

## Home

These pages contain a memoir of my time as a pupil at the [Edinburgh Academy](#) between 1962 and 1967 and also a recollection of travel in Europe in the year between school and university. I am publishing it as a Wiki to allow contemporaries to correct my errors and to add their own memories and perspectives. I am not sure (and it will not be my decision alone) what form it will ultimately take - possibly a text under my name with acknowledgments, possibly a multi-authored text, possibly both. I am also unsure whether it will remain a public document or disappear from view. The most satisfying outcome of all would be if other people were inspired to write their own memoirs, publish them as Wikis, and link them to mine.

The Wiki is currently public, that is open to editing and comment by anyone who finds it. Edits to the text and comment/discussion are equally welcome and are provided for in the Wikispace software. I hope to keep the process open.

At this point, the structure is thematic rather than chronological. I am writing it by expanding on a growing list of salient memories. Each page in the navigation panel on the left is a separate theme.

My time at the Academy was a happy one and the tone of my memoir will be positive. However, it records what I thought and felt at the time and those thoughts and feelings were not always positive. Also, it is primarily a memoir, a record of what I remember, and not a history, an account of what the best evidence suggests took place. That does not mean I am indifferent to historical accuracy but it does mean that I will be inclined to annotate rather than exclude memories which others consider to be inaccurate.

However, I do not wish to cause distress or embarrassment so I have taken out most names and will accede to requests to modify or remove from public view material which anyone finds offensive.

### What was Really Going On?

In a speech on the early history of the Academy published on its web site, George Harris asks the question "what was really going on". Harris is primarily interested in the motivation and objectives of the founders of the Academy, but the question can also be asked about the school over the course of its history and at the point at which I attended it; and also about my own participation in the life of the school. My answers to these questions will emerge in the course of this memoir: this section offers a few preliminary thoughts.

The explicit starting point for George Harris's article is Magnus Magnusson's history of the Academy entitled "*The Clackan and the Slate – The story of The Edinburgh Academy 1824-1974* ". Magnusson is a well known Scottish television presenter and writer who attended the Academy between 1935 and 1948, leaving the before I was born. His account of the Academy is positive but not uncritical. Its main themes include

- Foundation to fill a gap in Scottish education that was seen as disadvantaging the Scottish elite in its competition with the English for status and authority in the Union;
- Specifically, a desire to ensure that Scots boys were able to take a crucial first step on the path towards success - admission to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge;
- A particular economic history as predominantly a day school for the sons of the citizens of Edinburgh, funded almost entirely through fees and the voluntary contributions of its former pupils (that is to say, funded by the native elite whose interests it was established to promote);

- A particular mode of Governance, based on a board of Directors drawn from the Scottish elites that worked in (usually) creative tension with a Rector with extensive authority;
- Students and their parents coming from a set of linked or overlapping cultural groups – actual or aspiring lawyers and other native professionals, imperial administrators, military men, clerics, scholars;
- A high value placed on sport, particularly the elite sports of Cricket, Rugby and Athletics, again in line with emerging values in 19th Century education;
- A continuing emphasis on scholarship, initially classical scholarship and the study of Greek, but extending to Mathematics, Science and Modern Studies in line with (and sometimes but not always at the forefront of) developments in 19th Century British education for the elites;
- More broadly, a particular profile in relation to educational innovation – not unresponsive to new ideas but not the first to take them up, maintaining the balance between Whig and Tory which Magnusson finds in the early days and which would be a requirement in a school financially dependant on maximising support from parents and former pupils across the spectrum of political and cultural affiliation.

George Harris extends and occasionally qualifies the story told in “The Clacken and the Slate” in a number of ways. In relating the Academy’s ethos to the contemporary reformist agenda in education, politics and culture, he suggests that it might appear:

*... reasonable to suppose that one of the things that was really going on when the Academy was founded was the expression in the form of a school of that elusive abstraction ”The Scottish Enlightenment...the previous twenty years had seen enormous reforms in education on the Continent. Napoleon had overhauled the French system. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Humboldt had done the same for Prussia. This was the age of Johann Pestalozzi, the Swiss educationalist....*

However, his eventual conclusion is that:

*...the Academy reflected little if anything of this reforming zeal ...[That was] modern education in the 1820s... was not what was going on at the Edinburgh Academy.*

And he also suggests that only a minority of boys were able to follow the eminent scholars who taught them to the heights of classical or other learning and that for the majority the teaching may have involved hours of drudgery.

Harris emphasises the extent to which the Academy was a school for the servants of empire, and the diversity of career opportunities offered by imperial service:

*Of that first cohort of 521 boys, 22% went into imperial service of some sort. One hundred consecutive names from the register of the 1850s produced 34% in imperial service - slightly more than one in three - and another hundred names from the 1890s produced 28%.*

*James Skene became a magistrate on Corfu and married Rhalou, daughter of Prince Jacques-Rizo-Rangabe, Grand Postelnic of Wallachia... Charles Mackenzie... went from being one of Glog’s brilliant mathematicians to being Bishop of the Native Tribes near Lake Nyassa in Central Africa... John Gordon had a horse shot under him... Melville Wright, having been the Scottish Hundred Yards Champion became Colonial Surgeon in the Gold Coast, West Africa... The anecdotes are endless*

In considering the Academy when I attended it in the second half and my own orientation to its values, only some of this remains relevant, but not all of it. As a child of empire myself – son of a tea planter in Ceylon – it might have seemed that I had no alternative to lifelong exile,

given the diminution of imperial employment in the last half of the 20th Century. If the Native Tribes near Lake Nyassa still had a Bishop he would surely be one of their own; opportunities for having a horse shot under oneself have sadly diminished; and no path could lead me to the hand of a daughter of a Grand Postelnic of Wallachia<sup>1</sup>, given the demise of the Hapsburg Empire as well as the British.

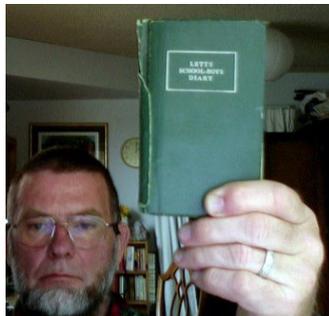
However, as it turned out, I came as close as I could to continuing this particular Academical tradition by becoming a civil servant in Australia. And in other obvious ways my values and interests were in alignment with those of the school. I loved study, enjoyed sport, sought the middle ground in politics...[to be continued]

1. I must confess to an initial unworthy suspicion that Mr Harris invented Rhalou, daughter of Prince Jacques-Rizo-Rangabe, Grand Postelnic of Wallachia. And though chastened to discover that Wallachia did indeed have a Grand Postelnic, I must say that I have been unable to find any other reference to the princely family of Jacques-Rizo-Rangabe. Perhaps I should try the Almanac de Gotha – unfortunately it doesn't seem to be on the web, but I am sure the Australian National Library will have a copy.

'Rhalou' most certainly did exist, she was my great great grand-mother. James and Ralou's daughter Zoe married William Thomson Archbishop of York. Zoe and William's daughter Zoe married Joshua Hoyle. Zoe and Joshua were my grandparents. *Myles Hoyle*

Extracts from a Diary

Before recent blogging days I only once kept a diary, or at least one which I have retained. It is a 1963 Letts Schoolboys Diary, printed and published by Charles Letts & Co Ltd of Diary House, London S E 1. Here it is:



The first entry is on 1 January and the last on 23 July. The “Personal Notes” at the front of the diary list my home address as St Peter's Rectory, Parsonage Road, Galashiels and the School address as Edinburgh Academy, Dundas House, Kinnear Road, Edinburgh 3. My height is recorded as “5.7” and my weight as “8.7” and my bicycle as a “Trent Tourist Red, Dynamo, Brown Saddle Bag”. Astonishingly, Google provides access to photographs of just such a bicycle. Here is one:



The endpapers of the diary contain color pictures of various emblems, crests and awards. There follow some 60 pages of information, about such topics as "British Freshwater Fish", "Countries of the World", "Books to Read" (subheadings including "Aircraft, Motors and Trains", "Pets", "Sports and Games", "Hobbies and Pastimes", "Nature" "Science" and "Careers"), "Sports Results" (with an apology: "we regret that we are compelled to print this diary before the end of the 1962 sports season") "Points of the Horse", "Logarithms", "Antilogarithms", "Table of Latin Verbs" "Principal French Irregular Verbs" "German Strong Verbs" and "Historical Events" (with something of an Empire bias).

There are also black and white photographs, including shots of sword dancing by the Royal Highland Regiment, Abu Simel, a Hospital Ship, the Brooklyn Bridge and horses pulling a plough.

Here are some entries from the diary:

Snowy Day. Going to Walkerburn. Records all morning, Reading "Russia with Love". Have still got a stinking cold.

Still snowy. Listening to records all morn and have written to Aunt Ada. Michael has party this eve. Am in miserable state over spending 30p on Plum Duff.

Went up to Edinburgh. Saw Hayley Mills in "In Search of the Castaways", Sean Connery Ursula Andress in "Dr No". Went to Carnival.

Purchased Tuck for School including 1 bottle cider, 1 pack cards for baccarat with Kaye. Prick?? Michael in Edinburgh with Uncle John.

Listened to records, read Chrysalids – Mark Wyndham – skipped a bit – watched TV all afternoon. Am in love with Hayley Mills.

Church in morning. Ruth Piper & Claire Browne - Redpath East End by Earliston – came over. Claire is a smasher.

Bought picture of Shadows. Saw "Prisoner of Zenda" and "Vengeance Valley". VG both. James Mason is cool. Gav came over. Tobogganed in afternoon. VG slopes.

