

# Divinity School

Harvard? Who would have thought? Me, a broken down New Leftie, hippie, scraping by on odd jobs, living a life on the margins of respectability, un-employable, still committed to the dreams of my generation, attending Harvard?

There is a joke that goes like this: I get to Cambridge, and drive around, looking for the Divinity school. I see a student, dressed in prep, as was the style in 1981, and ask him, "Do you know where Andover Hall is at?" He responds, "One never ends a sentence with a preposition." So I ask, "Do you know where Andover Hall is at, asshole?"

Well, it was not really that bad, but it was HARVARD. I had chosen to live in one of the dorms. I wanted to be close by, and to get to know the other students, to see what kind of world I had been teleported into (asshole). The Dean of Students expressed surprise, but accepted my explanation. I did not then realize how great a proportion of the students had just graduated from college, and were used to dorm life, and he presumed, I guess, that, having been out on my own, the last thing I would want was to live with a bunch of people almost young enough to be my kids.

I also remember, but did not fully appreciate at the time, the Deans comments during and introductory talk with us first year students. He reminded us that the degree we were pursuing, while necessary to be ordained and placed in most churches, did not guarantee success in that. He said this looking straight at me. He understood far better than I what a wild card, loose canon, I was.

They gave me my own room in Divinity Hall, built about 1820. I believe it was constructed when the Divinity School separated from Harvard College, and included the chapel where Emerson gave his Divinity School Address. The rooms were relatively large, and many had fire places. Another student living there and I arranged for a truck load of firewood to be delivered, which we shared with other students similarly inclined.

The room I had been given was in Divinity Hall, built in the early 1800 when the Divinity School separated from the College. In the building was a chapel, in which Ralph Waldo Emerson had given his justly famous Divinity School Address, in which he attracted "corpse cold religion" [I could relate to that, having attended too many churches that left me cold] and "acquaint thyself at first hand with deity" [I certainly could relate to

that, spirituality unfettered from book or person.].

In the basement was a kitchen, with several refrigerators. We self sorted into eating groups for dinner, as we got to know each other, on a very casual basis. It was a great forum to get to know each other as people. The bathrooms were coed. I once found a diaphragm in the shower, and knew to whom to return it. A young woman, just graduated from Vassar, noticed me, there, I guess, or maybe in Greek class, and decided to get to know me better. She and a similar aged friend arranged to invite me to a meal at a Chinese restaurant, I remember the exotic drinks. We spent that night together. Her name was Betsy.

The partnering became regular; we became a couple. She was fourteen years younger, and I, who had figured that I was never going to have a family of my own, was suddenly in a relationship with a very intelligent, very adventurous young woman who had pictures of the Christ child in her room, not particularly pious, irreligious, really, but a UU, if anything, in her theology. She was in Divinity School because she wanted to get a Ph.D. In medieval history, and medieval history was, of course, church history in the middle ages. Her parents had died two years apart, when she was ten and twelve, and what with survivor benefits and a modest estate, and the support of her uncle, who taught at Lafayette college, in Pennsylvania, she was able to pay full freight at school.

The joke at the Divinity School was that the women there, a relatively new phenomena, were looking to get the Mrs. degree. This was not really true of Betsy. Looking back, I think she really just wanted to explore adult life. Betsy was extremely intelligent, world traveled, remarkable to me for such a young person, and we shared many values of the liberated, entitled folk of the 1980's.

A week after we first met, I received a letter from my mother. She wondered if I had met a young woman, just graduated from Vassar, who babysat for the colleague of a neighbor of theirs over the summer. Her name was Betsy. I told my mother that I had, and left it at that, because it was too early in the relationship, but this was just another serendipitous event, entirely by chance, as far as I can tell, in my life that seems like part of the thread of a piece of historical fiction.

And she was in the Greek class, so they could study together. She was a serious student.

We were getting more and more serious, not married kind of serious, but certainly

exclusive kind of serious, and at the end of the year, decided to move in together, into an apartment a couple of blocks from the Divinity School. Not that everything was peaceful. I was still suffering from what I now understand as PTSD, from the craziness in San Francisco, and that, combined with an infantile rage when I felt abandoned, coupled with Betsy's chronic depression and subsequent withdrawal, lead to some epic inflammatory shouting.

