

STRANGERS

I don't know when or how I developed my fairly recently (the last few years, I guess) acquired proclivity for meeting and engaging perfect strangers in conversation. Maybe for most of my 75 years it's been somewhat dormant, lurking right under my skin, or awaiting just the right time to emerge. I don't remember, but cousin Mary Lynn Caldwell Morrill says that at extended Caldwell family gatherings, usually at Grandma's house, my dad and his 11 siblings' (Mary Lynn is the oldest child of the oldest of the 12, my Uncle Frank) birth and home place, I was running around, bugging everybody, asking endless questions and getting in to mischief while brother, Bill, 4 years older, was the reserved and perfectly behaving elder statesman (brother Harry, 2 years younger, was yet to be classified). The Kiser (my Aunt Verla Kiser had 4 sons and one daughter) boys (Frankie, the youngest, was 8 years my senior) had two, probably more but two that I remember, usual responses to my incessant queries: 1) "You're too little in the britch(es)", and 2) "That's for me to know and you to find out". (A few days after writing this paragraph, I called 1st cousin, Ben Franklin, who I hadn't talked with in a while, and told him about this story I'm writing. He said he remembered me as being pretty quiet and reserved in the old days, traits that he only began to notice receding in recent years. Who knows or cares where my inquisitiveness came from? The fact is, it's arrived in spades!)

I was always comfortable with family and neighbors. My first 2-3 years were in the neighborless, except for a black sharecropper family in a shack of a house across the road, "Shannon" house, about a 3-wood from Grandma Caldwell's house (Grandma was a Shannon. She may have been born and raised in the Shannon house, which was owned, when I came home from Presbyterian Hospital after arriving on earth, by Shannon {Shank} Forbis, the grandson of Grandma's brother, Jim) which was located, as we later called it, "down in the country", between Matthews and Weddington, 12-15 miles SE of downtown Charlotte. Our first real, as in non-family, neighbors were the Flatts, Swoffords, Pooles, Reynolds, Johnsons, Hicks, Edgertons, Daniels, Craigs, McManuses and many others, when we moved into old man Neal Craig's, surely older than he, uninsulated and ununderpinned frame house, heated only by the coal burning Warm Morning stove in the "family" (I don't know if that term had yet reached the vernacular in Charlotte, maybe in all the new brick houses that were springing up around us and all over Charlotte, many financed by VA loans, to house the returning veterans and their pre- [as in brother, Bill, born in '42 just before dad was drafted into the Navy] Baby Boomer and Baby Boomer generation [as in Moi, born 2/27/46, in the leading edge of the Boomer generation, 75 million strong {according to Wikipedia, Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, between the end of, IMHO, our {{the US}} last just and necessary war and near the beginning of a completely unjust, unnecessary and inhumane war, which needlessly killed, burned and maimed millions, mostly the Vietnamese who we were "saving" from communism {"better dead than red"}}, public reaction to which, again IMHO, began, or if not began, certainly exacerbated and accelerated the wide chasm that now threatens our Republic] and brother, Harry, born in '48)...I'm lost, myself, in my punctuation, wherein, like switchbacks (son, Tommy, 53, son, Tim, 49, and his son and my only blood grandson, Sam, 19 [my other grandson is Tai, 25 {?}], and I have just returned from a trip to California-I'll get to it shortly, well, in a bit-thus, the mountain hiking and driving "switchback" metaphor; I may have doubled back on myself, so, I promise, fewer thoughts within thoughts, within thoughts, which promise I hope will keep you, unlike my wife

Janet, from throwing up your hands in frustration and permit you to keep reading, unless you've got something better to do, like maybe polishing the silverware...

For some reason, and I can't for the life of me figure out why, except that maybe deep down I was an insecure mama's boy, though I don't know why I would have felt insecure at that point (but I do know that I felt somewhat so later), and, besides, I was as much a daddy's as a mama's boy, starting school must have been somehow traumatic for me, so much so that Mrs Jones, my first grade teacher at Oakhurst School (12 grades when I started in '52, dropped 10-12th when East Meck High opened in '53 and 8&9th when McClintock Jr High opened a few years later) called mom after my first day or so to tell her that I was crying and saying that I wanted to go see my brother, Billy. Mom, a genius at child psychology, at least this child's psychology, told her to tell me to go ahead and go see brother, Billy, which she did. I still remember getting up from my desk in our first floor classroom and walking up the stairs to the 2nd floor where Bill's room was (I don't know how I knew that-I guess I got him to tell me its exact location in case of emergency, and I guess I thought, walking up those stairs, that this indeed was such a case). The door to his classroom was closed. It had glass panes in the top half, all frosted except one, into which I peered. I saw Bill sitting in his desk. I might have gone so far as to put my hand on the doorknob, but if so, before I turned it, a light bulb suddenly clicked in my 6 year old noggin, thank goodness! I thought, what's going to happen when Bill sees me when I step into his classroom. Actually, I don't remember everything I thought, such as what I was going to say when his teacher asked what I wanted; all I remember thinking, and it was enough, was "Billy's gonna kill me". I took my hand off the knob, walked down the stairs and back into my room and took a seat. Mrs Jones never heard another whimper from me.

I don't remember Jimmy Hinkel or Rusty Abernathy or Jimmy Baker or any of the other guys who quickly became my buddies ever mentioning my cry baby escapade. Maybe that was because I was the tallest kid in my class, a distinction I held, reaching 6' by the 9th grade and eventually, 6'2", all the way through high school. An aside, which has nothing to do with this story except that it added to my athleticism, which has been a key to whatever success I've enjoyed in life, but I also was the fastest, sprinter, that is (anything longer than the 220 was a distance race for me) thru high school, although in the 4th or 5th grade, Joyce Arant may have beaten me once or twice on the playground. (I'm sure you can tell that little of my ramblings are researched, but I went to my East Meck senior annual last night after typing this yesterday morning and there she was. I can't remember any other interactions with Joyce after the races at Oakhurst, but I couldn't help but wonder whether she stayed speedy [hard to believe today, but there were no interscholastic sports for girls, only intramurals, in those days in the Mecklenburg Co schools, and they didn't include track or cross country], had speedy children or still runs as a 75 year old. Hope you've had and are still having a great life, Joyce. Thanks for the competition and memories.) Another aside; I feel sure my height has given me plenty of advantages in life, most of which I only later realized. Why else would Mrs Jones have made me the class monitor when she had to leave the room. Once, Vivian Couchell, whose family ran a diner a few blocks from the school and whose older brother founded Showmars restaurants, asked me, while serving as class cop, to come look at her Dick and Jane reader, pointing to a speck and telling me a fly had doodooed (her word) on her book. I took quick and decisive action with my finger. Vivian was always my friend thereafter, though her family must

have moved to another school district since she's not in my McClintock or East annuals. I met Peter once or twice and think I mentioned being at Oakhurst with Vivian, but he didn't offer any discount at Showmars!

Well, enough ancient history. I just got off the phone with my best and longest term (since his dad moved to Matthews, NC to become pastor of our church when he, the son, not the dad, was in 4th grade) friend, The Right Reverend, Dr & Col, USArmy Chaplaincy Corps, Ret, William Bryant Carr, Jr ("Bill"), who, with his lovely wife Jan is driving to Charlotte to see his oldest sister, Rachel, a dear friend and the keyboardist of the Joe&Louise Caldwell family's lives (as church organist, she played for both my maternal grandparents and dad and mom's funerals) and, when I told him about this story I'm writing, he said he hoped that the rambling, overly punctuated, run on sentence style of my previous offerings has been modified for this one; otherwise, his reading it would be, as my previous stories, relegated to after 10 pm reading, a non-chemical substitute for Nyquil. Heard you loud and clear, Willie, though old habits are hard to break!

In April I wrote a story entitled WESTWARD HO, THE WINSTONS GO, TEMPORARILY, about the trip we made out west in 1984 when Tommy was 16 and Tim 12, and my quitting smoking, for 7 days (I've now been quit completely for over 20 years). Westward prompted Tom (he dropped "my" when he went into prison chaplaincy over 20 years ago, with the explanation that "Chaplain Tom" sounded more appropriate in the world of prisondom than "Chaplain Tommy"; I've been Tom since Tommy was born; Big Tom to Col Mac Tweed, my now departed father-in-law; Big D, to my sons; Pawpaw to Tim and Sara's Sam, 19 and Sophie, 15, and Growly, short for Growly Bear [I'm fairly sure for when I used to chase them on my hands and knees while growling when they were younger and not because of my personality]) to Tommy and Kim's Emma, 15 and Anna, 13. Tommy, now 53, living in Frankfort, Ky and in his 19th year as a chaplain at the federal medical prison facility in Lexington, originally wanted to take Kim and the girls but found it would be impossible to get accommodations he thought would be acceptable to 3 females on such short notice and because both girls had planned on going to church camps during the time he was considering, called Tim, now 49 and an assistant high school principal in Oldham Co, just outside Louisville, where he lives with wife Sara, who started nursing school less than 2 years ago, without a bachelor's degree, and started just before we left for California as an RN at one of the Norton Medical care facilities in its stroke unit, one of the top such units in the country, Sam and Sophie, and psyched him up for a trip to Yosemite Nat Pk, which we visited for 2 days on our '84 trip, and in which they and a college frat buddy of Tommy's and I, in '91, after those 3 drove the van that we'd driven in '84, after Tommy had finished UNC and before Tim was starting Davidson, after I flew out and met them in San Fran, drove to Yosemite for a few days of backpacking in the Tuolumne back country (the valley was packed), camping at and seeing the 4th of July fireworks over Lake Tahoe and freezing the next night at a Giants game in Candlestick Park before I flew home the next day and they continued on their journey for another 3 or 4 weeks. (I tried to unravel this sentence in proofreading, but this as good as it got. Sorry, Willie.) Tommy was also inspired by his cousin, Will's climb up the cables on Half Dome, one of the true adventures in Yosemite valley that very few visitors even attempt (you have to win a lottery to be able to even make an attempt) with Cecelia, one of his twin 12-13 yr-old daughters last fall. I saw Cecilia, and her sister Annie, at brother, Bill's and wife Sylvia's when stopping by

Charlotte on my trip to the beach, which you'll hear about later. She acted like the Half Dome assault was no big deal. I guess maybe not for an avid horse rider who has taken many a fall! Cecilia's smaller than Annie, whose trip with her dad was to Paris, but she's wiry and apparently pretty tough, though I'm sure navigating Paris takes a certain kind of toughness, too! I'm sure I'll never stand on top of Half Dome but maybe I can the Eiffel Tower, via the elevator, not by the stairs, which Annie said Will said they had to go up, otherwise, it would be cheating. I don't mind a little cheating for a good cause, like preventing a heart attack!

So, Tommy and Tim hurriedly make plans for them and Sam to go west and invited me to go along, which I accepted after expressing my concern about and after their assurance that I wouldn't be slowing them down. So, Janet took her husband and 3 of her progeny to the Louisville airport for our flight at 12:30 pm on Friday, June 18, thru Atlanta to San Francisco where we arrived about 6, taking the airport train to rent a VW Tiguan suv from Enterprise, to spend that night in a so-so hotel in the Tenderloin district, which had no on-site parking. The cheapest garage was \$30 but there were open metered spaces on the street with a sign that said vehicles had to be moved by 7:00 am for street cleaning.

The next morning, Tommy was there about 6:30 to move it and a cop was writing him an \$83 ticket to which he rightfully and strenuously objected, pointing to the sign on the meter. The cop pointed to a slightly larger sign on a nearby pole that specified a 6:00 am moving time and said it took precedent. I didn't witness this exchange, but Tommy protested strongly but politely, in keeping with his Christian minister personality characteristics, asking how he, a visitor to their lovely city was supposed to know that, but the cop, without adequate explanation, gave him the ticket anyway which explained how he could appeal on a website, which he promptly did. I don't think he's heard back from his appeal. It was the only glitch in the whole trip, but one that gave us a good opportunity to discuss topics such as official unjustness, how to evaluate conflicting information, hospitableness v inhospitableness (I guess that's the same as hospitality v inhospitality, which, in hindsight, I could and probably should have used, but I hate to have to use wite-out), the value of and the chances of prevailing in contesting bureaucratic unjustness, the place of righteous indignation in human interactions, etc.

Maybe because of his job, or religious convictions, Tommy, who Tim had nicknamed Bullet (to explain here would be too great a detour, and besides, Tim has the copyright to the name and also besides, he's a better writer than me [I know that "me" should be "I", but "I" just doesn't sound as right here as "me" does, so I'm sticking with "me", even after proofreading rather than switching to "I". Is this called poetic license? If so, consider this story, or this paragraph, or at least this sentence, a poem] and I feel sure he will be glad to share his reasons for why his brother is the Bullet if you ask), tries to obey all laws, rules and regulations. Many, including Tim and Sam, jumped off the walking bridge over the Merced River into its cool swimming hole in Yosemite Valley, but Bullet didn't because of the "No jumping from Bridge" sign. I didn't because I was chicken. Tommy the Bullet had no hesitation, however, in crossing the creek above the 20+' waterfall, creeping up to the edge of the slippery rock beside it, and plunging into the cold swimming hole below at Rainbow Pools, a few miles from Yosemite Resort RV Park, where we stayed in one of its "Deluxe" (in addition to the bunk beds where Bullet slept on top and Sam on the bottom, the Deluxe factor was the trundle bed on wheels, which Tim rolled out from under the wide log framed along its back and both ends [very rustic, in keeping with the cabin, and park's, rusticity] couch

on which I slept, where he tossed and turned as his feet hung over the end by 6-8" and who I had to be careful not to step on in my nightly bathroom excursions) 10x20 cabins for \$200/nite, 20 miles from the entrance to Yosemite Nat Pk, which is another 15-20 miles from the Valley, which many others, but not Tim or Sam, and certainly not me (as mentioned, Scaredy-cat Tom didn't jump off the Merced bridge either, but I did take a refreshing dip in the cold Merced and the swimming hole below Rainbow Falls on a 90 degree day), following a number of other jumpers. There was no No Jumping sign!

OK, OK, Strangers. I enjoyed bantering with the Delta ticket folks and TSA workers at the Louisville airport and thanked them for their service. I don't remember who I sat beside to Atlanta. From there to San Francisco, I sat in the aisle seat beside a South Korean husband whose wife had the window seat. I introduced myself. His accent made it hard for me to understand him and I'm sure, him me. I think I understood that they were going out to visit a child, actually, I think two, one at Cal-Berkeley and the other maybe at UCLA. That's about all I got out of the 4 hour flight beside them. I'd never flown on a plane with TV screens on the back of the seat in front, whereon you could watch movies, TV, including several news shows, listen to music, or monitor your flight's progress, and you could hear the audio if you'd brought along plug-in ear phones, or lacking them, a set the flight attendant was happy to sell you for \$2, which I reluctantly forked out.

My neighbors watched what appeared to be Korean subtitled movies streamed, isn't that the term, on to a 6x8" I-pad, I guess it's called, which they stood on the let-down food tray. From their expressions, they seemed to enjoy them. I read *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the classic by Thornton Wilder which my friend Ricky Creech highly recommended to me years ago, an ancient copy of which I found at the estate sale of a couple who lived a few blocks from the 95 year old house in the Highlands neighborhood in Louisville which we bought in the fall and from which I'm now typing this, the wife having obviously been an outstanding teacher, which I deduced from the quality and variety of books being sold from her library (I bought 8 or 10 others, including several Hardy Boys, plus 2 cardboard cartons containing paperbacks of *The Great Books* series) and the clippings in some (stuck in *San Luis Rey* is a yellowed 4, 6x8", single spaced, page tract, not a newspaper or magazine cut-out, entitled "THE FORMULA FOR BEING AN INTERESTING CONVERSATIONALIST", by George W. Crane, PhD, MD ("Copyright"). I found it more interesting than the book. Maybe I should have read it before attempting to engage my seatmates in conversation, though it wouldn't have helped my Korean!

Unlike Ricky, I didn't particularly enjoy Wilder, as I didn't particularly enjoy the first hundred or so pages which I labored through of Cervantes' classically classic, *Don Quixote*, which Ricky loves but which I haven't picked back up. (Parenthetically, [isn't that what you call a thought in parenthesis?], I just went back and found this in February emails. For my 75th birthday on 2/27, Tim [thanks, Bubs {what I sometimes call him} for the best birthday present I've ever received] emailed many friends and relatives asking them to share a story about them and me, which he collected and delivered via email on 2/27. I received Tim's email with the attached stories on Saturday morning just as I got in my '04 Tundra to drive down to Shelby where brother Bill treated me to one of my best birthday lunches ever at Bridges BBQ Lodge [the best may have been the deli sandwiches and sides Janet picked up for lunch for me and the friends and family who joined me on my 70th birthday to pack 10,000 meals for Stop Hunger Now {now, Rise Against Hunger, "RAH"} at a cost of \$.33/meal for delivery to the starving around the world

{{which I was introduced to by my friend and college classmate, George Shaw, who, after retirement as advisor on strategy to the board of directors of Raytheon Corp, moved to the Raleigh area, where RAH's international headquarters are located, in order to volunteer his strategic experience to help achieve its goal of ending world hunger}}, so Janet read them to me over the phone, which consumed most of the 1.5 hour drive. Ricky ends his story for my birthday thus: "Actually, there is a famous epitaph that might best describe his presence on earth:

'Here lies the noble fearless knight, Whose valor rose to such a height, When at last death struck him down, His was the victory and renown. He was oft a bugbear in other men's eye, And reckon the world of little prize, But he had the wisdom of his age, To live a fool and die a sage.'