Came back to Klink. Fiddled with batteries, blew up 3 bulbs, ruined 1 electric motor. Am feeling B awful with lack of sophistication at school. Niven!?. Met Walker off train.

Cold day, snow falling. Played baccarat. Have got up a 4 with DAK, JLM & AKS. Went up town, bought panzer self propelled gun and soor plums. Pusscat came with me.

Cold day, played baccarat in afternoon. Wrote for H Mills starpics. Have idea of decorating dorm. 12/20 in English. Must buck up. O level in French next year possible. Science OK results I hope.

Cold snowy day. Made model of self propelled gun. U 13 practice game. Went sledging to Braids, great fun, a wonderful course, not too fast but bumpy with good corners. Very cold and wet afterwards. Missed dancing. Still snowy.

Seems to be slight thaw. Had poor marks in French and Latin. Must buck up, especially in French. Am going to Film tomorrow. Went for a foul run with Macilwaine.

Did maths exam. Am very afraid I have done poorly. Must buck up. No Hayley Mills pictures yet. Pity. Bought Pop Weekly. Am reading life story of a poacher. Had enormous tea.

I am very childish. Pride rebukes. Begins to snow again. With luck, no games. Slightly homesick. Must adopt a filthy mood tomorrow. Confirmed outing with Uncle Barry.

Played squash. Beat Eliot and Niven. Went to school debate – first class. “This house considers America's policy has caused UK's decline”. Have to revise hard. English makes me worry enormously.

Went out with Uncle Barry to rugger at Murrayfield. Wales 6 Scotland 0. Funds boosted by 5 pounds from Uncle Barry. Am very pleased.

Bought tuck and tools + pump for bicycle. Money supply depleted to 4 pounds 3 shillings 11 pence. Am a bit angry but won't mind later. Hayley Mills pics arrived. V Good.

Coldish day. Did poor French Test, very very bad science. Disgraceful. Inter debate with 'lovelies' from St George's. Davidson Kelly made good speech as usual. Some very very pretty girls.

*Knocked out of high jump in morning with very very poor jump. Went up town to buy Pop Weekly. Hated dancing. Dreamed about sexy girl without any principles at all at all.*

### **Boarding with a Teacher**

When I arrived at the Edinburgh Academy in 1962 there was no room in the boarding houses so I lodged with a teacher, Mr A. An englishman, he had an accent to match his double-barrelled name and a pretty wife who I think may have stirred my 13-year old hormones. I remember their renovated terrace house as being warm and modern but not entirely welcoming and I felt no regret when I was eventually able to move into a boarding house. Magnus Magnusson's history of the Edinburgh Academy records that before the boarding houses were established in ???, pupils from out of town commonly lodged with teachers.

Three memories from that time. Coming down to the kitchen late at night for a glass of water, I found a plate of home made chocolate éclairs in the table. Would I have hesitated before helping myself? Impossible to say but it seems unlikely that I was any less greedy than I am now. The As were not happy. The éclairs had been made for a dinner party and I was given to understand that my nocturnal indulgence meant that someone would have to go without. I remember that they expressed sadness, disappointment, giving me to understand that I had let them and myself down. I suspect that the cook's disappointment might have grieved me more than her husband's.

How precisely did this incident affect me? It certainly made its mark – it remains to this day a component of the taste of chocolate éclairs – an enhancement to it, actually. I remember feeling, then, that the moral rebuke was excessive and humourless but I could not have said so and must have internalised it against my wishes and judgement.

Back upstairs in my bedroom, an early version of the lair, the den, which I recreate wherever I live, I found consolation playing with my guns. As one does. Consolation for my exile to Edinburgh as much as for the minor vicissitudes that attended it. Cap guns, toys, but quality toys, a pair of pistols in a velvet-lined case or at least an imitation of a velvet lined case, made out of metal, not plastic, lifelike enough that trying to take them onto an aeroplane in these terrorised times would be a criminal offence. I remember it being warm in my room while I lay in bed playing with my guns and note that, as a late developer, I was not at that time enjoying other modes of bed-time play available to solitary teenage boys.

The house had a shallow stream somewhere behind it and a bowling club somewhere in front, both of which are associated with my third memory of my time chez Mr and Mrs A. With a friend, Bernard I think he was called, I experimented with home made explosives. In the 21st century one can find the recipes on the internet – I just confirmed this (eg, <http://www.geocities.com/jigoku05/bombs.txt>).

One might also risk being pursued by the security services for trying to buy some of the ingredients, especially if one wore a turban and a false beard. Back then we might have used a library or picked them up on some kind of schoolboy grapevine. We made two kinds of explosive, one which detonated on contact with water and another which required a match. We placed the first, whose ingredients I don't recall but which may be listed on p5 of the text linked above, in a perforated tin, which we tossed into the shallow stream. Results were disappointing.

Our second explosive worked much better. We made it by mixing sodium chlorate, sold as a weedkiller, with flowers of sulphur and powdered charcoal (ibid, p7) and trickling the mixture into drilled out gas cartridges from a soda siphon. Results were impressive, especially when we decided to take vengeance on the bowling club across the road in front of the house after one of its officials had abused us for taking a shortcut across its grounds on the way to school. A charged cartridge pushed into the bowling green and detonated by lighting a line of powder trickled onto the smooth grass left a satisfactory crater.

All subsequent responses to reproach have been disappointing in comparison with this.

## Letters Home

My mother has just sent me some of the letters I wrote to her and my father from the Edinburgh Academy between 1965 and 1968. She may also have some from earlier years. Reading the letters has been absorbing and disconcerting. There is an inclination to be unkind about their author, to describe him as a bit of a swot and a show off, but also reluctance to indulge that inclination because I can't delude myself that I am so very different – perhaps not even much less naive about revealing those traits.

The main topics of the letters written from school are the Edinburgh weather, my school work and success or otherwise in exams, what I have been reading and what I think of it, my book purchases, how my rugby team has been doing, my interactions with teachers and friends, and a range of other regular activities including visits to theatres, art galleries and concerts in Edinburgh, participation in school literary and art societies, and going for favourite walks to the Edinburgh botanic gardens and the Granton harbour.

I am certainly putting on a show for my parents, parading literary opinions and attempting well-written descriptions of the weather. I suspect that the frequent accounts of my studies were probably not intended to impress in quite the same way. I was preoccupied with my studies and wrote about them because they were important to me. There is some obvious concealment – I talk about books I bought but not ones I stole (more on this later) – but also an inclination to challenge them by disclosing things that might have been expected to disconcert them – beer drinking, illegal sorties to town.

Some extracts follow, with commentary. I begin with an extract in which a teacher warns me against bad company:

*...I have had a long lecture from Mr H on Bad Company; his attitude was reasonable. He said he feared that two boys from the other senior house were a bad influence on us because "one or more of*

*them” was, if not always in trouble, at least always inspiring masters with the desire to tick him off, or tell him to get on with it...He said that any involvement in the art (loving, doing, etc) group seemed to involve a cynical attitude to the school, and that there was nothing he opposed more than the gestation of a small hard core group of “cynics” within the house. He concluded by saying that our behaviour, deportment etc might, he hoped, justify the removal of these suspicions. I have considered his remarks and conclude that he errs in supposing that members of the art set have the same or even a similar attitude to the school. Two of us, in fact, might be described as rebels, one as a kind of occasional conformist and two as not at all unsympathetic to the aims of the school. The thing that binds us together is...community of tastes...we are all interested in the arts...and enjoy talking to each other about them. Last night Mr Hook was on the point of preventing me from going over to the New Prep to listen to some classical music because one of the Jeff House evil influences might be there. Later in the evening one of them did turn up – we listened together to Sibelius’s Second Symphony...an encounter fraught with peril to the school and to our morals...I think we will have to convince him [Mr Hook] of our virtue by being models of deportment...He says that he minds not so much what we think...but what we do, and we can certainly avoid giving him reasonable cause for annoyance...but I think it unreasonable to demand that we listen to Sibelius’s Second Symphony separately...*

What interests me now about this is how hard my 16-year old self is working to construct a position that, in my mind at least, will be acceptable to all parties, how I did this on a number of other occasions at school, and how I am doing it still. Mr H, at the time my Housemaster and later my English teacher, was one of the three outstanding teachers whose intellect and love of learning inspired me at the Academy (the others were the Rector who taught French and Mr R who taught History). I feared, respected and esteemed him, with the first of the three preponderant in these early days and the latter two largely (but never totally) replacing it later. He maintained discipline without raising his voice, but not without giving anger its due, and expressed himself with elegant precision whether praising or blaming.

And not only verbally – I remember him looking out onto the world, and down at his pupils, through heavy lidded and expressive eyes that could flash with humour as well as scorn. In another letter I describe him as consigning to outer darkness the then-fashionable Canadian academic Marshall McLuhan with a snort of contempt. In a letter home in June 1965 I record him as strongly advising against having girls play the female parts in a play we are planning to put on, citing a disastrous one on which he had tried it when the play quickly became of secondary interest. And from 1966:

*...Criticising one of my essays recently, Mr H said it sounded as if it had been written by a clergyman...*

*...Mr H is on form, telling me my brain is working slowly because my hair is too long – and this the day after I had it cut...*

Despite these keen thrusts, I attest to the reasonableness of Mr H’s attitude at the beginning of my account. I also acknowledge, by carefully describing it, the precision with which he expresses his views. I like and can hear his voice in the distinction between actually getting into trouble and inspiring masters with the urge to issue a rebuke, and note that he did not in fact stand in the way of my listening to Sibelius in questionable company. However, I also stand up for the “art group” and make my own distinctions. I don’t think I was counting myself among the two cynics in the group and probably also had someone else in mind as the occasional conformist. I shared the school’s valuation of academic success and am pretty sure I was the only member of the art group who played rugby with enthusiasm and modest (2nd XV) skill - more on this later.