Looking back, she should have said, "No, don't want to move in with you. I think there are too many signs that this will not work." and I, being more mature, should have seen things for what they were, but I was on fire, and had landed in the promised land, and have never been a realist. The next year, she became completely blocked, could not write, got into therapy, could not write, had her wisdom teeth removed, was completely blocked, and I cared for her, while I continued my work in school.

Historically, I had a very hard time learning languages, and, historically, I had found a lot of the Bible believers to be in error, so I wanted to learn the Bible in its original language, to better understand the problems I found with Christianity. To me, it was a test. If I really belonged there, at Harvard, then I would succeed in this endeavor. Fortunately, I thought to myself, I had two years of Latin in high school, so I would have at least a little bit of a leg up.

I was mistaken. The New Testament was written, originally, not in Latin, but in Greek. I would have to learn Greek in order to read the Bible in its original language. So I signed up for first year Greek. I was a Unitarian Universalist. Not only that, I was an agnostic humanist. Even the Christian UU students, of which there were, remarkably to me several, tended not to take Greek.

Ralph Lazarro had been, for many, many years, the teacher of first year Greek and Latin. He had no Ph.D., but he had the respect of Harvard's senior faculty in his ability to give students a basic grounding in those dead languages, brought back to life. And, as I learned, the senior faculty at the Divinity school were the tops in their fields. Harvard did not get its reputation for nothing.

Starting from scratch, learning the alphabet, both upper and lower case letters of Greek, I persisted, and learned Greek. I was not great at it, but functional, and it was made easier by several millennia of commentary on a relatively limited body of literature, the books of the New Testament, and was further made functional by the study of the Bible as a piece of literature, a product of its times, that is, the historical

critical method of Biblical criticism, which originated in Germany on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was first adopted in the United States at Harvard.

It turned out that I had not needed to read Greek to be able to read the Bible the way I wanted. Scholars had been doing that at Harvard for over a century. It's just that this methodology had not trickled down into Sunday School, even at UU Sunday school, so I was unaware of it. I learned that in the required Introduction to Ministry class, required of all students in the ministry preparation track.

I was surprised that we students preparing for the ministry were in the minority. Most of the students at the Divinity School were in an academic track, at either the Masters or Doctoral level. Even more surprising to me that this historically Unitarian school had so few Unitarian Universalist students. There were more Catholics there than UU's, even more Episcopalians than UU's, even though there was the Episcopal Divinity School just across the Cambridge Common from Harvard.

The course load was four classes a semester. For my third class, I contracted with a recently retired teacher, George Williams. He who had taught church history for many years. I wanted to speed read through two thousand years of history. George's father had been minister of the Unitarian church in Rochester, a humanist, and though George was not a humanist, he at least understood us. I would read whatever he suggested, and write a short report on each book, so that I could quickly get up to speed on a church history that, in my mind, might better be forgotten. To me, the Dark Ages were really dark, and the light of the renaissance was clouded by the smoke from people being burned at the stake, drawn and quartered, tortured ... George was a Reformation scholar, and had written several, or is it many books, on church history.

My fourth course was Introduction to Christian Ethics. I bridled at the adjective, but that was how it was taught, team taught by all three members of the Ethics faculty, including my advisor. I listened patiently to their lectures. Then I listened impatiently. As far as I could tell, they had no idea of what they were talking about (assholes). The ethics I was interested in had to do with things like reforming society, personal responsibility, right life. The ethics they taught were rule bound, universal laws, I guess, framed within a Christian narrative.

When my advisor gave me a C on a short paper I wrote, I realized that he did not understand me, what I was about, why I was there. Probably, to him, I was just one of the flakes that Harvard admitted, to stir the pot. In fact, the UU history lecturer there

shared with me the observation that, when they admitted me, they did not know if I would last more than 3 weeks when I got there. Needless to say, I did.

