Prologue:

December 24, 2010

"If at no other time of the year, on Christmas Eve,
we forget the present and turn to the past."
—Dad in a sermon of December 24, 1942

Lights dim in the Church of Our Lady, *Marienkirche*, Frauenau, Germany. Still, the crèche remains visible, a spotlight shining on the wood carving of baby Jesus, which ten minutes ago was paraded ceremoniously up the nave below a firmament of angels, Marys and saints, by two priests, two adolescent males, and eight girls, one self-consciously several years younger than the others. The organ cues us with the last seven notes of "*Stille Nacht*," and together we sing:

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!

Eyes shut, I am back in high school choir, closing the annual Christmas Concert with something *auf Deutsch*, after "*Adeste Fideles*" in Latin and "Good King Wenceslaus" in our very best BBC English. The languages pose no problems for late-1950s College Prep high school seniors: we have all taken two, three years of Latin, and most of us speak German as well. I do. So does Bonnie Lee Haussman, singing soprano on the risers opposite me. Bonnie sits beside me in German III, and knows the hymn as well as I do. She smiles at me beatifically, and for a moment we are one, if only in my imagination.

Eyes still closed, I drift back to Wittenberg University, to a Christmas service in a chapel designed by T. Norman Mansell, father of my high school friend Tony Mansell. To his parents' dismay, Tony did not make it to college, or even into 9-1, 10-1, 11-1, 12-1 the accelerated sections at Springfield High School. Our yearbook says that Tony will be remembered for "always sleeping in class." Well, hell, I didn't make the Wittenberg choir either, but that's okay in mid-December 1961, because alphabetical seating of the freshman class plops David Pichaske right beside Jan Peters, a Kappa Delta sorority pledge and as

untouchably lovely as Bonnie Haussman. Jan Peters is a varsity cheerleader her freshman year. On "*Stille Nacht*" I sing quietly along *auf Deutsch* with the Witten-berg Choir, L. David Miller conductor. All three verses. Jan is impressed. I am pleased that Jan is impressed. Come 1963, Jan and I will be riding together to football and basketball games in the same Wittenberg University Ford station wagon, she as captain of the cheerleading squad, and I as sports editor of the *Torch*. In the spring of 1965, my date to homecoming dance will be Homecoming Queen Jan Peters.

Tonight I stumble after "*Hirten erst kundegemach*," recover with "*Christ, der Retter*," lose the words again in stanza three. Frau Gibble frowns at me from behind her German II desk. So does Frau Kuhlmann, who taught German III. And Herr Doktor Professor Kool Kurt Fickert, who taught nineteenth-century German Literature at Wittenberg University . . . and the house mother of the *Deutsches Haus*, known to me now only as *Das Groszes Stock*, a nickname we hung on her because of her heavy walking cane. I lived spring of my sophomore year of college in the *Deutsches Haus*, sharpening my German and fantasizing about the unspeakably lovely Ruth Seeh, who slept in the upstairs dorm with four other girls, including Marty Ruloff. Marty was more impressed with my late-night piano solos intended to convey fuzzy messages *nach oben*, but I was sending Debussy's "Rêvere" up to Ruth, not Marty.

That was a long time ago, David. What do you suppose has become of Bonnie and Jan, Ruth and all the other angels of your young firmament? They are all old now, as you are old. They have kids and grandkids, possibly great-grandkids. If they're still alive. Your high school buddy John Stewart has already checked out, along with Ken Norman, Marlene Greenfield, Frank Marmelo, "Tiger" McGurk, Walt Read, and Bob Hollywood, captain of the football and basketball teams, who dated all the cool girls in high school. Your fraternity brother Ron Price is gone too; and John Nemo, your best friend from Bradley Polytech; and Bill Holm, your best friend from Southwest State. But dammit, buddy, here you are in the heart of Deutschland, at a Christmas service in as classy a German church as you ever imagined, with classy wife Michelle (homecoming queen her senior year at Big Piney High) and classy daughter Dr. Kristin Pichaske, captain of the North-western University Lady Cats. You're here with long-time friend Gabriele Schleif-Jones, a true German. You made it.