My assertion that love of the arts was all that drew us together was, although sincere, and true as far as it went, less than the whole truth. We certainly did love the arts. We went to concerts and galleries and the theatre, put on a play with help from teachers, started a literary magazine, printing it on an ancient (1926 vintage) Gestetner duplicator which we bought for 35 shillings from a pawnbroker and which seemed to share its ink equally between the pages it was printing and the fingers and clothing of its operators. We also established a literary society with the distinguished Scottish poet Robin Fulton, then teaching at the Academy, as patron and first guest speaker ([here](#) is one of his later poems). I record its early days in a letter home:

*...The literary society, founded last term, of which I am secretary, had its second meeting last Friday, at which Mr Fulton, my English teacher last year, who is a well known Scottish poet, talked about modern European poetry and read some modern Scottish poems. It was fascinating. He knew many of the poets and read very well despite being afflicted by the universal flu...*

Our coming together as bad company was also about identity – how could it not be, given our adolescent boys' uncertainties. We hung out together in the Art Room at Henderson Row, or (the boarders among us) in a room we had access to at the “New Prep” on Arboretum Road. My own presence in the Henderson Row Art Room was probably tolerated rather than welcomed by successive Art teachers, because I had no talent for painting or drawing (I did pass an art O Level, thanks to my prowess as an essayist) We had a sense that our shared values were at odds with some of the requirements of the school. All of us, cynics and EA true believers, resented compulsory membership of the CCF (Combined Cadet Corps) and the Academy's requirements for compulsory attendance at religious services. And we disapproved of corporal punishment, whether or not we had personal reasons to fear it.

No doubt we all expressed this in different ways. For my part, it was a matter of what I thought rather than what I did (to borrow Mr Hook's distinction). But I certainly did not keep my thoughts to myself. On the contrary, I wrote long essays on them and sent them to the Rector. Compulsory military service, corporal punishment, and compulsory Sunday attendance by boarders at a church are the themes I remember – there may have been others. The Rector was not persuaded by my arguments, but he responded to them courteously and never left me feeling I had acted inappropriately in submitting them. In 1967 I even try to enlist my mother's help in persuading the Rector:

*...When you do see the Rector, if you do, one of the topics you must broach with him is that of church. The Minister at St James Inverleith is a good and kind man but he is a poor preacher and his congregation is aged. I have asked to go elsewhere but the Rector, who himself deserted St James Inverleith a long time ago, returned a sympathetic no...*

Of course, I did grumble about school life, and in particular about Boarding House life:

*...House life at the moment involves cleaning, creasing, polishing, bulling, corpus uniforms for the drill competition on Monday. Corporal H, lanky, prim, bespectacled, believes it does me good. Corporal H. is head of the house so he must be right about this, but I have doubts...*

*...I am fine, if irritable, moody, bored and quarrelsome. The term drags its way to a turgid end with nothing much doing so that the official restrictions seem more confining than usual. I am not usually irked by, for instance, being told to go to bed at 10.30, get up at 7.25, take my bath between 9.30 and 9.55, get out of the House on Sundays between 2.00pm and 4, but these things now seem very tedious. The fact is that I have too soon fallen into a holiday cast of mind...*

*...At the moment most of the sky is blue but there is a blustering wind and before breakfast it was cloudy. Yesterday was cold but more or less sunny. We played a rather exhausting rugby match in the*

*morning, a lot of kicking, and in the afternoon had to watch another dreary match. In the evening I had to slog my way through an unbearably tedious French Essay, and I have an impossibly turgid History Essay to be finished by Monday. Woe is me!..*

*...Yesterday I visited a friend at University in Edinburgh, living in a chaotic flat with four or five other students, burning incense before some deity in the Hindu pantheon, painting his room white to achieve the monastic cell look that I also favour...I returned to my school supper of cold fried eggs with bacon in axle grease feeling low and have not recovered...A few people, friends and masters, a few places, the library at school and above all my study in Scott House, a few moments, working late at night or walking back from school through the Botanic Gardens with everything in or just past blossom, are making school just bearable...*

Other letters suggest that "just bearable" may be overstating the case and that the compensations of school life balanced its constraints, which were in any event applied by those in authority with a light hand:

*...Here it has been alternately tempestuous and clear with storm clouds, hail, a wind that strips the trees, then pale blue skies, sunlight the air sharply but elusively cold. I shall not I think go to church - too many old ladies, a wheezy organ, Victorian gothic architecture, a benevolent but deeply unstimulating preacher. I shall go instead to the botanic gardens and visit the big new hothouses full of orchids and palm trees recently opened by Princess Margaret. Then I will sit in the sun and read...As Blake put it: "The vision of Christ that thou dost see/Is my vision's greatest enemy"...*

*...Here people are sitting around the electric fire keeping warm and listening to "Radio Scotland", a pirate station broadcast from a ship of the coast near Dunbar..*

*...I have been out to the Traverse, a small modern theatre up a steep flight of stairs in the old town, my Sunday night visits frowned on as far as the school is concerned because the place has a bar and a habit of offending some of Edinburgh's town councillors with the plays it puts on. In fact the bar is not strictly off limits since the place is a private club of which one has to be a member, so one will meet senior ephors (prefects) there (the school rules only ban drinking in a public place) and share a half pint with them safely and often with half a dozen past and present Academy boys...I usually arrive back at the house before the doors are locked but sometimes have to clamber up a drainpipe or lob a pebble at somebody's window to be let in...At first I was nervous but now am hardened in crime...apart from the Traverse there isn't a lot happening in Edinburgh on a Sunday night so no-one seems to suspect one might have any reason to be out...*

*...One o'clock Monday morning, slow rain falling, has fallen all week, coffee cups and books on my desk and jazz on the radio which I turn down as the house tutor turns lights off. Spent the afternoon in a friend's flat with incense burning before a buddha and the music of Wagner coming through loudly from next door... skipped school tea and went to Sunday night theatre at the Traverse ... a Nigerian company, young dancers and talking drums ... I nervously came in late but no-one noticed... now too tired to sleep though tomorrow I will probably doze off in class ... Blues on the radio, melancholy as I have been all week with soft grey skies, new leaves and grass a washed green, Edinburgh with its sooty Georgian houses looking dilapidated... On Saturday afternoon they played cricket for five hours under a fine drizzle and came in with their flannels heavy with rain...*

As these extracts suggest, the Edinburgh weather features in most of my letters to parents living in the very different climate of the Sri Lankan highlands:

*...the weather has taken a turn for the better, the wind is warm, and the sun, during the morning at least, ventures up for a while. In the afternoon storm clouds overhand the castle, rain falls, the buildings are bright, everything is clean cut and hard again after the blurred grey of the last few weeks. This*

*afternoon was marvellous, warm, with a light breeze ruffling the hair of the footballers in the yards and swirling in through the open window of the art room where I am vaguely working*

*...at present I have a bad cold and the Edinburgh weather is grey, wet and rainy – the combination is particularly dispiriting*

*...I hope you are well and enjoying some of the sun which is at present shining down on me from directly above Edinburgh Castle. Today is lovely, a cold cloudless sky outlines the branches of the row of trees just across the playing fields and a breeze makes you shiver when you go outside...*

*...Outside it is darkish, with heavy low clouds – this morning it was fine, not a cloud, a dazzling sun rising through Edinburgh suburban mansions as I walked over to breakfast but it was hazy on the way down to school and the clouds came up about lunch time – the usual pattern...*

*...Here it is cold, wintry, most of the trees bare, cold, beautiful, Edinburgh at its best, the sky always asserting itself, the granite houses warming themselves a little in the winter sun, people playing rugby on the field below me sounding close and sharp, each in a cloud of his own breath, cold so you walk briskly but no so that you keep indoors or shut all windows...*

*...Today is so bright that I have had to draw the curtains so as not to be dazzled by the sun. The room I work in has a bay window looking out over a long stretch of the Edinburgh skyline with the castle squat and square in the middle...we are not far from the firth (Granton and Leith docks)... I often walk down to the harbour and out along the breakwater which is long and ends in a rickety wooden platform with muddy water swirling around between your feet. The other day there was an aqualung diver in a black rubber suit gliding around between the legs of the pier. Also a cluster of small boys fishing, using mussels for bait and throwing the shells at the frogman's bubbles as they broke the surface...*

## **Corporal Punishment**

Magnus Magnusson's history of the Academy tells us that while boys were beaten at the academy, the practice of corporal punishment was contested from the earliest days. One of the founders of the school, Henry Cockburn, an eminent jurist and writer, was also an educational innovator and theorist who opposed corporal punishment. George Harris in his [excellent article](#) on the early history of the Academy published on the school's web site writes of Cockburn's plans for the school that:

*...One improvement was to be a reduction in corporal punishment. Cockburn recalls his own schooldays where "out of the whole four years of my attendance there were probably not ten days in which I was not flogged at least once." He wanted nothing like that for [his own son] little James and his friends.*

Cockburn's wish to minimise the use of corporal punishment was maintained by the directors of the School throughout the 19th century, but this does not mean pupils were not beaten to an extent that would horrify their 21st Century successors. Magnusson notes that

*...the reminiscences of Academicals at Dinners down the years always took a perverse pride in the amount of "beating" to which they were subjected during their own time at school, compared to the 'soft' conditions that set in after they left!*

One of my two memories of corporal punishment at the Academy is of being strapped on the hand with a tawse by the then outgoing rector, Dr Watt, in 1962, for a misdemeanour in scripture class. A classroom somewhere near the main hall, a room with a high ceiling and old wooden desks with names carved in them. Dr Watt ran a complex system in which one moved backwards and forwards in the classroom depending on performance. I don't remember if I

was punished for ordinary bad behaviour or ignorance of scripture. As I was both pusillanimous and diligent in the classroom, neither seems obviously more likely. Wikipedia's [article](#) about the tawse is concise and includes a picture of a tawse and a reference to an article about corporal punishment in Scottish schools which, when I first read it, I thought lingered rather too long on the issue of what it called "bare bottom spanking". However when I looked up "tawse" on Google Images, bare bottom spanking featured heavily in the results.