Part of our program was to do field education work, at a church, or other off campus site. Again, I wanted to get my feet on the ground, get to know the various churches, and, anyway, there was a position at UU headquarters, in the Social Justice Department, which is where I belonged. Loretta Williams, the new director there, hired me, and I got to know the denomination from its institutional basis. That was important, because unlike all the other UU students, I had not been involved in UU church for decades. Most of them had been very active not only in a local UU church, but denominational meetings, including the continent wide annual meeting, the General Assembly. I did not even know what that was.

This meant that my Sundays were free to visit local churches, and find a church home. I checked out several, and found the church in Watertown to feel most like the Church in Ocean Park. I asked the minister if he felt comfortable with me attending, becoming active, and he said no. I think the reason was the congregation was small, struggling, and a divinity student he did not hand pick might turn out to be more a distraction than a help, especially a loose canon from Santa Monica, which is what I most definitely was.

As I was looking for a field education placement, I did visit the First and Second Church in Boston. I was offered a job there, in fact, the minister offered me the job of running the Religious Education program, but I did not feel sufficiently prepared to do this then. It turned out his uncle had been the minister at the Unitarian church in Rochester, and when I attended, it had the same feeling as that church, for whatever reason, so I started attending First and Second Church. The minister's name was Rhys Williams.

I just realized there are a lot of Williams in these few pages, but only three of them were related, George, his father David Rhys, and Rhys, the minister at First and Second Church. The other one, Loretta, my boss at 25 Beacon Street, then the headquarters of the Unitarian Universalist Association, was not related. She had grown up in Boston, had attended what was then Girl's Latin, now Boston Latin Academy, and earned a Ph. D. in sociology with a dissertation on the Prince Hall Lodge of American Masons, the African-American branch of the Masonic movement. Yes, Loretta was black.

I had heard that one of the UU churches in Boston, King's chapel, was Christian. I was still digesting the fact that there were even Christian Unitarians, unknown when I grew up, but a whole church of them? This I had to see, so one Sunday, I put on my newly

bought suit, and went to King's Chapel, in downtown Boston. Inside, it was an old style New England Meeting house, with boxed pews each having a small gate to gain entrance. I chose one, not too far back, not too far front, and sat there. A couple, probably in their sixties, joined me in the pew, I took it as friendly gesture, mumbled hello. They did not respond. They stared at me, icily. I took it as New England reserve.

I then saw the most amazing things. The service had a fixed liturgy, and I could hardly tell it was a UU service. The readings were from the Bible, and not only that, the minister knelt in prayer! The music was very good, I must say, but the congregation was sparse. There was not coffee hour, though a social was announced, but it was at King's Chapel House, a long walk across the Boston Common. I did not go, because I did not know where it was.

Later, I better understood my pew mate's diffidence. Most likely, I was sitting in their pew, not just the pew they habitually sat in, but the one they owned. "Huh?" you ask. Well, I would have then been as surprised, because I did not know that people owned pews. It turns out that, until the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Unitarian churches, that is the structures where worship is conducted, were funded by subscription, in which people would pledge money, that is, buy pews, in the soon to be built building, and then, literally, own them. Who knew? Well, the couple that Sunday morning at King's Chapel probably knew, because I was probably sitting in THEIR pew. And I had not been invited.

This problem did not exist at First and Second church. A fire had destroyed the building in the late sixties, and a new one, striking one, designed by Paul Rudolph, had been erected on the same site. No longer were there pews, but movable chairs, so there were no pews to own. Well, actually, it was a little different. In Rochester, the Unitarian church had a Board of Trustees, on which my father had served, and on which he had, for a term, been President. So to did First and Second Church, but the functions of the Board of Trustees at the Rochester Church were performed by what is termed the Standing Committee, as in Rochester, a Committee elected by the members of the Church. The Board of Trustees at First and Second Church was technically the Trustees of the Pews, and had the power to buy and sell the now phantasmagorical pews, and more importantly, husband the considerable endowment of the church, which contributed, each year, about a third of the money needed for the operation of the church. The Trustees were self perpetuating, they chose who would be a member, and it was always someone who was known to be stable and trustworthy. As I learned, it was largely made up of the first families of the church, from back in the old days

when ushers wore tails, and I don't mean raccoon tails, at church. There was a reason it was called the First and Second Church. It was the direct descendant of the first and second churches established by the Puritans in Boston. Who knew?