The hymn ends, and the lights come on. As the last of the liturgy plays itself out, I survey again the rococo interior of the *Marienkirche*, the gold leaf, the paintings above the altars, the host of cherubs praising God's creation from every corner of the building, the blessed virgin herself ascending into the clouds on the ceiling over my head. How much more talented were these painters than the artists we've been discussing this past week with Gabi and Joachim at Buchenau 75A—Arp, Breton, Konitz, Pollock, de

Kooning, Erwin Esch. The artists who painted this church were technical virtuosos beside those paint splatterers, ten-dollar philosophers with two-penny talents, merchandisers of the philosophy of merchandising, of the five minutes of fame, of ego and sensationalism masquerading as talent. Such has been the downward spiral of culture in my lifetime. Ingmar Bergman once said, "It is my opinion that art lost its creative urge the moment it separated from worship. It severed the umbilical cord and lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself." I'll buy that.

The arc of twentieth-century art snapped into focus for me on a 1998 visit to Gabi at her home in Berlin, on break from a Fulbright fellowship in Latvia. In Riga, I had been haunting the antique shops, art galleries, and flea markets, so I came to Berlin thinking about art. I had not yet read the book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art,* in which Serge Guilbaut argues that American leftists, disillusioned with Populist Front/WPA social realism after the Moscow trials showed Stalin to be as big an asshole as Hitler, and finding themselves "cut off on one side from the Communist party and on the other side from the middle class," latched onto European *avant-garde* abstract expression-ism as a kind of "Trotskyism for the artist," a "credo of complete freedom" and "a complete break with the political approach taken during the Depression." I had, however, been reading a Michael Lind article from *Harper's* magazine, February 1998, titled "Where Have You Gone, Louis Sullivan: Will America Ever Recover from Its Fifty-Year Bout of Europhilia?" Without speculating on motivation, Lind also traces the dramatic shift of professional attention from a native tradition represented by realists like Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and Andrew Wyeth, to an experimental, theoretical, abstract, *avant-garde*, an utterly foreign tradition which showed up first in America at the Armory Show of 1913, and triumphed in the 1940s. (Jackson Pollock's work was first shown at the Guggenheim in 1943, the year of my birth.) While looking at Russian icons, nineteenth-century landscapes, and social realists in Riga, I kept thinking of Lind's article.

Then in Berlin Gabi showed me a biography of Peggy Guggenheim, containing a facsimile of her letter to Frederick Kiesler in which Peggy misspelled or mispunctuated every tenth word: "Dear Mr. Kiesler, I want your help. Will you give me some advise about remodeling two taylor-shops into an art gallery. May I show you the space, and also may I show you the collection so that you will have some definate idea of what is needed. If you will telephone me at Eldorado 5-3559 as soon as possible I will be very gratefull. Very sincerele yours, Peggy Guggenheim."

"Those guys recognized a mark when they met one," I thought to myself. But Gabi was all pepped up about Guggenheim, because showing in Berlin was an exhibition of "ex-patriot" European artists . . . the very folks who had relocated in New Yuck and started the revolution which flushed Benton and Woods, Wyeth and Hopper from art history books and the art history class I took at Wittenberg. Drifting

with Gabi through the exhibit, I could only wonder, "If I saw one of these works for sale in a Riga gallery for $100, with no name on it, would I buy it?" Of course not.

And that Eisch piece in the Frauenau Glass Museum, *Narziss*! Eisch—issch. *Narziss* goes to the colored glass bin in the recycling Hof. Ah, but these altar paintings. I'd rent a whole shipping container to bring them to America, add a room to my house to display them.