I am sure there was no bare bottom spanking at the Academy. Or am I? I know a few people (not academics) who would consider my confidence naive. But confident I remain. Corporal punishment, by way of caning I think, was in those days administered by the senior pupils, known as ephors, who supported the teachers in maintaining discipline at the school. Magnusson says that the board of directors hesitated before approving this practice in 1903. I was never caned by an ephor but I remember fearing the possibility, the fear localised to the ephors' room the door to which I remember as being in a corner of the playground. In my private geography both the room itself and the adjacent part of the playground were places of pain. I was never an ephor, a wise decision on the part of the authorities to which I assented when asked if I wanted to become one.

Along with a number of other miscreants (quite a large number, as I recall) I was also caned by a house master early in my time at the Academy. The episode took place late at night after his bed time as well as our own. I remember that he appeared ridiculous rather than frightening because he was clad in pajamas, incoherent with rage and had forgotten to reinsert his false teeth.

## Results

Tests and exams are a common theme in my letters home from school and in my diary. I am constantly either preparing for tests and exams or reporting on my results:

*...Soon I will have to start working for exams, having only just over a month to go...*

*...I am on the eve of the exams - the first is tomorrow and they last for two weeks after that. So you can imagine my state of nerves...*

*...Exams are now over. I have as yet no results: I do not think I have done particularly brilliantly, but I should not fail any...*

From its founding in the early 19th century the Edinburgh Academy has valued academic success. Magnusson counts Oxbridge awards, the current website lists results in A levels and Scottish Highers. I certainly internalised that value from my early days at the school. I am not sure how often class results were posted on the notice board outside the classroom but whenever they were I would have been one of the boys crowding around to read them.

After some early hiccups I was usually in the top half dozen or so in my best subjects and I remember the names of some of the boys who tended to come in ahead of me – C, M, G. My recollection of their first names is uncertain as first names were not much used even between friends. None of these boys were close friends, perhaps not so much because they were academic rivals as because there were day boys and once I entered the boarding houses most of my friends were also boarders.

I did have an adolescent same sex crush on one of my academic rivals. He had an olive complexion and dark eyes. I remember him vividly. The feeling was certainly undeclared at the time, obviously unreciprocated, but not totally unrecognised by myself: I knew my feelings

about him were different and was probably awkward in my dealings with him.

My letters home record a lot of study, in the holidays as well as in term time, and I don't believe I was making this up for my parents' benefit. I was keen to please my teachers, enjoyed my main subjects, and constructed my identity around academic success. I was also living in an environment that was conducive to study. After leaving the Academy as Dux, my academic career followed a downward trajectory - only an Upper Second at Oxford and an uncompleted PhD at the Australian National University. It seems to me that my level of success at school was based on a combination of hard work and some talent, and that my problem later was that I did not have enough of the talent to make up for a steep decline in the amount of hard work.

## **The Sporting Life**

A cold and foggy late autumn morning outside in Canberra where I am writing, sitting next to a stained glass window in the café of the National Library. I was inspired to start this memoir by finding a copy of “The Clacken and the Slate” on looking up “Edinburgh Academy” in the catalogue. I come back here to write it for the discipline and inspiration of hundreds of other people reading and writing and the capacity to access research material from the shelves as well as on line.

On the way in this morning I stopped to take [some photographs](#) of bare trees outlined against the fog on a damp roadside and found myself thinking of rugby at the Academy, out there on a muddy field with the amazing Scots Baronial spire of Fettes College rising out of fog and the sun low in the sky at the other end of the day, When the sun burns off the fog it will be another classic Canberra winter day with clear skies and no wind to scratch the waters of the lake. Fog hangs in the trees as it did on autumn mornings in Edinburgh, where the prospects of improvement in the weather later in the day were less reliable than they are here – change was to be expected, certainly, but usually in the other direction.

As I remember it Rugby at the Academy went with cold, rain, wind, mud. Mud clogging the studs of my boots and adhering to much of the rest of my person. Mud washed off after the game in a warm communal bath in the changing room. Pleasurable memories of those warm baths. No, Amanda, not that kind of pleasure. After a brief and unhappy experiment with the position of full back (not a bad tackler but unreliable beneath the up-and-under), I must have had a bit of a growth spurt and moved into the second row where I gazed from above at the mud and turf of rugby fields across the south of Scotland and despite regular use of a scrum cap, felt the cracks opening up between my head and my ears as every rugby season advanced.

A ball playing second rower? Not exactly. I do have one glorious memory of what I can't resist describing as a “bullocking run”, peeling off a scrum with the ball (or could it have been a line out, or a maul – the terminology is rusty although I can't resist using it) and breaking tackles while advancing the ball 20 or 30 yards up the field. Well, alright, 10 or 20. Well, alright.... I am fairly confident that the memory is so glorious for a good reason – because it was the only occasion in my four years of rugby on which anything of the kind occurred. The only occasion on which I had the ball in hand? Probably not quite, although I did spend most of my time lumbering from set piece to set piece, as second-rowers did in those days, wishing the backs could stop kicking it quite so far. Watching the final of the last World Cup I was in no doubt where England found the inspiration for their tactics – the Edinburgh Academy 2nd XV in the mid sixties of the last century.

I have a similar memory of cricket, the summer sport at the Academy, at which I was, I suppose, an all-rounder in the sense that was not detectably better at either batting or bowling.

Or perhaps I was slightly better at batting, as my glorious memory is of scoring 50 not out, once. I also sometimes kept wicket, which, many years later, caused me pain when I joined an office cricket team, drank too much beer before the start of the match, offered to keep wicket, did so with much ostentatious crouching down and bouncing up and down, and hobbled about in agony from over-stretched muscles for the following week. I also played some hockey, which offers a painful rather than glorious memory, of having to run and run and run until legs and lungs were on fire.

Still, in rugby I did at least make the second XV. I seem to remember that we won more than we lost, and if I hadn't given up rugby in my last year I might perhaps have been reserve for the first XV occasionally, assuming a high incidence of illness or injury in more talented players. I abandoned rugby in favour of swimming – some form of sport was compulsory. This was not for love of swimming which I attended for a year without learning to swim – that had to wait until I arrived in Australia 10 years later, where you get to swim in water that is both warm and chlorine-free. I probably did enter the waters of the Leith Public Baths, as I have a memory of the chlorine too strong to have been caused solely by the steam, but I don't believe I ever remained in it for long. Swimming was a kind of token sport for the unsporting, run by Dr P, an amiable, scholarly and slightly absent-minded teacher of Modern Languages who, once he had ticked off your name on his list, took no further interest in your water play, which could therefore be as brief as you wanted. In 1966 I tell my parents that:

*...I am doing swimming as a sport and find it agreeably undemanding – one wanders along to the Baths about three and wanders off again about half past...*

As an aside, the same teacher assisted some of us in adhering to the letter but not the spirit of the law as members of the Combined Cadet Corps. The Rector proving unmoved by the long essay I submitted to him arguing against compulsory military service, I had no alternative but to join the Engineering Platoon, which was commanded by Dr P. After the CCF's weekly parade (was it on Monday afternoon?), we engineers would climb into the open back of the army truck which took us to an Engineers' Depot somewhere in Edinburgh. Our commander sat up the front next the driver. Crossing the city, the truck stopped at a number of traffic lights, at which two or three of us were rostered to jump out each week, leaving the platoon diminished, but not obviously so.

At the time we assumed that Dr P. didn't notice. In retrospect, I think he knew very well what was going on, and in putting Nelson's Telescope to a blind eye, was doing what he did at the Leith Public Baths and following an approach which the Rector would have unofficially approved if he had unofficially known about it. Flexibility in their application allowed the rules to remain in place without unnecessary fuss. I benefited from a similar attitude in my last year in the Boarding Houses, when I seem to have been allowed out after hours on a regular basis on the tacit understanding that I would continue to do well in exams.

Why did I give up rugby? I am not sure when I first realized that I rather regretted having done so – perhaps in my late 20s, when I resumed regular exercise as a runner. I think it was because I saw sport as incompatible with the identity I was constructing as an art-loving intellectual. I would not attribute this to the values of the school or its pupils as a group – I don't recall the kind of cultural distinction between sportsmen and aesthetes that appears in some books about English Public Schools and Oxbridge colleges. After all, the Rector was both scholar and athlete, as I am sure were some members of the First XV – I don't specifically remember.

But I don't believe anyone else in the Art Room set regarded sport (played or watched) as anything other than an imposition, and the writers I admired didn't seem too keen on it either. I

recently discovered that Jack Kerouac, who I was reading at the time, was a talented runner and college footballer but I don't recall that he is nostalgic about those days in "On The Road" or "The Dharma Bums". And I suspect that D H Lawrence, another favorite, was a bit of a weed when it came to sport.