One Sunday morning, I had read in the Globe that one of the founders of Massachusetts General Hospital was a physician named James Jackson. Now, Jim Jackson was a member of the church, a physician, in fact a trustee, and a nice enough guy, so I went up to him, and mentioned that I had just learned that he had the same name as one of the founders of MGH. He said, matter of factly, "Oh, yes, he was my great, great grandfather." Huh. Later, he once pointed out to me that the tie I was wearing was incorrect, that the Harvard insignia's on it were not those of the Divinity School. I had not noticed the difference. He was just trying to help me out, because, it turned out, I was in a social register environment, and these faux-pas were noticed.

Come Spring, it was time for the annual picnic, at the Ames home in North Easton, MA. Both Oliver and David, his brother, and their wives, lived there. North Easton is south of Boston, and since I hardly knew the towns next to Cambridge, which is north and west of Boston, I had no idea of where North Easton was. I still had my van, so Betsy and I drove some other parishioners into Terra Incognita. We followed the instructions written out. We went next to Stonehill College, and then took a left on Elm Street, and then the instructions said something like "take a left opposite the town offices," through a gatehouse. A H.H. Richardson gate house, as it turned out. Up a long driveway, where we parked outside of a Victorian mansion. This was Oliver's country house. On the other side was a patio, and a small ball room, a large lawn leading down to the mill pond, which had powered the shovel factory. Oliver's great grandfather and namesake Oliver, as well as his brother, Oakes, have a special place in US history. Check it out on [Wikipedia](#). Needless to say, Oliver was one of the Trustees of the church.

Ken, who had joined the church with his partner Bob, walked over to me, pointed at one of the columns holding up the roof over the patio, and said, "Look, Walter, red ants." Never one to fail to rise to the bait, I responded, "My God, communist red ants eating away at the very foundations of American capitalism!" Oliver's wife was standing right there. She smiled appreciatively.

Later on, learned more about the first families of the church, when two of them, Oliver and George, described growing up at the church. Oliver's town home was at the corner of Mass Ave and Commonwealth Avenue. No, not that one, the big one. I think George, whose middle name was Shattuck, and last name Richardson, was a physician

at MGH, head of the Gyn Department. He too was a Trustee, grew up in Brookline, on Boylston Street, on the hill overlooking the reservoir. He told of his and his brother Elliot's experiences, yes, that Elliot, at Milton Academy, and how much he detested the school. By the time I was at the church, Elliot had moved to Washington. And yet, despite all this, they were the nicest people, and, as Rhys pointed out, were more liberal than many members of the congregation. Becky, George's wife, once told me that she felt considerable regret she had not opposed the war in Vietnam earlier.

I was getting quite an education, and not all of it at the Divinity School.

And I was, to be honest, a little disappointed at the education I was getting at the Divinity School. I had thought we humanists would be the majority, but instead we were a small minority. Even worse, to me, was that the students there did not seem to be motivated. Each week, I would do the reserve readings, and notice that I was one of the 5% or 10% of the students who were keeping up. Turned out, most of the students waited until the reading period, to cram this information in, and then be done with it. Me, I saw that I had been given a magnificent gift, and did all I could to soak in as much information as I could. This was especially true because, though my undergraduate education was in the liberal arts, I knew almost nothing about the classics, and the history of western civilization before 1700. And, honestly, I think I knew as much about ethics than any of the professors in that department. Living with hardcore criminals, as I had in San Francisco, teaches you some valuable lessons.