As the Lutheran examines this Catholic church more closely, he ponders his affection for the art of the enemy camp. In his novel *The Promised Land*, Władysław Reymont has one of his Catholic characters tell a priest, "I wouldn't turn Protestant on any account. I am a man who loves beautiful things . . . fine paintings, artistic sculptures, a splendid ritual. . . ." The Catholic attraction to the body is especially evident in post-Gothic religious art: for adolescent girls, nearly naked Saint Sebastian tied to a tree, arrows piercing his chest and blood dropping from his body; for adolescent males, Mother Mary breast-feeding Baby Jesus. These are basic human truths lost on academic theoreticians. Camille Paglia's take on the academic feminism of the 1980s—given its obsession with words, its interpretation of virtually all sexuality as "harassment," and its antipathy to all that singer Madonna represents—is that it is, like all American liberalism, "simply Protestantism in disguise."

Although a little dubious about Madonna, I'm a big fan of Paglia, Meridel Le Sueur, women athletes and women in general. Does this make me a closet Catholic? I don't know. Just what do I think about Mother Mary? I don't agree with Le Sueur (whom I also admire, and who is also anathema to academic feminists) that women are superior to men *by virtue of their ability to bear children*. Besides, Mary takes Christianity half way downhill from a system of intellectual cognition (Augustine, Aquinas, Luther) to sentimental kids' stuff the likes of "*Ihr Kinderlein Kommet*." I'm a good Lutheran who believes in an individual commitment to Grace, and I need no help from Holy Church, saints, or the Blessed Virgin/intercessor. I will pray for myself, thank you very much, both now and in the hour of my need.

Then again, I like this music (okay—Lutherans, unlike Quakers and Puritans, resemble Catholics in finding music an aid to piety and inner mysticism) and I like this art: the fresco above me in the nave, "*Himmelfahrt Mariens*," capping at least twenty lower-level allegorical depictions of "Mary, Queen of Peace," "Mary, Queen of Virgins," "Mary, Queen of the Angels," Mary, Queen of just about everything there is to be queen of. Then again again, Mary Queen of the Angels reduces men halfway to feminist marginalization by removing them from the fertilization process. Joseph, you can lead the donkey, pay the bills. Your son will welcome his mother bodily into Heaven and leave you to carve another wooden cabinet, build yourself another outhouse. My own woodcarvings of Mary and Joseph, both by Zwiesel's Max Kagerbauer, give Mary an infant son and Joseph a wooden block plane.

So what? I still like this church. I like it even more as we file out into the Christmas Eve darkness past the grave of Heinz Schlag, the Bavarian farmer who sold Gabi and her Berlin friends the stone barn they renovated into the country condos in which we live on this vacation. And I like it more still as a four-piece brass band, standing under a portico on the wall opposite us, strikes up "*Tochter Zion*" for the departing faithful.

"One of Dad's favorite hymns," Kristin tells Malcolm.

"In English, it's an Easter hymn," I explain. "Maybe in all Protestantism it's Easter. Maybe in Catholicism too. Anyway, I like it."

I'm fuzzy these days on the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. I passed catechism with flying colors (confirmed at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, along with Tony Mansell, by Rev. Bill Elbert, Judy Elbert's dad), having memorized bits of *Luther's Short Catechism* in the original German. I've lost some of that over the years, as I have lost almost everything I knew about music, from the ability to play piano (Beethoven's "Piano Concerto #5," Debussy's "Rêvere," Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue") and organ (a so-so version of Bach's "Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor") to knowledge of classical music history, hymnology, and any pop (besides Dylan) after 1972. It's gone, long gone. But I do like this hymn: it has a peppy, rococo sound, confident and celebratory, light years away from the soft, Romantic "*Ihr Kinderlein Kommet*" or "*Stille Nacht*."

I'm at *Marienkirche* because my friend Gabriele Jones owns a vacation home in the nearby village of Buchenau. These visits to Buchenau—"place of the birch trees" (not to be confused with Birkenau or Buchenwald, places of the Nazis)—have been going on for thirty years now. We're in the middle of the Bavarian National Forest which, some ten kilometers to the east, becomes the Czech National Forest. Perhaps the real attraction of rococo is not the figure of Mary and the saints, but the play of swirls and rays, an artificiality which is in a way organic, a reflection of the rich foliage of the Bavarian National Forest. In winter the mountain landscape is transformed into an almost abstract expressionist canvas of pure texture. Like the landscape of Minnesota, it often reduces to simple patterned duotones: green and white, white and black, white and grey. Snow on pine trees—a single branch or a whole mountainside. Bare branches against the sky. The line of the train tracks or telephone wires or barbed-wire fence marching across white fields. Perhaps a dab of red barn or STOP sign. The rural geography is almost abstract geometries, even if it is a landscape of concrete natural realities.

