



Reflections

You cannot go home again

Thomas Wolfe is correct. There is no way back once you leave. Life is a one-way street. Turns and forks, to be sure, but no turnarounds.

I am a Midwestern by heart. I am more comfortable conversing with a farmer in Sleepy Eye than somebody with a fancy degree at Hopkins.

I ended up in Baltimore by accident. After we moved I deluded myself thinking we would one day go back “home”, but I was wrong.

Soon after I entered the University in Minneapolis I knew I would be a fish out of water in Sleepy Eye, but places like Minneapolis and the University, Rochester and the Mayo Clinic, Madison and the University of Wisconsin, or Lansing and the University of Michigan would be close enough, but though I was courted, we stayed in Baltimore, not because we loved it, but because it was the best place for what I did – clinical trials. Not much call for trialists back in Sleepy Eye.

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Going back over old stuff

By now I have written lots of “stuff”. Mostly scientific papers and textbooks, collecting dust.

I hate reading anything I write. When I finish I am done. Do not ask me questions to take me back.

Years after I finished my dissertation (two volumes; 500 plus pages on insulin assays) I got a phone call from some stranger wanting to know how I derived a particular equation. I said I would take a look and call back.

It took about a week for me to muster courage to look. As soon as I opened the cover on volume II bad karma started filling the room. I had flashbacks to the struggle involved in estimating the concentration of insulin in blood (because you have to sneak up on estimates by a complicated iterative process).

I looked at the equation and I had an out of body experience. I could not believe I was smart enough to have derived it.

I looked at it for several minutes, then closed the volume and called the person and said I no longer remembered what I did. Sorry.

Talking with an accent

I love accents.

You can imagine my surprise when someone, after we got here, asked “Where are you from?”

“Why?”

“Because you talk with an accent.”

Me? I ignored the comment, figuring the person needed a hearing aide.

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Now fast forward a few years. I am on the phone with a woman exchanging addresses for a meeting we were organizing. The woman gave a street address with a particular number that sounded exactly like my sister when she said it.

I interrupted “Hold it. Where did that number come from?”

“What do you mean?”

“Where are you from?”

“California.”

“California? You were born and raised in California?”

“No. I was born in the Midwest.”

“I was born in the Midwest. Where in the Midwest?”

“Minnesota.”

“I was born in Minnesota. Where in Minnesota? ”

“Southwest Minnesota.”

“I was born in Southwest Minnesota. Where in Southwest Minnesota?”

“A little place called Sleepy Eye.”

“That’s where I was born!”

As it turned out we grew up at the same time. I knew her family name and where they lived but she went to catholic school and me to public school so our paths did not cross.

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My academic home

I am trained as a biostatistician, I live in a Department of Epidemiology, and do trials. I am a misfit, like the elf in Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer that wanted to be a dentist. I ended up in epidemiology because there is no place for somebody like me. The best fit would be biostatistics, but the department at Hopkins is blue nosed.

Epidemiology is an observational science devoted to controlling or preventing disease by observing incidence, frequency, and distribution of disease. Clinical trials is an experimental science devoted to comparing treatments administered to like groups of people under similar conditions to determine the best treatment among those tested.

Beeping

Every thing beeps now. I could live without most of them. When I turn my computer on I don't want it to beep. The only way I could manage that was to cut the wire powering the speaker. That shut it up!

You try to find a device in your house giving an intermittent beep like you get from a carbon monoxide detector with a dying battery. It will drive you crazy trying to find where it is coming from.

Three snorts

A snort is a shot of whisky. Three snorts is enough to give you a buzz.

But a snort is also the sound you make when you come awake suddenly from a snooze.

When driving (usually on the way home from Chincoteague), if I got sleepy, I would pull over and announce "I need three snorts." After the third snort I was good to go. Rested and wide awake.

Things I miss

The song of meadow larks

Going for drives in the country

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Sunday cookouts

Small towns

People who say thank you

Cornfields as far as the eye can see

People who wave

Farmers in bib overalls

Saturday nights long past

A good argument

Story telling

Mema and me having a drink on the deck

Playing cribbage with Jack

Mema sitting in her chair

Rhubabagooyah

Sunsets you can see

Cranberry Lake

Harvest time

Watching trains

Train whistles in the night

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Hoot owls

Grainbelt beer in clear long neck bottles

My 35 Ford

Hand written letters