The first week in school, a fellow student invited me to a salon, being held at the home of a retired New Testament teacher, Amos Wilder, Thornton's brother. We were supposed to bring a poem. So I looked up a Shakespeare sonnet, copied the form, iambic pentameter, ABABCDCDEFEFGG, and wrote a humanist religious sonnet. The next evening we were sitting in a circle reading our poems. I was surprised the other students were not reading their own. I was embarrassed to bring my meager offering. I think they, and Amos, were amazed. If I could find it, I will include it here. I am still able to do this, recently wrote one for my son's wedding June of 2019. In a day. Once written, they seem like doggerel to me, but other people like them, but I have never found a way to make this gift I have pay.

Rhys Williams had taken the Unitarian Church in Jamaica Plain under his wing. It was failing, down to at most ten members showing up every Sunday. Rhys sent us divinity school students there to supply preaching. He offered it to me, and I accepted. It's liturgy was more traditional than I was used to, and included the Lords Prayer. Reading



it, as if for the first time, I had multiple problems with its theology, so decided to use my elementary Greek to translate it, to see what it really said.

It really said what it said, a prayer of supplication to a divine being, asking for his gifts ... Word for word, I translated it, in the large Greek dictionary that was in the library. Everything was going fine, until I hit the expression “daily bread”, in Greek, ἐπίουσιός ἄρτος. It turns out scholars don't know what the daily in daily bread really means.

There was a notation next to ἐπίουσιός which puzzled me, the letter sigma, so I went to the student behind the desk, and asked him. He said he did not know, but maybe I should ask John Strugnell, who was standing a few feet away from me. So I asked him, my new friend John, and he came over, had a look, and said, “That is very odd. It means Sumerian derivation, but there is no direct linkage between Sumerian and Greek.” I wasn't going to disagree, because I had no idea, no knowledge. He said. “Hmmm.” He was intrigued.

Strugnell, aside from his faults, was considered the best Greek scholar in the superb New Testament department at Harvard. But I did not know that. I just wanted to translate the Bible. Here, he met a beginning student who was doing the kind of careful academic work for which he was best known. I am sure he shared this revelatory experience with his colleagues. I'm pretty sure they noticed that I was there.

In late October, I saw a notice, that a madrigal group was reforming, and since I liked to sing, and I liked madrigals, I showed up. It was lead by one of the New Testament professors, Helmut Koester, a leading scholar, as it turned out, and about half the people there were his doctoral students, a kept crowd. So I stood out, if only because I was there to sing madrigals, not to suck up to my potential thesis advisor. After a couple of months, and having become completely disgusted with my advisor, I asked Helmut if he would be my advisor. He said yes, of course. I would go talk to him, tell him why I was taking what I planned to study, and he would approve it. After all, I was an adult. The only push-back I ever got is that he somewhat wistfully said, when I took fourth semester Greek, a study of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with George McRae, that he had taught that class too.

Had I known where he stood in the field, I would have taken his survey course on New Testament times. He had just finished translating into English his two volume series on Christian Literature, and Hellenistic literature, of New Testament times. Magisterial. He was German, and was one of Rudolph Bultmann's last student. Bultmann had made

major contributions to the understanding of the gospels using what was called form criticism, seeing in the structure of the writings similarities across the gospels.

Koester wrote in German, his native language. The question therefore arises, “Where was he during World War II.” He was in the German Navy, an officer I heard, and stayed in Germany after the war, completing his Ph.D., becoming a Lutheran minister. He then was recruited by Harvard, to beef up the Divinity school, which badly needed it in the fifties. We never talked about the holocaust, but I did once hear him deliver an excellent sermon about faith and works. His women students despised him, for sexual improprieties, but then was a different time, when such things were accepted.

At the beginning of my second year, I read that the University was soliciting essays, with a \$3,000 stipend for the winner, and that November I spent a couple of weeks writing out some ideas I had. It did not win, but I think it got circulated, because the next semester, the Dean of Students coordinated the publication of a small pamphlet of student writings, I submitted it, and they published not only that piece, but the poem I had written the first week of my first year at school. I was really on fire.

I also decided, during my very first semester, that I should try to focus every paper I wrote on the theme of time, how time was understood in whatever subject was at hand, and how that impacted the understanding of ethics. I thought that by the end of three years, I might have a book. It became my thesis, was a little short of book, and looking back now, was highly speculative.