I spend a lot of my life exploring landscape, in both Buchenau and Minnesota, and my photos of Bavaria are not all that different than my photos of Minnesota: snow-covered trees with clouds behind, a brook or path in the woods, an old farm building in some stage of decay, close-ups so tight as to be

texture pieces. Thoreau—I think—once said that God patented only one design, which he used for leaves, country roads, human veins and arteries. Perhaps when I drive the back roads of Bavaria or Minnesota, when I track the back paths of either place, I am walking the folds of a rococo drapery. Or the veins of my own aging body.

In any event, after my homes in Minnesota, this refurbished stable in Buchenau is my favorite place on earth. Here I have spent at least twelve Christmases and six months of my life. Here Mom and Dad recuperated after riding the night train out of Poland in 1990. Here I brought son Stephen on his 12-year-old visit to Europe in 1981; I have photos of him and Gordon Jones standing at the East-West border by Eisenstein train station. Here I brought grand-daughter Megan on her 12-year-old trip to Europe. Here I wrote "The Pigeons of Buchenau" and "The Greening of Buchenau." This place is part of my history.

There is more history here than my own. From Gabi's balcony we look out over the stone wall which once enclosed the stock yard to the palace of Knight Ferdinand von Poschinger, whose horses lived here. What a story there! Between 1855 and 1870, Ferdinand pumped the Buchenau glass operation into a major complex of some eighteen buildings: a sizeable palace where the family hunting lodge had been, this stable (above the central door, carved in stone, "18FvP57"), housing for his workers, a guest house, a gardener's house, a blacksmith shop, a wagon shop, and a steam sawmill to process timber from his extensive land holdings in the Bavarian Forest.

Ferdinand's son and heir, the younger Ferdinand Benedikt von Poschinger, remodeled the palace into a neo-Tutor magnificence for his wife, Juliane Scharvogel, who was from Mainz, not from Bavaria, and was interested in music, not sex or crystal. His only son and heir, Günther von Poschinger, served in World War I, but went over to the communists and stayed in Russia when the war ended (his mother wanted her ashes to be sent, upon her death in 1934, to her son in Moscow, but the Russians forbad delivery). The glass factory itself closed during World War I, reopened when the War ended, survived a workers' strike in 1919. When the Duke died of cancer in 1921, his organization rebuilt, but his widow was hopelessly incompetent, orders began to drop, and on July 4, 1929, a devastating tornado wrecked buildings and woods, "as if a war had hit us." On the last day of production, November 18, 1932, the debt had reached three million marks. So the von Poschinger estate was foreclosed upon by the Bayer, Hypothek, und Wechselbank bankers. Then it was snagged by the Free State of Bavaria, which bought it in 1939 for 1.5 million marks. In 1935 the State divided the rural property between Hermann Helmrich and Emil Schlag; in 1942 Erna Horn and Julius Arndt bought the palace to house a cooking school which continued after World War II ended. "Erna Horn was the Betty Crocker of Germany," Gabi once told me, publishing forty to fifty cookbooks, building the biggest cookbook library in Europe (some manuscripts

dating to the 1300s), serving lavish display banquets on Limoges dinnerware and sterling silver cutlery set atop elegant inlaid furniture rescued from Wittelsbach nobility. When Horn died in 1981, she willed the place to her assistants Theresia Dengler and Emilie Meisinger. Early in the twenty-first century, the aging pair—one deaf, the other senile—hired a couple of caretakers from what had been East Germany . . . who soon appropriated a lot of undetermined (because un-inventoried, because stolen) booty, before disappearing in the middle of the night, leaving their bedroom stripped, blank spaces on the palace walls where paintings once hung, the china hutch empty of fancy porcelain. The palace now sits quiet and empty except for occasional holiday events and open houses—a museum of sorts, a lesson in the theft of property one generation from another from another, and testimony to the fading population and power of this region.