At the time and place of writing, well into the 21st century and in Australia, lack of interest in sport can be made to seem unpatriotic, which of course creates a covert and defiant subculture of people who hate it, or worse, are indifferent to it, of whom there are no fewer in Australia than anywhere else. Some sports, in some places, have always been more acceptable to intellectuals than others. Soccer, aka football, attracts both hooligans and intellectuals in Europe and is becoming fashionable in Australia. Australian rules football has always been of interest to intellectuals in Melbourne, Australia, and is becoming so in Sydney, Australia. Sports like triathlon and mountain biking are popular with people who wouldn't know one Rugby League team from another (or if they did would conceal the fact from their friends). All sports are spin-doctored and marketed, or if they aren't, they have hired consultants to help them become so. This requires that the sport be packaged in a way that appeals to high income demographics and cultural analysis is one of the available packaging strategies.

I brought to my sporting, military and academic careers at the Edinburgh Academy a particular antecedent disposition, a cast of mind, an inclination to compromise rather than confrontation, paradoxically combined with indifference to the opinions of others. I retain those characteristics and have displayed them throughout the years between. I have always been sceptical about Astrology and always recognised that I exhibit many of the characteristics, both positive and negative, that are associated with [my birth sign](#).

## **The Rector**

"The Clacken and the Slate" was published in 1974, 12 years into the rectorship of Dr H H Mills. Magnus Magnusson says it would be inappropriate to offer any assessment of his rectorship while it was still under way. He describes Dr Mills' distinguished academic, sporting and military record and notes that he was a bachelor. I seem to remember that Dr Mills lived with an unmarried sister whom he rather resembled. I have a sense that there may have been some controversy about his rectorship in its later years, but I have been unable to confirm this. Am I misreading MM's "de viventibus nihil [nisi bonum]" one as implying that there had been adverse comments?

Dr Mills died in 1987. Googling "Dr H H Mills" I find, in addition to a number of Edinburgh Academy links and some obviously referring to other men, a link to a 1969 paper by the then president of the Humanities Research Association which footnotes an unpublished PhD thesis by a Dr H. H. Mills referred to as "friend and former pupil". I assume this was the same man. I also find a number of links to the web site of the Scottish ferry company Caledonian MacBraynes which indicate that a Dr H H Mills was chairman for a number of years. This was not the same man.

All this to precede an avowal, that I respected, admired, perhaps even loved the Rector. As a boarder at the school living away from his family, I probably needed a substitute father. I had the good fortune to be a member of a class of which the Rector remained the French teacher as it moved up the school. He was an outstanding teacher of a language he spoke fluently and of a literature and culture he loved and knew deeply. I remember it being said of him that he had passed for French while fighting with the Resistance during the war. I have told this story about him a number of times since so was disappointed to find it not explicitly confirmed in Magnus Magnusson's biographical sketch (Magnusson does refer to him parachuting in behind

German lines).

We spoke only French in his classes, learned grammar thoroughly, wrote essays in French, took dictation and translated in and out of the language both orally and in writing. All normal enough no doubt, and I ask myself what exactly it was that made it unthinkable to give anything but my best in his class. The answer suggests the reason why teaching at the highest level is rare. Dr Mills had qualities I admired, to an exceptional degree. That such a person should value something placed its value beyond doubt for me. That he did it well made me want to do it as well as I could. No doubt technique has its importance in teaching but so also do character, quality of mind and knowledge and love of what is taught.

The Rector helped to organise an exchange for me with a French school, the Ecole Saint Louis de Gonzague in Paris. At this Jesuit-run school for the sons of the Parisian bourgeoisie I was fortunate enough to encounter another outstanding teacher, Father Maucorps, who had me keep a daily journal in French and helped me avoid coming to grief at the hands of the school's formidable disciplinary system. I remember being detected reading Joyce's *Ulysses* in a supervised homework class. Although Joyce never actually made the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, *Ulysses* was officially unacceptable at the Ecole Saint Louis de Gonzague. Father Maucorps told me to put a brown paper cover with an innocuous title on the book and, if again challenged, show the cover. The senior pupils charged with maintaining discipline in the homework class would, he said, be happy with that. He also gave me to understand that he had read the book himself and had no problem with me reading it.

To call this Jesuitical advice says something about how Henry VIII's reformation has left its traces in the English Language, but is quite misleading about the quality of Father Maucorps' guidance. I see that as being about avoiding confrontation that would serve no purpose. I found a not dissimilar attitude at the Academy. I saw the Rector as an incarnation of reason and justice located somewhere above or apart from everything about the school that I thought unreasonable. I write elsewhere about how I sent him essays expressing my views on corporal punishment, compulsory militarism and the poor quality of sermon at the church boarders had to attend on Sundays. He was not persuaded, he approved my initiative in writing to him, I forgave him his failure to promptly abolish the CCF and the use of the tawse and cane or to allow me to seek out more interesting sermons. Honour was satisfied.

## **Friends**

I have been trying for some time to write about friends at the Academy. I am reluctant to do pen portraits and equally reluctant to generalise about my friends; both approaches offer themselves as ways of continuing the project of writing while not saying something that is there to be said but which encounters resistance. I have sensed what that is but been unable to describe it. Perhaps it is more to do with now than then, and more to do with myself than others. Writing that, I notice nausea and lassitude. Spreading like a stain, the thoughts encompass other kinds of failure.

Certainly, things haven't turned out as I expected. In what way? Unrealised expectations? Yes, but of what, exactly? Some obvious candidates present themselves – material success, public esteem – and more could be said about them, but at this moment I am after something else. A close group of young friends sign up to a collective agreement about who they are, what is important, what is expected of life. That sounds too specific, because we certainly didn't talk about any of those things. Certainly we could take for granted complicity and consequent mutual indulgence in uncertainty, pretension and experiment. But we also challenged each other, or at least, some of them challenged me. More on this below.

At school and university I was part of such a group, knights of the art room or the hash pipe, but later, as a reluctant bureaucrat, held myself apart from the people I saw every day. Now, close to sixty, I have made some buddhist friends but also keep them apart from the mainstream of my life. "I have no friends" is false – there are people who would rightly describe themselves as my friends. But they don't know each other.

In that context, no surprise that I should feel a recurring impulse to make contact with friends from those days. The impulse is to hunt for a treasure, using the maps the net has made available. Of course, the person, once discovered, is just another person, amiable and interesting to share a glass with but not so far bearing a key to any invitation to sit down at any round table.

After so much by way of preliminaries, some people I remember. J had curly black hair, a bony, pointed, alert and curious face, perhaps some kind of grievance. He was a fast runner who used his talent playing chicken with passing cars rather than winning races. Very much a member of the art set, he was uninterested in sport despite his speed but not emotionally driven to please his teachers. Consequently, teachers did not always think well of him. I was certainly anxious to ensure they thought well of me and while I was not consciously ashamed of this the difference probably worked on me. Perhaps I was a little ashamed, and a little inclined to see J's stance as not only an injustice, also in part a righteous choice.

A different kind of ambivalence around E. I don't think he was a boarder and I only got to know him in my last couple of years. Curly black hair as well but larger curls. A smoother, rounder face, an olive complexion, with a conspicuous mole like a beauty spot (a simile I would not have used at the time) (see [here](#) for the Wikipedia definition – I particularly like the list of celebrities with beauty marks). He read Karl Marx in translation, also Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and listened to classical music, Mahler was it, or Bruckner, perhaps both.

Retreating into distraction from the anxiety of what to write next, I go to Limewire, which I have only recently started using, download and start playing some music by Bruckner and Mahler, feel weak disquiet about copyright violation, wonder what E. would think of that and if he still listens to them. Click back to Limewire, browse the host from which I downloaded the music, find that in addition to symphonies it contains a number of pornographic videos – download one of them and find, as I have before, that explicit does not equal exciting. Delete it from my hard drive.

Returning to E, he hadn't won any academic prizes, may have been in a different stream but I knew that if he understood Marx, Bruckner and Mahler he was capable of something beyond me. I remember being with him in a crowded High Street pub after we had both left school and observing, between other conversations, that he seemed to be concerned to warn a very drunk girl against the lecherous intentions of an unscrupulous mutual acquaintance. He moved into Scottish political and intellectual life and remains there still. At the same time, I was becoming a hippy at University. Then I became a husband and father while trying to keep the hippy alive. And later, failed would be academic and bureaucrat for 30 years while waiting for something better to come along.

I made contact with E. a couple of years ago but did not sustain the connection. His brief comment about the Academy was unenthusiastic and further contact would have required me to admit that I enjoyed the place.

And there was S, red-haired, intense, humorous, a day boy whose father was an academic at Edinburgh University. I remember once or twice visiting the family's apartment, multi-storied in

the old Edinburgh style and being impressed at the density of artwork, beginning right inside the front door, two or three levels of pictures on every wall. This is a style of interior decoration which I still consider ideal and have partly emulated in my present home. I also remember noticing, perhaps a little envying, the family's solidarity, its private identity and language. I couldn't allow myself too often to regret being away from my own family at boarding school but perhaps such a feeling surfaced on this occasion.

Who else. I remember playing tennis with P J in my first couple of years in the boarding houses. His big brother was head boy, commandant, captain of rugby, etcetera. We were well enough matched on the tennis court but had little in common off it and lost touch in later years. I scarcely remember other art room denizens, perhaps because unlike R. and E and S., there was nothing about them that undermined my idea of myself or otherwise challenged me.

I recently met up with a friend from the Academy who, like me, has been living in Australia for thirty years. He contacted me after finding my details on the Academical Club Web Page. He had changed of course, but by no means beyond recognition - his voice in particular was the same. He told me that he had some painful memories of his time at the Academy and had been badly treated by some teachers. He also reminded me of a detail I am surprised to have forgotten - that the group of friends who hung around the art room also had access, through someone's sister, to a vacant artist's studio nearby where we could go to drink coffee and listen to music. We hope to meet again soon.