That summer, between my first and second year, I was hired to sit at the main reception desk of the school, which gave me ample opportunity to study the Introduction to Hebrew I was taking. I had enjoyed learning Greek so much that decided to learn Biblical Hebrew, at least to the extent of understanding how the language hung together. I did not want a grade, so I took it pass fail. Glad I did, because at the end of it, the teacher said that he would only give me a pass if I never took any more Hebrew.

It was a struggle, and I appreciated again what an excellent teacher Ralph Lazarro was. I am even more glad, now that he has long since passed away, that after I noticed one masterful class, and he surveyed the room, and to each puzzled face, and I think that there were thirty people in the class, to each face he reframed his explanation in the language they could understand. Oh, did I mention that he was supposed to have retired the June before I arrived, but for some reason decided to teach another year. Serendipity? I just consider myself lucky.

As I recall, the second year the UU's hired a therapist to convene a group therapy session, which I attended. I think it helped me. My senior year, Betsy and I saw him in couples counseling. Obviously, there were problems.

Now, as for First and Second Church, now renamed the First Church in Boston, Peter Gomes wryly remarked that Rhys Williams was a superb choice to pastor the wealthy and dying. It had been the bastion of Boston Brahmins. Echoes of this past were still alive, when I was a divinity student, especially in the Board of Trustees. I had never experienced this kind of Unitarianism, Mayflower descendants, founders of major scientific and cultural institutions, scions of mill owners and gilded age robber barons, and some just everyday folk. Every year, Rhys had two to five interns, supervised by an intern committee, headed by Jim's wife, Jim was the physician mentioned above, and several times a year we would journey to her house for some puritan shepherd's pie and salad, threadbare drinks, certainly no alcohol, simple desert, and "chat". Once, for our edification, she play a record of a sermon by then deceased pastor of the First Parish of Milton. She had maybe five records of them, but soon it became obvious that this was the first time she had played this particular disc. The preacher had a pleasant voice, with a distinctly British air, perhaps he was English, and he spoke words whose meaning was pleasant, but the recording process itself was flawed, and for some reason, each word had not just an echo, would be repeated over the next word said. We listened to the whole side ... it was like listening to the [Firesign Theater](#).

I kept myself from collapsing on the floor, giggling, and was very glad I had made a pledge, to myself, to stop smoking grass, to see if I thought the same way without marijuana that I did when I was smoking. What really saved me is that it was obvious not only that everyone was going to sit there, politely and silently listening, but none of the rest of them had ever taken LSD, and were reminded of that particular auditory hallucination, because, as I looked around, no other eye's locked on mine. If that had happened, I would have lost it, which I am sure, simply was not done.

Almost immediately as an intern, I suggested to Rhys that we sponsor a Thanksgiving Dinner for the homeless. Now, if you re-read Make Way for Ducklings, you will see in one scene a homeless man sleeping on a bench in Boston's Public Garden. Homelessness is not new, but by the mid eighties, it had become an epidemic. People who before had been confined to mental hospitals had been released, with the understanding that the anti-depressant and anti-psychotic drugs would stabilize them, and they would be able to live outside the institutions, in congregate housing.

However, the support services were not provided, and people would slip through the cracks, stop taking their meds, or their meds would no longer work, or newly ill would self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, and the result that there became a lot of homeless people, in far worse shape than the occasional bum of the forties or fifties.

Typical of my lone ranger tendencies, I even asked the minister of King's Chapel, a Divinity School graduate, to contribute some money towards it, and he, with a sly smile, immediately wrote a \$100 check.

The idea came, of course, from my own experience in Santa Monica, when Chuck had come by, and taken me to the turkey and stuffing meal on the beach that Thanksgiving. That church was Evangelical, and proud of it, but I saw no reason why the Unitarians might not engage in the same sort of social witness. I had experienced it on the receiving end, and I knew how wonderful it felt.