Happy birthday

PS. Poem may be off a tad. Sitting in woods (Firewood) with just my memories"

Ricky, I assume this is how Quixote ends. I'm editing this story at our cabin near Bakersville, NC on 8/12, but tomorrow am pulling a 6x12 Uhaul full of furniture, which the realtor says needs to go in order for the cabin to look more cabinish on the web, to Louisville, where my copy of the Don is located. I'll flip to the end when I get there. One final thing parenthetically while I'm writing parenthetically; I meant for the verse to have a new line for each clause, the way Ricky typed it, but I don't know how to go down one line. When I hit "enter" it goes down 2 lines. Maybe a sympathetic reader can advise.)

I began reading son Tim's Tim O'Brien's, The Things They Carried, a very true to life but fictionalized poignant portrait of Vietnam infantrymen, on the flights home.

We caught an overhead train to the rental car area at the SF airport and I sat down beside a petit young lady who appeared much younger than her 29 years. Her boyfriend, who looked 18, stood, holding onto the pole beside her. She seemed pleased, at least not displeased, when I engaged her in conversation, which was halting because she's Chinese. If I remember correctly, she's here on a student visa studying pharmacy. I told her we were visiting from Kentucky and she smiled and said, "Ohh, KFC", and I told her I lived not far from YUM Brands, KFC's parent company's corporate headquarters and her smile widened. I don't remember much else we talked about until I asked something about the pro-democracy protests being raised, especially by students, in China. Apparently she took offense to what I asked or maybe she mistook what I tried to ask, but without replying, she immediately stood up beside and mumbled something to her boyfriend, and they got off at the next stop without looking back or saying a word. Hope I didn't set back U.S.-Sino relations too far. Maybe she'll chalk it up to simply being chatted up by a senile old man (how old is Uncle Joe, POTUS?).

When Tim and I got up around 6 in the aforementioned Tenderloin of San Fran, our first morning in the Golden State, Bullet was up and out (his gunpowder doesn't require much rest or nourishment to stay dry and potent), taking a walk before moving the Tiguan, and Sam was still in bed, we found the room coffee fixings meager so we got directions to the nearest Starbucks from the desk clerk, the only Fusion Hotel employee we ever saw, and started walking the several blocks toward it on the deserted sidewalks (it was fully light) along the mostly deserted hilly streets. We were shortly joined by Andrew, maybe mid 40s (hard to say for sure), blondish brown curly, uncombed hair, scraggly beard, who volunteered to be

our tour guide for the price of a hamburger from his favorite local fast food joint not far from where he said he stayed along a back alley where he was king of the alley, unharassed by coppers or interlopers, and though he didn't mention them, probably do-gooders, too. I interrogated him as he walked with us, but I don't remember much personal information I elicited. Said he'd made some bad decisions in his life (no hock?) and hadn't seen his mother in over 2 years, which I suggested he remedy. He picked up a bike that had been abandoned on the sidewalk and pushed it along as we walked up a fairly, but, not, by SF standards, too steep a hill, all the while lobbying, but not in too pushy a way, for burger \$. We came to the intersection where we needed to turn toward Starbucks and he toward his burger joint and I gave him a \$20, the smallest bill I had, for which he profusely thanked me, and we parted cordially. Tim and I briefly discussed Andrew and his homeless brethren and sistrens' plight, without reaching a solution, and whether I should have given him what may have become alcohol or drug money, again, without resolution.

In Starbucks, we stepped up to the counter behind a male and female police officer who had just been handed their coffee and I offered to pay for them but they'd already paid on a card. I offered to reimburse them in cash but they politely declined and thanked me for my offer and I thanked them for their service, which they seemed to genuinely appreciate. They were both browner than Tim and me ("I" is, I think, proper grammer but it just doesn't sound right here), possibly some Hispanic, Asiatic, or Mid-Eastern blood in them. Maybe more later about the evidence our trip gave of the changing demographics of the US. We each got a medium size cup of regular, 87 octane, \$2.50@ and took a seat at a small table and gave a short greeting to the only other customer in the shop, who was sitting alone at an adjacent table. He appeared to be 55 to 70, hard to tell with these left coasters, thin, tanned, thinning, wavy salt and pepper hair, and, after determining that we were right coasters, at least from nearer the Atlantic than the Pacific, he stepped into full blown, this Starbucks, the City on the Hill, and the Golden State's Ambassador Extraordinaire, mode, giving us last night's Giant's score, their league standing, pitching and hitting stats, a breakfast dining suggestion and day's sight-seeing agenda, and may have broken into something of a song and dance routine, just as 2 early middle-aged ladies of his, as became readily apparent, short acquaintance came in and accepted his gracious greeting.

The ladies were 2 of 3 sisters, the other still in bed, who had flown out a day or so before from maybe Ohio or Pa or thereabouts, to celebrate the birthday of one of the 2, and Mr Hospitality had met them in Starbucks the previous morning. They had hired a driver who had driven them to Napa Valley the day before where they said they had a blast sampling not only the wine, but also the olive oil (never heard of swigging oil-doubt cardiologists or vintners recommend it) and he delighted in their every word. As this is all happening right before us, before they knew what was happening, they were on the witness stand being subjected to my cross examination. The non-birthday girl, the thinner of the two, we learned, if I remember correctly, that her son had just gotten his PhD or something from somewhere in something, which naturally turned the discussion to education. Birthday sister works for a title insurance company and has just been accepted into law school. I proceeded to tell her about the case book method of legal instruction when I was in school, how the student is expected to wade through old appellate decisions to try to figure out themselves the point of law they're supposed to glean therefrom, all while be grilled by a professor who (you know the old saw: couldn't do, so taught) relished turning the high beam on an unprepared suppliant. I told her, with what she already knew about real estate from her years in title insurance, that I could make her a competent real estate practitioner in a couple of weeks, and I think I could.

A good part of my 37 year practice was in real estate, of all kinds, residential, commercial, agricultural, buying and selling, subdividing, condoizing, borrowing and lending thereon, you name it. And the way I

learned was by spending thousands of hours in the Register of Deeds office, checking titles, which requires reading, at least partially, tens of thousands of legal documents. I learned that Buck Ayscue could draw a pretty good right of way agreement, but John Milliken a better one; that Buck's metes and bounds property descriptions were works of art (don't think I ever found a mistake in one), but that you'd better check some others' pretty carefully. Learning to draft good real estate documents requires time, patience, analytical ability, and no hesitancy to plagiarize. Find a good mousetrap and keep improving it. My guiding principal in drafting documents that would be recorded and thus become public record for at least as long as western civilization continues was my senior partner, Charles (C) Franklin (Frank) Griffin's words of wisdom: "Doctors' mistakes get buried; lawyers' get recorded." The longer I practiced, and the more bang real estate clients demanded for their shrinking buck, the shoddier the practice became. I guess the lawyers in the real estate mills have less concern about what posterity might think of them than I had. I'm sure I've made plenty of mistakes, but I haven't heard of any serious enough to have reached my ears, and I've been retired since 2008, but I've had to correct many others to straighten out title problems. I've always been pretty lucky!

Since birthday sis was in the title insurance business (title insurance is a guarantee of fee simple absolute, i.e., as good as it gets, title to the purchaser of a piece of real estate) and is starting law school, I told a story I thought she might enjoy and find illustrative of issues she had or could encounter in her career: Bruce Boney, president of Lawyers Title of NC, once told me of a title problem with some urban redevelopment property they had insured in Charlotte. The property had been owned by John Doe, who had died intestate, Latin, I guess, for without a will, survived by children. When the city was buying the property and their lawyer checked the title, he needed to know who all of John's children were in order to prepare a deed for them to sign. He asked for a list and had all of them sign an affidavit swearing that they were all of John's children and therefore all of his heirs. Those children signed the deed, the city paid them the sales price, and Lawyers Title insured the city that it owned a 100% interest in the property. Sometime thereafter, a guy appeared claiming that he was one of John's children, that he hadn't signed the deed, and that he was asserting his ownership of a child's interest in the property. The city called Bruce, who contacted the children who had signed the affidavit and deed and received the money and ask who this guy was who claimed to be their sibling. They said that he had been their brother, but years before John died, prodigal son did something so dastardly that father John said "you're no longer a son of mine" and banished him from the home and family. As far as John and his other children were concerned, that stripped the wayward son of kinship. Lawyers Title paid him to sign a deed for his interest in order that the city would own the 100% interest in the property that it had been guaranteed. The aspiring lawyer, her sister, and even Mister San Fran seemed to enjoy the story, and with that, court was dismissed. Tim and I bid bye-bye to him as he waited to reopen court at his table when the next patrons unsuspectingly entered for their java, and we followed the sisters out and wished them well on the remainder of their sisterhood travels. We looked to be sure Andrew wasn't lurking around for further stimulus money and got back to hear Bullet's explanation of the \$83 parking ticket.

Sam was up and showered, so we drove through light 7:00 am traffic to Fisherman's Wharf for breakfast at Pier 39, where suggested by the hotel night clerk. There were plenty of parking lots but the signs re public v private, cost and time permitted were confusing, so we parked at a metered spot on a side street and got out as a guy with a thick Hispanic accent greeted us. He said we'd be fine there and we asked him where we could get a good breakfast and he also suggested Pier 39 and the name of a restaurant, telling us that he was headed into work at the swanky restaurant across the street which he suggested for lunch. We walked several blocks to Pier 39, crossing a 5 lane street with only a natural gas powered city bus in the center bus lane. The restaurant didn't open till 8:00 so we had 30 minutes to

check out the tourist catering souvenir store fronts and see fabulous views of the mist rising from the beautiful San Francisco Bay looking one way, and virtually the whole skyline of the City on the Hill(s), the other. The breakfast burritos were as good as the views from the pier. We had a tourist city map and plotted a few potential excursions. Coit Tower is one of SF's most famous and visible landmarks, a stone 200' tower located at 1 Telegraph Hill, looking to be maybe a half mile from Pier 39, in the direction of our parked car, but hard to tell how high above us. We decided to walk off our breakfast and headed in its direction. We made several narrow street turns, steadily climbing with each step. A couple of young guys pointed us to some steep stairs and I told my guys to go on ahead, that I'd follow, taking my time. The stairs turned at 5 or 6 landings before emptying onto a steep street. I stopped and caught my breath at every intersection. The higher I climbed, the nicer the mostly connected, probably condo, residences became, all commanding a gorgeous view of the Wharf and the Bay beyond. I spoke briefly with a guy about my age sweeping his sidewalk and quipped about his view, and his short reply was something like "we like it-we've been here 40 years".

I got to Lombard St, one of SF's most iconic for its hills and switch backs in the distance and was told by a walker to go a block or 2 to its end, turn right, and I would be making the final assault on the Tower. I could see it, surrounded by trees, several hundred feet above, and I trudged on. I stopped an attractive blond, tanned and visibly fit lady, probably mid to late 50's and a younger gal, at the point where some rather steep steps departed the road, and asked which way to the Tower. They were mom and daughter. Mom and dad, a patent lawyer from Austin, Tx, using his business trip to Silicon Valley as reason to visit daughter, a several happy year SF resident who was sharing one side of a duplex with a friend just a few blocks away, but who was getting ready to buy a place in the Mission district with her fiancé.

When I told them I was a retired lawyer, that opened the door for my usual introductory spiel, refined for clarity and brevity with each occasion for its utterance, by then, something like this: "I was born and raised in Charlotte, NC, spent 73 of my 75 years there and in an adjacent small town where I practiced law for 37 years, retiring 13 years ago, then 2 in the cabin we bought when I retired in the NC mountains, which is now on the market since we've bought a 95 year old house in Louisville because my 53 year old son went up there to attend the Southern Baptist Seminary in '91, was joined by his now 49 yr old brother when he got out of college, and, with both children, 4 grandkids, 2 step grandkids and now, 2 step great grandkids later, I've finally convinced my wife of 54 years that "they ain't coming back home, Honey!"

Depending on time, temperature and interest, I sometimes, actually, I suppose, usually, add, as explanation of my being in the listener's presence, something like: "I'd flown, once, to, but had never been to the west coast on the ground, but had always wanted to, so when my older son was 16 and my younger 12, we bought a conversion van and left the day after school was out in '84, driving 9,000 miles in 23 days, seeing most of the national parks in the west, including spending 2 nites in Curry Village tents in Yosemite Valley. In '91, when the oldest had just graduated from college and the youngest was getting ready to start that fall, they and a buddy took the van, which we still had, west again, following a slightly different route, and I flew out and met them in SF and we backpacked several days in the Yosemite back country, camped at and watched the fireworks over Lake Tahoe on the 4th of July, before I flew back and they continued on for 3-4 more weeks. I've been writing some memories the past few years and in April wrote one I called WESTWARD HO, about the '84 trip, so my sons quickly organized this trip we're now on, which includes them and my 19 year old only grandson, who've all walked ahead, and me." Again, depending on time, etc as aforementioned, I may expand a bit further, or, less likely, detract a bit there from.

I expanded my bio a bit to mom and daughter, and after learning where they and dad had matriculated, flashed my Davidson College and UNC law credentials, whereupon, mom, becoming fully engaged and animated, told about meeting Carol Quillen, whose name she couldn't remember, Davidson's president, at a wedding celebration they'd both attended in Charleston, SC in the not too distant past. I told her I'd met Carol a time or two, that she came to Davidson from Rice, and was the college's first female and non-alum president. She said Carol was the coolest college prez she'd ever met, that I should have seen her moves on the dance floor. That immediately evoked an image in my mind, which, surprise, surprise, I didn't mention, to them, that is, though I feel sure y'all will want to hear about it, of the time Janet and I took a December Caribbean cruise with and to help support The Nation Magazine 8-10 years ago and met an equally brilliant, beautiful and cool, Katrina vanden Heuvel, Editorial Director and Publisher (I happen to have the latest issue at hand which I consulted for the spelling of her name and her titles with the magazine), who, at an early morning session, mentioned that she was barely awake because some of the younger Code Pink (Women for Peace) gals, many in attendance, had kept her on the dance floor way too late.

WARNING: Editorial note: I have 2 brothers and 2 sons, no sisters or daughters, 1 grandson, and 3 granddaughters. I wish mom and Janet had had a daughter; I think she would have enhanced their lives immensely, and I think dad would have treasured a daughter. I feel sure I would have learned much from and would be a better man if we'd had a daughter. I'm so grateful for all 4 of my grandchildren and that 3 are girls, beautiful, talented, loving and sweet as sugar, and for my 2 step grands, one of whom is a wonderful wife, mom to a daughter who turned 4 last week, and son, 2, and elementary school teacher. I guess girls were given the opportunity to grow and shine somewhat when I was in school, though, sadly, as I've previously mentioned when speaking of Judy Arant, there were no interscholastic sports for girls in my jr or sr high, only intramurals, and never any student body or class presidents or even vp's, though some secretaries. Even the treasurers were male. Davidson College was 1,000 men, or, more accurately, including and especially in my case, males only during my time in its ivory towers. I only remember 2, maybe 3 women in my law school class. Males have largely dominated the world before me and during most of my lifetime, and still primarily do. Obviously there are biological and sociological reasons why, but I think that a lot of the fault lines that underlie most aspects of life today, political, religious, economic, and social, have been caused by and still exist, maybe have even been widened today because of white, male, heterosexual dominance, which has given less historically powerful groups less space and nutrients to grow, thrive, and succeed, and, as these groups, and especially women, but also people of color, LGBT's, and the socially and economically depressed, begin to feel the light of a new day, allowing them to grow strong and tall and shine, their dominators are feeling the loss of their power, control and dominance and are holding on for dear life, while kicking and screaming. Why can't we learn that over the long haul, cooperation is more humane than competition, and that human evolution does not mean that in our struggle for survival, we must step on or over others in order to rise. I honestly believe that my children and grandchildren and greats, and yours, and especially these wonderful, beautiful, talented and brilliant girls and women, are better human beings than I and my generation of guys, and that our species, and others, are in better hands than ever.

