—This book is dedicated to my family and friends, and to all good souls everywhere who we hope will always be dear to us and with us.

Preface by the Author (DvJM)

“I remember standing on the corner at midnight trying to get my courage up. There was this long, lovely dancer, at a little club downtown, loved to watch her do her stuff.” —Bob Seger’s song “Main Street”.

“Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.” —The very independent, but just-humble-enough e.e. cummings, multi-talented yet best known as a great poet.

“I drifted into acting and drifted out. Acting is not everything. Living is.” —Irene Dunne, lead female actor in “Showboat”.

“There is only one race – the human race.” —Activist Lloyd Barbee.

In summer ca. 1990, I attended a Career Placement Workshop at UW-Stout for several days. One of the workshop assignments was to ask three referees to write a letter of recommendation for me. I asked Daryl Moen, my mentor from the UM-Columbia School of Journalism; John Hilary Whale, my journalism mentor from London; and one other teacher or employer I don’t recall now. One of them wrote an intriguing letter, beginning three consecutive sentences with the words, “He is curious…” I long wondered if that referee might have been partly alluding to the eccentricities of my approaches to work, which is possible. But one of the referees explained to me later that that person was referring to my inquisitiveness, which he deems an esteemed quality in any good journalist.

My first two university degrees were in history and literature (a History BA from UW-Madison in 1973, and an American Studies MA from UI-Iowa City in 1978). By the time I arrived at Mizzou, I could write and edit well, but I’d never really owned a decent camera until late 1979. I took many street photos to train myself, and by September 1980 had enrolled at Mizzou. I studied both photojournalism and written journalism, but the latter became my major there, because photojournalistic academic training in those days required big cash investments for equipment, travel, etc. But my writing major didn’t stop my interest in taking photos. I’ve authored 75 or so photo monographs so far, and 45 or so books of texts. I’ve written thousands of essays and articles (quite a few are still collecting dust, having not made it to a printing press or a computer printer yet; I wrote many of this collection’s essays more recently; then revised many of them), and have taken about half a million photos too, so far. This book comprises many of my best recent essays. I hope you enjoy reading them, and that they reveal the art of human curiosity about humor, sadness, life, and love.

There’s plenty in this book (and my “Spirit of America” series generally) for readers to chew on, then. As comedian Bill Maher said about his family’s roots to Henry Louis Gates, you’ll find “people with gumption, and get-up-and-go, and that is America” (one of my direct ancestors, Louis Joliet, whose granddaughter Madeline married Jean Marcoux, had lots of get-up-and-go; he and Fr. Marquette were the first white men to explore the upper Mississippi River in 1673; see my essay, “The Perfect Height of Trees: From Joliet to Marcou in Wisconsin” at: http://lacrossehistory.org/literature/Perfect_Height_of_Trees.pdf) – but to those interested in sexy, steamy, cheap romance or even blood and gore in this book, remember, I can’t do that much of that stuff: Early in my life, I was taught for 12 years by Franciscan nuns who believe very strongly, like St. Teresa of Calcutta, in St. Francis’s Prayer for Peace. But still, there’s some of even that, since they’re part of life too; as a great Madison sports writer Roundy Coughlin used to say, “What more could be fairer?” --Feb. 2017, by DvJM.
The FSPA’s and Me

“Fear of failure is a great motivator.”— Dennis Quade.

“He said, ‘There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday and the other is called tomorrow, so today is the right day to love, believe, do, and mostly live.’”—Dalai Lama.

St. Francis’s Prayer for Peace begins: “Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where… injury, pardon; where … doubt, faith; where… despair, hope; where… darkness, light; where… sadness, joy.” Then-Msgr. John Paul used to recite that prayer daily on the radio Angelus. The Monsignor’s recitation of that prayer via radio is in my play “The Marcous of Prospect Street”. Mother Teresa often included the text of that prayer with her letters to me later.

La Crosse, WI -- where my son and I were born and raised -- is headquarters city of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, who have had at least two nuns praying in their HQ chapel (Mary of the Angels) non-stop for something like 140 years; it might be a Guinness world record, or close. At least one Franciscan taught me in each of my 12 years in grade/high school (1956-1968). I learned good study/writing practices from them, including good observational skills (in 1983, I’d do a photo-essay on their HQ convent, St. Rose, for a UW-L class taught by Roger Grant). And the inspiration not to give up on my best ideas and to pray often also comes from them and my parents. FSPA influences began when I was home sick five months with rheumatic fever my first year at St. James Grade School. Sr. Valeria I believe, had my classmates each create a page for a yarn and construction-paper book for me. That and my mom having read to me from books when I was very small inspired a keen love of books in me since then. In second or third grade, I got to know some of the kids better I’d be in school with a while: Mike Dawson, Tom Wittenberg, Ed Koelbl, Chuck Lindner, Steve Geier, and the girls too, like Barb Brisson, Kathy Haggerty, Linda Sanford, Linda Fitzpatrick, Lynn Rodenkirch, Kathleen Collins, and those were just the prettier ones. In fourth grade, I chummed with two fifth graders, George “Beetle-bomb” Debettinges and Robert “Crazy, Upside Down Grin” Cranshaw. We’d play buzz-bomb through youngsters’ games at recess to let the girls know we existed. We could be wiseacres, and tiny, tough Sr. Robertina got so angry with me once, she lifted me towards the ceiling by my collar in front of our combined class, busting off my top shirt-button. I complained about that when I got home, and caught hell from my parents for it. In fifth grade, my teacher was Sr. M. Macrina (not Macarena, as in the Latin American dance). I can’t recall receiving many bad grades in grade school, but maybe that’s because I believe my last year at St. James, 8th grade, my grades were very good. Fifth grade wasn’t one to write home about. I was particularly good in Spelling and Geography; my week spots were many, e.g., one D each in English and Art, a bit ironic given what I’ve been good at more recently, or perhaps both D’s motivated me to do better in those areas, a good thing. Out of 56 letter grades that year, I received only four A’s, two D’s, plenty of C’s, several B’s, but no F’s at least. Regarding check marks for “needing improvement” on the Habits and Attitudes side, I received two marks out of a possible 68 marks, one for “needs to practice self-control”, and one for “needs to respect authority”. Nothing major; but my letter grades were terrible.

I guess it came with the territory there’d be kids who were bullies in grade school. They tested wits with me; one of them punched me in the shoulder (and stomach) a lot. In the Old Testament way of thinking, maybe I had it coming; after all, whenever my younger brothers ganged up on me, I punched them in their shoulders too. (My brother Dennis would play league softball until he was 60, but he needed two shoulder surgeries for that; I hope I had nothing to do with that.) By eighth grade, I was playing on the St. James boys’ basketball team. Because Chuck Lindner, our starting point guard, was sick for the city championship game at close of season, I started in his place and scored four valuable points, one bucket on a fast-break layup, the other on a 20-footer that luckily went in. I believe those were the only two shots I took, but we beat St. Thomas More (or Cathedral?) for the championship by a very modest score, something like 39-36, but it made our coach, Tom Rathburn, very happy. My parents were happy, too. Dad had played on a St. James city championship team as well, and Mom and Dad’s very memorable wedding had been in St. James Church on Valentine’s Day, 1950, right after a considerable blizzard.

Another good memory from those days was the 40-foot set-shots of Fr. Henry R. Hoerburger, our pastor for nearly all my grade school years (grade school for me: 1956-1964). The nuns liked it too, when Father H stopped by our team’s practices. When he did, we all wanted to see him swish his patented two-handed set-shots. He only took shots until he made one; and if memory serves, the first 8-10 practices I saw him shoot, he made them first try every time. Late in season, he tried one, barely missed it; then sank the next. Not a bad record for a parish priest! He passed away recently age 97 after being priest many years at Elk Mound, WI. Father H’s passions other than his parishioners were riding his yellow scooter and gardening. As La Crosse Diocesan Archivist Kurt Apfelbeck told me recently, “If there ever was a priest known for his gardening, well, [Father H] was a very good gardener.” Fathers Doerre and Lemke were also good teachers.

However, in addition in eighth grade, JFK was assassinated. When the nuns got word on Nov. 22, 1963, they had Tom Rathburn bundle the basketball team up in vehicles and go to Holy Cross seminary for a scrimmage. When we returned that afternoon, the entire student body was in the gym, watching the single TV the school owned. It was a very sad day, because America’s first Catholic president was a darling of the nuns and most parishioners (at many, many Catholic parishes worldwide). I since have developed more negative feelings about the
president who may have been killed because he recklessly had sexual liaisons with mafia molls, communist spies, and many other women not his wife. Maybe it doesn’t matter much that JFK’s mom was a Fitzgerald; but my paternal grandmother’s maiden name was Fitzgerald.

Next came Aquinas High School, autumn 1964, etc. Sr. Paulinda taught me World History freshman year. She was so tiny the kids nicknamed her “Mouse”. Also, her teeth sometimes whistled when she talked – but she was a superb teacher. Sr. Winifred taught me at least one year of my two years of high school Latin. (Amo, amas, amat, amamus:… I love, you love, he/she loves, we love…) I scored high on national Latin tests. Junior year, I took English from Sr. Carola, American History from Sr. Geneva, and Chemistry from Sr. Paula Marie (who would also teach at Notre Dame University before she passed from cancer). I wrote my first good research paper for Sr. Carola, earning an “A” reviewing “Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. An unusual class with Sr. Carola occurred once when I was asked to stand up front and describe what it might be like to visit the planet Mars. I hemmed and hawed, because I didn’t like speaking in public then, and Sister stood next to me and put her hand in my front pants pocket. Embarrassed, I mumbled something but don’t remember what I said. I just know I was very glad when she removed her hand from my front pants pocket!

Sr. Geneva’s American History class was top-notch and she was very disciplined (she had a square jaw and you didn’t want to mess with her); we had quizzes testing for names, dates, and events – rote memory is downplayed by some now, but it kept the flow of thinking and writing intelligible. (Jack Nockels, freshman year, was superb teaching vocabulary and grammar, as well as sentence diagramming, mainly through rote learning and practice.) In Sr. Paula Marie’s Chemistry class we each gave an oral report. I hemmed and hawed again, reading my notes badly; she’d left the room luckily, before I gave my speech. I wasn’t much of a public speaker until 1991, when I taught my first classes for Western Technical College. Senior year, Sr. Julia Ann taught me Advanced English. In English one or two years, we saw good films – “A Man for All Seasons” about St. Thomas More (I’d write a good paper on him at UW-Madison) from the Robert Bolt play, and her); we had quizzes testing for names, dates, and events – rote memory is downplayed by some now, but it kept the flow of thinking and writing intelligible. (Jack Nockels, freshman year, was superb teaching vocabulary and grammar, as well as sentence diagramming, mainly through rote learning and practice.) In Sr. Paula Marie’s Chemistry class we each gave an oral report. I hemmed and hawed again, reading my notes badly; she’d left the room luckily, before I gave my speech. I wasn’t much of a public speaker until 1991, when I taught my first classes for Western Technical College. Senior year, Sr. Julia Ann taught me Advanced English. In English one or two years, we saw good films – “A Man for All Seasons” about St. Thomas More (I’d write a good paper on him at UW-Madison) from the Robert Bolt play, and “Lord of the Flies” from the William Golding novel. The Sister who taught me Advanced Algebra and Trigonometry was very good too.

Aquinas’s lay teachers were sterling as well, e.g., Mr. Nockels, Norm Flynn, John Michuta, Lee Gilbert, Walter Kelly, Nancy Baker, and Dave Reinders. Frs. Delbert Malin, William “Wild Bill” Grevatch, and James O’Connell were fair-minded too; one of the priests teaching me, Fr. James Falconer, chewed me out in front of everyone once for not following his lecture; I had it coming; I hadn’t been paying attention until then, probably shouting off to a friend in back; Fr. Falconer was a good customer at the IGA store my dad worked for in Bangor, WI., and a superb musician. He directed the school band. My Aquinas grades overall were slightly over 89 percent I believe, out of 100 per cent. I made the top 15 percent or so in my graduating class. My grades weren’t bad for my three university degrees either, though there were brief periods when I needed to improve considerably. My overall score on the Graduate Record Exam (a national standardized test) just before I began my MA work at the University of Iowa in 1977 was 89%.

Back in Catholic grade and high school, Sisters and Priests had real power in the 1950s and 1960s. It’s a shame they’re rarely seen teaching there anymore. The FSPA’s taught me two things for sure – no way, no how was I to have premarital sex, and I should not fail at good work, both of which prayers were supposed to help with. The first lesson almost set me back a millennium (no, it did set me back a millennium; I’m still feeling the negative effects, though I’m very happy I’ve a superb son and great daughter-in-law); the second has been golden. Oh, a related thing I learned is -- if someone says I can’t do something good/productive/useful I very much need to do (I don’t care who or how well-placed that person is), I often do it anyway, work hard at it, and become skilled at it generally. That’s a lesson any youngster with big, good dreams should remember. Also, a few Catholic sisters and priests physically abused children then; I was never sexually abused, but I was physically abused by a priest once (he hit me hard in the face), and one lay teacher as well. Although I didn’t do it much before then, I learned when my son was four years old that alternative disciplines work best; physical abuse doesn’t work. Matt is 29 years old now and when he and his wife have kids, I hope they feel like I do about that.—ca. 2015, and added to in 2017, by DvJM.

Photography’s Founder-Geniuses: Especially Niepce, Daguerre, and Fox-Talbot

Niepce –

The chemical and aesthetic approaches to the invention of photography occurred for many centuries, including near the end of the 18th century, when the English proto-photographers Elizabeth Fulhame (inventor of catalysis) and Thomas Wedgwood experimented with chemicals, and in Wedgwood’s case especially, attempted (unsuccessfully) to fix camera obscura images, before photography’s invention. Then, in the 1790s, Joseph Nicephore Niepce began the experiments leading to what he would call “heliographie”. It was his goal then not to investigate nature scientifically or to create multiple designs, but rather to do multiple reproductions of landscape views via the camera obscura, the device to copy nature used by painters for many years (windows are covered darkly, except for a small pinhole opening, and the image from outside enters well-focused, though upside-down, on the room-wall behind).
Although Francois Arago claimed in 1839 that JAC Charles had demonstrated imaging with silver salts to the Parisian scientific public, ca. 1800, Niepce's work proceeded independently of Parisian scientific circles. After year of trials and experiments, Niepce managed to copy and engraving in 1822 and made, in 1824, a point de vue – a positive (but difficult to view) image made in the camera obscura. (He had abandoned attempts to reproduce images with silver salts on paper; he believed more solid, reflective surfaces and chemicals were needed.) Accounts of his earliest experiments have not survived, but Niepce's letters indicate the images he created were formed by the unique use of a thin varnish of the resinous asphalt bitumen of Judea, dissolved in oil of lavender, on bases of stone and glass. He later applied the same process to pewter. In a letter of September 1824, he declared to his brother that this stage signaled his success.

Niepce and Daguerre –

Also in 1824, Louis Jacque Mande Daguerre borrowed a laboratory to investigate the possibility of fixing images by sunlight. It's believed his earliest experiments involved phosphorous and silver compounds. Not having progressed very far, he learned of the experiments of Niepce. Daguerre initiated first contact and the two men met in Paris in 1827, after which Niepce traveled to England to visit his brother Charles. When he arrived in England, Joseph Niepce found his brother in very bad health, so they abandoned some of their plans to work on joint projects. Joseph, though, decided to try his luck with the Royal Society regarding his heliographic process. He was not well-received by the Society itself, due to its “disarray” at the time. Joseph's work was well-received, though, by an individual member of the Royal Society, Francis Bauer, who made available to the British a photo-plate made by Niepce, the earliest surviving example of a photographic plate made in a camera obscura. “View from the Study Window” is a direct-positive, laterally reversed image Niepce had made the previous summer, with an exposure of probably 2-3 days. It was in England that Niepce was also forced to provide a name for his process, which he determined could be called “heliographic”.

By 1829, Niepce had entered into a partnership with Daguerre that would lead directly to the invention and perfection of the daguerreotype in the 1830s. Unfortunately, none of the pair's images from their earliest years together have survived. Niepce had made an important step forward, though, via his experiments with silver iodide as a light-sensitive compound, but he died suddenly in 1833 and was succeeded by his son Isidore in the partnership with Daguerre. The further steps needed to perfect the daguerreotype process remain unknown, but Daguerre's own key discovery of mercury vapor as a means of developing the latent images, with salt as a fixer, likely took place ca. 1835.

Fox-Talbot –

At Lacock, England, Henry Fox-Talbot had been conducting his own imaging experiments, which would rival Daguerre's in 1839. Coming to his experiments relatively late, Talbot achieved his desired results relatively quickly. He began his attempts at photography in 1834, and attained stabilized images fairly soon, but set aside his research for more pressing concerns in optics, biblical studies, and calculus. It is from the summer of 1835 that Talbot's earliest camera obscura negatives survive, made in “miniature cameras”. It is in his discovery of an effective negative process (known more fully as the negative-positive calotype process) wherein resides Talbot's great contribution

Daguerre and Talbot, Talbot and Daguerre, Equals in the Post-Niepce Story of Photographic Invention –

The photographic events of the first half of 1839 were dominated by the public announcements of two inventors, Daguerre and Talbot, and two scientists, Arago and Herschel. In 1831, Sir John Herschel had demonstrated the formation of a weak image of the spectrum with platinum salts, which Talbot had been present for. Herschel then-unknowingly discovered that hydro-sulfites dissolve unreduced salts of silver, the basic principle for photographic fixer, or “hypo”, which Herschel would perfect soon after the official announcements of photography's invention made in January 1839 – Daguerre's on January 7th, and Talbot's on January 31st. The discoveries and inventions around the time of these announcements signaled the dawn of a new photographic age – the daguerreotype took off as a globally accepted phenomenon early on, but was superseded eventually by Talbot's negative-positive process, the preferred method of photo-capture until the digital age.—

Published with earlier edits within DrJM's book “The Photographic Spirit”, online and in paperback forms, early 2013.

The Meaning of an Idea

In 1981, a colloquium was held at UW-Madison titled “The Wisconsin Idea” in honor of Prof. Carlisle P. Runge’s retirement. Prof. Runge’s friend of 45 years, State Chief Justice Nathan Heffernan, would memorialize him with his passing in 1984 as “the leading exponent of the Wisconsin Idea” in his time. Back in 1904, UW President Charles Van Hise had first summed up that idea, “the borders of the University are the borders of the state”. The Wisconsin Idea has been further defined as the policy developed in our state fostering public universities’ contributions “to the government in the forms of serving in office, offering advice about public policy, providing information and exercising technical skill, in the forms of doing research directed at solving problems that are important to the state and conducting outreach activities.”
Its second aspect is “to ensure well-constructed legislation aimed at benefiting the greatest number of people”, with the “search for truth” at the core of its mission. When Gov. Scott Walker proposed that the Wisconsin Idea be “eliminated” in recent years, then changed his proposal to “amended”, citizens balked because the Wisconsin Idea is likely the greatest element of social planning in our state’s entire “post-Native” period.

During the Progressive Era led by Wisconsin Governor/US Senator Robert M. “Fighting Bob” La Follette Sr., proponents of the Wisconsin Idea saw our state as “the laboratory for democracy”. Policies like social security, negative income tax, child and adult labor laws, family assistance, state taxes, progressive taxation, and integration of immigrants/minorities were born or fostered here. La Follette was long a Republican but suggested to Democratic Presidents too what domestic policies should be. His ideas won the day; many are still with us. For his part, Carl Runge earned an Army Bronze Star during World War II. After attending Oxford a year and graduating UW’s Law School in 1948, he became Assistant US Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin. He’d later serve as an Assistant US Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy administration -- then directed UW’s Center for Public Policy and Administration (eventually renamed the La Follette School of Public Affairs). I worked for Prof. Runge as a full-time clerk-typist; he was one of the calmest (partly due to a weak heart, if memory serves), most informed, fairest-minded educators imaginable. He exemplified how a university administrator should educate his/her students and aid everyday citizens by sharing knowledge gained through hard-won experience and research.

In a group-book I edited “Spirit of Wisconsin”(2005), educators Tamara Horstman-Riphahn and Ronald S. Rochon wrote: “In the shadow of national and international tragedy and war, it would be easy to close our doors, barricade state lines, and foster suspicions of the ‘other’…. Many times we strive to support and nurture those to whom we feel devoted, but in order to survive in the existing interdependent structure of our societies, we must also contemplate the ways in which we open our lives and provide opportunities for old and new alike.” Then-Gov. Jim Doyle wrote in his Foreword to that book, “Challenges still remain, but I have faith in Wisconsin – in its people and their tremendous spirit…. Let’s continue working together to keep our great state moving forward.” Bob La Follette, Carl Runge, and others have given so much to Wisconsin and the world and took so little in return. The people of Wisconsin owe a lot to our universities and the world around us; but the world owes a lot to the Wisconsin Idea, as well. On Wisconsin!—In trimmed-down form, this essay was published in the La Crosse Tribune with the title “Honoring Wisconsin Leaders” on Nov. 8, 2016.

Learning from the Best

These days, when there is so much interest in Hillary vs. Donald, ISIS, refugees and immigrants, healthcare, plus climate change, all fair topics for discussion, my heart pulls me back to the human environment I first grew up in. Around 1970, when I was early in my training at UW-Madison, it was suggested I meet and chat with an African-American professor of Theatre & Drama named Esther M. Jackson. My “in” had been my Theatre Appreciation teacher, Tom Ryan, who’d go on to become a dramaturge for the National Theatre of Britain. Tom asked his students to see Sean O’Casey’s classic Dublin tragicomedy “Juno and the Paycock” on-campus then, which I soon loved and which I’d write a sequel to three decades later, “Song of Joy—Or the Old Relibles”. When I mentioned I’d like to do some playwriting, he recommended I speak with Prof. Jackson, one of the very brightest teachers on campus then, though I also loved the teaching of American cultural historian Dan Rodgers, who won the Frederick Jackson Turner Award at UW and who’d go on to stellar tenure and more big awards (including the Bancroft Prize for his book “Age of Fracture”) at Princeton University.

My first wife and I visited Prof. Jackson; she was originally from Arkansas, then Ohio State U. We chatted about playwriting and William Shakespeare. Prof. Jackson had insightful things to say about both, and even said I might write some good plays myself someday. I’d enroll in various classes of hers, especially after I graduated in History and entered T&D as a Master’s student; she’d become my advisor. She knew as much about the fine arts of civilization as anyone I’d ever been around (she was a fellow at some point for the Victoria and Albert Museum in England), and was physically beautiful, too. Esther Jackson spoke of aesthetics using the most precise and advanced language, and knew a lot about Walt Whitman, Martha Graham, Judith Jamison, Lorraine Hansberry, and James Baldwin. Also, she’d already written the first book about Tennessee Williams’ plays, “The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. When it came time for my thesis, I suggested using a paper I’d written about the only American playwright to win a Nobel Literature Prize, Eugene O’Neill. She was an expert on his work too, but asked me to write about the theme of history in Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible” instead. I tried starting the latter paper often, but just couldn’t write it, though I did research it. Maybe I just felt, with the Vietnam War just-passed, there’d be too much criticism for anything except a firmly anti-Joe McCarthy slant, because history’s and Miller’s Salem Witchcraft Trials evoked many McCarthy-era comparisons. There was peace-protesting on campus from 1968 when I entered UW, until somewhat before 1976, when I left T&D.

I enrolled at the University of Iowa in 1977 to earn my MA in American Studies. Back in Madison, in 1979 I wrote a brief paper on ethical naivete in “The Crucible”. These days, with Esther Jackson since passed and no early resolution to our difference over my thesis topic, it
seems the only ethical naivete in T&D in the 1970s was mine. Oh I did grow up a bit more at some point, and eventually wrote plays Prof. Jackson said I might; one being about the 1970 Sterling Hall Bombing at UW, “Bloody Math: An American Tragedy”. The final time I saw Esther Jackson was in 1983. I’d put up a display of photos at UW by the great Picture Post photojournalist Bert Hardy and she and I chatted when she visited it. Though I’d also go on to receive a Journalism degree from Mizzou in 1984, I didn’t receive a T&D degree. It was still a great honor to learn from one of the finest teachers I’ve ever known, Prof. Esther Merle Jackson, who in 1961 or so, had been the first theatre and drama specialist appointed to the US Office of Education in Washington, DC.—2016, by DvJM.

Students in an Earlier Wartime

There’s much support for America’s Vietnam veterans today and should be, due to their very real sacrifices for this country in an unpopular war. But there were other good ways then to serve America too, despite the nation’s upheaval. For one thing, universities could be very good places to learn about the pluses and minuses of US culture then, since they were often hotbeds of activity in the Vietnam era; being a politically “uninvolved” student wasn’t easy while working jobs too. I worked many jobs earning three degrees from 1968-1984. For 4-plus years, I worked for UW Athletics when our teams had trouble winning. Later, I’d unload semis for UPS, manage an ice-delivery business, and work as a full-time clerk-typist for what’s now the UW La Follette Institute, to pay for various schooling. My first UW-selected dorm roommate (his given name was Gordon) was a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); I wasn’t. An SDS neighbor worked for the football team and lined up a job for me as a student manager there. I didn’t agree with either about politics or the illegal drugs they took. SDS, Black Panthers, and Weathermen could be violent. Little of their violence helped their causes, though the four student deaths at Kent State in 1970 turned even more Americans against the war. “Quieter” times on campus involved music, dance, and beer. From the Association to Credence Clearwater Revival to the Rollingstones to Peter, Paul, and Mary to Simon and Garfunkel, music helped many Americans cope. Classic campus films – serious foreign or comic Marx Brothers -- eased home-front anxieties.

Martin Luther King Jr. had criticized the war shortly before his assassination in 1968, preaching non-violent protest. Young adults in the Peace Corps went abroad to aid the poor. VISTA enlisted young adults for similar work on the home-front. La Crosse leader-to-be John Medinger served with VISTA. John, a self-described “peacenik”, is a good friend of mine, and of the Hmong too, who fought on America’s side in Vietnam. Some college students, then, studied and avoided violence. But in Madison, National Guard troops were often nearby. Tear gas was sprayed often. Indoors, I saw a huge footballer throw a large metal desk off a lecture platoform as our math class and instructor stood by, helpless. At times even the best students relented and went to watch protests. I was not a top student, but I wasn’t violent either. Many students were first in family at college, like me, oldest of seven children. I wasn’t drafted, and my draft-lottery number kept me just free of the draft. I’d eventually write a play about a lethal protest, “Bloody Math: An American Tragedy”. In 1970, the Gang of Four tried destroying UW’s Army Math Research Center on sixth floor in Sterling Hall. Their huge bomb did damage to the basement instead, where innocent young physics researcher Bob Fassnacht died very late that night.

The North Vietnamese idolized Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence and had asked for US help earlier versus the French. More recently, if we’d have kept out of Iraq a dozen years ago (after ensuring no nukes were there), its army might now be a stronger bulwark versus terrorism. And Barack Obama allowed Moamar Gadafi to be killed though Libya’s leader had paid a huge financial compensation to victims’ families for a airliner bombing he’d had something to do with over Lockerbie, Scotland; eliminated his nuclear and chemical warfare programs; and ousted the terrorists who’d trained there. Legislators, business people, and pundits who clamor for war without having served in the military, and/or without offspring in the military, don’t help. My son did well in the Army, and I’ve authored-edited 35+ volumes of “Spirit of America”. Volume 1 was published ca. 10/01/01 after a year’s work. My adult students and I won an award in Kansas City for it via Mary Eisenhower and Greg Hilbert (CEO of the Sept. 12 Initiative), The Spirit of America Award. Mary’s peace-loving People to People International organization was founded by her grandfather, President Eisenhower.—ca. 2015, by DvJM.

Reflecting on an Even Earlier Era

It was a time more like our own than we honestly admit sometimes. The only way out of the economic plight then was for the government to deficit-spend and directly put people to work. Unemployment hovered around 25% when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in 1932. Farmers had been thrown off the land in large numbers, by erosion and poverty, and many migrated to other parts of the country; or if you were a young man, without much if any family along, you might ride the rails until something better came up. The nation needed positive leadership and FDR provided it. “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” he intoned. Alphabet soup was the order of the day, as new government agencies sprang up, including the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Tennessee Valley
Authority (TVA), Social Security Administration (SSA), and Farm Security Administration (FSA). Critics called it Socialism, and to a key degree, it was, though not always as evil as some said.

The Oakies and Arkies joined Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and many others, in California, praying for work. Dorothea Lange took her most famous photo in Nipomo, at a Pea-Pickers’ Camp. Like Florence Thompson in Ms. Lange’s ‘Migrant Mother’ portrait, people in the 1930s were desperate, yet often showed more strength than people today in decent shape, imagine. Some people had to be satisfied then with the thinnest soup and smallest crust of bread; or even, simply, a half-cup of milk, for a meal. The American nation was still segregated by color and seemed in need of the crucible of sacrifice to bring it together. Erosion and poverty helped do that; but without positive leadership in every part of the nation, and hard work, America might not have survived in any way like we know it today.

