

10/27/10

PAUL,

TAD, SILIKOVITZ AND I WERE CLOSE FRIENDS
AT CENTRAL -- WE ATE LUNCH TOGETHER, PLAYED
PENNY FOOTBALL TOGETHER -- DISCUSSED BASEBALL --
I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT HIS FAMILY BACKGROUND
UNTIL THIS YEAR -- HE WROTE TO ME ABOUT
HARDSHIPS DURING THE WAR -- (AND THE IMPACT IT HAD ON HIM)

FOR THOSE WHO KNEW AND RESPECTED
HIM, I'M SENDING YOU A COPY OF HIS
LAST LETTER I'LL LET YOU JUDGE
AS TO WHETHER IT IS APPROPRIATE
FOR GENERAL PERUSAL

Barry

47644 Mid Surrey Square
Sterling, VA 20165
August 6, 2008

Dear Barry,

Thank you so much for your extensive letter and accompanying chap book of poems. I have delayed responding mostly because shortly before your packet arrived in the mail, I was away in Hampton, Virginia, about to participate in a five-day workshop for K-12 school teachers of American history. Though I retired from active teaching at Skidmore back in May of 2005, I have been busy doing these kinds of workshops that are funded by Teach American History grants issued to school districts by the Department of Education. I have probably done about thirty-five of them all over the country, including Lafayette, Louisiana, and Winona, Mississippi—nothing in Alabama, however. I've also been in New Orleans four or five times, only once since Katrina and that was part of the Lafayette trip.

On the first day of the Hampton workshop in the middle of my presentation, I felt a strange and disconcerting physical sensation that I could not understand. I completed my presentation and answered some questions from the teachers immediately afterwards, but realized that something was wrong. My colleagues listened to what I told them I felt, and they became quite alarmed for my safety and took me to Riverside Hospital in nearby Newport News. After initial tests and scans, the doctors determined that I had suffered a dissection of the aorta, the largest artery that runs from the heart and through our body core to supply blood to the arms, head, major organs, and eventually to our legs. The tear or dissection occurred not in the ascending portion of the aorta that sends blood to the arms and head. That was fortunate. The tear began toward the end of the arch and down toward the left leg. The net result was that I was hospitalized for five days and then put on a hefty regimen of three different drugs that have sapped a lot of my energy. I think my situation has stabilized, and I am hopeful that continued treatment will result in a healing of the tear and return to normal functioning. I am reminded by this and a host of other medical issues that I have dealt with in the past ten years that life is unpredictable in many ways and that our time here is precious and should not be wasted.

It is probably commonplace for us as we become senior citizens that we look back on our lives and think about all that we have experienced. Some of what has happened results directly from decisions we have made; many other events are accidental and random—at least they appear that way. I have met many people in schools and in workplaces, and have enjoyed most of them. Yet I recognize that I do not know them well. I recall reading a convoluted piece by sociologist George Mead that distinguished between the objective me and the subjective I. The former is what others expect of me and is their definition of me; the latter is the I that comes from within. The two are not identical but should be compatible, I suppose. My senior college roommate and I got to know each

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other well and my wife and I know each other even better. But we see most friends and colleagues for only part of a day and not necessarily every day. They remain friends and colleagues that I treasure, but I cannot know them fully.

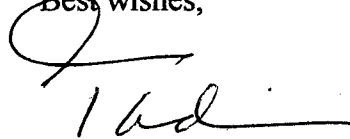
Your life has been filled with all kinds of interesting twists and turns. What happened to the radicals of the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties? Somehow the New Left of the Sixties did not replace their predecessors. And where is the Left today? Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seems that radicalism has lost traction in the U.S. Your movement from microbiology to English at Indiana was dramatic, but I saw lots of students at Skidmore make unexpected changes in majors and careers. My son began as a pre-med biology major and wound up in political science and he is now in management consulting in the telecom field. Who could have predicted that?

Incidentally, I was a colleague of Phyllis Roth, a member of the English Department at Skidmore, who later became chair of the department and then dean of the faculty. She collaborated with a colleague at Indiana on a book. That collaborator was none other than Gilbert Chaitin of the 210. When he came to Saratoga to visit Phyllis, I met him and enjoyed the occasion a lot.

I love your account of discovering international folkdancing and chamber music. What I find fascinating is the way interesting people combine work, study, hobbies, diet, dress, and home life in unpredictable ways. It is that combination that makes the individual unique and opens up opportunities for different perspectives. One constant that I find in your narrative is humanism. There is always concern and interest in the human experience whether in your studies, professional training, music, dancing, and family, and the desire to know more and to contribute to the betterment of those around you. That's something to be proud of. I know that when I retired from Skidmore after 36 years there, I felt that I had spent my time doing something of value. It would have been nice to have made more money, but at the end of the day I did what I wanted to do and what I had become good at.

Thanks again for sharing your story with me. I remember our time together at Central fondly, and am grateful for your friendship. Stay well.

Best wishes,



Reviews are wonderful - they invite me to return to them and each time I find something that I didn't catch previously.