Leaving Coit Tower, we drove down, and up, Lombard St, heading toward the Golden Gate, where we parked and joined the throng eager to say they had walked, biked and/or scooterd on one of the engineering marvels, crossing one of the most famous and beautiful bodies of water, in the world. Mist was rising from the water on both sides of the Gate and the sky was completely overcast, hampering long distance views, but that detracted little from the magic it held for visitors. After having someone snap our picture as we approached the bridge, the boys walked on ahead as I chatted with several

groups, some with accents, one Flemish (I googled to learn that Belgians speak French, German and Belgian-Dutch, or Flemish). Often I engage strangers with a quip, such as, upon seeing someone walking a dog and/or pushing a stroller, I've found the following to usually evoke at least a smile: "Excuse me; may I ask you a question?" Usually they say "sure", but sometimes even before they can get that out, I'll follow with "which of you", with obvious reference to the dog or kid, "is having the most fun?" I've asked that of scores of walkers, in my neighborhood, in Cave Hill Cemetery, a beautiful and peaceful 300 acre final resting place for tens of thousands, including Muhammad Ali, several miles from our house in Louisville, on the Appalachian Trail, and don't ever remember getting rebuffed or ignored, usually a comment that Jr or Fido are the happiest hikers. Another favorite, used when 1 guy is accompanied by 2 or more females: "Why are you so lucky? How is it that you're able to attract 2", or whatever larger number, "beautiful women, and me none?", sometimes followed by "your looks, your brilliance, your wallet?", the guy's stumbling response to which is usually, "just lucky, I guess". For the life of me, I can't figure out why family members, particularly my grandchildren, are nervous when strolling with me?

I don't remember how I struck up a conversation with a couple, probably in their early 60s, before I got to the bridge. He had worked at GE Appliance Park in Louisville, a humongous industrial facility built in the late 50-early 60s, which employed upwards of 25,000, running 24/7, at one time, but which since has been sold, along with GE Appliances, to a Chinese company and now employs around 7,500. Very coincidentally, my across the street neighbor, Debbie Wexler, is the retired director of communications at the Park, and when I asked if he knew her, he said that he didn't personally but that he remembered her since she was, I think he may have said "notorious" initially, and as I laughed and told him she was my neighbor, he modified that to say that she was well known, whereupon, I made a short video of them and sent Debbie, who didn't remember him from among the 100s she knew there. The video is on my phone, so I have the couple's names, but I'm not naming names without permission (I'll let Debbie read this before you do). They now live in Fresno where he works for Land O'Lakes butter. Wonder how many slices of LO'L buttered bread have been toasted in GE ovens?

A major aside: I started typing my rambling memories as emails to family and friends several years ago and my son asked if I was saving them, to which I responded "What-how do you do that". He said I should be saving them in case I, or someone, might want to compile them later, so he showed me how to type in Word and save to a thumb drive, which probably now holds 20 or so stories, and which I understand can probably hold 10 or maybe way more times that. I don't remember who helped me set up the format I've been using, but it works well; when I type to the end of a line, it drops down a single space to start the next, just like the manual typewriter I took typing on in the 9th grade did when you hit the return arm, which, if I remember correctly, you could adjust to double or maybe even triple space. I can hit Enter to cause it to shift down a line before I get to the end. Two Enters shifts down 2 lines, my paragraph delineation. But something strange happened as I was typing on Saturday morning, July 3. When I'd typed to the end of the line, it automatically shifted down two spaces, and when I backspaced, it went back to the end of the last typed line. I tried a couple of things to fix it but was worried something disastrous could happen, such as the worlds', or at least my long suffering readers', loss of my irreproducible wordsmithery. I texted son, Tim, Tommy's wife Kim, and Debbie about my problem. The ink, or whatever, wasn't dry before I had a text from Debbie asking if I could Facetime her. Before I could respond, there was her smiling face on my phone from the passenger seat in significant other Dean's pickup in which they were headed to Wisconsin to visit his relatives and ride his motorcycle that they were transporting. I'm not going to bore you with the play by play, but Deb had me turn the camera on my computer screen and she patiently and painstakingly walked this dull Luddite thru the necessary surgery to restore the patient to its former properly spacing condition. PURE MAGIC, Debbie and technology! Thanks, friend and neighbor! They don't come any better than you!

I caught up with Tommy, who was coming back toward me on the bridge, his having lost Tim and Sam, who usually stuck with his dad on hikes early in the trip, probably weary, and/ or leery, of Pawpaw, me, talking to strangers or Bullet, missing the target and lodging in a tree or shooting off into space. That changed a few days later at Taft Point in Yosemite, but I get ahead of myself. Tommy hadn't gone but about half way across, so he turned around and joined me in walking all the way across the bridge. Janet has walked on the Great Wall in China and the streets of Hong Kong, on a stretch of El Camino de Santiago in Spain, up Machu Picchu in Peru, and swum with the turtles in the Galapagos Islands; brother, Harry and wife Kate have hiked in the Alps, Scotland and all over Acadia NP in Maine; Harry and brother Bill have backpacked together around Mt Rainer and along the Presidential Range in New Hampshire's White Mountains; and Bill has walked where Jesus walked in Galilee. Most likely I'll never tread in their steps, but I hope they'll be able to trace ours across the magnificent Golden Gate. Tommy and I turned around at about the 3/4 mark, concerned that younger father and son might get concerned about older father and son, and headed back, chatting briefly with a couple of coeds from NC. If I remember correctly, they were Pirates from East Carolina in Greenville.

After our whirlwind morning and early afternoon in the City by the Bay, we headed east, across the bridge to Oakland. I don't remember whether it was on the outskirts of Oakland or in Modesto, we're tooling along a commercial area and noticed what appeared to be a car show of some kind in a small shopping center parking lot. We were beyond the entrance but circled the block, and in that nondescript parking lot, parked in impromptu fashion under some trees, providing a little relief from the noonday sun, sat probably the most expensive collection of automotive hardware as on any half acre in California. Sam, 19, is into cars. I doubt he knows a camshaft from a drive shaft, but he knows makes and models and prices, especially the fast, sexy, expensive ones. I'm not going to give you his whole car history, but here's the short version. Within the last 6-8 months, he scoured the woods and bought, with his own money, made working pretty much full time at Target while taking some online classes at the community college, a very nice Honda Accord with 100K miles but not a scratch on it.

He called me about a month ago and told me he was selling his Honda and wondered if he could drive my '04 Tundra till he bought a new car, and since we have 3 vehicles between Janet and me, including the '04 small Mercedes wagon she inherited when her dad passed away 6 years ago, Sam's been truckin' the last month. Just before we left on our trip, he bought a Nissan 350 or 80, or something, x or z or zx, or some such, 6 in the floor. He's never driven a straight drive and he, like his dad and sister, is a southpaw. And to make matters worse for a preternaturally worrying grandma and a grandpa who's had his share of close calls on the road and has tried many lawsuits arising out of car crashes, the exit from their driveway onto a narrow, much and fast traveled, 2 lane hiway where cars approaching from the left, coming down hill and around a curve, are on you before you know it, poses a clear and present danger for anyone, but particularly my novice, lefty, stick shifting grandson, who hasn't mastered avoiding the stall.

I was lucky enough to learn how to let a clutch out while goosing the engine just enough to avoid stalling on one of Uncle Leighton, my mom's twin brother's orange Allis Chalmers tractors on his dairy farm outside Chester, SC when I was 9 or 10, and Bill and I would spend a night or two on the farm with Uncle Leighton and Aunt Eva Dell (I haven't heard that name before or since, and I don't remember giving it any thought until just now. I think I used to think it was real country, but as I say it now, I like it. Reminds me of Evie Jo, the youngest of Joe, who was pastor of 1st Baptist in Monroe when we joined in '71, and Edith Larrimore's 5 or 6 children, the last three of which, Peter, Donna and Evie, I taught in Sunday School. Evie is a terrific athlete, basketball, tennis, golf, and an even more terrific person, a

retired elementary school PE teacher) and their 3 sons, Frank, a couple years older than Bill, Ray, a year younger. and David, a year or two younger than Harry. They were very patient with this city, well, I guess actually, suburban, kid's many stalls until I finally got the hang of it.

Sam knew, or within seconds, via his I-phone, knew something about, including the value of most of the cars: the 'Vettes, Mustangs, Ferraris, a Shelby Cobra, I think it's called, BMWs, and dozens of others. The coolest car and owner was the white Lamborghini and its late 20s, maybe 30 year old blond haired, ear-studded owner who was eager to tell us about winning it in a raffle. When I told him that raffle winnings are taxable income, he said his winnings also included \$60K to fork over to Uncle Sam. The front sits no more than 3-4" off the ground, but rises up enough for ground clearance when cranked. The owner said he drives it to work every day and graciously allowed Sam and Tommy to have a seat under the wheel. I didn't try. It would have taken a forklift to get me out, not because of envy but gravity.

I best related to the flawlessly restored '70 Volvo station wagon and closely resembled its octogenarian owner who told us why, though I don't recall, it was some, darker than olive drab, green, not a stock color, and I could see why. I told him that my first car, which my dad bought for me the summer before my junior year in college from an Army buddy of brother Bill, before he, Bill, shipped out to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, and his buddy shipped out to somewhere safer, was a '65 Volvo 2 door which resembled a '48 Ford, and he immediately said the model #, PV 544, which I'd forgotten. I also told him that because he was impressed by the gauge of the metal on the body of mine, my father-in-law, Col Mac Tweed, USMC (who owned a '54 Chevy, '65 Pontiac and a VW bug that his 2 children drove when I first met him, and later, thru the overseas purchase program that some of us USMC contemporaries had used, a '65 or so Mercedes 4-door 220 sedan, now in the hands of his son Doug's grandson, Joshua) bought a '70 Volvo wagon which, like the VW Dasher wagon before it, he eventually handed down to my son, Tim, who handed it off to his step-son Tai, and which, on life support, was sold for a few bucks to a Volvo enthusiast who has given it new life. I sure wish I still had my PV 544, 3 in the floor, the perfect car for Sam to learn stick shifting on. He continually spotted and pointed out, like I'm sure teenage me did, cars that struck his fancy as we proceeded toward Yosemite, spending the night in a Holiday Inn Express in Westerley, which our young dinner waitress at Denny's told us was the apricot capital of the world, watered from a concrete aqueduct flowing through the brown, where not irrigated, San Joaquin Valley.

BTW, it's Monday morning, August 16, and I'm in my recliner at 2246 Rutherford Wynd in Louisville, KY, as I'm adding this as I'm proofreading, which isn't nearly as much fun as the original effort. Sam sold his Nissan a few weeks ago and bought a bright red '12 VW GTI with an automatic transmission, with plaid front bucket seats, which he, and I, love, not just the snazzy seats, but the whole car. About 3:30 yesterday I was driving the half mile over to hit some range balls at Seneca golf course. There were a number of cars parked in front of a house at 2306 Douglass Blvd and up Carolina Ave beside it. I parked to see what was going on. It was an open house for the contemporary abode which is on the market. I'd driven by, both in a vehicle and on my recumbent tricycle on my way to trike in Cherokee Park, and admired the house on many occasions. I joined the 25-30 going through the house. It is spectacular! I called Sam who, at 4:30 was finally taking his lunch break before getting off work at Target at 6:00. I told him to eat light and asked if he'd come over, that I wanted to show him something. He got here about 6:15 and I hopped in the GTI and rode in it for the first time over to the house for sale. Sam absolutely loved the house. He said it reminded him of Ferris's buddy's house in Ferris Bueller's Day Off in which Ferris and buddy wrecked buddy's dad's Porsche. I facetimed Janet in NC and Sam took her on an outside tour (the open house was over and it was locked up) while I sat on the deck and drank a Fat Tire in a cold mug I'd brought along. Boy, did it hit the spot. The realtor said they're taking offers up till 2:00 today. I want to buy it. Janet doesn't. After the tour, Sam and I had tacos at Taco Luchidor.

We talked about his future. He's a born, well, probably more learned than DNA'd in, entrepreneur. Maybe I'll write about his entrepreneurship later. Suffice it here to say that I told him I thought he'd make a good stock day trader. He'd already read a little about that and said that one can lose one's rear day trading, and I told him that's true, but one can also make good \$ at it, that I thought careful attention, which he has in spades to something he's interested in, is the key. I mentioned that I chatted with a fairly young black truck driver when we were both having our vehicles serviced at Oxmoor Toyota a few months back and that he's also a day trader, and apparently doing pretty well at it. Sam told me he has a buddy that has interned at Oxmoor as a salesman and he's thinking of doing it, too. My first thought was "a car salesman?" What the..., but I thought the same thing when he quit basketball before his junior year in hi school and started working at Walmart. In retrospect, I think it was a terrific decision. I not only love Sam, as I do all my grandchildren, I also love being his grandpa and get excited just thinking about his, which I'm positive he's going to have, bright future. I think the trip I'm writing about has brought Sam and me much closer. My mother used to say that you sure get to know someone by spending a week in a house at the beach in a house with them. The same is true on a whirlwind trip California.

NEWS Bulletin: I learned on the 5th (I'm typing this on 7/7) when all my immediate family except Janet, who drove back to our NC mountain cabin which is on the market (this as a fantastic opportunity for you mtn lovers to own your own log cabin [actually 3 reconstructed and joined pre-Civil War log cabins] on 19 acres on a ridge at 3200' elevation, with a view from the front porch of 6,000'+ Mt Celo in the Black Mtn Range, which is anchored by 6,683' Mt Mitchell, the highest point east of the Mississippi, and a view of Roan Mtn, at over 6,000', from the kitchen and back porch. Google Timberline Properties, Spruce Pine, NC listings. It's the one with the green roof and obscene price) and Tim's wife Sara (she was nursing stroke victims at Norton Healthcare-Brownsboro, one of the top stroke care hospitals in the country, where she started several weeks ago after receiving her RN certification just a week or so before) came over for ribs, chicken and pork chops from Kingsleys Meats, that Sam is selling his Nissan. He's still truckin' and grandma and gramps have one less worry!

Instead of stopping at our lodging outside, on Sunday we drove directly to the western entrance to Yosemite Nat Pk where Tommy had made previous reservations, and tested our recollections of the scenery as we slowly rounded the curves on the narrow 15+ miles to the valley itself. We incorrectly remembered that we would pass Inspiration Point, which gives enterers their first panoramic view of the valley, but we learned the next day on the 10+ mile drive from the valley up to Glacier Point on the south (?) rim that Inspiration Point is located a mile or two up that road. So, we drove into the valley on the one way loop, passing Bridal Veil Falls on the right, El Capitan and then Yosemite Falls on the left, and then Half Dome further down on the right, with Vernal (below) and Nevada (above) Falls behind. Google had warned of the crowds and possibility of not even finding a parking space, but we easily found a spot and took off across the meadow and the Merced River toward Yosemite Falls. From '84, we remembered the roar and then the mist as you approached the lower falls, but the west has been in a drought the last several years and the snows were less this past winter, so the roar was barely a whimper and the spray, unless you worked your way thru the crowd and over the rocks right up to the falls, was nonexistent.

The guys were somewhere up ahead and I stopped where most of the crowd had to pose on the rocks and logs for pictures with the falls behind. I don't remember how or who started my conversation with 2 fairly young guys with day packs on their back. They were super friendly New Jerseyites, as they soon told me, friends from church. The older is starting med school in Grenada this fall and the younger is working as an electrician, after deciding that a year of college was enough for now. I don't remember

the exact lead-up, probably my usual intro spiel aforementioned about being there with sons and grand, inspired by our '84 trip, my Tommy-coming-to Louisville-seminary explanation of where we were from and why, when, out of the blue, the electrician asked if Jesus was my personal lord and savior! Whoa, I wasn't expecting that rifle-armed, no hop, frozen rope from center, or maybe it was from right, definitely not left field. I'm sure I fumbled the throw a little before I attempted to tag the runner before he scored. I hope those of you who haven't played and are not baseball fans will catch the metaphor; if you don't, maybe your grandson or even softball playing granddaughter will give you an assist, which can be understood in regular parlance or as a basketball term. When you get it, hopefully they will throw both arms straight up, which, of course, everyone knows signals a TOUCHDOWN, 6 points on your side of the scoreboard. YEA Team!

OK, OK, enough sports' banter. Should I now discuss the religious, or as some say, spiritual issues raised by the EE's (electrical evangelist) question in general and my response to it, in particular. As I've reflected on the episode, several thoughts occur. This is a story about my encounter with strangers on our trip, a fairly, though not completely, given my propensity for rambling, straight narrative of events and people. I've sent some of the stories I've written previously, including this one's immediate predecessor, WESTWARD HO, which gave birth to this one, to immediate and some extended family members, some college (one such, commenting on some of the trip photos I posted, said he was looking forward to my story of the trip) and other friends, and they have been primarily recollections of my past, usually without commentary. I've had a couple of meaningful phone conversations the last day or two with a few relatives and close friends, drifting into discussions of mortality and how to use what time we have left. My good friend, Ricky Creech, who I previously mentioned, loves to read and learn. I've seen the leaning tower of books on his bedside table. I've started but will probably never finish a few of the books he's suggested, such as Don Quixote. I mentioned earlier that I read Bridge of San Luis Rey on the flight out, which Ricky loves and suggested. He said and I of course know, that reading good writers will make me a better one. I told him that I can spend my remaining conscious days reading and writing, much as I'm doing now, and that I'll enjoy both and might even improve my prose. And I get a pretty good kick out of it, seeing how I can translate my memories into something others may enjoy, and it's nice to have some of you say that you enjoy my rambling strolls down memory lane. But, other than maybe helping slow down my mental deterioration and providing some of you a nod of recognition when my memories connect with and may even unlock some of yours, am I accomplishing much "worthwhile", even in terms of what I say, as the sands of time swiftly depart my hourglass?