It’s been said FDR lured the Japanese into war in 1941, because his economic programs couldn’t rescue the nation sufficiently from poverty. Well, if you know what the Germans, Italians, and Japanese were doing in the 1930s, you know WWII was more inevitable than any other war in modern times. WWI had been another matter. Teddy Roosevelt, FDR’s sometimes heroic cousin, hadn’t helped, by signing off on the Russo-Japanese Treaty of 1905 or by pushing for US entry into WWI in 1914 already. Korea would be under Japanese rule 40 years, and China was open to invasion, as a result. The Rape of Nanking occurred, and many other atrocities, too. And we all know about Germany’s Fuhrer and Italy’s Il Duce. And all that had begun well-in-advance of WWII’s onset.

Today, our president has many difficult entities on his plate – terrorism around the world threatens the existence of many, though it is not as close-to-home as for people in the Middle East. And his health care reform and economic stimulus packages may or may not solve our nation’s economic problems. It’d be nice if President Obama would earn his Nobel Peace Prize now, and lead us in the fashioning of peace, and prosperity, soon, for us and the world. We’ve been at war eight long years, with disastrous economic results and at the cost of many lives. If the president and his administration can exercise real diplomacy, safely pull our troops out of Afghanistan very soon, and lead the rescue of our economy, too, he might be remembered as one of our greatest presidents. Though I didn’t vote for him, I hope Obama succeeds, because my son, Matthew, is serving in the US Army, and I don’t want Matt to fight a war/s after his training concludes, but, rather, man a camp or two somewhere, not involved in combat. Isn’t that what troops should do? -- be vigilant and well-trained, but not have to shoot real bullets at real people anymore than absolutely necessary. Let’s hope our era isn’t really like the 1930s much. Let’s hope peace and prosperity are on the horizon and that we reach out and grasp them, properly and soon.—Matt Marcou would serve two tours in Afghanistan before mustering out of the Army in 2013, this essay was written ca. 2011, by DoJM.

Our Mumbai Tiger and London Whales

Twenty-seven years ago – though to me it seems like yesterday -- I was a journalist in London, part of the “Missouri Nine”, though with John H. Whale, our instructor-editor, we were ‘Ten’. The Missouri Journalism School group preceding ours was labeled the “Magnificent Seven”. We were the Mizzou/London Sunday Times reporting interns who preceded and followed the Royal Wedding of summer 1981, during the tandem-rule of Elizabeth II and Margaret Thatcher. Mizzou’s London semesters then were autumns, fitting school/editorial calendars. Mr. Whale was a religion/politics specialist for the Sunday Times, plus he and Mrs. Whale were that paper’s chief proofreaders. John Whale, who died recently (2008), wrote a series of masterful essays for the Sunday Times Magazine, which became the style book “Put It in Writing”. He authored several books, and became BBC religion editor; then edited the (Anglican) Church Times. We corresponded with letters the last 27 years of his life.

I’m reflecting on “My London Autumn” (also my British memoir’s title) due to the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, formerly Bombay, hometown of a member of our London group, Pinki Virani. Pinki covered the wedding gifts Royal Newlyweds Charles and Diana received. Our Mumbai Tiger, four others in our group, and I, lived in a flat in London’s Islington District – at 13 Willow Bridge Road. Dan Higgins and Pinki often watched TV together when not covering news. “Brideshead Revisited” was the big series then; and there was a popular British program very much like “American Bandstand”, too, maybe called “Top of the Pops”. John and Judy Whale had found us the flat, and would visit us – for a meal Pinki, Marynelle Hardee, and Louis Trager prepared – in early December. Andrew Cavanaugh, our Welshman, was there, though he lived elsewhere in London, and perhaps our Chinese colleagues, Grace and Simon, too.

In-between, I/we covered artists, plays, IRA protests at 10 Downing Street and Westminster Catholic Cathedral, Palestinians, American Indians (my immediate roommate-then Calvin Lawrence’s report; until recently, he was Newsday’s national editor), a Paralympic champion (Rudi Christopher), Paddington Bears (Dan’s report), 3-year-olds’ daycare, pain relief, a suggestive panda, Bert Hardy and James Cameron, Cardinal Basil Hume and the IRA, Covent Garden, Billingsgate (Louis’s reporter; I took some photos there that weren’t published then), and racial and immigration issues (Anglo-African and Anglo-Indian -- later, I’d photograph and write of Calcutta’s Mother Teresa, and receive her 18 personal letters to me). Memorable, too, was Pinki’s treating me to a dinner of curried chicken and rice at an Indian restaurant,
temporarily subduing my biscuits (cookies), peanut butter, and fish and chips “diet”. Pinki advised me as a journalist to ask questions like: Why can’t India and Pakistan get along? Why can’t more Muslims accept the Jews as a nation/people? And why can’t the world eliminate the causes of terrorism and war – hunger, disease, poverty, class-ism, bigotry, sexism, racism, radical sectarianism, tribalism, and violence? (I broach those topics in my Irish play “Song of Joy, Or the Old Reliables,” which debuted in 2008 in La Crosse.)

My clearest memory of Pinki is of her playfully wrestling with Dan by the TV. Today, Pinki Virani is an award-winning author (“Bitter Chocolate” and “Once Was Bombay”, for starters). I hope the Viranis weren’t struck by the Mumbai attacks -- to be sure, I’d like to share positive stories with Pinki and the rest of our Missouri Nine again soon-enough. That’s what autumn, and soon after, Christmas, help us recall.—This essay by DvJM in edited form was published in the La Crosse Tribune, ca. 2009.

My 1981 London Photography

Environmental Portraits Around 1981 London

Although more than 2,000 of my Autumn 1981 British photos went missing between 1981 and 1987, I still have enough of my London images in my possession for a decent portfolio of work. Included in that portfolio are quite a few environmental portraits I took around London that Autumn. I wish I still had my portraits of housemate Pinkie Virani (a noted Indian author and human rights advocate now) and Calvin Lawrence, my roommate, now a coordinating producer for abc.com in New York City. Environmental portraits I took in 1981 London and still own copies of include: Jim, a court porter on the dole sitting by a statue of the literary great Samuel Johnson; a dustman smoking on the job; a guitar busker playing across from Covent Garden; a homeless man coughing under Charing Cross Bridge; an Anglo-Asian man reading in Soho; and a woman looking through the back window of a blue van at an outdoor market. These six mentioned portraits may not seem spectacular at first, but they are honest-enough documentary images of everyday people involved in everyday life.

Photographing a London Children’s Day Centre for a Month

When I was a member of the Missouri-London Reporting Team as a London Sunday Times intern, one assignment I chose for myself (not part of the regular writing program, which was directed by John H. Whale) was to photograph a children’s day centre in Canonbury, Islington District, London. The famous Picture Post photojournalist I’d photograph later that autumn, Bert Hardy, also photographed children in a day centre, about 30 years before me. I first obtained formal permission in writing from the District Education Authority. Margaret Johnson, I believe, was the day centre’s principal. She was very helpful, as was her chief assistant, Gloria -- or was her name Gladys? The timing for my coverage was in October 1981, I believe. Although I wanted to show collapsed-time-style a full day of activity there over the full month, including a just-after-dark shot from the building next door (where George Orwell apparently once lived), I couldn’t get clearance from the man in charge of that next-door building to take the just-after-dark shot I wanted. Each time I visited the centre, I took pictures about an hour.

Children of all colors and backgrounds attended the centre (one little girl wore a mink or faux mink coat, but most of the kids were from working class families). My favorite subject may have been the great 3-year-old artist Demien, whose drawings adorned areas inside the centre. He was Anglo-African, as was his friend Jonathan. I took facial shots of Demien, and the two friends together too, though I was asked not to identify any children if published then. My best portrait of Demien was my black-and-white picture-postcard image of him for my one-man photo show in Seoul’s Pine Hill Gallery and Restaurant in Feb. 1987. Along the way, in addition to lots of kids, I also photographed a laundry attendant at her ironing board, and the teacher Elizabeth helping a little girl on with her winter coat. My self-imposed assignment probably wrapped up by early November. I also like my photo of two little girls kibitzing on the centre’s back door steps, the teacher and playwright Bob helping a little boy learn to swim on a daytrip to the YMCA, and a little boy kissing his mom as she drops him off one morning (though I no longer have a copy of the latter image). I also photographed a teacher tucking in a little girl for her nap, a little girl seeming to sneak out of recess (I always thought a child snuck out for recess, not out of it), and a little girl being walked into the kitchen area by Gloria/Gladys. My three other favorite photos are of a small group of kids eating breakfast as a teacher oversees things; a little blonde girl named Lucy reading; and Gloria/Gladys receiving newspapers, etc., from a shop deliveryman at one of the centre’s gates as a small boy with toy golf club looks on.

My second now ex-wife seems to have pilfered 688 (my bag had the number marked on its outside) of my best early negatives and slides, including most of my day centre images; I’ve still got 60 or so day centre prints I believe. I’d taken 15-to-18 rolls of 36-exposure Agfa color 400 ASA print film, and three rolls of Agfa 36-exposure color transparency film. In Wisconsin later, I had the color negatives made into BW contact sheets and sent one set (there may have been two sets, but I can’t recall for sure) to Margaret Johnson. I never heard back from her. One of my housemates, now an attorney, Marynelle Hardee, asked me later what those children’s day centre pics were all about. I hope about great photography, and getting reacquainted with the child side of me for positive reasons. Readers/viewers can be the judge.
Various Key Photos from 1981 London

Autumn 1981 was a very memorable time for me and my writing and photography. Though I didn’t meet our group’s individual requirement of writing at least 12 feature stories (I did eight, all edited by our moderator/editor John H. Whale, who wore many hats at the Sunday Times including chief proofreader, the latter job shared with his wife, Judith), I did take at least a couple thousand good photos then. My peers in the Sunday Times intern-group from the Missouri Journalism School did not take nearly as many photos as I did, unless they were much more secretive journalists than I believe.

After the first two weeks, I found myself without a good story idea. So I set out walking one day with my camera from our group’s large flat in Islington, and walked for a couple miles or more, eventually sensing I was close to the Sunday Times Building. As I walked near it, I came upon a small art gallery advertising a show by a British neo-mannerist painter Erica Daborn, who had done some paintings inspired by “Elephant Man”, an award-winning play. I entered, found no-one in the gallery, took some shots of the paintings, and someone emerged. Long story short, I arranged an interview with the artist, took several photos of her with her paintings, sent my original slides and story to the Baltimore Sun newspaper, and didn’t hear back. I learned then to always make copies of your photos or find out later perhaps, how valuable they are to someone else other than you, the photographer and authentic copyright-holder.

I was a relative newcomer to photojournalism, so the streets of London tempted me and my camera greatly, but not a newcomer to writing ironically. As years have passed, that London semester inspired me to author and publish many books and articles about Picture Post magazine and its staff, including the first complete history of Picture Post, my book “All the Best”. I also wrote and published my dual biography of PP-lead-photographer Bert Hardy and writing mate James Cameron covering the Korean War in 1950, “Crucial Collaborations”; my biography of Mr. Hardy, “The Cockney Eye”; and my biography of Mr. Cameron, “James Cameron’s World”. In Autumn 1981, I wrote some good stories about others, too – including my published report about a very tense meeting between 50 IRA relatives and then Cardinal of England Basil Hume in the rectory of Westminster Catholic Cathedral; my unpublished report about the only professional Palestinian theatre troupe in the world then, El-Hakawati; my published report on a recently-begun, but fast-developing theatre in Islington, the Almeida; and my published report about Archie Shepp’s renowned jazz quintet at the Camden Jazz Festival, with emphasis on Shepp’s trumpeter, Charles McGhee. I took photos in all these places, but no longer own any of those. Photographers, beware: Guard your originals keenly, for some people will want them, especially if you have talent and photographed in the right places at the right times.

I photographed for some of my intern-mates then too, including Marynelle Hardee, Louis Trager, and Dan Higgins. I’ve no photos left from my shoot of Union Chapel with Marynelle (she kept them); only one photo left of my shoot of the Billingsgate Fish Market with Louis (I may have lost those myself); and only five photos of my shoot with Dan Higgins (he kept some fairly good negatives for his story and didn’t return them, including some superb views of Covent Garden from an upper-level of a building kitty-corner from CG; but I still have four photos I took from the roof of Drury Lane Theatre, including two views of CG, plus my guitar busker close-up across from CG.

Also, walking and bussing about London, and training to and from Surrey to interview and photograph Bert Hardy, I took some good images I still own. Two of my photos at the British Museum stand out – a guard smoking just outside an entryway; and people exiting and entering an entryway. And just up the street from my photo-portrait in Soho of an Anglo-Asian man in hat and coat reading a newspaper, I photographed two Chinese restaurant employees smoking on break. At the London Zoo, I took a series of photos (some in black-and-white, some in color) of Chia-Chia, a panda who was then said to have sired the fetuses the “mother” was supposed to have inside her. It was a false pregnancy, which makes my best portrait of Chia-Chia comic; he seems to be saying in that image, “Oh me, oh my, what will we ever do now?” Other photos I’ve since lost or that were stolen include my stills of a garbage truck and one of the men manning it, who was pushing refuse along a curb with a long push broom; he wore a French beret and looked a bit like my Grandfather Marcou.

Three transparencies I’d set aside to gift to the Whales when I departed England, I ended up having to give to Pinkie Virani, a housemate staying in London a few more days to relay to Mr. Whale. I asked her to first have the Grove Hardy darkroom (owned by Gerry Grove and Bert Hardy) -- which printed the vintage 8X10 of my best Bert photo-portrait with dogs; another copy of it I had Bert Hardy’s darkroom print later, and is now in the British National Portrait Gallery Collection -- make some color prints to give to Mr. and Mrs Whale. Mr. Whale told me years later he never saw those images. One was my photo of the Union Jack I photographed from our large office area on the top floor of the Sunday Times Building; a second was my photo of two little Anglo-African girls in Brixton with one of them I believe seen from an unusual perspective; and a third was my photo of an empty baby carriage outside a shop by a Marlboro cigarette ad-poster. As I later discovered, the Bert Hardy Darkroom produced only BW prints.

I was very naïve about being free with my originals in those days. For instance, one of my first nights in London, I walked to the Sunday Times Building from my temporary lodgings, the Melville bed-and-breakfast. I came upon a homeless man sleeping under tungsten light on the front steps of a corner store, photographed him, felt guilty, and put a pound in his pocket while he slept. New to this business of cadging
photos this way, I felt so bad soon after, I tried flushing my slides down a toilet. I don’t know if they were recovered anywhere by anyone, but they were dramatic-enough images. Also, I believe my now second ex-wife, when she absconded with a paper-bag filled with 688 of my best early negatives in 1987 and then around that time forced me destroy some of my best 8X10 prints (some were of beautiful young women from Korea, but not all), including I believe my most nostalgic photo of 1981 London. I’d cadged a shot of two young teen-age girls in long coats walking ahead of me on a Embankment stairway that Thames Day. Other people were alongside the stairway, including a good-looking middle-aged man (perhaps with a lady friend) in spring jacket with silver hair looking out at the Thames. One of the two girls, maybe both of them, had pigtails. I’d looked at that photo many times before 1987 and thought this is what street photography is all about, a nicely taken, cadged shot, showing everyday people doing everyday things with a bit of aplomb in the view. Maybe my memory exaggerates it slightly, because I have been without that photo so long. But I hope it is rediscovered while I and my offspring still are well, because I know a vice president at Getty Images who has critiqued my work for me a long time. He rarely has ever said one of my photos is good, but he has a strong interest in those 688 negatives, because he’s long said my early black-and-white work is the best photography I’ve ever done.

If I’ve learned only one lesson about retaining my original photos (and writings) and any good copies made of them too, it’s proper conservation of your work pays dividends, if not much monetarily initially, at least in the decent recognition your works can achieve. Over time, then, even money will be obtained, hopefully for the photographer, plus his/her heirs, and the archives he/she/they put trust in. In addition to the British National Portrait Gallery, I’ve many photos and writings in some of the very best public archives in the world, and dozens of my 100-plus books in some of the world’s very best libraries too, including in various archives and libraries of the Smithsonian in Washington, DC.—Earlier versions of these three sub-articles by DvJM were published on the British Photo History website ca. 2015.

Media Coverage of D-Day

“This is history; it is a thing I can’t be eloquent about in an aeroplane, because I’ve got engine noises in my ear. But this really is a great moment for us…. I feel detached, and that awful feeling that the great history of the world is unfolding before us at this very moment…. ” — W. Helmore, 6 June 1944.

Hungary-born cameraman Robert Capa’s photograph showing an American soldier crawling on watery Omaha Beach amidst the rain of hot shells has become the most famous image of D-Day. But virtually no one, outside of the British perhaps, remembers that one of the best eyewitness accounts of that day’s fighting was recorded for BBC Radio by RAF Air-Commodore W. Helmore. Very properly, a great deal has been written about the courage, skills, and sacrifices of the troops who fought that pivotal World War II battle. Less well-known is the story of the journalists, mainly British and American, who “went in” with the combat troops on the first day of the invasion, and were generally there for its aftermath, as well. Helmore was serving as an RAF observer flying in a Mitchell bomber when the BBC allowed him to record his impressions of the landing. An accomplished professional, he had invented the Helmore aircraft searchlight and was a tester of in-flight fueling techniques; he’d already earned a Ph.D. and C.B.E., and from 1943-45 he was MP for Watford. In addition, he had composed “City of Dreams,” a song that became a hit in America.

Back on the news-hungry Allied home-fronts, many days passed before the print media published semi-complete details of the Normandy landings. Early on, British and American newspapers ran stories based mainly on official Allied communiqués. For instance, they reported Supreme Commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s historic address to his troops: “You are about to embark on a great crusade. The eyes of the world are upon you and the hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people go with you. We will accept nothing less than full victory.” Soon after the landings began, a one-sentence Allied communiqué also received widespread distribution: “Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied Naval Forces supported by strong Air Forces began landing Allied Armies this morning on the Northern Coast of France.” Billboards, placards, chalkboards – and gossips – announced the assault in Britain. Most reports contained few accurate details, although not for lack of trying. Many Allied newspaper, magazine, and radio reporters, photographers, and cameramen went in at Normandy. But transmitting stories quickly back to the home-fronts proved difficult, even after the first few days. Most combat correspondents found themselves engulfed for several days and even weeks in the heavy fighting that followed the landings before they could do the initial clashes justice.

In fact, the German reporting organization, Trans-Ocean, issued the very first journalistic communication about the invasion’s start, at 12:37 Eastern War Time, on 6 June 1944, thus “scooping” the Allied correspondents. However, one fortunate Allied reporter beat his Western colleagues to the punch. A British officer tipped off Ross Munro, of the Canadian Press, that a destroyer was heading back to Britain from a Normandy beachhead to pick up General Montgomery. Munro thus sent back the first dispatch from the coast of France, perpetuating his impressive record of success. Munro’s dispatches had previously become the very first eyewitness print stories published from Dieppe, Sicily, and Italy. One Allied reporter’s fate was similar in its early results to many others, though. CBS’s Walter Cronkite writes of having met with Canadian print correspondent Charlie Lynch, who had just carried three homing pigeons with him in the assault on Omaha Beach. Soon after Lynch had arrived there, he’d typed up his first dispatch and sent copies with all three birds. All three of them proceeded to fly towards Berlin.
of the approach of the 5,000-ship invasion armada to the coast of France, he said: “You see the ships lying in all directions, just like black shadows on the grey sky…. Now planes are going overhead…. Hearing fire now just behind us… bombs bursting on the shore and along in the convoys……” Then he added, “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll just take a deep breath for the moment and stop breathing.” His initial D-Day recording was aired in parts by CBS, NBC, and the North American Service of the BBC, between 11 and 11:30 p.m., Eastern War Time, on 6 June—although the transmission of those broadcasts broke down several times. From D-Day on, recorded news became more prevalent in the radio industry. Previously, producers believed recorded messages could be falsely altered, and so had favored live broadcasts.

The buildup to D-Day had been secretive and effective. As Allied troops rehearsed in Britain, Allied journalists made their own preparations for The Second Front to take pressure off. Allied leaders treated the media almost as another branch of the military by June 1944, so completely had media owners and staff cooperated in defeating the Nazis. A week before the invasion, Allied journalists had been put on trains and shipped to Scotland as part of a broad deception plan designed to make it look as though something big was happening in the north. But when the time came for the actual invasion, Allied governments did everything they could to help those same journalists cover what was in fact to come. No fewer than 558 writers, radio reporters, photographers, and cameramen were accredited for the landing. The correspondents soon sent back about 700,000 words recounting the events of the first day. When you read these reports today, you can’t help feeling that the size and violence of the invasion overwhelmed them, making most reporters less than eloquent then. Radio reporters seemed to manage best, because, unlike print media, radio allowed reporters as much space (time) as needed, provided the circuits didn’t break down from bad weather or faulty wires. The BBC assigned 48 correspondents to the D-Day operation, including Chester Wilmot in a glider, Richard Dimbleby with the RAF, Robert Dunnett with the US Army, Stanley Maxted in a minesweeper, and Robert Barr with Gen. Eisenhower at Allied Headquarters. Seventeen BBC men landed on the beaches that day. American journalistic preparations had gone on for several years, ever since CBS Radio had assigned Edward R. Murrow to organize radio programs in London in the late 1930s. Murrow lobbied with New York headquarters a long time before CBS top brass allowed him to personally report news, which he did famously with his patented “This is London” lead-ins. CBS management thought Murrow, the most famous American journalist working regularly in Britain during the war, was too valuable to send across the English Channel on D-Day. Instead, he read Eisenhower’s announcements via radio to Allied troops, letting them know how important they were to the super-historic operation. Murrow had already proven his courage and skills. His London After Dark programs during the Blitz included many late-night reports from the roof of the BBC’s Broadcasting House, a prime Nazi target. Murrow often broadcast from BBC facilities, because it had the gear to do the job.

James Cameron, the noted British journalist who would eventually cover many global hotspots brilliantly and earn a C.B.E., also missed D-Day. After his first wife died in childbirth in May 1940, he tried to enlist. Due to “organic cardiac disease,” he was rejected and told he should never be at an altitude of more than 3,000 feet. Later, he flew so often and high, he’d recall, “In the years to come, in Germany, Korea, Malaya, Indo-China, I was to reflect upon the curious durability of the officially infirm.” All this came later, though. Cameron’s boss kept him at home during World War II, mapping the war’s progress with his drawings. Cameron’s future mate during the Korean War, Bert Hardy, who’d become lead-photographer for Picture Post after World War II, did go in at Normandy soon after D-Day, and went on to brilliantly cover the Liberation of Paris, and the crossing of the Rhine. Among his other notable coverages before he was in the Army, for Picture Post, had been his sterling Blitz photo-essays, one of which earned him the first photographer credit in that magazine’s history, in early 1941. Hardy was a sergeant in the Royal Army Photographic Unit from 1942-46. Picture Post’s founding editor, Hungary-born Stefan Lorant with a modicum of Jewish ancestry had been imprisoned some six months by Hitler in 1933, and attacked Hitler early and often afterward. And Picture Post’s publisher/owner Sir Edward Hulton helped found the Home Defence School, which aided in effective home front defense. In addition to the stable of legendary photographers Picture Post hired, some of the best writers of the day wrote for it, too.

British and American journalists working in Britain during the war developed what writer James Tobin has called “a structure of solidarity.” Despite the rivalries that existed between Allied reporters of various nationalities, there was also a keen sense of shared obligation, not only to report their stories and take their pictures well, but also to push hard for Allied victory. All of them wanted to report well on actions like D-Day and the war generally – and help eliminate the Nazis. In the end, the esteemed American reporter Ernie Pyle, who went in on 7 June at Normandy, wrote the best summary of the early impact of D-Day: “...it will be some time before we have a really clear picture of what has happened or what is happening at the moment. You must experience the terrible confusion of warfare and the frantic nightmarish thunder and smoke and bedlam of battle to realize this.” More than 150,000 Allied troops took part in the D-Day assault; 9,000 of them died on 6 June. Eleven more grueling, bloody months passed before Germany surrendered, but surrender it did. V-E Day is still celebrated annually, and though the war was not fully won until August 1945’s atomic bomb blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for the British people, the long, hard battle with their biggest nightmare, Nazi Germany, ended on 8 May 1945.—This article was originally written by David Joseph Marcou and first-published on a British Heritage magazine website in 2004; it was amended and updated by DvJM as well, for publication to commemorate the 65th anniversary of D-Day in 2009. Many sources were used for this report, including personal interviews by phone, written communications, and/or in-person with journalists from D-Day. One book of special value has been Philip Knightley’s “The First Casualty,” a history of media coverages of war throughout history. DvJM’s photo-portrait of Bert Hardy and his dogs is in the Photographs Collection of Britain’s National Portrait Gallery (www.npg.org.uk, NPGx126230).
Old-School Journalism Reborn, or “Yes, We Can”

The aim of good journalism used to be to reflect the world sufficiently so people knew what the world was really like. How did life become so complicated and vain that something more “objective” became very much subjective, for too many journalists? When did the mirror known as News become a steering wheel? As a writer trained in journalism at the Missouri School of Journalism, the first School of Journalism created (1908), I’ve watched during my career of about 40 years so far, as journalism has gone from being revered and “objective” to being scorned for its utter-subjectivity (the great British journalist James Cameron was fairly “subjective”, but always with a great deal of objective truthfulness represented too), at least by hard-working people who don’t belong to unions, don’t express their opinions much in public, and would rather battle life with basic ideals than switch to a more complicated, perhaps dubious ideology.

For the last two years in particular, I’ve watched as the case for Barack Obama as President has been made by the elite US media, and the elite media in other countries, too. ABC has pushed so hard for the Big O, our first black President, I’ve often thought that network would burst at its seams. Never mind the Congress is mainly Democratic and key members have been legislative obstructionists, led by Harry Reid, as have some well-known Republicans. However, despite much of the media’s intent to “slay” Caesar (John McCain), it may be that eventually it will realize that John McCain really is an American hero, and would not have been our worst President. It’s unfortunate both men couldn’t be President now, though Sen. McCain can be fairly scary with his talk of “a hundred years war”. Barack Obama knows well, how to curry favor with the elite media and people who admire that media. He seems to be a staunch family man, but his Chicago background may be dubious-enough to warrant further scrutiny, none of which the elite media, other than FOX, have engaged in. wasn’t it true, in the 1960s, that the William Daley Machine was so “effective”, it was feared more than loved? Mike Royko wasn’t afraid of old Bill Daley, but will anyone take Mike’s place?

And yet, doesn’t it seem Barack Obama is more loved than feared, at least now? He may even become one of this nation’s greatest Presidents, despite the media’s errors of methodology. Young people, minorities, and the downtrodden had sound-enough ideals in mind, in voting for Barack; I hope he proves worthy of their trust, and a positive present-day reminder of the state (Illinois) that first elected Abraham Lincoln, arguably our greatest President, or at least the President who sacrificed more of himself and the nation than any other, to save the Union. As our new President-Elect says, the true spirit of America is summed in the words, “Yes, we can.” Let’s hope he’s right. Since polls, born to reflect the world accurately, now shape it to a frazzle or a phenom, many media organizations have become as much propaganda arms of politicians as detached deliberators on reality. It’s a bit unfortunate, for media were established to preserve democracy, not Democrat-ery. Which party is in the majority makes no difference to me, as long as its rule is fair, generous-enough, and just. To me, there was never much wrong with being more-objective about hard-news, or even the inverted pyramid story. It may not have been perfect, but at least it was virtuous and contained more truth than today’s journalism often does, pleased too much with self-aggrandizement. I liked Walter Cronkite a great deal before he went to Vietnam. But perhaps Walter wasn’t as good a journalist later.—ca. 2015-2016, by DvJM.

My Unusual Relationship with Seoul’s Ms. “Park Hae Lee”, by David Joseph Marcou.

Sometime before autumn, 1986, I met a woman whose real name I don’t know, but who seduced me fairly well on two occasions. I’d been at a disco alone I believe, at one end of the main street in Seoul’s I’tae-won, a shopping and bar district especially frequented by US troops, because there were plenty of beautiful ladies of the night at work there too. I was a journalist, and not always a very hard-working one then. Sitting alone in that disco, I noticed a woman, who may have been with some lady friends who got up to dance, or may have been sitting there by herself all along. In any case, I asked her to dance, which we did a brief time, then I asked her if she wanted to go someplace more private, and she said she had a room at an I’tae-won hotel, perhaps the Hamilton.

We went there and she said she wanted to change her clothes, in her room’s bathroom. When she emerged, she was wearing a very appealing long, black negligee. We enjoyed ourselves a while, and then I asked her to go with me to my apartment. We went there and enjoyed ourselves some more. Next morning, I asked her if she wanted to have breakfast at the famous Lotte Hotel, which I knew fairly well. We went there, ate some pie (mine was cherry I believe, perhaps with ice cream), and then we went to a nearby bookstore. I asked if I could buy her any books. She said a Korean-English dictionary and an English-Korean dictionary. I obliged her.