From Gabi's balcony, we look also to the *Gasthof Pension zum Latschensee*, one of Ferdinand V. P.'s 1860s constructions and my favorite restaurant in the world, operated by Oswald Ausborn and his wife. Zwiesler Dampfbier and *Glüwein*, *Schnitzel* with French fries and salad. There are not so many guests as formerly (both the glass industry and the tourists, from hikers to skiers, increasingly opt for the cheaper Czech Republic five miles east), and there are increasing state-mandated expenses, like new water systems, sewers and roads. After the attack of the pine beetle, Frau Ausborn tells me, logging trucks drove day and night right through the village, past the *zum Latschensee* and the palace, on roads and a bridge not designed to carry their weight . . . and now the wrecked roads need to be rebuilt strong enough to carry logging trucks—at the expense, of course, of villagers, not loggers. This tale of theft and capitalist exploitation is all too familiar: country people are made to pay the price of meeting standards set by state and federal government officials to the benefit not of the local community, but of the interests which construct those mandated improvements. In an essay titled "Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community," Wendell Berry once wrote, "A community, especially if it is a rural community, is understood by its public servants as provincial, . . . and therefore in need of whatever changes are proposed for it by outside interests (to the profit of outside interests)." What he said of Kentucky certainly applies to Bavaria.

From Gabi's balcony, we look across the street at the field where the actual glass factory once stood. It is now a small park where kids practice soccer in the summer, cross-country skiing in the winter, and where the locals hold their annual Christmas Snowparty and New Year's fireworks display. We can look down the hill to Heinz Schlag's home and new barn, now the property of his widow Helen and their son Andreas. Closing my eyes, I visualize the cows plodding down the road from pasture to barn in the summer, Heinz's old black Newfoundland, and a New Year's Eve party where they all sat in Gabi's

apartment around a table, eating, drinking beer, talking in a Bavarian German I cannot understand, and singing German folk songs until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

Despite the language problems, I am at home here, and if ever ’90s academic politics at Southwest State had become as vicious as academic politics at Bradley in 1981, it was to 75A Buchenau that I planned to escape. I could die comfortably in this place.

Or I could live here, comfortably, far from the madding crowd and far from the threat of terrorists. I will never be part of the local citizenry, just as I will never really belong to Granite Falls in Minnesota, just as Gabriele, Wolfgang and Brigitte were never really part of Buchenau. But the history it tells is a familiar history even if it is not personal: depopulating Bavarian villages are not so very different from depopulating Minnesota villages. The long-empty Art Nouveau school building in Buchenau, built in 1920, is not much different from schools in the small Minnesota towns I know, now converted into museums or apartments, or standing empty and broken (or demolished like Central School in Springfield, Pennsylvania, where my mother once taught). The cabin by the creek and dam site just outside of the far end of Buchenau could be anywhere in New England, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Black Hills. I’ve seen it everywhere.

When I visit Buchenau, I am visiting my personal museum.

In fact, thus far this vacation we have hit a couple of museums: the Glass Museum in Frauenau and the Technological Building of the Deutsches Museum in München. Both have returned me to my own past. The glass museum celebrates primarily the glory days of this region, but even when I was in Poland in 1990, that business was moving eastward into Czechoslovakia and Poland. Now that shift is mostly complete. On our visit a couple of years ago we noticed that the art glass Nactmann retail store had closed, and last year the glass shop by the bus stop in Zwiesel had closed. This visit, Nachtmann itself is having a going-out-of-business sale, and Poschinger Crystal Shop is pretty quiet. Even Joska Crystal in Bodenmais is half empty.