I took a nap after typing this and I've decided to continue telling the story of our trip without getting too philosophical. Tim suggested some time ago that I start a blog and put my stuff on it. Debbie can maybe help me set one up. Then, rather than emailing my ramblings, presumptuously thinking that you or anyone will be interested in reading them, I can simply put them on my blog and maybe categorize them, separating narrative from philosophy and MHO's. Maybe I'll even stop posting opinion stuff on FB. Nah!

Suffice it to say here that I had a rather long response to EE's question, delving into my personal religious history and experience, not as long or as cerebral as William James' "The Varieties of Religious Experience", which I think is on my shelf because Tommy was assigned, and maybe even read it in college (I'm fairly sure it wouldn't have been assigned at Southern Baptist Seminary, which morphed from carrying a very moderate to highly progressive, for Southern Baptists, anyway, reputation to a very conservative one before Tommy entered. Its president, Al Mohler, ran for but lost his bid for presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention several months ago, which, if I remember correctly from the news reports, is the largest religious body and maybe has the largest membership of any organization in the

country. He periodically writes op-eds in the Louisville Courier- Journal, usually on a controversial religious/social/political issue, and his views are usually pilloried in the next weeks' letters, often by progressive, even moderate religious leaders. After I read him I kick myself for having wasted my time [I know, we need to know what those we disagree with think, but still...]). I think I was still talking to EE and doc-to-be when Tommy came up and I introduced them to him and slipped away. We saw them the next day at Glacier Point.

We stopped briefly to see the valley views and snap some shots at Inspiration Point on the way to Glacier, and stopped again before reaching Glacier and parked in an almost full lot to hike the 1-1.5 mile trail to Sentinel Dome, which the boys said but I only vaguely remember us hiking to in '84. It's a moderate hike leading to 360 degree views from atop the granite dome and there were plenty of hikers of all descriptions that morning. T,T&S were going to hike first to Sentinel Dome and then to Taft Point before returning to the Tigan, but I was only going, or going to attempt to make it to the Dome, so I told them to go on ahead. About half way there I was overtaken by a family of 6 from southern Indiana, my first evidence of which was that the dad was wearing a Purdue sweatshirt. I'm sure I shot the opening volley, asking if they were Hoosiers and telling them I was from just across the Ohio in Louisville. Dad was a Boilermaker, an engineer now working in controls', such as in HVAC controls, sales, I shortly learned from his wife Twila, so named by her mother Gwen, one of the 6, a 78 yr-old retired school math and PE teacher and coach. As a young single teacher, she had gotten knocked up (it's amazing what people will tell you after you've established some rapport) by a married with children teacher and the baseball coach where she had taught. Great with child, Gwen moved from Indiana to California to live with an aunt and uncle, and, while attending a Dodgers TWILight double-header, settled on the name she would give her daughter and only child. Twila and hubby's daughter, taking a week off from serving as a summer ranger at the Admiral Perry Peace Park on Lake Erie, is a rising Purdue junior. Alex, who I walked and talked with a little ways, is a tall, thin handsome blond lad, a rising high school senior, who has played the piano for 10 years, and a musical theatre passionata who has sung the lead in either his school or his town's production of one of the classics, maybe Les Mis, whose goal is to be on Broadway, probably as a music writer or arranger instead of a performer, since he, not self-diminishingly but honestly, said that his vocal talents didn't rise to that level-a delightful young man.

How do I know all this? Twila told me as her family went on ahead and she lingered back to walk and talk with me. Though I told her to catch up with her family, she said they'd be there when she got there and she stopped every time I did to catch my breath. She is a very bright, articulate, attractive woman. In fact, she is the spokesman and director of communications for her Catholic diocese. She was baptized and raised by Gwen as a Methodist but joined the Catholic church when she married her Catholic husband. They have raised all their children Catholic, but she says she's now the biggest popeist of her bunch.

When Twila was little, Gwen and she returned to a different but close by town from the one where Gwen had taught when she got pregnant and Gwen resumed teaching and her clandestine affair with coach, which went on for another 10 years, until Mrs Coach discovered it. Coach and his Mrs are still married. Twila met her 3 older half siblings about 10 years ago. Gwen, who I chatted with briefly when we got to the top of the Dome, has never married. When I felt it was comfortable enough, after we'd talked religion briefly, I brought up the subject of abortion with Twila. She is not dogmatic in her pro-life stance. She said that her feelings about it are probably strongly influenced by 2 things, the fact that Gwen chose to have her and the fact that Alex, who they adopted from Russia when he was 3 months, wasn't aborted by his mother, who had 2 other children, both of whom she allowed to be adopted. We discussed but I can't remember for sure, but I think she said Alex would like to meet his birth mother. I

don't remember at all what she said about his father, whether even the mother knows who he is. I also felt I'd gotten to know Twila well enough to ask whether Alex is gay. He is. He came out to his parents some time ago but only recently to others. Apparently he's happy with who he is and glad he came out. My eyes are beginning to water as I type about this extraordinary woman and her family. I don't know her politics and don't care. I would trust her with any secret I have. I don't have many.

When we got to the base of the dome, I told Twila to go ahead, as I gingerly picked my path up. My guys had already summited and headed on to Taft Point. The views from the Sentinel were as fantastic as advertised. I stayed on top for over a half hour, making pictures and a 360 degree video, which I later shared on FB. I chatted with several folks. A guy was sitting on a rock on the 359th degree, with El Capitan beyond. I asked him on the video if he'd climbed it and without looking at me, he responded, expressionlessly and monosyllabically, "No". This concluded the video. Twila introduced me to Gwen and her 12 year old, beautiful, big boned like her dad, frizzy blonde haired with her braces shining with her big smile, multi-sports playing, delightful daughter and 3rd child. Twila (she might spell her name Twyla-she told me but I don't recall) and her husband had been to Yosemite and Sentinel Dome the year before for their anniversary, but this was Gwen and her children's first visit, most likely Gwen and my last, but hopefully not Twila nor her husband and children, nor my progeny and their families' last. I think I'll recommend that the Park Service put a visitor counter at the Sentinel. We'll never know how many have stood on it; I'm sure millions, and it doesn't appear any worse for the wear. In fact, I think I saw a big grin on its face. I know I saw a lot on its visitors'. Twi(y)la's and her family put a big smile on mine!

Coming down, I walked a ways with some folks from Austin, Tx. One helps maintain the sports complexes at UT and his wife works in the sports teams' travel office. It's a good thing I met them. At a juncture, I didn't notice the signs and they kept me from following them to the parking lot where their car was rather than the trailhead lot where Tiguan was parked. (Google says a Tiguan is a combination of tiger and iguana. Sheesh-glad cats and lizards can mate only in some disturbed ad guy's mind!) Down the right trail, I said something to a young, maybe Asian Indian boy, walking ahead of his apparent parents. Kids are usually startled when I speak to them, a sign that they're listening when their parents tell them not to talk to strangers. I often say to an obviously 5 or 6 year old, "you must be at least 9 or 10", which almost always gets their attention, especially boys. He was 5, but a tall 5. His parents, coming up, smiled. They're both docs at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, not mds, Phd physicists who work in oncology radiology, doing both research and assisting the care givers. To bigger smiles, I suggested to them that their son would probably discover the cure for cancer.

Tommy and Sam arrived at the car just as I did, wondering where Tim was. He came up in a few minutes. All 3 had hiked to Taft Point together, but Tim went on ahead, thinking they were behind him on his trek to Roosevelt Point, but apparently uncle and nephew, new hiking partners, didn't feel the New Deal like their brother and dad, skipping Roosevelt and coming straight to the car. BTW, when we got back to Ky, Tommy asked us to send him all our trip photos. On the 5th, all my immediate family except Janet, who left on the 4th for our cabin...oops, I kinda remember talking about this on FB or a text to my brothers, or somewhere, so I just scrolled up and saw where I told this in yesterday's (now, a couple days ago's) NEWS Bulletin. YIKES! Maybe my memory's not what I thought it was. In any event, Tommy asked us to send him our trip pictures. He picked one out and took it to Walgreens where, for \$26 (it was supposed to cost \$90 something, but the lady helping him cropped out half my face [the better half], redid it, charged him only half price and then gave him the discount they were running-Bullet can do some negotiating) he had it blow up to probably 14x22" and brought it over for me on the 5th. It is a great picture of the four of us, made when we stopped at an overlook on the narrow curvy road toward the

Tioga Pass eastern exit/entrance from/to Yosemite NP on our way to Tahoe, where signs marked the trailheads for 8-9 mile hikes across amazing graniteland to the top of Yosemite Falls and El Capitan on the Valley rim opposite Sentinel Dome, Taft, Roosevelt and Glacier Points. In the photo, Tim's on the left, Sam between and with his arms around his dad and Tommy, and the now, fully back in, me, all except me with priceless expressions, and mine better than most photos catch me in, a remembrance of our trip and my guys that I'll treasure the rest of my life. It's now sitting on the living room mantle. Thanks, Bud! You cut plumb dead center with that, (a line from one of our favorite movies, "Sgt York", when Alvin York's bulls-eye won him the beef which he parlayed into enough cash to buy the bottom land he needed before he could ask Miss Gracie to marry him) Bullet!

Our next stop was at some vista view with quite a few vista viewers. I made a comment to a short, balding guy, browner than me, who was with apparent family, browner than mine, about our similarities in age and traveling companions, and he made some gruff, accented retort, something about why I wanted to know his age, which I hadn't asked, and walked away. A bit later, we found ourselves jockeying for photo spots with him and his clan, and further conversation ensued, I think between Tim and them. The patriarch joined in and said he bet we couldn't guess where he was from, the westernmost part of Europe. I immediately responded with "the Azores." He lit up like a Christmas tree, saying that in the 50+ years he'd been asking that question of Americans that I was only the 2nd who'd answered correctly. For the next few minutes, I learned more about the Azores than I'd ever known, the approximate # of islands, the sizes of the largest, that they are part of Portugal, in his opinion, and in Janet's, who's visited both, a much better country to visit than its neighbor, Spain, and that there are upwards of half a million Azorans in Cal, or maybe it's the whole US. I think one or more of his accompanying progeny had married accompanying Puerto Ricans or other, I started to say foreigners, but caught myself-of course, PR's are no more foreign than North Carolinians or Kentuckians.

I think I was wearing a T-shirt that I inherited from my father-in-law Mac, a relic of one of a number of Marine gatherings he attended after his retirement from the Corps, this one a "Pop-A-Smoke" convention of the Marine Helicopter Veterans' Association. A lady approached me from the rear (the Pop-A-Smoke stuff was on the back of the shirt), thinking I was the original owner, and asked me about my service. I quickly disabused her of the notion that I was a Marine, giving her, I'm not sure which, the short, medium or long, history of Mac's Marine career, which I have refined such that I can spit either of the 3 out in rapid-fire, rather, if I do say so myself (which I, since no one else, will) gripping and descriptive fashion, which, as it usually does to most audiences, got her attention. Another nice lady joined us, both appearing to be a little older than I, both attractive and articulate, twins! Their father was a physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos. One of their husbands joined us. It wasn't clear whether their father or his had developed a ball point pen size gadget that everyone anywhere near radiation constantly kept clipped to their pocket, as you would a pen, which measured the accumulated amount of radiation in their bodies. The twins' dad was sent to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even before the Japanese signed their surrender on the USS Missouri in Tokyo harbor, to measure the radiation. I guess he was exposing himself quite a bit. I don't think I learned what he did after the war or how old he was when he died. Mac was sent to Japan for a year around '57 and I'm pretty sure he visited one or both of the nuked cities. He lived to be 94.

At Glacier Point, Tommy and Tim hiked down the 4 Mile trail to the valley and Sam and I joined the crowds pressed up to the guard rails to get the most magnificent views. (This is where, those of you who've read WESTWARD HO may remember, in I was called down by a park ranger for climbing over the rails to get a better photo in "84.) Coming down, we checked out a geologic exhibit, with sketches, narratives and photos showing how a glacier had carved out the valley, shearing off half of Half Dome

and leaving El Capitan's sheer 3,000' face, making it the most iconic climbing wall in the world. If I remember correctly, the narrative said the latest molten granite cooled about 100 million years ago. Walking down to the snack shop, I asked Sam if there was any doubt in his mind that the earth is many, many millions of years old, much older than the, what, 7,000 years the Bible says and the Ark (with dinosaurs mingling with other animals and people thereon) in northern Ky portrays, and he said no doubts at all, adding something like you'd have to be dumb not to believe what scientific evidence clearly shows. Thank-you, Sam!

We ate an over-priced cellophane wrapped, refrigerated sandwich on a rock wall along the sidewalk in the shade, where a guy and his wife and mother slid down and made room for us while their 10 year old son sat on a huge rock outcropping across from us. Grandma was born, raised and still lives in Morehead City, NC and son, a UNC journalism major, now works in coding with a tech company in Raleigh. I asked Granny the name of the famous seafood restaurant in Morehead and she named the one I was thinking of, the Sanitary Fish Market, where she said she worked for 17 years. In discussing when those years were, we determined that she might have cooked or served me the delicious seafood platter I ate when Janet and I visited there. Small world, and shrinking all the time.

Our timing was been good. Tim and Tommy finished the 4 mile hike, which Tommy said was the best, in terms of views, but most strenuous, on the thighs especially, as any he's ever taken, and they hooked up with grandpa and grandson just as we were finishing the 20 something mile drive down from Glacier Point and pulling into one of the few parking spots at the rendezvous point we'd agreed on, near one of the bridges over the Merced River, which had several sandy beaches, one of the valley's favorite attractions on a hot day, with shrieks aplenty as bathers plunged into the chilly waters. I mentioned before that "obey all rules" Tommy didn't jump off the bridge as Tim and Sam did, but he and I took a cooling dip.

I brought along a chair I'd bought for \$7 at the Modesto Walmart and placed it beside a chair in which a fully dressed, late 50s-early-60s appearing guy was sitting under a tree nearby. He was a YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System) bus driver who had driven from Fresno, picking up park visitors along the way. He told me about his job and something about his background, though I don't remember much about that. His personality seemed a bit melancholy and his geo-scientific knowledge questionable. I'd asked him about California's Central Valley, of which the San Joaquin Valley and the concrete aqueduct which we had crossed is a part, and I asked about other aqueducts providing irrigation to the valley. He said their main purpose was to carry fresh water all the way to and empty into the San Francisco Bay so salt water wouldn't flow into the valley. I knew I needed to change the topic so I asked about his health. Unfortunately, he'd had colon cancer and permanently defecates into a bag, which and where it is attached to his person he described in some detail. It's zipped closed and he has to unzip, empty and wash it out periodically. Yes, when unzipped, it smells of fecal matter. He said that when he breaks wind, the bag inflates and he can unzip it a little to emit the same odor we unbagged windbreakers do. WELL, I asked about it! I'm sure melancholy wouldn't be the word to describe how I would be, despondent would be more like it, if I, into my 60s, had to sit in a bus driver's seat all day on a bag of my own poop. I told him I enjoyed talking with him, maybe a bit of an exaggeration, though it was informative, and wished him well.

I've mentioned that one of Tommy's primary goals for himself on our trip was to pull himself up the cables on the backside of Half Dome to its top. That required a permit which could be obtained only by entering and winning a lottery, which you could enter only within 3 days before you wanted to summit. He began trying to enter on Friday but became increasingly frustrated trying to negotiate the website.

We encountered several who had climbed up and Bullet milked them for all the info he could glean. He got Tim to enter the lottery as well, though Bumble Bunny (a nickname I tagged Tim with, Bumble for some actual physically careless and potentially dangerous stumbles while hiking or climbing in his early youth, Bunny because of a Halloween costume Janet thought, but Bunny didn't, was adorable [I know, I know, a father should be ashamed of ever disparaging his offspring, and I am, though in my mind, it wasn't intended to disparage but to playfully remind him to pick up his feet, slow down, and watch where he was stepping; I didn't call him that often and, I don't think, ever in front of anybody but Janet and Tommy; I'm sorry, Bubs, another hopefully less disparaging, intendedly affectionate, moniker I've called him most of his life, maybe more frequently now than ever]) said all along that he would hike with Tommy to the cables but didn't think he was going up them.

Monday, they got word that they'd both won the lottery for a Tuesday assault and could take another along. Tommy was ecstatic. Tim and Sam were less so. The trail up by Vernal and Nevada Falls to the cables is about 8 miles. Cousin Will and Cecilia had slept in their car at the trailhead and backpacked the 8 miles to the cables and camped at the base that night. From there, it's only about 400', but at 45 degrees, up the twin cables, which are attached to metal poles sunk into the Domes's granite, to the summit. Will, concerned about climbers above slipping and falling and mowing down those below, wanted to be the first up, and they were, their way lit by coal miner's headlamps. Tommy planned to start up the trail before daylight, and though they wouldn't reach the cables for hours, he would be, if not the first, near the first up the cables, and if nothing else, avoid the hottest time of day.