This beautiful Korean woman about 30 wouldn’t tell me her name, but said she was married (I’d never knowingly committed adultery and possibly still haven’t). I didn’t fully believe that story, or the story she worked at a South Korean airport. But I named her “Park Hae-Lee”, because the name Lee may have slipped out at one point. She said she had to go, but might return sometime in future. I thought no more of my temporary good fortune, but a couple months’ later she knocked on my apartment door. We said hello and again enjoyed ourselves. Then she said she might never again see me and gave me a gift: a tan, short-sleeved, polo shirt with a small deer on one side of the chest. She said the deer meant I would have a long life. Although I’ve not seen Ms. Park these 30-plus years since, I’ve thought of her occasionally. She reminds me of various women I had sexual relations with, 1985-1986, the only time in my life I freely experimented sexually. All of these
women were in Seoul, except one young woman I spent a couple hours with in Manila, while reporting on the Philippines for Korean Air’s “Morning Calm” magazine.

What those ladies suggest to me now is I may have additional children to my son Matt, since I don’t believe I used a condom much if at all then. AIDS was just beginning to make news, but I wasn’t really very much aware of it until my second, now-ex, wife, a Korean citizen then, showed me a news story on it when we married in late 1986. I’m very glad my son was born in September 1987, before his mother tired of me as her husband. We divorced in 1992.—ca. 2015-2016, by DvJM.

When Romance and Sex (in Seoul Mainly) Meet Fears Instilled by a Catholic Upbringing

Ms. Park Hae-Lee and I saw each other in 1986 only. I’d begun dating young ladies late in my youth, mainly in my second year as a UW-Madison student. I’d fooled around a bit in a high school, but didn’t climax a relationship sexually until Ann Majeska and I married in 1972, and even then we hardly climaxxed at all. After our divorce in 1979, I had only one date at Mizzou (1980-84), no sex, with Susan Harr, a redhead I admired (she voluntarily sat immediately behind me at her typewriter in the newsroom daily, so she may have been admiring me too); I did have a one-hour photo session with a thin redhead I’d have given my eye-teeth to have had a romantic relationship with, Elizabeth Beth Bland, but she wasn’t much interested in me apparently (I did mail her a marriage proposal from Seoul when I worked for Yonhap News Agency, but she didn’t reply to me as far as I know); she went on to a 20-year career as an entertainment reporter for Time magazine. In early 1985, when I was working as a journalist in Seoul, my friend David Johns took me to a bordello once, where I enjoyed myself with a young lady. I returned to La Crosse a few months, and when I found work again in Seoul in February 1986, I met Jinny Kwak (that’s the name she gave me, though she wouldn’t show me where she lived), whom I dated without sexual climax six months. Meanwhile, I fooled around fully with quite a few other young South Korean women, before I’d meet my second wife, the fashion designer/clothing store owner Ms. Sim Suk-Hee. That six-month period right before I met Suk-Hee was the only extended period I’ve ever experimented much sexually, though I did date some South Korean ladies before that period, too.

Among the South Korean ladies I dated and/or had sexual liaisons with were: Ms. Park Young-Sun (my first date in Seoul; she was the most famous female news anchor there then, for MBC-TV, and has gone on to a political life; she was the first female main opposition party leader ever in the National Assembly, and it was said she would be elected the next president of South Korea, until a scandal broke over her responses to the big ferry disaster off Korea’s southwest coast); a Ms. Eun (who worked in an office atop a building Business Korea magazine, one of my employers, had offices in); Ms. Lee, who worked for Business Korea’s ad department, and another lady at Business Korea I don’t recall the name of, perhaps Ms. Chae; Ms. Sohn Jie-Ae, then a very young star reporter for Business Korea, who insisted on a group-date if she was to go out with me (we did), and who later married a fellow BK journalist (she’d become the New York Times correspondent in Seoul; CNN’s Seoul Bureau Chief; and President of the Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club; I believe now she is CEO of Arirang TV); the diminutive, but beautiful Ms. Moon; Ms. Hong, the Taiwanese news agency’s secretary; Ms. Cheong, secretary to the President of my first employer in Seoul, Yonhap News Agency); a tall, thin woman also named Ms. Lee, whom I likely saw on the street and asked for a date (we saw each other several times before she wanted money); and some prostitutes in 1986, including three Ms. Kims (make it four; there was a Ms. Kim I believe her name was, who men lined up for on the stairway; she worked in a different Seoul district from I’tae-won (where most night-ladies worked), O-Pal-Pal or 588; she was stunningly gorgeous and eventually probably had the full array of STDs to prove it). Also, I asked the Ms. Kim who worked at the “Little Flower Shop” in Itae-won to marry me; she said she had too good a thing going with the money her mama-san paid her and couldn’t return with me to America. I heard while I was still in Seoul she had to move to the southern part of the Peninsula, and I’d guess she either contracted AIDS or something like that, had gotten pregnant, and/or decided to move to where her family might have been from, etc.; or maybe her mama-san hid her a bit in Seoul, after I’d asked her to marry me. I can’t remember using condoms much in those days, except when I visited Manila to write about the Philippines for Korean Air’s magazine, Morning Calm. The prostitute I saw once there insisted on condoms, and we used two I believe in 90 minutes, before she left my hotel room. There was also a muscular coffee-shop waitress named Chong-A I dated. We even visited her family’s home-turf, the port of Inchon, the only time I visited the site of a famous 1950 US invasion to take the South back from Northerners. My parents’ lifelong friend, Frank Devine, was in that invasion and went on to win a Silver Star, taking out three Russian-made tanks at Seoul. Also, two journalists I interviewed in Britain, Bert Hardy and James Cameron, famously covered that invasion for Picture Post magazine.

Another South Korean woman I saw a fair amount of was Ms. Kim Young-Im, a noted photographer; we weren’t romantic with each other, but a few years later she asked me to marry her; my divorce from Suk-Hee wasn’t final yet; Ms. Kim didn’t want to wait for me where she lived, in NYC. I’d photographed her in late 1984 for her Pine Hill exhibit brochure. I believe I took another photo of her, her then-husband, and their son on a DC Metro escalator ca. 2010, but didn’t recognize her until I edited that pic. I’ve basically had no romantic relationships
Recently a newspaper editor said her paper covers “community-oriented news”, which likely stems from the idea of “community journalism”. Wikipedia defines the latter as “locally oriented, professional news coverage that typically focuses on city neighborhoods, individual suburbs or small towns, rather than metropolitan, state, national or world news. If it covers wider topics, community journalism concentrates on the effect they have on local readers.” That famous free encyclopedia goes on to say community newspapers, often but not always publish weekly, and also tend to cover subjects larger media do not. Some topics include students on the honor roll at the local high school, school sports, crimes such as vandalism, zoning issues and other details of community life. However, such “hyper-local” articles are sometimes critiqued as “chicken dinner” stories. Leo Lerner, founder of Chicago’s former Lerner Newspapers, used to say, “A fistfight on Clark Street is more important to our readers than a war in Europe.” But I propose that both are important, if they impact the community strongly. Mom and pop operations still exist, but most community newspapers are owned by corporate organizations these days.

Most community journalists are professionally trained, and often university-educated. But community journalism should not be confused with the work of citizen journalists, who are often unpaid amateurs though potentially as capable as professional journalists, or with civic storytelling using actual, relevant facts. Hypothetically, is it honest to cover a big business as contributing greatly to the local economy, but not cover any corruption that may make that company’s earnings illegally gained? Or is it helpful to cover big layoffs in a local company, with the work of citizen journalists, who are often unpaid amateurs though potentially as capable as professional journalists, or with civic storytelling using actual, relevant facts. Hypothetically, is it honest to cover a big business as contributing greatly to the local economy, but not cover any corruption that may make that company’s earnings illegally gained? Or is it helpful to cover big layoffs in a local company, but not cover its local executives taking their big business overseas? I was fortunate enough to study at the world’s oldest (and likely best) school of journalism, Missouri’s. I’d earned degrees at UW-Madison and University of Iowa previously, but I’ll always be grateful for the professional, practical approach at Mizzou. Over time, many good news organizations have employed me, and I’m now semi-retired from the money-making circuit, if that’s what journalism is. (News-people who are more entertainers than journalists are in another category, likely millionaires.) I see many things to report on, and author many books. I still feel fortunate to write guest columns for newspapers too.

Good community journalism should never be downplayed, if each news source of that type still adheres to truthfulness and relevance. It may take as much hard work, courage, and dedication to operate a journalistic organization well, as it does to operate a military, police, or firefighting unit well. Journalists too can aid greatly in keeping the peace. To think less of journalism is to dishonor the Journalist’s Creed, written by the first Dean of Missouri’s Journalism School in 1914, Walter Williams, translated into more than 100 languages and on a plaque in the National Press Club in Washington, DC. For journalists, the bottom line may earn short-term profits, but it is honest journalism that wins long-term readers and an honestly balanced bank account over time.—2016, by DvJM.

Truth, Lies, and Magical Photos

It's said the camera doesn't lie, but it does sometimes. Since startup, photography has been a "magic art", from early darkroom creativity to ubiquitous SmartPhones. But it's crucial to be truthful in documentary work. For that, Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moments" -- compositions of people and their contexts in holistically "perfect" photos -- need to be frozen vitally in time. Many people need empathy in their lives, and background details can be as crucial as main subjects. Novelist Gustave Flaubert said, "[T]he good of the world, or God, is in the details." Thus, it doesn't help to see photos of suffering refugees fleeing Syria without data about the origins of Syria's civil war and the degrees of fault of all groups there? Yes help the refugees, but also negotiate peace with President Bashar al-Assad et. al. Assad studied in Britain post-grad; his wife was raised and educated there. Bad as Assad is, he's not Hitler.

There are paradoxes. Even documentarians sometimes move subjects out of everyday settings for photos. National Geographic's Steve McCurry, who took the famed "Afghan Girl" portrait of Sharbat Gula in 1984, admits doing that often. Yet, "Afghan Girl" is a truly compelling photo-portrait precisely because it's without visible background; the girl's green eyes and red scarf convey her deep mystery. And when war photographer, UW-Madison alum Lynsey Addario's work was on TV news, she lamented that few see her photos; PBS anchor Judy Woodruff called them incredibly beautiful. But war photos shouldn't simply show beauty; often-enough they should grab consciences, asking: why support this war to begin with? (Some of Ms. Addario's photos do ask that.) In rare cases, wars are justified, but not nearly as often as they're fought. If the major political parties support unjust wars, citizens should boycott elections or vote for peace-inspired independents. To be sure, there's nothing evil about taking clear-eyed war photos or even basic selfies in various situations, but true documentary work generally focuses on other people and the world around them through clear, well-contexted eyes.

Recently, photos were published of developmentally disabled people taken by Polly Braden in Britain. One shows Tessa and Mark, just married and joyfully emerging from church to well-wishers. It can aid us to see truthful photo-stories on everyday people who overcome big adversities via courage, humor, hard work, perseverance. Those brave, everyday people include military, police, and fire personnel too. Photography has been very useful since its invention ca. 1826 by Nicephore Niepce. And it evokes awe to recall the rigors pioneers endured...
to make photos presentable, and truthful -- from horse-cart-drawn cameras on tripods, big glass negatives, head braces, and flash powders, to manually-set 35-ers, and now digital cameras finely recording space, oceans, street life, etc. The title for my book on documentary photo masters is “Things As They Are”, from a Francis Bacon quote Dorothea Lange lived by. George P. Elliott wrote of Lange's famed 1936 "Migrant Mother” photo-portrait of Cherokee/Oakie Florence Thompson and her children: "Not all the wire-pulling and slipper-licking in Babylon will, finally, do a fraction as much to get a picture known and seen as its own power.” "Migrant Mother" and "Afghan Girl" have that power, as does W.E. Smith's photo of an African-American youth atop a pole in 1955 Pittsburgh, with the sign "Colwell St." by him as he hangs on and looks just below at the words "Pride St." Three magical photos, all blessings to humanity.—A trimmed version of this essay by DvJM was published in the La Crosse Tribune, “’God Is in the Details,’” on Aug. 29, 2016.

The Historical Validity of Documentary News

The University of Missouri’s first J-School dean, Walter Williams, wrote a Journalist’s Creed that still should be read by all journalists. Mizzou was recently in the news for its football team’s civil influence and its student body being only 7 percent African-American; my roommate in 1981’s Missouri-London Program was African-American; Cal Lawrence is an abc.com coordinating producer and a former national editor for Newsday. But it seems too many news outlets haven’t recently been interested in truthful, honest news; too often the focus has been on super-boosterism and entertainment, not in telling a story in-depth with solid, balanced-enough writing and photos. Even some of the biggest metro newspapers have slipped, trying to earn big profits navigating the digital world. The idea of “journalistic objectivity” has been jettisoned so much by many news outlets, that anything often goes, including journalists’ becoming the center of stories and entertaining with the entertainers and others they interview.

My first university degree was in History (UW-Madison); my second in American Studies (MA-Literature and History-Ulouwa); my third covered writing, editing, and photography in Journalism (UM-Columbia). I’ve had a great education for Journalism, but also for Historic, Artful Documentation. And I’ve been fortunate enough to see my works included in and displayed by many noted archives, including the La Crosse Public Library, Wisconsin Historical Society, and Smithsonian. But news editors basically stopped paying me in 2008. The selfie/entertainment gurus took over. I take a selfie sometimes, but there is much more to documentary photography than mainly making sure you as a journalist are included in stills of famous people. Candid street photography and instantaneous photo-portraits interest me a lot, because recording history honestly and artfully is important to me; found, not set-up, life is what moves me most. Shakespeare suggested via Hamlet what the artist’s and documentarian’s chief role should be -- “[The] purpose… was and is, to hold, as twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” Showing what human beings and life really are like and can naturally be, still can inspire decently the tenacity of pleasant surprises. Life is an often difficult miracle, as beautiful in its everyday goodness as it is clear at times in its unpleasantness. Bryan Doerries wrote “The Theater of War” about what ancient Greek tragedies can teach us. He said a general said recently after seeing a play by Sophocles, “The purpose of this play is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”. I wonder how war profiteers can seem so comfortable, but then there are many ways to serve people positively, if one remains as ethical as one can.

As to the historic validity of documentary news, when I directed-edited “Spirit of La Crosse” in 2000, the first complete history of our city (which then-Mayor John Medinger and then-City Planner Larry Kirch wrote the final, forward-looking chapter for), though my group used all earlier books of history relating to this city, it was La Crosse Tribune articles that proved the foundation mainly, because that newspaper of record was generally at least as accurate and more comprehensive than anything else, for which we’re grateful.—ca. 2016, by DvJM.

The Peoples’ Champions

The recent passing of humanitarian novelist Harper Lee suggests two other artists’ works that still inspire many too, by their respecting of human differences and also the universality of humanity. Eighty years ago this month (Feb.), Dorothea Lange was an unknown clerk-photographer on Roy Stryker’s Farm Security Administration team. She had just been on a California work-trip and passed a Pea-Pickers’ Camp, drove 20 miles farther in the rain still eight hours from home, then headed back to the camp on a hunch, to see who was there.

Cherokee-Oakie Florence Owens Thompson (born Florence Leona Christie) was with little ones. Ms. Lange was cautious, but took the most famous photo of the 1930s, “Migrant Mother”. Its first publication elicited food aid for California’s migrants. Later, Ms. Lange covered WWII’s stateside Japanese-American internments. One of her latter photos shows a car by a Japanese-American store in 1942 San Francisco with store-sign saying, “I Am an American”. Another photo by her shows little Japanese-American schoolgirls among young girls of other ethnic groups enthusiastically reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, hand over heart, in their plaid winter coats. Perhaps the most dignified family
group photo by Lange of the Nisei internees shows the Mochida family of nine (seven children plus two parents), with name-sewn duffle bags and purses, waiting for an evacuation bus.

In rural 1923 Kansas, white youths tried drowning Gordon Parks, youngest of 15 Parks kids. He couldn’t swim, but made shore crawling along river-bottom. His mom told him before she died, “Work hard and have faith in yourself.” Sent by his father from Kansas at age 15 to a sister’s in Minnesota, the sister’s husband evicted Gordon. The frightened youngster spent that 30-below night riding cross-town streetcars to survive. After working as a piano player/singer, semi-pro basketball player, and train waiter, Gordon caught on as a documentary photographer, impressing Joe Louis’s wife, Marva, then joined Stryker’s 1942 Works Progress Administration team, where he photographed black WPA worker Ella Watson holding broom and mop by a US flag – inspired by Grant Wood’s famed “American Gothic” painting. Covering the first black fighter pilot unit’s training, Gordon was later hired by Life magazine in 1948 as its first African-American photo-journalist (writer too). He’d felt racial insults often, but was hired to good jobs, for he learned fast and was a hard worker.

Mr. Parks’s greatest Life coup was his 1961 coverage of Flavio da Silva -- a poor, badly asthmatic Brazilian boy for whom readers sent money for housing and healthcare. Other subjects included Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Duke Ellington, Ingrid Bergman, Gloria Vanderbilt, and Barbra Streisand. He also poeticized his father in “Funeral”, and Martin Luther King Jr. in the ballet “Martin”. Two of Mr. Parks’ films are in the Library of Congress National Film Registry – “The Learning Tree” (1969), adapted from his novel; and the stereotype-ending detective film “Shaft” (1971), which Parks directed; Isaac Hayes won a Grammy for best film-score on it, and an Oscar for best song (“Theme from ‘Shaft’”). Son Gordon Jr. directed “Super Fly”; then died in a plane crash. President Reagan bestowed the National Medal of the Arts on Gordon Sr. Denzel Washington filmed his autobiography. Mr. Parks died of cancer in March 2006 at age 93. Ms. Lange had died in 1965 at age 70, also of cancer. The two photographers are the subject of my book, “The Peoples’ Champions”. Ms. Lange helped curator Edward Steichen organize the humanistic 1955 MOMA “Family of Man” group-show. Ms. Lange’s and Mr. Parks’ photos are included in FOM’s permanent exhibition in Milwaukee-raise Steichen’s native Luxembourg, at Clervaux Castle.— A trimmed version of this essay was published in the La Crosse Tribune, “Remembering the Champions of the People,” on Feb. 28, 2016.

Healthcare Reform Soon?

Early last year, my guest view column “Let’s Produce Healthier Government” was published in this paper. At that time, I proposed what others have also proposed -- a universal, single-payer system of US healthcare. I believed then that the simplest single-payer system would be administered by our federal government, and to date, a private single-payer system has not been seriously considered, maybe because it would grant a massive monopoly to a single, private source. Although I’ve since had second thoughts about some of my proposal, due mainly to the economy’s having gone seriously downhill since then, I still believe the general idea can be accomplished sensibly, if we all work together on it.

Originally, I proposed more types of and higher taxes/fees be paid to the government, because the money would have to come from somewhere, and the middle class, to be honest, would have to sacrifice, just like the upper class. Even the poor might have to come up with money and/or work-barter for co-payments. I also think of something else when I consider the health needs of all Americans. I consider what my father and mother mean to me, and my son and his family, and others like us too. When I was much younger, my mom wouldn’t let me and my siblings take pictures. She was the family picture-taker, and Mom is a good photographer (Dad provided her with cameras). However, when I was 29 years old in 1979, after being trained for 24 years as a writer, I’d just gone through my first divorce and decided I’d try something new. I bought my first 35 mm camera in Madison, and began taking many sorts of photos, mainly on the street and/or back at home in La Crosse, of family. It took some courage to do this, because it took money, time, and, also, taking pictures of people on the street is itself a chancey activity, especially when you live abroad.

Although I’ve taken many photos of celebrities and also of wonderful middle-aged people, my favorite photos are often of the young and the old – the two bookends of life. Despite today’s big US economic recession, then, with nearly ten percent unemployment and a huge national debt growing exponentially, threatening our currency and our very livelihoods, we still should recall FDR’s “long-ago” words, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Now, it’s easier to say that when you’ve got the military, police, and fire firmly behind you. FDR also had millions of disadvantaged people behind him. Barack Obama is trying to push through his health care bill, without many people knowing what’s in it. At the same time, Congress is making almost no moves to downgrade their own very expensive lifestyles. When and how, then, should everyday Americans pray for healthcare reform succeeding? Even John McCain said early last year that our healthcare system needs fundamental reform. But in order for Americans not to receive harsh, rationed care and ginned-up end-of-life directives, we need vigorous debate now about what will go into the bill to be enacted. Democrats and Republicans better get used to criticism, suggestions, and sacrifices,
if decent reform is to pass. Let’s hope violence doesn’t win out, but that legitimate critics are heard, now especially, in town-hall meetings and elsewhere too, and many of their suggestions implemented.

Back to the Great Depression era -- there were some government-photographers, yes government-photographers, who took many extraordinary photos of Americans under duress then. Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, Russell Lee, Ben Shahn, Jack Delano, and Arthur Rothstein are the most familiar names. I often return to Ms. Lange’s iconic “Migrant Mother” photo-portrait, with that mother’s little children gathered round her, looking almost used up, but not quite. What they wouldn’t have given for a decent meal in their tent, much less a doctor to exam them. And yet, medical exams are called for, once we all have a decent meal, clothing, and shelter. Americans should be more united. Our destiny as a people is to be, as St. Matthew wrote, family to the least among us, the poor and disabled, and all who need our care. We all are, or have been, young, so let’s all become decently old, resiliently and positively, before we pass to the next life, whatever it be. And let’s do this right, so we don’t foist a thoroughly crippling national debt (financial and/or spiritual) onto our children and our children’s children.—A trimmed version of this essay by DvJM ran ca.2009 in La Crosse Tribune. Of course, the Affordable Care Act soon became law, yet did not cover all Americans, who are still awaiting effective, universal, single-payer health care.

Not Voting Is a Right Too

“You’re dressed up today, Special day?”—UW Coach Greg Gard to one of his players at press conference after the UW-Madison men’s basketball team played very badly (except for Ethan Happ’s 32 points), but beat Rutgers in overtime at Madison Square Garden, 1-29-17.

An associate of mine recently told me that if I don’t vote, I have no one else to blame for the nation’s state except myself. He added that if I don’t vote, my opinions don’t count. It seems to me that in a free nation, a free citizen can vote or not vote, depending on the circumstances of the public debate and the decency or lack of same in the candidates. Voting is not a “forced right”. Everyone’s opinions count in a democracy, especially if, like me, a person is not a continuous partisan, but rather a free citizen trying to keep a good conscience. I’ve voted in Presidential elections ever since 1992, after a spotty record of not voting regularly since gaining the vote ca. 1970. (Part of the time, I was living outside the United States.) Since 1992, my vote for the Presidency has either resulted in my candidate’s losing or in my candidate’s winning and then doing significant damage to the nation and world. Thus, at this time I believe I’ll sit out this Presidential election due also to my not liking the “ethics” of either major party candidate. Donald Trump has said so many racist, sexist, and anger-fomented things since entering the campaign, I cannot vote for him now, though I empathized with his circumstances early. It bothered me some media had declared him the American Mussolini soon after he’d entered the race. It also bothers me most media have been down on him since, including right-leaning FOX-News, but not enough to prompt my vote.

Hillary Clinton is a somewhat different case. I respect the fact women had to struggle many generations for the vote (in ally Britain a century ago, good women died after hunger strikes and a notable suicide at a horse race). I’ve authored positive books on women several times, and respect many women -- who have been decent literary and photo-subjects of mine countless times -- starting with women in my family. However, Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State when Libyan President Moamar Gadaﬁ was assassinated (shot in the head with US involvement or careless non-involvement), after he’d been a reliable US ally, thus afterward, ISIS’s spread. Also, Hillary’s looked the other way far too often regarding her husband’s marital infidelities. (Reckless infidelities may have led to JFK’s death, and affected Bill Clinton’s presidency too.) The Clintons may be made for each other, but in a state of political greed and intrigue. Hillary Clinton’s 30,000 e-mail deletion, including State Department notes, from her private server, with Justice Department absolution, also suggests this. I somewhat respect Chelsea Clinton; but Chelsea’s not running for President now; her mother is.

Voting for a third party candidate is equally unappealing, after Bernie Sanders caved to Democratic leadership, who had kidnapped all the “super-delegates” on behalf of Mrs. Clinton. There are countless women capable of being great US presidents. I do not feel Hillary Clinton is one of them, though I admit, if she wins, she may surround herself with enough good people not to do extreme damage to the nation or world. If so, I may look a bit foolish on this score. But Hillary’s continuing hawk-like (she’s never been the unifier she claims to be) stances may get our nation involved in more warfare soon that we cannot easily pull out of. But then, that seems to be America’s modus operandi since 2002 and even before. World Wars may await this nation, then, that our offspring should not have to fight.—DvJM wrote this essay in mid-2016 & polished it in early 2017; he did vote after all, but wrote in his own candidates for President and Vice-President.
**Korean Speed and Other Seoul Memories**

South Korea, a formidable political, economic, military, and athletic power in Asia -- with a long history of advanced culture in key respects, but whose financial poverty at the outset of the 20th century has been reduced greatly the last few decades via the protectionism America has allowed in its trade policy not only in South Korea but also in China and Japan -- has become known for its high-powered entertainment industry; No.1 video players; giant cargo ships; solid autos; top archers, golfers, and speed skaters; and at times its disasters, like the ferry sinking that killed hundreds. (The first woman I dated in Seoul, Park Young Sun, was the nation’s top female news anchor who later changed jobs and became first female opposition leader in the National Assembly; she was even said to be a good bet to be South Korea’s next president until the ferry scandal affected her status.)

I lived in Seoul 23 months, variously, between August 1984 and April 1987, working in English-language journalism and English teaching. My first job was as chief English-language copy editor on the International Desk of the national news agency, Yonhap (YNA). I’d edited an MA thesis on YNA’s gate-keeping function (YNA then controlled peninsula news for local presentation, and much Korean news that went overseas via the wire too) for a Korean student at the University of Missouri (a Mr. Han), perhaps suggesting some people at Mizzou were arranging that job for me long before I was hired by YNA. (Edwin Q. White, AP Seoul bureau chief in those days, and formerly AP Hanoi bureau chief during the Vietnam War, told me in Seoul that I should forget the J-School I graduated from as soon as possible; he said that should be the case for all J-School graduates and their J-Schools.) At Yonhap, I edited news translated from the field by our in-office reporters. Sometimes, I also edited (and occasionally wrote) stories for the agency’s monthly features newsletter. The daily reporters-translators had keen minds and did decently with English. The feature reporters copied their stories from encyclopedias and government publications. I was asked to ensure reporters' style -- punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and usage -- was uniformly acceptable. (In America later, I copied US copyright law books for the Korea Foundation, so Seoul would know its limits and potential with that.) Yonhap also published then and still may do a regular publication on North Korea, “Vantage Point”. (Also, in 1991 when visiting Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Library, I found addresses for free publications from both Koreas, and began receiving some. North Korea was regimented and its leaders dictatorial, but they weren’t as insane as Americans believed, though I wouldn’t want to live in their country.)

Three memorable things from Yonhap were: when I accidentally broke a colleague’s eye-glasses, he took me to a shop where it took 20 minutes for Mr. Kim’s new glasses to be cut and neatly put together; I paid the bill. When I asked him how it was done that fast, Mr. Kim said simply, “Korean Speed”. (I’d been told Koreans were great imitators of others’ technology, clothing, cars, etc., but I found them superb impromptu artists too, though Korean men and women could both be heavy-handed sometimes.)

Also, the YNA photo department printed my images for my December 1984 one-man show at the Han Madang Gallery and Coffeeshop; the prints were contrasty, beautiful black-and-whites; the show was well-attended by top journalists (including Ed White; my first YNA guide Mr. Yi Do-Sun; and the soon-to-be president of Yonhap, my then-immediate supervisor Mr. Hyun So-Whan), plus many artists as well as three women I was dating then -- Ms. Moon, Ms. Hong, and Ms. Cheong (secretary to YNA’s president). After completion, I asked that photo department to do 20-to-30 prints (a couple were very large) as gifts for my colleagues and supervisors, which they did.

In addition, YNA staff, including night-editor friend David W. Johns, who’d attended Mizzou too, aided me a bit when I photographed some of the leading women of South Korea. DWJ began writing an article, and we were going to send it to Life magazine in New York with my photos, but my health faded fairly soon after that and I had to return to Wisconsin in May 1985; I’d return to Seoul in Feb. 1986. Though she wasn’t Korean, I’d met/photographed Mother Teresa too, in Anyang in Jan. 1985, and later received 18 personal letters from her. My photos of women in Korea would eventually help inspire two books I photographed-authored – “Human Character, Vol. 6: American Women in Photos” and “Spirit of America, Vol. 24: Some Of My Impressions of Women”. Also, my second wife (Suk-Hee Sim – we married in 1986; divorced in 1992), my son’s mother, was born/raised in Seoul, where our son was conceived.—2016-2017, by DvJM.