## **Edinburgh**

It can readily be verified through Google Earth that the Edinburgh Academy is not the geographic centre of Edinburgh. "Henderson Row, Edinburgh" will take you there and if you back out a little you will see the school is north of the centre of the city and quite close to the Firth of Forth. Looking at the Google image now (and after wondering who owned the seven cars seen parked in the front quadrangle on the day the current image was taken and what the demolition work being done in the top left was all about) I find myself surprised at how far north the School is and how close to the end of the City. My subjective sense of space back then had it not quite at the centre – Princes Street, and specifically the Railway Station, occupied that location – but close to it, and below it.

"Below" was a relativity known in my body, as I usually accessed Princes Street by walking up Hanover Street through the New Town – or when I took the bus there was also a sense of earned ascent as it laboured to make the climb. "Below" also attenuated any sense of the School being north of Princes Street. I think I knew this was so, would have answered correctly if asked, but perhaps after a moment's hesitation, because in my personal geographic orientation, then and now, above is equivalent to north: Scotland above and north of Sri Lanka, Inverness above and north of Edinburgh, Sydney above and north of Canberra. "Above" is not quite right – "up from" is closer as "above" implies a difference only in altitude whereas "up from" makes the connection by also allowing for longitude.

I have had a number of conversations with friends and family about this, centering on whether one goes "up to" or "down to" one specified place from another and have been surprised that they do not all feel the same answer as I do. On reflection, though, I recognise that I am making a simple error, one that could not unfairly be described as obtuse. Yes, north is above south on the circle of a compass but this does not mean any correlation between altitude gain and direction of travel.

Historically, of course, Edinburgh was built close to the water but could only expand away

from it, so the cultural centre of the city, the old city, is well north of the geometric centre of its populated area in the 21st Century. In the forty years since I attended the school the city has probably expanded many miles to the South but even back then I had a sense of the southern suburbs as being remote and peripheral, at the end of the line on bus routes and shading into villages and the Pentland Hills.

As to what was north of us, there is an odd gap in my memory. The Google Earth image shows the school as being close to the Firth and I find in a [letter](#) I wrote to my parents in 1967 that I used to go to the Leith and Granton docks and walk out on the jetties but I have no memory of doing so and no memory of the direction of the Firth vis a vis the School or the Boarding Houses.

This is odd, because I have always loved docks and jetties, visit and photograph them whenever I have the chance, and could easily list a dozen or more favourites around the world. I suspect the failure of memory may be because of the anomalous location of the Firth, in relation to the School, as “north”, but not “up from” (“up” being in the opposite direction, towards Princes Street). Such a place could not exist.

This is doubly dubious as retrospective speculation but it receives support from another memory of confusion. I used to travel by train from Edinburgh to Inverness and then on to the Black Isle where many of my family lived. This was a journey to a place north of, and hence up from, Edinburgh, but one which I started by going to the Station which was to the south of, but also, paradoxically, up from the School. The result of this was a period of directional uncertainty while the train was travelling from the station to the Forth Railway bridge.

The Bridge is west of Edinburgh and if you are travelling north, west is a left turn but on my actual journey, which started travelling south (and up, as to altitude, but also down/south by the compass), the initial train journey from the city to the bridge was a right turn. The confusion lasted until the Bridge at which point my inner orientation turned by 180 degrees to conform to my actual direction of travel. This kind of thing continues to happen. I have a workable sense of direction but it sometimes fails me, no doubt for various reasons, but sometimes because a gain in altitude makes me mistake my compass course.

So, what of all that? Does it mean I was always in some sense, lost, or at least disoriented, in Edinburgh? I am not sure. It is tempting to say so, it would make a story, but I can't say I think so. I remember at least as much assurance as I do anxiety, knowing where I was and where I had to go and where I could choose to go, and I remember being in those places, a physical assurance. I remember my head on my pillow in dormitory or, later, very happily, in my private study. I remember my feet on the ground, walking on pavements or timber-floored classrooms or along the streets of Edinburgh or through its shops and galleries, running on playgrounds or the soft green and mud of a playing field.

## **Holidays**

I went back to Ceylon for the long summer holiday most years. Finding the air fare must have been difficult for my parents. I travelled as an unaccompanied minor and so was guided through airports by BOAC hostesses, a privilege of childhood which I regret. I suppose there is some chance I will regain it, if I have the opportunity to travel by air in the early stages of senility.

There were no in-flight movies so I had plenty of time to read. I also had some stamina, which on one occasion took me all the way through *The Brothers Karamazov* between London and Colombo. But my tastes were not always so elevated – Agatha Christie and Ngaio Marsh were

also on my reading list. I preferred Dame Ngaio to Dame Agatha, and still do.

London to Colombo took longer than London to Sydney does now, because the plane had to stop to refuel four or five times. You stumbled sleepily down the steps (no air bridges) into a blast of heat. Dubai airport in those days was a tin shed without air conditioning where you could get warm orangeade. New Delhi was the next stop and the last before the plane turned south for Ceylon. As hot as Dubai but more humid and richer in scents and sounds, it provided a multisensory encounter with “the Orient” that prepared me for Colombo.

I spent the shorter school holidays, and half terms, with John and Betty Marshall and their family. Betty is my mother’s older sister and a distinguished Scottish novelist under her family name of Elizabeth Sutherland. John was a priest in the Episcopalian Church of Scotland who, while I stayed with them, had parishes in Galashiels in the Scottish Borders and on the Black Isle north of Inverness. He loved the Goon Show and the Third Program, played the organ with distinction, preached short lucid sermons which held his Congregation’s attention and conducted services enriched by the scent of incense billowing out from censers swung by one or other of his sons serving as Altar Boy. He died in ????. The Black Isle was and remains home to numerous family on both my mother’s and father’s sides. My mother and her younger sister Florence live there and Betty lives in the neighbouring village of Rosemarkie.

John and Betty’s sons Michael and Jeremy were respectively a couple of years older and younger than I am and so, as teenagers, more or less members of the same species, on good terms despite great differences in character and interests. Their daughter Alison was a few years younger, and a girl, so wholly beyond my understanding.

Michael and Jerry both attended Glenalmond College, where Michael became Head Boy in preparation for his career (after a brief attempt to become a rock legend) as a Teacher and Head Master. Jerry was never in danger of becoming Head Boy, but developed an interest in electronics which took him to his current employment as a wise elder of microchip design with a Silicon Valley multinational.

The Marshall family took me in with great kindness, indulging my eccentricities and leaving me largely to my own devices. My letters to my parents record time spent in my room reading and time spent wandering in the border hills or through the woods and along the shores of the Black Isle.

### **Am I a “Boarding School Survivor”?**

A couple of weeks ago my partner emailed me a copy of a short article by the psychotherapist and author Nick Duffell entitled *Surviving the Privilege of Boarding School*. It can be found [here](#). The article also contains a link to a web site, [boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk](http://boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk), which provides access to material supporting and extending its argument.

Duffell argues that sending children to boarding schools is a bad idea because it damages them. This happens because their “attachment formation and natural development in their family” is interrupted and they are lead to adopt a “drastic survival mode”. The child sent to boarding school “finds himself in an unfamiliar world where the hierarchy of those who have been there longer serves to enforce that he is at the bottom of the pile” and he is denied the opportunity to return at the end of the day to “loving homes...where they can be safe, regress if they need to, talk things through or remain silent, as they wish”. In response the child will construct a “Strategic Survival Personality” (SSP) by “design(ing) a character that keeps the heat off him, in many disguises: a winner is best, but a clown, a pleaser an isolate, even sometimes a victim will do”.

Duffell sets out a range of consequences for ex-boarders, or, as he calls them, “Boarding School Survivors” (BSSs). They may always feel “as if ‘on the run’”, they may be “ever-ready to perceive a threat where there may be none”, they may misinterpret “advances towards them in intimate settings... as danger” and respond with “aggression or withdrawal”, in co-ed boarding schools they may suffer “terrible stress” by being “on the receiving end of others’ fantasies”, they may be “humiliated or bullied for being ‘different’”, they may over-invest in the “*doing* side of life at the expense of *being*,” they may become “skilled at stealing time for themselves, at living a secret life”, they may become a “magnet for pedophiles”, with “catastrophic outcomes”. It seems particularly unfortunate, given this range of difficult characteristics, that Boarding School Survivors “would be unlikely to present themselves for therapy, and, if they did, would find it difficult to stay the course”.

Duffell concludes his article by suggesting that BSSs fall into “three broad types”. There are the “*Compliers*, who toed the line and live in denial”. They face “deep trouble” if their Strategic Survival Personality is threatened, as it may be through a work or relationship crisis. “From brittle functioning they teeter into helplessness, only to pull themselves sharply back when the crisis is survived”. There are the *Rebels*, who have “taken an anti-authoritarian stance”, possibly by way of “refusing to marry or live their potential”: they are “engaging but infuriating”, and need to have their value system challenged and be told (by their therapist) that they should “stop surviving and start living”. And there are the *Casualties*, who “have barely survived”, who were “already damaged at home”, and were “unable to mount a successful SSP and have not escaped being at the bottom of the pile”. Contemplating these people makes you “glad you have your own children safely at home.”

What primarily interests me in this analysis is whether and how it applies to me. Before turning to that, I will say something about how it applies to its author. Nick Duffell tells us that he boarded for ten years, that although nothing particularly bad happened to him he hated it, that he lost touch with his parents, that he taught in a boarding school for two years then spent 15 years trying to get away from the privilege he associates with English private schools, that he had a breakdown, went into therapy, retrained as a therapist himself, now trains other therapists working with ex-boarders and has founded a charity and helped to establish web sites devoted to the trauma caused by attendance at boarding school.