The three mountaineers turned in about 9 Monday night after making some peanut butter crackers and sticking them and some energy bars in their daypacks and filled water bottles in the small freezing compartment in the little dorm room type fridge. I heard them stirring about 3:45 but, aided by my C-pap machine, went immediately back to sleep. I woke about an hour later and they were gone. They got to the trailhead at 5:30, just at first light, and lit out. The first mile or so was straight uphill, some up steps, no switchbacks. After 2.5 hours hiking, at the top of Nevada Falls, realizing they weren't even half way to the cables, Tommy the Bullet, remembering how hard on his legs the 4 mile hike down from Glacier Point to the Valley the day before had been, decided to terminate their assault on the Dome. I wasn't there, so, of course, what I'm relating is what I was told by the would be summiters. I haven't heard them discuss in detail how the decision to turn around was made, whether they convened a formal meeting, a motion was made, seconded and voted on, or what, but my guess is that Tommy suggested they abandon their attempt and Tim and Sam were, if not gleeful, certainly in agreement, heading down before Bullet could change his mind and upward trajectory.

While T,T&S were off to Half Dome, I explored Yosemite Pines RV Resort, where ours was one of ten cabins, with RV and tent camping up the hill and the general store, pool, bathhouse housing the laundromat, yurts and conestoga wagons down the hill. Camping in a 5th wheel, big truck pulled RV just across the street were twin sisters and their hubbies and kids. They were finishing up breakfast as I moseyed over and introduced myself. One twin lives in the very southern part of Illinois and teaches 7 and 8th grade math and science at a public Montessori school in St Louis (K-6 are real Monty, 7-8, quasi) and her husband works with a company doing environmentally good stuff, like wetland reclamation. They have 3 cute, polite kids, 12 or so down to probably about 8. When I asked what her sister did, several said, in unison, "show him your badge", which I assumed meant law enforcement; yes, but a special kind. She is one of only about 40 employees of the US Dept of Agriculture who oversee such things as invasive species. They live in Mass or Conn. I asked her appropriately sized husband if he was a Patriots linebacker. He'd played ice hockey in high school. They have two no-neck sons, about 6&8, who will need to add some height to their girth to be anything but sumo wrestlers, but they'd probably be as

tough as their mom on invaders. Their dad owns a property management company and while everyone else took off sightseeing for the day, he stayed in camp, sitting at the picnic table at his computer, saying he needed to catch up on some work, obviously a hint for me to move on. I took the hint.

There were all kinds of rigs housing campers, from small pop-up pull-behinds to Greyhound bus size Class A's (I think that's what you call those behemoths that you drive.) I can't look it up right now. I surprised Janet yesterday when I drove from Louisville down to our cabin near Bakersville, NC. It's on the market and she's been spending most of her time keeping the yard and house presentable, i.e., showable [her bar for presentable/showable is much, much higher than mine] and my phone said it wasn't connected to the internet. She worked on it for close to an hour and finally gave up. I've gotten so dependent on that astonishing little piece of black plastic for spelling, general info and the names, as well as a few notes, of the strangers I'm writing about that I decided to take it to Verizon to get it fixed. I told the young lady at the phone store that I'd just come to Spruce Pine [SP is the largest town in Mitchell Co, 5-6 miles from Bakersville, the county seat. Our cabin is near the community of Ledger, between the two] from Louisville and couldn't get internet connection and handed her the phone. Without saying a word, she turned it off and then back on and, voila, service, explaining that sometimes when you come from a more urbanized area with many cell towers to where there are few, the phone gets confused. No charge! My trip to town served a double purpose, i.e. also getting, lunch a cheeseburger all the way (mustard, slaw and chili) from Drive-In Diner, always busy at lunchtime.

As I stood beside the counter waiting 10-12 minutes for my burger (it was really hopping yesterday- there were 12-15 meat patties frying on the grill at a time), a lady walked up to the counter to pick up her called in order. When they handed it to her in a little white paper bag, I said "sure smells good." She, anywhere from 50 to 70, short with her long darkening blond hair pulled back in a ponytail, said "yeah, but she won't eat much". I asked, "Your mother?" "No, my daughter" and proceeded to tell me that her 34 year old daughter had a stroke almost two years ago and is paralyzed down her right side. It affected her memory and speech, both of which she is slowly regaining. "And she lost her husband, too." "He left her?" "No, he died of pancreatic cancer at 33." OMG! The daughter and her husband didn't have any children. Momma has another daughter and son, but she's her afflicted daughter's primary caregiver. As she left, I said the only thing that seemed appropriate: "God bless you and your daughter." "Thank-you." I drove home and ate my burger with some chips and a glass of milk. I couldn't help wondering if that 34 year old girl, 15 years younger than Tim, was able to eat hers.

I'm typing this at 6:00 am on Friday, July 21st in the basement of our log cabin, having driven in late yesterday afternoon from a few days solo sojourn in Litchfield Beach, SC. Janet thought she needed to stay here in case a potential buyer wanted to see the cabin, though I thought a few days away from her weeding, picking up sticks after storms and general worry about the presentability of the place would do her good. But she got a pleasant surprise when Tommy's wife Kim and their daughters, Emma, 15, and Anna, 13 drove down from Frankfort for a visit. That made me feel less guilty for abandoning her. Though this story is about the strangers I met on our California trip, I'm going to take a detour and talk about some folks I met the last few days while they're fresh on my mind.

I stayed at the Litchfield Inn, an oceanfront 1960's motel, kind of funky with two 3 story wings that flank the main building which contains the office, where a continental breakfast is laid out each morning, a ground floor informal restaurant and bar (the "Cabana Grill") with service inside or thru the windows where parents and grands can sip a cool drink while watching the kids cannonball into the swimming pools on both sides, or sit around tables either under a shaded canopy or under full sun on the ocean

side. Sitting near the pool, I heard an apparently timeless and placeless challenge which my brothers and buddies shouted 70 years ago but which I hadn't heard in years: "Last one in's a rotten egg!"

I got there around 5:00 on Sunday, checked in and wandered over to the pool and Cabana Grill and struck up a conversation with a couple who I'd spoken to briefly as we were checking in. They were sitting on stools and finishing up dinner, he a Cobb salad and she a plate of fried shrimp and fries, on the narrow counter outside the windows through which they were served. I think I said something like "that looks good" and asked for a menu. She pushed her plate of 5-6 huge shrimp and mostly untouched fries toward me and said "here, have one-I can't eat them all", and I did, expressing my appreciation for her generosity and for the deliciousness of the shrimp. She pushed her plate over to me and said that she was full and gave me free rein to take over, which I did, cleaning the plate, except for a few taters I left so as not to appear overindulgent. Wow! First night, free dinner. I think he said he was 58 and had grown up in Raleigh where his father, who'd gone to Hampden-Sydney, worked for Wachovia Bank. He followed suit, going to H-S (he knew about FUMA [Fork Union Military Academy] just up the road where Tim went for a year, primarily to play basketball, between high school and college) and becoming a banker in Greenville, SC. He was probably 5'8-9" and weighed 240+, with big legs and arms. I asked if he'd been a middle linebacker at H-S. He said no, that he'd played football in hi school but it looked like the fraternity boys sitting on the blankets with their girlfriends on the hill watching the game were having a lot more fun than the players, so he joined them. He had just retired the week before and his wife had recently retired as a social worker, two moderately conservative Republicans, she rather opinionated. I saw and spoke to them briefly over the next couple days, but the lack of much possibility for the meeting of our minds became apparent in conversation soon after I polished off her shrimp and fries. (After typing this, I realized that I probably gave them more story time than I should have. Most of my other characters are much more interesting.)

The next morning I took my coffee and Jimmy Dean sausage, egg and cheese biscuit, heated 1 minute in the microwave, out to sit on a high stool around the tall round tables on the ocean side of the Cabana and the only person there was a lady who appeared to be in her late 50's-early 60's, wearing an Iowa t-shirt, so I asked if she was from Iowa and she said no, that she was a military brat but her husband was. They live in Greenville, SC. In a few minutes her husband, Ali (pronounced Ollie) joined her. He and one of their sons-in-law work for Michelin. Ali is Lebanese. His 17 year old grandfather boarded a ship in Lebanon in 1912 bound for France, the first leg of his trip to the US. On the ship someone they (his cousin or a friend was with him) encountered got sick and they befriended and aided him. When they reached France, the befriended one was met by his wealthy father and introduced the Lebanese boys to him and told him how they had helped him. To show his appreciation, the father offered to take them to Paris and show them around but they said they needed to get to England and board the Titanic on which they had booked passage to the US. The father told them they could catch another ship and took them to Paris; hence, Ali's existence.

Ali and wife were soon joined by their two daughters, one an education professor at Winthrop who this fall is leaving the ivory tower and going back to teaching in the public schools in Rock Hill, and the other a special education teacher at Dorman High located on I-26 in Spartanburg. I've driven past it several times. It looks like a small college campus and has over 3,000 kids. The daughters have 5 daughters between them. Avery might be the cutest 4 year-old I've ever met. The whole family was seated at a large table at Pawleys Raw Bar where I went for dinner that night and I walked past them on my way to eat at the bar, thus avoiding a 45 minute wait for a table. I didn't notice them as I walked by but Ali did me and called me over and I said hi to them all, including Avery, who gave me a big smile, an All-American family if I've ever met one.

Early that afternoon I took a dip in the Atlantic and, between bobbing with the waves in shoulder deep water, did the arms exercise part of my water aerobics routine. Afterwards, I went to my room, poured a cold beverage in my insulated glass, grabbed a pack of nabs and an apple I'd gotten from the breakfast layout and a couple of New Yorkers I'd brought down, and set up shop on the end lounge chair at the end of the pool, turning it to face the ocean, using the low brick wall beside me to hold my stuff, much as I do the table that sits beside my recliner back home. Before I flopped down, I noticed a guy in his late 30's-early 40's on a computer at the other end of the row of lounge chairs, so I moseyed down to interrupt his typing, saying something like "surely you're not working" and he, not appearing to be annoyed by my intrusion, said that unfortunately he was. He's a software guy and told me that he had developed some software to assist lawyers. Well, that was the perfect entre for me to cross examine him. He asked if I was familiar with "heir property" and I said I knew what "heirs" and "property" are but not what they mean linked together. He explained that the term as he uses it describes property which has passed down through Intestate Succession (my term, not his, which means how property of a deceased passes who dies without a will) for generations, and that in Georgia alone (he lives in Atlanta) there is \$32 Billion of heir property, that is, owned by a usually large number of descendants of a land owner, most of whom are black. His software supposedly helps lawyers determine the ownership. I've dealt with property that's passed down by intestate succession through generations. It's not hard to figure out the fractional ownership; the difficulty is in determining who all the heirs are (remember the story I told the title insurance sister who's going to law school in Starbucks in San Francisco). Well, this young entrepreneur thinks he's discovered a way into that \$32B niche market. No wonder he was working on vacation.

I left the heir guy and settled in for lunch and reading. Shortly a lady, also late 30's-early 40's, settled in two lounge chairs down and before long we began a conversation that lasted at least 1.5 hours. Stephanie and her husband own a 300 acre farm outside Lexington, Va, on which they milk 125 Holstein cows and raise 95,000 broiler chickens, doing most all of the work themselves. I asked how in the world they could get away to the beach. She said they don't have many windows of opportunity when they are between chicken flocks and a friend is available to oversee the milking operation, which is done robotically, and when her husband isn't preparing the ground for, or planting, cultivating, harvesting and processing the corn they grow for silage. She didn't grow up on a farm and graduated from George Mason University, just up I-81 in Harrisonburg. Her husband did grow up on a farm and graduated with a degree in agribusiness from VPI. They borrowed \$1M to build and equip their chicken houses a couple of years ago. I asked who walks through the houses daily and picks up the dead birds. She does. It takes her 2 hours a day, but she said to compare that with working 8 hours a day in an office. Hmm!

Stephanie's husband was out on the beach, so she was watching her 6 year-old daughter, quite the tomboy she says, and 7 year-old son, a brother and sister who they adopted when they were 2 and 3, rescuing them from an abusive childhood. This past year, with school out because of Covid, she and some other mothers formed a group to provide some events to allow their kids a chance to get out of the house and away from the computer screen and see their friends. She hosted one in their barn. We discussed a number of things, many dealing with kids, the world they're growing up in, the issues they'll face in the future. I told her about my interest in early childhood education and the 30 Million Word Gap and she told me that she is worried that kids grow up too quickly, that she would like for hers to remain children longer and is particularly concerned about the early sexualization of children, and, of course, she's right. I suggested you'd have to start by turning the TV off. Just within the last couple of days, I guess because the Olympics are here, there have been several FB postings about the scantily clad female athletes, particularly the bikini bottoms worn by beach volleyball players, with the claim that their purpose is to draw more male viewers, which is probably true.

Brother Harry called and I told him where I was and that I was talking with Stephanie and gave him a quick synopsis of their farming operation and he asked to speak with her, so I handed her the phone, telling her who was on the line. After a few minutes I rescued her from what I gathered was his grilling her about the logistics of robotic milking, hearing him mention embedded computer chips, asking her for the phone back and telling Harry I'd already worn Stephanie out with my questions and pontifications and that one blathering Caldwell was enough for her to be subjected to. Her husband came up from the beach and I met him briefly. Another All-American family!

I walked down (south, down in my geography) the beach early Tuesday morning at low tide, to where the houses stopped (you can only walk, or bike, half that far on the street as the lower half is gated, controlled by a guard shack, but the beach is public) and approached a lady with 3 dogs. She was tossing a ball with a plastic launcher but only one pooch was chasing it; I guess the other two considered ball chasing a spectator sport. Leashes aren't required until 9:00. She was Allison Hardin, a UNC grad and USC law grad, who has never practiced but clerked for several SC Supreme Court justices for over 25 years and lives with her engineer husband in Columbia. I walked with her and her 3 4-legged companions back to beyond the guard shack to the first public beach access where her car was parked and thoroughly enjoyed meeting and talking with her on a variety of subjects. Our political leanings aligned closely. I guess it's easier and less stressful that way; conversing is easier than debating. I told her I was writing this story and that I would like to put her in it and got her permission to use her name, and got her contact info to send her a copy.

Allison and her dogs had only just departed for her car when I spotted my next victim, a small guy walking a little ankle biter. I used my line about who was having the most fun, and after hesitating a few seconds, he said he tried to think of a clever response but couldn't come up with one, thus beginning one of the most interesting and delightful conversations I'm reporting on in this story. Scotty (I didn't ask his permission to use his last name. He told me which street he and his two children and their families were on and what he thought was the street # and name of the house, but I later drove up and down what I thought he said the street was but couldn't find a house with that # or anything close to the name he gave. I was going to ask his permission and get his contact info so I could send him a copy. Maybe he wanted to stay a stranger and didn't want his name in print. I might not have either if I were him) is 74 and also lives in Greenville, SC. He went to Newberry College his freshman year but got drafted. When I said I didn't think they drafted college students, he said they did if you were flunking out.

He was stuck in the Army and was on his way to Vietnam when the North Koreans captured the USS Pueblo, which they said was in their waters. I remember the incident quite well. The captain surrendered without a fight and he and his crew were held for quite some time. It was around '68 or '69. I was in law school and Janet, Tommy and I were visiting her folks, Mac, who had just returned from flying over 600 missions as a helicopter squadron commander in Nam, and Mary, at their home in Virginia Beach. Their neighbor and good friend, Stan Nicolai, also a Marine colonel and pilot, came over and he and I got into a bit of heated discussion when he said the Pueblo captain should have fought to the last man (glad I never served under Stan). Scotty was diverted to Korea. The Pueblo's capture may have saved his life. After Korea, his orders were to Fort Jackson, near his home in Barnwell, SC, but when he got to San Francisco, he was diverted to its Presidio, which the guys and I drove by a few weeks ago, with views of the Golden Gate, San Fran Bay, and the Pacific. Tough duty station!

After Scotty was discharged, he returned to Barnwell where Daniels, a large construction company which became one of the world's largest when it merged with Fluors, was building a nuclear power plant

on the Savannah River. He applied for a job and was asked if he had any experience in “critical path”, and he, desperately needing a job, said he’d had a course in it (as a freshman at Newberry or with the Army in Korea or the Presidio-I guess the interviewer didn’t have his curriculum vitae?), which, of course, he hadn’t, but he did tell me that he’d heard of it, and he got a job, starting at \$9,600/year (I started practicing law for Frank Griffin and Bob Clark in Monroe, NC in ’71 for \$9,500). Apparently he faked it pretty well. In less than a year, a high up visited his area and asked him to step into an office so he could speak with him privately. He thought that he’d been discovered as an imposter and was going to be fired; instead, he was given a 25% raise! Over \$500M was spent on the plant, but because of environmental concerns and cost overruns and delays, it never opened. Scotty said weeds now grow in the parking lots. Thereafter, he applied for a job at the Savannah River federal nuclear site downstream but was turned down. A couple of weeks later, he had a call from SC Senator Strom Thurmond’s office and was told to go back and reapply and he did and was immediately hired, working there until he retired. Thurmond’s first wife, who had predeceased him, was from Barnwell and her sister still lived there and was friends of Scotty’s family, and apparently she asked Strom to intervene. Scotty said the old Dixiecrat founder and presidential candidate was renowned for his constituent services.