**When History Makes Peace**

David McCullough, the very respected historian who’s won two Pulitzer Prizes so far, including one for his book about President Harry S. Truman, has long talked about the value of studying history: "History is a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are.” That navigation can lead to a life of learning that teaches even teachers how to learn. In any case, as Mr. McCullough states, “Real success is finding your lifework in the work that you love”. And work really is easy for the worker when you’re doing what you love to do, no matter what others think of its ease or difficulty.

It helps readers grow personally to reflect on and imagine what life must have been like many years before our own. Whether you like reading about Revolutionary America, Civil War battles, Victorian England, Republican France, the German Reichs, the “Greatest Generation”, or
the Golden Ages of Mesopotamia (the cradle of human civilization, located in modern-day Iraq), China, Korea, Japan, Greece, Rome, Russia, Mexico, the Holy Land, Australia, or Egypt, the knowledge and wisdom gained from your readings may not always mean a paycheck for you, but you'll have good ideas about how to solve even thorny problems now that were similar in earlier eras.

Because I became a professional writer and photographer at age 30 (I'm now 66), after studying history, literature, journalism, and photography in good universities, and because I've always loved books, I've authored dozens of books of my own, including histories and biographies. Documenting the past and present is essential to human societies' solving problems in the present and future. And it's not always necessary to have a college degree to love history or to write about it well. President Truman never earned a Bachelor's degree, but read histories and biographies regularly and applied historical lessons to his life, including his two presidencies. Mr. McCullough suggests: "No harm's done to history by making it something someone would want to read." Reading up on the past yourself, then, helps you find enough in it to decently express and/or write about some of the wisdom you've gained from your new knowledge. You can't go wrong by understanding history well; it's the doorway to the present and future we live in. That doorway is there for everyone who studies the meeting points of civilizations past and present.

And if you'd like to write historical accounts yourself, you'll find sharing your insights can add greatly to American civilization, if, that is, you are empathetic to all societies and their issues, and truly interested in seeing all peoples get along with each other to preserve world peace. It's what Jesus Christ entered this world to prepare the way for, world peace. That seems worth remembering too, this Christmastime, a time I will also always associate with the writings of the great British journalist James Cameron, especially his very moving account of the World War I Christmas Truce in "'1914": Have a Blessed and Peaceful Holiday Season, and the Happiest and Healthiest of New Years too!—Dec. 2016, by DvJM.

Remembering Greatness

Two men I've admired for years passed this year -- one of them a Nobel Peace Laureate who survived the Holocaust, the other the first Asian-American Olympic Gold Medalist for the USA. In addition, Paul Chryst's UW Badgers lost the Big Ten Football Championship Game recently. Still, Paul Chryst is one of the finest coaches and teachers of young men anywhere.

Holocaust Survivor, Nobel Peace Laureate, author of 50 books, founding chairman of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Elie Wiesel, passed at age 87 this summer. He'd spoken a day and night at Viterbo University in September 2006, and I photographed him then for Viterbo. Later, I photographed other leading holocaust survivors too for Viterbo. Mr. Wiesel had a shrewd, very human sense of humor. He didn't smile for every posed photo; he preferred his smile be photographed as he spoke. Elie had been a prisoner at Auschwitz and then Buchenwald included in a very famous 1945 liberation photo taken by Pvt. H. Miller of the US Army Signal Corps. And his ground-breaking holocaust memoir, "Night", won top awards. He didn't have a co-author or ghost writer. He was a great writer and speaker himself, and took the idea of world peace to heart. He truly was the guiding light of the American Holocaust Remembrance Movement and dearly loved in the Holy Land too.

Two-time Olympic Diving Gold Medalist Sammy Lee passed this month at age 96. In 1998, I wrote about Sammy in my 10th anniversary article for Korean Culture magazine about the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics and his thoughts on how far athletes of Korean ancestry had come in Olympic history. I interviewed Sammy several times via phone; he was a tough, but very dear man with a vital sense of humor. Dr. Lee grew up a diminutive, resilient son of Korean immigrants who ran a "little chop suey restaurant" in California. Later an MD specializing in the human ear, Sammy would be discriminated against often, but he'd have his own family with wife Rosalind, was named US Amateur Athlete of the Year in 1953 (serving in the US Army Medical Corps in Korea that year too), was a member of the President's Council on Physical Fitness, and became an honoree in the US Olympic Hall of Fame. Also, in 1984 the Sammy Lee Diving Award was established by the World Diving Coaches Association, given to the diver who’s done more than any other for that sport worldwide. Also, Sammy coached Greg Louganis, who would win four gold medals and one silver medal in three Olympics. Sammy himself had been the first male Olympic diver to win back-to-back golds in platform diving, plus the first Asian-American Olympic Gold Medalist for the USA.

Paul Chryst is a superb teacher and coach of student-athletes. Many of his assistant coaches are former Badgers, and he’s very successful recruiting top Wisconsin-raised athletes plus out-of-state greats to UW. Though his Badgers lost this month's Big Ten Championship Game to Penn State, 38-31, UW was superb this entire season, especially a stout defense anchored by T.J. Watt, Vince "Rocky" Biegel, and Leo Musso. For the first time in UW football history, the Badgers defeated three teams in the same season ranked in the top ten then. Paul Chryst had been offensive coordinator for the Badgers in two Big Ten Championship seasons as well, including the season now-NFL star quarterback Russell Wilson led UW on the field. Paul is known as the ultimate "quarterback whisperer" and play-caller. His biggest weakness has been in not always making winning adjustments in second halves of some postseason games, but his teams are tenacious winners generally, and love their coach deeply. It's said Paul Chryst never won a press conference; he's not a fancy talker, but is never rude and his teams win many games, and will continue to. The positive memories of Elie and Sammy will continue on too. As any of the three would say, life can be terrifyingly brutal, but living well and long is the greatest gift God can give us. He sent his own Son into the world two millennia ago to remind us of that.—Dec. 2016, by DvJM.
Key Life Lessons

Having studied well only one language, English, I feel a bit like Sir Winston Churchill sometimes. He only knew English, but as thoroughly as Shakespeare. What I've learned from Britain and the Brits has filled some of the books I've authored, but the best wisdom about them came from meeting Brits in streets, stations, pubs, cafes, offices, schools, museums, libraries, and dwellings when I lived in 1981 London -- and from photographing them, too. Generally at least, Brits can be as feisty and argumentative as any people; in fact, the United States has rescued their armies in various wars, though we should never have been involved militarily in World War I; however, the Brits can also be endearingly comic, sympathetic, and pithy.

Bert Hardy was my favorite Brit (“The Cockney Eye” is my bio about him) along with his Korean War journalist-mate James Cameron (my bio about him is “James Cameron’s World”. I also wrote a dual bio about them, because my son’s mom’s family suffered through that war and I worked as a journalist in Seoul 1984-87. The oldest of seven kids (same as me) in a neo-Dickensian upbringing, Mr. Hardy left school to work full-time at age 14; he’d become top photojournalist for Picture Post magazine, the most widely-read British magazine during WWII. Bert had the human touch and an eloquent, earthy, at times whimsical, eye. He died in 1995 at age 82, but is still a "supremely revered" photojournalist.

I interviewed and photographed Bert at his Surrey farmstead in November 1981 and soon after interviewed his Korean War mate, Mr. Cameron, a superb writer of English essays, articles, and dramas, though he’d left school for work at age 15. I interviewed James Cameron at the beautiful London home he shared with his Indian wife, Moni. He died in 1985 at age 73, but likely the UK’s single, most-prestigious journalism prize/lecture is given in his name annually. Also, his good friend Studs Terkel, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his oral history of WWII, “‘The Good War’”, dedicated that book to Mr. Cameron, calling James “Master of His Trade”. Mr. Cameron hated all wars, but WWII a little less so than all the other bloody, immoral affairs. James and his dad had both been thoroughly opposed to WWI, and believed WWII might never have had to be fought, if WWI had a better treaty or hadn’t been fought at all.

As for learning more about many facets of the English language, it helped that my editor while I was an intern for the London Sunday Times was John Hilary Whale, a political and religion expert there, plus its chief proofreader with wife Judy. (The Whales had insisted on being the paper's chief proofreaders, because literary standards had fallen so low at that otherwise leading publication.) Mr. Whale would write 30 essays for the Sunday Times Magazine on grammar, punctuation, style, and usage that became the style book "Put It in Writing". Born in 1931 and Oxford-educated, he'd begun his career acting superbly Shakespeare’s “King Lear”, and could speak plain or high-church English poetically, sensibly, wittily with anyone. And he had one of the most commanding radio voices I've ever heard, when he employed it. He'd later become religion editor for the BBC and also edited the Anglican paper Church Times, before dying of cancer in 2008 at 76.

Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Sir Winston Churchill, and Agatha Christie wouldn't be the positive influences they are for me without Hardy, Cameron, and Whale. Mr. Whale wrote tellingly in his style book: “The written word is immensely precious,” and I’ve remembered that sentence ever since. The English and History teachers at Aquinas High School and good university professors didn't hurt either. As for war-mongers in allied and adversary governments, they could learn deeply human lessons from those role-models; their influences live on as Christmas nears. Which is related to what I most learned from nursery-school children I photographed daily for in autumn 1981 in London's Canonbury Day Centre, Islington District, next door to where George Orwell once lived -- beautiful, bright youngsters, who allowed me with their teachers, to record their funny antics and goodness, suggesting why Christmas is Christmas, and why Tiny Tim (Scrooge via Mr. Dickens too), a very grateful youngster, despite his being crippled and his family poor, exclaimed “God Bless Us Every One!” —A revised essay by DvJM ran Dec. 13, 2016 in the La Crosse Tribune, “Memories Conjured by the Season” (next).

Memories Conjured by the Season

Every Christmas time, I reflect on the autumn I lived in London (1981) as part of the Missouri-London Reporting Program. I had to return to the University of Missouri early that December, missing Christmas in England, and have not been able to return since.

John Whale was our group’s moderator-editor. He and his wife, Judy, hosted a welcoming party when our group arrived. Many of my peers and I lived in London’s Canonbury, Islington District, arranged for by Mrs. Whale. As part of our coursework, we were required to write 12 feature articles. I didn’t; a lifelong writer, I was new to photography, and I couldn’t resist walking and photographing the streets of London daily. Our intern group of nine had a big office atop the Sunday Times building. I typed a bit there and used the phone. Cal Lawrence, my roommate, used my Olivetti in our flat often. Cal would become national editor for Newsday and a coordinating producer for abc.com. Eight articles I wrote reached Whale’s desk, but as a graduate student, my C grade didn’t cut it. I’d later be forced to downshift to a second bachelor’s degree. Near the semester’s end, the Whales joined our group at our flat for a going-away meal. It was elegant, yet homey.

London was very enjoyable, grades notwithstanding. I wrote about and photographed fascinating people and events, and Whale answered questions and edited, always fair and kind. Whale didn’t criticize me for taking pictures. He knew I was doing good work, just not much
writing then. Since, I’ve been able to author books relating to my 1981 interviews of Picture Post magazine staffers Bert Hardy and James Cameron. And for 27 years, until his death a decade ago, Whale corresponded with me, encouraging my journalism, my books and my family activities. He even said a modest 1998 pamphlet I did on Hardy and Cameron’s Korean War reporting was the best thing I’d ever written.

Whale was born in 1931 and graduated from Oxford. His father was a nonconformist minister who lived to 100 years old. Whale acted in Shakespearean plays early on, and he studied and taught a year at the University of Minnesota. Later, he and Judy read plays on BBC Radio. Though not a large man, Whale had a commanding voice, and his tongue-in-cheek humor was superb. He was a politics and religion editor for the paper; he and Judy were made its chief proofreaders. He wrote 30 essays for the Sunday Times Magazine that became the style book “Put It in Writing,” his quintessential book. Earlier, he’d been a British Journalist of the Year for covering the masked IRA.

Christmases after 1981, I received beautiful art cards showing stained glass windows in various churches in Normandy, where he and Judy had a vacation cottage. Cancer coincided with his retirement, but Whale still loved hiking in the countryside. Wherever the Whales of this world and heaven are today, I hope memories of good Christmases are with them and all of us. Whale wrote in his style book, “The written word is really a large matter — ‘tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” As Tiny Tim said in the Dickens’ classic: “God bless us, every one!”—This essay by DvJM, minus Mr. Twain’s quote, ran in La Crosse Tribune on Dec. 13, 2016.

Lord Snowdon: How He Came to Photograph the Disabled and Disadvantaged

In early 2014, I glanced through my personal take on the history of world photography, “The Photographic Spirit: Inspiring Photo Lives and Images” (2013), and discovered I’d not included a chapter on Britain’s Antony Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon, also known as Lord Snowdon (spelled differently than Edward Snowden’s name, of international whistle-blowing fame).

In 1981, I lived and worked as a writer and photographer in Britain. Though I may have heard his name then -- because he’d worked for the “Sunday Times” newspaper, where my group’s office was located and that of our teacher-editor, a key member of the ST staff, John H. Whale -- I did not really know who Lord Snowdon was yet. When I returned to Wisconsin in 1982 and later on as well in the 1980s, I read a photo book titled “Snowdon: A Photographic Autobiography” (1979) that the La Crosse Public Library used to own. That book’s dust jacket shows a Snowdon photo of a white beluga whale’s left eye and mouth. The whale seems to be smiling back at the photographer. In the 1990s, that library offered the book in a sale and I purchased it. I’m still fond of key images in that book, from celebrities of great note, to some of Snowdon’s photos of the economically disadvantaged, the physically and/or mentally disabled, and the aged. Some pages from my copy had been torn out, presumably by less-than-thoughtful public library patrons. Most of the book’s photos are in black-and-white. Ca. 2004, when I was applying for Royal Photographic Society Fellow Status, an RPS Fellow (Margaret Salisbury) told me I might be the next Snowdon, which made me feel a bit hopeful. But I did not gain Fellow Status then, partly because the RPS was not clear in its instructions about the tech criteria for my slideshow review. In one or two key respects though, I’ve no interest in being like Snowdon – he had mistresses while he was married, and one of his mistresses, Ann Hill, whom he had an affair with from 1976-1996, committed suicide in 1996. However, key parts of Snowdon’s professional life are worth studying in greater detail, and a few are very much worth emulating.

Lord Snowdon, or Antony Armstrong-Jones as he was named by his birth-family, was born in 1930 to barrister Ronald Armstrong-Jones and his first wife Anne Messel. Antony’s paternal grandfather, Sir Robert Armstrong-Jones, was a noted British psychiatrist and physician. Antony’s great-grandfather on his mother’s side was Linley Sambourne, for 40 years a political cartoonist on “Punch” and the taker/collector of 12,000 photos to ensure the accuracy of his drawings. The name Linley came from earlier ancestors, the Linley sisters of Bath, famous beauties, one of which eloped with the playwright Sheridan. Another ancestor was Alfred Messel, the architect of the Wertheim Department Store in Berlin and a pioneer in uses for metal and glass in construction. The Messel side included the founder of Messels, the City bankers, and Oliver Messel, who dominated English theatre and opera design 30 years. The book “Snowdon” is dedicated to the memory of Oliver Messel. At age 6, his hard-working, perfectionist Uncle Oliver Messel let him make some masks in his studio for a Cochran revue. Armstrong-Jones notes, “Later, I went with him on my first visit to Venice, where he taught me to use my eyes.” He told Elizabeth Grice of “The Telegraph” in 2010, Oliver “taught me how to look up, not down.”

In 1943, Armstrong-Jones left Sandroyd School after four years en route to Eton College. The Sandroyd Headmaster’s Report said, “Armstrong-Jones may be good at something, but it’s nothing we teach here.” At Eton in 1945, Armstrong-Jones revived the Eton Photographic Society, where he took a photo of the Upper School criticized by a newspaper for not having people in it. At age 16, he spent six months in a Liverpool infirmary with polio, of which the symptoms would subside until a temporary, middle-aged re-onset. In 1948, he abandoned plans to attend the American university MIT and instead enrolled at Britain’s Cambridge University in architectural studies. He
bought his first large camera there, a Thornton-Pickard single-lens reflex camera. He made many architectural views then, and a few portraits. In 1950, Armstrong-Jones coxed Cambridge in the Boat Race, which his crew won by 3 lengths. However, he soon after failed his architecture exams, and left Cambridge. In 1951, he apprenticed with a man named Baron, and also worked with David Sim, doing portraits for “Spotlight”, etc. That September, he was published in the “Tatler”. In 1952, he converted an ironmonger’s shop in Pimlico into a studio. He saw published his first spread in “Picture Post” then too, his photos of flamenco dancers at an Oliver Messel party. In 1954, he made his first photo stage call, at Terence Rattigan’s “Separate Tables”. He started using a miniature camera for theatre coverage around this time. His magazine clients soon included “Vogue”, American “Vogue”, “Harper’s Bazaar”, and the London newspaper “Daily Express”. He began making blowups of his photos for displays in the front of his house, rather than conventional 8x10s. In 1957, he held his first exhibition at Kodak House, Kingsway. Asked to take official pictures of the Queen and her family, he also began regular contributions to “The Queen” magazine, covering Cruft’s (dog show), Henley Regatta, Chelsea Flower Show, etc. That magazine’s owner, Jocelyn Stevens, said Armstrong-Jones had become “the eye of The Queen magazine.”

One portrait of Queen Elizabeth II and family from then is notable. He writes, “There were only going to be twenty minutes available to do the pictures of the Queen and her family; so I got permission to go along before and submit a sketch for approval. I planned a photograph based on eighteenth-century romantic paintings. The Queen and Prince Philip would be leaning over the bridge in the garden of Buckingham Palace watching the children below catching trout. I hired a rod and bought two trout from the fishmonger. The sketch was approved. On the morning of the assignment, Mrs. Peabody, who looked after me in Pimlico, came in with breakfast. ‘I thought you needed a good start to the day today,’ she said; and I took off the lid to find she had grilled the trout quite beautifully. The released photograph shows the children reading a book instead.” In 1958, Snowdon designed photo sets for “Keep Your Hair On”, by John Cranko, which closed in two weeks. He also designed a collection of women’s ski clothes then, and visited New York for the first time, with Penelope Gilliatt. He published two books that year, “Malta” with Sir Sacheverell Sitwell by Batsford, and “London” for Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

In 1960, Snowdon married Princess Margaret, the Queen’s younger sister, and closed his studio in Pimlico. In 1961, he began with Frank Newby and Cedric Price the design for an Aviary for London Zoo, Regent’s Park, which opened in 1965. Also in 1961, he signed a contract to work exclusively for “The Sunday Times”, mainly for the new color supplement. In 1964, he became a member of the British Arts Council, and started doing features on various social problems for the “Sunday Times” with his photo-essay, “The Old”. Also in 1964, Snowdon photographed the ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev for “Life” magazine. In 1965, Snowdon published “Private View” with Bryan Robertson and John Russell, a study of London’s art world, by Nelson and Time/Life Books. “The Sunday Times” published his photo-essay “Some of Our Children”, about child neglect. In 1966, he contributed to “The Sunday Times” magazine devoted to Indian coverage, written by David Holden. Snowdon also did a 14-page photo-essay in “Life” about the English theatre, with text by Penelope Gilliatt. That year, his feature “Loneliness” appeared in the “Sunday Times”. In 1967, his essays on vanishing Venice and booming Japan appeared in the “Sunday Times” magazine. The next year, his first TV documentary, “Don’t Count the Candles”, about old age, was broadcast on CBS in America, with Derek Hart and edited by Jules Laventhal. It won seven awards, including two Emmies, and was shown in 22 countries. Snowdon also did a feature for “The Sunday Times” in 1968 called “Mental Health”. Having had polio himself as a teen, Snowdon pioneered a vehicle for the disabled in 1968, the Chairmobile, which went into production in 1972. In 1969, Snowdon was put in charge of the visual aspects of the Investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales at Caernarvon. He commissioned Carl Toms as designer, emphasizing simplicity, getting rid of awnings and red carpets, opening up the ceremonial for TV cameras to see the castle better.

In 1970, Snowdon resumed his work for British “Vogue”. He also did a TV documentary, “Love of a Kind”, about paradoxical British attitudes towards animals, made with Derek Hart, who’d also work with him on future documentaries. In addition that year, the Snowdon photo-essay “Children Under Stress” appeared in “The Sunday Times”. Social problems were a key theme of the era, and Snowdon did a TV documentary in 1971, “Born to be Small”, about the problems of people of restricted growth. In 1972, Olivetti, the typewriter maker (which made the small but efficient portable typewriter I owned and used in 1981, also used by my London roommate Cal Lawrence, who now is a coordinating producer for abc.com), commissioned a book by Snowdon, “Venice”. That same year, Snowdon also did an essay for “The Sunday Times” about Peru, and about the Amish for “McCall’s”. In addition, he did a photo exhibition and book, “Assignments” then. The exhibition was first turned down by the Kensington store Derry and Toms and showed first in Cologne, and later at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, and in the US, Far East, and Australia. It was seen in person by 1.5 million people. In 1973, Snowdon did the TV documentary “Happy Being Happy”. In 1974, he directed actors for the first time in his two films for the BBC Explorer Series — “Mary Kingsley” in Gabon and “Burke and Wills” in Australia. In 1975, Snowdon’s “Sunday Times” feature “Children Behind Bars” emerged. It was three more years before his “Sunday Times” feature on Brazil was published, in 1978. In 1979, Lord Snowdon was made a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society with Bill Brandt. Both of them had worked for “Picture Post” magazine early on. Snowdon also won the RPS Hood Award that year for “promoting concern for children, the disabled and the generally underprivileged.”
During more than 20 very productive years, Tony Armstrong-Jones had photographed many of Britain’s “underclass”, and also quite a few of its top celebrities. Regarding his work with the underclass, he writes: “In the mid-Sixties I began taking photographs which were very different in subject matter from anything I had taken before. In 1965 I worked on a story on the problems of the old for the *Sunday Times* magazine. Subsequently I did features for them on disabled people, children under stress, spina bifida children and the mentally handicapped. The magazine didn’t have to sell on the bookstalls so I could take pictures that were serious, and, if necessary, unprepossessing. My job was simply to make people stop and read the text”. Though Armstrong-Jones once had said he liked to take photos that made people react, causing them to laugh or cry, not wince, some of his social-distress photos made some people feel uneasy. He writes: “I don’t want to overemphasize the misfortunes of people, but on the other hand I don’t want to turn a blind eye to them if they happen to exist. I found some of these stories painful and shocking. Many of the conditions I was seeing had not been photographed, or at least published before.” (John Thomson in the 1880s and Bert Hardy in the 1940s had photographed generally similar conditions in Britain, but in their way Snowdon’s photos were even more shocking and further “inside walls”). “There were high walls round many of the institutions I visited which were there as much for the people outside as for those inside. We think of ourselves as a sophisticated society where these kinds of conditions only exist in the third world – which simply is not true.”

Snowdon continues: “I was aware of being a visitor. But I was determined not to be a voyeur.” (He turned out to be something of a voyeur, but not without a sense of fair-minded objectivity.) “Photographically I tried to be as straightforward as possible – no colour, no wide-angle lens shots, no distortion. I wasn’t taking fine photographs but wanted to make a simple record of what I saw and experienced. I hoped to break down barriers, but not to shock: I thought if these things were recorded for a better understanding of the situation, then perhaps people would think more deeply about it, what it meant to the people involved, and what might be done.” He also notes: “Many memories remain: children on remand are surrounded by barbed wire and wardens in uniform; they are treated like convicts before they are convicted. Also the most caring nurses in hospitals and institutions seemed to be West Indian. Perhaps it’s because they come from a rural background. If they come from a small village they haven’t had to go through all the middle-class politeness and tact. Their response is very direct. Or it may be that their community life is altogether more tolerant.”

To an extent the ground glass he viewed the world through distanced Snowdon from the children, but he could not be totally detached; he empathized and felt compassion for his beleaguered subjects, for he’d been disabled as a child himself. He writes: “When I was photographing some children in Liverpool living in appalling conditions, I found myself thinking of how to get it all in – the damp coming through the walls, the dirt, the worn face of the mother; and when I looked up from the viewfinders, I saw that the writer of the story, Priscilla Chapman, had been more directly affected; she was suppressing tears.”—ca. 2016, by DvJM.

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**Stolen Children Along One Stretch of the Mississippi: An Urban Legend Involving 11 Mysterious River Deaths of College-Age Men at La Crosse, 1997-2014**

“Sometimes we’d have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. Yonda was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark – which was a candle in a cabin window; and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two – on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddler or a song coming over from one of them crafts. It’s lovely to live on a raft.”—From Chapter 19 of Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”

“Come away, O human child!/To the waters and the wild/With a faery, hand in hand,/From a world more full of weeping than you can understand.”—Refrain A from “The Stolen Child,” by William Butler Yeats.

“Most people here do believe that there is something going on. My wife thinks it’s a serial killer. She’s totally convinced.”—Then-La Crosse Mayor John Medinger, ca. 2004.

“Write a story about a community with its head in the sand – about the drinking deaths of its children, and how the community doesn’t want to admit the source of the problem: alcoholic consumption.”—La Crosse Police Lt. Daniel J. Marcou, Uncle and Godfather of Drowning Victim Anthony “Tony” Skifton, and the Author’s Brother.

“It’s human nature to believe urban legends. Somehow, it feels better than blaming a dead young man for putting himself in danger.”—Matt James in One of His Columns for the “La Crosse Tribune”.

“Repentance is valuable because it opens in us the idea of change.”—Poet-Author Kathleen Norris.
What’s become -- in our modern, stressed-out world -- of the more benevolent influences of the rivers in our lives? To my mind, the passage cited above, from Mark Twain’s “Huck Finn”, is one of the most beautiful passages in American literature. I’m prejudiced about that, because I was born and raised in La Crosse, Wis., along that greatest of American rivers, the Mississippi. But this story isn’t mainly about the more benevolent influences of that river, although this reporter hopes that eventually the city of La Crosse can get back to more idyllic dreams along it and the two other rivers that flow into the Mississippi here. It is about some of the key details of life and death here along its shoreline -- involving at least 11 mysterious river deaths of young men between 1997 and 2014, that may lend themselves to a deeper understanding of the darker influences of that river -- perhaps all rivers, and the towns and people along them.

Life can be as hard as a stone that breaks other stones. It can also be as wondrous as a child’s first steps to its parents. When an awesome river, plus two, steals the children of those parents, though, life becomes, if not impossible, at least less improbable. Some stricken parents may laugh some things off, but in their reflections, they often think how much they would enjoy laughing with that stolen child again – finding comfort in some special secret that they would share, just for the sake of sharing sometimes. And when those parents cry, each of them cry with the knowledge their strongest tears are saved for the child stolen from them.

Many people in this river city of 50,000 souls on the western edge of the Badger State have said many times in recent years that the three rivers that meet at Riverside Park (the Black, La Crosse, and Mississippi) steal the city’s children from it more often than most river-cities. What is especially cruel about the rivers’ lust for youthful humanity here, though, is that from July of 1997 to July 2014, the river took 11 college-age men. All these young men were highly alcohol-intoxicated at the time of their deaths. Their blood-alcohol levels ranged from about .20 percent to .42 percent; in Wisconsin, the legal limit in recent years for driving has been .08 percent; it was .10 percent before. Medical experts say, once the blood-alcohol content is above .40 percent, most people will, in all likelihood, die from alcohol poisoning. These rivers have at least one deadly henchman, then, and in these cases it is alcohol. Are there others? And if so, were murders, suicides, and/or accidents involved in these deaths? All 11 of the young men drowned, and murders by drowning hadn’t often been involved previously here, at least not in the memory of most living residents. But even abroad, in countries like Great Britain, 15% of drownings there in 1998, were alcohol-related, and bodies of water can lend themselves to “murders” of many types.

**What Can Happen When a Person Is Very Drunk**

In 2009, then La Crosse County Medical Examiner John Steers said that between 1974 and 2009, 24 college-age men (18-28) drowned in the three rivers at La Crosse. But not all these deaths involved alcohol, or thoroughly mysterious circumstances, as many have in the most-recent years. The mysterious deaths of 11 college-age men from 1997 to 2014 do not bode well for the future of college students or young working people in La Crosse. There are three colleges in town now – the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Viterbo University, and Western Technical College – and nearly all the young men (not to mention young women) who enroll at these institutions eventually have a thirst for alcohol. Alcohol is not usually poisonous when imbibed in moderation; but this city’s young people do not always curb their thirsts. The blood-alcohol levels of the 11 speak volumes about the connection between drinking and drownings. Other, older males have drowned in the river here during this period, some possibly due to their intoxicated states. One of the latter, Thomas Dierkop, a 38-year-old Company Store employee, apparently fell in, while relieving himself into the Mississippi River near Houska Park. His girlfriend had driven him to the river, and she heard some sort of commotion, like Tom slipping on the rip-rap down there, and then a splash.” It was a little before midnight, Friday, August 12, 2000. The toxicology report noted that Dierkop, a second cousin of Hollywood actor/La Crosse native Charles Dierkop (actor in the TV series “Policewoman”), had a blood-alcohol level of .23 percent and tested positive for marijuana.