Clearly, Duffell knows what he is talking about, in a specific sense: his analysis is able to be informed by his experience. He tells his story and it is a story with a particular, and familiar, structure: trauma, suffering, confusion, struggle, understanding, redemption, healing, constructive action. Familiar from a range of contexts - Alcoholics Anonymous, where the healers are always former abusers - or the spiritual life - “Once was lost but now am found”, where many ex-sinners who have seen the light are eager to share that light.

And of course, most familiar from a range of therapeutic narratives. There are lots of stories around about the modes of psychic trauma which people deeply believe, and are told by their therapists, that they have endured. I will begin at the beginning and go only a little way: there is birth itself, breach birth, caesarian section, being an only child, being a youngest child, being a child of a single parent, being a child of divorced parents, being placed in child care at an early age, being a sensitive child at a rough school, dyslexia, physical abuse, emotional abuse, satanic abuse - and so on. Therapists offer themselves to assist with all of them and some of them become therapeutic specialties. Attendance at Boarding School seems to belong on this list.

The underlying story is universal and indisputable - children and other people suffer, respond, grow up, recover in various ways, act constructively to help others who are experiencing the

difficulties from which they have recovered. I am less sure about the usefulness of the therapeutic model with its pseudo-scientific jargon, its description of people as traumatized victims who need to be healed by therapy and who are defined as being in denial (or, in Duffel's words, failing to stay the course) if they do not accept the story that is on offer and its presentation of the therapist as the savior from whose eyes the scales have fallen. I will return to all this, but must first say something about my initial response to reading the article, which was much more ambivalent than the tone of my commentary implies.

I certainly felt initially defensive. I have thought and written about being at Boarding School and have mixed feelings about the experience, but I would say the same about other parts of my life and have no plans to present myself for therapy. Is this fellow telling me that I should? The short article I began by reading did seem to be telling me that, as did the web site linked above. Specifically, the article seems to be saying that attending a Boarding School is necessarily rather than possibly damaging. Duffell writes that "a visit to any boarding school will not reveal the presence of unhappy children" and explains why the apparently happy ones could not possibly be so - "they at all costs have to avoid their vulnerability and put on a brave face". And while he talks about forms of damage and suffering that "may" be found in boarders and ex-boarders, his use of the word "survivor" seems to make little allowance that the quality of survival may extend to the positive end of the spectrum, that Boarding School may present challenges and opportunities and that some children will be resilient enough to take advantage of them.

Am I a BSS? Well, in a sense, yes. While I managed to escape being a magnet for pedophiles, was never humiliated or bullied for being different, and don't believe that I am prone to misinterpreting advances towards me in intimate settings as danger (a list of negatives that could be extended), I do tick some of the other boxes on Duffel's checklist. I was homesick when I first went to boarding school at the age of 7 (a preparatory school in Ceylon) and suppressed my tears. I remain slow to weep and reluctant to display emotion. I didn't lose touch with my parents or confidence that they loved me but my relationship with them was certainly influenced by seeing them for only a few months each year (we were always on our best behaviour when we were together - got on very well, but normal adolescent conflicts were suppressed). I am skilled at stealing time for myself and value my private inner life. I am not sure if it is "super-private" - Duffel's term - and I don't believe it is associated with any propensity to prefer doing to being, as he seems to suggest - rather the opposite.

I certainly do have something that looks very like an SSP, a "Strategic Survival Personality", a protective mask, a constructed demeanour that shows the world only what I think it wants to know about me; and I do think that the nature of that mask was influenced by attending a boarding school. I do believe that boarding school required strategies for self-protection that hardened into emotional habits and remained with me after the need for them diminished. What kind of SSP, in terms of Duffel's distinction between *Compliers*, *Rebels* and *Casualties*? Here it gets more complicated. I don't believe I am a casualty, but I do have elements both of the complier (toeing the line) and the rebel (taking an anti-authoritarian stance). I made a deal with the Edinburgh Academy - compliance in some dimensions - good marks, keeping generally under the radar - in return for indulgence in others - hopeless cadet, lapsed rugby player, art room rebel. Both parties kept their sides of the bargain. Was it a good deal? At the time yes, but subsequently there has been a price to pay. I have tended to expect that a similar deal would continue to be available to me in other environments and been slow to understand that it wasn't.

So there is certainly something to it. But I do not describe myself as a BSS. And I remain

uneasy about Duffel's analysis, as I understand it. My reasons for both can usefully begin with the observation that while I certainly have what seems to be a Strategic Survival Personality, I also know hardly anyone who doesn't, and very few of my acquaintances went to Boarding Schools. To generalize the point, Duffel does not, in the material I have seen, provide any evidence that the modes of suffering and delusion which he describes (conflicts with parents, difficulties with relationships, suppression of emotion and so on) are more prevalent among people who attended boarding school than they are among others. We are all survivors of our childhood, and of the rest of our lives.

Duffell does address the question of evidence, or at least, he explains how he has been confirmed in his beliefs. He observes that "once you begin to see Boarding School Survivors...it is as if the scales have fallen away. You see how endemic this syndrome is in the Anglo-Saxon world, its contribution to national character, the stiff upper lip, the inability to say directly what one wants, and the tendency towards hostility couched in innocence". He describes the response to his publications and to a film based on the same ideas: "I still receive weekly letters from readers who thought they were the only sufferers". And he notes that there has been a sociological study which "discovered many instances of child abuse..."

Well. Yes. But. This is all fine, as far as it goes. It makes an alluring story, and one that has often been told before. As Duffel also notes, "literature {is} riddled with tales of awful public-school childhoods". It would be silly to deny that many people have suffered at boarding school and been damaged by it and it is entirely understandable that some of them would welcome the explanatory framework for their suffering provided by Duffel's line of argument. Duffell makes much of the "English disease" dimension to his story, and his perspective will have its attractions for many of his fellow-countrymen who are engaged in fighting that particular good fight.

However, literature also contains many tales of other kinds of awful childhood, including some in the bosom of the child's family. Duffell's makes explicit a black and white contrast between happiness at home and suffering at boarding school when he observes that boarding school casualties make "you...feel glad you have your own children safely at home". I don't find this convincing. I would have been reluctant to send my own children to boarding school, but might I have done so if, as in my parents case, it had been the only way of reconciling my way of making a living with my wishes concerning their education. It is fair enough to consider living with one's family as normative for children and to explore the ways in which other arrangements may create difficulties for them. But those difficulties are not insuperable and the proposition that living away from home is necessarily damaging, to a degree that requires therapy, requires more evidence than Duffell provides.

In the end, my disagreement with Duffell is based on skepticism about therapy and a preference for the frame of reference provided by the Buddha's teachings. And that is another story.

## **My Gap Year**

I am not sure if the expression "gap year" was current in 1967, when I left the Edinburgh Academy a year or so before starting at Oxford, but the idea certainly was. Wikipedia achieves an impressive density of cliché and blends unnecessary capitalisation with unnecessary inverted commas in its entry for "gap year":

*...the first 'Gap Years' actually started in the UK in the 1960s, when the baby-boomer generation in*

*the midst of the 'swinging sixties' headed off to India on the infamous Hippie Trails, inventing the 'independent travel market'*

However, it says nothing about the origin of the term, instead offering a number of unconvincing synonyms - 'year out', 'year off', 'deferred year', 'bridging year', 'overseas experience', 'time off' or 'time out'. The OED will settle the question when I find a current version. The rates for the on-line OED are far too stiff for me. I was out and off and overseas experiencing for sure but I didn't see myself as deferring anything - life after school had begun.

I had no interest in heading for India, having come from those parts, and no notion of being an early participant in the independent travel market. I would have found the idea distasteful. The Wikipedia author is primarily interested in independent travel as a market and in the pioneer companies that serviced it (STA travel, Lonely Planet etc). However I was a hitch-hiker, too poor even for the converted double decker buses of the early budget travel companies, and I saw myself in a tradition that started before the European hippy trails.

My inspiration came from writers, principally from Robert Louis Stevenson (*Travels with a Donkey*), Patrick Leigh-Fermor (*Between the Woods and the Water*), and Jack Kerouac (*On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*). The differences between their voyages and mine are obvious enough - no donkey, no connections in the minor European aristocracy to provide me with accommodation in castles, no freewheeling hipster companions. I had no itinerary: when I boarded the cross-channel ferry my only intention was to remain on the other side of the channel for as long as possible. And I had no plan to write about my experience - I kept no journal, took no photographs and probably wrote few letters - none have survived.

I took from my literary patrons the idea that travel was a significant undertaking, spiritual if you like, and that it required a governing idea or aspiration as to the right way to do it. Each had a distinctive quality of mind which appealed me, Stevenson's a gentle but quick-witted humor, Leigh Fermor's a morning of the spirit remembered after darker times, Kerouac's a more driven and theorised openness for which he paid a price and which also requires some endurance from his readers. Stevenson and Leigh Fermor perhaps more interested in the contingent identities of the people they met, Kerouac on the look out for types of human potential or delusion to celebrate or dismiss.

At the time I would have identified with Kerouac, because I aspired to a life as a dharma bum and had other people broadly categorised as requiring either celebration or dismissal on wise-to-the-zeitgeist lines. We also had hitch hiking in common, although our techniques differed. I had a union jack sewn on my pack and carried a rolled umbrella, thinking it would be better to look like an adventurous foreigner in Europe rather than a local down and out. A speculation that was confirmed by several of the people who picked me up. They told me that they would have been horrified if their own son took to the roads of Europe but an adventurous 'jeune anglais' with a rolled umbrella was another matter. I could correct 'anglais' to 'ecossais' as a conversation starter and found, particularly in France, that to do so worked in my favour.