Scotty’s wife died from breast cancer 6 years ago and he said it devastated him. He became something of a recluse, moving to a gated (he said it had a gate but didn’t rate one) in the South Mtns, near Morganton, NC. He said his only social life was playing tennis with some buddies. His two children grew concerned about him and talked him into moving closer to them in Greenville. After some years of widowerhood, a new group of tennis buddies suggested he needed some female companionship and when he said he didn’t know any women his age and hadn’t dated in over 50 years, they suggested he join a dating site, which he did. “You wouldn’t believe it”, he said. He was inundated! After visiting with an attractive lady about his age (I didn’t ask and he didn’t say how many times and whether in person or otherwise), he said she said she had just one question: “Can you perform?” Scotty is one of the most understated, hilarious people I’ve ever met. He asked her, “Perform what? I can’t sing, play or tap dance.” He said a lady from Grier emailed what she would like to do to him! If I were a gentleman, I probably wouldn’t have asked my next question: “Well?” His answer: “I’m still seeing her, and the woman from Grier, too!” He’s brought the Grier gal to watch him play tennis with his friends. They asked if he’s using a condom and he said he didn’t think they could get pregnant but they told him that they’d read that sexually transmitted diseases were rampant among that cohort. I didn’t ask and he didn’t say what precautions, if any, he’s taking. GO SCOTTY, GO, GO!

I offered to give a guy a hand struggling to put up a canopy. He was wearing a t-shirt with a B-25 bomber on the front and something about a museum, so naturally, I told him about Mac’s flying a B-25 in the Pacific in WWII (I’ve been typing this story for several weeks and can’t remember whether I’ve mentioned Mac before, so, if not, Mac is McDonald Douglas Tweed, Janet’s dad, a pilot for 33 years in the Marine Corps). Kevin Donovan is a 72 year old lawyer who’s still practicing somewhere in Ohio, near Dayton, I think. His father was the radioman and bottom turret gunner in a B-25 which flew either 30 some or 60 some, I don’t remember which, missions from Corsica, bombing bridges in Italy to trap German troops trying to get out of Italy as Allied troops climbed the boot. Kevin is a member of a museum which owns a restored B-25. He’s flown in it many times. I have his contact info and hope they’ll let me take a ride. I sure wish Mac was still living and could too!

The next morning I was in the lobby for a little breakfast and a guy holding two cups of coffee mistook me for an employee and asked about something, and when I told him I was a paying guest, he asked me to join him at an outside table. Mike McKinnon is my age and recently retired from practicing law in Greenville, SC, mostly criminal defense, including white collar misbehavers, those usually in federal

court. He said he just got tired of listening to lying crooks. He went to USC law school. When he told me he'd graduated from High Point, I think it was a College then, I asked if he knew my East Meck classmate, Dianne Holt, who didn't seem to be ashamed to be seen in my company our senior year, her only one as an Eagle, and who permitted me to sponsor her in the homecoming and sweetheart courts, and who accompanied me to the jr-sr prom. She came down to homecoming dance weekend my freshman year at Davidson and hers at Hi Point. Mike not only knew Dianne well, he married her sorority sister and asked me to say hello to her, which I have via email to her in La Quinta, Cal, where she lives with her husband Rob. Mike said I could find him later surf fishing just down the beach.

After Mike left to get his fishing gear, a young lady and her two 10-12ish daughters took his table. They live in Florence where she practices neurology and where her husband, the athletic director and basketball coach of one of the girls at the Montessori school they attend, was directing a camp their son was attending. She played freshman basketball at Presbyterian College, graduated from USC med school and did an epilepsy fellowship at Mayo Clinic. She became a neurologist because someone in her family has MS, and she practices Tele-medicine with a group headquartered in Fla. When I mentioned that Janet's niece, Jennifer's daughter Mia has recently been diagnosed with epilepsy, she said that if they were looking for an expert they should see Jonathan Edwards with the Medical College of SC in Charleston, one of the top epilepsy docs in the country. Wonder if he's a descendant of the Jonathan Edwards, one of the top preachers in the country of his day.

I started my beach walk and there's Mike, casting in the surf, so we picked up where we left off (I'm not sure where we were, but that didn't matter). After a few minutes a tall, robust, bronzed dude with a shock of white hair and a female companion walked by and we exchanged brief greetings. It wasn't long before Roger, 78 and wife Janet Ach came back by and joined Mike and my conversation. He was on Wall Street for years-I think he said he started with Lehman Bros-and apparently still has his hand in the market. They live in Cincinnati where they're from. I asked if he knew the Big O (basketball superstar Oscar Robertson) and he said they're friends and see each other occasionally at social functions. He said if I'll come up to the Reds opener next spring, he'll introduce me to Johnny Bench and Pete Rose. In NY, they knew some movers and shakers. Janet pulled up what appeared to be a 30+ year-old photo of them with Rudy Giuliani when he was mayor, who they said was then a pretty good guy but who now they despise. They are liberal Democrats, as is Mike, and, if you didn't know, am I. I asked if they'd ever met Trump and they said they sat at a table beside him on some occasion.

I was telling them about the story I'm writing on Strangers, beginning with the ones I recently met in Cal and also telling them about our '84 trip. Roger and Janet gave each other a bemused look and told about their family trip about the same time. They took an RV and were gone for 6 weeks. Janet drove with their kids. Roger and some partners were in the process of buying a railroad, so he flew to wherever they were on Fridays and returned to lay some more RR track on Sunday night. I think they said they were in LA for the Olympics, so it would have been '84. We considered taking in some of the games on our trip until I checked ticket prices. I have the Ach's contact info (also their permission to use their names), and Lord willin' and if the Ohio River don't rise, I plan to meet Johnny and Pete next April. Maybe I can fly with Kevin in the B-25 on the same trip to the Buckeye State!

When I checked into the motel on Sunday, you could hang meat in my room. It was 63 and I couldn't get the temp to budge. It was about 7:00 pm and the young maintenance guy said I'd have to talk to the regulars the next morning and got me two blankets. The next morning I got up with Roger and David, who were buzzing around in their Gator and they said they'd take care of it. They gatored up as I was crossing the parking lot later in the afternoon and told me they'd fixed it. Roger's from Fla originally and

was in the Navy. He has a partial Native American chief, at least the partial Native American has a partial headdress, tattooed on his forearm and I asked him how inebriated he was in the Navy when he got it, and why wasn't it complete. He got it after he got out and was sober as a judge. It was a 2 sitting job. The day after the first sitting, the tattooer ran his motorcycle into the back of an 18 wheeler. David is from Hemingway, about 30 miles inland from Georgetown and on my route home. I told them I'd had plenty of good seafood and was craving some good barbeque. With no hesitation, David said "Scotts", just outside Hemingway.

By the time I checked out Wednesday morning, I had met several other motel staff folks, including Jamie, a tall young man with dreadlocks and a couple of young guys from Jamaica. One told me that Covid had killed the tourist traffic there and he was here on a work visa. The Inn doesn't do housekeeping every day unless requested, which I didn't, but provided a bag to put dirty towels in to set outside your door, and clean ones would be put in your room. Nevertheless, there were a number of females cleaning rooms every day and I had made it a point to speak to several of them. David and Jamie saw me packing up and gatored over to my pickup. David gave me directions to Scott's BBQ and I asked if I should say he sent me. He said yes, to tell them Day-Day, the name they would remember him by, which is what his younger brother called him before he could say David, sent me. Then he made a call as I was talking to Jamie and one of the Jamaicans. He hung up, or whatever you call ending a cellphone call, and said he'd just talked to Mrs Rosie, the widow of Rosie Scott, Scott's founder, and told her I was coming. Just before I left, I asked them if they knew which lady would be cleaning my room. They weren't sure. I pulled out a \$100 bill and told them to divide it up however they wanted but to be sure my housekeeper got a good cut. They said that I didn't have to do that and I said that I knew that but that they had all treated me well, that they were hard workers, and that though I wasn't rich, that I'd made a good living working not nearly as hard as they and most "working people" did, and that I appreciated them and all hard working people. I even made a plug for Bernie Sanders, saying that he has done more to support the working man in this country than any other politician in my lifetime. They all shook my hand and bid me safe travels. I left shortly after the 11:00 check-out time, after stopping by the front desk and bidding farewell to Latisha, the bubbly 20 something girl behind the desk who I'd made friends with, and lit out for Hemingway.

I pulled into the Food Lion in Ernest's town (hope you got that funny) to get a six-pack of diet Mountain Dew's, my no-dozes, for the trip home. A chubby white late middle-aged guy wearing a bright yellow golf shirt, pushing a cart, stood out because all the employees I saw and most of the patrons were black. When I went to my truck, the gentleman had started his recent model Volvo station wagon parked beside me, and rolled down the passenger window and commented about my recumbent tricycle in the bed of my '04 Tundra. He asked if it was comfortable and I told him it was like sitting in my recliner. He told me about his bike. I told him my first car was a '65 Volvo that came down in the rear like a '48 Ford. He said he remembered that style. I told him I wish I still had it. I asked if he was from Hemingway and he pointed to a small, white asbestos shingled house across the street and said he grew up in it, but lived away somewhere and was in town visiting relatives. For most of the strangers I've written about hereinabove (love those efficiently descriptive lawyerly words that serve in place of several), I've remembered their names and stories, sometimes putting a name and a note or two in the note app on my phone, but I had forgotten to plug my phone in and it was dead, so before I bid yellowbird adieu, I jotted his name and a few notes on a scrap of paper. Now, I can't find it. All to say that I think his name was Pat, and I don't have his permission to so won't use what I think his last name was, and that he has an interesting job and leads a life only slightly less colorful than his shirt, light years away from his birthplace. Pat (or whoever) is evidence that Thomas Wolfe was only partially right, that you can go home again, but wearing a yellow shirt, you will stick out and probably won't want to stay long.

Scott's is about two miles from downtown. It's hard to tell whether Rosie built the old, white painted block building to house Scott's BBQ, or converted a car grease joint into a pig grease joint. Under the shed roof on the porch, an older than me black lady sat on an old bench beside a ceramic pig guarding a humongous watermelon. Several grocery carts were filled to the brim with cantaloupes and melons for sale. I don't remember their price but they didn't appear to be steals. I asked if she was Mrs Rosie and she mumbled what I took for yes, but said more distinctly that that's what they call her since her husband Rosie died around Christmas. Inside, a large photo of Rosie (his nickname-I don't remember his real name, probably Roosevelt) Scott hung on the back wall with a write-up about him. On the opposite wall was a montage of photos and clippings as large as Rosie, the most prominent being several photos of the Obamas, together and individually, and one with Barack and Jim Clyburn. FDR and JFK photos would have fit right in.

Behind the counter a lady was taking orders and another filling them, ranging from a sandwich to bulk BBQ, slaw, potato salad, baked and green beans, pimento cheese, corn on the cob, cornbread, and more. Whoever is doing the pricing has kept up to date with the price of meals in bigger towns. I ordered a BBQ sandwich; slaw is extra, and I had to have some potato salad. They filled a paper bag with separate plastic containers of the goodies, a small container of sauce, and two slices of white loaf bread. I told the cashier that I'd been sent by Day-Day Parker who told me he had called Mrs Rosie to tell her I was coming, and she told me that she was the daughter-in-law and had taken the call. I went out and fixed and ate my sandwich on the bench beside Mrs Rosie. Two college-age guys came out with bulk goodies and spoke to the matriarch. They were from Arlington, VA and were staying with their families at Pawleys Island and were going to surprise them with Scotts' 'cue. I asked if they had ever eaten at Scotts before and they said no, that they'd found it on the Internet. They were excited by their discovery and were very gracious toward Mrs Rosie. Wonder if they were UVA Wahoos or members of the Bill&Mary (that's what former Oklahoma basketball coach, Billy Tubbs called William&Mary when criticizing Dean Smith's UNC schedule) Tribe, or maybe they were culinary students or studying to be food critics. I wouldn't be surprised if their tribes didn't send them back for more.

It was lunch time so the place was hopping. A forty-some guy was passing through for the first time since his dad brought him there 15-20 years before. My sandwich was delicious. They had given me a generous portion and I ate only half and decided to keep the rest for dinner. Brother, Bill, as does, only to a slightly lesser degree, his wife Sylvia, loves BBQ, so I decided to take them some. I had a small cooler, cooled by a couple of those plastic containers you freeze, containing a couple of diet Cokes and 2 cans of Yuengling, the remainder of the 6-pack I'd bought at the Food Lion at Litchfield, since they didn't have my usual, Newcastle Ale. The BBQ is cooked daily in a Quonset hut beside the main building. A couple of cookers were sitting on the picnic table out front, cooling off. I walked over with the 2 cans of Yuengling and said I knew they wouldn't/couldn't/shouldn't drink them on the job but wondered if they might want them for later. They said they'd never heard of Yuengling but gladly agreed to try it, later, I feel sure. I went back in and bought a half pound of 'cue, sauce and a container of slaw and put it, with my left over, in the cooler. A tight fit but I got it all in. Thereafter, Henry and Juicy gave me a tour of the hut. They cook whole hogs on 8 waist high, 3 sided concrete block pits with grates at various heights. Henry took me out back where wood was stacked high, with a fire burning down wood piled out the top of a 55 gallon drum with an opening in the bottom from which they shovel coals for the pits. Inside, there was a finished half hog, halved horizontally, that is, from snout to tail, lying on a grate on the top of the pit. Another pit was covered with some cardboard which they uncovered to show me a large pile of skins, which are apparently a delicacy to some. I've never tried them. Are skins the same as pork rinds, George HW Bush's favorites?

I asked Mrs Rosie if she had any children to carry on the business. She said she only has one son and he's started a Scott's in Charleston. I posted on FB some photos I made while visiting this delightful and delicious part of Americana, including a shot of a plaque honoring Rosie and Ella (I've been calling her Mrs Rosie. I just read her name when I pulled up the photo of the plaque) Scott and their historic eatery, with www.easternSCheritage.com at the botto, and Pam Griffin Toledano, one of my former law partner's daughters, who lives in Charleston commented: "Haven't been to Scott's in Hemingway, but his son or maybe grandson Rodney has made quite a name for the family BBQ here in Charleston on Upper King. Just won a top award! I'm sure Rosie is smiling!" I hope to eat Rodney's 'cue some day.

I've forgotten when I started typing this story. I think it was within a week or so after we got back to Louisville from California on June 26. It's now July 31 and I'm thinking that if I don't wrap it up pretty soon, some of you might become strangers when it comes to your reading my rambling stories. But before I return to telling about strangers I met out west and in transit, please permit me one more detour. The last 3 sentences are the last I typed yesterday. The realtor who has our cabin listed for sale called Janet Friday night at 10:30 to say that another realtor from Asheville had a client who'd flown in from out of town and was flying out at noon Saturday and wanted to see our place at 9:00 am, so we were up early, scrambling, mostly Janet (my advice was to just make up the beds but she thinks it has to look like it's not being lived in) to be out before 9. Now, I realize that what I just told you has nothing to do with this story on Strangers, and that my stories sometimes read more like a diary than an essay. Maybe that's because I'm more of a conversationalist and raconteur than a journalist. Being the former is easier and therefore a lot more fun than the latter, so I'm sticking to it.

A page or two back I said that I'd lost the note I'd scribbled down about Pat with the yellow golf shirt in the Food Lion parking lot in Hemingway. I just found it. If I was a real writer, I'd go back and add what I'm fixing to say now to what I said about him earlier, but being that I hate editing and rewriting, I'll just say it here. Pat lives in Ashland, KY where he's still trying to make a living in the dying, thank goodness (for the environment, that is, not so much for W Virginians and eastern Kentuckians) coal business. His 68 year-old brother is a lawyer and preacher in Charleston. I don't know which came first, law school at USC or Southwest Baptist Seminary in Texas, which is a perfect segue into my last, I think, detour before returning to the strangers I met on our western adventure.

I have 3 9-10 minute interviews on my phone that I've made the last year or so of 3 very interesting but completely different gentlemen. The first is Claude (I'm not going to give his last name because I don't yet have his permission), 76, a Vietnam vet suffering from stage 4 cancer all over his body as a result of Agent Orange and retired agriculture extension agent, living less than 15 miles from us here in the mountains. The interview was made about a year ago. I called him last week to see how he was doing and to see if I could come over and show him the interview and get his permission to go public with it. His voice was strong even though he's undergoing several weeks of intensive radiation and chemo, designed he said to help control his pain. His docs have given him months to live (his son-in-law told me they gave him 6 months 2 years ago), but he's one of the most upbeat, delightful, salt-of-the-earth people I've ever met. I'm going to go see him next week if he's up to it. I hope that soon you'll be able to meet him via the videoed interview, too. The second is 90+ year-old Cortez Baxter, an African American who's grandmother was a slave. Bax works 3 days a week as the starter at the Asheville Municipal Golf Course. I drove over to see him on the job Monday. It had been about a year since I'd interviewed him. He'd never seen the interview before and was thrilled to see it, calling over Jeff, a much younger white golf course employee to view it. I got Mr Cortez's permission to go public with it. Jeff said he was already a celebrity and asked if I'd seen the documentary entitled Muni, which I hadn't heard of but have since

watched, and you can too at callaway.com/muni. I hope you'll also be able to watch my interview of him telling his extraordinary story soon. The 3rd is of a WWII and FBI vet who was the lead investigator into the murders of the 3 civil rights workers who were murdered and bodies buried in an earthen dam outside Philadelphia, MISS in 1963, as told in *Mississippi Burning*, starring Gene Hackman. I hope to get his permission to show the interview when I get back to Louisville, where he lives.