Steers said Dierkop apparently fell down a steep embankment, with no rip-rap boulders there to leave bodily marks. Steers said there were no marks on the victim’s body, but La Crosse Fire Department rescue and recovery diver Mark Smith, who also worked that case, told this reporter there is rip-rap all along and near Houska Park, not that that fact alone would have resulted in marks on Dierkop’s body. He could have “run down” the embankment, tripping but catching his balance all the way, until he finally dropped into the river. Or perhaps he walked most of the way down the embankment, began to relieve himself, and then slipped, moving a few rocks noisily, and then fell in. A few people here might think it could have been murder, but Dierkop’s girlfriend said she would have seen someone else in that area, if there had been anyone else there. However, it was late at night, and she apparently wasn’t looking down the embankment when the drowning victim went in. But Tom Dierkop died then, and needn’t have. He may have been somewhat older than the college-age men who have died mysteriously in the river here, but his case suggests what can happen to young men (or women) when they get drunk by a river. Drownings at/near La Crosse since 2009 include a young Hmong man who went into the water fishing by Dresbach Dam, and a young Hmong woman and then a young man who both missed a turn driving near Jackson Street, drowning in Swift Creek, with a wicked current.
Case-Studies

What do we know about the 11 sons who were college-age, drunk, and drowned mysteriously at La Crosse from July 1997 to July 2014?

The first death that would later set local people to worrying was the drowning of Richard Hlavaty, 18, of Western Springs, Ill. Richard and his 21-year-old brother James may have been forced into the Mississippi River by a crowd of rock-throwers, after a fight outside a bar on the corner of Third and Pearl Streets, and a second fight near the Cargill Grain Dock, less than a quarter-mile south of Riverside Park, around 2:40 a.m., on July 12, 1997. Unfortunately, none of the rock-throwing perpetrators have been positively identified, not even by James Hlavaty, who lived in La Crosse then, and survived the attacks and swim, Police Detective Cpt. Mitch Brohmer told this reporter. There’s even some talk among the dive and rescue community that the rock-throwing story was concocted, that Richard Hlavaty’s drowning was a swim gone-bad, while the brothers were racing across the river. But La Crosse County District Attorney Scott Horne said the Hlavaty parents would be “overjoyed”, if a positive perpetrator-ID could be made and criminal charges brought against that person/s. (We’ll take up the matter of the reliability or unreliability of eyewitness accounts later in this report.) Richard Hlavaty’s blood-alcohol level was 0.271 percent, almost three times the legal limit for driving in Wisconsin back then, .10 percent. Hlavaty’s manner of death may be the closest there has been to a murder-drowning, at least officially, since 1974, if there were rock-throwers that night. His cause of death was listed as drowning, while nonfatal bruises and cuts from the rocks were found on his body, Steers said.

The second drowning was that of Charles Blatz, 28, a Kiel, WI, native, Army veteran, skilled scuba diver, and UW-Platteville student. Blatz had come to town to celebrate Oktoberfest, which early on was at the end of September and in early October for about 10 days total. Police Detective James Schleifer said: “We know very little about him. He was here for the Oktoberfest. He did not return [alive to his home].” Blatz’s death was ruled “probable drowning”, with no evidence of foul play. But his head was badly injured and his right arm cut off right above the elbow, probably by a boat propeller, post-mortem, according to the medical examiner, because there was no bleeding in below-skin tissues. The victim had apparently been bar-hopping with friends on the night he disappeared. He had split from the group at Sneakers Bar, 223 Pearl Street, to return to Happenings Bar, 215 S. Third Street, in downtown La Crosse, and was never seen alive again. A friend of Blatz’s reported Blatz drank about 12 beers and two cocktails that day. The friend said Blatz appeared in good spirits when the group parted company. The victim’s mother told a detective her son was an experienced swimmer, and though he had recently ended a relationship with his fiancée, he seemed to have handled the break-up well. John Steers said there was .37 percent alcohol in the victim’s urine, the equivalent of about a .20 percent blood-alcohol level, and was measured alternatively because of the advanced decomposition in his body. Steers noted that Blatz probably fell into the water accidentally, and if so, the currents in the Mississippi are wicked and run deep, and a drunken victim, despite his or her swimming ability, might panic, throwing one’s judgment off, especially if the panic were compounded by not wanting to be in the water at that moment.

The third intoxicated, college-age male drowning here in 1997 was Anthony “Tony” Skifton, 19, who worked at a local Waste Management plant. The drowning victim had attended a house party at 520 Fifth Ave. South near the downtown area and received a phone call there, according to a cousin of his, though no one seemed to know who had called him. That was very early the morning of October 5, 1995, just two days after Charles Blatz’s body was found. Skifton owned a bike and no car, but he was apparently walking that night. Police were later told the victim may have been involved in a drug deal gone-bad at Houska Park, a few blocks south of Riverside Park, but that information apparently couldn’t be verified. One week later, Skifton’s lifeless body was pulled from near the mouth of Isle La Plume Slough along the east side of Houska Park, close to the main channel of the Mississippi River. The victim’s fly was open, and police believe he was relieving himself (the autopsy showed his bladder empty) and accidentally fell into the river. Tony Skifton was this reporter’s nephew. Tony’s mother, Diane Skifton, a civilian employee for the police department, is this reporter’s sister, as she is for now-retired La Crosse Police Lt. Dan Marcou, who said it was doubly hard to lose his nephew, because Tony was also his godson. Cause of death was listed as accidental drowning, with a blood-alcohol level of .23 percent, more than twice the legal limit then for driving. Diane Skifton said the accidental drowning ruling was hard to bear, “I knew my son well, better than anybody. How could anybody purposely walk into freezing cold water?” She said her son’s biggest single fear was water. Tony Skifton had planned to go to Logan High School, but switched to Central (and then Aquinas), because Logan was the only city high school that had a pool in the building then, and he didn’t want to be anywhere near that pool. Young Skifton’s mother and Henrietta Blatz, Charles’s mother, both said their sons wouldn’t have committed suicide; they weren’t the type. But Tony Skifton (his adoptive father was Robert “Rocky” Skifton) was said to have been depressed at Christmas, 1996, when his biological father (Mark Becker) did not pick him up to visit his paternal grandparents, a traditional visit for him. Other family members said Tony had his ups and downs, but generally had bounced back from that Christmas. A Stroh Brewery worker was said to have seen a young man matching Skifton’s description carrying a pack of beer as he ambled towards the walking bridge at Houska Park, by Swift Creek, not too far from the city’s sewage plant. Brewery worker Steve Hildahl said a “man” in an athletic wheelchair appeared to be following Skifton. Due to the lack of lighting on Market Street close to Front Street, Hildahl said the person in the wheelchair was only a silhouette. The chair’s wheels were slanted, as if for competitive racing. A police report also said the night Tony Skifton disappeared, two young men in a car picked up a third young man who apparently had a bleeding head-wound. When I followed up on the latter report a while later, I couldn’t locate any of
the three men. Houska Park is not a huge park physically, so if there was violence there that night, Tony might have seen something, and been pushed into the slough (known as Swift Creek).

The fourth victim in this group was Nathan Kapfer, a 20-year-old Viterbo University student-baseball player from Montana. Kapfer disappeared early the morning of February 22, 1998. According to Ed Hoskin and Anastasia Mercer’s roundup coverage of the college-age river deaths here since July 1997 as of the June 13, 1999 La Crosse Tribune, Kapfer’s body was spotted by a fisherman in Running Slough in the Town of Shelby, south and east of downtown La Crosse, near Goose Island National Wildlife Refuge. What separates Kapfer’s case from the first three cases, is that he was stopped by police and given four citations relating to disorderly conduct and underage drinking, just before he disappeared that night. Police gave Kapfer a breath test at about 1:45 a.m., and it recorded a blood-alcohol level of .077 percent, just under the 2004 limit for driving in Wisconsin. Then Police Chief Edward Kondracki said, despite the four citations, the police couldn’t detain him due to laws on the books, which doesn’t explain why they didn’t at least get or give him a ride home. When Kapfer’s body was discovered in the river on April 4, 1998, an autopsy determined his blood-alcohol level to be .22 percent, more than twice the then-legal limit. Apparently, Kapfer consumed more alcohol before heading down to the river. His father, Mark Kapfer, of Glendive, MT, was not satisfied by the police investigation. He said, “Once the autopsy was completed, basically the investigation was closed. Whether anybody saw [Nathan] or not [at the river], who knows?” Fellow baseball players, who were searching the morning after Nathan went missing, soon found their teammate’s wallet, police citations, and baseball cap neatly laid out at Riverside Park on the deck of a riverboat giftshop, Kondracki said.

Robbie Lowery, of the Wisconsin Criminal Investigation Division, said that when a person commits suicide, they often arrange their things neatly before they do away with themselves. Though it’s very possible young Kapfer committed suicide, it’s also possible someone forced him to empty his pockets, then pushed him into the river. Several teammates of the victim told detectives they had decided to search the area, because they’d heard rumors about someone’s being responsible on the night of his disappearance, according to a lengthy case report. The victim apparently had a fake ID card and had no trouble gaining entry to several bars. According to the report, friends described Kapfer as hard-working and level-headed. He was an A or A/B student who apparently had told more than one person that committing suicide was “selfish” and “a cop-out”, the report said. His live-in girlfriend, Angie Truttman, then 23, told investigators that Kapfer was someone who worried a lot about school and how his parents perceived him. Police Detective Mitch Brohmer wrote in the report: “[Truttman] said she did not believe Nate was the kind of individual who would take his own life, but she did say the tickets he received, along with the fact he felt he may have disappointed his parents and may [have faced] some disciplinary action from the baseball team, could have caused him a great deal of stress and anxiety.” Two days after Kapfer was reported missing, a La Crosse resident told police he had witnessed a young man, in his late teens or early 20s, standing on the east side of the Cass Street Bridge within a few blocks of Riverside Park, staring at the water, “oblivious to the rest of the world around him.” This was said to have occurred around 1 a.m., that night, just before Kapfer was cited by police and just before he went missing. That witness couldn’t identify the man on bridge as Kapfer.

Fourteen months after Nathan Kapfer drowned, the fifth victim, a 20-year-old UW-La Crosse student from the Stevens Point area who had last been seen talking with two girls at Club Millennium (where many African-Americans drank; Geesey was white), 121 S. Third Street, disappeared the night of April 10-11, 1999. The girls were never identified. Jeffrey Geesey’s body was discovered on May 22, 1999, near the same spot Kapfer’s body had been found, in Running Slough in the Town of Shelby. Again, there was no apparent sign of trauma or foul play, police said, and the medical examiner listed the manner of death as undetermined, the cause as drowning. Apparently a chronic drinker, Geesey had been drinking with friends the night he disappeared, police said. The friends said they don’t remember much about the evening because they, too, had been heavily intoxicated. Richard Geesey, Jeffrey’s father, came to La Crosse soon after he learned the body pulled from the river was his son’s, and spent the night at Riverside Park – the place he believes his son went into the water. “There are hundreds of drunk people down there [after bar-time at 2:30 a.m.]. I just have a feeling that someone knows something that happened to Jeff, but they’re just afraid to say anything.” John Steers said the drowned man had a blood-alcohol level of .42 percent, more than five times the current legal limit for driving.

Although Steers said La Crosse had not had a college-age male drink and drown since 1999 until Jared Dion in 2004, in fact, Patrick Runingen, 23, of West Salem, WI, who apparently fell through the ice and drowned in the Black River near French Island on March 8, 2001, is at least very close to that type of case. Runingen, the sixth related victim, had last been seen in the Nutbush City Limits bar parking lot, at 3264 George Street, by three people, late the night of March 7, 2001. Then-Chief Kondracki said at a Town Hall Meeting on April 22, 2004, that several people watched for a while as Runingen waited for a cab, because they thought he might get in another car and drive off by himself while intoxicated; apparently none of those people watched long enough, because the victim walked off before the cab arrived and was never seen alive again by them, or perhaps by anyone. The next day, fishermen saw a marking pen (the drowning victim was an employee of a West Salem IGA grocery store), a hat, and a pack of cigarettes, floating on the water, and called authorities. The location of his body was about 100 feet off Airport Beach, on Fisherman’s Road, French Island, just across the river from south Onalaska. Nutbush City Limits is very near if not on the La Crosse-Onalaska border. The victim’s blood-alcohol level was .24 percent.
The seventh man in this group was Jared Dion, 21, of the Town of Merton in Waukesha County, a UW-La Crosse student-wrestler. Dion disappeared early Saturday, April 10, 2004, after a night in downtown bars with friends. A La Crosse search team dragged the river near where a Boston Red Sox cap had been found, which apparently belonged to Dion. His body was pulled from the Mississippi River just south of Riversides Park at 7:50 a.m., Thursday, April 15, 2004. Jared Dion had just been getting his life back to normal after sustaining a broken arm in a match in Pennsylvania in January. The month before his arm was broken, he’d won an incredible match versus a UW-Parkside All-American, 5-2. He was last seen around 2:30 a.m., April 10, when his friends left him at John’s Bar, 109 N. Third Street, to catch the Safe Ride Bus back to campus. A member of the band that had been playing at John’s said later, he had talked with Dion and found him to be very drunk. When police interviewed the bartenders at John’s, none of them could remember serving Dion drinks the night he disappeared. (Though bartenders in La Crosse have since gone through required serving-etiquette classes, it’s rumored some of them still serve heavily drunk people.) A preliminary autopsy report said Dion’s blood-alcohol level was .27 percent. The victim had made plans with his mother, who lives in Merton, to celebrate Easter (April 11, 2004) in La Crosse a day early, because he was working on a school project on deadline, but young Dion failed to contact his girlfriend as planned that Saturday. The girlfriend was very worried, because Dion and she usually talked 5-6 times a day.

The eighth victim in this group of mysterious river-deaths was Luke Homan, a UW-La Crosse basketball star, who had quarterbacked the football team at Brookfield Central H.S. Three of his former football teammates, all of whom went on to play at UW-Madison – Joe Thomas (an Outland Trophy Winner and now an All-Pro Tackle for the Cleveland Browns), Ben Strickland (a former assistant Badgers coach), and Steve Johnson – joined in the search for Homan’s body after he went missing on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2006. He’d last been seen apparently at the Vibe Bar, on 4th Street, in downtown La Crosse. Police said there appeared to have been no related bar altercation, but did not immediately rule out foul play, as they had in nearly every previous case mentioned here. A police bloodhound was called in, and tracked Homan’s scent from Third Street through two alleys and on to the underpass between the La Crosse Center and the Radisson Hotel, down to a spot near the Mississippi River levee in Riverside Park. Homan’s body was found just south of that levee on Monday, Oct. 2, 2006. Because Homan had been a teammate of Joe Thomas’s, and a very popular student-athlete at UW-La Crosse, many national media outlets began covering the river-deaths. (In addition to the La Crosse Tribune, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel had been covering them from the start in 1997, mainly reported in the latter paper by DvJM.) Homan’s blood-alcohol level turned out to be .32 percent. The Minnesota Regional Coroner’s Office determined there was no sign of trauma to Homan’s body. And then-La Crosse County Medical Examiner John Steers told the La Crosse Tribune: “Other toxicology tests which were conducted were all negative…. These included tests for GHB, Rohypnol and any other incapacitating drug.” Many people, of course, consider alcohol to be a potentially incapacitating drug.

The ninth drowning victim in this group was Christopher B. Melancon, 24, a Milwaukee native and Marine veteran of the Iraq War, who was living in Bloomington, Minn. at the time of his demise. He was visiting La Crosse with Anthony Tupert, to take in Oktoberfest, but was apparently alone when he slipped, was pushed, or jumped off the Cass Street Bridge at about 1:30 a.m., on Sunday, Sept. 30, 2007. A group of campers at Pettibone (Island) Resort campground said they heard a splash and saw a man in the water. At the same time, a young woman who had been separated from her friends downtown and who was heading home to La Crescent, Minn., had just crossed the bridge, turned back for an instant, and saw a man matching Melancon’s description plummeting down to the Mississippi River slough below. When his body was pulled from the water, his autopsy showed a .24 blood/alcohol count, currently three times the legal limit for driving in Wisconsin. On Oct. 3, 2007, La Crosse police said there was no evidence of foul play. No other drugs were found in Melancon’s system, and there were no internal or external injuries.

The 10th drowning victim in this group was Craig Meyers, 21, a WTC student who went missing at about 1:30 a.m., on Sunday, Feb. 13, 2010 (the same day as DvJM’s parents were celebrating their 60th Valentine Wedding Anniversary), after partying at a wedding reception at South Lanes on Mormon Coulee Road, and at a couple of downtown bars too. He was dropped off in below-freezing temperatures on the 700 block of Market Street by his cousin. They both believed that area was near Meyers’ girlfriend’s home. However, she lived on 16th Street at the time. When an investigation occurred, a Sara Lee Bakery surveillance camera revealed Meyers had walked by the bakery in the direction of the Mississippi River. He may have even passed a Logistic Health Inc. building where his mother worked, though it was probably locked up that night. A bloodhound soon determined he’d gone down to the river; evidence even shows someone stumbled down the river bank. A single pair of footprints on the river-ice shows a hole where Meyers apparently fell in. About three days after he went missing, his body was found by the La Crosse County Dive and Rescue Unit when an underwater camera showed a hand that seemed to be glowing white, sticking out of a pile of massive rocks, trees, and wreckage from a collapsed bridge. The River Watch Group, established a while before, comprising volunteers taking turns watching the riverfront, did not normally extend its reach to where Meyers likely went in.

The 11th and most recent victim in this group was Shalim Augustine, 23, a nephew of Rev. Patrick Augustine, rector of Christ Episcopal Church in La Crosse, the city’s oldest congregation. Shalim was the son of Rev. Augustine’s brother, also an Episcopal priest. Shalim had been boating the day of Tuesday, July 8, 2014. His group and he had been drinking heavily, and when they docked at the Powerhouse at 518 Logan Street on the Northside of the city, just north of the Clinton Street Bridge, at about 11:58 p.m., Shalim and friends stopped at the...
nearby Kwik Trip store for food and cigarettes. On his way out, Shalim told his friends he had to go and that he would find his own way home, looking like he would walk the five miles to his home on the Southside. One report says he may have walked in some alleys and/or side streets to avoid police, because he’d been court-ordered not to drink alcohol after a DUI arrest. When his family reported him missing the next night around suppertime, he’d not shown up for his work-shift that day at Huck Finn’s on the Water. They said he was afraid of water and didn’t know how to swim, which doesn’t explain why he was boating drunk on July 8th. A police bloodhound was called in, but lost the scent near the tennis courts, south of the Powerhouse, in nearby Copeland Park. The dog’s handler said it was possible Augustine had even entered a vehicle before he ended up drowned. A boater discovered his body at about 6:15 p.m., July 11th, just south of the I-90 bridge, more than a mile north of the Powerhouse, along the Black River. His July 8th outing’s boat owner had tried reaching Augustine via cell-phone 39 times July 9th, with no luck. Shalim’s cell-phone was found on his body, when he was recovered from the river.

The La Crosse Police Crimestoppers Program, which has been effective in solving many crimes here, has apparently turned up no reliable leads pointing to murder or suicide in any of these 11 cases; that may change as even greater national and international attention is given to this group of cases. Other cities in this region have had alcohol-related drownings of college-age men the last few years, including Lansing, Mich., and Minneapolis, Minn. Denise Vujnovich, a Western Technical College vice president, said in 2004 at a Town Hall Meeting about the river deaths at La Crosse, that 1,400 college students died of alcohol-related causes in a previous year; 500,000 college students were arrested for alcohol-related violations the same year; and 70,000 college students went into alcohol detoxification units that year.

Siren Song of Three Rivers

Since 1972, according to a La Crosse Tribune graphic that reporters Ed Hoskin, a native of Britain, and Anastasia Mercer did the research for, as of the June 13, 1999 edition, only two years during the 1972-99 span were death-free on the three rivers at La Crosse; and in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial year, there were seven accidental deaths on those rivers here and one suicide. Sixty-two of the 69 local river deaths during that span were termed accidental, four were judged suicides, and three had an “undetermined” manner. (Police also said that in the decades leading up to 2000, six or seven college-age males had drowned at La Crosse every decade. However, they did not say how many of those earlier drownings were alcohol-related.) Less than three deaths on average per year during that span may not seem like anything to worry about to outsiders, but try telling that to the parents, family, and friends of these individuals, especially during the immediately recent 17-year-period, especially since the national average for rural drownings is three times higher than urban drownings. La Crosse County, which has a significant rural population, rarely has a rural drowning. Add in the recent propensity for young men to get drunk and slip or throw themselves into the river, as police suggest, and it becomes clear that, one way or another, binge drinking contributed to their deaths – even if there might be an additional human or two involved, too.

John Steers offers slightly different statistics. He said that from 1974 to 2004, there were 82 river deaths in the La Crosse area. Twelve of the latter were accidental female drownings, 57 were accidental male drownings, five were adjudged to have been male suicides, and one was an undetermined male drowning. (It’s a mystery why the 11 drownings in the recent group here have all been called accidents by police, coroners, and even by some public archivists, when these officials don’t know a lot about the manner – versus cause? -- of death in a significant number of these cases. That does not mean authorities should suggest a lot of them are murders or suicides; it just means that “undetermined” could and maybe should be listed as the manner of death in more such cases.) Males in this country die much more often by drowning than women. That may be because women are much more likely to stay in regular contact with someone they trust while going into or near water. E.g., it’s very rare when a young woman gets falling-down drunk and goes off by herself and drowns, at least here. But generally, very incomplete (if any) historical data is available for historic alcohol-related drownings among college-aged people.

What makes young men so susceptible to death in water here? La Crosse resident and military veteran Mark Clift, who has seen a lot of life and death, says: “It’s possible that these drownings may be isolated incidents, that is, accidental or self-inflicted. It’s also a possibility that they are related; but these are college-age kids and they think they are invincible.” Is it only young men’s propensity to feel unbeatable, and thus having the sense that no body of water will intervene between them and the good life, that causes, at least in part, their deaths in these rivers? Some of them at least, then, with an assist from alcohol, may be willing to tempt fate fatally. Some even suffer from mental illness, and those illnesses may add to the difficulty of staying out of the rivers. Jeff Geese apparently was bipolar; Tony Skifton and others under pressures from one source or another, may have felt a bit of depression. In other words, drinking alcohol may seem an “easy out”, and perhaps going beyond that, even, a most compelling escape. From time to time various people with mental illnesses disappear in La Crosse. Gordon Stumlin, 37, of Holmen, disappeared from Dec. 2003 to June 2004, before his body turned up in the Mississippi River here. Gordon was schizophrenic. Beyond mental illness, paranormal experts even have said the spirit of the ‘War Eagle’ steamboat, which carried President Millard Fillmore through La Crosse in 1854 during his famed “Grand Excursion”, and which sank in a fire a while later, draws young men and women towards the river, and potential doom.
Diver, firefighter, and outdoorsman Mark Smith suggested some answers to river death questions. He said two things outline the dimensions of the problems cited in this report -- that not even parents see the danger when they bring their very small children to the riverfront, and that the siren song of three rivers lures many teens and young adults down to the treacherous shoreline at Riverside Park and vicinity. “I see parents walking with little kids along that levee wall at the park, and they don’t have a clue about what they could be getting in for if their children go into the water, whether they go in intentionally or go in accidentally.” As for the lure of the river to intoxicated young people, Smith said that the river “is definitely an attraction for many people…. People go downtown to blow off steam, and then they drown after they have had a lot to drink. Those [college-age] guys are under a lot of pressure. They’ve got so much going on, and they look for some form of escape. They go down there for some air and to sober up. And if you have been drinking, the river draws people down there to reflect and think about life…. When you drink, your judgment is bad and some people end up in the water.” Smith said a few of these men may have been relieving themselves or vomiting into the river, then slipped and fell in. Lack of early training, plus pressures and poor judgment later, help cause some youngsters not to grasp the dangers of the river here and to think it is forgiving to drunk people.

What the rivers here throw up at these young men, not to mention what those young men throw back up into the river, is formidable. Gerald Bonsack, a manufacturing engineer in La Crosse and science-sleuth who reads the local paper daily to check the number of gallons of water that pass through Dresbach Dam, a few miles upriver on the Mississippi, said: “When barges are coming upriver and they swing wide at Riverside Park, they will actually create such a wake that they will kick up debris off the bottom of the river. Now, a lot of kids like to sit down there and watch the Pettitbone Beach lights on the other side reflect across the water. Just imagine if you’re sitting there paddling your feet in the water off the floating dock or the shoreline rocks, and a barge comes by, throwing up a huge wake, and you’re concentrating on watching the swirls and eddies in a hyper-inebriated state -- you could get disoriented, even sicker, and fall in.” To get a better idea of the tremendous torrent of water that rushes past Riverside Park -- on April 15, 2004, the day Jared Dion’s body was found, an average of 28,700 cu.ft./sec. passed through Dresbach Dam, or about 214,000 gallons per second, Bonsack said. That’s an awful lot of water per second, with an awful lot of force. The current is nearly always strong at Riverside Park, and the water-temperatures vary seasonally, from just above freezing in the severest winters to around the sixties in summer months.

John Steers, who passed away in Feb. 2014, once said some young people are even more foolhardy than Smith and Bonsack state. He worked part-time in 2003 as a night-watchman on the John Steers, who passed away in Feb. 2014, once said some young people are even more foolhardy than Smith and Bonsack state. He worked part-time in 2003 as a night-watchman on the Julia Belle Swain, a riverboat which docks regularly at Riverside Park. He said: “I’ve seen kids standing on the levee posts and balancing. I’ve also seen kids come down there at midnight, jump in and swim in 40-degree water. They got out all right, but if they would have drowned, I would have called the police.” If a hypothetical drunk young man much like Charles Blatz, a skilled scuba diver, accidentally fell into the river while drunk, in an otherwise worst-case scenario he might face not only a wicked current (in which he would have to angle his swim back to shore without swimming fully against the current) in 18 feet of water (the shoreline is cut to that level), but also near-freezing water-temperatures, not to mention encumbering clothing and shoes, the abusive alcohol in him, and probably, panic.

Police Work

A key challenge for police in the first of these 11 cases, also indicating a related problem with all of them, is the lack of confirmative eyewitness accounts. Not even James Hlavaty could or would give a positive identification of even one of the perpetrators in his brother’s death, although he and his brother had purportedly been involved in two fistfights and one rock-throwing incident with several men, which would have been terrifying and could have caused him to be unable to focus on their faces, sizes, skin and hair colors, names, etc. But this reporter tried phoning a James Hlavaty in Western Springs, Ill., the only Hlavaty listed in that hometown of the brothers, but my calls were automatically screened every time in 2004 and no call returned; the message then said phone “solicitations” would not be accepted. On April 26, 2005, this reporter at last got a live person on the other end, and was told in forceful tones only this: “I’ll tell you this once, and once only: Don’t ever call me again.” He then hung up. Maybe the real truth of the Hlavaty case lies in a swim-gone-bad. (At least two potential witnesses -- one male, one female, and friends -- in one of the other river death cases were willing to state anonymously to this reporter that they feared for their lives if they implicated a man in that other case – the man they had thought to implicate had been a local basketball star. The female potential witness used to be a steady girlfriend of that jealous star. The potential male witness friend of the girlfriend of the athlete said, because he lived near Tony Skifton, it’s possible he was a target for murder, but that Skifton was murdered in a case of mistaken identity. The sister of the male witness is a well-known Wisconsin broadcast journalist, who told me she can understand my wanting to publish this report: “Although I’ve feared for my brother’s life, on the other hand, I think, as a journalist myself, what you are doing is right.” She added, “What my brother says [re: basketball player] isn’t just speculation; there’s a lot of truth in it.”)

In the other cases, there are apparently no reliable eyewitness accounts of people seeing the drowning victims going into the water, except for the Melancon case. The police may be saying “no foul play” so quickly in nearly all the cases, because they have so little evidence some of these young men might have been pushed, figuratively or literally, into the water, possibly not even from James Hlavaty. There is internal evidence that Nathan Kapfer was “pushed” by his police citations to do something drastic, because the police officer/s citing him may not
have done their job sufficiently by some key standards. Also, when a press conference was called seven hours after Jared Dion’s body was recovered, and police said no foul play was suspected, some local residents and others appeared very upset. That had been the pattern of quick police announcements on foul play or lack of it, even as the investigations in question had barely begun. In fact, at a Town Hall Meeting on April 22, 2004, Kim Dion, Jared’s mother – who’d said she doesn’t believe her son was alone when he died -- shouted, “That was my son and I have a right to believe any story I hear and to pursue it.”

