought, what I really wanted to do, why I had gone back to college, to help change US politics for the better. But I found, as Saul Alinsky had suggested back when I was working for SDS, that change really could not come from the entitled well educated white middle class students.

About the second month there, , I noticed that the Roger the receptionist was talking with a couple of guys, and motioned for me to come over. They were from the FBI. They had an 8X11 sheet of mug shots, maybe thirty or forty different people, who they were looking for. It was pictures of the Weathermen. They asked if I recognized any of them. I did, about a third of them. They asked if I had seen any of them lately. I had

not. They asked that if I did, would I call them, and gave me their card. I began to understand my Forest Gumpiness a little better.

This was the Spring of 1970. In May, the National Guard killed four students at Kent State who were in an anti-war demonstration. For me, recollecting Kent State puts things in perspective. The Weathermen were wrong, in their tactics, but they were on the right side regarding the war, and I shared their passion.

Joan, the script writer, had written a play about Women's Liberation, a melodrama entitled "The Independent Female, or, a Man Has His Pride." The climax of the play was when the male chauvinist pig boss, yelling at the independent female, has a heart attack and dies, on stage. The character's name was Walter. Joan's partner, Dan, told me that it was and wasn't Walter, meaning me, but I did not want to be put in that rung of the hierarchy. I figured if they were going to do that to me, I better get into performance, and I figured that the easiest way to do this was to join the band. So I asked to join the band. They said I needed an instrument. In junior high school I had played the mellophone, which took the alto part in the horn sections, the marching band french horn instrument. I picked one up, for cheap, found that I was still able to play it, but needed practice, of course.

The band leader said no.

I quit. Forest Gump again, never quit a job unless you have another one lined up.

Steve asked me what I was going to do. I said I was going back to the antipoverty agency. He said they would not hire me. He was right.

The next six months were sort of a blur, living off, I guess, the money I had saved in LA, picking up odd jobs, couch surfing with friends. I do remember, to my regret, allowing myself to be seduced by women in unhappy marriages, three times. The common factor of the women was they all had infant children. I know they liked my free spirit life, and maybe I was attracted to their mothering qualities. As one mutual friend put it, one couple was already an accident waiting to happen. Anyway, I lacked the emotional stability to resist temptation, and it was a time and place of more open relationships, but still, I regret my actions.

I also spent a lot of time hitchhiking up and down the California coast, spending a week, I remember, in a canyon in Big Sur, getting up as north as Eureka, CA. I spent time near

Point Reyes and Olema, camped for a while in the abandoned wood frame elevator shaft of the Mime Troupe, and just hung out.

In fact, I had become homeless. I did not see it that way at the time, but I had no address that I could call home. For example, one afternoon I was walking down Portrero Hill, and I saw two hippies running out the back door of a house. I figured they were burglars, and had been discovered. A few minutes later, a cop car pulled up next to me, and told me to get in. He meant it. Inside, I saw one of the young men who had run out of the house, and I looked enough like the other one to understand what was going on. I got in. The other hippie looked at me, surprised. The cop shut the door and I learned something about cop cars. Back doors do not have inside door handles, for obvious reasons. They took us down to the precinct house, separated us and questioned us. Where did I live? Well, then, I was living in the elevator shaft, but it was not a legal residence, but it was the Mime Troupe, and after about half an hour, questioning both of us separately, they let me go, having taken off their badges. They did not want this to become a Mime Troupe playlet. When I got back to the Mime Troupe, and told someone what had happened, his response was, "You abandoned that other guy!" In my mind, he deserved to be abandoned, but I learned a little more about middle class revolutionaries.

I was in fact homeless, and no matter how much I saw the communal and collectivist movement of the sixties to be my spiritual home, for whatever number of reasons, I was not able to construct a physical home, meeting the basics of food, clothing and shelter. Love would have been nice too, but that seemed to be just as difficult for me to decode.

When people think of homelessness, at least those who are not homeless, they think how sad it is, to be living out on the street, or in tents. But it isn't really. For me, it was like a choice. I did not really understand what I was giving up, but I was embracing freedom, and, if you look more closely at the homeless people, at least those who are not in the middle of mental health and/or addiction crises, you will find that most of them are choosing a style of life. Some of them, for very good reasons, refuse to be warehoused in shelters, and would rather sleep outside, in nooks and crannies that shelter them from the wind, rain and snow. It might not be the life you, or I at this point in my life would choose, but it is a choice, and I seemed to make it often during the 1970's.