After seeing Mr Cortez, I drove back to Spruce Pine on the Blue Ridge Parkway, meeting 2 Columbus, Ohio brothers who were motorcycling it as far as Roanoke after riding the Tail of the Dragon at Deals Gap from far western NC into TN the day before; a UofTexas, Austin sociology professor and his wife who are exploring retiring in the NC mountains; and a retired FLA assistant state's attorney with long, gray hair flowing from under his hard hat, who, with 5-6 other retirees who volunteer for the Park Service several days a week, were repairing the old picnic tables at the Craggy Gardens picnic area, and that was just before meeting a retired math teacher and his retired special ed teacher from the Buffalo-Rochester area who have retired to Asheville to enjoy such things as the hike which they were beginning.

Now, the segue. I drove up to the parking lot near the top of Mt Mitchell State Park and hiked up to the observation tower located at the top of the highest point east of the Mississippi River at 6,683'. Back down by the gift shop and concession stand, I spotted a Davidson cap on a guy and asked if he was a Wildcat, and he said "Yes, 1980" and I said I was a much older Cat, 1968. Elliott Hipp, and though I didn't ask permission to use his name, I'm using it because he's in the public domain as the pastor of Paw Creek Presbyterian Church, on the west side of Charlotte, and if you check out its website, you can see his photo and read about him, see his sermons on video, and read his pastor's blog. He grew up in Charlotte and graduated from West Charlotte High School, which had been an all black school when I graduated from East Meck in '64. When I said East, a big burly guy nearby said "East, '92" and another guy in hearing range said "Harding" and his graduation year, which I didn't get but, from his appearance, I'm sure it was later than mine, Elliott's, and the East '92er's. Elliott got a law degree from Columbia and was a legal aid attorney in NYC and Boston before attending Princeton Theological Seminary, entering the Presbyterian ministry and pastoring several churches (I remember his mentioning one in Roanoke) before landing at Paw Creek, which is near Cook's Memorial Presbyterian, which of course he was very familiar with, asking the name of my maternal grandparents (Beaty) after I told him they and other relatives were buried there and that the church was named for Dr. George Cook, its founder, who was married to my Grandma Beaty's sister, my mother's Aunt Em(ma).

He mentioned his rather unusual career change and I told him about Bill Carr's 1 year at UNC law school before hearing Uncle Sam's call (actually, he had heard and accepted our country's call when he transferred to Davidson after 2 years at Mars Hill and became an advanced Army ROTC cadet, thus in effect joining the Army and agreeing to serve 2 years as an officer) and entering the Army Medical Corps, serving a year in Vietnam before attending Columbia Seminary in Decatur, GA. I then told him about my brother-in-law Doug Tweed, who, after being a National Merit scholar at Duke, a law reviewer (top student) at Vanderbilt Law School, a Marine JAG officer, the top biller (according to his dad) at the largest law firm in northeast TN in Kingsport, resigned from the firm, commuted to Asbury Methodist Seminary just outside Lexington, KY for 3 years, was ordained as a deacon rather than as a minister by the Methodist church so that he could stay in Kingsport, being assigned by the bishop to be pastor of an AME Zion church in Kingsport which he pastored for over 10 years, founding, being the primary benefactor of and still leading a ministry called Friends of the King, writing a monthly, or maybe bi-monthly (I just googled "bi-monthly" to see if it means twice a month or every 2 months, and to my surprise, and I'll bet yours as well, it can mean either, though in this case, I mean the former) religion

article (actually, a Christian semi-sermon) for the Kingsport newspaper, and is now leading what's being billed as the New Great Awakening for their region. Reverend Hipp said that lawyering and preaching had at least one thing in common; using words as their tools. I guess to show him my cleverness, I commented that hopefully a lawyer's or preacher's words emanate from good reasoning.

OK, OK, I promise, my last detour before returning to the west. On Sunday, July 25, Janet and I rode over to Elk River Falls near the tiny village of Elk Park (though it used to have a motel and restaurant called the Times Square where, the weekend after Thanksgiving, my now deceased, [he died 10 years ago with a Ted Kennedy type brain tumor, may he RIP] good friend Andy Boggs, his neighbor, Ed somebody, and I ate a tough steak and spent a rainy night before backpacking on the Appalachian Trail the next day from Carver's Gap, where the road crosses the Roan Mountain range, over Jane and Round Balds, and Little and Big Hump Mountains, ending back in Elk Park where our car was parked) on US 19E near Newland, NC, the county seat of Avery Co, home of Grandfather, and Grandmother Mountains. The Elk River plunges in a voluminous waterfall probably 25-30' and a rock ledge partially dams the water to form a perfect swimming hole. I had been there 6-8 years before with brother Bill, Bill Carr, and Chris Pappas, Bill Carr's good friend from their Mars Hills days (Chris's beautiful and talented wife, Cheryl [sp?] has served as chairperson of Mars Hill University's Board of Trustees and Chris on its investment committee, and they both sing in the choir at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte with brother Bill). They and brother Harry, who'd left us to drive back home to Severna Park, MD, had spent a nite or two at our cabin, sans Janet, who still complains about the grease left on the stovetop after Carr's delicious country ham and pancake breakfast, which is what I remember and which was worth the greasy stovetop (of course, Janet, not I, cleaned it up). I took them to see the falls on our way to mow the grass at Cheryl Pappas' mother's (her mother is a widow who winters in Fla) house on the Mountain Glen golf course in Newland, where Cheryl's dad had been head of the power co-op. Oops, sorry for this extraneous information about folks who aren't strangers to me, though they may be to you. Now to the strangers, even to me.

A good many fun loving adventurers had edged out on the rock ledge dam, including me and Janet, who cautioned me that every step could be my last, maybe not my last last but my dry last. A short, shirtless Buddha type, maybe my age, sat cross legged on a huge rock island which you could step on to from the ledge. I quipped something like "is that your rock?" and he looked at me quizzically. I said something less quipful and he said something in a foreign language, probably Spanish, to some ledge sitters, but didn't budge for quite some time. (He probably gathered that I wanted to try the rock). Janet sat down beside a young couple. I slid down the slick ledge into the water, which was chilly but not icy, and floundered around in over my head water, diving under, but struggling a bit as I tried to freestyle around with water shoes on my feet, finally back stroking back to the hard to hold onto slick rock. I had a heck of a time inching my way up the slippery rock on my fanny, grasping for finger holds and a little rise to push my feet against, probably much like climbers inching up El Capitan. I later posted a picture or two on FB, with the caption "I'm getting too old for this kind of fun!"

Janet was still sitting beside the young couple and said "you'll never guess what they do" and I couldn't; in fact, if I was still over there guessing, I wouldn't have guessed it yet. (Janet just walked by and I asked her how long she thought it would have taken me to guess it and she said "Never-I never would have, either"). Kyle and Katie are drag racers. They met racing in Gaines, Fla where she, a civil engineering student at NC State, had pulled her 400+ hp Camaro down from Clayton, near Raleigh, on her 40' trailer with her 40' Class A motorhome and he had pulled his street rod over from Ft Lauderdale. He has since moved to Clayton and is working as a journeyman electrician and taking community college courses, with the goal of becoming an EE. In addition to his street rod, Kyle also owns and races a rail (is that the

right term?) dragster with, I think I remember this correctly, a 1400 hp rear engine. I asked him if that was a Don Garlits' (who's name I remembered from the late 50's-early 60's when Bill took Hot Rod Magazine) type dragster and he said it was, adding that he had met Garlits, who he said he thought was deceased, but I just googled him and he's still kicking at 89. Katie's reached 120 something over the 1/8 mile track in her Camaro. Kyle has run close to 150 in his Garlitsmobile. He has a parachute but said he usually can brake to a stop without it. They've raced at most of the drag strips on the east coast. I don't know how Kyle got started but Katie grew up with dragging, as both of her barbering for a living parents and her brother are dragsters. K&K, a delightful young couple. Who would ever have guessed their passion?

OK, I lied! A couple more recent strangers before I head back out west. Last Saturday I was at the Burnsville, NC farmers market when it opened at 9:00 to get some vine ripened tomatoes. There wasn't a one there. I bought some cucumbers from an organic farmer who said the mornings so far have been too chilly to ripen maters. He said he'd only pulled 4 or 5 and I asked him why he didn't have them out and he said that he had to have some to eat himself. I don't blame him! (I found out where his farm is, and after typing this part of the story but before editing it, as I'm doing now and thus adding this, I stopped by his ramshackle house and garden and bought a few vine ripened tomatoes. He's quite a character. Both his parents and he are graduates of Cornell. For most of his career, he worked for the state of Maine inspecting dairy farms, while also farming a large truck farm near, I think he said, Cow Pond.)

Parked nearby was an amazing vehicle unlike any I'd ever seen before, so I walked over and asked its owner, Seth Matteson, what I was seeing. It was a '77 Mercedes 0309D van or bus. He said there are probably no more than 20 of them on the road in the US. It stands at least 9' tall, his made taller by a rack on top, and must be 25' long, snub nosed, with windows down both sides. I made a video of Seth and the bus he's converting to a camper and he gave me permission to show the video on Utube or wherever, so I'm sure he won't mind my using his name here. He's retired from 20 years in the Navy and has the tattoos to prove it. He bought it in Butte, Montana and it still sports the Big Sky Country state's tag. He drove it across to the Washington coast and then down to San Diego, 1,800 miles, and then 2,300 to the cabin where he lives in the Green Mtn section of Yancey Co, of which Burnsville is the county seat.

Yesterday, August 2, I played 18 holes of golf on a sunny, 77 degree, perfect golfing day at Mt Mitchell Golf Course and stopped by Ingles grocery in Burnsville on the way home (actually, before I got to Burnsville is when I stopped by the former Mainer's organic garden off NC 80 for the tomatoes) and there was Seth's 0309D sitting in the parking lot. I didn't see him in the store. It was about 3 and I'd only had a pack of nabs for lunch, so I got a fried chicken leg and thigh and a piece of cornbread from the deli and went over to a small eating area in the store. The only others seated there was an older couple, she eating a salad and he drinking a Starbucks coffee. I asked if they were having a late lunch or an early dinner, and thus began one of the most delightful and serendipitous encounters I've ever had. Sandi was born in Chattanooga but her salesman father's job necessitated moving his family around quite often. They were living in NJ when she met Henry (Hank) Donaghy, born and raised in the Bronx. He was 32 and she 23 when he considered proposing marriage. He was concerned about their age difference and consulted his minister, who asked how old she would be when he was 42, and he answered 33. He asked how old she would be when he was 52, then 62, 72 and finally, 82, and before Hank could answer 73, the minister said "you'll both be old and your ages won't matter". Hank is now 90, Sandi 81. She said he'd only recently retired from financial planning. When I asked how long they lived in Burnsville, they said they live in Charlotte and are visiting their daughter, one of their 6 children, who lives in Mountain

Air, a gated, community sitting atop Slickrock Mountain, with room for a landing strip and 18 hole golf course, just a few miles from downtown Burnsville. Is it any wonder that the wine, cheese, deli, salad bar and other selections reach a much higher end, and that there a lot more Mercedes and Range Rovers in the parking lot at the Burnsville than at the Spruce Pine Ingles?

Three of the Donaghy children graduated from East Meck and two from Providence High in Charlotte. For many years, they lived in Providence Plantation and I told them they might have lived on some of the 300 acres located right in its center which were part of the almost 1,000 acres in Mecklenburg and Union Counties that my paternal grandfather had acquired by the time he died in 1942, paid for by raising cotton thereon with the help of his 12 children, but mostly by the black sharecropper families that lived in weather boarded shacks build on stone pillars with tin roofs but no plumbing, central heating or electricity, located on the farms they worked. The 12 Caldwell children sold the 300 acre "Creek Place" to a developer after Grandma died around 1960 for \$600/acre. If there are any lots left in Providence Plantation, I doubt one can be bought for less than \$100K. The Donaghys now live off Sardis Rd. They've been members of Matthews Methodist Church for years and knew well my Aunt Dorothy Caldwell Black, with her twin Don, the youngest of the 12 Caldwells, and her husband Bill.

Hank has been told that he's the oldest living Eagle Scout in Mecklenburg Co. He was on the board of the governing body of the Mecklenburg BSA Council for many years. They have many friends who're members of Sardis Presbyterian Church, where I told him my brother was a Boy Scout and I was a cub. I think our friendship became cemented when I told him I was Scoutmaster of Troop 109 sponsored by First Baptist Church in Monroe for almost 10 years. If I'd thought about it, I would have told him about Jim Terry, my college fraternity brother, football teammate, and one year roommate who was the chief financial officer for the Boy Scouts of America before he died with Lou Gehrig's disease 8-10 years ago.

I told Sandi and Hank that I was writing a story about Strangers I've met, like them, and asked if they would mind being in it and they said they would be delighted. Sandi said Hank has recently finished writing a book entitled Make It A Great Day and is in the process of getting it published. I got their contact info and as soon as I take a break, I'm going to send them an email so they can let me know when it's available to the public. I want to be one of its first readers. Sandi said it was nice meeting me and pushed her cart off to finish shopping. Hank asked if I'd heard of a woman, then immediately said, "of course you haven't", after he'd said her name, who ran a night club in the Catskills, where Dinah Shore, Dean Martin, and others earned their chops way back and who had a saying: "There aren't any strangers, only friends you haven't met yet!" With diabetes and having had 4 heart stents and 2 by-passes, I doubt I'll see 90, but whatever age I make it to, I hope to be even half as genial and optimistic and with the zest for life that Hank Donaghy has. I'll be happier and I'm sure my family and friends, even those I haven't met yet, will be happier, too. Hank, I'm looking forward to reading Make It A Great Day. You and Sandi sure helped make the day I met y'all a great one!

I'm now typing on August 5. I had to scroll back to page 18 hereof (my computer says I'm now on page 30) to find where I left this story in California to take a few (my cousin, Mike Hughes, comment when I said a "few detours" in one of my previous stories was "Ha") eastern detours, and found I'd taken the detour exit just as I was telling about my walk through the campground across from our cabin outside Yosemite after Tommy, Tim and Sam had departed in the dark on their Half Dome quest. Did I tell you earlier about the guy with the two sons, maybe twins, 8 or 10, then wearing Spiderman T-shirts? Whether I did or not, I encountered them again with their mother, studying, or at least they each had a book, (they are home schooled) at the picnic table in the site where their camper was parked. As I type this, I feel sure I've already talked about this family. When I proofread (have I mentioned before that I

hate proofreading?) this, if I find I've already told you about them, I may, or may not, delete what I've just said, but if I find that I haven't, I'll add more about them here as they are a very interesting family. ***Now proofing/editing on what I hope is my final day of such, 8/19, I see that I haven't told you about them. The father is recently retired from 20 years in one of the armed forces and they're traveling around, home schooling their sons, trying to decide where, if anywhere, to put down roots, pulling their fairly modest camper with a Mercedes Sprinter van with just 4 seats in it. The camper frame extends 6-8' in front of the camper proper, floored, with side rails to carry bikes, a grill and such. She took me around back to show me the washing machine in operation, hooked up to the campsites water supply and discharging into its sewer. I'd never seen one. It's quite a neat rig. A lot of folks probably like to do their washing on rainy days when they can't get out. I expect she prefers sunny wash days!***

Hot from my jaunt around the campground, I went down to the pool for a cooling dip. It was VERY cooling! There were two brothers, 14-16, one at each end, using their arms to turn an otherwise placid body of water into a wave pool. I learned from their poolside mom that they live in a rural area of CA and, with the schools closed by Covid, they turned their barn into a wrestling arena. There is a third brother and all three are competitive wrestlers. If I remember correctly, the oldest will be attending Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC on a wrestling scholarship. When I asked why so far away, the mom said that he is dyslexic and PC offers the best help to sufferers thereof of any school they looked into. Again if I remember correctly, both of the wave makers are ranked pretty highly for their age and weight, I think statewide, if not nationally. Their father, who wasn't poolside, was a wrestler and is their coach. Bill, Harry and I were rasslers, not wrestlers, growing up. Siblings that wrestle or rassel each other stay together!

When the waves subsided, a young couple ventured into the cooling waters and I was soon finding out about them. Angela Jorgensen and Neil Tomsett live in southern CA. Both are in the entertainment/communications/motion picture business. Angela writes for and, I think she said, hosts something called International Infamy podcast. I just googled her name and International Infamy and the first several pop-up, dated June 08, 2021 reads: "15 countries. 15 crimes. Ashley Flowers takes you on a wicked world tour, exploring notoriously high-profile cases and the cultural details that make them unique...". Scroll down a few entries and one reads: "Podcast Episode 6 Meet Angela Jorgensen and hear about our plans for 2020". Click on it and it says "Published on April 20, 2019 by hookingrugs" and a place to click to "Play on SoundCloud", which I clicked, but apparently you have to set up an account for that. Not now. I don't remember what his contribution was, but Neil's name appears in the credits at the end of Star Wars 7. Are there as many wars as there are stars? (I don't remember whether I asked Angela and Neil's permission to use their names herein, but since both are already out there, I'm presuming they won't mind.)