The Glass Museum—much fancier than you would expect of a dinky little town like Frauenau—carries visitors on a journey from early local glass blowing workshops to warehouse-sized glass manufacturing operations, to the local strike in the first year of mechanized production, to the inevitable decline of jobs and production not long thereafter, to the work of a local contemporary artist-in-glass. The display includes an actual production line conveyor belt, which reminded me of my summer at Crown Products, when I stood ten hours a day at the end of a similar belt, piling sisal carpet pads one on top of the other as they rolled off the continuous process conveyor, counting as I stacked them to whatever number made a bundle for wrapping and shipment. One five-minute break each hour, half an hour for

lunch. (I remember the morning a fellow at the other end of the line decided he'd done enough work for a day, and dropped the heavy metal hook used to manhandle bales of raw sisal onto the conveyor belt, whence it moved inexorably into the choppers which sliced the sisal fiber before spreaders spread it and stompers stomped it and cutters cut it into the pads I stacked. Talk about the shot heard 'round the world! "Sonofabitch, I wondered where the hell that thing went. . . ." And that was the end of work for two hours that day.)

I thought too of my days at Mauser-werke in Germany, of the two or three weeks on the production line before I joined the loading crew, long days of thinking no special thoughts, long days of learning what I did not want to do for the rest of my life. In the Glass Museum, I felt an empathy for the workers in the German glass factories that was hard to explain to Michelle, Kristin, and Malcolm.

Nor did they share my own enthusiasm for the mediaeval glass along the Museum's first corridor: fragments of windows, really, collected and compressed into single panels of nearly abstract designs: faces, filigrees, ornaments. The faces of men and animals and demons took me immediately to Chartres Cathedral, which I, like Henry Adams, have visited several times in my life. My memories reach to the days when Malcolm Miller, the resident British art historian-cathedral expert, was a middle-aged man squeezing the butts of startled young men he had recruited to shape their extended arms into a human vault, from which he suspended the weight of his torso. And the text of the mediaeval Latin on the wall beside the glass which I cannot read (beyond the word "Zwiesel") is written in a script familiar from Anglo-Saxon texts like the *Lindesfarne Gospels* (perhaps this is Carolingian miniscule), with abbreviations I also recognize (horizontal line above the letter represents a deleted M or N). Some panels look like illuminated manuscripts, a book of hours perhaps, or *Piers Plowman*. For a moment, I was back in graduate school, when these texts, these images, these inscriptions made sense to me. As we age, I have discovered, we forget what we once knew, but we do remember that we once knew it, and this familiarity breeds curiosity if not understanding.

Then there was that 1950s documentary "Glass," running on a screen set inside a late-fifties-era television. It transfixed my daughter, who teaches TV documentaries, and my wife, who enjoys documentaries and absorbs information like a blotter. For me, it was a trip back to 555 Delaware Road, Kenmore, New York, watching *Howdy Doody* on our first television: same fifties set, same grainy black-and-white picture, same brassy music.

I tripped over the fifties again in München. We did the Christmas Market, of course, and the Hofbrau Haus, and Frauenkirche and tiny Asamskirche, but at Malcolm's suggestion we spent the afternoon in The Deutsches Museum of Science and Technology. You couldn't see this place in a week,

but the Museum's airplane and rocket ship section recalled my high school infatuation with Wernher von Braun, missiles, satellites, and the days when on summer vacations to Canada I shot my own solid-fuel rockets out over Papineau Lake.

I also enjoyed the permanent exhibit on the fifties: television sets like the one in the Glass Museum, with brown and gold consoles and microscopic screens showing the test patterns that meant "your set works, but no programs are being aired at the moment"; radios big as a suitcase, with knobs on each side and a dial across the middle between the oval speakers showing dark through the screen of light plastic, like the radio-record player I kept on the desk beside my bed, with a drawing of the dial on which I had marked all the stations which broadcast baseball games; a model of Sputnik, the earth's first artificial satellite, launched in 1957 by the Russians who were up there right now, spying on us; a typewriter like the black Royal portable I inherited from my dad, on which he had written his sermons and on which I wrote my high school and college papers, right through my 200-page doctoral dissertation; a couple of nickelodeon record players with a ring of those old 45s with the red and pink and yellow labels; a reel tape recorder like the one I took to college; cameras that used rolls of film and light meters; cars with metal bodies and real bumpers, in styles I remember less from high school than from my years in the East Bloc—Trabants and Skodas, tiny Fiats and slightly larger Ladas. Advertisements for products unfamiliar to me, but filled with the bright, primary colors, and peppy blondes with curled hair and designer faces that were so universal fifties.