Rhys asked me to hold off for a year. The church's lay leadership that year was more conservative, as I learned, and probably would not have let it happen. I am sure the minister at King's Chapel knew this, and thus the sly smile. Attendance at both churches, downtown churches, was sparse enough so that, in a sense, they in were competition, and the practical, down and dirty social justice ministry might pry a few souls loose.

The next year, I asked Rhys, and he asked me to present it to the Standing Committee. I am sure that this was in part for me to deal directly with a governing body of church, gain some valuable experience, but also, to take ownership, in case it failed. They accepted it, but asked how it would be paid for. We would make an announcement in the weekly bulletin, asking for volunteers, for people to cook food at home, for people to wait on the tables, for people to host the tables, and, of course, for money.

It was a success on every level but for one. It's only failure is that Thanksgiving Day is the one day of the year that no-one needs to put on a meal for the homeless, because there are plenty of them available, as I learned. The success was both in the numbers of people that came, not just the homeless, but the many single people of the church who were housed, but had no real place to go for Thanksgiving. I ran the kitchen, Rhys and Leo, the music director sliced the Turkeys, the potatoes and peas were not over cooked, the pies were often home made and delicious, as was the apple cider and other soft drinks, and every one was justifiably proud of the way we all came together. Finally, and most amazingly, we even made a little money on, getting more in donations

than what the food and supplies cost.

Part of my education was to learn to pray in public. I had never had a prayer life, and had never really thought it through, that part of the service was to offer prayers. I learned. I also learned to speak more slowly. I was always nervous in the pulpit, and so would rush my words. It was not until I was serving a church, first year out of Divinity School, that I learned to preach, but that is the next chapter.

The summer between my middler year, as they called it, and senior year I spent as a chaplain, at then called Boston City Hospital, made famous in the opening credits of Saint Elsewhere, and at a Congregational church on the South Shore. The formal name of the program was Clinical Pastoral Education, CPE, and the word on it was that it was a bear, extremely challenging. The Unitarian Universalists required that ministerial candidates take and complete one quarter.

It was a boot camp for the pastoral responsibilities of ministry. Now, honestly, I had never received such care, in my life, nor had my parents. My father would never have asked for help, and my mother did go to David Rhys Williams once, the minister in Rochester, but he told her, truthfully, that this was not his strong suit, and it would be better for her to see a psychologist.

We were learning to become quick and dirty therapists, not licensed therapists, but to gather experience and knowledge, in a clinical setting, of what issues might arise for us in such encounters, expected to happen in the parish ministry. In the hospital, we were assigned patients. I was assigned someone suffering from aphasia, that is, her only sign of life was her breathing, and her open eyes. No words, no facial expressions, no slight tics for me to see if she even heard what I was saying. I was supposed to spend at least twenty minutes with her, and write up a verbatim description of everything I said.

We then would go over our verbatim, in a small group, with our supervisor pointing out ways in which we had guided the conversation, or changed the topic, as examples of how something in us prevented us from staying emotionally connected with our client. A woman from Canada was first. The supervisor wondered why she had used her initials, and not her first name. She said that was how things were done in Canada. They chewed on that for about fifteen minutes.

And then it was my turn. I had nothing to say. I explained the situation. He grilled me, and grilled me, and grilled me. Looking back, now, I would have handled the interaction

with the patient differently. I have since that time read The [Diving Bell and the Butterfly](#), and wonderful book, and equally wonderful movie, about a man who suffers a stroke, and become completely aphasiac, except for the ability to blink his eye. But not Lex, my supervisor. His job was to put the fear of him in our hearts. It was a rough summer, but I made it through.

It helped that I was being paid. Because it was not formally a church setting, work study money paid me a low, but decent hourly, forty hours a week. You see, it was really service learning, with a learning contract and everything, just like what the higher education act had included in 1975, that I had helped get adopted. But at the time, 1975, I did not know that I would be self dealing.

That winter, I organized a small conference at the Divinity School, about social justice. It further helped to put my name on the denominational map, and, I hoped, would steer me toward the proper kind of placement. I wanted to serve, or create, actually, a congregation like the one in Ocean Park. Very few UU churches were like that; the most similar one, as I learned later, the Charles Street Meeting House in Boston had been closed just before I got to town.