As I look back, the year and a half I spent on the west coast has a slightly surreal tinge

to it. Perhaps from the LSD, or perhaps from how my life seems so often to be. It has made for an interesting life, with lots of struggle, and disappointments, and reinventions, and now, as I sit and write this, I marvel at how well it has all turned out, but back then, it certainly was strange.

A lot of my life seems to have that strange quality. In fact, the blog post I mentioned above in this chapter recounts a similar experience, much later in my life. No longer taking LSD. Living in a house I owned. Yet, still, my life has this strange fictional quality at times:

Mike is a big guy. I am pretty big myself, over six feet, but thin boned. Mike is not only taller than me, but bigger boned, and beefier. He is also blond, square faced, and looks like the pride of the Aryan race.

All these, and the fact that he had a Connecticut state police decal on his car when I first met him, made me wary. What was he doing at this artist run, improvisational dance, retreat center?

Well, he was dancing, just like I was dancing, rolling round on the floor, rolling around each other while standing up, even doing contact improvisation lifts, and dancing, with the floor, with a woman, or another man, or a group of people, men and women. He was dancing with me. We got along just fine.

Several years later, there he was again, at the Sierra Hot Springs, for a contact improvisation jam high in the mountains of California, rolling on the floor with me, again, and swimming in the hot springs. He was explaining to some of the younger dancers how he connected the flow of improvisational dance with his profession, mathematics, how he understood it in the same way he understood harmonic frequencies and wave forms.

Now, Nikola Tesla had always been a fascinating person to me, because, from what I read, he seemed to have a mystical understanding of electrical energy, of wave forms, and while he died impoverished, and quite mad, he also was the lead person in the creation of our modern, alternating current electrical system.

Junior scientists, such as myself in high school, remembered him best for the Tesla coil, a transformer, which would boost voltage, creating an arc that would

climb up between two exposed electrodes. Mad scientists we were, learning how to chuckle ominously to the zap, zap, zap sounds of the device. We were also fascinated that, because of the high voltage, low amperage of the device, there was little danger to us with it, and that, at a distance light bulbs would glow.

One more thing I learned about Tesla was his theory that, with the right frequency, he might cause the world to dissolve. And that he experimented with this idea in Colorado, on Long Island, and even on Houston Street, in lower Manhattan.

So I asked Mike about this, if he knew of Tesla's theories, and what he thought of them. He looked at me, and said, "Of course, that is what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki." Until that moment, I had never understood the practical implications for the unity of energy and matter, Einstein's $E=MC^2$. Of course, I understood that nuclear fission and fusion released a tremendous amount of energy from a very little bit of material, but I had not understood that physicists used wave form calculations to determine material transformations. I had understood fission and fusion as particle interactions, like a microscopic pool table, and not the far more ephemeral electromagnetic radiation that bathes us in its light, or enables our radios to sing, or sends pictures to our televisions.

Mike went on to explain that when he was in the Air Force, he worked on the Star Wars program, and, if some morning I noticed that a chunk of the moon was missing, I would know that the harmonic frequency generators envisioned by Tesla had finally been built. And I recalled that at the first test of the atomic bomb, in New Mexico, the physicists were worried that they might possibly melt the world with their new device.

Just so you know, they did not. Nor have I noticed a new notch in the crescent of the moon.

But I did think of our conversation several days later, when I was in Oakland, and a thunderstorm rolled through. It took me a while to remember that thunderstorms are very rare in the Bay area, and that lightning was plasma, which could best be understood as a wave form. I was pleased with such a natural welcome back to the Bay area, very much like my first, and discovered to my great surprise, and even greater enjoyment, a spectacular Ecstatic Dance,

complete with rolling around on the floor, just a couple of blocks from where I was staying.

My next stop was Los Angeles, Venice/Santa Monica to be more precise, where I had lived in the late seventies. I had a long lunch with my former minister, Jim Conn, and then reconnected with my friend Chuck. As we were talking, we heard a loud boom. We thought it must have been a sonic boom, from a military aircraft. We found out it was not. Literally out of the blue, for the sky was clear, came a bolt into the Pacific Ocean, not five miles from where we were standing. Later we learned one person was killed. Here is the news coverage of the unbelievable event: <https://www.cnn.com/2014/07/27/us/lightning-strike-venice-beach/index.html>

Now, I remember the sky being completely clear, but notice that this newscast explains how a thunderstorm came through. Fake news? I just don't know, but Chuck and I looked West, toward LAX, just south of Venice, and saw not a cloud in the sky.