And the fifties colors: aqua and pink. And the fifties hip sans serif lettering. How it all flooded back! All the photos stored in the nano memory cards of my 67-year-old brain! I was there again.

Malcolm zeroed in on the exhibit on nanotechnology, which, while it spoke to his own area of specialization and not mine, opened new worlds, explaining how the new digital Canon EOS Rebel 550D which Michelle gave me for Christmas could store so many sharp photos on a memory card the size of my thumb; how my brain can store so many images, so many stories; how even inside the human organism reality is virtualized (and thus transformed? abstracted? deconstructed?) in the very act of perception.

As we grow older, three questions loom increasingly large. The first is, of course, how much room remains in the memory cards of our brain? "Plenty of room down there," Malcolm assured me. "Almost infinite capacity." No sweat on that one.

The second question, however, is more complex: what is down there, forgotten in storage trunks, awaiting the trigger of a museum like this to resurface? What personal museum exhibits (letters, photographs, records, artifacts) might trip a memory switch? What has been lost to memory, but still

lurks somewhere in filing cabinets, diaries, photographs, letters, books on Gabriele's shelf or mine, notes in the margins of those books, dated tax returns, discarded billfolds?

Shortly before we left for Germany, I had spent a weekend shoveling snow off of the roof of my old house, which flooded in 1996 and nearly flooded again in 2002. The garage sits about two feet lower than the house, closer to the river, and it is almost certain to flood this spring. So even before we left for Germany I was formulating contingency plans: pull the lawn mower, move boxes of books up to the house, empty at least the bottom two shelves.

In the process, I discovered a box of memorabilia from my late high school and early college days: notebooks, German-English vocabulary flash cards, baseballs autographed by my high school and college teams, a few photos, old Christmas cards . . . and an old billfold with my Wittenberg student ID, my Ohio driver's license, and photos of Jan Peters, Ruth Seeh, Kristin Jensen, Mary Jo Coyle, Marilyn Babler—all the angels of my young firmament. There they were, smiling at me as they had in 1965. What a treasure. What a treasury of memories buried in the nano cards of my brain. What a universe of Moments and What Ifs and Might Have Beens. What a life!

The billfold photos took me to my college year books, to boxes of old letters and newspaper clippings, and the floodgates opened. What a vein of ore waiting to be mined, sifted, sorted, refined! I had just spent two years—two decades if you want the truth—trying to make some sense of Bob Dylan's life for *Song of the North Country*, sorting through Hibbing High School newspapers and yearbooks, interviews and articles, nearly a thousand song lyrics, searching, looking, sifting, fitting him into the framework of Midwest culture and the changing scene of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and so on. The thought occurred to me that maybe it was time to try to make some sense of David Pichaske—to recover and examine the documents of his life, to make some sense of what he's done, how he fits into the big picture. One of Dad's co-workers had written in his retirement booklet, "Don's lifelong ambition had been to write a best-seller titled *The Quest for the Historical Pichaske*," but that project never got done. Benjamin Franklin did the deed: "the thing most like living one's life over again seems to be a *Recollection* of that life, and to make that recollection as durable as possible, the putting it down in writing." I played with that idea on the flight to Germany, thinking I'd better get on this project while the brain is still functional and the files are still there.

The third question is this: at what point do the random images and sense perceptions pouring into our brain, and the "infinite capacity" of memories stored in our brain, begin to form a coherent picture? When do the leaves become a branch, the branches become a tree? When does the swirl of abstract

patterns become an image; when do random events shape themselves into a coherent history? And to what extent is our personal history the collective history?