And I was soon to graduate. That meant I needed to get a job. Helmut approached me about going for Ph. D., but I wanted to get out in the real world. I also knew that languages would be my downfall in a Ph.D, program. Not only would I have to really learn Hebrew, but also Aramaic and German, and maybe Coptic ...

The Unitarian Church in Concord was looking for an Assistant Minister. The senior minister there, Dana Greely, had been President of the American Unitarian Association in the 1950's, and engineered the conflation with the Universalists to form the Unitarian Universalist Association, of which he was President for 8 years, and a year after he became the minister in Concord. He had a long history of support for social activism, and had marched in Selma, near the front of the parade. He was in every sense of the word Mr, Unitarian.

The Concord search committee asked me to interview. I did.

The church in Concord was the church of Emerson and Thoreau. But Emerson had described it bitinglly in his Divinity School Address, or at least the minister there, as being less alive than the snow flakes seen falling outside, and Thoreau resigned, once, or maybe twice. Concord itself is a very wealthy suburb west of Boston, settled in 1636,

and the town, and church, had several descendants of signers of the Declaration of Independence. It is, after all, where that rude bridge arched the flood of the first battle of the War for Independence.

We met in the board room. All around the room, on the walls, were portraits of the ministers, dating back, way back, but one stood out, more brightly colored than the others. It was of Dana. All the portraits were the same size, except for one larger one: Dana. Get the picture?

Halfway through the interview, I made a confession. I was really there to see what it was like to be interviewed. I had no intention of coming to Concord as Assistant Minister. First of all, as far as I could tell, Concord was a museum church in a museum town, and I was not a good fit for that. Secondly, I would have to work for Dana, and Dana and I, while we agreed on many things, would not be a good match, in terms of our personality. Thirdly, I did not want to serve a church in a town I could not afford to live in. (assholes). I apologized for wasting their time, and thanked them for the opportunity.

Two weeks later, they called me, telling me that they like what I had said. Would I come out again for another interview. At that meeting they said yes, they were a museum church in a museum town, but they did not really want to be that. Second, they understood that Dana and I were very different people, and they were glad I understood that. I think that they were very impressed that I had built a cabin, just like Thoreau, and saw me as a modern day Thoreau. They were not far off. But thirdly, regarding my housing. They would buy me a house, in Concord.

If I had been bluffing, they would have called my bluff, but I was not bluffing. What could I say? Three years prior I had been lost and broke, and now the heavens were opening for me. I said yes.

Betsy and I decided to get married, with reservations. We had made it through three years with each other, it was not a perfect relationship, but either we should move forward, or end it, and we decided to move forward. May 1 was the date of the ceremony, which we designed. Rhys performed the service. I chose not to get legally married, because I did not like the state determining what was an authentic relationship, and Betsy went along with this thinking. We went up to Ogunquit, Maine that night, had dinner from a vending machine, because no restaurants were open by the time we got there. It was an inauspicious start to a long relationship.

We spent the summer going to the General Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, then driving down the West Coast to Los Angeles, and then camping across the country, arriving in Concord in late August. The trip was not without its problems. At one point, both of us decided to end the relationship, but there we were, on the West Coast, as I remember, in Oregon, and what else could we do but just continue the trip. It was not all bad. In San Louis Obispo, we discovered we both liked natural spring hot tubs, and when we got to Colorado, we went searching for more of them. We also hiked up a trail, halfway between Durango and Silverton, up to the snow line, where the trail simply disappeared under the snow, this was in late July, and Betsy showed me how strong she was, as we hiked back down. It was on this trip, also, that I discovered Tom Robbins, through his *Even Cow Girls Get the Blues*, which both Betsy and I read, and liked. She must have chosen it for the trip, because I had never heard of him. One of the most lasting memories I have of the trip was arriving in Concord, and seeing cows, COWS!, in a field just as we were arriving in town. I thought it was wonderful to be in an environment where they still had herds of milking cows.

Maybe I was really returning to the farm of my childhood.