Since then I have continued to read travel books. My own travels, such as they were, influenced my tastes and I read to keep in touch with the pleasures of travel in the constrained reality of life as a parent and wage slave. What was my story as a traveller? I hope that may emerge in the writing. Moving on from school and entering the world, overseas travel, part-time work were desires I would have acknowledged in conversation with my parents. Getting laid, drunk and high were probably somewhere on my agenda, although not avowed, even to myself.

On hitch-hiking: I do remember a few of the people who gave me lifts. the German salesman,

the austrian lawyer, the irish-australian priest. the czechoslovakian truckie. the english salesman. the italian businesswoman. Vague and unrealised sexual possibilities in these private encounters, side by side in people's cars. I rejected advances from three of those listed above and dared not make them to one. I learned about waiting somewhere drivers could stop and finding the right bus to take you out of larger cities to the start of the highway.

There weren't very many people hitch-hiking that year, at least on the roads I travelled. I felt like the first hippy to reach Nantes, and then later, Vienna. Paris and Florence certainly had downmarket travelers but there were no backpackers and, apart from youth hostels, no facilities designed for people like me. I stayed in some Youth Hostels, but never felt I belonged there. Youth Hostels were for respectable people on holiday, hikers, scouts, girl guides. I needed to work to support myself and youth hostels discouraged itinerant workers. I rubbed shoulders with manual workers and truck drivers and students in places that sold cheap food and drink.

Immediately after leaving school I stayed in Edinburgh for a while, finding a bed in a student flat and working to fund my travel plans and spending most evenings in pubs. Of the flat, I remember overcrowding, kitchen squalor and the smell of unwashed clothing and bed linen. My first job was in a bakery, somewhere around Rose Street. You had to start very early and the approach to kitchen hygiene was eye-opening. I remember a tray of jam donuts falling on a dirty floor, picked up and dusted off with powdered sugar. I moved on, largely because of the early start, and found work as a window cleaner. This time it was the approach to occupational safety that was eye-opening. Edinburgh had in those days lots of vertical guillotine windows, which you cleaned by climbing outside onto the window ledge and then closing the sliding part of window while hanging on to the fixed part. Can that be right? Surely not, but I remember it. No safety harnesses but the money was good and with a contribution from my parents I soon had enough to hitch hike south to the channel ferry.

I am not sure where I embarked and landed. Dover and Calais are the usual suspects but there were and are other crossings. After landing in France I made straight for Paris, where I had the address of a Sinhalese surgeon with a young family. His brother or some other close connection had worked for my father in Sri Lanka. I remember a welcome outstayed in a warm modern apartment while I tried to find work and lodging in Paris, a certain shaming hard-headedness on my part about how long I could hang on in comfort.

I found work selling the International Herald Tribune on the street, but I had a poor location (somewhere in the Jardin du Luxembourg I think) and made little money. You had to wait your turn for the best patches, outside the Louvre or Notre Dame or one of the big Metro stations. I am not sure where I slept after leaving the surgeon's flat, probably a youth hostel (a faint memory of lockers), but in any event I didn't stay long as Paris was expensive and my money was running out. I never contacted the family I had stayed with on my school exchange a year or so before - I am not sure why. After visiting the Louvre and some other Galleries and Versailles I was ready to move on.

I am not sure why I went to Nantes. A memory comes of someone in Paris suggesting it was a good place to find work. As it proved. I found a job as a window cleaner that was less alarming (slightly) than the Edinburgh version and better paid. I don't remember having to climb out of guillotine windows, but I do remember long ladders and a trick used by my co-workers that involved walking the ladder from one window to another without descending it. I never mastered this skill. The other 'laveurs de vitres' had thick local accents which I could hardly understand at first, and we took wine with morning and afternoon tea as well as lunch, which calmed my nerves on the ladders.

I lived in the Youth Hostel, a run down building near the railway station, with two other itinerant workers, Jeff Ounis from Algeria and Doualla from French Cameroon. I see that the Nantes Youth Hostel is still near the railway station but has been renovated. I wonder if there is still a biscuit factory nearby (“Petit Beurre” in big letters high on the wall of the building) so that the scent of cooking biscuits outstays its welcome in the air for miles around. Jeff had no visible means of support but plenty of money and may have been some kind of gigolo or rent boy. Doualla was a big man, deep shiny black, a skilled welder who, while I was there, had a job repairing stills in the brandy country north of Nantes and brought cheap brandy back to the hostel. We were semi-permanent residents, against Youth Hostel Association rules, indulged because the manager, a medical student named Michel, was also in breach of the rules by having his girlfriend living with him.

Occasionally we hired those french machines half way between motorcycles and bicycles to make trips out of town. What are they called? My french dictionary offers “mobylette” or “cyclomoteur”. I remember one trip I made with Jeff down the river to the estuary at the end of the Loire when we cooked moules over a wood fire on the beach in a big pot with wine. Somewhere we had met two australian nurses with whom we spent the night in a ruined gun emplacement on the beach. Both of them slept (successively) with Jeff, one briskly rejected my uncertain advances. Later Jeff asked me if I was a “puceau” which I vehemently denied, thinking somehow that “puceau” means “homosexual”. Had I known it means “virgin” I might still have denied it, perhaps less convincingly.

Not many proper youth hostel types came to the Auberge de Jeunesse de Nantes and some who did left quickly, alarmed by the empty wine bottles and the stench of gauloises in the kitchen. Debbie, who three years later I was to marry, was made of sterner stuff and lasted for a night. She had come to Nantes to visit a friend who, like her, was studying for a term at a European University as part of her degree course at the University of Santa Clara back home in California. Finding her friend in Nantes away, she came to the Youth Hostel for her first night in Nantes, moving on when her friend returned. We spent some time together and I took her address in Vienna where she was studying and asked if I could visit her there later in the year.

I am not sure how long I stayed in Nantes or what route I took to get from there to Italy. I have a recollection of passing close to Marseilles but not visiting it. Some nights I slept under bridges or in barns, others stayed in youth hostels or cheap hotels. I remember eating a lot of bread and cheese, cut with an Opinel pocket knife, the classic french wooden handled knife with a locking blade. I remember visiting Monaco where I had been with my parents on a tour of France years before, and traveling for a few days in hill country with an english sales rep for a french publisher who talked about literature and bought me the occasional proper lunch. I remember a long lift in a big truck when the truck driver made a pass at me and I pretended not to understand because it was raining and getting dark and we were entering the suburbs of a big city so i didn't want to have to get out of the truck too soon.

Florence was my first Italian destination and the site for a self-inflicted misfortune that could have ended my travels. I left my rucksack in the care of a friendly local while going off somewhere, to visit a gallery or church perhaps, and of course found no sign of it or him when I returned. Luckily money and passport had stayed in my pocket. I sent some money to my Aunt Betty in Scotland and asked her to buy a new pack and sleeping bag and post them to me, which she did, quite quickly. I told this story for years without ever wondering why I didn't buy them locally. I spoke no Italian but remember finding my good French took me a long way. I may have been less assured as a traveller than I seem in retrospect. There were no camping

shops in the centre of Florence and venturing out to the suburbs might have been a challenge. But that seems less than plausible. Perhaps I didn't believe Italians went in for camping. That feels more plausible (as a mistaken view, I mean - I am sure the most elegant camping equipment was and is available in Italy).

By this time my plan was to visit Debbie in Vienna. We must have been writing - no emails or mobile phones in those days, and I know I used Poste Restante for mail. I had thought of visiting Rome but never did. I stopped in Bologna for a day or so on my way north and thought I might return to it some day. It seemed less in the eye of the world than Florence. I also stopped in Venice but remember scarcely anything about it. Walking up and over a bridge, green scummy water, birds in a big open square. Cliches of Venice that might or might not be memories.

I wonder how long it took me to hitch hike from Venice to Vienna. I never had to wait long for lifts. I remember sleeping in a culvert under the road in a green summer landscape. In Vienna I also slept rough, behind a wall in a public park in the centre of town for a while then in the Vienna Woods. The police never bothered me, probably because there was no-one else sleeping in the park or the Vienna Woods. I brushed my teeth in a fountain as I watched the burghers of Vienna on their way to work. I was the only hippie in Vienna. I still had my umbrella with me and used it to spear a trout in a little stream in the Vienna woods where I was speaking. Or so I remember, and have often said.

I may have slept rough but I ate well, thanks to Debbie who gave me tickets to eat in the university cafeteria. Rice, goulash, dumplings, in abundance. We ate dumplings and goulash ("goulasch mit knodel") in the cafes as well, and drank the local weisswein in quarter litre glasses ("ein viertel weisswein bitte"). Weisswein is a low-alcohol white wine made quickly after the grape harvest and consumed in quantity. We talked and held hands, sat in cafes, walked in park and the woods, took a boat ride on the Danube, stayed in a Youth Hostel which was once a monastery, watched the sun going down over the river.

I am not sure how long I stayed in Vienna. I travelled on my own when Debbie went away for a few days (I think to Salzburg), going to Austria's border with Czechoslovakia (as it was then) and feeling excited and a touch afraid at the idea of communism over the fence and the sight of the border guards in their dark uniforms. On the way to the border I got a lift from a lorry driver who was on his way to Prague and who drank neat slivovitz, plum-flavoured, from a dirty bottle, and offered me a swig, which I accepted.

Debbie and I agreed to meet again in Ireland in a few months. I hitch hiked back to Britain through Germany, stopping in Munich for beer, and I think the Netherlands, taking the Ferry from Rotterdam. I don't remember much about the trip, any of the lifts or how long it took or where I slept. I think I may have been away and sleeping rough for long enough