One thing I have learned from decades of teaching books and poems and stories, which might give students a little insight into themselves and a little forewarning of trouble ahead in their own lives, is that they don't always make the connection. "That is not *my* world. Their fuck-up isn't *my* fuck-up. I'll make my own life, thank you, and my own mistakes too (which I just may choose to ignore after I make them)." We were like that too, hearing about the past but looking expectantly ahead. That's America. The past, Carl Sandburg famously said, "is a bucket of ashes"; tomorrow is "a day." In *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler warns us that education, to be at all relevant, "must shift into the future tense."

But there must be more than one tense to consider. If we can look ahead and receive public acclaim for our foresight, if we can look to different cultures on all sides and be praised for our open-mindedness, can't we also look behind for alternatives to or at least measures of our present culture? Going back is as real a mode of going out as hopping on a jet plane for Germany, South Africa, Outer Mongolia. We learn from past decisions good and bad. Cause-effect relationships as they shook out in old histories are more tangible than the cause-effect scenarios theorists hypothesize, and we need to recover cause-effect thinking if we are to solve the problems created by having denied cause-effect. At least we need more balance: granddaughter Megan tells me that the Rushville Rocket cheerleading squad needs "bases" to support the "fliers." If you can't reclaim the artifact, recover the story—the *real* story, not some invention: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Hamlin Garland's *Main-Traveled Roads* are writings, sure, but insofar as they embody a place and time, they are not postmodernist fictions that claim truth is whatever you imagine. Texts, photos, art, artifacts are as real as snow and firs, and I believe in bedrock facts.

I also believe that hindsight is almost 20-20, that we see clearer from a distance, in the rearview mirror. As we grow older, we should have a look at ourselves, see what we have become, how we became what we became, the way our story is really the story of a generation and, perhaps, the human story. Memoir—if it's honest, not constructed—is valuable. Friend Bill Kloefkorn wrote four books of memoir, one for each of the four basic elements. Friend Linda Hasselstrom has written two or three. Friend Bill Holm's later books—especially *The Windows of Brimnes*—look around in order to look back. More than anything else we need to see how we fit into the big picture: what legacy we received from our parents and environment, what legacy we pass on to our children and grandchildren.

So while a memoir is a personal history, it is also a public, communal statement. Bill Holm's never-completed personal history of sixty years in education would have spoken to us all. Henry Thoreau

apologizes for writing so much about himself ("I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience"), but *Walden* is one of the top ten books in American literature, because it speaks to us all. *The Education of Henry Adams*, published privately for friends in an edition of 100 copies, won a Pulitzer when released commercially the year after Adams' death, and someone ranked it first among the 100 most important non-fiction books of the twentieth century. Readers were not with Adams when he grew up on Beacon Hill or when he studied at Harvard, and you were not with me at Springfield High School, at Wittenberg University, at Southwest Minnesota State, or in Poland or in Latvia or in Mongolia. Nor were my friends and colleagues, although bright (some of them), the intellectual elite of America which surrounded Adams. But in *A Generation in Motion*, I thought I spoke for a generation, and in *Late Harvest*, I thought the same thing. Perhaps I am being arrogant, but I think—I hope—that the memory pixels in this book form a coherent picture, and that this book is our shared history. We were there together in the fifties, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties. You walked beside me in the city and the country. You too have been shaped by and rebelled against what shaped you. You too have become pretty much what you rebelled against . . . and then, probably, set to wondering just what it is that you actually are these days.

I am no Benjamin Franklin or Henry Adams, and my memories will not win a Pulitzer Prize or make the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, but they might ring a few bells and help readers address the only questions that really interest us: Who am I? And why? These are the questions that must be answered before we can address the dis-location which so obsesses post-modernists, "What can I become?" Because we *can't* be anything we imagine. We have learned that—even the generation of the sixties. Look at me. Look at us. We are what we are. Let us confront ourselves honestly—as honestly as we can in front of spouses, family, colleagues and friends. We are where we came from, and what we've been through. That is the subject of this book.