After 3 nights in our Deluxe cabin, we headed toward Lake Tahoe, exiting Yosemite NP through its eastern exit/entry, Tioga Pass. We stopped at a beautiful lake, whose name I forget, with the blueness of the sky possibly exceeded by the blueness of the water, surrounded by mountains. As I made a short video of the scene, I noticed a guy in a bright yellow jacket doing the same. Liam Madigan is a Brit who's married to a lady from Mexico where they now live. He has travelled all over the world as a ceramics engineer consultant and was on a week-long motorcycle trip, the reason for which had something to do with the fact that a buddy in southern CA, who he had cycled up from Mexico to visit, wouldn't be home for a week, so he thought he would get in a little sight-seeing. Hard to say how old Liam might be, but I would guess he's closer to 70 than 60. We walked back to the parking area with him and bid him safe travels as he cranked up his BMW cycle and us our Tiguan.

That afternoon we walked down to the beach at an historic spot called Camp Richards at South Tahoe. My guys walked on ahead as I stopped to speak with a couple sitting in adirondack chairs and feeding the ducks and geese. Jerry and Peggy Johnson live near Sacramento and, if I remember correctly, are both recently retired from the state, Jer, as he calls himself, from the probation and parole dept and Peg from another agency which I don't recall. Within minutes, we were talking as though we had known each other and had been friends for years. As you've probably gathered if you've read this far, it doesn't take long for a stranger to learn most everything about me. I'm an open book and I quickly flip the pages myself, divulging in short order who I am, personally, philosophically, religiously, politically, etc., and as it turned out, Jer&Peg are just as open. I don't know who brought up politics first, but we quickly discovered that we were sympatico, both of us being very progressive (I didn't get into this with them, but years ago, I changed my voter registration from Democrat to Independent so I could vote in the Union County and NC Republican primaries, which is where most all the ultimate office holders have been elected the last, what, 25 years? In partisan elections, I don't think I've ever voted for a Republican, except in Republican primaries. Some of you will say that I'm a fool, or worse, that one should vote for the person, not the party. Well, I do. I think that every candidate that I've ever voted for, all Democrats, as I said, more closely align with my views on governing than their opponents. Actually, there is one exception to my history of voting Democrat; I voted for Bernie, an Independent, in 2016 and 20. I won't bore you with why, except to remind you of what I told those guys I gave the \$100 bill to at the Litchfield motel; I'm for the average working man in this country and no one, I repeat, no one has stood up for him and her as consistently over their whole political careers as Bernie has. Would he have beaten tRump in '16 or '20? Who knows, but given the opportunity, I think he could have won over many working class voters by convincing them that they've been voting against their own economic interest since at least Reagan.)

I kept the ducks and geese from getting their cracked corn from Jer&Peg for at least half an hour, probably closer to an hour. Jerry asked me whether I thought our democracy can survive. I don't remember exactly what my response was, but I prefaced it by saying that that issue is above my pay grade, that I don't have sufficient expertise to be able to address it adequately. But, having said that, I'm sure I proved my inadequacy by throwing out a few opinions. If I recall, I think on balance I was a little more optimistic about whether, after 12 score and 5 years, a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, now engaged in a more civil, i.e. without bloodshed (or very little compared to 156 years ago, and, hopefully, very little more in the years ahead) but equally divisive war, can long endure than Jerry. I fully realize how much easier it is to make friends of strangers who you identify with, but please permit me to make a slight detour here to describe an encounter I had a few months ago with someone I don't identify with at all.

A few months ago, Tommy's wife Kim was given a surprise 50th birthday party by her sister, attended by over 50 relatives, including all of her 5 or 6 half siblings, including Willie (not his real name), whom I'd briefly met before once or twice. He came down to the basement where Tommy and Tim were shooting pool and I was kibitzing with them, leaning on his Louisville Slugger cane and proclaiming that it was his "liberal knocker". I think T&T were dreading what I might say. Willie sat down on the couch beside me. He may have been wearing a hat or T-shirt with a flag or something patriotic on it. I asked him if he had served in the military and he said he hadn't because of physical issues. I then told him about his brother-in-law, Tommy's and his brother Tim's paternal grandfather, USMC Col Mac Tweed. I think I gave him the full spin, from Mac's great grandfather, Neely shooting the sheriff in Madison Co, NC in 1861 and going north with his sons to fight to preserve the Union, to his grandfather taking his family, including Mac's father, to CA in a covered wagon, to Mac joining the Navy on July 4, 1942 and going to Navy preflight at Chapel Hill where he was in the class just behind George HW Bush, that Lt Jg Gerald Ford was

his drill instructor and that John Glenn was in his class (have I told all this previously? I've told it so many times I can't remember. If I have, please forgive me. If I haven't and you're interested in hearing it, I'm going to post a story I wrote about him in 2016, shortly after he died, on a website a guy is now forming for me, which tells all I know about Mac). I'll skip to Mac's personally flying over 600 missions, many med evacs, as a helicopter squadron commander in Viet Nam and ending his 33 year Marine career as director of Naval ROTC at Vanderbilt. Louie listened to Mac's story with rapt attention, shook my hand and thanked me profusely for telling it to him. I think I said something like "Willie, you and I might disagree on some things but I'll bet there are a lot more we'll agree on". He agreed.

As I told Jerry and Peggy how glad I was to meet them, he got up from his chair and hugged me. I got their permission to use their names herein. I don't have Jerry's permission but presume he won't mind my sharing a few of our emails since:

6/26 (the day, or maybe two days after our encounter),

Jerry: "Hello Tom-It was nice meeting you at Richards Camp located in South Lake Tahoe! It is easy to engage in a conversation with likeminded individuals. Have a safe journey back home-Bye Jer"

6/26, Me:"Likewise, Jerry. I guess our challenge is to engage civilly and hopefully constructively with those not as like minded as we. When I get home and rest up, I'll send you some of my sure cures for insomnia.

Hi to Peggy, Tom"

6/27, Jerry:"It's good to hear back from you so soon Tom, plus I enjoyed your funny sense of humor. Tonight on this evenings TV news, I watched a CNN special report on the attack on our nation's capitol-my take away was this, the cornerstone of all democracies is the peaceful transition of power from one regime change to the next. That didn't happen & now southern states are prepared to retaliate by changing election laws to ensure their favorite political outcome prevails. Under those circumstances, how much longer can a democracy last, if state legislators refuse to certify the majority outcome of their voters?

I think our democracy is already over & and we haven't caught on just yet. We are so polarized as a nation, it's generating social segregation among our citizenry since our politics are so diametrically opposed to each other.

That is why it was such an honor to meet and converse with you about politics. I wouldn't give anyone from a "red state" the time of day-you were a "break-through" who opened up my mind, that's why I was so over joyed to shake your hand & hug you, before departing-
Bye Jer"

And he gave his phone number

"Ps; This was my letter to Nancy P-read it when you're bored to death"

Thence follows a lengthy letter dated January 16, 2021, which begins "Dear Madam Speaker Pelosi" and advocates removing the offices of the congressmen and senators who explicitly or implicitly supported the capitol invaders from the Capitol building since their presence constitutes a continuing danger to their colleagues and others and ending with this:

'It's a strange concept, that the essence of a single man can redirect & convert an entire society or political party like magnet directed at pieces of metal.'

By Karen Blixen-Danish writer, political analyst 1933 & author of the book, Out of Africa

Best wishes,

Jerome Keenan Johnson, DOB 12/25/58 (typing this I just realized Jerry was a Christmas baby-the best gift one can receive-Tommy was born 12/24/67 about 7:30 pm)

Son of Bud Clark Johnson, DOB 3/16/1932 (my father was in the CIC)"

6/27, Me: "Good morning, Jerry and Peggy from Louisville, where, after a 2 hr delay in Detroit because a flight attendant didn't show up and we had to wait for a replacement, we finally arrived about 12:15 this morning, and I awoke at my normal 5:45. Jerry, that was a great letter to Pelosi. It may have provided the impetus for tRump's 2nd impeachment. As promised, I'm attaching one of my Nyquil substitutes, which I wrote on Veterans Day, '19. If that doesn't have you snoozing within minutes, let me know and I'll increase the dosage. 91 here today. There? Stay cool, Tom"

6/30, Jerry: "Sorry for my delayed response, Tom. I really enjoyed reading your Veterans Day commentary. Its literary style illustrated your life experiences, your past visions & genuine human sensibilities. I could guess the next word use in your following sentences. You've got a smooth writing style, buddy. That's talent.

I look forward to the day when we can chat over the phone about climate change, coastal condo purchases in Florida, Trump indictments & the passage of infrastructure legislation! Enjoy the music-Bye Jer

(in blue): Sade-Why can't we live together?-Montreux Jazz Festival (1984)-Bing video"

6/30, Me: "(the thanks emoji) Jer, inspired by you and Peggy and others, early this morning I started my latest story which I've entitled "Strangers". No telling how long it will take to finish. Depends on how I'm feeling. Flying home, I came down with the worst cold/bronchitis I've had in years...Will bore you with Strangers when done.

Hi to Peggy. Stay cool, No longer a stranger, Tom"

Well, I've bored you long enough with my email chain with Jerry. It continues on with a few more exchanges, the last from Jer on 7/2 in which he says, in response to my query regarding whether I can use his name in Strangers (I had forgotten about this earlier when I said I presumed he wouldn't mind): "By all means, please identify me by my name which is Jerry Johnson who is currently living in the outer regions of western territories of Antelope, Calif-who you met while feeding some Canada geese & ducks at Camp Richards". He attached an email to his friend about running in to me at Tahoe, in which he says: "...End result was this, we were both likeminded & I witnessed him cry for our nation. I've never seen a democrat shed a single tear for our country. I ended up hugging him! This attorney Tom Caldwell changed my outlook on the entire nation..."

Back to me, now. WOW! I don't remember shedding tears, and as far as I know, no one has ever seen me shed tears for our nation, though, as Janet and my family know, I can tear up pretty easily these days, in happiness and sadness. I experience both frequently, happiness primarily because of my family and friends and sadness, not from things that have happened to me or mine, but from so many things, from the bitterness, hatred and strife that is tearing our nation apart, to the poverty and abuse that so many millions, particularly children, suffer from, here and abroad, and seeing on TV, victims of war in places like Syria and Afghanistan, again, especially children, wandering around bombed out ruins of their homes. If that doesn't bring one to tears, I don't know what will. If only tears could help! But I know some things that will: UNICEF, the Red Cross, and so many other relief organizations can use yours' and my contributions, both of money and time and talents. For me, tears, which stem from our emotions, are like prayer; they are beneficial only when they inspire or urge or drive the crier or the prayer to action. This isn't intended to challenge anyone's religion or, to use a term used frequently these days, spirituality, whatever that means. I've heard people of faith say such things as, "God helps those who help themselves" (sounds more like pragmatism than theology to me), or "we are God's hands and feet

on earth", or "God works through His people"; even James, in scripture, says that "faith without works is dead". My philosophy is in line with those sayings; if you think something needs to be done, or changes made, don't wait for somebody else, including your god, to do or make them; do or make them yourself. Who knows, maybe you'll inspire someone to join you.

Finally, 7/3;

Jerry: "All great minds think alike".

Me: "Remember LBJ's corollary: 'If a group is all thinking alike, one guy's doing most all the thinking'."

Jer&Peg, adieu, for now!

On the first leg of our flight home, from San Francisco to Detroit, I had an aisle seat. Sitting beside me was a guy wearing a turban and sporting a beard, apparently from a lot further east than Louisville. Across the aisle was a lady who looked as though she might have some connection with him. There was a girl and boy, 14-15ish, beside her. I asked my seatmate if the lady was his wife and when he said she was, I asked her if she would like me to trade seats with her husband so that they would be separated only by the aisle, not by an old provocateur. She laughed and said it depends on what kind of mood he's in. He and I switched seats. So, by now you can guess what happened. The book in his hand did not deter me from grilling him. (I thought I had entered at least their names, if not their contact info in notes on my phone, but apparently not, so I'll have to refer to them in the third person.) They are Sikhs. A tenet of Sikhism is that men NEVER cut their hair or shave. I've forgotten how old he told me he is, probably early to mid-30's. He has abided by the tenet his whole life. The main reason for the turban is to contain his hair. Apparently, if not cut or shaved, hair and whiskers' growth slow down; otherwise, I don't see how a bushel basket could have hid his locks and why his beard, not long an scraggly like Capitol invaders and others, but neatly arrayed, was not below his waist.

Mr Sikh patiently answered my questions, explaining that Indian family names, which they use in the US, such as Patel (I told him I knew several Patels, all in the hotel business and wondered if their name indicated their trade) signify the area of India they come from as well as their caste. The caste system is a by-product of Hinduism. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion and has no castes. Mr&Mrs Sikh live near Philadelphia and both are techies. The daughter wants to be a lawyer and the son a doctor. They are a delightful family. I would enjoy having them as a neighbor.

Our one hour layover in Detroit lengthened to two when, as I think I've previously mentioned (I started typing this story in Louisville in early July, a week or so after our return. It's now August 11 at 7:00 AM and I'm in the basement of our log cabin near Bakersville, NC, which is on the market for sale. As I've written, I have been on the go since I drove down from Louisville almost a month ago; a trip to the beach and drives around here, each excursion introducing me to more strangers. This story is up to 27,500 words and, as I'm sure you can tell if you've read this far, I can't remember all I've said, so I'm determined to finish it today [do I hear some YAYS and HALLELUAHs?], or maybe tomorrow [I write usually no more than an hour or so a day, and not every day, usually this time of day, and all while keeping an eye on Morning Joe, with the sound muted, unless the caption at the bottom of the screen {for example: "89% OF THOSE HOSPITALIZED IN MISSISSIPPI ARE UNVACCINATED"} piques my interest]; otherwise, every time I go out and meet an interesting stranger, this story will keep growing. And I'm leaving out a bunch of folks I've met. For example, I met a lady who is in charge of housekeeping at the Esseola Lodge in Linville on Saturday. She has a fascinating story about her mother. She didn't have time Saturday for me to interview her on camera but said she would be glad to tell the story and gave me her contact info. I called her last night to see if I could come over to conduct her interview today or

tomorrow and she said several on her staff have contracted Covid since Saturday, so we've postponed it. I may have previously mentioned (I realize I could scroll back to see what I've already said but that is laborious and time consuming and just plain no fun. I'm sure you won't mind a little repetition) that a guy is helping me set up a website. This story and others I've written, as well as interviews, most impromptu, that I've recorded on my phone will be posted on it. After www.tomcaldwell.org (I think that will be the name) is completed, rather than my emailing my rambling stories, presumptuously thinking that you might be interested in wasting your valuable time here on earth reading them, I'll put them on my website and you can decide whether you want to go there to see what's new. I don't know when my venture onto the net will be ready, so I'll probably email STRANGERS to you, my erstwhile readers.) the flight attendant didn't show up.

After sitting awhile in the Detroit terminal, I walked around a little to stretch my legs. A little girl, no more than 4 or 5, walked toward me with her mother, and she started goose stepping, kicking her leg out with each step, so I did the same, though my legs wouldn't go as high as hers. When she saw me, she ran toward me and gave me a hug. I don't remember what I said to her or her mother or what they said to me, but words weren't necessary, our huge smiles said enough. I may have teared up a little.

Walking on, I saw another little girl, a little older, trying to stand on her head on the dirty carpet and support her upward thrust legs against a column, as her mother, seated nearby, watched. I said something to them both. Mom told me they were flying to Atlanta to visit relatives, who she may have said were in the military, because the subject came up; maybe it was that her husband is in the military. In any event, I told her I was travelling with my 2 sons and grandson and that their grand and great grandfather had been a colonel and pilot in the Marines. Her father, Rear Admiral Ray Sareeram, had, like my father-in-law, Mac Tweed, attended the Navy War College in Newport, RI. The Admiral died at 69 in '07. His obituary is on the Internet. I just googled it. "Ray Sareeram holds the unique distinction of being the first person born of Indian heritage to earn the rank of Rear Admiral in the U.S Navy." I wish he and Mac could have met each other.

When the replacement flight attendant arrived, pulling her suitcase at double time, we applauded her. We arrived in Louisville about 12:30 PM. T, T and Sam had carried their luggage on board but I had checked the parachute bag which Mac gave me over 50 years ago and which has been my suitcase ever since. Sam grabbed it from the carousel and toted it, along with his stuff, to where Janet was waiting for us in her Subaru and Sara, Tim's wife, in their Prius. Sam thanked and hugged me and told me he loved me before he hopped in the Prius. I jumped in with Janet and she asked me what was wrong and how was our trip? As salty water trickled down my cheeks, I said "Nothing's wrong; everything's fine; the trip was great!" Need I say more?