City authorities may not want to stir up more of a hornet’s nest than exists, but the imperfect communication (of all pertinent evidence, for instance), has a lot to do with why at least some people here still suspect a serial killer has been on the loose. Some people were already talking that way in 1997. Why hasn’t James Hlavaty been interviewed by local reporters recently, if ever? And what has become of investigations as into the Kapfer drowning? Then-Chief Kondracki said in the 2004 Town Hall Meeting that all these cases were still open, when in fact some officers, when speaking to the press, had called them closed? And why was Ed Kondracki, around April 15, 2004, quoted in newspapers as saying all of these young men died accidentally, with no foul play involved in any of these cases? City police can’t really ask the district attorney to bring charges against anyone without positive evidence that foul play has been involved (in the Hlavaty case and others). And to save families’ feelings, police don’t want to publicly specify any of these deaths are positively suicides either, unless they have a lot of evidence confirming that assessment. This is not to say residents feel that much safer about the general situation, because if James Hlavaty was telling the truth to police in 1997, foul play looks to have been involved in his brother’s apparent murder; yet no human culprits, not in the specific manner of deaths in the other cases, have been positively identified by police.

No doubt, as La Crosse Police Sgt. Roger Barnes said, “Eyewitness testimony is the most unreliable testimony in the world. Defense attorneys know that, prosecuting attorneys know that, and juries know that. We’ve enacted events in classrooms with student audiences, with the enactors coming in and enacting something for 15-20 students. We then ask them what they saw, and we get 15-20 different answers.” They get 15-20 different answers, that is, even in a situation that students don’t try to lie in. But there is a lot more that can go into evidence against culprit/s than eyewitness accounts. Still, why did it take so long (until Jared Dion’s death) for police to begin ticketing bar tenders and bar owners who won’t clearly say what happens in their bars in cases like this, and yet have let young people continue, in some cases, to get very drunk? Ed Kondracki admitted it’s difficult to get any bar tender to own up to serving an already-intoxicated young man more drinks, especially if that bar tender had been drinking himself while working then, and if the victim is missing or drowned; his suggestion that bartenders need to undergo mandatory training does little good for those who have suffered the most already; but mandatory training and adherence to law may save some lives in future.

But city police called in a dog-handler from Milwaukee in one case, with her bloodhound, after the woman claimed the dog could detect scents that had been left a year before. Apparently, she also said her dog could detect the scent of a man having passed through a crowded bar, out the other side. To make matters worse, local residents wonder why night-vision surveillance cameras along the riverfront haven’t apparently been installed yet. Kondracki noted at the 2004 Town Hall Meeting that the co-owners of Brothers Bar, 306 Pearl Street, had by then raised $10,000 of what was supposed to be a $100,000 bill for the installation of those cameras. In 2016, downtown La Crosse was slated to have police-installed surveillance cameras downtown, in addition to many private businesses’ cameras, but nothing apparently has been added in that regard near the waterfront. Then-Mayor John Medinger criticized the idea of cameras ca. 2004, claiming it would be just like George Orwell’s 1984. The day after the Town Hall Meeting, there was a lot of talk in city media about possible camera-installations and a barrier-fence. There still is no barrier-fence there, and Mark Smith says that even if a barrier were installed, some drunks would insist on climbing or otherwise circumventing it. Then-Chief Kondracki also requested an agent be assigned to the Dion case from the Wisconsin Criminal Investigation Division. In addition, the publication of a city task force report in March 2005 presented recommendations on everything from keg registration (many young people are drunk from house parties even before they head to the downtown bars, which are in close proximity to Riverside Park), to increased police patrols of house parties, both of which have apparently been enacted. An Alcohol Awareness Taskforce has been created in recent years, and a volunteer River Watch Patrol established. And two former New York City police detectives conducted an independent investigation here in recent years, too. A St. Cloud (Minnesota) University Professor has done a study that links 40-plus river deaths in the upper Midwest via the interstate highway system, university locations, and rivers, helping create the urban legend of a smiley face gang of killers (who supposedly leave their smiley face scribbling near where victims go into the rivers), which may be so far from the truth as to be laughable, or may not be laughable in some cases.

Former City Councilman John Satory was an observer-rider in a police car in April 2005, and said there were not only more police patrols around house parties then, but also near the river. The La Crosse Police Department, the city council, the three colleges’ leadership, and many others here need to do a lot more to stem the tide of these mysterious deaths. And rumor-mills on the streets, social media, Websites, talk-radio, TV, newspapers, and other news leaders -- or the authorities’ inaction or mistaken actions -- may do in present and/or future city administrations, and/or almost worse even than that, get more of our young people killed in or near the rivers here. Fox News ran a one-hour national special report on Saturday, Aug. 30, 2014, hosted by Greta Van Sustern. It may have been of interest to viewers who had never heard much of anything about the La Crosse river deaths; but to local people there apparently wasn’t much new in it.
An Urban Legend, and College and Community Education

The challenges police and other local authorities face, go much further than the downtown bar district and the riverfront. But the urban legend that has grown up around these deaths is hard to put off. La Crosse is unique in related respects, and these deaths make that uniqueness public. As Matt James wrote in a column for the La Crosse Tribune: “Here is what we do know: La Crosse has a downtown packed with bars, college students and drink specials. Many of these bars are within three blocks of the largest river in North America. Yes, Riverside Park is beautiful and Riverfest is outstanding and the fireworks on the 4th of July will leave you breathless.” “But the downside of all that beauty is a powerful river that doesn’t know any better. It’s not a sunny little lake that you tumble into, come out and have a great laugh. The [Mississippi] River [here] is 18 feet deep, and it drops straight off.” It may be, then, that the myth of a vaguely unknowing river to “steal our children”, leaves people not believing the river can deceive, or that they’re children can be “unthinking” about their own well-being. Thus, theories about murders and suicides, not only accidents, emerge. And maybe there’s truth here and there in many explanations.

Overcoming the ignorance and/or questionable intentions of young people, tavern keepers, and townspeople generally, is tough. Although the police department claims there is a liaison officer at each of the colleges in town, some students have complained there have been no police-involved presentations to demonstrate to and educate student bodies sufficiently about the scope of drinking problems among young people here or much discussion on-campus about the best solutions. For his part, though, former UW-L head wrestling coach Tim Fader said, “UW-L does a huge amount of education about alcoholic alternatives – like Rectoberfest and Planet Rec and other events. Drinking doesn’t fit with what we do as a wrestling team.” He added, “Different people handle alcohol in different ways.” A fit wrestler with little body fat, who is not used to drinking huge amounts of alcohol, like Jared Dion, would have gotten drunk fast, and his .27 blood-alcohol level would have caused severe loss of reflex-ability and orientation, according to John Steers. If Dion didn’t eat much before he went drinking that night, he would have been in even worse shape with the alcohol. Some people can handle more alcohol than others; and yet, alcohol does not go easy on anyone. How does a police officer know, as in the case of underage Nathan Kapfer, that a .077 percent breath test isn’t any more dangerous for him than a .08 percent result, which would have prevented him from driving legally a few years later, if he’d been driving? Maybe four citations that night would have been a red flag to police to do something more than give him more citations.

Former La Crosse County Circuit Court Judge John Perlich summed up the way some influential elements in La Crosse feel, “We fought a war on drugs, but have never fought a war on alcohol.” Not since Prohibition at least, and that, apparently, was too extreme a solution. The post-1920s reaction has proved that. But something new and much more effective must be done. The breweries in this community helped build La Crosse, but they do damage to some people, too. As do the late-night drink specials downtown, when hard-liquor sells for a song.

To make matters worse at UW-L -- which has lost three of its students to drinking and the rivers here since 1997 – it draws students who love to drink and party, due to the school’s and city’s reputation. Mary Torstveit, then a UW-La Crosse Assistant Director of Prevention Services, said: “The students told me they hear [UW-La Crosse] is a great party school. It’s second only to [UW-]Madison. It’s known for big parties and house parties... When I asked them about La Crosse, they said La Crosse is also known as a big party town. Students said they chose La Crosse because of the celebrations like Oktoberfest. La Crosse is home to the world’s biggest six-pack [giant, decorated, outdoor brewing vats]. They said the whole town centers around drinking.” La Crosse depends a great deal on its college communities, and all authorities here should make much greater efforts to teach young people the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Kondracki said legal, social, and infrastructural changes are all called for. New laws need enacting, he said, and new equipment and techniques need implementing. Maybe even the famed Third Street bar district will have to be eliminated, and bars opened much father from the river here. (It was once claimed by a culture-watch organization that Third Street had has more bars on it than any other street in the world.)

As for the particular disorientation heavy drinking causes, police say officers find drunk men who end up in the wrong home and get beat up as a result, or are seen walking the streets with no idea where home is; even some drunk young women have been found totally disoriented. Related to this problem was the easy access for all east-west downtown streets to the river during the years of most of these alcohol-related drownings. I drove on Front Street (one block off the river) from La Crosse Street (near police HQ) to Jackson Street (leading to Isle La Plume) in April 2004 and saw only one or two problematic accesses on foot to the river of about 12 lanes of transgress from those east-west streets. Ten walking routes were wide-open enough to cause distress to any parent of local college-aged sons and daughters. However, when I spoke with La Crosse County Dive and Rescue diver Mark Smith in early 2017, some formerly open walk-routes have been cluttered recently due to new construction, e.g., by the Weber Performing Arts Center on King St., next door to Logistics Health, Inc., on the river bank, owned by Don Weber (and WPAC is named for him), which has built up that lengthy river-parallel stretch. Weber also recently bought and remodeled the former Funke Candy Factory building into the Charmant Hotel, and there’s more surveillance of that area a block from the Mississippi River by Riverside Park than formerly. Many new police observation cameras have been installed downtown too, but none have apparently been added along the shore, though I’d guess the Charmant and LHI have some.
As for the idea of a possible serial killer, Ed Kondracki -- an intelligent, sensitive, even dashing figure, who cut his teeth in Milwaukee, eventually becoming the No. 3 man in its police department -- said rumors have spread widely since 1997 that include the hypothesis of a rogue cop. But he said matter-of-factly: “I’m convinced that there is someone behind deaths of these types. He goes by the name of alcohol-abuse, he goes by the name of depression, and he goes by the name of substance-abuse.” Former UW-La Crosse university relations director Cary Heyer, though, believes lumping these river deaths too much together is problematic for solutions. He counsels that each river death needs to be “treated separately”, based on individual criteria in each case. That makes a certain amount of sense, if individuals are to be treated positively, before they otherwise come to an impasse they feel only drinking, other drugs, and/or the rivers here, may resolve. As the late comedian Joan Rivers once said, regarding the suicide of her husband and her feelings afterward: “Dark moods can pass over time.” People helping people, sometimes through therapy, can save many lives. In the end, it’s important for everyone to remember that, generally, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

What Else It Will Take

Changing the whole alcohol-dependent culture in this area is a huge and diverse problem that needs multi-faceted solutions. On the opposite side of the state, Milwaukee used to claim to be the beer capital of the world, with all the breweries it used to support. And La Crosse hasn’t been far behind. The G. Heileman Brewing Company -- which used to be headquartered here and which used to brew Heileman’s Old Style and Special Export beers, and which became Stroh Brewery -- and today, the brewery for La Crosse and City Lagers, have employed many workers more than a century. Several other breweries used to do so here, too. In addition, the summer and fall festivals La Crosse has been famous for, including Riverfest, Jazzfest, and biggest of all, Oktoberfest, sell torrents of beer every year, as do similar festivals around the nation and world. All three of the local festival areas are near the riverfront; Charles Blatz was here celebrating Oktoberfest as was Christopher Melancon, when they drowned.

Bar tenders and owners, not to mention dishwashers and wait-people, and the makers and distributors of alcoholic products generally, earn significant incomes in the bars and restaurants around this town. America generally is a land of bars and restaurants, it seems. The concept of designated drivers, which swept the nation in the 1980s and 1990s, is still alive here. But what happens to those people who don’t rely on designated drivers, and/or who are walking home, often after becoming separated from family and friends? The Safe Ride Bus that runs between UW-L and the downtown district at night should be expanded perhaps, in terms of times and places. Or maybe, if the Third Street Bar District isn’t to be eliminated, there should be a different age-limit for bars and events in the downtown area – perhaps 25. People have to be more insightful and focused, resist the “comforts” of alcohol, and watch the backs of their peers. Can’t bartenders cooperate with authorities more, and answer questions more clearly by stopping drinking themselves, stopping offering 2-4-1 and other closing-time drink deals, which John Satory says are deadly, and also by keeping an eye on whom people come in with, what they are about, and when (more often) it might be prudent to say, “Hey guy, you’re sober, why don’t you walk your friend to the Safe Ride Bus or to your car and make sure he/she gets home safely?” And why do some bartenders keep pouring more trouble for drinkers already in trouble?

Whether one feels there is a human killer/s on the loose here or believes alcoholic stupors cause these deaths more directly, it is certain college officials, health care educators, police and the courts, and public servants of all kinds, not to mention parents, family, and friends, need to be awake around a town like this – a town drinking much more than it should, one not vigilant enough to prevent not only over-drinking, but the unsavory effects that over-drinking helps bring on. And when will the witnesses who actually see “some things” happening in drownings and other fatal cases come forward more, to say what they have seen and know?

No one publicly recognized here for it has seen the work of a “serial killer” in these cases so far, except insofar as what alcohol and the rivers have done to these 11 young men’s bodies. And if a violent urban-deaths-explanation or two has grown up around these unfortunate incidents and the circumstances that have caused them, the two UW-La Crosse professors who responded to that legend with a 2004 paper resulting particularly from the drinking drowning of Jared Dion, one of their own, may have said it best. Betsy Morgan and Kim Vogt, in “Why We Are 99.9% Sure It Is Not a Serial Killer – a Data Based Explanation”, conclude: “We join you [family and friends of the drowned men] in your grief, but we urge you to use your critical thinking skills. For each of the questions you hear or ask, please try to think of the types of information you would need to know to help think through the various theories and hypotheses. We encourage you collectively to take action to prevent events like this from happening in the future. For example, what can you as an individual student [parent, other relative, or friend] do to prevent accidents and deaths that are alcohol related? How could the student body work together with the city of La Crosse to make the river’s edge and drinking downtown safer [such as the Safe Ride Bus, the River Watch Patrol, and elimination of late-night, hard-liquor specials]. Finally, we encourage you to make use of campus resources to assist you in the grieving process and in your education about alcohol and its consequences.”

La Crosse’s recent river death explanations contain elements of truth and untruth. But rumor-mills don’t often help the situation. Readers must make up their own minds where the most helpful truth resides in the objective situation this report attempts to describe. UW-L, Viterbo
University, and Western Technical College, it should be said, are three of the most progressive college campuses in this region in many respects. What is done proactively to protect women from harassment and assault, for instance, is generally laudable. And the instruction given in the health care sciences at all three schools is generally stellar. But the most threatening negative agent may still be lurking in this city along three rivers – that agent or culprit, as we now surely know, is, first in line, alcohol, and second, other human beings. They’re twin-culprits that must be dealt with effectively. Seventeen years of exceedingly bad luck and poor judgment around the subject and reality of alcoholic consumption does suggest this community has had its head in the sand about drinking and the deaths of many people here, especially our young people. This city that has lost 11 of its college-aged sons in related fashion since July 1997 should have said a while ago, enough is enough. Even then-Mayor Medinger (whose wife Dee is convinced there is a human killer involved), admits he’s 99.9% sure “there’s no such animal out there” as a serial killer -- except alcohol.

Mark Twain said, “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Young people should not be fatal statistics. They are our future; and if we all are to appreciate the glory that was Huck Finn’s creative life on a raft again, then we will need to do something very proactive about alcohol along our waterways. In that way, we will not always have to be living in a world “full of weeping”, in W.B. Yeats’s phrase. The over-consumption of alcohol is never productive in fact, what some ads, jokes, and pop culture may say. This reporter’s family lost a beloved family member who succumbed at least partly due to drinking too much. So have too many other families around the world and through all times to count. At least 11 families know this in recent La Crosse history; I hope many other readers do, too.

It may be wise for all of us, religious or not, to repent and change regarding these river deaths, for it’s good public policy, and as far as I can tell, there is a God somewhere. Also, the people of La Crosse want to get back to fully trusting a police department that’s generally proactive and progressive. It’s not pretty to see a police department reeling defensively from challenges to its very way of preventing and solving crimes, as it had to in 2004. My brother Dan, who was in charge of training for the La Crosse Police Department during the early years of this period, suggested I write this full story, and though it’s probably not as flattering of the La Crosse Police Department as some might like, it does outline and flesh out many truths that can’t easily be denied, including the very broad-based and real dangers of alcoholism in this country. And for keeping me aligned with this related truth-seeking journalistic mission, I thank all my family and friends – Dan (I hope you’re with me yet), Diane, Rocky, our mom Rose, and my son and his wife (Matt and Jessica), especially, plus a lot of great journalists who have inspired me over time. I hope it shows signs of promise that Chris Passe, a UW-La Crosse assistant wrestling coach, said about a candlelight vigil held the night before Jared Dion’s body was found: “The police chaplain was at the vigil. He helped us; he said it’s important to have faith and hope in this situation.” We all could use a lot more faith, hope, and yes, love, too -- authorities and public alike, especially since Ed Kondracki said in June 2009 that the next drowning of a college-aged intoxicated young person in La Crosse was not a matter of if, but when. (Two more since 2009 are included above.) Let’s hope whenever drownings like these occur, young people’s deaths will not be mysterious to the point of exasperation with authorities and each other. And let’s hope people, including young people, will enjoy the rivers here again the way Huck and Jim did a bit south of here. After all, Mark Twain once visited La Crosse, and termed it a “choice town” with nice architecture and design. It deserves a better fate than to be the routine locale of mysterious deaths of our young people, from one ugly cause or another.--Reported/written progressively by DvJM from 1997 on, including shorter reports by him published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Capitol Times newspapers; updated further subsequently and in early 2017 by DvJM.

Deaths -- Defeats -- Yet Reasons to Hope

My parents’ immediate family of nine -- seven children, Mom, and Dad -- had survived many tough ordeals without any of us dying; we were as positively resilient as any family. Dad was the most physically afflicted over time, though he worked as a meat-cutter 60 years. In 1987, at age 56, he had heart bypass surgery, and swore he’d never have another doctor saw his chest bone again. A few years later, he had surgery to eliminate a large colon tumor. He recovered from both surgeries. But he became diabetic and took insulin more than 15 years near the end of his life. He also suffered from gout, a very painful disease, periodically.

The ailment that marked the beginning of the end for Dad, though, was shingles, an itchy, painful rash that generally occurs in people who had chicken pox as children. A doctor who saw Dad for it in November 2014 put him on a steroid for pain relief. Mom told the doctor Dad never did well on steroids, but the doctor insisted, and soon Dad developed excessive fluid in his lungs, legs, and abdomen. Before long, he was undergoing dialysis four times a week. During that time, Mom and Dad celebrated their 65th Valentine Anniversary with our family, in the nursing home Dad was staying in. His heart was giving out, though, and to avoid his passing during a treatment, his dialysis was discontinued after four weeks. I phoned a nursing home nurse the night it was discontinued and she said Dad had been put on morphine. I asked her if dialysis could be resumed; she said once dialysis for a patient who’d needed it badly ended, death would soon occur.

I visited Dad the next day, a Saturday. He was fairly comatose due to the morphine, but I spoke to him a few minutes two different times that visit, and said some prayers softly. I didn’t know if Dad could hear me at all that day. He may have gotten upset with me a few times for
crying tears (generally tears of joy) over the years, but I didn’t want to cry that Saturday. I did tell him how much we all loved him, that I
was still saying my prayers, that the Badger men would play (and defeat) Ohio State in basketball the next day, that I was doing fine, and
that my Pennsylvania-residing son and his wife were doing fine too. At one point near the end of my talking there, Dad seemed to come out
a bit from his “semi-conscious” state, rose up a bit from his pillow, and said something like “Overwhelmed” or “Overwhelming”. I kissed
Dad on his right temple at the end of both my chats to him that day (and twice more two different times in his casket a few days’ later). Dad
passed next day, just before 7 AM, Sunday, March 8, 2015. It seemed fitting; he’d been raised Catholic, but hadn’t tended to his prayer life
much, as far as I knew, until his heart surgery in 1987. He gave up drinking and smoking with that surgery, and those various adjustments
helped bring my parents much closer together the next 28 years. Their praying together often helped greatly with many things, after 1987.

Dad had worked very hard for many years, had a great sense of humor, sang dirty limericks with the best of them, and believed in and loved
God and his family very much. Oh, the Badger men lost recently in the NCAA championship game versus Duke (April 2016), the first time
they’d been in that game since winning it all in 1941. Though I am a Badger alum but wasn’t an intercollegiate athlete there, I’ve gone on to
be a good writer and photographer; and I’m still positively proud to have worked for the Badger Athletic Department 4-1/2 years ca. 1970,
when Elroy “Crazy Legs” Hirsch came home to Madison to become one of our greatest athletic directors. Dad loved the Badgers, Packers,
Brewers, Bucks, Blugolds, Rangers, Red Raiders, and Eagles very much, even the Iowa Hawkeyes and Missouri Tigers too, my two other
university alma maters. Dad bet on games, but always wanted his favorite teams to win too. And he believed Pete Rose was getting an unfair
punishment over his sports gambling. Dad never believed Pete bet against the teams he worked for. Pete, the all-time hits leader in the MLB,
still is barred from the Baseball Hall of Fame. He and Dad would have gotten along fine, if they’d ever met. Maybe they will someday, along
with the rest of us -- in Heaven we hope.—Written ca. 2016 and polished in Feb. 2017 too, by DvJM.

Blood, Money, and History

“I sold my vacuum the other day. All it was doing was sitting around and collecting dust.”—Greg Gard.

US Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, winner of two Congressional Medals of Honor and at the time of his death in 1940 the most highly decorated
US Marine in history, wrote that war is a financial racket, helping a few big profit-takers and hurting everyday people, the latter paying the
profit-takers’ wages with their blood, sweat, tears, and too often their lives. Gen. Butler stated: “In World War [I] a mere handful garnered
the profits of the conflict. At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War. That many
admitted their huge blood gains in their income tax returns. How many other war millionaires falsified their tax returns no one knows.” Butler
continued: “How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it
meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine
gun bullets? How many of them parried a bayonet thrust of an enemy? How many of them were wounded or killed in battle?” From wars,
nations confiscate additional territory, if they’re victorious. This newly acquired territory soon is exploited by the few—the same few who’d
wrung dollars out of blood in the war. British WWI Prime Minister David Lloyd George said ca. 1916 that if the general citizenry knew what
was really going on in that war, they’d end it immediately. We live in a particularly revenge-driven world, with leaders directing troops and
home-fronts to sometimes insane states, mainly so the rich can get richer and the poor suffer. Maybe it’s always been that way; maybe not.

But America didn’t become imperialistic until a high-level Navy Department official gave the US fleet the go-ahead to brutally invade the
Philippines near the start of the Spanish-American War in 1898. That Navy official, Teddy Roosevelt, would soon be president, and would
win a Nobel Peace Prize in 1905 despite brokering a Russo-Japanese Peace Treaty that gave Korea to Japan mercilessly for 40 years. TR
went on to push hard for US entry into WWI in 1914; 1917 was the year of actual entry. Teddy would lose his youngest son, Quentin, in a
dogfight over France in 1918. The former president and Nobel Peace Laureate died five months later, of a broken heart. Perhaps he learned
the hard way that having bloodthirsty aims may result in the death of your dearest loved ones. (That seemed to be the most central criticism
of war in TV shows like M*A*S*H.) TR’s visage is one of four on Mount Rushmore; does it deserve to be?

Every time US troops come home from wars, we hail them as heroes, for laying their lives on the line. But there would be a whole lot less
laying of American lives on the line, if we’d not be the world’s “No. 1 cop” in a state of nearly constant warfare. Wars began cons early, but so
did peace-keeping efforts. Today it seems peace-keeping has become a forgotten art. Look how long the Holy Land has gone without a decent
peace treaty. The United Nations was founded to create and keep peace worldwide, not so US troops should go into battle regularly as top
“defender of world order”. As to US business people making big profits on US wars, ask them how they feel living and making money in a
Global Revenge Epoch; the headquarters of one such war industrialist is nearby; he may or may not have made up for his Iraq and Afghanistan
war shenanigans with large amounts of philanthropy more recently; you’ll need to check his record overall. And if you think radical Muslims
began the 20th and 21st centuries’ holocausts, review the origins of WWI, where Christian European powers came to incredibly violent blows
against each other, over an arch-duke's assassination by a deranged anarchist; or WWII, where a largely Christian Germany switched to the
Devil’s side and annihilated millions of innocent people, including countless children.
There have been thousands of mass murders in US history, and far too many wars. In 1923, British novelist D.H. Lawrence stated: “All the other stuff, the love, the democracy, the floundering into lust, is a sort of by-play. The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted.” I suggest if that's true, we’ve taught our killing lessons to many others who now oppose us, as have some bloodthirsty Brits too. Maybe we should all learn new lessons. There's nothing wrong with competing with others generally, if it doesn’t result in blood-lust. If I recall the New Testament well, Jesus came to promulgate a Law of Love and Peace, not the old Law of an Eye-for-an-Eye.

A play I wrote, “Bloody Math: An American Tragedy,” summarizes what Americans faced a generation later regarding Vietnam. It deals with the Gang of Four’s bombing of UW-Madison’s Sterling Hall in 1970. Sterling wasn’t demolished nor was the gang’s target, the Army.

**The Real Me Generation**

It was once said, rightly or wrongly, that young Americans who grew up during the 1960s and 1970s were members of the “Me Generation,” for the lack of genuine interest among many in military service and other human beings. Today’s young people might also be considered members of a Me Generation, if for no other reasons than the widespread use of selfie-photos and social media to spread the news about their latest activities (all activities these days are apparently “accomplishments”). Some politicians say college students now are studious and other-motivated, to win votes. But many people want to be a celebrity and/or make a lot of money, plus enjoy a good sex life, and it doesn’t make much difference if you’ve worked hard all your life and have many positive works to show for it and would like some positive recognition, or if you’re a fresh 23-year-old member of a newspaper’s Pulitzer-winning team; fame is fame, and the thought of it drives many people. Even St. Teresa of Calcutta was aware of spotlights; she knew how to milk events for all their publicity value, generally though in good causes -- for the poor, the dying, and her community of nuns.

Most people don’t mind being photographed with the famous. But the public today knows almost too much about even some newscasters’ lives – e.g., their spouses, kids, and birthdays -- because those newscasters keep putting that data out there. Neither major party presidential candidate really needed to win this election; both have a great deal of money, fame, and family. What concerns me, though, is many “little people” get forgotten by both parties. Each has their list of favorites among the poor and destitute; unfortunately, not every poor and destitute person is on their favorites list. When President Nixon wanted a law for single-payer, universal healthcare ca. 1970, Sen. Ted Kennedy opposed him because Nixon never had any good ideas, did he? Kennedy said later, when he was about to die without a universal healthcare system in place, that his biggest legislative regret was not teaming up with Nixon to enact that system 40 years before.

Though I’ve reported on many celebrities, I keep remembering everyday photo-subjects most, little Lucy in a London daycare reading in a nice light; little Demien, a top artist in the same daycare; a tiny girl escorted up a sidewalk by her tall, lean dad, holding hands walking together; a British dustman by his wagon in 1981, smoking at pre-dawn; an elderly farm woman with bamboo hat along the road south of Manila; a homeless woman sleeping along a busy Manhattan sidewalk; a little girl smiling quickly at my camera on a Seoul street corner one New Year’s Day, then vanishing; and tens of thousands of others too who were anonymous when I first reported on them. I’m proudest of and most grateful for my son and his wife, though; hopefully they’ll have children soon. And for sure, we’re thankful to those who have gone before us too. We’d all like to be positively famous and maybe we are or will be soon, for a very long time.—2016, by DvJM.

**What Is Brave Throughout Each Year?**

Only once in my life has my courage regarding the Vietnam War been questioned directly, but it was in 2016. My critic didn’t seem interested in my real background then, so I only said I stayed in college because I didn’t fully believe in that war. But also, I’m the oldest of seven kids and wanted to be first in our recent family-line to earn a college degree. Plus, my lottery number left me out of the draft, and I chose not to enlist. Why is America at war almost constantly? When I speak of all the legislators, business people, and pundits who push this nation into ill-conceived wars, but often who have never served in the military themselves nor have children who do, it makes for more-honest debate. I was a college student on-and-off many years, earning three degrees, and during and after, working many jobs. I had a breakdown in the early 1980s, defending and researching a then-unpopular story I was writing, which turned out to be a very important story I covered in big ways later. Filled with hospital-administered junk (the right medicine was in the future a bit) in spring 1982, I trudged to classes daily in a medicinally-induced fog/stupor. I’d eventually author five very accurate books inspired by that one controversial story and the interviews, photos, etc., relating to it, plus many others of the 120 or so books I’ve so far authored. Many generous sponsors have helped pay for the books I’ve personally authored; they are all self-published and were paid for on-time, and some have won awards. The initial keys to the five story-inspired books were two British journalists’ in 1950 Korea. They bravely covered the pivotal Battle of Inchon, and the US Marines who fought well there; they also honestly reported on UN atrocities just before then, at Pusan.