The next day, I met with Tom Hayden, now deceased, to discuss the state of the left, and electoral politics. Upon meeting him at a coffee bar in Venice, the first words out of his mouth were, "Maybe you should leave town today. Aren't you worried that lightning is going to hit you?" Now, I do have a tendency to be paranoid, and in fact, this whole blog piece is in many ways an internal exploration of my self-centeredness (Mike, who must have had a security clearance to work on Star Wars, had casually divulged too much to me, so, from a satellite, THEY concocted a thunderstorm in Oakland to warn me to keep my mouth shut, and, when that did not work, there I was in Santa Monica, meeting with Tom, so THEY would show they were serious, and then Tom showed me he was part of THEM by his question) ...

I think.

I told him that I would take my chances.

One of the things I wanted to talk with him about was my FBI files. The previous summer, I had started the process of requesting them through the Freedom of Information Act, and I had seen a picture of Tom, with his files, in a single stack, twice as tall as he. I did not think that mine would be near that numerous, but

was pretty sure that some were there. I had initiated a similar request in the mid 70's, but was told they had no records of me. [I took this to mean that I was still under active surveillance, for a number of reasons.] Anyway, the very next day I received a letter from the IRS, dated the very day I received it, saying that they had made a mistake in my taxes(!) and I owed another \$700. That was odd. So I went to the Boston IRS office, where they confirmed that, yes, I owed the \$700, and yes, it was their mistake, but no information about how the mistake had been made. I suggested that perhaps this was because of my Freedom of Information Act request, that I had in college known some of the Weathermen before they became the Weathermen. The IRS official, not just a clerk, or receptionist, but someone with a private office, and windows, shrugged his shoulders and blushed.

Anyway, I presented this story to Tom, who responded firmly, almost angrily: "THERE IS NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE FBI AND THE IRS." Then, more softly, he asked why I wanted my files. I told him that I hoped they would form the skeleton of a planned memoir, the story of my life, which has always seemed to me more the stuff of fiction than reality. Much like this piece.

I had wondered why, in a nearly empty restaurant, the only table occupied was the one right next to ours, so close that the two men there could hear every word. And now I wondered even more. He had gotten there early. Had he chosen to sit next to them, or, more likely, I thought, they had chosen to sit next to him, after all, he was famous, or were they in some way part of his security system. Anyway, he gave me a long look, and then at the two people who were sitting at the table just next to us, at which the waiter came over to say they were closing for the afternoon ...

Just because you are paranoid, does not mean that THEY are not out to get you.

And at least it is an interesting story. I sent a shorter version of it to Mike that Fall, but he never responded. So you never know ... And then I sent him this draft, in case he wanted his name left out. We communicate through Facebook, and wouldn't you know it, right after I sent the email to him, my Facebook tab crashed. More grist for the mill, I thought, but quite appropriate for this piece.

It seems as much a short story, or a treatment for a movie, as a narrative of events in my life. Who knows. I have written several other pieces like this, waiting to be

discovered by Netflix, or Amazon. Serendipity seems to be my guiding principle.

My life in San Francisco was not working. I knew I had to get my life together. I hitchhiked up to visit my sister in Vancouver, BC for Christmas. It did not go well. Her husband offered to help me get established there, could find me a job, if I cut my hair. I refused, headed back south, and got stuck at the Washington border. My sister kindly came down, and gave me a ride through Washington, where hitchhiking was illegal, and I went on my way, back to San Francisco. My plans, sketchy, sketchy, sketchy, were to go to UMass Amherst, which had admitted me into their Masters program, in political science.

Looking back, I am disappointed, surprised that no one in San Francisco sat me down, and got real with me, told me what a mess my life had become, and given some practical and useful directions to me. It is not that I expected them to, but there seemed to be an ethos of not getting that involved, and I certainly needed to have the kind of wake up conversation my brother in law had tried to give me.

Somehow I connected with a couple of people who were driving to Boston. After several adventures along the way, I got to Amherst, and stayed with a couple who I had known in New York, David working on a degree in history at UMass, he who had introduced me to Linda, and Karen to whom I had introduced him.

I certainly must have been a strange sight to the Political Science Department, with my duct taped boots from the Salvation Army Thrift store, army surplus great coat and long hair with head band, but they said, sure, take some classes, let's see how you do. I found a room in an apartment with two other Poli Sci grad students, forged a signature on a loan application, and was set, for at least the semester, or so I thought.

In fact, I was a piece of still living flotsam the tide of the sixties had thrown up on the beach, and then abandoned as it retreated, leaving me to flail like a fish out of water.