A play I wrote, “Bloody Math: An American Tragedy,” summarizes what Americans faced a generation later regarding Vietnam. It deals with the Gang of Four’s bombing of UW-Madison’s Sterling Hall in 1970. Sterling wasn’t demolished nor was the gang’s target, the Army.
Math Research Center much higher up in that building, but an innocent young physics researcher, Bob Fassnacht, was killed in basement damage. The Armstrong brothers and two friends should never have used lethal violence to protest that war, but my play also suggests why many Americans were discontent with our government’s war policies then. The Irish playwright Sean O’Casey, whom George Bernard Shaw called a “titan” for his “The Silver Tassie”, portrayed peace and war in surreally horrific ways in that experimental tragedy. The story is basic: A huge soccer star, winner of the Silver Tassie cup, goes off to World War I. He is blasted there, permanently crippled. When he returns home, no one wants to see or talk with him; he is an outcast, as if his crippling was his own moral and physical fault.

A courageous young man in my family served two tours in Afghanistan as an Army Special Ops Combat Medic. I tried talking him out of enlisting due to the dubiousness of our recent wars, but he had made up his mind he wanted to save lives in wartime as a combat medic, so I prayed for him and his wife at home, and stayed in as much contact as allowed, to ensure he was not only doing his job well, but also being careful not to endanger his own safety foolishly. He did well there. Today, he’s a superb university student and good husband to his wife. All the young men and women who fight our wars deserve a positive life after military service. And at Christmastime and throughout each year, we should remember why Jesus was born, died, and rose again. His keenest word was Peace, a joyful reality I hope my beloved dad too, who passed in March 2015, is feeling very much now.—2015-2017, by DvJM.

Honoring Our Military Veterans Via Impulse Control

Recently on the PBS News Hour, it was announced there had been no coverages by PBS, customary there, of faces and names of military veterans having died in the Afghan and Iraq Wars in the last 84 days (’84 was the year I graduated from Mizzou, where then PBS News Hour anchor Jim Lehrer also graduated), because there had been no American deaths in those wars during that time. Perhaps the peace movement is taking effect sufficiently around the world that even in those formerly treacherous places for our military, US troops are no longer the enemy – or maybe our troops have just been fairly lucky during that period. Either way, let’s hope there is more peace there (and here) rather than more war, for a long, long time.

I’ve watched local and national media coverages of America’s longest two wars, seeing the journalists and commentators praise our troops for their heroism, which our troops have shown generally, but at the same time I’ve wondered how long we can equate the sacrifices of our recent troops with those of WWII’s US troops, supposedly the “Greatest Generation”. There are more memorials for fallen troops in this nation, I’d guess, than memorials for any other national grouping. But are our national leaders at last saying enough is enough with wars, and bringing our troops home long enough to put together the longest peace not only in US history, but in world history? If we see “terrorists” behind every criminal action, will we be able to stop sending millions of our troops into harm’s way? And what of our leaders, who compromise the safety of not only our troops, but also our everyday citizens, by engaging US citizens in endless wars? Two thousand years ago, there lived a man who believed in spreading the ideas of Peace and Good Will toward others—Jesus was his name. Many people even believe he was God.

Jesus didn’t say an eye for an eye, like his ancestors did. He said instead we should love God with our whole being, and we should love our neighbors as ourselves. That doesn’t mean we should stop protecting ourselves and our loved ones; but it does mean we need to reconsider what makes a people and a nation great, not only at home, but around the world. If we want to continue to protect the best interests of our own off-spring, along with our personal best interests, American and Americans need to learn the lesson of impulse-control much better, so we don’t take things so personally. In other words, it’s time we find a way to navigate this world on behalf of peace, and move forward to achieve that peace in the best ways we know how – not via the old school method of an eye for an eye, but by doing our best work for better reasons, because we see positive values in our works and those of others, giving our lives worth and those of our offspring, too.

George Washington spoke of America needing to avoid “foreign entanglements” in his Farewell Address. Avoiding foreign entanglements doesn’t mean we should have nothing to do with the rest of the world; it means we should avoid constant deadly strains globally on our citizen-troops. The gist of our work overseas should be peace-loving, not war-making. The best way to honor our veterans isn’t by sending them off to wars constantly, but by making sure they have the educations they need to make our world better. And our world could stand present and future generations making not only this world but all worlds better via education and peaceful living. America and Americans need to be much better neighbors and friends to the rest of the world; too often we’ve been ugly ones.—ca.2016, by DvJM.
Harry Benson, Photojournalist

Recently, I caught the last 20 minutes of an interview by Charlie Rose of Harry Benson, the great Scots-American photojournalist. Rose had also interviewed Harry Benson in 2002, because Benson’s career has been more exemplary perhaps than that of any other U.S. magazine photographer’s. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, to a middle-class couple, Harry was inspired by the great British magazine, Picture Post, and the likes of Bert Hardy, its star photojournalist. Benson, like Hardy, left school in his early teens. In Hardy’s case, it was because he was the oldest of seven children and had to bolster the family’s income; in Benson’s, the Scottish education system was too “fickle”, and he knew he had to find a way out of that system soonest to be successful. After working for local papers, Benson got his big break assigned to travel with the Beatles on their first US tour in 1964. He covered that tour and other Beatles travel; his personal favorite and most recognizable photo is a pillow fight the Beatles had in a Paris hotel room.

Harry Benson married a wonderful lady early on, Gigi, and she like Sheila Hardy for Bert’s work, has been the personal archivist for the photos, where the big archives, etc., have begun collecting the photographers’ works. The Bensons have two daughters, Wendy Benson, an actress, and Tessa, who also works in Los Angeles like Wendy. Migrating to America and working for many years for Life magazine, Harry Benson photographed many of the top celebrities and news events of the last 50 years, including every US President since Dwight Eisenhower, and also was there when Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, at Martin Luther King’s funeral, and with the masked IRA in Northern Ireland. He’s also photographed nearly every very famous world leader during that time, including Sir Winston Churchill greeting the young men of Harrow, the Prime Minister’s old school. After Life closed, Benson has worked for People magazine with more than 100 People cover-photos to his credit. Twice named Magazine Photographer of the Year by the National Press Photographers Association via the Pictures of the Year International Contest at the University of Missouri Journalism School, many other top awards have come his way too, including from the Scottish Parliament and a Commander of the British Empire honor from Queen Elizabeth II.

In 2009, I edited the second volume of “Spirit of America”. In addition to other top photographers enlisted for SA2, I communicated often with the Bensons to obtain Harry’s photo of two wheelchair-bound veterans shaking hands in Vietnam -- one a former Vietcong, the other an American. It’s a touching photo that suggests what it takes to achieve peace in this world. Benson has himself authored several books, perhaps the most humanly compelling being “President and Mrs. Reagan: An American Love Story” and the massively impressive “Harry Benson: Fifty Years in Pictures", which features on the cover his photo of Muhammad Ali having some fun with the Beatles. If you’ve never heard of Mr. Benson before, you’ve likely seen many of his beautiful photos. You might want to read more about his work and life online or at a library for an adventure in great seeing.—Jan. 2017, by DvJM.

Photographing Presidents and Would-Be Presidents in La Crosse

La Crosse, WI, USA--On Oct. 10, 1887, Grover Cleveland paid what apparently was the first visit of a sitting US President to this city of 50,000 residents on the banks of the Mississippi, Black, and La Crosse Rivers. Since then, many have visited, and I’ve been fortunate enough to photograph America’s five most recent Presidents here and other Presidential candidates too. My work in this genre began Friday, Aug. 7, 1992, when Democratic Presidential then-hopeful Bill Clinton visited with Hillary Clinton and Al and Tipper Gore at the Clinton Street Bridge on the Black River here. My 4-year-old son, Matt, accompanied me. We made it into the press area officially, but had to forego close-ups; the candidate’s entourage was more than 90 minutes late and a German-American band played too loudly next to us to “quell” the crowd, so we moved back for my pictures. The best I could do with my doubler-lens-attachment was 100mm with my 35mm still-film camera, but I got three good shots at least. Ca. Nov. 1, I photographed President George H.W. Bush at La Crosse’s Airport. In addition to close-ups, I also took a very good photo of Air Force One taking off in the mist.

Apparently neither major Presidential candidate visited La Crosse in 1996, though I photographed Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole’s wife, Elizabeth, when she visited as American Red Cross President for western flood relief, ca.1996. In 2000, Matt and I attended the George W. Bush and Al Gore Presidential rallies, and took photos, including images of Al Gore and Joe Lieberman at La Crosse’s Riverside Park as they launched their post-convention river excursion phase of campaign on the Mark Twain Riverboat on Aug. 18. (I know Mr. Twain will forever be known for his writings about the Mississippi River, so politicians, writers, photographers, and actors want to capitalize on that whenever possible, but I’ll suggest here that one of Mr. Twain’s biggest secrets to success was that he kept his eye on the ball, “Main Street” and its bookstores/customers, USA, not only on the riverboats and river he learned to navigate as a young man.)

On May 7, 2004, Matt and I attended the George W. Bush rally at Copeland Field. We had to wait that day too, and Matt told me he had decided to walk home early, though he may be in one of my photos in the middle distance when W came close to me after speaking, and the President schmoozed a female fan. I also photographed W’s daughters later that year at La Crosse County Republican HQ. But I couldn’t get press clearance to photograph Democrat John Kerry; he visited our city in the middle of the night in an airport hangar and I didn’t want to risk sneaking in without some sort of permission. In 2008, I photographed both major Presidential nominees -- for six hours each at Barack Obama and John McCain events on Oct. 1 and Oct. 10, respectively. I’d photographed McCain on Feb. 15 that year too, plus surrogate Chelsea Clinton Feb. 12, Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee Feb. 14, and surrogate Michelle Obama Feb. 18. In 2012, neither major
Presidential candidate visited La Crosse officially, but I did photograph Presidential contenders Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich (with his wife, Callista), plus Vice President Joe Biden and Republican Vice Presidential nominee Paul Ryan. Then on July 2, 2015, President Obama spoke at UW-La Crosse and I photographed him from a press-riser. Many of my photos of him, including with White House Official Photographer Peter Souza, turned out well. The hall with huge US and Wisconsin flags aided my photos. A line of Democratic dignitaries faced my cameras too, including Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Congressman Ron Kind, and former Governor Jim Doyle.

In late March 2016, I photographed Hillary Clinton’s speech at Western Technical College and Donald Trump’s speech at the La Crosse Center that April 4th. The photos I took of Candidate Trump turned out especially well. He’d given his speech about 25 feet from me; afterwards, he came down to our partition and shook hands with the public plus signed autographs. He stopped about two feet from me for a couple minutes, signing autographs, and I took many very good photos of him close-up as well as several very good photos of him speaking earlier. He employed many positive, dramatic gestures and modes of speaking. I was at a distance from Mrs. Clinton during her speech, but as she left I gave a photo-book I’d authored to a security women to give to her, signed; she, her husband, and the Gores were in a photo I took in 1992 by the Clinton Street Bridge near close of that volume of “Spirit of America”.

When photographing Presidential Candidates, I’ve also photographed crowd members; security personnel and security dogs; button, pennant, Presidential crowd shot so far and was published on the cover of my photo-book “Human Character, Vol. 8: Obama in La Crosse”, ca. 2013. At John McCain’s Feb. 15, 2008 event; I photographed Steve too. And Laurie Reed, a former adult student of mine, took a photo showing me on a press-riser clad all in black, when I photographed Barack Obama for the online New York Times and for the Smithsonian and Wisconsin Historical Society Archives too. My photo of a little girl resting atop her dad’s shoulders wearing an Obama Baby sign is my favorite Presidential crowd shot so far and was published on the cover of my photo-book “Human Character, Vol. 8: Obama in La Crosse”, ca. 2013. Some of my best Presidential Campaign photos are included in city, state, and national archives, including in La Crosse, Madison, and Washington, D.C. Eight of my Presidential Campaign photos were included in the New York Times Dec. 2009 online feature “Documenting the Decade” (my 8 photos there were the most by a single photographer). My very best photos of Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee from 2008 were on-display from 2011-2012 in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Archives Center’s group-show, “Gift of the Artist”, curated by SI Archivist David Haberstich.—ca. 2014 & 2017, by DvJM.

Eight Hours of Nonstop Photographing New York City (Saturday, 4-9-11, 11AM-7PM)

In spring 1974, my first wife and I travelled to Europe for a month in the hopes of finding work and staying longer. We could find no work then, but did see quite a bit of Portugal, Spain, France, and England, and I took a few photos on a very inexpensive camera, photos my first ex kept after our divorce. Although I really wanted to live in London then, and did so later (1981), my curiosity was also piqued by our train stopovers in New York City, to take a cruise ship to and back from Europe at student-rates.

Thirty-seven years later, my brother Tom and his wife, Joy, who lived and worked in the Washington, DC area then, arranged for our daytrip to New York City, so I could decently photograph the Big Apple, a city I long had a love-hate relationship with, due in part to the indifference for several years of the New York Times toward my works, a newspaper I’ve done a bit better with in recent years. An attempt to visit that city the year before had fallen through, because I couldn’t find a friend living there to touch base with to begin a day-long adventure in that city. But by April 9, 2011, Tom, Joy, and I had lined up a meeting with a fellow Aquinas HS alumnus, Patricia Skemp Angelin, who had critiqued my best Irish play, and had been thinking to direct it in our hometown of La Crosse, WI. We were scheduled to meet her at a Starbucks Coffeeshop near Penn Station at 11 AM that day.

At 6 AM or so that Saturday, Tom, Joy, and I arrived at a commuter bus stop in the Washington area, and boarded our bus before sunrise heading to the Big Apple. I took a few photos along the way, including of a large billboard in Pennsylvania I believe, showing the image of Jim Thorpe, a great Native American hero and athlete; but I was saving my two cameras’ memory cards mainly for the City That Never Sleeps. Thankfully, the weather was superb, with mild cloud-cover and mainly sunshine. When we entered the famed metropolis, we saw the Empire State Building almost immediately, and I took a decent photo of the skyline with a natural sunburst effect from the still-climbing sun. I also photographed many people and storefronts immediately outside our bus’s window. I believe that’s when I photographed a black man seated with his head down at a bus stop, with giant-sized posters behind him.

I met Patricia at the Starbucks; Tom and Joy had gone to look for directions. Along the way, I’d photographed a large group of people crossing an intersection neatly; a self-portrait reflected doubly in a pub window; a man turning back on a street corner in the direction of a passing woman in front of me; and an Asian Indian man jaywalking towards me. At Starbucks I snapped pics through its window as Pat went over some things on her laptop computer with me. There was one group of seemingly happy protesters that passed by; plus people across the street walking by and waiting for buses in front of the Fashion Institute of Technology. Soon, Tom and Joy arrived. Pat showed them her website, and I snapped some pics of them. Pat teaches acting, directs plays, and writes about theatre, occasionally acting herself. We’d
become acquainted when Richard Dungar, an Aquinas Archivist and mutual friend, mentioned her. When I discovered she’d been the author of a book I’d browsed earlier, about the correspondence between New York drama critic George Jean Nathan (married to actress Julie Haydon, who later lived in the building I now live in, when she was a widow, Becker Plaza in La Crosse) and Irish playwright Sean O’Casey, I was pleased to be able to meet her. I long have admired O’Casey’s “Juno and the Paycock” Dublin tenement tragi-comedy and even wrote a sequel to it, “Song of Joy, or the Old Reliables”. With Colleen Hogan directing and acting in my play, the group I lead, the Mercury Matthews Players, successfully performed the pub scene from my play at Irishfest-La Crosse on Aug. 8, 2008; 14 days later, my troupe did a staged reading of the entire play as a community event, kicking off Aquinas Catholic Schools’ 80th anniversary year.

We four exited Starbucks and I snapped a photo of a woman on cell-phone wearing a Wisconsin jersey. Soon, Pat and we three from DC parted, right after she said they’d have to figure out a way for me to come back again to New York City. Tom, Joy, and I made our way towards Madison Square Garden. I photographed some intriguing people along the street, including two homeless people -- a lady sleeping in front of a building along the sidewalk, and a man drinking coffee and smoking by a manicure-pedicure business. Other stills included two women crossing intersections pulling their luggage; a group of people crossing by a Middle-Eastern man standing at corner, one of the people in front of a building along the sidewalk, and a young man walking by a business named Soho Living; people walking near the Universal News Café, and near a Victoria’s Secret shop; and a young man walking while he chatted on his phone wearing a white-windbreaker in front of The Café Duke, at 545 Broadway. I published the latter photo on the hardback front cover of “Spirit of America, Vol. 11: Everyday New Yorkers in BW”. In subsequent SA volumes about NYC, I also published other photos I took that day. In one SA volume, I published my photo of an Asian-American woman holding up a sign on a stick, advertising full-body massages. One word on that sign was “Relax”. The sign-lady was standing across the street from Willoughby’s Camera Store, a nationally known photo equipment dealer. In addition, I photographed a large chain-link fence covered, I believe, with “Tiles for America”, in honor of the victims and survivors of 9-11, framing my photo with a profile view of the African-American lady seated across the aisle from me. (The Pump House Regional Center for the Arts in La Crosse did a group-show created by many hundreds of local school children, called “Compassion Tiles”, and it may partly have been inspired by “Tiles for America”.) Off the bus and onto the streets again, Tom took a photo of the Canon Camera Building across Broadway. I took a photo of him taking his photo, with a large African-American man in dark stocking cap seated on corner, appearing to snooze. Maybe he was a security guard putting on a little pretense. I also photographed underneath a building’s scaffolding, a metal strip in sidewalk declaring subtly the Yankees had won the World MLB championship in 2000.

A couple years before I published my three black-and-white volumes of my New York City photos (SA11: “Everyday New Yorkers in BW”; SA12: “Manhattan Moments in a Day”; and SA13: “New York People & Streets, 4-9-11”), I’d published a color photo-book, Vol. 4 in my “Human Character” series. HC4’s subtitle is “Daylight in New York”. Almost all my color photos in HC4 were converted by me via computer to BW, along with many others from that day-trip, for SA11-13. The front cover photo for “Daylight in New York”, I took soon after Tom, Joy, and I got off that first in-city tour bus. We’d walked from it to St. Paul’s Chapel, or the Little Chapel That Stood, because it’s located at Ground Zero but escaped physical damages on 9-11. That chapel served as a place of solace and sanctuary for survivors and people remembering the deceased from 9-11, and still does. I took a lot of photos in and around that chapel. But my front cover photo for HC4 is a simple-seeming still – a young boy lighting a remembrance candle with his father’s guidance. It was daylight then, so there are few conventionally dramatic effects. But off to the right in my best photo of them is an area called Sanctuary, with a modest-sized cross, and some words and photos relating to 9-11. Since then, I’ve hoped someday, when I’ve passed, my son, his wife, and their children, and their children’s children, etc., will light candles for me and others loved who have passed.

We took photos outside the chapel as well, of the areas being rebuilt at Ground Zero, and of many fascinating people walking alongside that area, near a large concrete building also physically untouched by the destruction. One beautiful, thin Asian-American woman flew along so quickly, her hair became caught in the breeze; a strikingly good photo. Next, I photographed two or three different groups of people looking for locations along the street, and a young man with a young woman wearing a shirt saying, “I Love (heart picture not word for Love) NY”. And I photographed a young couple sitting alone under a big Trinity tent, with the words “good for the world” on it. We were at the New York Stock Exchange entryway too, didn’t go in, but took pictures there, nonetheless; and I remember also photographing a red-haired young
woman talking on her cell-phone as she walked nearby; a black man hawking materials and negotiating with a buyer; and an two different, but both beautiful, Asian-American women walking near us. A little farther and we came to the big bronze statue of the Merrill Lynch Bull for pictures there too. There was a person dressed as Sponge-Bob Square-pants entertaining tourists. Before long, we were at Battery Park, where cruise boats depart to tour the Statue of Liberty area, which can be seen on a small island in the harbor. I didn’t have a long lens to get good close-ups of Lady Liberty, but I did take at least one or two photos of her I like, one showing her modestly impressive in the background as the launch Sam Holmes in profile comes into view.

There was a man selling antique posters; street artists sketching tourists; military personnel with their partners; three figures dressed to look like Lady Liberty; some Japanese tourists taking photos; and NYC dwellers, seeking a place of refuge, perhaps being homeless or at least expected to while away their days in-between returning to the places where they slept at night. The World Orb sculpture, battered from 9-11, stood near the entrance to Battery Park, where the costumed-Lady Liberty performers worked. And a guard station was there too, in front of which I photographed a petite Asian-American mom with toddler in stroller, taking photos herself. The security staff kept a clear eye on me and others. When I turned from that view, I looked across the street to New York’s National Museum of the America Indian -- a branch museum of the Smithsonian’s two related museum/cultural resource centers in the Washington, D.C. area. Some big buses rolled by too, including two white ones with the name Bloom on them. Another bus had the words Coach USA on it. Bicyclists and walkers, including a young African-American woman eating an ice cream cone, occupied my lens a while.

From Battery Park, we boarded another in-city tour bus, which made a lengthy circuit, mainly heading along 1st Avenue and Houston Street I believe. When we’d gone a fair distance from the park, we saw a bridge, and then a ways further east, another bridge, to photograph. I didn’t realize until ca. July 24, 2014, I’d actually taken a photo under one elevated “connecting ramp” of some sort, showing the two bridges crossing the water. I’d long wanted to photograph the Brooklyn Bridge, which I just learned was one of the two bridges in my two-in-one photo; the other was the Manhattan Bridge. Under the ramp were panoramic views of the shore with protective railing, and the East River-scape and the urban landscape (Brooklyn) across the water. A tour bus came alongside us, and it would have made for only a bad photo, overly gray and without much contrast, except when you look closely at that photo, you’ll see a young boy in a Yankee cap, sheepishly looking my way under the upper rail of his bus with no roof. I felt a bit sorry for him, because it didn’t seem he was much enjoying his ride. I also took a photo of the harbor pier, showing a big dark yacht with the name Peking on it. And I snapped a shot of some people approaching a Seaport Hotdogs stand. A mom with her daughter riding on her shoulders was approaching that stand too. There were also skateboarders and joggers, and parents walking children in strollers by the shore. It was busy-enough there, considering it seemed a bit out-of-the-way due to the overhead ramp.

As we moved forward, on our right (or the southeast side I believe) we came into an Asian-American area and perhaps a Jewish or Middle Eastern section too; there were ad-boards on buildings with Chinese and, if memory serves, Korean lettering too. A big street sign said Hester Street. A little ways up, on either 1st Avenue or Houston Street I believe, was a business selling live lobsters, and then a performance space building, and then some graffiti on a building about five-stories high. One name in that graffiti was Neck Face. To the left of our bus, looking northwest, we passed many shops, laundries, cultural associations, and restaurants, of various ethnic groups, as well as NYU’s high-rise dentistry center and Beth Israel Memorial Hospital. We also saw the Chrysler Building from a distance, and then drove right past the United Nations Headquarters Building, the Ron Brown US UN Mission Building, and the Trump World Tower, with plenty of reflecting-panel/windows in its steeply ascending veneer. And we passed some side-streets with foot and pedestrian traffic.

As our bus passed some buildings with traditional American and Spanish style windows, I took a couple photos of them, which look dramatic in BW. In that vicinity, there was also a low-rise apartment building into which an elderly man was wheel-chairing an elderly woman maybe his wife. We moved slowly past the Marriott Hotel East Side, in front of which a man with video-camera was recording us. As we passed intersections here and there, with cars and pedestrians, there were tricycle taxis and bikes as well. One intersection revealed a young woman being tugged by a large dog as they crossed a street in profile near a corner building with the name Armstrong large on it. Another intersection even presented a canyon-like view of some medium high-rise buildings, including Sachs Fifth Avenue. Street artists were located in many places in lower Manhattan, sketching portraits of paying customers. And there was a department store with a large Harry Potter window-display, in which the lead-character points at passersby with a small wand looking like a dagger, with large words above, saying “Be Outrageous. Be Extraordinary!” as a girl about 13 in dark leather jacket wearing a white knit cap, strode by. This was near 30 Rockefeller Plaza, home of NBC-TV, Radio City Music Hall, and General Electric. Time-Life used to be headquartered there too.

Near 30 Rockefeller Plaza, I took a photo of the front of The Russian Tea Room, and perhaps the base of NBC Headquarters too. I also took photos of a place called “Colony”, and the front of the Eugene O’Neill Theatre where “The Book of Mormon” was playing. Across the street from that was the Ambassador Theatre, where Christie Brinkley was starring in “Chicago”. In that gareas as well, two nicely dressed women were walking immediately behind two nicely-dressed men, with one of the women mimicking taking a photo of the men as I photographed the four of them by a parking ramp. Speaking of well-dressed women, as we rounded one corner, I photographed two very well-dressed,
middle-aged women with nicely-attired male escorts. One of the women wore a gorgeous mink. Big plastic bags of garbage were on the sidewalk just behind her. Around a corner we exited the bus as I snapped more photos, and then I photographed a blonde woman feeding a vanilla ice cream cone to a man in a spiffy fedora hat by a street vendor’s stand advertising “Soft-Serve”.

Soon, we were walking towards Times Square, passing by the Circle in the Square Theatre, where the play “Lombardi” was showing; a black man resembling former Green Bay Packer Leroy Butler walked by us with a young woman who was likely his girlfriend. We also passed the pub Emmett Lunney’s with some lens-flare in my photo. Nearby, I took two photos of a man and young woman walking towards me; the young woman kept her head down; perhaps that couple was meeting secretly and the young woman didn’t want to be identifiable in my photos. Also, I photographed a street artist sketching a young couple; and construction workers on scaffoldings inside and outside the first floor of a building. By the New York Athletic Club, I photographed a silver-haired, handsome, elderly man who looked familiar; he was with a young Hispanic-looking woman, and they seemed to be a couple, for now at least.

Soon, we entered a store Tom and Joy had been aiming for along the way – the big M&M Store, replete with as many intriguing figures and boxes filled with M&M candies as you can imagine. Birthday kids were entering with their parents, young women without kids, and men with girlfriends. A young mom held some balloons by the door, marked with the words Geoffrey’s Birthday on them. Tom and Joy wanted a large, plastic Statue of Liberty figure filled with those candies I believe for their grandson, Sebastian. Since my own son’s main initials are MM and he doesn’t much like candy, I took as many good photos as possible there. Outside, a person dressed as Sesame Street’s Elmo chatted with teens and children passing by, holding out a big, fluffy stocking for donations. I read recently the Sesame Street street-entertainers of NYC are usually played by new immigrants, looking for enough money to feed their families.

Somewhere along the way, apparently while we’d still been on our second in-city bus, I’d photographed a woman with an ice cream cone by a street sign saying Bleecker Street. Robert Frank, the photographer-author of the trend-setting 1950s monograph, “The Americans”, lives on Bleecker Street. I’d tried to arrange a time to interview and photograph the generally reclusive giant, but couldn’t arrange it. Soon, Tom, Joy, and I had stopped to eat at Sbarro Pizza. I’d accidentally moved the auto-focus button on my 35mm DSLR to manual-focus, and whenever I do that, I take a few out-of-focus shots before I realize what’s happened and can adjust my camera. This time I’d taken at least three dozen of them, including in the pizza shop. (I seem to recall using Sbarro’s public restroom, a commodity hard to find in Manhattan generally. When we’d first arrived in the Big Apple six hours earlier, while waiting for Pat to arrive at Starbucks, I’d photographed many people standing in line to use the restroom there, including a nervous little girl and her mom. The door-message said “Occupied”.)

At Times Square, there was a lot going on – an African-American photographer was trying to flag down people to take their photo and probably sell them copies; a neon sign said, “Step Inside for Your 15 Seconds of Fame”; a young woman with her mate (an apparent transvestite) strode by; play ad-boards signaled productions like “Mama, Mist!”; “The Phantom”; “Harry Potter”; and “Chicago”. I also photographed the tower where the New Year’s Ball is dropped annually, and Tom & Joy posing briefly there too; and I took at least four photos of an Hispanic wedding party posing for photos – two from the front; one from the side-rear as they leaped for joy; and one directly behind them, attached to the ground.

As we headed to our bus stop corner for the jaunt back to Washington, D.C., Tom and Joy held hands and walked slightly ahead of me, and I photographed them then too. We passed the theatre where the Beatles Revival Band, “Rain”, was playing, and I photographed its front. The Barrymore Theatre was almost directly across the street; I snapped two shots of it as well. I also recall that while riding one of the two in-city buses we took, I’d photographed a huge, neon American Flag. It seemed NYC’s comment on the American Dream. Near the Hotel Pennsylvania, I photographed a black man wearing gold clothes with skin painted gold too, performing for money. I’d not tipped any street entertainers we’d seen, and this man rang a very loud bell and smiled broadly when I did.

Soon, we were at the corner where our commuter bus would pick our group up, en route back to D.C. I used my small point-and-shoot Canon to snap candid photos of people going by, and there were many of them. A man or woman wearing an Arab burka, walked by a telephone booth labeled Titan. A man and two women walked by in a three-on-a-string lineup, walking two little white dogs. A tall street photographer stood on the corner-curb, taking shots of street and sidewalk traffic. Many other people crossed at that intersection too -- breezing by were an attractive Korean-looking young woman; and then a well-dressed, middle-aged, Korean-looking woman. A man wearing a cowboy hat and Marine insignia waited on his bike for the light to change. Two middle-aged men walked close to one another, whispering, in the intersection. A middle-aged man looking like Woody Guthrie carried his guitar in case, looking frustrated or haunted. A middle-aged man looking like Groucho Marx in hat with suitcase smoked a cigarette crossing to our corner from Fresh & Co.

Among our group apparently was a young couple, a man and his Asian-American girlfriend. She walked around in the general area munching a large, soft pretzel, and moving her carrying case once or twice in line. A large African-American man chatted with Joy and with some other
people too, as an African-American young man wearing a Yankees cap chatted on his cell-phone nearby. I also happened to accidentally point my camera down at the sidewalk an instant or two, and one shot shows the modish, black high heels a young woman was wearing; another shows a young woman carrying a big white designer’s bag with lettering on it. Also at that corner, I photographed two young men waiting on the curb as a bus painted huge with the words “Jersey Boys” passed by. And a bus painted “Break with the Masses” also made its way into my lens. At one point, I held my little camera above my head and shot down the side-street into the mass of humanity created now by the people taking our bus with us back to D.C.

As we boarded, young men banged on a pub window, jumping up towards that window. My shots of them are out-of-focus, but do show that action. We’d taken two within-city tour buses that day about one hour each; the remaining six hours, we were on-foot. All the way along I was snapping photos, rarely looking through my cameras’ viewfinder (Pentax DSLR K110D) or LCD (Canon Power Shot A3000 IS). I’ve long taken photos knowing approximately what each lens will do for my photos, mainly snapping them from my side, my front-waist, or above my head. During that 8-hour stretch (11 AM to 7 PM), I took about 1,200 in-focus photos. Later, I’d need to straighten, sharpen, and crop some images in my computer, but there are a very large number from among those 1,200 that are good images, edited.

As our bus headed towards the tunnel to New Jersey, I took a couple shots of the urban skyline at dusk. One I published on the back-cover of “Spirit of America, Vol. 13: New York People & Streets, 4-9-11”; it didn’t turn out badly, with buses moving towards our bus in the foreground and the Empire State Building standing proudly in the middle distance, among the buildings of New York. I also photographed a billboard whose words “The Kennedys” are out-of-focus. The street heading to the tunnel included some large and small churches. I said a prayer, and we entered the tunnel to New Jersey and beyond, reasonably peacefully.—ca.2011 and 2017, by DvJM.

Changes Needed to Fund Benefits

The U.S. national debt is many trillions of dollars, and it doesn’t take an accounting expert to know something has to give if the people who need government benefits most are to continue to receive at least the basic necessities of life. Republicans are often painted as villains for wanting to slice benefits most. But in fact, when the biggest entitlement, Social Security, first became law under President Franklin Roosevelt in 1935, the percentage of Republicans in Congress who voted for passage was greater than the percentage of Democrats who did same. But it’s true that most of the public criticism these days from legislators regarding entitlements does come from Republicans. Even venerable House Speaker Paul Ryan R-Wis., has long pushed for entitlement reform.

There is waste and fraud in the U.S. entitlements system, which includes Medicare, Medicaid and food stamps, among others, but with Social Security, there are many people who have earned coverage under longtime federal rules by paying into the system most of their lives. Still, the elderly who own very expensive homes or have huge bank accounts shouldn’t receive Social Security payments — not until they spend down substantial assets. On the other hand, the elderly poor living on very slim Social Security benefits should be allowed to work without public or private penalties, if they can and want to work. And more leeway should be made for disabled people who can work without extraordinary costs to employers.

If people living on entitlements have to see their Social Security checks reduced in order to reduce the national debt, other non-entitlement federal items, including the Department of Defense, should be reduced as well. Many signs indicate that’s the way federal budgeting will go in future. All “charity” — government funded or privately raised — begins at home, and Americans need to take better care of one another. Then, perhaps, when we contribute charitably abroad, we won’t be robbing Peter to pay Paul, but instead giving resources resulting from a resilient, restored U.S. economy. After all, if life isn’t always fair, it can be more fair.—An edited version of this essay by DvJM was published on June 7, 2016 in the La Crosse Tribune.

Bronson Koenig: Blugold and Badger Basketball Star and Native American Role Model

Bronson Koenig, currently UW-Madison’s star senior point guard and top scorer, graduated from Aquinas High School in 2013; I graduated from Aquinas in 1968. If Bronson graduates from UW-Madison, we’ll be fellow Badger grads too, me from UW in May 1973. Bronson is the product of a bi-racial marriage, between Ethel Funmaker and Paul Koenig, Ethel being full-blooded Ho-Chunk and Paul mainly German-American. The couple is divorced but both are prime backers of their son’s life and career. Born and raised in La Crosse, WI, in recent years Bronson has become a national role model for Native American youths, because there have been very few top Native American basketball players ever. The legendary Jim Thorpe was very good at basketball, but didn’t focus on it as much as on other sports.
After leading La Crosse’s Aquinas High School to two state boys’ basketball titles in his four years there, Bronson Koenig has led UW-Madison’s men’s team to two Final Four appearances so far, and is working on helping them win Big 10 and national titles this season and postseason, 2016-2017. When starting point guard Traevon Jackson went down with a serious injury early in Bronson’s sophomore year, Koenig took over as starting point guard and has been starting there since. He is especially known for his nifty passes to teammates for scores, good defense and rebounding, and especially for making clutch shots at or near the end of games. His dad, Paul, a former basketball star himself, taught his son from an early age how to shoot the ball. Beginning with two-handed set shots when he was small, Bronson transitioned smoothly at age 12 to a one-handed jump shot, etc. His dad emphasized that shooting three-pointers in particular (and Bronson is on the brink of breaking the UW career record for 3’s) is a full-body motion, requiring three actions: Set. Square. Shoot. Paul learned how to shoot from watching pro stars Pistol Pete Maravich, Walt Frazier, and Oscar Robertson. UW Head Coach Greg Gard praises Paul’s son’s shot, saying:

“Underneath, before I knew him, he was already a very good player. But it’s another thing to become a national title contender and make the Final Four two years in a row. In a season like this, Paul is a key to making it happen.”—2017 UW recruit Cade Green, from Austin (TX), a new Badger wide receiver.

Bronson Koenig is opposed to using Indian names as mascots, and is particularly against the Washington Redskins team name. Though he has hit many game-winning shots for UW-Madison, after hitting the game winner against Xavier University in the 2016 NCAA Tournament, sending UW to the Sweet 16, Koenig said, "That was for all my natives." In an interview with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Koenig stated, "With the mascots and all that stuff I think people think it's OK to make fun of us...I feel like sometimes we are the lowest of the low among the minorities...and when a Native American kid sees that growing up and sees disrespect, it lowers their self-esteem and puts them in a lower place in society." But if you think BK doesn’t have a sense of humor, after UW beat Rutgers in overtime at New York’s Madison Square Garden Jan. 28, 2017 he said, “Nobody could really throw it in the ocean today for most of the game,” much less the tiny area of a basketball basket. Neither team scored much during regulation. But Badger scoring picked up greatly in overtime.

Bronson Koenig has a lot to live and play basketball for. Some observers say he might be drafted by an NBA team, then have to play semi-pro ball a while. I’d say if he continues playing very well this season and postseason for UW, he not only will be drafted by an NBA team, but he’ll likely become a mainstay for an NBA team soon-enough, because not only is Bronson Koenig a very competitive and talented basketball player, but he is also a true leader of young men on the teams he plays for and with -- a leader who is doing something very few Native Americans have ever done: playing basketball and living life in widely and highly esteemed ways.—Jan.-Feb. 2017, by DvJM.

**Sports Bring People Together**

“Wisconsin is a really welcoming place,” [Cade] Green said. “When people get here, they aren’t from Florida or New York or Wisconsin. When they get here they are all University of Wisconsin kids. They are all Badgers, and that’s what brings them together. There’s no separation; everything is one tight-knit group.”—2017 UW recruit Cade Green, from Austin (TX), a new Badger wide receiver.

Former Green Bay Packers great LeRoy Butler recently said sports are meant to bring us together positively. I tend to agree with Mr. Butler, the inventor of the “Lambeau Leap.” Sports can aid people in becoming ethical individuals and forming communities, preparing many for life’s ordeals and triumphs. The Olympics is a key example of sports uniting people for peaceful reasons. It hasn’t gone unnoticed, though, that athletics can occasionally lead to discord, too, as the terrorist murders during the 1972 Munich Olympics showed. But in addition to the traditional Olympics generally uniting its participants and fans, the Paralympics and Special Olympics can inspire us, too. Mikey Brannigan of Long Island, N.Y., was once an underdog in the Paralympic running events. He has autism, but he’s persevered, improved and recently smashed the four-minute mile mark; he won the Paralympic gold medal in Rio de Janeiro this year in the 1,500 meter with a time close to the winner of the Olympics 1,500 meters in August.

Additionally, Aquinas High School alum and UW-Madison basketball star Bronson Koenig recently promoted empathy toward Native American perspectives regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline’s cutting through ancestral lands, when he and brother Miles joined the protest against it in North Dakota. Bronson also spent some time there teaching basketball to Native American youths. There need to be better routes for pipelines, if they’re to be safely dug, built and maintained. At UW-Madison, this writer worked as a student manager, then as a student
trainer, for the football team. UW-Madison head coach John Coatta was in his last year there in 1969, my first with the team. John had been very successful as a UW-Madison quarterback, but as head coach his teams lost all their games his first two seasons and won only three in 1969. But we did beat the three “I” schools that year — Indiana, Iowa and Illinois. The Wisconsin Idea has a lot to do with how well UW-Madison student-athletes perform on and off the field, and why the concept of team is so crucial there these days, an idea suggested by Wisconsin Gov. Robert M. “Fighting Bob” La Follette Sr. more than a century ago.

Golfer Arnold Palmer, who recently passed away, knew family and fans help, too. Many of us were proud members of “Arnie’s Army.” Mr. Palmer summed up his philosophy as athlete, businessman and human being: “Concentration comes out of a combination of confidence and hunger.” Thus, his seven major championships, his Presidential Medal of Freedom, and his Congressional Gold Medal. And if you read about the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children and the Winnie Palmer Hospital for Women and Babies, you’ll learn how one’s money can be compassionately, wisely donated.

Former Packers coach Vince Lombardi, whose name has adorned every Super Bowl trophy for more than 40 years, said: “The dictionary is the only place that success comes before work. Work is the key to success, and hard work can help you accomplish anything.” LeRoy Butler is accurate: sports can truly bring us together, to see the value in work with and for those we love. When meeting challenges becomes fun and people love what they do, competitors and fans will be victorious when and how they most need to be. That idea is what should unite all who love God, sports and human life generally. —This essay by DvJM was published in the La Crosse Tribune on Oct. 4, 2016 with the title above, but without the lead-quote.

Good Friendships

This essay was originally going to be about the Milwaukee Braves Henry Aaron, Eddie Mathews, and Warren Spahn, and especially about the first two men, though all three played brilliantly for the Braves in 1957 when Milwaukee won its only-so-far World Series Title; and Mathews was manager of the Atlanta Braves when Aaron broke Babe Ruth’s home-run record. Aaron and Mathews were close friends, even when the home-run king faced racial insults and death threats, and their friendship should be written about more fully. However, I decided to write about friendships more variously, though most of my own friends couldn’t be mentioned by name here; they’re likely mentioned elsewhere by me. The friendships we all had/have in school are almost always special; in South Korea to have graduated high school with someone means you’ve bonded for life. Something similar applies in America, though some classes are closer than others. In grade school, in addition to my immediate family (always my best friends), I was very close to my St. James basketball teammates, especially Mike Dawson, the Wittenberg cousins, Ed Koelbl, and Chuck Lindner, because we won the City Catholic Title in 8th Grade when there were many Catholic grade schools in La Crosse. Tom Rathburn was our coach. At Aquinas High School, I was closest to Tom Elsen and Greg Kloss. Tom died of cancer in the early 1990s. He’d moved away from La Crosse after graduation, and I wish we’d remained better friends then, but Greg and I did visit Tom together, a few months before he passed.

At UW-Madison, I was dorm social chairman, friendly with many young men and women. I also worked for the varsity football team. Charlie Freiberg lived in the same dorm, and he and his wife, Chris, have been friends of mine ever since. Werner Engel and Brant Moore were two of my roommates. We’ll always be Badgers at heart. I don’t really stay in touch with friends from University of Iowa, but Mark Lucarelli and David (Cohen) Marc were my best friends there; I’ve since communicated with Emeritus Prof. John Raeburn twice, who taught me Popular Culture. At Mizzou, I roomed with Dan Balaban and Cal Lawrence. For decades, I’ve also been friends with the Hardy and Whale Families of Britain. I still stay in contact with Daryl Moen, my Wisconsin-born J-School advisor. But my best friend from Mizzou is David W. Johns, a computer programmer and landlord for many rental houses in the Kansas City area. I helped obtain a job at Yonhap News Agency in Seoul for DWJ, when I worked there in the mid-1980s. We went through trying times; South Korea was in a state of turmoil (it had not yet had a democratically elected president), but we’ve remained friends, as have Yonhap man Yi Do-Sun and me.

Back in La Crosse, the people who have been my adult writing and photo students, and others who have contributed to the anthologies I’ve directed-edited, mean a lot to me. I still stay in touch with some of them, like Msgr. Bernard McGarty and sister, Ellen McGarty Flynn; Charlie and Christine Freiberg; Steve Kiedrowski and Julie Klein; John and Dee Medinger; Mark and Jean Smith; Roger A. and Charlotte Grant; and Dale Barclay. Also, I converse with friends Roger L. Chase and Brian; Richard, John, and Ann Zeisler; Linda Raisbeck; Charles Jonas; Dave Maly; La Crosse City Housing Authority Staff; New Pioneers Lunch Club (J. Medinger, R.A. Grant, Kerry Hruska, Mark Felker, Joe Kotnour, Bill Harnden, DWJ); Prentice and Carrie Vaughn; Scott and Paula Andersen; Phyllis Daniel; Dave Ladwig; Jerry Anderson; Mike “Pierce” Murphy; Lori Peterson, plus Deanna, Bruce, Dawn, Helmar, Eugene, Stanley, Molly, Sami, April, Andi, Therese, several additional Daves including Therese’s husband, Eric, Ryan, Karie, more Marys, Shirley, Kathy, and Jim; Gina H.; Jim Hobart; two men named Nate and their families; Aquinas Catholic Schools; all La Crosse schools in fact; Care Wisconsin; International Home Management; our
My book and drama projects’ sponsors have also been very generous over the years, especially Don and LaVonne Zietlow, owners of the Kwik Trip convenience store chain; Matt and Jessica Amarnek Marcou; Tom and Joy Marcou; my parents (my deceased dad, David A. Marcou, and my still-living mom, Rose C.M. Marcou); other family (especially the Marcous, Muskats, Amarneks, Sims; Majeskas; Yous; Halls); Charles Gelatt; Ron Wanek; Don Weber; John Hansen; Ignacio and Argentina Peterson; my literary/photo subjects; my adult students; my teachers and mentors; counselors, clergy, and medics; customers, audiences, and readers; and my works’ archivists (especially Anita Doering, Helmut Knies, Jon Nelson, Andy Kraushaar, Phillip Prodgier, and David Haberstich, the U.S., British, French, Irish, and S. Korean National Libraries). These days, I also converse with Emeritus Aquinas Archivist Richard Dungar. And I knew the life-student from Mozambique/La Crosse, who died in Montana in recent years. A. Carlos Sadi was a decent man of peace. I never heard him utter an ugly word, though he’d been tortured and hounded years ago in Africa. I also photographed the Mennonite(?!) Sister Margaret Brooks, an Aquinas alum who died tragically in Jan. 2017. And I hope to meet/photograph Emmanuel Kelly, a former Iraqi, the strongest heart and best singing talent I’ve seen recently. To be a good friend means to be a friend to others through thick and thin. I’ve not always been the best friend to those mentioned here, but I try hard to be. I’m glad for all my son’s and his wife’s friends, too, and glad to be a Marcou, as well. Life’s hard enough when one has a few friends; it must be nearly impossible “without friends”. And yet, God is a friend to us all.

Finally, the secret to Henry Aaron's power was in powerful, quick wrists. I’d guess he learned about baseball wrists from Eddie Mathews, whom Ty Cobb said was one of the three or four players he'd ever seen with a perfect swing; Eddie Mathews graced the front cover of the inaugural Sports Illustrated magazine edition. Henry, like Eddie, learned how to befriend someone of a different color then; both men thought highly of each other. It’s like activist Lloyd Barbee said: “There’s only one race – the human race.”—ca.2012 & 2017, by DvJM.

**Devotion in a Wonderful World**

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”—Henry Ford

Since at least some readers may have had their fill of terrorists, wars, entitlements angst, Orwellian perils, greedy CEO’s, and ungrateful stars, we recall here a positive event probably not covered by national media back then, but which is still important to at least a few of us. St. Valentine’s Day is a nice day for many couples. It’s been a very special day in the Marcou family a long time, because my parents were married that day, 60 years ago. A blizzard kept Mom’s parents (Roman and Ida Brunner Muskat) from reaching La Crosse’s St. James Church from their Sparta-Cataract farm (they did make it in for the reception), so Mom’s brother Ray gave Rose away to Dave. My paternal grandparents, David A. Marcou Sr. and Agnes Fitzgerald Marcou, were there. Maid of honor was Ramona Bever; best man, Jim Marcou. The wedding party also included Frank Schiffer, Larry Muskat, and Zita and Kathleen Muskat. Johnnie Sullivan and Mary Marcou were ring-bearer and flower girl. Darlene Lawrence had hosted one of three pre-nuptial showers. City notable Orby (with Mrs.) Moss and 100 other guests attended the reception. The honeymoon was in Milwaukee and Chicago.

Sixty years later, my parents are still doing reasonably well together – feisty, but likeable, as ever (as Sam McKay, a former student of mine, always was, too; Sam passed away recently, and lived and breathed swing/jazz music). All seven of us Marcou kids are doing decently, too; we all have good children. For Mom and Dad’s Golden Valentine Anniversary in 2000, they repeated their Wedding Vows for Fr. Roger Scheckel at St. James Church, as a TV camera and still camera(s) (one of the latter operated by me) rolled. Life’s seldom easy. My sister Diane’s oldest son drowned; we all pray for Tony, on eagles’ wings. There have been divorces too, but also enough stability to keep us heading in the right direction. Mom and Dad have both had serious health problems (cancer, heart bypass, chronic migraines, diabetes, gout), but they take those words “in sickness and in health” to heart. They listen to their doctors, and follow strict-enough regimens; also, they attend Mass Sundays. Mom worked 30 years as a nursing home medical records administrator; Dad worked 60 years as a meat-cutter. Mom gives good medical advice; many of her grandchildren work in healthcare. Dad is a good storyteller, which is likely why my brother Dan, a crime-novelist and historian, and I, are writers. (Mom’s pictures taught us photography.) Brother Dennis is La Crosse’s municipal judge. Sisters Diane, Lynn, and Mary all work full-time. Brother Tom lives in Virginia with his wife, Joy; he is chief office accountant for the US Comptroller of the Currency; Tom’s first career had been in the Air Force; Joy helped negotiate the US-Poland missile treaty a couple years ago at the Defense Department. My son, Matt, is on university-leave, training to be an Army medic (since 2010, Matt has completed two tours in Afghanistan in Special Ops, mustered out honorably, and is a top Engineering student on the East Coast married to the artist, university teacher, and full-time wedding planner Jessica Amarnek Marcou). I hope… we all stay safe-enough.

One St. Valentine story says the good saint united two young lovers previously separated by society. About my parent’s marital durability and others’ too, it’s clear love is the truest art any of us can excel at. Let’s hope everyone’s luck with love improves this Valentine’s Day and beyond, and that at least one good La Crosse couple’s 60th Valentine Anniversary Diamond Devotion will be remembered positively, a very
long time. As Louis Armstrong sang: What a wonderful world!—In edited form this DvJM essay was in the La Crosse Tribune ca. Feb.14, 2010. DvJM also had a column about his parents’ 65th anniversary in the Tribune in Feb. 2015. After his parents celebrated their 65th Anniversary Feb. 14, 2015, his dad, David A. Marcou, passed about three weeks later. As DvJM says, “Dad is forever in our hearts!”

We Must Learn the Lessons of Peace

Aussie writer John Pilger says the term “public relations” was coined by Woodrow Wilson friend Edward Bernays. In “Propaganda” (1928), Bernays defines PR, including World War I’s, as “an invisible government which is the true ruling power in our country” thanks to “the intelligent manipulation of the masses.” But British Prime Minister David Lloyd George said if the people knew what World War I was all about, they’d have stopped it very soon. One Bernays PR “success” was persuading “liberated” women to smoke in public with headlines lauding cigarettes as “torches of freedom.”

Pilger adds that Vice President Dick Cheney precipitated 50 years of war by promoting illegal tortures, inciting hatred from radical Muslims, thus recent attacks in Brussels and Paris by ISIS. It doesn’t help America has 740 military bases in 63 countries, with U.S. military personnel present many other places, too. Unfortunately, America is a global empire whose troops bleed real blood in too many conflicts they should not have to fight. The arrest, trial and punishment of al-Qeda leader Osama bin Laden could have won real justice for 9/11/01’s attacks on New York better than two wars and his apparent murder by U.S. Navy Seals in 2011. The list of America’s false war premises and dubious aims is long. And if Iraq’s Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction in the 1990s, he apparently got rid of them before UN inspections; also, he seems to have had nothing to do with 9/11. But Saddam was hanged for earlier crimes, possibly because he’d once been an ally to U.S. leaders who’d be embarrassed by investigation of those connections.

Gen. David Petraeus said even the Afghan War was a “war of perception” conducted via media. Keenly truthful British journalist James Cameron, after visiting Hanoi in 1965 (Britain wasn’t at war there), wrote in “Here Is Your Enemy:” “If we who are meant to find out what (western leaders are often) up to, if we don’t report what we find, if we don’t speak up, who’s going to stop the whole bloody business happening again?” The North Vietnamese were human beings, like Shakespeare’s Shylock, the Jewish money lender who pleads, “If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?” Input Muslim, Vietnamese or Christian for Jewish, and it’s still true. The dubious “Arab Spring” of 2011 led to Libyan leader Moamar Gadafi’s murder. Gadafi had been “forgiven” his role in downing Pan Am Flight 103 over 1988 Scotland, when he admitted Libyan responsibility and paid victims’ families $2.7 billion in 2002, halted terrorists training in Libya, and stopped his nuclear and chemical weapons programs. Due to regional chaos after Gadafi’s and bin Laden’s deaths, ISIS gained footholds in Libya, Syria and Iraq. And as much as it would be nice to elect the first U.S. woman president, if Mrs. Clinton is that president, she should learn to negotiate a peace treaty or two, something not done on her watch as secretary of state.

Journalists who are American “war stenographers” don’t aid peace efforts by stoking war sentiments. St. Teresa of Calcutta tucked into many of the personal letters she sent me, 1989-1996, St. Francis’s “Prayer for Peace.” I recall from childhood Msgr. John Paul’s (soon after bishop here) reuniting prayer each dawn on the radio’s “Angelus.” It’s not a foregone conclusion Islamism, Judaism, and Christianity should be at war forever. Jesus offers good, realizable Paths to Peace, not ways to destroy it via extremism from many religions, including some extreme Christians.—This essay by DvJM was published in the La Crosse Tribune on April 11, 2016 with the title above.

Mr. Twain’s Secret

“I really need your love. God speed your love to-oo-oo me.”—“Unchained Melody”, Bart and Cherry Starr’s, and my, favorite long song. “Are the meatballs Swedish enough? --Two geezers were laundering. One: ‘We’re having Swedish Meatballs at the site today.’ The Other: ‘Good. Better hurry and put clothes.’ First: ‘Why? We’ve got two hours before lunch.’ Second: ‘Well, you know the ladies. I’ve got to bleach my skin and put on my Swedish girl wig. The old gals really go for it if you pass for Swedish, especially a Swedish babe.’ First: ‘Well, don’t forget your Swedish ID card, or even with the bleach and wig you won’t pass. You don’t have the legs for it, buddy!’”—DvJM. “Thanks for helping make our archives world-class!”—La Crosse Public Library Exec. Director Kelly Krieg-Sigman to DvJM, ca. 2005.

Long ago, when my grades weren't so good, but I still knew there were good things I could learn in school, I decided to focus on what I'd earned good grades for -- writing. My first wife and I had tried two marriage counselors, but she loved another man deeply. I moved to Iowa alone to earn a Master's degree in Literature and History (American Studies), requiring much reading and writing. After I earned that degree, my first wife and I divorced. Then, after working a full-time job at UW-Madison and saving some money, I enrolled at the Missouri School of Journalism to study reporting, writing, photography, and editing. A decade later, after journalism work overseas and in America too, I taught adults writing and photography here. In 2000, I edited my students' grassroots history, "Spirit of La Crosse", the first complete history of our city. Just as we'd wrapped up our book-signings, we embarked on a new group book. Some of us were at my apartment discussing it when it became clear we'd need a master-typist to get copy to our designer for what would become the award-winning volume one of "Spirit of America"; widely esteemed historian David McCullough would call it in a note to me, “a sumptuous treasure trove”. My 13-year-old son, Matt, working on our computer during that meeting, overheard us and how pressured we were to find a good typist. Matt said only somewhat
shyly, "I can do that." When I said to the others Matt could type more than 100 words per minute very accurately, he demonstrated his skills and everyone signed on for him to type the 100,000-word text that would emerge.

I'd recently obtained full custody of my son, and though we had some tough times the next couple years, Matt knew that that typing job, which we paid him decently for, was important, and he did it well. He'd earlier wanted a paper route, but I didn't own a car then and knew from many years before, when I'd had a paper route, that parents sometimes need to help their paper-carrier offspring with a car-ride. I couldn't let Matt have a paper route, but I did the next best thing -- I taught him how to create papers and books.

Ability comes in many forms. Many in the Marcou family have very good skills. E.g., one of my nieces in her 30’s, Jacqui, has worked as a nurse and is married to a computer man, Joe. They saved some money and bought a historic home they wanted to restore, a 19th century commercial photographer’s home (Jacqui’s a very good photographer), and it was on the Heritage Home Tours circuit in La Crosse this past autumn. I've never owned my own house, but I can see the value in their investing in a good house and working on it, as they raise their children. Also, Jacqui is running for office this spring, for the 6th District City Council seat. Our family and friends hope she wins!

Matt is married too, and after serving four years in Army Special Ops, he's a top Engineering student on the East Coast. His wife, Jessica, is a dedicated artist, university teacher, and full-time wedding planner. When it comes to accomplishing positive things in life, it may or may not make much difference when you get started; it is crucial you do get started though, working hard to realize your dreams. As Mark Twain once said, "The secret of getting ahead is getting started." – even if you have to put on boots to do it. Take that to heart, dear readers, in your own lives and loves. Christmastime and New Year’s is a great time to remember that. As rock singer Bob Seger sings: “Sometimes, even now, when I’m feeling lonely and beat, I drift back in time, and I find my feet, down on Main Street.”—Dec. 2016, by DvJM.

A Twain-Style Thought for the Millennia: I prefer thin women, but you have to admit -- a lady with a little extra weight on her will likely live longer than a man who mentions it to her! — Feb.13, 2017, by DvJM.

I’ll always be grateful to a beautiful lady named Heather for a story she related to me that I passed on to the newspaper to include with my dad’s obituary soon after I'd heard it (La Crosse Tribune obit for David A. Marcou Jr., March 10, 2015). -- A man came upon a lamp partly buried in sand on the mainland, picked it up and rubbed the sand off. A genie sprang forth and granted the man one wish. The man said, “Well, I’ve always wanted to go to Hawaii, but don’t like flying. Could you build me a bridge from here to Hawaii?” The genie looked at him and said, “Man, do you know how much steel, concrete and construction that would take? It’s impossible. Make another wish.” The man thought a minute then said, “Well, I’ve always wanted to understand my wife better. Could you make it so I know what she’s thinking and what she really wants?” The genie looked down and responded, “Do you want that bridge two lanes or four?”—Feb. 13,2017, via DvJM.